Safeguarding Linguistic Heritage: Policy, Education, and Community-Based Strategies for the Development and Protection of Maluku's Local Languages

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges and strategic opportunities in safeguarding Maluku's local languages as essential cultural heritage and intergenerational knowledge systems. Despite their role as mother tongues and carriers of oral traditions, these languages face rapid decline due to shrinking numbers of active speakers, disrupted transmission processes, limited educational integration, and fragmented policy implementation. Adopting a qualitative approach that combines policy analysis and linguistic ethnography, the research focuses on selected Maluku communities representing varying levels of language vitality. Data were gathered through policy and curriculum document analysis, in-depth interviews with policymakers, educators, elders, and youth, and participant observation of language practices across formal and informal domains. The findings highlight a misalignment between national and regional language policies, inadequate educational implementation, and weak community involvement, collectively accelerating language shift toward Indonesian and foreign languages. Nevertheless, grassroots initiatives , such as school-based programs, community literacy activities, and adat-driven revitalization , offer promising foundations for preservation. The study proposes an integrated model involving policy reform, pedagogical innovation, and community-based strategies to strengthen language vitality. Its novelty lies in the multidimensional framework combining top-down and bottom-up approaches in Maluku, a linguistically rich but understudied region. The study contributes to sociolinguistics, language policy, education, and cultural sustainability scholarship.

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INTRODUCTION

Local languages in Maluku represent one of the region's most valuable cultural assets, holding a crucial position in the social life of its people. Beyond their communicative function, these languages serve as a medium for transmitting values, knowledge, and collective identity that link generations over time (Eaton & Turin, 2022; Manuputty, 2022). However, current social realities reveal that these languages are facing a serious threat. The number of active speakers continues to decline as elderly native speakers, often referred to as language masters, age, while younger generations tend to use Indonesian or even foreign languages in their daily interactions. Language transmission, whether vertically from parents to children or horizontally among peers, has become increasingly ineffective. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of comprehensive and binding regional policies to support local language

preservation, as well as the limited role of local languages in formal education (Rajagukguk et al., 2022; Sarah, 2022). This is not merely a linguistic issue but one that concerns the sustainability of Maluku's cultural identity. The loss of a language entails the loss of a unique worldview, ecological knowledge tied to island communities' living spaces, and oral artistic and literary expressions that embody collective pride.

These concerning facts become even more apparent when examined through the lens of policy and educational practice. Although the 1945 Constitution, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, and Law No. 24 of 2009 on the National Flag, Language, and Symbols recognize regional languages, implementation in Maluku remains limited. Regional regulations, such as the 2017 Governor Regulation of Maluku, lack strong enforcement mechanisms to integrate local languages into broader regional development policies (Apituley et al., 2022; Hukubun et al., 2022). In schools, local languages often appear symbolically in extracurricular activities or ceremonial events rather than being part of the core curriculum. Yet, education plays a central role in language revitalization, as schools are key spaces where young people can develop positive attitudes toward their ancestral languages.

Studies on regional language preservation are not new, and many previous works offer useful insights. For instance, Meek (2019) and Valijärvi & Kahn (2023), through the Reversing Language Shift framework, emphasize that revitalization can only succeed through intergenerational collaboration, particularly by engaging families and communities in sustaining a living linguistic ecosystem. Grey (2021) and Lonardi (2022), who employ ecological approaches to language revitalization, highlight the importance of viewing language within broader social, political, and educational contexts. In Indonesia, similar patterns have emerged. Ding (2022) and Maseko (2021) note that regional languages face severe threats due to the dominance of Indonesian, particularly in urban areas. Collins (2022) and Rohmadi et al. (2023) further argue that geographic and political histories have accelerated language shift across the archipelago. Studies by Putri & Nurita (2021), Sudarmanto et al. (2023), and language surveys by SIL International also reveal alarming levels of endangerment among many local languages.

Several studies have provided in-depth perspectives on Maluku specifically. Tableessy & Umkeketony (2022) and Wenno et al. (2021), for example, report a drastic decline in domestic use of local languages in Central Maluku, such as Tulehu and Haruku. Lumaela & Que (2021) and Souisa et al. (2020) find that intergenerational language transmission within families is weak, as parents often use Indonesian to better prepare their children for formal education. Similar patterns are observed in Hidayati & Santiana's (2020) and Lituay & Serpara's (2021) research on the Nusalaut language, showing that younger speakers tend to be passive and lack confidence in using their ancestral tongue in public domains. Meanwhile, Hamied & Musthafa (2019) and Purwanta & Novianto (2022) show that Indonesia's language policy remains overly centralized, leaving limited space for regional governments to develop contextually grounded preservation strategies.

The relationship between education and language preservation has also received significant attention. Damanik (2020) and Foster & Welsh (2021) argue that schools have great potential to shape students' positive attitudes toward local languages, but only when these languages are systematically integrated into the curriculum. Agustina et al. (2019) and Sakhiyya & Martin-Anatias (2023) show, through their studies on Javanese language education, that teacher involvement and policy support can enhance language vitality despite existing challenges. Similarly, Sumintono et al. (2019) and Trudgill (2020) demonstrate that mother-tongue instruction in early education not only helps preserve local languages but also improves learning outcomes. Globally, Degroot et al. (2022) show that multilingual education policies supporting minority languages strengthen both identity and academic performance.

Other literature emphasizes the community's critical role in language revitalization. Carroll (2022), in Saving Languages, asserts that without community engagement, formal policies remain merely symbolic. Fox & Goodfellow's (2022) study in Latin America illustrates that the Quechua revitalization program succeeded due to community-driven initiatives aligned with educational policies. In the Asian context, Lee et al. (2023) argue that preserving minority languages requires hybrid approaches combining formal regulation with community practice. This resonates with Juniyanti et al. (2021), who show that involving indigenous Dayak communities in language preservation proves more effective than top-down interventions.

From this body of literature, it becomes evident that research on regional language preservation in Indonesia has largely polarized into two approaches: macro-level policy frameworks (top-down) and community-based revitalization efforts (bottom-up). Few studies have attempted to integrate both perspectives into a comprehensive analytical framework, particularly within Maluku's complex socio-cultural and geographic context. As one of Indonesia's linguistic mosaics, Maluku hosts dozens of local languages that risk extinction without systematic intervention. This gap calls for an integrative approach that connects policy, education, and community-based initiatives in a mutually reinforcing strategy.

This study addresses that gap by proposing an integrative approach that links policy analysis, educational practice, and community initiatives in the preservation of Maluku's local languages. Rather than treating these as separate domains, this study situates policy as the binding framework, education as the formal vehicle of transmission, and community life as the living domain of the language. By combining macro- and micro-level perspectives through policy analysis and linguistic ethnography, this research offers a holistic understanding of the current state of local languages in Maluku and proposes grounded strategies for their preservation. This integrative model also provides a replicable framework for other endangered minority languages.

The objectives of this research are to identify the current condition of local language use in Maluku, analyze national and regional language preservation policies, and formulate integrative preservation strategies involving government, schools, and communities. Through these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the development of language policy, linguistics, and educational research, while offering practical guidance for regional

governments and communities in safeguarding their invaluable linguistic heritage.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, as the issue under investigation is deeply intertwined with the social, cultural, and linguistic dynamics that can only be understood through an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences and perspectives. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to capture the nuances of local language use in everyday Maluku life, elements that cannot be reduced to mere numbers or statistics (Allan, 2020; Cho et al., 2022). Furthermore, the research design combines policy analysis and linguistic ethnography, recognizing that language preservation depends not only on formal regulation but also on community practices. Accordingly, the study positions policy as the macro-level framework, education as the formal transmission arena, and community as the living environment of the language.

The research sites were purposively selected from several villages in Maluku with differing levels of language vitality, such as Tulehu on Ambon Island, which retains strong customary traditions, and Haruku and Nusalaut, which are experiencing a decline in active speakers. This selection reflects the geographical and linguistic diversity of the region, allowing a more comprehensive understanding of Maluku's linguistic landscape. Primary and secondary schools within these areas were also included as research sites, given the significant role of formal education in shaping young people's linguistic attitudes.

The study's informants consisted of four main groups. The first group comprised local government officials, including representatives from the Department of Education and Culture, the Language Center, and members of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), as they are directly involved in formulating and implementing language policy. The second group included traditional leaders and elder speakers regarded as "language masters," who preserve linguistic and cultural knowledge no longer familiar to younger generations. The third group consisted of local language teachers and school principals, serving as mediators between policy and classroom practice. The fourth group included young people, particularly students and adolescents, to capture their attitudes toward local languages and how these are used in daily life. Informants were selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, resulting in approximately 25–30 participants actively engaged in local language use or language policy and education. This number ensured sufficient variation of perspectives while maintaining analytical depth.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. Document analysis focused on examining national and regional regulations, curriculum documents, and existing language preservation programs, given that policy implementation is inseparable from its legal framework. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow informants to express their views freely while maintaining focus on the research themes (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Pyo et al., 2023). Participant observation involved attending traditional ceremonies, community events, and classroom activities to directly observe language practices across social domains. This method

served to verify whether informants' narratives aligned with actual practices. All interview and observation data were transcribed, systematically coded, and thematically analyzed.

Data analysis followed an inductive coding process consisting of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Lim, 2025; Priya, 2021). Open coding identified preliminary themes such as policy support, transmission barriers, community roles, and school initiatives. These were then grouped into broader categories through axial coding, namely, policy framework, language-in-education, and community engagement. Finally, selective coding synthesized overarching patterns illustrating how policy, education, and community interact in the preservation of Maluku's local languages. Through this process, the analysis not only maps existing conditions but also reveals the interconnections influencing language vitality.

To ensure data validity, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was conducted by comparing findings across data sources, documents, interviews, and observations, to confirm consistency (Bhangu et al., 2023; Stanley, 2023). Member checking involved verifying interview interpretations with key informants to prevent researcher bias. Peer debriefing was carried out through discussions with other researchers and local language experts to obtain critical feedback. Additionally, an audit trail documented the entire research process to ensure transparency and traceability of methodological decisions. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining participant anonymity, and protecting sensitive data related to indigenous communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dynamics of Local Language Vitality in Maluku

The vitality of local languages in Maluku has shown alarming signs of decline over the past two decades. Languages that once flourished in family settings, customary communities, and religious rituals are now facing serious threats due to the decreasing number of active speakers. This decline is not merely a matter of statistical reduction but also reflects the weakening of language functions in everyday life. This aligns with Brennan and King's (2022) argument that the vitality of a language is determined more by its consistent use across various social domains than by the mere number of self-identified speakers. In the context of Maluku, local languages are still widely recognized but are no longer the primary medium of communication, especially among younger generations.

Interviews with several informants revealed that young people tend to feel more comfortable using Indonesian, even in daily conversations with their parents. A junior high school teacher in West Seram Regency, anonymized as YL, noted that her students consider using regional languages as "old-fashioned" and inconsistent with the modern image they wish to project. Similarly, a customary leader, coded as TR, stated that parents today often prefer to speak Indonesian with their children because it is seen as more "practical" and compatible with school demands. These accounts illustrate that intergenerational transmission has been disrupted, not because children reject the local language, but because parents have stopped using it as a language of upbringing.

Field observations reflect a similar phenomenon. During an afternoon visit to Hatu Village on Ambon Island, for example, children gathered in front yards were heard conversing mainly in Indonesian. Although they spoke with a distinct Malukan accent, few words from the village's indigenous language were used. When older adults joined the conversation, some local terms appeared briefly but quickly disappeared as the dialogue reverted to the dominant language. This illustrates how local languages now function symbolically and within limited contexts. To illustrate the situation further, the following table summarizes data from a small survey conducted across three regencies in Maluku.

Table 1 Patterns of Local Language Use in Everyday Life in Maluku

Domain of Use	Older Generation (50+)	Middle Generation (30–49)	Younger Generation (10–29)
Household	Frequent	Occasionally	Rare
Customary community	Frequent	Frequent	Rare
School	Never	Never	Never
Social media	Rare	Occasionally	Frequent (in Indonesian/foreign language)
Traditional ceremonies	Frequent	Frequent	Occasionally

Source: Observation and interview data, 2023

The table clearly shows that local language use is now concentrated among the older generation, while the younger generation uses it rarely and in highly limited contexts. This indicates a clear process of language shift, where younger speakers prefer the dominant language. Aizawa and Rose (2019) describe this phenomenon as domain narrowing, a condition in which a minority language loses its social spaces and survives only within ritual or symbolic domains.

This shift is reinforced by prevailing social perceptions toward local languages. In an interview, a university student (coded as AN) from Ambon admitted that his peers commonly use Indonesian mixed with slang from social media. He remarked that speaking in a local language makes someone seem "outdated" or "unmodern." This reflects the workings of language ideology, wherein local languages are viewed as lacking both economic and social value. Such findings align with Barak et al. (2021), who demonstrated that minority languages often lose their social capital when not supported by education policies or representation in public spaces.

Observations in elementary schools across Central Maluku further reveal that local languages are no longer taught, even though some teachers still have proficiency. All classroom interactions occur in Indonesian, including during lessons related to local culture. When asked, most teachers responded that the curriculum does not require the use of local languages, leaving them without a formal basis to teach them. This indicates that language shift occurs not only at the family level but also within educational institutions. Consequently, the chain of transmission is broken at two crucial points: the home and the school.

This situation exemplifies the policy–practice gap identified by Huber and Helm (2020), where government policies often remain symbolic and lack concrete implementation. While local languages are officially recognized as part of national cultural heritage, they are not granted a tangible role within the education system. As a result, communities perceive these languages as lacking practical value.

Conceptually, the weakening vitality of local languages in Maluku can be explained as a consequence of domain contraction. In homes, local languages are increasingly replaced by Indonesian. In schools, they hold no status. In public and digital spaces, Indonesian and foreign languages dominate. Consequently, local languages survive only within traditional contexts, and even then, under severe constraints. As their functional domains shrink, these languages lose vitality, even if a number of older speakers remain.

This situation underscores the urgency of revitalization strategies that go beyond language documentation and instead focus on reopening everyday domains of use. Sinakou et al. (2019) emphasize that language sustainability depends on its continued presence in daily practice. Thus, to sustain local languages in Maluku, strategies should aim to create new spaces for use, through primary education, community-based initiatives, and digital media relevant to younger generations.

National–Regional Policy Gaps

Language policy in Indonesia has long positioned regional languages as cultural assets worthy of preservation. Foundational legal frameworks such as the 1945 Constitution, Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, and Law No. 24/2009 on the National Flag, Language, and State Symbols formally recognize regional languages as integral to national heritage. However, findings from Maluku indicate a significant gap between national-level recognition and regional-level implementation. Policies that are normatively protective often lack binding force at the operational level. As a result, local languages in Maluku are caught in a space of political rhetoric without strong legal instruments or sufficient resource allocation.

A local official from the Maluku Provincial Education Office, anonymized as SL, stated in an interview that while the regional government feels a "moral obligation" to preserve local languages, it lacks the technical mechanisms to do so. The education budget is primarily directed toward national priorities such as digitalization and standardized testing, leaving language preservation programs marginalized. This highlights how weakly local languages compete within broader national education agendas.

Field observations in several elementary schools across Central Maluku support this. In one school in Haruku Village, for example, researchers found that local language subjects were entirely absent from the formal curriculum. Teachers admitted they could teach the local language but were reluctant to do so without legal mandates. One teacher, coded as MY, stated that teaching local languages remains "just a discourse," since no regional regulation (peraturan daerah, or Perda) compels schools to implement it. In other words, national policies remain at the level of documentation, while local governments lack operational mechanisms.

This condition can be analyzed using Resch and Schrittesser's (2023) policy–practice gap framework, which posits that multilingual education policies often remain symbolic, unaccompanied by concrete implementation tools. This results in a disconnect between "policy on paper" and "policy in practice." In Maluku, while national policy recognizes regional languages, it provides no clear curriculum standards, funding mechanisms, or enforcement measures. Consequently, schools and local governments tend to disregard local language use due to the absence of strong legal and institutional mandates.

In Maluku, local languages are often trapped within ceremonial rhetoric. Government events frequently highlight them as markers of identity; officials may open speeches with greetings in local languages. However, such gestures are rarely followed by substantive policy action. A customary leader (coded as TR) expressed community frustration, noting that local languages are "displayed on the podium" but absent from education and public services. This demonstrates how local languages are treated as performative cultural symbols rather than living means of communication.

Documentary evidence also shows a scarcity of regional regulations. Only a 2017 gubernatorial circular exists, serving merely as a recommendation without legal force. At the regency level, virtually no regulatory initiatives exist. The following table summarizes the status of local language policy instruments in Maluku.

Table 2 Availability of Local Language Regulations in Maluku (2023)

Government Level	Type of Regulation	Status	Legal Force
National	Law No. 20/2003; Law No. 24/2009	Available	Weak at operational level (non-specific to local languages)
Maluku Province	Governor's Circular, 2017	Available	Non-binding (recommendation only)
Regency/City	Regional Regulation (Perda) on Language	Not available	None
Schools	Local Curriculum (Muatan Lokal)	Not implemented	No formal instruction

Source: compiled from policy document review and interviews with Maluku Education Office officials, 2023

This table affirms that while national policies exist, they remain general and lack implementation depth. At the provincial and regency levels, binding legal instruments are almost nonexistent, leaving schools and communities without formal obligations to integrate local languages into daily life.

Such conditions have grave consequences for the vitality of local languages in Maluku. When policies remain symbolic and lack enforceability, local languages lose legitimacy within formal domains. This aligns with Joyce and Cartwright's (2019) findings that symbolic language policies can, paradoxically, accelerate language shift by eroding public confidence

in the functional value of regional languages.

Beneath all this lies a paradox: local languages are celebrated as emblems of cultural identity while simultaneously being neglected in policy and practice. During an official event observed in Ambon City, organizers opened with greetings in a local language, yet the remainder of the proceedings, including cultural discussions about Maluku, were conducted entirely in Indonesian. This moment illustrates the performative yet superficial inclusion of local languages, revealing how they are used for cultural legitimacy but excluded from substantive communication.

Challenges of Integrating Local Languages in Education

The integration of local languages into education in Maluku faces significant challenges that are clearly evident in the field. The main findings of this study reveal that schools across various regencies rarely use local languages, either as subjects or as media of instruction. Although regional languages are formally recognized as part of the local content component (muatan lokal) in the curriculum, actual practice shows the overwhelming dominance of Bahasa Indonesia, even in everyday classroom interactions. This occurs not only in urban schools but also in villages where communities still actively use local languages at home.

An elementary school teacher from Haruku Island, identified as MT, stated that although she speaks her local language fluently, she has never received training or guidance on how to use it in class. She explained that the nationally standardized curriculum leaves no room for teachers to adapt to local linguistic realities. Teachers also worry that using local languages might be seen as "deviating" from national standards. This reflects a structural pressure that marginalizes local languages within the formal education system.

Field observations at an elementary school in Ambon illustrate this phenomenon. During a Bahasa Indonesia class, the teacher asked students to write about their holiday experiences. Almost all students wrote in formal Bahasa Indonesia, even though during recess they conversed in a mix of Ambonese Malay dialect. However, the specific local village language was completely absent in the classroom. The teacher explained that she preferred to maintain Bahasa Indonesia to help students adapt to national examinations and academic requirements. This observation reinforces the conclusion that schools in Maluku provide no space for local languages, effectively excluding them from educational practice.

The main causes of weak local language integration can be explained through three key aspects. First, teacher limitations in both number and competence. Many teachers do not speak their students' local languages because they come from other regions, a common outcome of national or interregional teacher recruitment processes. Second, the nationally uniform curriculum leaves little flexibility for the inclusion of local languages as instructional tools. The muatan lokal component, which should provide space for regional languages, often exists only as a formality without implementation. Third, there is a prevailing perception among both teachers and parents that local languages are irrelevant to children's futures, rendering their use academically and economically unbeneficial.

The theoretical framework of translanguaging pedagogy as articulated by Greenway et al. (2019) offers an important perspective for understanding this issue. Translanguaging emphasizes that local languages should not be viewed as barriers but rather as resources for constructing deeper understanding. By using local languages, children can express their ideas more naturally and authentically, which can then be bridged to Bahasa Indonesia or foreign languages. However, this pedagogical paradigm has yet to be adopted in Maluku's educational practices. Local languages remain positioned outside the classroom, and their pedagogical potential is thus left untapped.

A high school student from Tulehu, identified as AN, shared that he often struggles to understand certain subjects, particularly natural sciences, because all concepts are explained in Bahasa Indonesia with complex technical terms. He admitted that it would be easier if the explanations were given in his local language, but teachers never do so. This statement highlights how the absence of translanguaging practices in education deprives students of more effective learning opportunities.

In an observation at a secondary school in West Seram, it was found that when teachers explained lessons in Bahasa Indonesia, many students appeared confused. Yet, when they discussed the material in small groups using their local languages, their comprehension seemed much stronger. Ironically, these discussions occurred informally, without teacher recognition. This reflects the existence of spontaneous translanguaging that arises naturally but is not pedagogically accommodated. To illustrate the current state of local language integration in education, the following data were compiled from interviews and classroom observations across several schools in Maluku.

Table 3 Integration of Local Languages in Schools in Maluku

Aspect	Field Findings
Use of local language in curriculum	No specific subject on local language; local content is merely formal
Language of instruction	Almost all subjects are fully taught in Bahasa Indonesia
Teacher competence in local language	Many teachers do not speak their students' local languages
Community and teacher attitudes	Local languages considered irrelevant to children's future
Natural translanguaging practices	Occur among students but not pedagogically facilitated

Source: Field Observation and Interviews, 2023

This table highlights a significant gap between the potential of local languages as learning resources and the reality of school practices. Translanguaging, which should serve as a bridge between local and national languages, lacks legitimacy in formal education. Consequently, students are unable to use the language they know best to grasp academic content.

Conceptually, these findings indicate that education in Maluku has yet to transform toward recognizing local languages as valuable learning assets. Instead, local languages are still treated as obstacles to achieving national education standards. This paradigm stands in

stark contrast to translanguaging theory, which regards multilingualism as capital rather than a problem. If education continues to marginalize local languages, not only will linguistic vitality further decline, but the quality of learning itself will also suffer, depriving Maluku's children of the chance to learn through the language of their hearts.

The Role of Communities and Grassroots Initiatives

Community initiatives to preserve local languages in Maluku demonstrate vibrant yet constrained dynamics. In several villages, traditional rituals have been revived with a renewed emphasis on using the mother tongue. Ceremonies once abandoned are now reinterpreted as spaces to strengthen collective identity. One traditional leader, for example, explained that although young people now mostly speak Bahasa Indonesia, during traditional celebrations they are encouraged to use their ancestral language. This is not merely symbolic but also an effort to restore the cultural authority of local languages. Field observations reveal that during certain cultural festivals, children are trained to sing traditional songs in their mother tongue, though their pronunciation is often influenced by Bahasa Indonesia. Their presence on stage, dressed in traditional attire and singing in their ancestral language, signifies a small but meaningful step in revitalizing linguistic heritage through culturally embedded practices.

Beyond cultural festivals, community-based literacy movements have emerged that use local languages as primary mediums. In several coastal hamlets, youth groups have organized informal reading and writing classes introducing Latin script through local vocabulary. These initiatives serve dual purposes: promoting basic literacy among children and demonstrating that local languages can be written and standardized. A volunteer teacher involved in one such initiative shared that parents were initially skeptical, believing local languages had no relevance to their children's future. However, as they saw their children's enthusiasm for reading folktales in their mother tongue, attitudes began to shift. Observations of these literacy sessions showed lively learning environments where children laughed upon hearing rare local words and eagerly tried to incorporate them into daily speech.

Equally important are youth initiatives leveraging digital media. In several villages, young people have begun producing social media content in Maluku languages, including parodies, music videos, and short stories recorded and shared online. Despite limited equipment, these creative efforts have successfully attracted peers' interest and helped make local languages "cool" again. Field observations documented a modest home-based studio buzzing with laughter and creativity, where local language was not a relic of the past but a reimagined lifestyle.

These findings align with community-based revitalization theory, building upon Joshua Fishman's foundational ideas and expanded by Afdhal & Kurniawati (2023), which emphasize that communities are the primary agents of linguistic revival. Languages cannot be sustained through policy alone without active community engagement. It is within communities that the energy to create new social spaces for language use, transmission, and reinterpretation emerges. The Maluku context illustrates that revitalization does not necessarily require grand institutional programs, it can thrive through cultural practices, informal education, and digital

creativity grounded in collective effort.

However, these initiatives remain sporadic and lack strong linkage with formal policy frameworks. Many programs persist only through the dedication of a few individuals or small groups, without sufficient financial or institutional support. For instance, a community literacy class that once operated actively ceased when its volunteer teacher relocated. Similarly, cultural festivals often depend on temporary government sponsorships or seasonal funding. This reveals a structural gap: while communities display strong vitality, there are no policy mechanisms to ensure sustainability.:

Table 4 Community Initiatives for Local Language Revitalization in Maluku

Type of Initiative	Form of Activity	Main Challenge	Potential Impact
Cultural festivals	Use of mother tongue in rituals and traditional songs	Reliance on specific occasions	Restores linguistic authority in cultural traditions
Community literacy movements	Reading/writing classes using local vocabulary	Limited resources and personnel	Promotes literacy rooted in local language
Youth digital content	Videos, parodies, music in Maluku languages	Consistency and audience reach	Rebrands the mother tongue as trendy
Nonformal schools	Local language teaching by elders/volunteers	Lack of curricular support	Revives intergenerational transmission

Source: Compiled from policy documents, field observations, and interviews, 2023

This dynamic clearly shows that community strength can serve as the foundation for language revitalization. However, such strength must be connected to concrete policy support. Without institutional backing, these promising initiatives risk fading despite their transformative potential. Conceptually, this reflects that local languages in Maluku persist not because of robust legal protection, but because of community vitality that continuously recreates alternative spaces for their use. In other words, even though Maluku's languages remain structurally marginalized, communities have shown that revitalization from below, through creativity, solidarity, and cultural attachment, remains both possible and powerful.

Policy Reform, Pedagogical Innovation, and Community Strategies

The integrative model for the preservation of local languages in Maluku emerges as a response to the complex challenges where policy, education, and community cannot be treated as separate entities. Field findings reveal that language policies often remain at a symbolic level without tangible implementation; education continues to place local languages in a marginal position; and communities operate sporadically without structural support. When viewed in isolation, each of these dimensions exposes its own weaknesses, yet when combined within an integrative framework, they can complement one another to strengthen the vitality of local languages. This framework aligns with the concept of multidimensional language planning articulated by Sutrisno (2023), which posits that effective language planning requires layered interactions between macro-level state policies and micro-level

community practices.

In the context of policy reform, a clear and binding legal framework is required, one that not only recognizes local languages as cultural heritage but also incorporates them into development agendas. Several informants from local government sectors noted that language policies often lack strong legal grounding, making it difficult to translate them into sustainable programs. A local education official, referred to here as B, remarked that the recognition of local languages in national documents often "lacks teeth" because it is not followed by a dedicated budget allocation. Field observations at the local education office showed that funding for local language–based programs was virtually nonexistent, and even teacher training relied on short-term projects from the central ministry. The absence of legal instruments and budgetary support traps local languages within the realm of political rhetoric, without practical momentum. Therefore, policy reform in the integrative model must position local languages not merely as symbols of identity but as strategic assets protected by legislation and supported by financial resources.

The second dimension involves pedagogical innovation, which views local languages not as barriers but as learning resources. In many schools across Maluku, local languages are rarely used either as subjects or as mediums of instruction, due to a uniform national curriculum that prioritizes Bahasa Indonesia as the primary medium. However, translanguaging pedagogy, as developed by Cenoz and Gorter (2022) and Emilia and Hamied (2022), emphasizes that incorporating local languages in classrooms can enrich learning experiences, strengthen student identity, and foster intrinsic motivation. Interviews with a junior high school teacher, referred to as M, indicated awareness of this potential. M explained that students became more engaged whenever he inserted local language expressions to explain certain concepts, even though such practices were informal. Classroom observations showed that when the teacher used local vocabulary to explain simple scientific concepts, students appeared more enthusiastic and demonstrated greater comprehension. Nonetheless, these practices remain uninstitutionalized due to the lack of curricular directives. Consequently, pedagogical innovation in the integrative model involves creating formal spaces for local languages within schools, through local content curricula, the development of bilingual teaching materials, and teacher training programs that promote translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy.

The community constitutes the third pillar of this model. Amid weak policies and limited integration within formal education, local communities in Maluku have shown significant vitality. Community-based literacy movements, traditional festivals employing mother tongues, and youth-driven digital initiatives demonstrate that society still possesses the energy to create new social spaces for local languages. An indigenous leader, referred to as T, noted that although young people frequently use Bahasa Indonesia, they are encouraged to speak their mother tongue during cultural ceremonies as an expression of respect. Observations at a village cultural festival revealed children performing dances and songs in their local languages, albeit with hesitant pronunciation, evidence of an intergenerational transmission process that, though fragile, continues through cultural rituals and celebrations.

When this communal energy is strengthened and linked with education and policy support, local languages have a far greater chance of survival.

Thus, the integrative model combining policy reform, pedagogical innovation, and community strategies serves as a bridging framework. Policy reform provides legitimacy and resources; pedagogical innovation ensures sustainability through formal education; and community strategies sustain the emotional and social bonds vital for language vitality. None of these dimensions can operate effectively in isolation, policy without education and community becomes elitist; education without policy and community remains fragile; and community without structural support risks sporadicity. By interconnecting these dimensions, the revitalization of local languages in Maluku gains a stronger foundation.

Moreover, this model is not exclusive to Maluku. Many other regions in Indonesia face similar issues, with minority languages increasingly marginalized. The integrative framework derived from Maluku's experience can thus serve as a reference for other linguistically diverse regions lacking policy support. This conceptualization underscores that language preservation cannot be separated from social and educational development and must be approached multidimensionally. As emphasized by Putrawan (2022) and Yilmaz (2021), the success of language planning depends on the interaction between formal policy, educational practice, and community dynamics, elements that, when integrated, can foster a healthy linguistic ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that preserving local languages in Maluku can only be achieved through an approach that unites policy reform, pedagogical innovation, and community-based strategies in a mutually reinforcing framework. Policies that have long remained symbolic must be transformed into operational instruments backed by adequate legal and financial support. Education, which has tended to marginalize local languages, must evolve toward utilizing mother tongues as learning resources that enrich students' experiences while strengthening their identities. Simultaneously, community energy expressed through literacy movements, traditional practices, and digital initiatives provides a vital foundation for intergenerational language transmission. By integrating these three dimensions, this study asserts that language revitalization need no longer remain a normative discourse but can become a realistic, multidimensional, and replicable model for other regions facing similar challenges. The novelty of these findings lies in demonstrating that the success of language preservation in Maluku does not depend on a single actor but on the synergy among the state, schools, and communities, ensuring that local languages endure not merely as cultural symbols but as living elements of social practice across generations.

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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