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Language Ideologies and Educational Inequality: Linguistic Hierarchies in an Elite Multilingual School in Jakarta

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Abstract

This study investigates how language ideologies shape and reproduce educational inequality in an elite multilingual school in Jakarta. In Indonesia's multilingual context, where Bahasa Indonesia functions as the national language alongside hundreds of local languages, English has assumed a dominant role in elite private schools adopting international curricula such as Cambridge. Within this setting, English serves as the primary medium of instruction, Bahasa Indonesia is used mainly for informal communication, and local languages are virtually absent. The research explores how linguistic hierarchies are constructed, practiced, and legitimized through classroom discourse and institutional policy, and how these hierarchies affect students' learning experiences and access to educational opportunities. Using a qualitative design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and administrators, and document analysis of language policies, syllabi, and promotional materials. Data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) within the frameworks of Language Ideology Theory and Bourdieu's linguistic capital. Findings reveal that English functions as high-status linguistic capital associated with intelligence, global citizenship, and socioeconomic privilege, while Bahasa Indonesia occupies a pragmatic and subordinate role. Students from non-English-speaking backgrounds face subtle linguistic and social barriers, reinforcing educational stratification. The study contributes to Southeast Asian sociolinguistics by highlighting how elite multilingual education sustains symbolic inequality and calls for more inclusive language policies balancing global and national identities.

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INTRODUCTION

Language mirrors social structure, and within elite educational spaces, it often serves as the most subtle yet decisive marker of status. In Indonesia, a multilingual nation with Bahasa Indonesia as the national language alongside hundreds of local languages, language use in schools should ideally strengthen national identity and ensure equitable access to education (Mitchell et al., 2022; Winarti, 2018). However, the reality often moves in the opposite direction. In elite private schools adopting international curricula such as Cambridge or the International Baccalaureate (IB), English dominates nearly every academic and social domain. Bahasa Indonesia is often relegated to informal conversations among students, while local languages have disappeared entirely from everyday practice. This phenomenon reflects a language ideology that positions English at the top of the linguistic hierarchy, revealing the reproduction of social inequality beneath the façade of educational modernity (Parba, 2018;

Woolard, 2020).

The dominance of English in international schools in Jakarta is not merely a matter of instructional language choice; it represents a broader structure of symbolic power. English is imagined as the key to social mobility, intellectual prestige, and global citizenship, whereas Bahasa Indonesia is perceived as less prestigious and "uncompetitive" in the global market (Khasbani, 2019). This inequality becomes particularly evident when considering who has access to mastering English. Students from upper-middle-class families typically grow up in English-speaking environments and can afford high tuition fees at international schools. Conversely, for students from less privileged backgrounds, English can serve as an invisible barrier to academic and social success. Thus, elite multilingual schools risk becoming spaces that reproduce both linguistic and social inequalities, a form of disguised inequity behind the narrative of "global education."

Scholars in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology have long explored the notion of language ideology. Haidar and Fang (2019) describe it as "a key link between linguistic forms and social forms," a belief system connecting language practices with social and political structures. Kurniasari and Mbato (2018) and Paradewari and Mbato (1998) emphasize that language ideology always involves processes of differentiation and hierarchization, wherein certain languages are valued more highly than others. In educational contexts, Bouchard (2019) and Hornberger et al. (2018) demonstrate that language policies in schools are never neutral but are imbued with ideological values that favor specific social groups. Setyono (2018) even identifies the dominance of English in global education as a form of linguistic imperialism, where language functions as an instrument of cultural and economic power.

Several studies have highlighted the impact of English dominance on identity and educational equity. Fang (2018) and Zein et al. (2020) note that the spread of English often coincides with the marginalization of local languages and the internalization of Western values in developing countries' educational systems. In Southeast Asia, Hamied and Musthafa (2019) and Mirhosseini (2018) reveal that bilingual or multilingual policies tend to be symbolic, while national languages are officially recognized, English remains the dominant symbol of progress and elitism. In Indonesia, Muttaqin et al. (2020) and Saputra and Saputra (2020) observe that English language education often imitates native-speaker models, thereby neglecting the academic function of Bahasa Indonesia.

Research has also shown that international schools in major Indonesian cities serve as arenas for reproducing social and cultural capital. J. F. K. Lee (2019) and J. F. K. Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020) argue that international education functions as a mechanism for constructing global elite identities, with English serving as linguistic capital that reinforces social class distinctions. Similarly, Gouvias and Alexopoulos (2018) and Guzmán et al. (2021) contend that multilingualism in the global context does not always promote inclusive diversity; rather, it often manifests as marketable multilingualism, where linguistic diversity is recognized only when it carries economic value. In Indonesia, Coffey (2018) and Sah and Li (2018) observe that internationally oriented schools tend to construct "global" identities by

marginalizing local languages and cultures, positioning Bahasa Indonesia merely as a formal national symbol rather than as a medium for intellectual expression.

Nevertheless, not all studies adopt a critical stance. Some, such as Harvey and Mallman (2019) and Preece (2019), interpret the teaching of English in international schools as a positive adaptation to educational globalization. This perspective positions English proficiency as a prerequisite for Indonesian students to compete globally. However, such arguments often overlook the ideological dimensions behind language use, namely, who benefits, who is marginalized, and how social structures are reproduced through school language policies. Consequently, research focusing on language ideology in Indonesia's elite international schools remains scarce, despite these institutions serving as social laboratories where language, power, and identity intersect.

Most existing studies on multilingualism in Indonesia focus on public education or regional contexts, such as Huot et al. (2020) on local language shifts or Drajati et al. (2018) and Sutisna and Vonti (2020) on language revitalization. Research on elite private schools with international curricula, especially in Jakarta, remains limited from a language ideology perspective. Yet, within these spaces, symbolic negotiations occur between linguistic nationalism and economic globalization. Understanding how language ideologies are formed, enacted, and socially accepted in such schools is crucial for analyzing new dynamics of educational inequality in Indonesia.

The main limitation of previous studies lies in their lack of attention to everyday practices within classrooms and social interactions among educational actors. Many have remained at the level of policy or public discourse, without tracing how language ideologies are enacted and negotiated in concrete school practices. This study, therefore, adopts a combined approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Ethnography of Communication to examine how language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a field of power that reproduces or challenges social structures. By analyzing linguistic practices in Jakarta's elite multilingual schools, from classroom discourse to informal interactions, this research opens new perspectives on how linguistic hierarchies are constructed and maintained within the framework of globalized education in Indonesia.

By integrating discourse analysis, ethnographic observation, and in-depth interviews, this study seeks to uncover not only how language is used but also why it is used and with what consequences. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of language in mediating access to knowledge, social status, and cultural identity. Amid global pressures urging educational institutions to adopt "international standards," this research provides a critical reflection on the meaning of Indonesianness in elite education and the position of the national language within the global marketplace.

Ultimately, this study argues that language issues in schools are not merely matters of communication or pedagogy but also of social justice and cultural representation. By examining language ideologies and linguistic hierarchies in Jakarta's elite multilingual schools, the research illustrates how language operates as a symbolic instrument that determines who is considered "intelligent," "modern," or "global." Through this lens, it calls for greater

awareness in shaping more inclusive educational policies, ones that not only pursue global standards but also reaffirm linguistic equality and national identity as integral to educational justice.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, primarily because its objective is not to measure quantitative relationships among variables but to understand the meanings, experiences, and social practices that shape language ideology in elite multilingual educational settings. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore deeply the hidden social processes behind everyday practices, how language is used, interpreted, and negotiated by actors within a particular institutional context. As Wiesner (2022) asserts, qualitative research allows scholars to interpret phenomena within the sociocultural contexts in which they occur. In this study, the focus extends beyond classroom language use to include the underlying ideologies and symbolic power relations.

The research was conducted at Sekolah Bakti Mulya 400, located in South Jakarta, selected through purposive sampling. The school adopts the Cambridge curriculum and represents a type of elite private education in Indonesia's urban centers that combines global values with local context. It exemplifies a linguistic paradox, between the nationalist spirit mandated by Indonesia's educational policy and the practical dominance of English as a symbol of prestige. According to Gephart (2018), qualitative site selection should prioritize information-rich cases, and this institution meets that criterion given its diverse actors, complex language policies, and distinctive sociolinguistic dynamics.

Fifteen participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to and involvement in the school's linguistic practices. They comprised five teachers (from English, Mathematics, and Science subjects), eight high school students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, and two school administrators, including the principal and the Cambridge curriculum coordinator. This selection acknowledges that these groups occupy different positions and experiences regarding school language policy and practice, thereby providing a comprehensive perspective on emerging language ideologies. As Guillen (2019) notes, selecting participants with diverse yet relevant perspectives is essential for capturing the complexity of social phenomena.

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted over four weeks across three classes, English, Science, and Mathematics, to record language-use patterns between teachers and students, as well as the social contexts in which code-switching occurred. The observation was moderately participatory: the researcher was present in classrooms without interrupting teaching processes but close enough to capture authentic linguistic interactions (J. J. Lee & Thorne, 2022).

Semi-structured interviews followed the observation phase to deepen the interpretation of preliminary findings. Teacher interviews explored their views on school language policy, the rationale for language choices, and perceptions of students' linguistic

abilities. Student interviews focused on their learning experiences within the multilingual system, their confidence in language use, and their perceptions of the symbolic value of English and Bahasa Indonesia. Interviews with administrators sought to uncover institutionalized language ideologies embedded in policy documents and public communication.

Document analysis included the Cambridge syllabus, school language policy, and promotional materials (e.g., brochures and website content). This analysis aimed to identify institutional representations of language ideology consistent with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, which views discourse as both text and social practice that reflects and shapes power structures (Bouvier & Machin, 2020).

Triangulation was conducted across data sources and participant groups. Observational data were compared with interview narratives to assess consistency between practice and perception. The researcher also employed member checking by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to ensure alignment with their lived experiences. Official school documents served as a further triangulation source against interview and observational data. This process not only enhanced data validity but also enriched the understanding of how language ideologies operate within complex educational environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Linguistic Landscape of the Elite Multilingual School

This section begins by describing the sociolinguistic context of an elite multilingual school in Jakarta, which serves as the research site. The school positions itself as a *global educational institution*, as reflected in its language policy, curriculum design, and visual representations dominating the school's social spaces. Upon entering the school gate, visitors are greeted by a sign reading *"Excellence for a Global Future,"* entirely in English, accompanied by the flags of various nations waving in front of the main building. Along the corridor walls, posters display slogans such as *"International Mindedness"* and *"English as the Language of Success."* Almost no visible trace of Bahasa Indonesia appears, except for small administrative nameplates such as *"Kepala Sekolah"* (Principal) or *"Tata Usaha"* (Administration Office), which are also accompanied by English translations underneath. Local or regional languages are entirely absent, neither in textual, symbolic, nor everyday communicative forms within the school environment.

This condition vividly illustrates that language at the school functions not merely as a communicative tool but also as a means of representing social identity and symbolic status. Through the visual and verbal dominance of English, the school constructs an image of itself as a modern, cosmopolitan, and globally oriented institution. Within Bourdieu's (2018b) concept of the *linguistic market*, English operates as a form of linguistic capital with high exchange value, perceived as a key resource granting access to broader social and economic mobility. Bahasa Indonesia, despite being the national language, serves only a secondary communicative function in administrative or ceremonial contexts such as flag ceremonies. As

one teacher, anonymized as Mrs. S., explained, this policy has long been part of the school's branding strategy: *"We want our students to get used to an English-speaking environment because that's what they'll face internationally."* This statement demonstrates that language use in this context extends beyond pedagogy, it reflects the institutional ideology embedded in the school's identity.

Field observations reinforce this impression. Within classrooms, teachers and students communicate almost exclusively in English, even during casual exchanges. When a student attempts to explain something in Bahasa Indonesia, the teacher gently reminds them, *"Let's try in English, please."* In the teachers' lounge, informal conversations among educators are also predominantly in English, with occasional switches to Bahasa Indonesia for administrative matters or practical concerns. Bahasa Indonesia thus appears *functionally limited*, used only when pragmatic clarity is required or when bridging comprehension gaps for students with less developed English proficiency. This phenomenon reveals a subtle yet powerful linguistic hierarchy, wherein each language occupies a distinct social role, shaping the linguistic habitus of students and staff alike.

The school's Cambridge-based curriculum further reinforces this ideology. Nearly all subjects, including Science, Mathematics, and even Social Studies, are taught in English. Bahasa Indonesia occupies only a marginal position, limited to compulsory national subjects. In interviews, a student identified as A.R. admitted that the Indonesian language course "feels less important than the others," as it is not used in international examinations and is irrelevant for overseas university admissions. This attitude reflects an internalized valuation that privileges global languages over national ones, a phenomenon also identified in studies of elite multilingualism in East Asian international schools (C. S. Lee, 2019). Such studies reveal that global languages like English function not merely as communicative tools but as markers of class distinction and cultural capital. Similarly, in this Jakarta-based school, English signifies modernity and intellectual sophistication, whereas Bahasa Indonesia is associated with the *local* and the *less global*.

Beyond classroom practices and curricula, the school's visual landscape reinforces this symbolic hegemony. On notice boards, admission brochures, and the school's official website, nearly all textual content appears in English, employing rhetorical styles that emphasize global values such as *leadership*, *critical thinking*, and *global citizenship*. Bahasa Indonesia is reserved only for legal or administrative sections mandated by national regulations. In the school's exhibition hall, for instance, a poster titled *"Our Future Leaders"* features students in formal attire delivering speeches on a stage framed by the United Nations flag. Such visualizations symbolically assert that English proficiency constitutes an integral component of the *global middle-class identity* that the school idealizes. These observations illustrate how language operates as a *signifier*, constructing the school's social identity while legitimizing broader social hierarchies.

From Bourdieu's (2018a) theoretical perspective, this scenario represents the formation of a non-neutral linguistic market. English becomes a commodified language endowed with high economic, social, and symbolic value, legitimized by both society and the

global labor market. Conversely, Bahasa Indonesia and local languages lose their exchange value within the elite school context, despite their symbolic national significance. This process exemplifies the reproduction of symbolic inequality, wherein global languages emerge as powerful capital while local languages are marginalized. Loizzo et al. (2018) reinforce this analysis, noting that in many Asian international schools, the use of global languages reflects not only pedagogical choices but also subtle mechanisms of social exclusion, accessible primarily to those who already possess specific forms of linguistic and economic capital.

Within the empirical context of the studied school, the implications of this linguistic hierarchy manifest clearly in students' social interactions. Learners from non-elite backgrounds or with lower English proficiency often appear hesitant to participate in class discussions. In an interview, a tutoring teacher, anonymized as Mr. R., acknowledged, *"Students whose English isn't fluent tend to be quieter, afraid of making mistakes, and often withdraw."* This observation suggests that English dominance shapes not only the institution's public image but also its internal social structure, governing who is deemed *competent* and who is *less capable*. In this sense, language functions as a mechanism of social selection that reinforces class boundaries within the school itself.

English as Symbolic Capital and the Construction of Linguistic Prestige

In the elite multilingual school examined here, English functions not only as a medium of academic communication but also as a symbol of social status and intelligence collectively recognized by the school community. In this context, language operates as a form of *symbolic capital*, a source of symbolic power whose value is legitimized by a particular social group (Bourdieu, 2018a). Within this institution, this value materializes in the form of greater recognition afforded to those fluent in English, a linguistic prestige that regulates social interactions, academic hierarchies, and even the personal identities of students and teachers. English is not merely practiced; it is *performed* as a marker of intellect and modernity, functioning as a symbolic currency that delineates those who belong to the *globally empowered* from those positioned at the margins.

Classroom observations reveal how this symbolic value operates subtly yet effectively. When a teacher begins a lesson with greetings such as *"Good morning, everyone. Let's get started with today's topic!"*, students respond enthusiastically in English, establishing English as the normative linguistic code. In several classes, students who speak with a more "natural" or "native-like" accent receive greater attention from teachers and peers. During group discussions, for instance, a student named A.L., who had previously studied abroad, is often chosen as spokesperson, perceived as more capable of articulating ideas "better" in English. This suggests that English fluency is not only evaluated in academic terms but also serves as a symbol of social competence and an enhanced form of self-representation.

Teachers further reinforce this construction of symbolic value. In an interview, one teacher, anonymized as Mrs. D., admitted that students' English proficiency is often regarded as an indicator of *academic quality*. She noted that while some students possess strong subject mastery, they are often perceived as *less confident* if their English skills are limited. This reveals an evaluative mechanism oriented not solely toward academic substance but

toward the ability to perform within a linguistically prestigious code. From Bourdieu's (2018a) perspective, this exemplifies *symbolic power*, an invisible mechanism that legitimizes specific social structures through languages deemed more legitimate and prestigious.

Similar patterns emerge in students' informal interactions outside the classroom. In cafeterias or rest areas, students conversing in English often attract more attention and are perceived as more confident. While code-switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia occurs, English remains dominant. For instance, students might say, *"We should totally join the debate club, it's good for our English,"* followed by approving laughter in English. Meanwhile, students more comfortable with Bahasa Indonesia tend to remain quieter, often relegated to the role of listener. Such linguistic practices represent symbolic actions that structure access to social recognition. Those who can speak English fluently acquire a form of *linguistic honor* that consolidates their social positioning within the school community.

In an interview, one student, anonymized as R.N., reflected on this phenomenon: speaking English made her feel "smarter and more confident," yet she sometimes felt uncomfortable when conversing with more fluent peers: *"Sometimes, if my grammar's wrong, my friends kind of judge me a little."* This statement highlights the paradox of linguistic capital, it empowers some while simultaneously inducing feelings of inadequacy and exclusion in others. Language thus becomes a marker of distinction separating those with high linguistic capital, typically from educated, affluent families, from those without.

These findings align with studies on *linguistic privilege* in elite bilingual schools across East Asia (Verge et al., 2018). Lee's research demonstrates that English proficiency often functions as a subtle form of social exclusion, as access to English-speaking environments is usually limited to groups possessing particular economic and cultural resources. A similar pattern emerges in the Jakarta school studied here: students from upper-middle-class backgrounds tend to have early exposure to English courses, international interactions, or overseas schooling experiences, while those from less privileged backgrounds lag behind linguistically, resulting in subtle social subordination.

Another teacher, anonymized as Mr. T., reflected that English proficiency often reflects "exposure since childhood" rather than innate intelligence: *"Kids whose families travel often or watch English movies connect faster, but that doesn't mean they're smarter, just more used to it."* This insight underscores that linguistic competence is not purely an individual attribute but a product of unequally distributed social and cultural capital. Thus, English mastery operates as a class marker rather than a mere educational achievement.

From Bourdieu's (2018a) perspective, language serves as a tool of social reproduction, transmitting symbolic capital across generations. Within this school, students possessing high linguistic capital from the outset tend to maintain dominant positions in the school's social space. They participate more actively in academic and extracurricular activities, display greater confidence in public speaking, and often become role models for peers. Conversely, students with limited English proficiency are subtly excluded from significant spaces of social participation. As a result, the school's professed values of globalism and multilingualism inadvertently reinforce internal social hierarchies grounded in linguistic competence.

This symbolic structure becomes especially evident during extracurricular activities such as the *Public Speaking Club*. Teachers lavish praise on students who deliver speeches with near-native accents, labeling them as "true global students." Meanwhile, those speaking with local accents, despite delivering strong content, receive minimal recognition. Such practices institutionalize a symbolic standard in which *accent authenticity* becomes a marker of superiority, reinforcing the idea that the most legitimate linguistic proficiency entails the emulation of an idealized global identity.

Bahasa Indonesia and the Pragmatics of Linguistic Subordination

In elite multilingual schools in Jakarta, *Bahasa Indonesia* occupies a paradoxical position: ideologically celebrated as the national language and symbol of unity, yet in everyday practice functioning only pragmatically and subordinately. Within classroom spaces, it is not the primary medium of thought or knowledge production but rather serves as a linguistic bridge to aid students' comprehension of materials delivered in English. This position reveals that *Bahasa Indonesia* no longer operates as an intellectual language within elite education but has been reduced to a *linguistic crutch*, a temporary support when the English-based teaching system encounters communicative barriers. This phenomenon exemplifies what Anderson (2019) terms *language ideology and inequality*, namely how institutional language policies and practices reproduce symbolic power structures that weaken the national language under the hegemony of global languages.

Field observations reveal a consistent pattern across various classrooms. In a high school science session, the teacher begins entirely in English, explaining concepts such as *photosynthesis* or *energy transfer* fluently. However, when some students appear confused, the teacher suddenly switches to *Bahasa Indonesia* in a softer tone: "So basically, energy moves from the sun to plants, yes?" After a brief clarification, the teacher returns to English to continue the lesson. Such transitions occur repeatedly, demonstrating the pragmatic function of *Bahasa Indonesia*, used only when English loses communicative effectiveness. In these interactions, the national language does not function as the main medium of cognition but as an emergency instrument ensuring knowledge transmission remains unimpeded.

In interviews, one teacher, referred to as Mrs. S., admitted that she often used *Bahasa Indonesia* "when the children start to look confused or go silent." She added that it was "only to make sure they understand the concept, not to replace the medium of instruction." This statement highlights the subordinated position of *Bahasa Indonesia*: it is useful, even necessary, yet lacks the same symbolic legitimacy as English. Within the institutional logic of the school, English remains the language of knowledge, while *Bahasa Indonesia* serves merely as a language of clarification.

Students are acutely aware of this hierarchy and have internalized it in their linguistic perceptions. As one student, pseudonymized as N.A., remarked, when teachers switch to *Bahasa Indonesia*, "it feels like a short break, a relaxation time, not serious study time." Another student, R.F., noted that using *Bahasa Indonesia* "feels easier when I'm tired of thinking in English," but added that "if we keep speaking Indonesian, it doesn't feel cool in this school." These remarks explicitly reveal the differentiated social values attached to each

language: English is associated with seriousness and prestige, whereas *Bahasa Indonesia* is linked with comfort and familiarity, domains considered less valuable within elite educational contexts.

This phenomenon cannot be detached from school language policy and curricular orientation. By adopting the Cambridge curriculum, English becomes the *de facto* language across nearly all academic activities. Teaching materials, syllabi, and even assessments are designed in English, while *Bahasa Indonesia* appears only in "Indonesian Studies," often perceived as a "light subject" or "time filler." Observations of bulletin boards and promotional media reinforce this hierarchy, slogans such as "Empowering Future Global Leaders" or "Excellence Through English" are exclusively in English, with no *Bahasa Indonesia* representation of institutional identity. Symbolically, this constructs a clear linguistic hierarchy: English at the top, *Bahasa Indonesia* in the middle, and local languages at the bottom, or entirely absent.

In the framework of language ideology theory proposed by Bailey et al. (2020), this situation reflects *institutionalized language ideology*, wherein language policies and practices are never neutral but embedded with values and interests that reinforce social hierarchies. English represents globalism, modernity, and intelligence, while *Bahasa Indonesia* is reduced to a token of local identity, stripped of intellectual and symbolic capital within elite education. Linguistic inequality, therefore, is not a matter of individual preference but a manifestation of institutionalized value systems.

An interview with the school principal, pseudonymized as Mr. R., further illustrates this institutional legitimation. He asserted that English-medium instruction was part of the school's "internationalization vision," claiming that "students must be prepared to compete globally." However, when asked about the role of *Bahasa Indonesia*, he replied that it "remains important for national identity but doesn't need to be the main academic language." This statement exemplifies a common ambivalence in Indonesian elite education: while there is symbolic acknowledgment of *Bahasa Indonesia's* importance, there remains a structural belief that it lacks the prestige and intellectual weight needed in a globalized era.

This paradox reflects the tension between linguistic nationalism and the neoliberal realities of education. At the national policy level, *Bahasa Indonesia* is declared the unifying tool and official language of education. Yet in globally oriented elite schools, this principle is compromised for the sake of international image. Educational globalization, driven by values of competitiveness and international mobility, has created new symbolic inequalities wherein the national language becomes marginalized within its own homeland. As Artasia et al. (2022) argue, language ideologies operate not only through formal policy but also through everyday practices that subtly shape perceptions of what constitutes a "valuable" versus a "merely useful" language. Within this context, *Bahasa Indonesia* shifts from a symbolic position to a pragmatic one, useful, but not prestigious.

Field observations further reveal how students position *Bahasa Indonesia* in their social lives. Outside the classroom, it is used casually in conversations, jokes, or informal discussions. However, once the context turns academic or formal, such as during class

presentations, students instantly switch to English, even when speaking to fellow Indonesians. In one group presentation, when a student briefly used *Bahasa Indonesia*, a peer gently reminded, "English, please," half-joking but firm. Such micro-interactions illustrate how linguistic norms are socially constructed and maintained: English becomes the moral standard for "serious communication," while *Bahasa Indonesia* remains confined to informality.

Within the framework of language ideology, this phenomenon represents not merely a shift in linguistic function but a broader symbolic reconfiguration. *Bahasa Indonesia* loses its *symbolic capital* within elite education, not because of declining quality or relevance, but due to institutional and social systems that privilege economic value and globalism over national identity. Consequently, the subordination of *Bahasa Indonesia* is not merely linguistic but structural, revealing deeper inequalities between the global and the local.

Silenced Vernaculars: The Absence of Local Languages in Global Education

This chapter begins by revealing how the absence of local languages in international schools in Jakarta is not a mere linguistic coincidence but a reflection of subtle mechanisms of symbolic power. In the daily life of the school, local languages are not only unused but seemingly non-existent. Throughout months of field observation, not a single instance of local language use was recorded, whether in classrooms, corridors, or informal interactions between students and teachers. Bulletin boards, event posters, and banners were all written in English, with Bahasa Indonesia appearing only in limited administrative contexts. Languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, or Minangkabau were entirely invisible, not even acknowledged as part of the linguistic identity of the school community. When asked whether students ever used local languages at school, one responded with mild surprise: "Local languages are for home, not for school." This response reflects the entrenched idea that schools are "global spaces," where local languages have no legitimate place.

This phenomenon can be interpreted through the concept of symbolic erasure, the process by which a language or culture is rendered invisible because it is deemed irrelevant to the dominant order. In this school context, local languages are not only practically excluded but also ideologically erased from symbolic representation. Observations revealed that both teachers and students rarely, if ever, mentioned their local languages. One English teacher, who identified as Sundanese, admitted that she "rarely" used Sundanese at school because "it would confuse the students and doesn't feel professional." Such remarks exemplify the internalization of the belief that professionalism and linguistic modernity are embodied only through global or national languages, not local ones.

Drawing on Bourdieu (2018a), this can be understood as a form of symbolic violence, a type of cultural domination that operates invisibly through symbolic legitimacy. As an institution, the school possesses the authority to determine which languages are valuable and which are not. English occupies the highest position as linguistic capital with high economic and social value, followed by Bahasa Indonesia as a national symbol, while local languages are expelled from the sphere of legitimacy. When a language ceases to be used, it loses both its communicative and symbolic functions. Thus, the erasure of local languages is not simply a

linguistic issue but a question of power, who has the right to define what language is deemed appropriate within elite educational spaces.

These findings align with Khanlou et al. (2022), who discuss commodified multilingualism in East Asia, emphasizing how global schools privilege economically valuable languages, especially English, while relegating local languages as "non-market languages." In the context of Jakarta's international schools, local languages hold no exchange value within the institutional linguistic marketplace, offering neither academic nor symbolic benefit. One student noted that speaking a local language "isn't really useful if you plan to study abroad." Such statements reveal a commodified linguistic consciousness shaped by global economic logic, where a language's worth is measured by its utility for competitiveness and career advancement.

Visual observation of the school environment further reinforces this ideology of "global identity" through English. The main hall displays a large slogan reading "Empowering Global Minds," accompanied by a list of foreign universities attended by alumni. There is no linguistic or cultural representation linking the school to its Indonesian context, except during ceremonial moments such as Independence Day celebrations, where Bahasa Indonesia appears briefly in formal usage. Even then, the decorations and narratives foreground global values like "diversity," "excellence," and "leadership." The absence of local languages in these symbolic displays exemplifies what Masunah et al. (2021) and Prameswari et al. (2020) describe as iconization, a process by which global languages are iconized as symbols of progress and rationality, while local languages are relegated to the realm of tradition and backwardness.

This process extends beyond institutional structures to individual self-perception. In interviews, several students confessed to feeling embarrassed when using local languages at school. One student from Sumatra recounted that when she accidentally used a local word, her peers mimicked her playfully, discouraging her from doing so again. Although such behavior was not overtly malicious, it reflects how local languages are constructed as "other" and "less prestigious" in spaces that idealize English proficiency. Bourdieu's concept of misrecognition aptly describes this: the dominated accept their own subordination as natural, perceiving linguistic domination as legitimate.

In this context, the silence surrounding local languages signifies more than the loss of linguistic diversity, it reveals a new form of symbolic colonialism operating through global education. The neoliberal orientation of schooling, centered on international competence, global mobility, and English-medium standards, creates a structure that marginalizes local languages to the periphery. Consequently, local languages lose not only communicative relevance but also cultural and symbolic legitimacy.

This analysis underscores that the erasure of local languages is not merely a pragmatic choice for communicative efficiency but a systemic ideological outcome that values languages based on their economic and symbolic capital. When local languages lack "market value," they are gradually excluded from formal educational domains. Over time, this process risks weakening students' connections to their cultural roots and linguistic identities. As O'Doherty

et al. (2018) assert, language ideologies shape not only language use but also how individuals understand themselves within broader social structures.

Linguistic Hierarchies and Educational Inequality: From Classroom to Social Structure

The linguistic hierarchy established in an elite multilingual school in Jakarta reflects not only patterns of language use but also deeper social structures, structures that delineate who holds symbolic power and who does not. Classroom observations and everyday interactions reveal that English proficiency functions not merely as a communicative skill but as a primary key to gaining both academic and social recognition. Each lesson begins and ends in English; discussions, presentations, and even humor in the classroom are all conducted in that language. Students who respond fluently, employ what is perceived as a "natural" accent, and use appropriate academic vocabulary often receive explicit praise from teachers, such as "Excellent point!" or "That's a very smart observation." Conversely, students who hesitate or mix Indonesian in their responses are often met with little or no acknowledgment.

Field observations show a recurring pattern: students from families who use English at home tend to be more active in discussions, more confident in asking questions, and have closer relationships with teachers. They are able to interpret complex instructions with ease and sometimes assist peers who struggle to understand. In contrast, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds tend to remain passive and prefer silence. One student (F.R.) confessed that he often felt left behind not because he did not understand the lesson content, but because he "needed more time to translate" in his mind. He noted that his more fluent peers seemed "smarter," although, according to him, the only difference lay in their linguistic environment at home. This statement illustrates a form of symbolic inequality that operates implicitly, where English proficiency becomes a perceived measure of intelligence and academic prestige.

In such contexts, language functions as a mechanism of social filtering. The school appears "neutral" because it does not officially discriminate based on linguistic background; however, the values embedded in its curriculum, classroom practices, and social interactions reinforce hierarchical structures. When students perceive that success depends on mastery of a language to which not all have equal access, inequality is reproduced systematically. Gustine (2018) refers to this phenomenon as the critical sociolinguistics of inequality, in which global languages such as English play a central role in reproducing structural inequities within education. Language, therefore, is not neutral but a vehicle of power that determines who can fully participate in academic practices and who is symbolically marginalized.

One teacher (N.T.), in an interview, mentioned that students fluent in English usually demonstrate better "critical thinking." However, upon further inquiry, it became apparent that "critical thinking" was largely measured by a student's ability to articulate ideas fluently in English rather than by the quality of those ideas. This conflation of language proficiency with intellectual capacity reveals how linguistic competence is equated with intelligence. Consequently, students with strong analytical abilities but limited fluency in English become less visible. Bourdieu (2018a) describes this as an effect of symbolic capital, where mastery of a dominant language functions as a form of capital that grants social legitimacy. In the context

of international schooling, this linguistic capital is highly convertible, it can be transformed into academic recognition, social prestige, and even future economic opportunities.

From a sociological perspective, the spatial and interactional organization within the school reinforces this linguistic stratification. In cafeterias or rest areas, students from expatriate or elite families who use English at home tend to sit together, conversing fluently about international activities, Western music, or plans for studying abroad. Meanwhile, less fluent students form smaller circles, speak less, or revert to Indonesian in their internal conversations. When attempting to join broader English-speaking discussions, they often hesitate, fearing mispronunciation or ridicule. One student (A.L.) admitted that she often "measures her words before speaking" because she fears being perceived as less intelligent if her grammar is wrong. This sense of linguistic anxiety indicates that linguistic hierarchy has become internalized as a social hierarchy, those who command the dominant language are not only treated differently but also perceive themselves differently.

The consequences of this situation extend to the broader structure of education. English becomes a primary criterion in internal selection processes, such as debate competitions, student council leadership, or scholarships for overseas programs. Teachers acknowledge that students fluent in English are "more prepared" to represent the school at international events. Consequently, language serves as a form of legitimacy that determines who deserves visibility and recognition. Linguistic inequality intertwines with economic disparity: students from affluent families have greater access to English courses, bilingual home environments, and early exposure to foreign-language media. Meanwhile, students from lower-middle-class families who use Indonesian or local languages at home must work twice as hard to adapt.

This phenomenon demonstrates that linguistic inequality is not merely a pedagogical issue but a social structure reproduced through educational institutions. Schools that appear "inclusive" in rhetoric often practice symbolic exclusivity through language. Morganna et al. (2020) argue that in the era of globalization, bilingual and international education often becomes an arena where social inequalities are sustained in new forms, not through direct racial or economic divisions, but through linguistic abilities associated with global economic value. English, in this context, functions as the language of symbolic capitalism, determining who qualifies as a "global citizen."

From an observational standpoint, even patterns of student participation in classroom activities reflect this inequality. During group presentations, for example, students with stronger English proficiency often take the role of main speakers, while less confident peers act as slide operators or note-takers. Teachers unconsciously reinforce this dynamic by allocating more time and praise to articulate speakers. In one academic debate session, a student with a local accent was quickly interrupted by the teacher with the instruction, "Clarify your point in English," while another student with a "natural" accent was allowed to speak at length despite weaker arguments. Such situations exemplify linguistic gatekeeping, where access to academic space is restricted by globally dominant linguistic standards.

Ideologically, this condition illustrates how educational neoliberalism operates through language. Global-oriented education does not merely promote international standards but also embeds value systems that position English as a symbol of progress and intelligence. As a result, national and local languages become subordinated, not only practically but symbolically. The linguistic inequality generated by such systems is self-reinforcing: upper-class students have more opportunities to succeed because they already possess linguistic capital, while lower-class students remain disadvantaged within a symbolic field they do not control.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the language ideology operating within Jakarta's elite multilingual school subtly yet systematically reproduces educational and social inequalities by constructing a linguistic hierarchy that positions English as a symbol of prestige, intelligence, and highly valued social capital. Bahasa Indonesia, despite its national status, is reduced to a pragmatic tool for clarification or social intimacy, while local languages are entirely erased from formal educational spaces. The school's language practices and policies reveal that English proficiency is not merely an academic skill but a marker of class and access to social mobility, reflecting how global neoliberal values penetrate local educational spheres. By combining the perspective of language ideology with Bourdieu's (2018a) concept of linguistic capital, this research demonstrates that international schools function not only as sites of global knowledge transfer but also as arenas of symbolic power reproduction through language. The novelty of this study lies in unveiling the ideological mechanisms behind "global education," which outwardly appears neutral but in fact embeds value systems privileging global languages while marginalizing national and local ones. Therefore, the study underscores the need for more equitable and reflective school language policies that recognize Indonesia's linguistic diversity, ensuring that global education becomes a truly inclusive learning space for all linguistic and social identities.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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