Negotiating Language Policy and Local Practice: Multilingual Challenges in a Sundanese Classroom in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article explores how Indonesia's national language policy, which designates Bahasa Indonesia as the primary medium of instruction, is negotiated within local classroom practices in a Sundanese-speaking context. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan, Sukabumi, West Java, employing a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and curriculum document analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns of interaction between Bahasa Indonesia and Sundanese in the learning process. Findings reveal both tension and adaptation between formal policy and local practice. Teachers often relied on Sundanese to clarify complex materials, while official instructions remained in Bahasa Indonesia. Students were more responsive to Sundanese in everyday interactions but also acknowledged the importance of mastering Bahasa Indonesia. Translanguaging strategies, dynamic shifts between languages, proved effective in enhancing conceptual understanding while maintaining students' linguistic identity. The study underscores that national policy is not rejected but rather adapted through context-sensitive local practices. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the interaction between national and local languages in classroom settings, an underexplored area compared to studies emphasizing Bahasa Indonesia and foreign languages. By presenting the Sundanese context, the study highlights Indonesia's broader multilingual realities and advocates for more flexible language policies. This research contributes to the fields of education, language, and literature by providing empirical evidence of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy and recommending policies responsive to local linguistic needs.

INTRODUCTION

Language has always been an arena of tension between state policy and everyday community practices (Fitriati & Rata, 2021; Sakhiyya & Martin-Anatias, 2023). In Indonesia, the language constitution designates Indonesian as the official language as well as the primary medium of instruction in education (Mitchell et al., 2022). However, classroom realities in multilingual regions often tell a different story. In schools across West Java, for instance, Sundanese tends to be more dominant in daily interactions between teachers and students. This phenomenon creates both pedagogical and policy dilemmas: how to maintain compliance with formal regulations while ensuring effective learning rooted in students' linguistic comfort (Siregar, 2023). The fact that teachers often switch to Sundanese when explaining complex material is not merely a practical choice, but rather an adaptive strategy

that reflects real classroom needs (Hanifah et al., 2024; Puspitasari et al., 2021). At the same time, this condition raises serious questions about how the role of Indonesian as the national language is enacted in basic and secondary education, as well as its implications for students' literacy development and linguistic identity.

This situation is increasingly significant to discuss because it closely relates to the broader aims of national education, namely fostering a generation proficient in Indonesian while also valuing regional languages as cultural heritage. Data from the National Language Agency show that more than 700 regional languages remain in use in Indonesia, with a considerable number of speakers (Aji et al., 2022). Within this context, the tension between the national language and local languages in education is not a marginal issue but a reality faced by millions of students. Empirical evidence also shows that the use of local languages can strengthen students' conceptual understanding, though it may simultaneously delay mastery of academic Indonesian. For this reason, examining how language use is negotiated in the classroom is crucial, as it concerns both educational effectiveness and broader politics of identity (Suherman et al., 2023).

Previous studies have highlighted multilingual issues in Indonesian classrooms. Liando et al. (2023) and Putrawan (2022) observed that translanguaging, the practice of alternating between more than one language, often arises naturally in primary school learning. Their studies revealed that although language policies demand the use of Indonesian, teachers and students frequently mix languages to support comprehension. Similar findings were reported by Emilia & Hamied (2022) and Sutrisno (2023), who examined bilingual practices in schools in Yogyakarta and concluded that linguistic flexibility is an essential part of pedagogical strategy. Other studies, such as those by Rulyandi et al. (2024) and Yusra et al. (2022), also emphasized that the implementation of language policies in Indonesian schools has never been entirely clear-cut but always adapted to local needs. These findings suggest that the tension between policy and practice is a recurring issue, though its manifestations differ across regional contexts.

Research on multilingual education in Indonesia has also extensively addressed the relationship between Indonesian and foreign languages, particularly English. For instance, Susanto et al. (2024) and Tiawati et al. (2023) stressed that Indonesian language policy often coexists with strong pressures to improve English competence. Meanwhile, Froiland (2020), Muslim et al. (2022), and Wan & Gao (2021) demonstrated how global aspirations drive parents and schools to emphasize foreign language learning, even though students' daily realities remain anchored in regional languages. Studies by Abtahian et al. (2021) and Wongso et al. (2023) showed that the three language layers, Indonesian, regional, and foreign, often overlap, producing complex dynamics that challenge educational practice. Thus, prior studies reveal the diversity of multilingual situations in Indonesia, though the focus on the interaction between national and regional languages in classroom contexts remains relatively limited.

Additionally, several scholars have highlighted the importance of regional languages in shaping students' identities. Andayani (2022) and Arono et al. (2023) argued that the use of local languages in schools not only supports comprehension but also reinforces a sense of

belonging to local culture. Similarly, Herawati (2022) and Sukamto et al. (2021) found that students who continue to use regional languages at school feel more confident in communication, even when pressured to use Indonesian. International research also offers relevant insights, such as Cenoz & Gorter (2022) and Prilutskaya (2021), who developed the concept of translanguaging as a productive pedagogical practice in multilingual contexts. In the Southeast Asian context, Le et al. (2021), Nguyen & Nguyen (2024), and Shepherd & McEntee-Atalianis (2021) showed how teachers in Vietnam negotiate national language policy with multilingual classroom realities. These studies illustrate that multilingualism is not merely a challenge but also a pedagogical opportunity that must be managed wisely.

Nevertheless, the discussion of regional languages in Indonesian educational practice, particularly Sundanese, remains underrepresented in broader academic forums. Most studies on multilingualism in Indonesia focus more on the interaction between Indonesian and foreign languages, while the dynamics between national and regional languages receive less attention (Nursanti & Andrianti, 2021; I. G. A. C. S. Putra & Tustiawati, 2024; J. R. Putra & Musigrungsi, 2022; Putrawan, 2022; Siregar, 2023). Yet, for students in certain regions, local languages serve as their primary means of daily communication and play a major role in shaping their identities. This phenomenon highlights a gap in the literature, particularly in understanding how national language policies are actually enacted in classrooms, rather than merely formulated at the policy level.

The Sundanese context offers an especially compelling case because Sundanese is one of the largest regional languages in Indonesia, with a substantial number of speakers, yet it remains overshadowed by national language policies. Teachers in West Java often face a dilemma: they must teach using Indonesian in compliance with regulations, while simultaneously engaging students who feel more comfortable with Sundanese. This situation drives the emergence of creative strategies, including translanguaging, which allows flexible language mixing in the learning process. Such an approach not only facilitates academic comprehension but also maintains students' connection to their linguistic identities. This phenomenon has rarely been deeply explored, thereby providing an important contribution to the discussion of multilingual education in Indonesia.

From this framework, the present study seeks to provide empirical insights into how teachers and students at a junior high school in Sukabumi negotiate the use of Indonesian and Sundanese in the classroom. The focus is not merely on how frequently one language is used, but on how both languages are strategically combined in everyday pedagogical practice. Thus, this study not only enriches academic discussions on translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy but also reveals the lived dynamics of tension and adaptation between formal policies and local practices. The ultimate aim is to understand classroom multilingual practices as realities that must be accommodated rather than avoided, while also offering recommendations for language policies that are more responsive to students' linguistic needs. In this way, the article seeks to open discussions on how language education in Indonesia can become more contextual, inclusive, and relevant to students' everyday lives.

RESEARCH METHOD

Metode This study employed a qualitative research approach, as its main objective was to gain in-depth understanding of the experiences, strategies, and linguistic practices that emerge in the classroom. A qualitative approach makes it possible to capture nuances, meanings, and social dynamics that cannot be reduced to mere numerical data (Bhangu et al., 2023). In the context of this research, the phenomenon of using Indonesian and Sundanese cannot be understood solely by measuring frequency, but must also consider the reasons behind language choice, teachers' adaptive strategies, and students' perceptions of the languages used. Therefore, a case study design was chosen, enabling the researcher to focus on one school site as a representation of multilingual reality, while exploring everyday practices in intensive and contextual ways (Nassaji, 2021).

The research site was SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan, Sukabumi Regency, West Java. The location was selected based on its characteristics as a public school in a rural area where Sundanese is the dominant language. This setting allowed the researcher to observe authentic multilingual practices, since most students use Sundanese in daily life, while Indonesian is present mainly as a formal language in the curriculum and national policy. Thus, the school provided a fertile ground to investigate how language negotiation occurs between formal policy demands and local practices embedded in the community.

Participants were selected purposively, based on who could best provide relevant information for the study's focus. They consisted of five teachers and ten students. Among the five teachers, two were Indonesian language teachers directly responsible for teaching the national language, while the other three taught general subjects such as science, social studies, and mathematics, but still had to navigate linguistic dynamics in their teaching. The ten student participants were drawn from grades VII to IX, allowing variation in experiences across grade levels. Their selection was based on teacher recommendations, with an emphasis on students who were active in classroom interactions.

Data collection employed three main techniques: classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to capture real patterns of language use, both in formal instruction and informal interactions. This technique was important since linguistic practices are not always explicitly articulated by participants but can only be observed in interaction. In-depth interviews then complemented the observations by exploring teachers' and students' reasons, perceptions, and experiences regarding multilingual practices in the classroom. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexible and open-ended questions, which in turn produced richer responses (Yoon & Uliassi, 2022). Document analysis was carried out on the curriculum, syllabi, and lesson plans to understand how national language policies are formally translated into school-level instruction.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis, focusing on identifying patterns of meaning within the data (Hiver et al., 2024). Observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents were repeatedly read, coded, and organized into major themes concerning translanguaging strategies, language negotiation, and learning implications. The analysis was conducted

cyclically, with ongoing comparisons across data to sharpen interpretations.

To ensure validity and reliability, triangulation was applied in several ways. First, source triangulation compared information from teachers, students, and documents to examine consistency or differences in perspectives. Second, methodological triangulation combined observation, interviews, and document analysis, ensuring that findings did not rely on a single method. Third, time triangulation involved conducting observations at different times to ensure that identified patterns of language use were not situational coincidences. These triangulation strategies strengthened the credibility and academic accountability of the findings (Turnbull et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tensions between National Policy and Local Practice

The tension between national language policy and local practices in classrooms in Sukabumi reveals an educational reality that is never entirely linear. Normatively, the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture stipulates that Indonesian is the official medium of instruction in teaching and learning, while local languages are only allotted space as elective local content. This provision is intended to strengthen the function of Indonesian as both a national means of communication and a language of unity. However, in practice, the classroom does not only serve as an arena for policy implementation, but also as a space where students' daily experiences, comfort, and needs shape patterns of interaction. Teachers and students bring Sundanese as part of their linguistic identity, and this language naturally emerges in classroom interactions, both formal and informal.

Findings from interviews illustrate this dynamic. For example, an Indonesian language teacher noted that although she attempted to use Indonesian when opening lessons and giving formal instructions, she often felt the need to repeat explanations in Sundanese when the material was considered difficult. According to her, students were quicker to grasp abstract concepts when explained in a language that was closer to their daily lives. A science teacher further added that using Sundanese to explain certain scientific terms was not a violation of regulations but rather a strategy to prevent students from losing their bearings in understanding the material. These admissions demonstrate that language is not merely a tool of communication but also a flexible pedagogical instrument that must be adjusted to the cognitive needs of students.

Students' experiences corroborate these perspectives. An eighth-grade student admitted that he often felt confused when the teacher exclusively used Indonesian, particularly when introducing new and complex concepts. However, when the explanation was supplemented with Sundanese equivalents, he found it easier to relate the material to his everyday experiences. From this standpoint, the use of Sundanese does not simply "interfere" with mastery of Indonesian but instead opens a bridging space between abstract curriculum concepts and students' familiar realities.

Field observations at SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan reinforce these findings. In one science lesson, the teacher began with instructions in Indonesian, for example, by having students

read aloud the learning objectives written on the board. Yet when moving to an explanation of the human respiratory system, the teacher switched to Sundanese to illustrate the function of the lungs through analogies from daily life. Students appeared more enthusiastic, nodding along and occasionally offering comments in Sundanese. When the teacher returned to emphasize the term alveolus in Indonesian, students were already more prepared to internalize the concept. This observation illustrates a fluid language transition pattern: Indonesian is used as the formal academic language, while Sundanese emerges to clarify, contextualize, and foster student engagement.

The tension evident in this phenomenon is not simply the product of non-compliance with policy. Rather, it arises from pedagogical necessity to ensure that the learning process is effective. Indonesian continues to be positioned as the official language and national symbol, but at the classroom level, teachers and students cannot disregard the comfort and communicative efficacy offered by Sundanese. Thus, this tension can be understood as a form of negotiation between the state's formal authority and local realities in the classroom. The negotiation produces hybrid practices: neither fully obedient to policy nor entirely detached from it.

From a theoretical perspective, this phenomenon can be understood through Hornberger's (2022) continua of biliteracy framework. This framework emphasizes that literacy practices and language use do not occupy a single extreme point but unfold along a spectrum between dominant and local languages, formal and informal contexts, and oral and written modes. In Sukabumi classrooms, Indonesian and Sundanese are not mutually exclusive; rather, they complement each other within this spectrum. Indonesian appears as the representation of policy formality, while Sundanese strengthens accessibility and comprehension. Consequently, the translanguaging practices of teachers and students are not acts of resistance but strategies to move within a dynamic literacy continuum.

Carroll (2022) and Fernández (2024) further develop the idea of translanguaging as an adaptive practice in response to rigid monolingual policies. They stress that translanguaging is not merely about mixing languages but about creating pedagogical spaces that allow students to mobilize their entire linguistic repertoires for learning. What occurs at SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan exemplifies this: teachers and students collaboratively construct a translanguaging space, in which Sundanese is used to bridge understanding while Indonesian is maintained as the academic language. In this way, monolingual policies mandating exclusive use of Indonesian are practically adapted to become more relevant to local contexts.

Viewed from classroom dynamics, the tension between national policy and local practice does not result in frontal conflict but instead produces creative adaptation. This adaptation underscores that classrooms are not only sites of knowledge transfer but also arenas of language politics where teachers and students act as active agents in shaping practices suited to their needs. When a teacher chooses to re-explain concepts in Sundanese, it is not merely a linguistic decision but simultaneously a pedagogical and political act that negotiates the authority of formal policy with local realities.

Teachers as Language Negotiators

In classroom practices at SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan, the role of teachers stands out not only as instructors delivering subject matter but also as language negotiators who daily confront the dilemma between formal policy and pedagogical necessity. Indonesian is officially used in instructions, particularly when teachers begin lessons, state learning objectives, or read out rules from the syllabus. However, when explaining material considered difficult, teachers often shift to Sundanese so that students can better understand the concepts being taught. This demonstrates that teachers occupy a unique position: on the one hand, they must comply with the mandates of national policy, while on the other, they recognize that students' comprehension is the primary priority.

In interviews, for instance, one Indonesian language teacher, referred to here as Ms. S, explained that when teaching formal reading texts, she always began with Indonesian, in line with curriculum demands. Yet, once she noticed students' confused expressions, she felt compelled to re-explain in Sundanese. According to her, using Sundanese was not an act of policy violation but a strategy to ensure that meaning was conveyed to students. This indicates that teachers consciously mediate between policy and classroom practice, aligning with the view that teachers often act as policy mediators, bridging formal regulations with contextual needs in practice.

Field observations clearly illustrate this dynamic. In one science lesson, the teacher opened the class with a formal statement in Indonesian: "Children, today we are going to study the human respiratory system." Yet when explaining the term alveolus and its functions, he shifted into Sundanese, using simple analogies rooted in students' everyday experiences. This language transition occurred naturally, without any explicit announcement that the medium of instruction had changed. Students responded with greater enthusiasm; some who had been silent began to nod and even posed questions. This practice reveals that translanguaging is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a pedagogical strategy that makes learning more inclusive.

Bonacina-Pugh et al. (2021) and Canals (2022) emphasize that translanguaging should not only be understood as language mixing in interaction, but also as a form of pedagogical creativity. Teachers engaging in translanguaging are in fact developing creative ways of dealing with rigid policy regulations. In the context of SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan, such pedagogical creativity appears in the form of linguistic flexibility: teachers demonstrate formal compliance with regulations by using Indonesian for structured academic components, yet simultaneously employ Sundanese as a pedagogical instrument to clarify meaning. Thus, translanguaging becomes a negotiation mechanism between two poles: monolingual policy and multilingual realities.

A science teacher, referred to here as Mr. A, admitted in an informal conversation that he sometimes felt "uneasy" when using too much Sundanese, fearing he might be perceived as not supporting national policy. Yet he also acknowledged that without the help of Sundanese, some students would struggle to follow lessons. His statement reflects a self-aware recognition that he is walking a fine line between compliance and pedagogical success.

Ultimately, teachers like Mr. A choose to prioritize students' comprehension, even if that entails renegotiating the boundaries of policy at the classroom level.

In everyday practice, it is evident that translanguaging strategies also help maintain students' linguistic identity. They feel more comfortable and confident when Sundanese is used as a means of explanation. This was observable when students responded quickly to questions posed in Sundanese, while the same questions asked in Indonesian took them longer to answer. This condition supports arguments by Flynn et al. (2019) and Galante (2024), who contend that translanguaging enables learners to activate their full linguistic repertoires, thereby making the learning process more meaningful. In other words, translanguaging creates space for local languages to remain alive in the classroom without diminishing the function of Indonesian as the official medium.

The analysis of these findings demonstrates that teachers are not simply passive agents implementing top-down policies but active actors who adapt policies to local needs. When teachers consciously employ two languages with distinct functions, they are enacting an adaptive strategy. This strategy is not mere improvisation but reflects a deep understanding of students' socio-linguistic contexts. Teachers are acutely aware that enforcing the use of only one language may disadvantage students in the short term, as conceptual understanding would not be achieved. Through linguistic negotiation, however, students can draw upon the strengths of their local language to foster comprehension, while simultaneously realizing the importance of mastering the national language for academic and future purposes.

Students' Responses and Linguistic Identities

Within classrooms at SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan, students' responses to the language used by teachers reflect profound emotional connections. Sundanese, as the language they use daily at home, among peers, and in broader social interactions, functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a marker of identity. Field observations showed that when teachers posed questions in Indonesian, students tended to answer in subdued voices or remain silent, as if carefully choosing their words. However, once the teacher switched to Sundanese, the atmosphere of the classroom became more vibrant: students answered quickly, smiled, and even offered spontaneous comments. This suggests that Sundanese provides a sense of safety and belonging that encourages them to express themselves more freely.

One student, here referred to as R, explained in an interview that he found it easier to understand and speak when Sundanese was used in class. He noted that Sundanese made teachers' explanations feel closer and more familiar, as though speaking with parents or friends. However, he also acknowledged that although he was more comfortable with Sundanese, he was aware that for national examinations and pursuing higher education, Indonesian remained essential. This statement reflects a dual awareness among students: Sundanese as the language of attachment and identity, and Indonesian as the language of academic and social mobility.

This duality was evident in classroom interactions. When the teacher delivered material on narrative texts in Indonesian, some students appeared hesitant to answer questions, with a few simply looking down. But once the teacher illustrated the lesson with examples in Sundanese, students' responses shifted dramatically. They raised their hands, offered answers, and engaged in lively exchanges. The classroom atmosphere became less rigid, more fluid, and interactive. From these observations, it is clear that Sundanese creates affective spaces that enhance students' emotional engagement with learning, something difficult to achieve if solely relying on formal Indonesian.

Nevertheless, this does not mean students reject or avoid Indonesian. On the contrary, they possess pragmatic awareness that Indonesian is the national language, the language of examinations, and the gateway to broader sources of knowledge. Another student, A, stated that while he preferred teachers using Sundanese, he continued to practice responding in Indonesian, knowing that proficiency in that language would be crucial for his future. Such awareness reveals the dual dynamics in students' linguistic identities: Sundanese functions as a language of belonging affirming cultural roots, while Indonesian serves as a language of mobility enabling them to move beyond local boundaries.

This situation aligns with Dutton & Rushton's (2020) concept of translanguaging space, in which classrooms are understood as fluid arenas where students negotiate their linguistic identities. Within such translanguaging spaces, students are not forced to choose between Sundanese and Indonesian; rather, they use both flexibly to meet communicative, cognitive, and identity needs. In this way, students create inclusive spaces where one language is not positioned as a threat to the other. They can remain grounded in their local community through Sundanese, while simultaneously preparing for broader opportunities by mastering Indonesian.

These conditions also indicate a balance between emotional affiliation and functional orientation. Sundanese provides a sense of belonging, solidarity, and a more comfortable learning atmosphere, while Indonesian functions as symbolic capital valuable in academic and social mobility contexts. This combination demonstrates that students' linguistic identities are not static but dynamic and continually negotiated in daily classroom interactions. Field observations further revealed how students often blended the two languages within a single sentence, for instance, beginning an explanation in Sundanese and completing it in Indonesian. Such practices indicate that translanguaging is not only a teacher strategy but also an integral part of how students construct their linguistic identities.

Underlying these practices is a deeper meaning regarding how students view the role of language in their lives. They understand that Sundanese represents who they are and where they come from, while Indonesian represents who they aspire to become in the future. The interplay of both languages allows students to navigate between two worlds: the emotionally grounded local sphere and the nationally oriented sphere that opens pathways to education and broader opportunities.

Translanguaging sebagai Strategi Pedagogis

In the classrooms of SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan, translanguaging practices are visibly present in the everyday interactions between teachers and students. When teachers explain abstract academic concepts, for example, the term "ecosystem" in science lessons, the initial explanation is delivered in Indonesian, in accordance with textbooks and curriculum guidelines. However, once the teacher notices signs of confusion on students' faces, they immediately shift to Sundanese to provide more concrete examples, such as rice fields, gardens, or rivers that are familiar in students' daily lives. This dynamic shift makes the classroom atmosphere more fluid and enables students to grasp difficult concepts more quickly. Field observations show that once explanations are given in Sundanese, students nod in understanding, with some adding examples from their own experiences, such as fish ponds at home or small forests around their village.

Such practices demonstrate that translanguaging is not merely "mixing languages," but rather a pedagogical strategy that enables teachers to bridge the academic world with students' local experiences. Ho and Tai (2024) emphasize that translanguaging is not only a linguistic practice but also a strategy that integrates cognitive, affective, and identity dimensions in learning. This becomes evident when teachers link academic terms with students' local experiences through Sundanese. On one occasion, a social studies teacher explained the concept of "migration" with its formal definition in Indonesian, then followed up with an illustration in Sundanese about relatives of students migrating to cities for work. Students responded more actively, mentioning their own family experiences, which broadened the scope of the discussion.

In an interview, one teacher, referred to here as Bu S, stated that she could not rely solely on Indonesian, as students would struggle to grasp the lesson. According to her, Sundanese serves as a "shortcut" for students to understand more quickly, though she emphasized the importance of reinforcing academic terms in Indonesian so that students become accustomed to hearing and using them. This statement highlights that translanguaging is not seen as a replacement for Indonesian but as an additional strategy to strengthen comprehension. Teachers are aware that their role is to balance national policy requirements with students' local realities.

From the students' perspective, translanguaging practices provide them with greater confidence. One student, A, explained that when teachers use Sundanese, he feels less afraid to answer or ask questions because the words feel closer to his daily life. However, he also added that teachers often ask students to repeat their answers in Indonesian, especially when it concerns formal terms in textbooks. This demonstrates that translanguaging enables students to move dynamically: they feel comfortable processing concepts in Sundanese while also training themselves to articulate their understanding in Indonesian. Field observations reinforce this point: students who initially answer in Sundanese are then guided to repeat in Indonesian, and they do so without appearing pressured.

This practice shows that translanguaging is not simply a pragmatic solution to overcome language barriers, but rather an effective pedagogical strategy in multilingual

education contexts. Rather than treating linguistic differences as obstacles, teachers employ them as resources that enrich the learning process. Through translanguaging, teachers are able to align students' cognitive demands (conceptual understanding), affective needs (comfort and connectedness), and linguistic identities (pride in Sundanese alongside awareness of Indonesian's importance). This aligns with Lin and Leung's (2024) perspective that translanguaging creates a space where students can draw upon their full linguistic repertoires to learn more meaningfully.

Moreover, translanguaging functions as a form of pedagogical creativity in dealing with rigid regulations. Formally, national language policy mandates the use of Indonesian as the main language of instruction. However, classroom realities demand flexibility. Teachers find a middle ground by practicing translanguaging, maintaining Indonesian as the official language while simultaneously allowing Sundanese to reinforce comprehension. Observations show that this pattern occurs across nearly all subjects, including science, social studies, and even Indonesian language classes. For instance, when teaching text structure in expository writing, the Indonesian language teacher still used Indonesian to explain sections of the text, but during class discussions, students were allowed to use Sundanese for examples, before switching back into Indonesian.

Language Policy Adaptation through Local Practices

In the context of learning at SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan, Sukabumi, classroom language practices demonstrate that the national policy mandating Indonesian as the medium of instruction is not ignored but rather adapted contextually by teachers and students. This adaptation emerges as a balance between formal compliance with policy directives and the practical need to use Sundanese to ensure effective learning. At the beginning of lessons, instructions, greetings, and the announcement of learning objectives are almost always delivered in Indonesian. Yet, as soon as the material becomes complex or difficult to grasp, teachers fluidly shift into Sundanese. Field observations reveal that these shifts are not merely spontaneous choices but rather an internalized strategy, where teachers actively ensure that no student is left behind in comprehension.

This adaptive practice is particularly evident in science classes when teachers explain technical terms such as "respiratory system" or "photosynthesis." Initially, the terms are presented in Indonesian as they appear in textbooks. However, once students show signs of confusion, teachers quickly supplement explanations in Sundanese, using local examples more relatable to students' lives, such as describing how rice leaves in the fields "produce white smoke" as a simple analogy for photosynthesis. Students appear to understand more easily once such local-language explanations are provided. This phenomenon indicates that Indonesian continues to function as the legitimate academic language, but learning success is supported by contextualized explanations in Sundanese.

In an interview, one teacher, referred to as Pak D, emphasized that his use of Sundanese was not meant to oppose policy but to implement it in ways students could accept. He argued that the goal of the policy is for students to master Indonesian, but if its delivery is rigid and incomprehensible, the policy's essence would not be achieved. He stressed that

Sundanese acts as a bridge to understanding, which ultimately strengthens mastery of Indonesian. This statement underscores that adaptation is not an act of resistance but a form of bottom-up policy negotiation that enriches implementation.

Further classroom observations show that students do not perceive bilingual practices as contradictory but rather as natural. When teachers ask questions in Indonesian, students often respond in Sundanese, after which teachers ask them to repeat in Indonesian. Students comply willingly, perceiving this as part of the natural classroom dynamic. This illustrates that formal policy remains present but is flexibly adapted to local needs. Teachers serve as mediators of policy, while students actively participate in negotiating everyday language practices.

This phenomenon can be analyzed within the framework of multilingual education flexibility. Dutton and Rushton (2020) argue that multilingual classrooms should not be viewed as spaces for enforcing rigid boundaries between languages, but as fluid spaces where all of students' linguistic resources can be mobilized. In this context, language policy adaptation through local practice in Simpenan demonstrates how national policies can operate more inclusively when interpreted by actors on the ground. In other words, the effectiveness of policy is not only determined by top-down regulations but also by the flexibility of its application, enabling teachers and students to find the most relevant ways to enact it.

This adaptation process also illustrates that multilingual education in Indonesia holds great potential if not framed as a dichotomy between the "national" and the "local." Rather, the two domains can complement each other. Indonesian sustains national cohesion and academic legitimacy, while local languages such as Sundanese strengthen affective connectedness and ensure students' comprehension of subject matter. Thus, local practices are not obstacles to policy but tangible contributions from the field that help maintain policy relevance in complex multilingual settings.

This aligns with Prilutskaya's (2021) view that language policy is not only the state's formal texts but also includes the practices and beliefs of its speech communities. What occurs at SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan illustrates that Indonesia's national language policy is enriched by the everyday practices of teachers and students, who adapt without undermining policy goals. This adaptation demonstrates that policy is living and fluid, shaped by the interaction between formal regulations and the real needs of classroom practice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesia's national language policy, which positions Indonesian as the main language of instruction, is not implemented rigidly in classrooms but negotiated through more contextualized local practices. In Sundanese-speaking classrooms at SMP Negeri 3 Simpenan, the formal policy gains renewed relevance when combined with translanguaging strategies that allow dynamic shifts between Indonesian and Sundanese. Such practices demonstrate that the use of Sundanese is not an act of resistance but a pedagogical mechanism to strengthen student comprehension while maintaining their

linguistic identity. Accordingly, this research affirms that the effectiveness of language policy is determined not only by top-down regulation but also by bottom-up adaptation emerging from students' real needs and teachers' creative mediation of learning processes. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis that language policy in Indonesia should be understood as a fluid arena of negotiation, where local multilingual practices, such as those in Sundanese contexts, offer important models for designing more flexible, responsive, and inclusive policies toward the nation's linguistic diversity.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

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