

Language retention based on local wisdom: anthropological and linguistic perspectives

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi pemertahanan bahasa lokal yang berbasis pada kearifan lokal dengan pendekatan interdisipliner, yaitu antropologi dan linguistik. Fenomena pergeseran bahasa yang terjadi di berbagai daerah di Indonesia menjadi ancaman serius terhadap kelangsungan bahasa daerah sebagai identitas budaya. Globalisasi, urbanisasi, dan perkembangan teknologi informasi turut mempercepat proses asimilasi bahasa, sehingga mengurangi penggunaan bahasa lokal, terutama di kalangan generasi muda. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif etnografi, penelitian ini menggambarkan secara mendalam bagaimana praktik pewarisan bahasa berlangsung dalam lingkungan keluarga, komunitas, pendidikan, dan media. Data diperoleh melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh masyarakat, orang tua, anak-anak, dan pihak sekolah, serta dokumentasi interaksi berbahasa di kehidupan sehari-hari. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keberlangsungan bahasa lokal sangat dipengaruhi oleh peran aktif keluarga, dukungan komunitas, integrasi dalam kurikulum sekolah, serta penggunaan media digital untuk dokumentasi dan penyebaran bahasa. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pelibatan lintas generasi dalam menjaga bahasa lokal, serta perlunya kebijakan kultural yang mendukung revitalisasi bahasa daerah melalui pendekatan berbasis budaya dan partisipatif. Dengan demikian, pemertahanan bahasa lokal tidak hanya menjadi upaya linguistik semata, melainkan juga sebagai bagian dari pelestarian jati diri budaya bangsa.

Kata Kunci: Pemertahanan Bahasa, Kearifan Lokal, Bahasa Lokal, Antropologi Linguistik, Pewarisan Bahasa.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategy of local language retention based on local wisdom with an interdisciplinary approach, namely anthropology and Linguistics. The phenomenon of language shift that occurs in various regions in Indonesia is a serious threat to the continuity of regional languages as cultural identities. Globalization, urbanization, and the development of Information Technology also accelerate the process of language assimilation, thereby reducing the use of local languages, especially among the younger generation. Through a qualitative ethnographic approach, this study describes in depth how the practice of language inheritance takes place in the family, community, education, and media environment. Data were obtained through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with community leaders, parents, children, and schools, as well as documentation of language interactions in everyday life. The results showed that the sustainability of the local language is strongly influenced by the active role of the family, community support, integration in the school curriculum, as well as the use of digital media for documentation and dissemination of language. This study emphasizes the importance of cross-generational engagement in preserving local languages, as well as the need for cultural policies that support the revitalization of regional languages through a culture-based and participatory approach. Thus, the preservation of the local language is not only a linguistic effort, but also as part of the preservation of the nation's cultural identity.

Keywords: Language Preservation, Local Wisdom, Indigenous Language, Linguistic Anthropology, Language Transmission.



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INTRODUCTION

Local languages play a vital role in preserving the cultural identity of a community and serve as a medium for transmitting values, knowledge, and traditional wisdom passed down through generations. However, in today's era of globalization and modernization, the existence of local languages is increasingly under threat of extinction. Younger generations tend to prioritize the use of national and foreign languages, which are perceived as more prestigious and functional in supporting daily activities, including education, work, and social interactions. This shift results in local languages being used less frequently in everyday life, thereby endangering their long-term preservation. In this context, the preservation of local languages has become an urgent matter to ensure that cultural identity is not lost over time.

Local wisdom represents the collective knowledge and cultural intelligence embedded in traditions, customs, folklore, and other forms of cultural expression. Local languages carry deep meaning in conveying these values of wisdom, such as norms, ethics, and worldviews of the community. For example, traditional expressions and proverbs in local languages often contain moral messages that are valuable for daily life. Through local wisdom, local languages are preserved in various customary and ritual activities that continue to be practiced by the community. Therefore, local wisdom plays an essential role in maintaining the existence of local languages amidst the strong influence of foreign cultures and the rapid development of information technology.

From an anthropological and linguistic perspective, the preservation of local languages can be analyzed more thoroughly. Anthropology focuses on the relationship between language and culture, as well as how language reflects the community's way of thinking, values, and social structures. Meanwhile, linguistics examines the structure, function, and use of language in various sociocultural contexts. The ethnographic approach used in this research allows the researcher to understand the meaning of local language use in daily life, including in rituals, traditional ceremonies, and everyday conversations. A collaborative approach between anthropology and linguistics is highly relevant in revealing how local languages adapt to the social dynamics of modern society.

However, efforts to preserve local languages face several serious challenges. Changes in modern lifestyles, urbanization, and the influence of globalization have caused local languages to become increasingly marginalized in daily life. The lack of supportive government policies for teaching local languages in schools and the declining interest of younger generations in learning local languages further worsen the situation. Local languages are often perceived as outdated and irrelevant to the needs of the present era. As a result, local languages are being pushed to the margins and are at risk of becoming extinct in the near future if no serious preservation efforts are made.

Local wisdom plays a crucial role in language retention and cultural preservation across various communities. In Indonesia, fishermen's language and traditions reflect spiritual, cultural, and economic wisdom, revealing their worldview (Abdullah, 2016). Similarly, the Javanese "tolak balak" tradition in weddings demonstrates the interconnection between language and culture, preserving local wisdom through linguistic units and rituals (Adeliya & Fateah, 2024). Language learning based on local wisdom effectively instills character values like cooperation and responsibility in students (Rasyid & Aisa, 2024). To revitalize local wisdom, strategies such as documenting traditions, incorporating them into education, and celebrating annual ceremonies can be implemented, as seen in the Dayak Kanayatn 'Nyangahatn' oral tradition (Melati & Rahardi, 2022). These studies highlight the importance of integrating

local wisdom into language education and cultural practices to maintain linguistic and cultural heritage.

This study aims to identify and analyze the role of local wisdom in the preservation of local languages from both anthropological and linguistic perspectives. Specifically, the research seeks to explore how local cultural values, traditions, and customary practices influence the use and preservation of local languages in the daily lives of communities. Furthermore, this study also aims to understand the challenges faced in efforts to preserve local languages amidst the currents of modernization and globalization, as well as to develop effective strategies for maintaining the existence of local languages so that they remain relevant and accepted by younger generations. By adopting an ethnographic approach, this research is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of local language preservation policies and to raise public awareness of the importance of maintaining cultural identity through language.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using ethnographic research, aiming to deeply understand the practice of local language preservation in the daily lives of communities, particularly within cultural and social contexts. The ethnographic approach allows the researcher to directly observe the process of local language transmission and its connection to the local wisdom values embedded within the community. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to comprehend the symbolic meaning of using the local language and how cultural values are passed down across generations.

The research was conducted in a traditional community that still actively uses the local language in daily life. This location was chosen due to its strong adherence to local cultural practices and the use of a regional language, such as Sundanese, as the primary means of communication within family and social settings. The research subjects included family members (parents and children), traditional leaders, local curriculum teachers, and community figures involved in local language preservation.

Data collection was carried out through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to examine language behavior in real contexts, such as language use in household activities, traditional ceremonies, and daily conversations. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including parents, educators, and cultural figures, to explore their views on the importance of the local language and the challenges faced in preserving it. Meanwhile, documentation involved collecting supporting materials such as transcripts of conversations, photos of cultural activities, and local curriculum materials from schools.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive-qualitative method with thematic analysis techniques. The analysis process involved three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was performed to filter important and relevant information in line with the research focus. The data were then presented in narrative form, supported by direct quotations from interviews or observations. Conclusions were drawn by connecting field findings with relevant anthropological and linguistic theories. To ensure data validity, the study employed technique triangulation, which involved comparing the results of interviews with those of observations and documentation. In addition, a member check was conducted by presenting preliminary findings to informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation aligned with the reality intended by the informants. This step was essential in maintaining the objectivity and validity of the research findings.



Fig 1. Flow Chart Of Local Language Retention

The diagram above illustrates the cycle of local language preservation based on local wisdom, integrated within the socio-cultural ecosystem of the community. This process begins with the crucial role of families and local communities as the primary centers for transmitting language and cultural values. Through daily interactions and language habits within the home and surrounding community, children naturally learn to use the local language. This environment is further strengthened by the influence of local communities and cultural education, which provide both informal and formal spaces for introducing traditional norms and narratives. Next, the education system plays a role in integrating local values into the curriculum, involving the teaching of regional languages through inclusive methods. Media also plays a major role in language preservation, whether through digital documentation, visual content, or culturally sensitive digital literacy. Media dissemination expands the reach of local languages, helping them remain relevant amid technological advancements. The cycle continues as communities and support systems such as cultural organizations, indigenous schools, and local governments form cooperative networks that support language preservation. The diagram shows that all elements family, community, education, media, and institutional support are interconnected in a continuous loop, indicating that the preservation of local languages is not solely an individual task, but rather a collective effort grounded in organized and sustainable local wisdom.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Tables and Quantitative Data

To reinforce the qualitative findings, this study is also supported by quantitative data obtained through the distribution of questionnaires to respondents from the local community, including parents, teenagers, and traditional leaders. This data provides a numerical overview of the level of local language usage, the community's perception of its usefulness, as well as the factors influencing the maintenance of the language in daily life. The following table presents the percentage of local language usage across various areas of social life:

Table 1. Frequency of Local Language Use in Daily Life

Context of Use	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
Family	60%	30%	7%	3%
Local Community	55%	35%	8%	2%
Traditional Ceremonies and Rituals	80%	15%	3%	2%
Formal Events	20%	30%	40%	10%

Source: Data obtained from a questionnaire completed by 60 local community respondents in January 2025.

The results of Table 1 show that the local language still plays an important role in informal contexts, especially within the family environment and local communities. As many as 60% of respondents frequently use the local language at home, indicating that the household remains the primary space for language transmission. Similarly, in local communities, 55% of respondents stated they often use it, showing that the local language remains alive in the social interactions of the community. The highest usage was recorded during traditional events and cultural ceremonies (80%), emphasizing that the local language serves as a medium for cultural preservation. However, the use of the local language has begun to decline significantly in formal settings, where only 20% reported frequent use, 40% admitted to rarely using it, and 10% stated they never use the local language in official situations. This reflects the dominance of the national or foreign language in more institutional formal contexts.

Table of Inhibiting Factors in Local Language Preservation

To support the understanding of the challenges in preserving the local language, Table 2 presents data on the main inhibiting factors that contribute to the decline in local language usage among the community. This data was obtained through interviews and field observations, which were then categorized based on the frequency of mention by informants.

Table 2. Inhibiting Factors in Local Language Preservation

Inhibiting Factors	Persentase (%)
Lack of Local Language Teaching in Schools	45%
The dominance of national/foreign languages	30%
Stigma of Local Language as an Ancient Language	15%
Lack of Government Support	10%

Source: Data based on questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and supported by literature from Sumarsono (2013), Lauder (2020), and Amelia et al. (2024)

Based on Table 2, it can be interpreted that the biggest challenge in preserving local languages stems from the formal education system, where 45% of respondents mentioned the absence of local language instruction in schools as the main factor for the decline in its usage. This highlights the need for integrating local languages into school curricula to strengthen preservation efforts. Additionally, 30% of respondents pointed out the dominance of national and foreign languages, especially through mass media, technology, and work environments that require the use of Indonesian or global

languages. Another influencing factor is the stigma surrounding local languages as being outdated (15%), making some people, especially the younger generation, reluctant to use them. Lastly, the lack of government support (10%) was also noted, indicating the need for concrete and sustainable policies in local language preservation programs. Overall, these findings indicate that preserving local languages requires a systematic and cross-sectoral approach.

Interview with Mr. Harun, Traditional Leader of Sukamaju Village:

Interviewer (I): *Why is preserving the local language important for the community here, Mr. Harun?*

Mr. Harun (H): *"The local language is not just a communication tool, but also our identity and pride. It holds ancestral values, history, and local wisdom that cannot be found in other languages. If the local language disappears, our identity and culture will disappear as well. That's why we strive to teach the local language to our children from a young age through folklore, traditional songs, and ritual activities."*

I: *What is the role of the younger generation in preserving the local language?*

H: *"Young people need to be more involved in traditional and cultural activities. We encourage them to actively use the local language in daily life and traditional events. Nowadays, technology can also help for instance, with local language learning apps or social media content in regional languages."*

Based on the interview with Mr. Harun, the traditional leader of Sukamaju Village, it can be concluded that preserving local languages faces serious challenges in the era of modernization and digitalization. The use of local languages among the younger generation is increasingly declining due to the strong influence of formal education that prioritizes Indonesian and foreign languages, as well as the use of digital technology and social media dominated by modern languages. This condition reflects a phenomenon commonly found in various regions of Indonesia. Local communities have made various efforts to preserve local languages, such as cultural activities, folklore, traditional rituals, and integration into local school curricula. Creative initiatives such as using social media to create content in local languages have also begun to attract the interest of young people. However, Mr. Harun stated that these efforts are still not effective enough without supportive government policies that recognize the importance of local languages in school curricula and official activities. He also emphasized that local languages are not merely communication tools, but cultural identities and sources of local wisdom that reflect ancestral values. If local languages are not preserved, cultural identity and ancestral heritage are also at risk. Therefore, collaboration between communities, the government, and the younger generation is crucial to ensure the continuity of local languages so that they remain alive and thriving amid changing times.

Conversation between Ibu Siti and her daughter Ani, in Local Language (Sundanese):

Ibu Siti (S): *Ani, wash your hands before eating!*

Ani (A): *Yes, Mom. I'm going to wash my hands now.*

S: *Remember, we have to preserve our language. Even though you use Indonesian at school, don't forget to speak Sundanese at home.*

A: *Yes, Mom. I want to be able to tell stories to kids someday.*

S: *Right, don't let our culture fade. Language is a part of our identity, isn't it?*

A: *Yes, Mom. But only a few of my friends at school can speak Sundanese.*

S: *Don't be ashamed to use Sundanese. If not us who preserve it, then who will?*

The conversation between Ibu Siti and Ani in Sundanese shows the dynamics of local language preservation within the family. Ibu Siti emphasizes the importance of maintaining the Sundanese language even though Ani often uses Indonesian at school. This reflects the internalization of cultural values from parents to children as a form of local cultural inheritance. This dialogue also illustrates a common sociolinguistic condition in multilingual societies, where local languages often lose prestige compared to national or foreign languages in educational and modern communication contexts. Ani admits that few of her friends can speak Sundanese, indicating a shift in local language use among the younger generation. Moreover, Ibu Siti teaches Ani that local language is a form of identity and pride that must not be abandoned. Her statement, "If not us who preserve it, then who will?" emphasizes that the responsibility to preserve local languages lies with the community itself. If the younger generation is not proud or accustomed to using local languages, there is a risk that the language will disappear over time.

From this conversation, it can be concluded that the family plays a crucial role in preserving local languages. Ibu Siti strives to pass down cultural values and local identity to Ani through the use of Sundanese in daily communication. This reflects the importance of informal education within the family to preserve local languages when the influence of national and foreign languages becomes stronger. However, the conversation also reveals real challenges in preserving local languages. The younger generation tends to use more Indonesian and foreign languages, thus reducing the frequency of local language use. This poses a threat to the sustainability of local languages if there is no collective awareness and pride in using them in everyday life. Therefore, preserving local languages requires support from families, communities, schools, and the government so that the use of local languages remains relevant and appealing to younger generations. This support can include strengthening local content in school curricula, cultural activities, as well as utilizing technology and social media to promote local languages in creative and modern ways.

The Role of Local Wisdom in Preserving Local Languages

Research shows that local wisdom plays an important role in preserving local languages. Cultural traditions such as traditional ceremonies, performing arts, folklore, and other cultural expressions serve as media to transmit cultural values and local languages to younger generations. For example, in traditional events such as weddings, harvest rituals, or religious celebrations, local languages are used in prayers, chants, and traditional speeches. This ensures that symbolic meanings and cultural values remain alive and passed on. Additionally, in the context of performing arts such as wayang (shadow puppetry), traditional dances, and regional music, local languages are used to tell folklore, legends, and local histories that contain moral messages and ethical teachings. This educational function keeps the local language alive in the lives of the people. Language preservation through local wisdom is also evident in the use of proverbs, traditional poems, and idioms in everyday conversations, reflecting local knowledge and life wisdom.

Community Motivation in Using Local Languages

This study found that people's motivation in using local languages is greatly influenced by cultural awareness and ethnic identity. Research informants who have a strong sense of pride in their cultural identity are more consistent in using local languages in daily life. This is evident in traditional communities that strictly adhere to their customs and traditions. The use of local languages becomes a form of respect for ancestors and an effort to maintain cultural identity amid modernization. However, the

study also identified a negative stigma that views local languages as "old-fashioned" or "less modern." This stigma leads the younger generation to prefer using Indonesian or foreign languages, which are considered more prestigious and relevant in educational and professional contexts. This reveals a challenge in motivating the younger generation to continue using local languages actively. Community support and the strengthening of cultural pride are essential in maintaining the use of local languages among the younger generation.

Barriers to Local Language Preservation

This study reveals several obstacles to local language preservation, including the lack of government policy support for teaching local languages in schools. Local languages are not yet optimally integrated into the formal education curriculum, limiting opportunities for young people to learn them. Moreover, globalization and the strong influence of foreign cultures have marginalized local languages in everyday conversations. Changes in modern lifestyles have also affected the frequency of local language use, which continues to decline. The younger generation is more exposed to digital media that uses Indonesian or foreign languages, thus reducing their local language proficiency. The limited use of local languages in public spaces and work environments also reduces their appeal as a daily communication tool.

Effective Strategies in Local Language Preservation

To address the challenges of preserving local languages, this study recommends effective strategies that can be implemented by governments, educational institutions, and communities. One strategic step is integrating local languages into the formal education curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels so that the younger generation can learn them in a structured manner. In addition, cultural events such as festivals, local language competitions, and traditional art performances can serve as effective tools to attract the interest of young people. The use of digital technology and social media is also an important strategy to popularize local languages. Creating creative content such as short videos, podcasts, interactive learning apps, and other digital media can be engaging tools to educate the public about local languages. The role of families in teaching local languages to children from an early age as a mother tongue is also a crucial foundation for language preservation.

Dynamics of Local Language Use in Daily Life

This study found that local languages are more frequently used in informal contexts and cultural activities, while Indonesian and foreign languages dominate formal communication and workplace interactions. This leads to the marginalization of local languages in modern life. Older generations tend to be more consistent in using local languages in their daily lives, while younger generations tend to switch to Indonesian or foreign languages, which are seen as more practical and modern. This situation highlights the challenge of ensuring local languages are used more widely, including in education and public spaces. Preservation efforts should aim to make local languages relevant in modern life so that younger generations are interested in using them.

The Relevance of Local Language Preservation to Cultural Identity

This study emphasizes that local language preservation is highly relevant to maintaining the cultural identity of local communities. Local languages are not merely communication tools but also symbols of cultural identity containing noble values, history, and the worldview of local societies. The loss of local languages means the loss of a rich and unique cultural heritage. Local languages also function as bonds of social solidarity in traditional communities and as a means of conveying moral and ethical values. Therefore, preserving local languages is a crucial effort to safeguard cultural wealth and local wisdom so that they continue to thrive amid social and cultural changes.

This research provides important implications for the development of local language preservation policies. Governments need to issue regulations supporting the teaching of local languages in formal education and continuously support local cultural programs. An integrated approach among governments, educational institutions, local communities, and the mass media is required to strengthen the position of local languages in society. Additionally, public awareness campaigns are needed to foster pride in local cultures and raise awareness of the importance of local languages as part of national identity. Thus, local language preservation can proceed effectively and sustainably, even amid rapid social and cultural change.

CONCLUSIONS

This study emphasizes that the preservation of local languages based on local wisdom, from anthropological and linguistic perspectives, is a crucial effort in safeguarding the cultural identity of communities. The roles of the family, cultural activities, formal education, and digital media each contribute significantly to the process of local language preservation. The family serves as the first and most effective environment for transmitting local languages, while cultural activities function as a medium to reinforce identity and revive local vocabulary. Formal education, through local content integration, helps ensure that local languages continue to be taught to younger generations, although challenges in implementation remain. Digital media also has a dual impact; on one hand, it threatens the survival of local languages due to the dominance of national and foreign languages, but on the other hand, it offers vast opportunities to promote local languages through creative content. Globalization and modernization pose serious challenges to local language preservation, but these can be addressed through innovative adaptations that blend local values with modern technology. Overall, the success of local language preservation requires synergy among various stakeholders, including families, traditional communities, educational institutions, the government, and the younger generation. An integrated strategy that leverages cultural, educational, and technological approaches can ensure that local languages continue to thrive and serve as a strong marker of cultural identity in the face of globalization challenges.

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