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Language, Identity, and Education: Exploring Students' Linguistic Repertoires in Multilingual Indonesian Communities

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Abstract

Indonesia's multilingual landscape offers a dynamic site for exploring how language, identity, and education intersect in everyday life. This study examines how students in multilingual Pontianak, West Kalimantan, construct and negotiate their linguistic repertoires across school, home, and religious domains, and how these repertoires reflect broader ideologies of language and belonging. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach within a multi-site case study design, the research was conducted in four secondary schools representing public, Islamic, and Catholic institutions. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, language portrait and mapping activities, and classroom discourse analysis involving students, teachers, and administrators. Findings reveal that students possess fluid and hybrid linguistic repertoires shaped by their sociocultural environments. While local Melayu dialects dominate informal communication, Bahasa Indonesia and English function as symbols of academic legitimacy and modernity, and Arabic indexes religious identity. Institutional language policies, however, often reinforce hierarchical ideologies that marginalize local languages. The study introduces the Multilayered Linguistic Repertoire Model (MLRM), which conceptualizes multilingualism as dynamic identity practice rather than discrete linguistic systems. The model advances theoretical and pedagogical contributions to language policy, literacy education, and sociolinguistic research in postcolonial contexts, underscoring the need for inclusive and culturally grounded approaches to multilingual education in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's linguistic diversity has long been celebrated as one of the most complex and vibrant in the world. With more than 700 living languages spread across thousands of islands, the nation embodies a mosaic of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identities that coexist within the same political and educational system. Yet beneath this celebration of diversity lies an enduring tension between multilingual realities and the state's monolingual orientation toward Bahasa Indonesia as the sole language of national unity and instruction (Abdullah & Hussin, 2021).

In many educational contexts, particularly in urban centres such as Pontianak, West Kalimantan, this tension manifests in subtle yet profound ways. Students grow up speaking multiple languages, Malay dialects, Dayak languages, Hakka, and sometimes Arabic, yet find that their schools often validate only Bahasa Indonesia and English as "legitimate" languages

of learning and intellectual engagement (Sahib et al., 2021; Zalukhu et al., 2021). This discrepancy between linguistic practice and institutional recognition reflects deeper sociopolitical dynamics, where language becomes both a marker of identity and a site of inequality.

Such a phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia, but in this archipelagic, postcolonial nation, it assumes particular significance. The promotion of Bahasa Indonesia after independence was not merely a linguistic policy but a nation-building project intended to unify diverse groups under a shared symbol of modernity and citizenship (Ismadi et al., 2021; Kadir, 2021). Over time, however, this ideology has created an implicit hierarchy privileging the standardized national language and global English over local languages, which are often relegated to domestic and informal domains. In Pontianak, home to Malay, Dayak, and Chinese (Tionghoa) communities, this hierarchy becomes especially visible (Afryanti et al., 2021; Susylowati et al., 2019). Each group brings its linguistic and cultural heritage into interaction with state-mandated norms, producing a complex linguistic ecology in which students constantly navigate and reposition their repertoires depending on context.

The importance of studying students' linguistic repertoires lies in its potential to uncover the often-unseen ways that language mediates belonging, power, and learning. Scholars such as Kaiser (2022) and Preece (2019) have demonstrated that linguistic repertoires are not merely collections of codes but embodied histories of experience, ideology, and interaction. Within the Indonesian context, this perspective invites a move beyond the simplistic binary of "mother tongue" versus "school language," instead exploring how young people deploy their full linguistic resources to make sense of their social worlds. Yet, despite the growing body of research on multilingualism in education, studies foregrounding students' lived experiences and agency, particularly in secondary education, remain limited.

Existing literature has established a robust foundation for understanding multilingual education in Indonesia and beyond. Preece (2019) and Zein et al. (2020) examined the policy implications of Indonesia's national language ideology, showing how the promotion of Bahasa Indonesia often sidelines local languages. Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2022) explored how English functions as a symbol of prestige and aspiration among Indonesian youth, reinforcing global linguistic hierarchies. In the broader Southeast Asian context, Ding and Chee (2023) and H. Y. Lee et al. (2023) argued that English-medium instruction tends to privilege certain social groups, deepening educational inequality. Meanwhile, Santoso and Hamied (2022) and Walker et al. (2019) found that although policies support multilingual education, classroom practices seldom accommodate local linguistic diversity, revealing a persistent gap between policy and practice.

Recent ethnographic studies have captured the lived realities of multilingual learners. Cabral (2021) and Mitchell et al. (2022) introduced translanguaging to describe how speakers fluidly move between linguistic codes to construct meaning. In Indonesia, Kayumova and Tippins (2021) and Phyak (2021) illustrated how bilingual students use translanguaging to negotiate identity and social positioning, especially in digital spaces. Mahalingappa et al.

(2022) further emphasized the performative dimension of language, demonstrating how linguistic choice is intertwined with identity formation in postcolonial societies. However, few studies have examined how these processes unfold across different institutional contexts, public, religious, and private, within a single multilingual city.

The relationship between language and identity in educational settings has also been explored from broader sociolinguistic perspectives. Yoon (2023) conceptualized identity as a site of struggle continually reshaped by power relations embedded in language practices. Sah and Li (2018) underscored the importance of recognising multilingual competence as a resource rather than a deficit, particularly in postcolonial contexts where linguistic hierarchies persist. In Indonesia, Lumaela and Que (2021) and Wenno et al. (2021) observed that language education often privileges correctness and standardisation, leaving little room for students' local linguistic identities. Mataraw and Adriansyah (2023) and Wulandari et al. (2023) similarly demonstrated how teachers' attitudes toward linguistic diversity can either reinforce or challenge inequality in classrooms. Despite these insights, little is known about how students themselves interpret and negotiate ideological tensions between institutional expectations and their multilingual realities.

In West Kalimantan, sociolinguistic research has largely focused on interethnic relations or the use of Malay as a regional lingua franca, leaving educational dimensions underexplored (El-Daly, 2019; Ross & Rivers, 2018). Yet Pontianak offers a particularly rich site for investigating how multilingualism operates in everyday life. The coexistence of Malay Muslim, Dayak Christian, and Tionghoa Catholic communities produces a vibrant tapestry of linguistic practices involving Bahasa Indonesia, Malay dialects, Dayak languages, Hakka, English, and Arabic. Within schools, these languages interact in complex ways, some celebrated as symbols of cultural pride or religious devotion, others silenced in pursuit of linguistic "purity" or academic legitimacy. By focusing on students' linguistic repertoires, this study extends previous scholarship by situating multilingualism at the intersection of language ideology, education, and identity formation.

While prior research has contributed valuable insights into language policy and multilingual pedagogy, many studies have treated languages as discrete systems rather than interwoven resources that individuals mobilize dynamically across contexts. The present study moves beyond this compartmentalized view by examining multilingualism as an everyday practice embedded in students' lived experiences. Through ethnographic observation, interviews, and language-mapping activities, this research seeks to reveal how students' repertoires function as both symbolic and practical tools for navigating social life.

This study introduces a new analytical framework, the Multilayered Linguistic Repertoire Model (MLRM), which conceptualizes students' multilingual practices as layered and fluid, shaped by overlapping social, educational, and religious spaces. Rather than viewing language as a fixed category, the model captures how identity is continually enacted and negotiated through interaction. It thus responds to the need for a framework that integrates cognitive, sociocultural, and ideological perspectives on multilingualism in education. By situating Pontianak as a critical postcolonial site, the study repositions Indonesia within global

debates on linguistic justice and educational inclusion, offering a counter-narrative to deficit-oriented discourses dominating language education policy.

Accordingly, this research explores how students in multilingual Pontianak construct and negotiate their linguistic repertoires across social and institutional domains, and how these repertoires reflect broader ideologies of language, identity, and education. It illuminates the ways in which young people exercise linguistic agency amid structural hierarchies, thereby contributing to the design of more equitable and culturally responsive language policies in Indonesian schools. Ultimately, it underscores the transformative potential of recognizing students' multilingual repertoires not as obstacles to standardization but as vital resources for learning, belonging, and social participation in a plural society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic design aimed at deeply understanding the experiences, practices, and meanings constructed by students in their everyday linguistic lives. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to explore social and linguistic realities as lived and perceived by participants, rather than merely measuring them quantitatively (Muskat et al., 2018). Within linguistic repertoire studies, such an approach is crucial since language is viewed not simply as a symbolic system but as a layered and meaning-laden social practice (Oe et al., 2022). Through ethnography, the researcher was able to trace how students use, interpret, and negotiate language across various spaces, home, school, community, and digital environments, all of which shape their linguistic identities.

The research site was Pontianak, West Kalimantan, chosen for its uniquely complex multilingual landscape. Pontianak represents the intersection of three major ethnic groups, Malay, Dayak, and Tionghoa, each with distinct linguistic systems, values, and communicative practices. This diversity makes Pontianak not merely a geographical location but a sociolinguistic arena ideal for exploring how language operates as a marker of identity and social relations. The city also exemplifies tensions between national and local language policies: while schools implement a national curriculum emphasizing Bahasa Indonesia and English, students' daily lives remain saturated with local and religious languages. This context enables direct observation of the intersections, negotiations, and adaptations between language policy and local linguistic practice.

Participants consisted of 32 purposively selected individuals representing diverse experiences and backgrounds. Of these, 24 were students aged 13–18 from four secondary schools: SMP Negeri 03 Pontianak, SMA Negeri 5 Pontianak, SMA Santo Fransiskus Asisi Pontianak, and MAN 1 Pontianak. Four Indonesian language teachers, two English teachers, and two principals were also interviewed to provide institutional and policy perspectives. The selection considered ethnic, religious, and school-type diversity to ensure a comprehensive representation of Pontianak's sociolinguistic reality. Students were included as primary agents of everyday language use, while teachers and principals were critical in shaping institutional discourse and language practice.

Data were collected through four main techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, language portraits and mapping, and classroom discourse analysis. Participant observation was conducted over six months to capture patterns of linguistic interaction within and beyond classrooms. This technique allowed the researcher to engage in daily school life without disrupting learning activities (Holmes, 2020). Semi-structured interviews explored students' subjective experiences with language use across various life domains, as well as their perceptions of the relationship between language and identity. Language portraits and mapping enabled students to visually and narratively reflect on the languages they use and the emotional meanings attached to each (Cheron et al., 2022). Classroom discourse analysis involved recording teacher–student interactions to identify ideological patterns implicit in pedagogical practice (Guillen, 2019).

Data were analysed using linguistic repertoire analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The former examined how students organize and make sense of their linguistic resources within specific social contexts, while the latter identified the language ideologies underlying educational practices and policies. The analysis proceeded iteratively, with repeated readings of transcripts, thematic coding, and contextual interpretation grounded in social, historical, and institutional realities.

To ensure data validity, triangulation was conducted through three strategies. First, source triangulation compared data from students, teachers, and principals to assess consistency across actor levels. Second, method triangulation combined observation, interviews, and document analysis (e.g., curricula, school regulations) to avoid dependence on a single data type. Third, member checking was implemented by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to confirm interpretive accuracy (Prosek & Gibson, 2021; Ritter, 2022). This triangulated approach ensured the credibility of the research and anchored the analysis firmly in participants' lived social realities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fluid and Hybrid Linguistic Repertoires: Everyday Multilingual Practices

Students' linguistic lives in Pontianak reveal that multilingualism is not merely the ability to use multiple languages but a way of living embedded in their everyday experiences. In daily interactions, students navigate multiple linguistic codes flexibly and creatively, displaying a high level of adaptive competence toward social contexts and interpersonal relations. Field observations across four secondary schools in Pontianak demonstrate that students' linguistic practices cross formal and informal boundaries, where language serves as a central means to negotiate identity, signal solidarity, and mark social differences. As Moore (2019) observes, translanguaging is not simply a communicative strategy but an identity practice, a social act that links language, experience, and meaning in a fluid and dynamic whole.

Within the home domain, most students use Pontianak Malay or other ethnic language varieties as their main medium of communication. These languages are perceived as symbols of intimacy and emotional warmth. In interviews, a female student, N (SMPN 03),

expressed that she felt “closer and freer” when speaking with her family in Pontianak Malay compared to Bahasa Indonesia, which she considered “too formal and like being at school.” This statement highlights the affective role of local languages as emotional mediums representing belonging to the local community. Observations in several participants’ homes reinforced this finding: family conversations often occurred in mixed Pontianak Malay and Bahasa Indonesia, especially when discussing personal or humorous topics. In this context, language is not only a communicative tool but also a social atmosphere-builder that reinforces intimacy and cultural identity.

In contrast, school life demands a more standardized form of communication. Bahasa Indonesia is used dominantly in academic and official interactions, while English often functions as a symbol of prestige and modernity. In English classes at SMA Negeri 5 Pontianak, for instance, teachers attempt to maintain exclusive use of the target language; however, students naturally mix it with Bahasa Indonesia when explaining ideas or asking questions. This practice does not indicate linguistic deficiency but rather reflects a communicative strategy to maintain fluency and clarity. As one student, R (SMA Negeri 5), stated, switching between languages made him “more comfortable explaining something difficult” and made conversations “more alive.” This finding demonstrates the social function of code-mixing as an adaptive response to expressive and cognitive needs.

English usage at school also carries strong symbolic value. In many informal student conversations, words such as sorry, actually, or by the way not only enrich their style but also mark a modern and educated identity. In this sense, English serves not merely as a learning tool but as symbolic capital indicating affiliation with global modernity and social status. However, this practice coexists with subtle resistance to the school’s monolingual norms. When teachers reprimand students for using mixed language in class, students often respond with laughter or linguistic humor that strengthens peer solidarity. This phenomenon exemplifies translanguaging as a performative act with dimensions of power and identity negotiation. As He (2018) and Norton and De Costa (2018) argue, every linguistic act represents a social stance taken by speakers toward existing systems and norms.

In the religious domain, language functions as a marker of both spiritual and communal identity. Students at MAN 1 Pontianak, for example, display strong attachment to Arabic, especially in prayer, recitation, and moral discourse. However, Arabic proficiency here is largely symbolic rather than communicative, representing affiliation with Islamic tradition and religious authority. As one male student, H (MAN 1), explained, reciting prayers in Arabic made him feel “calm and closer to God,” even though he admitted not always understanding every word. This experience illustrates the emotional and spiritual dimensions of language practices that cannot be explained solely through linguistic competence.

Conversely, at SMA Santo Fransiskus Asisi, a predominantly Chinese-Catholic school, different linguistic patterns emerge. Hakka is used within families but rarely appears in the school domain. Students predominantly speak Bahasa Indonesia and English, while Latin and Indonesian are used in liturgical settings. A female student, J, stated that she felt “too Chinese” if she spoke Hakka at school but “not Chinese enough” if she did not use it at home.

This paradox illustrates how language serves as a site for negotiating ethnic and social identities. Observations during school mass revealed students singing hymns and reciting prayers in mixed Bahasa Indonesia and English, creating a form of translanguaging that reflects both spiritual devotion and cosmopolitan experience.

The phenomena above demonstrate that Pontianak students' linguistic practices cannot be understood through a traditional monolingual or even bilingual framework. They inhabit fluid linguistic spaces in which boundaries between languages are constantly negotiated. In social interactions, students draw on diverse combinations of languages to navigate power relations, express solidarity, and articulate shifting identities. In other words, their linguistic practices constitute forms of linguistic agency, wherein speakers strategically navigate social structures through language choice (Esch et al., 2020).

Analysis of language portraits further reinforces this understanding. Nearly all students represented their bodies in multicolored forms to symbolize their language use. The head was often colored blue or red to represent Bahasa Indonesia and English, indicating their role in thinking and learning, while the chest was shaded yellow or green to represent local languages, symbolizing emotional attachment and familial identity. When asked why, one student explained that local languages are "more than just words" but "the sound of home." This visualization resonates with Zhang-Wu and Tian's (2023) argument that linguistic repertoires are affective and embodied, as each language carries traces of lived experiences and relational connections.

Overall, field data indicate that Pontianak students inhabit a translanguaging space, a social arena in which language boundaries are blurred and flexible, and where linguistic practice becomes a means of identity and meaning-making. Within this space, students use language not only to communicate but also to negotiate social positioning, resist formal norms, and assert their multilingual, multicultural selves. This supports Hammine's (2021) contention that translanguaging is an ideologically charged social act that challenges dominant linguistic orders by demonstrating that linguistic identity is not fixed but continuously constructed through interaction and experience.

Hence, the fluid and hybrid linguistic practices of Pontianak students should not be seen as deviations from linguistic norms but as reflections of Indonesia's complex sociocultural multilingualism. When students mix Malay with Indonesian or insert English terms in casual talk, they are, in fact, constructing new spaces for identity, where local traditions, national values, and global aspirations intertwine creatively. Observations in classrooms, schoolyards, and religious settings reveal that language functions not only as a medium of knowledge but also as a bridge of emotion, spirituality, and social solidarity. Within the framework of translanguaging as identity practice, these linguistic acts can be understood as forms of student empowerment in articulating diversity and resisting the simplification of their identities into a single linguistic category.

School as a Site of Linguistic Ideology and Hierarchy

In multilingual societies such as Pontianak, schools are not merely academic spaces but ideological arenas where certain linguistic values are legitimized while others are

subordinated. Field observations reveal that educational institutions play a central role in producing and reproducing linguistic hierarchies rooted in both national and global language ideologies. Bahasa Indonesia is positioned as the "proper" and "civilized" language, whereas local varieties such as Pontianak Malay or Dayak languages appear only in peripheral informal interactions. English, in turn, is associated with progress, prestige, and sophistication, but remains accessible mainly to students with greater educational resources. Through curriculum, policy, and pedagogy, schools shape how students evaluate language, not merely as a communicative tool but as a symbol of social status and cultural morality.

At SMA Negeri 5 Pontianak, for instance, the Indonesian language class begins with the teacher reminding students "not to use local dialects in class, especially when answering questions." Over a week of classroom observation, this unwritten rule was consistently enforced. When one student, A, answered using a strong Malay accent, the teacher gently but firmly corrected him: "Please use proper Bahasa Indonesia." The student's shy reaction captured the subtle reproduction of linguistic ideology that positions local dialects as inappropriate for academic contexts. In this sense, Bahasa Indonesia functions not only as a medium of instruction but as a symbol of intellectual legitimacy.

School policies further reinforce this ideology. Large posters in the school hall proclaim, "Use Proper Bahasa Indonesia!" alongside an English slogan, "Speak English to Be Smart!", a rhetorical pairing that implicitly orders the hierarchy between national and global languages. Local languages, by contrast, have no symbolic visibility. A senior teacher, S, acknowledged in an interview that the use of local dialects was viewed as "uneducated" because it could "lower academic standards and decorum." She explained that schools should instill formal language habits to prepare students for external competition. Such attitudes illustrate how educational institutions act as ideological agents that equate linguistic form with moral and intellectual worth, a process of iconization, as described by Irvine and Gal (2000), in which linguistic features become linked to social character.

Yet paradoxically, students frequently use local or mixed forms of language outside classrooms, in canteens and schoolyards, to build solidarity and intimacy. During a lunch break at Santo Fransiskus Asisi Catholic High School, Chinese and Malay students were observed speaking freely, mixing Bahasa Indonesia with local accents and English expressions. One student, M, said that speaking in Malay "made conversations funnier and livelier," but admitted that doing so in class "would make the teacher say I'm being impolite." This demonstrates students' reflective awareness of the power structures embedded in language norms and their ability to shift according to context.

The hierarchy also manifests in curricula and extracurricular programs. Some schools require an English Day once a week to encourage English-speaking confidence, yet no equivalent initiative exists for local languages. An English teacher at MAN 1 Pontianak, N, commented that such policies are "good for building students' confidence," though she admitted many students "feel awkward and afraid of making mistakes." In practice, English Day becomes a symbol of linguistic exclusivity, actively engaged by a few confident students while the rest remain silent. This exemplifies what E. Lee and Canagarajah (2019) describe as

linguistic hierarchy reproduction, where institutions unconsciously sustain inequalities between global and local languages by associating one with progress and the other with backwardness.

Restrictions, explicit or implicit, on the use of local languages also reveal tendencies toward linguistic homogenization. At SMP Islam Terpadu Al-Amin, the principal stated that "local languages may be used outside school hours, but not within the madrasah environment" to accustom students to "more polite and directed" Bahasa Indonesia. This view reinforces the ideology that local languages must be controlled or excluded from educational spaces, even as the national curriculum promotes multiculturalism and local diversity. Here lies Indonesia's paradox of multicultural education: pluralism is acknowledged in policy texts but often unsupported in institutional practice.

Informal discourse among teachers further reproduces these hierarchies. When a teacher recounted a student's use of a local accent during a presentation, colleagues laughed and commented that it was "funny but inappropriate for class." Though seemingly trivial, such reactions reproduce linguistic ideologies that devalue local variation as "irregular" or "nonstandard." Mahalingappa et al. (2022) refer to this as fractal recursivity, where distinctions associated with one social level, such as "formal" versus "village" language, are replicated across broader contexts, including the relationship between school and society.

Meanwhile, English occupies an ambivalent position: celebrated as a marker of global competence yet accessible only to those with sufficient linguistic and economic capital. At SMA Negeri 5 and MAN 1, English-proficient students were often praised and showcased during school events. However, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds reported feeling excluded. One student, R, admitted feeling "not smart enough" because he could not follow English conversations among peers. Observations suggest that schools, often unintentionally, reproduce social inequality through language: English becomes a marker of exclusivity, while local languages lose their symbolic legitimacy.

Through these layered practices, schools emerge as ideological arenas that normalize linguistic hierarchies. Bahasa Indonesia is idealized as a neutral national language but carries hegemonic power that marginalizes local tongues. English occupies the top of the hierarchy as a symbol of global progress yet simultaneously generates internal inequality. Meanwhile, local languages are confined to private spaces, maintained at home but silenced in schools. Within the framework of language ideology theory, this dynamic illustrates how educational institutions actively produce "legitimate languages" and discipline other linguistic forms deemed inappropriate to dominant norms (Diao & Liu, 2021; Kayi-Aydar, 2019).

Negotiating Belonging: Language, Faith, and Ethnic Identity

In Pontianak, a city where Malay, Dayak, and Chinese communities intersect, language functions not merely as a means of communication but as a symbolic arena where identity, faith, and social belonging are continuously negotiated. Within this multiethnic and multireligious social space, every linguistic choice carries deep social meanings, signaling who a person is, where they come from, and the community to which they feel they belong. The linguistic practices of students across schools reveal that everyday language use constitutes

an ongoing process of becoming, wherein individuals employ language to negotiate belonging and delineate identity boundaries.

At MAN 1 Pontianak, Arabic holds a privileged status, serving not only as the language of religion but also as a symbol of piety and moral virtue. Classroom observations during fiqh lessons show that teachers emphasize accurate pronunciation of prayers in Arabic, highlighting that "every letter carries meaning and should not be recited carelessly." For students, especially those active in Rohis (Islamic Spirituality Organization), mastering Arabic is perceived as a sign of spiritual closeness. One student, F, explained that reciting prayers in Arabic "makes my heart calm and helps me feel closer to God." Here, Arabic operates as a boundary marker, a linguistic emblem that distinguishes the sacred Islamic sphere from other social domains while reinforcing moral identity and communal belonging.

Outside worship contexts, however, Arabic use is often limited to symbolic expressions that index religious identity. In class WhatsApp groups, Muslim students commonly insert greetings or phrases such as insyaAllah, alhamdulillah, and jazakallah khair amid predominantly Indonesian and local dialect exchanges. These Arabic expressions serve as moral and spiritual indices, signaling piety without altering the overall medium of communication. This aligns with Hiratsuka's (2023) theory of indexicality, which posits that identity meanings arise not from linguistic forms themselves but from how such forms index social positions, values, and ideological affiliations. In this sense, religious utterances act as semiotic markers linking speakers to specific moral stances and reinforcing their Islamic identity within broader social interactions.

Conversely, in SMA Katolik Santo Fransiskus Asisi, linguistic practice manifests in more plural and hybrid ways. Chinese Catholic students in this school blend Hakka, Indonesian, and English in both daily interactions and religious activities. During chapel masses, hymns are sung in Indonesian and English, while post-service conversations among students often shift to Hakka when topics become more personal. In one group interview, a student, L, noted that using Hakka with friends "feels warmer and closer," though she added that in class, "speaking Hakka can be considered impolite." Thus, Hakka serves not only as a heritage language but also as a subtle form of resistance to the dominance of Indonesian as the "official" communicative norm.

Observations during the school's spiritual retreat further illustrate how language bridges difference. In interethnic discussion groups, Chinese, Dayak, and Malay students used mixed Indonesian and English to facilitate understanding. A particularly revealing moment occurred when a Dayak student, J, tried pronouncing several Hakka words taught by a friend, prompting laughter and easing the atmosphere. Such moments highlight how language, often viewed as a boundary, can also operate as an affective bridge fostering cross-cultural solidarity.

Kim's (2023) expanded notion of indexicality is useful here, explaining how language functions as a fluid social sign through which identity is performatively enacted. Identity, in this framework, is not static but constructed through iterative semiotic acts in which language choice becomes a key form of identity performance. When Muslim students use Arabic

greetings online or Chinese students mix Hakka and English in casual talk, they are not merely communicating but doing identity, performatively enacting who they are in relation to their community's moral and social expectations.

Digital spaces extend these practices. Analysis of students' social media accounts reveals a far greater fluidity of linguistic identity compared to school settings. Muslim students often write Instagram captions blending Indonesian and Arabic expressions such as barakallah, ukhuwah, or hijrah, accompanied by emojis signaling moral values. Meanwhile, Chinese Catholic students post in English to convey global connectedness but comment in Hakka or Indonesian to maintain local intimacy. One student, T, wrote that using English on social media "feels cool," yet speaking in a local accent "reminds me of who I am." These patterns suggest that social media serve as hybrid spaces where students negotiate multiple identities, religious, ethnic, national, and global, simultaneously.

Language use in digital contexts also reflects students' linguistic agency. They are not passive recipients of institutional language ideologies but active agents who negotiate the symbolic value of linguistic forms. As Weirich (2021) notes, linguistic identity is constructed through stance-taking, the act of positioning oneself socially, emotionally, or morally in interaction. When students write bismillah at the start of a post or add LOL in an online chat, they are positioning themselves within overlapping symbolic worlds, local and global, religious and secular, traditional and modern.

Identity negotiation is also evident in intercultural school events. At SMA Negeri 5 Pontianak, Culture Day provides a platform for students to showcase ethnic identities through songs, dances, and traditional clothing. Interestingly, language becomes a key performative element in these presentations. While official announcements are made in Indonesian, several groups introduce themselves in their local languages. Dayak students open with greetings in their mother tongue, while Malay students recite local pantuns before performing. These acts transform the event from a formal institutional ritual into an inclusive celebration of linguistic diversity, momentarily affirming multilingual expression within the educational space.

These diverse practices demonstrate that language functions paradoxically, as both a boundary marker delineating difference and a bridge connecting distinct social worlds. Students in Pontianak skillfully navigate this complexity, using language to express emotional intimacy, articulate faith, and affirm ethnic pride. In each interaction, prayer, or social media post, language becomes a site of identity negotiation, not as a fixed label but as an ongoing process shaped by dynamic social contexts.

Multilayered Linguistic Repertoire Model (MLRM): A Framework for Understanding Multilingual Identity

The Multilayered Linguistic Repertoire Model (MLRM) emerges as an analytical framework to capture the complexity of students' linguistic identities in Pontianak's diverse sociocultural and religious landscape. The model synthesizes empirical insights from students' linguistic practices across schools, homes, religious institutions, and digital platforms, revealing that multilingualism is not a purely linguistic phenomenon but also a reflection of

power relations, emotions, and ideological structures. MLRM posits that individuals construct their repertoires through three interrelated layers: the personal-cognitive, the social-interactional, and the ideological-institutional. Together, these layers form a dynamic configuration that underscores how language is never neutral but always implicated in meaning-making, identity construction, and social positioning.

At the personal-cognitive layer, language connects emotional experience with self-awareness. Several students described how using certain languages evokes unique feelings of warmth and authenticity. For instance, a Muslim student shared that speaking Malay Pontianak with her grandmother made her feel "more accepted and genuine," whereas using Indonesian at school made her feel like "someone else." Such accounts illustrate how languages carry affective memories that anchor individuals to particular spaces and relationships. Field observations show that laughter, teasing, and affection most often occur in local languages rather than in formal Indonesian, emphasizing the affective dimension of multilingual repertoires.

The social-interactional layer concerns how language operates as a resource for social negotiation and power mediation. Students swiftly adjust their language choices according to interlocutor and context: Indonesian for teachers and formal settings, and Malay or ethnic languages among peers to create familiarity. In a Catholic school, students greeted their English teacher with expressions such as "Good morning, Sir" or "How are you today?", not merely as politeness but as symbolic performances of a "global student identity." In informal spaces like the canteen, they shifted back to mixed Indonesian-Malay speech, demonstrating fluid transitions across codes. Martínez (2018) conceptualizes this as translanguaging as identity practice, where individuals strategically manage linguistic repertoires to construct relationships and project identity positions. Thus, language simultaneously connects and differentiates social actors within the community.

The ideological-institutional layer, meanwhile, captures how institutional norms and national language policies shape and constrain students' linguistic practices. Policy documents from four schools emphasize the exclusive use of Indonesian as the "official language of education." Some schools explicitly prohibit local languages in classrooms to maintain uniformity and discipline. Such policies reinforce linguistic hierarchies that position Indonesian as the language of "national intellect" and English as the language of "global progress," while relegating local languages to the margins. One teacher admitted to reprimanding students for speaking Malay in class, deeming it "contextually inappropriate." These practices not only regulate linguistic behavior but also impact students' confidence in expressing their local identities.

Within the MLRM, these layers are mutually constitutive rather than discrete. For example, affective awareness at the personal level may challenge or reinforce dominant ideologies at the institutional level. A Chinese Catholic student noted that although she mainly uses Indonesian and English at school, she continues to speak Hakka at home "because that's where I feel like myself." This subtle form of resistance echoes the concept of dynamic multilingualism proposed by Viegen and Zappa-Hollman (2020), which views multilingualism

as a fluid, adaptive system shaped by social, ideological, and emotional contexts.

In practice, interactions among these layers yield unique configurations for each individual. Some students negotiate their identities by blending linguistic codes to express both solidarity and modernity. A Muslim student, for instance, posted “Alhamdulillah for today’s blessings” on social media, an act of translanguaging that signifies both linguistic dexterity and the fusion of religious and cosmopolitan selves. Such examples illustrate that linguistic repertoires are not static inventories but multilayered systems of meaning in which every language choice indexes affective, social, and ideological dimensions.

Conceptually, MLRM offers two key contributions. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of multilingualism in Indonesia by integrating cognitive, social, and ideological dimensions within a single analytical frame. Whereas dynamic multilingualism highlights flexibility in everyday linguistic practice, MLRM foregrounds how affect and institutional power co-shape individual repertoires. Pedagogically, it provides a framework for inclusive multilingual education that recognizes local languages as assets rather than barriers. By incorporating local narratives into literacy instruction and allowing translanguaging in classroom discourse, educators can harness students’ linguistic diversity as an authentic learning resource and as a vehicle for identity affirmation.

Reimagining Multilingual Education: Implications and Reflections

This section reflects on how the findings concerning students’ linguistic repertoires in Pontianak open new possibilities for reimagining the direction of multilingual education in Indonesia. The study demonstrates that students’ linguistic practices are not neutral linguistic activities but socially meaningful arenas where identity, power, and policy intersect. Students’ use of multiple languages across home, school, religious, and digital contexts reveals that language is not merely a system of signs but an existential space through which they become and belong within their social worlds. In this sense, multilingual education should be understood not only as a pedagogical concern but as a broader social project involving recognition, representation, and linguistic justice.

Field observations across four secondary schools in Pontianak reveal that classrooms often operate under rigid monolingual paradigms. Teachers emphasize the use of “proper” Bahasa Indonesia even in situations where students naturally employ mixed Malay or ethnic languages to express ideas more effectively. In one social studies class at a public school, a student attempted to answer a question using a blend of Malay and Indonesian. The teacher gently corrected the student, saying, “Use Bahasa Indonesia so it sounds more polite.” Although well-intentioned, this moment reflects how schools unconsciously reproduce the ideology that only certain languages are legitimate for “academic” use. Yet, as noted by Leimgruber et al. (2018), fluid multilingual practices actually demonstrate an adaptive form of linguistic intelligence, whereby individuals creatively mobilize their linguistic resources to navigate diverse social contexts.

Such findings challenge traditional views that treat languages as separate and hierarchical entities. In everyday life, students in Pontianak do not distinguish Malay, Indonesian, Arabic, or English as discrete systems. Instead, they weave them together within

meaningful social interactions. A Muslim student described frequently alternating between Arabic and Indonesian when messaging friends from her study circle because “some things can only be said in Arabic, but when explaining, Indonesian helps it make sense.” Similarly, a Chinese Catholic student explained that she feels more comfortable singing hymns in English at church but prefers to speak Hakka with her parents at home. Both examples illustrate that language practices are relational and emotional rather than merely mechanical.

Theoretically, this aligns with the notion of linguistic citizenship proposed by Yoon (2023), which conceptualizes language as a form of social participation that enables individuals to express themselves, contribute to society, and claim space within it. Whereas conventional language education policies position students as passive recipients of linguistic norms, linguistic citizenship positions them as active agents with the right to “own” and “use” their languages. In this context, students who boldly employ Malay, Hakka, or Arabic in public school spaces are, in effect, asserting themselves as linguistic citizens resisting the homogenizing forces of monolingual norms.

These reflections carry important implications for language education policy in Indonesia. First, linguistic diversity should be recognized not as a barrier to learning but as a rich pedagogical resource. Schools could integrate local languages into literacy activities, for instance, inviting students to write local narratives, translate folktales into multiple languages, or engage in dual-language literacy projects. Such practices not only enrich students’ linguistic skills but also reinforce their cultural identities. At one Catholic school, a small initiative of this kind emerged when an Indonesian language teacher encouraged students to write poems about their hometowns using a blend of Malay and Indonesian. The resulting works were not only more expressive but also sparked meaningful discussion about the role of local identity amid globalization.

Second, teacher competence development is critical. Teachers need training in translanguaging pedagogy, which emphasizes using students’ entire linguistic repertoires as learning resources. In practice, this may mean allowing students to explain concepts in their most familiar language before transitioning to Indonesian or English. Field observations showed that when teachers permitted this flexibility, student participation increased significantly. In one English class, for example, a teacher who allowed discussion in a mix of Malay and Indonesian found that students spoke more confidently and generated richer ideas. This demonstrates that linguistic flexibility enhances, rather than diminishes, the learning process.

Third, the study highlights the need for reform in national language education policy toward greater inclusivity of multilingual practices. Rather than enforcing a single homogeneous medium of instruction, policy should allow contextualized approaches that value regional linguistic diversity. In the long term, such an approach would strengthen linguistic equity, fair access to linguistic and symbolic expression. As Schissel et al. (2021) emphasize, linguistic justice underpins social justice because language is a fundamental means of articulating experience and identity. Recognizing local languages in schools is therefore not merely symbolic but an essential part of building a more equitable and humane

education system.

Beyond formal education, the study also reveals how digital spaces have become new arenas for inclusive linguistic identity practices. Many students use platforms such as Instagram or TikTok to display their multilingual identities, blending Arabic, English, and Malay within a single post. In one observed example, a student captioned a photo: “Bersyukur hari ini, alhamdulillah so happy for small things.” This code-mixing is not merely stylistic but a way of acknowledging multiple layers of self, religious, local, and global. Such phenomena reinforce the argument that multilingual education can no longer be confined to formal classrooms; it must extend across the entire social ecosystem that shapes students’ linguistic experiences (Hall, 2018; Kusters, 2021).

Ultimately, this reflection points to the understanding that constructing multilingual education is, at its core, constructing just education. When students are given the freedom to express themselves in the languages they cherish, they learn not only about words and grammar but also about self-worth and respect for others. Recognizing students’ linguistic repertoires represents a step toward social transformation in which diversity is celebrated as cultural wealth rather than treated as a deviation from the norm. As one public-school teacher in this study observed, “When we let children speak in their own languages, they come alive. They feel that this school belongs to them.” This statement encapsulates the essence of linguistic citizenship: a language education that restores the right to speak, think, and be to the students themselves.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that students’ language practices in Pontianak cannot be understood as isolated linguistic systems but as dynamic and layered identity practices through which language serves as a primary medium for negotiating meaning, belonging, and social position. In their everyday lives, students fluidly combine Malay, Indonesian, English, and Arabic not merely to communicate but to express who they are and how they wish to be perceived in diverse social spaces. While schools continue to reproduce hierarchical language ideologies, they also act as arenas of negotiation where students exercise linguistic agency to blur the boundaries between “official” and “everyday” languages. Through the proposed Multilayered Linguistic Repertoire Model (MLRM), this research offers a novel understanding of students’ multilingual identities as products of dynamic interaction among personal, social, and institutional layers. The implications are theoretical, pedagogical, and ethical: language education in Indonesia must shift toward a more inclusive and contextual paradigm, one that acknowledges linguistic diversity not as deviation but as a cultural and symbolic resource for equitable and humanizing learning.

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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