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Vernacularism in Centralized Multicultural Societies: The Case of Javanese in Indonesia

Lusia Neti Harwati & Mala Rajo Sathian

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Abstract

Most countries prioritize teaching and promoting national languages over vernacular languages. While national languages promote national identities, vernacular languages are viewed as embedding cultural identities. This paper investigates the decline and potential endangerment of Javanese, the most spoken vernacular in Indonesia, from the perspectives of Javanese language teachers, provincial government policies, and conservationists. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews with 20 Javanese language teachers, this paper examines the interplay between cultural identity, local affiliations, and national belonging. The teachers' perspectives reveal a strong sense of ethnic pride and responsibility, while policymakers and conservationists emphasize the importance of preserving Javanese as a cultural heritage. Results show that multicultural nationalism sustains Javanese language acquisition and cultural appreciation, offering a paradigm for balancing regional diversity with national unity. The paper suggests that strategic language planning embeds vernacular languages and values them as a vital part of national identity.

Author Information:

Lusia Neti Harwati
PhD Candidate
s2142566@siswa.um.edu.my
orcid.org/0000-0002-7674-5338

*Mala Rajo Sathian
Senior Lecturer
malarajo@um.edu.my
orcid.org/0000-0003-2996-6864

Department of Southeast Asian Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Universiti Malaya
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

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In today's globalized world, multicultural nations must prioritize the preservation of vernacular languages, as the dominance of English as a lingua franca has become an inevitable outcome of increasing worldwide interconnectedness. The harsh reality is that many countries must deal with the decline of their vernacular languages (Civico, 2021; Roistika, 2019). Introducing linguistic multiculturalism, which values the diverse languages spoken within a society and encourages students to learn and use them, is important for balancing ethnic and national pride.

Students can celebrate diversity while building a strong unified national identity (Stahl & King, 2023; Weldemichael, 2023; Zein, 2019). Language plays an essential role in shaping the concept of both ethnic and national identities. Identity is developed as a result of becoming a member of a particular community and a nation. Teachers and students' love and appreciation for their vernacular language and its literary works may help promote inclusivity, which in turn leads to the development of nationalistic feelings.

Indonesia is a multicultural and multi-ethnic country in which diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups coexist and differences are regarded as a source of cultural richness rather than fragmentation. The national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), underscores cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. However, Bahasa Indonesia is chosen as the national language to unify the country.

To protect vernacular languages, the government introduced *trigatra bangun bahasa* (the three dimensions of language development), namely, prioritising Bahasa Indonesia, maintaining vernacular languages, and mastering foreign languages. With this approach, vernacular languages should coexist with Bahasa Indonesia and foreign languages. The government's goal of accommodating all vernacular languages can promote multicultural nationalism. This is an idea that celebrates and respects the diversity of cultures within a nation while encouraging the inclusion of various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups (Modood, 2024).

The Indonesian government's policy aligns with the UNESCO General Conference's 1999 definition of multilingual education as the use of at least three languages in the educational process: the mother tongue, a national language, and an international language. In relation to the concept of multilingual education, the government pays attention to foreign languages because it would be beneficial for young generations to enhance their career prospects and increase their job opportunities by learning, for example, English. Thus, limited space is allocated to vernacular languages, and school systems choose a language of instruction at the government's discretion.

Javanese is one of the vernacular languages in Indonesia and has played a crucial role in shaping the vocabulary of the national language. Compared to other vernacular languages, Javanese is the most influential language in enriching the vocabulary of Bahasa Indonesia. This article examines Javanese language teaching and learning in rural schools of Yogyakarta, in the south-central part of the island of Java. Despite limited resources and low income, rural Javanese language teachers demonstrate remarkable dedication and resilience. Hence, the entanglement between sustaining vernacular language education in Indonesia and the government's limitations in vernacular teaching and learning within the national curriculum foregrounds our discussion.

Embracing both multiculturalism and nationalism through vernacular language learning is strategic yet challenging for Indonesia. To this end, the article examines how the Javanese language curriculum and teaching methods enable balancing nationalist sentiments by leveraging multiculturalism. We juxtapose vernacular and national language education not as binary opposites but as complementary and essential to national unification. Our research reveals the challenges in this approach and suggests potential strategies to manage vernacular language education in Indonesia.

Vernacular language education is closely linked to language teacher identity (LTI). LTI is shaped by teachers' values and beliefs about language, culture, and education, which can influence their pedagogical approaches. Academic discussions highlight LTI in professional contexts, including professional impact, language ideologies, and pedagogical choices and practices. The term LTI refers to teachers' perceptions of themselves as educators and how they relate to their work. It is also the way other stakeholders in education, including colleagues and students, perceive them (Barkhuizen, 2021; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Norton, 2021; Sadeghi & Bahari, 2022; Yuan, 2022).

Language teachers need to be aware that students' attitudes, behaviors, values, and habits are derived from their interrelationships with one another. Additionally, students need to learn and respect community values. Thus, helping students learn the accepted ways of behavior within the surrounding community is imperative, as one of a teacher's roles is to actively promote social values in classroom practices.

Past studies on the correlation between language and cultural identity have analyzed the impact of English as an international language on cultural aspects, including vernacular languages. Rapanta and Trovão (2021) argued that although English enables people from diverse cultural backgrounds to communicate and understand one another, we should promote cross-cultural understanding, including language diversity, because language shapes self-identity. Yet little research has focused on how vernacular languages can survive. Every language must be able to cope with global cultural challenges and survive, since language diversity provides people with an opportunity to broaden horizons and learn from one another. It is vital to teach vernacular languages to children to preserve cultural values and prevent their extinction. It is also important for speakers of vernacular languages to be included and not left behind in terms of knowledge, development, and community resilience.

The future of linguistic diversity is unclear due to the decline in children's ability to speak vernacular languages (Kik et al., 2021). Yet specific strategies of intergenerational vernacular language transmission have not been identified. Older generations, especially parents and teachers, play a vital role in transmitting cultural knowledge, including norms, values, and vernacular languages. Learning vernacular languages in both formal and informal settings, such as school and family, is possible since the national language and English are adopted at school and at home. Parents and teachers are expected to play their roles as figures of authority in developing children's language proficiency.

Furthermore, a language policy as a guideline to language planning is necessary. The term 'language planning' refers to endeavors undertaken by governments to intervene in the function, acquisition, and structure of a language. Abdelhay, Makoni, and Severo (2020) maintained that there are three types of language planning, namely status planning (language use in public domains, including education), acquisition planning (teaching and learning a language to promote bilingualism and multilingualism), and corpus planning (creation and modification of language forms).

A key issue in Language Policy and Planning (LPP) is who makes decisions in the planning and development process. There are two types of LPP design: top-down and bottom-up. The former, which focuses on the role of government, tends to be more popular than the latter because the government has the power to influence, direct, and shape the LPP landscape. However, there have been scholarly debates about a bottom-up approach, which is seen as essential for initiating LPP, especially in relation to vernacular language preservation. Governments need to learn from and hear from the community of users about the most crucial steps in the LPP-making process (Trinick, May, & Lemon, 2020).

This paper underscores the pivotal role of teachers as agents of language policy, inverting conventional frameworks that position policy as a top-down dictate. By centering teachers' agency, this paper examines how their practices not only enact language policy but also shape nationalism

and multiculturalism, creating a symbiotic relationship with vernacular learning. The interplay between nationalism and multiculturalism in Indonesia highlights the need for language policies that balance national unity with regional diversity. Teachers, as key stakeholders, can promote a nuanced understanding of Indonesian identity that values vernacular languages like Javanese. This approach can contribute to effective language maintenance efforts and reinforce Indonesia's commitment to multiculturalism.

Furthermore, the perspective of Javanese language teachers is intricately linked to language policy and practice in Indonesia. Teachers' understanding of language policy can shape their pedagogical approaches, influencing the effectiveness of language maintenance efforts (Zein, 2020). By recognizing the importance of Javanese in education, teachers can contribute to more inclusive language policies that value vernacular languages. This, in turn, can inform language policy and planning (LPP) decisions that support the sustainability of Javanese.

Methodology

The paper is based on data collected to study vernacular learning in Indonesia, and it employs an ethnographic design aimed to grasp the informants' point of view (Malinowski, as cited in Spradley, 2007, p. xi). Our case study is compatible with the ethnographic approach, as it entails a qualitative research design, which is typically employed to study a specific group of people to understand their cultural practices, beliefs, language, and values (Creswell, 2013).

The decision to focus on 20 teacher informants was deliberate, aligning with the ethnographic tradition of in-depth exploration (Geertz, 1973) and allowing for nuanced understandings of local contexts (Creswell, 2013). Given the study's aim to explore teachers' perspectives and practices, our sample's homogeneity (teacher-only) actually strengthens internal validity (Patton, 2015). Moreover, the rich, contextual data gleaned from interviews and observations provide a foundation for theoretical generalizability (Yin, 2014) rather than statistical representativeness.

More specifically, the selection of 20 teachers was grounded in the primary aim of identifying and interviewing appropriately chosen individuals capable of addressing the research question, rather than relying on straightforward random sampling to achieve data saturation. In other words, the researchers purposively select teachers who possess the specific qualities and experiences relevant to the research question.

The paper applies reflective interpretive theory. In discussions of the position of ethnographers, reflexivity emphasizes the ethnographer's influence on the research. Coding and categorization, meaning-making, and contextualization are crucial steps that enable them to extract insights from the informants' utterances and develop a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon.

The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 Javanese language teachers from grades 1 to 6, aged 23 to 55, both male and female. Two male (acronym MT1 and MT2, aged 25 and 31) and 18 female (acronym FT1- FT18, aged between 23 and 55) teachers of two rural elementary schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, were interviewed. Each interview lasted 60 minutes in Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese to interpret the meaning of being a vernacular language teacher.

Furthermore, informant validation was applied. The researchers went back to 'the field' with tentative results and shared them with the informants. Knowing whether these results align with their own experiences is important. Recording their reactions helped the researchers to refine the findings. This approach aligns with Lindheim (2022), who stated that, with this type of validation, the researcher needs to present preliminary analyses to informants. The ethnographer's task is to record,

write, report, and explain what lies behind them.

The selection of Karanganyar Turi Elementary School and Sanjaya Tritis Pakem Elementary School was deliberate, driven by the unique characteristics of the Javanese language teachers. All teachers held undergraduate qualifications in elementary teacher education, ensuring a standardized level of pedagogical training. Moreover, they shared common teaching strategies, professional beliefs, and values, creating a cohesive teaching environment. Crucially, their origins from the local Turi and Pakem areas fostered strong community ties, enabling them to effectively integrate local culture and language into their teaching practices. This specific context allows for an in-depth exploration of how Javanese language teachers' backgrounds and community connections shape their language maintenance efforts.

This study prioritized informed consent and anonymity. A letter in Bahasa Indonesia explained the study's objectives, methodology, and data collection process, including the use of audio-visual materials, to the teachers. A consent form was provided, and teachers were informed of their right to withdraw without reason. To ensure anonymity, data were identifiable only to researchers, and teachers were assigned acronyms.

Data analysis employed In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016), emphasizing teachers' own language and cultural context. The process involved two cycles: (1) the initial coding of data, focusing on indigenous terms and phrases in Javanese and Bahasa Indonesia; and (2) reorganizing and refining codes to identify themes, such as "politeness in Javanese" emerging from codes like "mother tongue", "respect elders", and "krama speech level".

This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of teachers' experiences and challenges in teaching Javanese, with evidence density per theme supporting the findings.

Results and Discussion

Based on the semi-structured interviews that were conducted between June and August 2023, the researchers gathered the following understanding of teachers' roles and ideals: (1) teacher as a role model, (2) teacher as one with integrity, and (3) teacher as an effective custodian of culture. The three themes converged under the umbrella of 'the expectations and ideals of being a vernacular language teacher'.

The Expectations and Ideals of Being a Vernacular Language Teacher

Javanese language teaching and learning, as well as teachers' commitment and competencies, are two critical factors in the preservation of the vernacular. Developing pedagogical and leadership skills is linked to teachers' ability to adapt to changes and global forces. The analysis of the interview data reveals that the teachers' perspectives as Javanese teachers and the correlation between the vernacular and nationalism in this global era lead them to recognize the importance of language and cultural maintenance and promotion. As a means of communicating beliefs and values, the Javanese language symbolizes community identity. It can be used to develop a sense of love for the country among students, as it is a component of nationalism.

The Javanese teachers are seen as authority figures with legal and formal rights to be obeyed, to give instructions, and to provide examples. By the same token, the teachers see their profession as an opportunity to strengthen Javanese values amid greater global connections that redefine the ability of individuals and groups to maintain their own ethnic and national identities. One informant commented on making Javanese learning a fun activity: "I am a role model who provides authentic language examples and contexts. I also develop class activities" (FT2, aged 26, interview, August 7,

2023). The informant also showed excitement after guiding the students: “I like helping my students” (FT18, aged 55, interview, July 5, 2023).

The informants’ comments suggest that teachers play a pivotal role in making Javanese learning engaging and authentic. FT2 (aged 26, interview, August 7, 2023) highlights the importance of being a role model and providing contextual language examples, while FT18 (aged 55, interview, July 5, 2023) expresses enthusiasm for guiding students, indicating a sense of fulfillment in facilitating language learning.

Thematic analysis reveals that teachers’ approaches to Javanese instruction are characterized by a learner-centered focus and a commitment to creating meaningful interactions. This aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of scaffolding, where teachers facilitate language acquisition through authentic contexts and supportive guidance. Furthermore, this emphasis on contextualized language teaching resonates with García’s (2009) advocacy for dynamic bilingual education, highlighting the potential of vernacular language instruction to foster inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments.

Additionally, one of the teachers made a claim on the importance of the Javanese language as an element of nationalism: “The vernacular is not only a national asset but also a symbol of national pride” (MT1, aged 23, interview, June 14, 2023). The teacher’s statement (MT1, aged 23, interview, June 14, 2023) highlights the symbolic value of the Javanese language as a marker of national pride, echoing Anderson’s (2006) concept of “imagined communities,” in which languages play a crucial role in shaping national identity.

Thematic analysis reveals that teachers associate vernacular language maintenance with broader notions of cultural heritage and nationalism, suggesting that language policy and identity are intertwined. This aligns with Fishman’s (2001) work on language revitalization, which emphasizes the role of local languages in fostering community pride and cultural distinctiveness. The intersection of language, identity, and nationalism in this context underscores the complex dynamics shaping vernacular language education in Indonesia. This also implicitly suggests that introducing Javanese values from an early age is essential, as Pramudibyanto (2023) found that linguistic etiquette has been neglected by some Javanese pre-teens and teenagers, who tend to behave disrespectfully. Wijayanto (2025), on the other hand, found that impoliteness in Javanese communication arises from an inadequate grasp of *tata krama* (the Javanese concept of proper etiquette or social conduct) coupled with the intricacies inherent in the language’s stratified speech levels. Consequently, these findings reinforce this paper’s assertion regarding the criticality of instilling Javanese values during early developmental stages.

Geertz’s study (1961) found that a set of values in the Javanese village family is designed to prepare children for respectful behavior. His research findings are still relevant. Three Javanese words can be related to such behavior, namely *wedi* (afraid), *isin* (shame, shyness, embarrassment, guilt), and *pakewuh* (reluctant, hesitant). To be ‘an ideal Javanese’, the children are obliged to learn how to know *wedi*, *isin*, and *pakewuh* toward others, especially those who have authority based on age and experience. In the family, for example, a father is a figure who should be respected, as Asian cultural values often prioritize respect for the head of the family. This implies that the children’s worldview begins at home, where they gain understanding of Javanese values and norms, which means basic beliefs that guide their actions and society’s expectations of their behavior. Therefore, they will be able to manage feelings and relate positively to their peers and teachers.

Javanese teachers are aware that vernacular language teaching entails both pedagogical and ethnic dimensions. Intellectual and emotional qualities, as well as cultural connectedness, are imperative. Javanese teaching and learning can be seen as a moral practice in which teachers teach

by providing real examples of good manners, explaining the importance of a loving attitude toward Javanese culture, and practicing new vocabulary in both written and verbal communication.

Additionally, the teachers regard globalization as an opportunity rather than a threat. To substantiate this claim, our data suggest that the teachers play active roles in shaping the students' cultural identity by immersing in the Javanese language and culture learning process without neglecting the importance of Bahasa Indonesia.

The data provide evidence that the teachers are motivated to lead their students through a process of cultural awareness, paying attention to both verbal and non-verbal behaviors. In the modern world, one significant implication that may result from this concerns nationalism or the feeling of belonging, a sense of shared identity not only to the Javanese ethnic group but also to the country.

Nationalism is claimed to be inseparable from language, including the vernacular, because it can protect a language and cultural inheritance (Singh, 2022). In this paper, two informants commented that loving the Javanese language and its culture, and being enthusiastic teachers, are considered the real meaning of nationalism. Below are excerpts of responses to a question about the meaning of being a good teacher and its relevance to nationalism:

"Being able to be a good role model by providing insight when asked or needed, encouraging students to improve their ability in Javanese and love its culture."

—FT2, aged 26, interview, August 7, 2023

"Shaping my students' mindsets, beliefs, and attitudes about themselves as Javanese, their feelings about Javanese culture, and their sense of social belongings."

—FT18, aged 55, interview, July 5, 2023

"As Javanese, when we are able to give examples of good manners to our students, we can say that this is a concrete example of nationalism."

—MT1, FT1, and FT2, aged 23, 25, and 26, interview, June 14, 2023

The findings reveal the teachers' capacity to see their ethnic pride as a positive feeling of belonging to the Javanese ethnic group. This, in turn, leads to a balance between the personal and professional sides of their lives.

The teachers' statements (FT2, FT18, MT1, FT1) highlight their roles as cultural ambassadors, emphasizing the transmission of Javanese values, culture, and identity to their students. Thematic analysis reveals that teachers' sense of ethnic pride and responsibility is intertwined with their professional practice, echoing Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop's (2004) notion that teachers' identities are shaped by their personal and professional experiences. This alignment of personal and professional identities resonates with Nataraj's (2018) work on teacher identity, suggesting that educators' cultural backgrounds shape their pedagogical approaches. The intersection of ethnic pride, cultural transmission, and professional practice underscores the complex, multifaceted nature of language teaching in this context.

Learning Javanese is conceived as a process of transferring cultural knowledge from the older generation to the younger generations. Javanese learning is a long-term path believed to begin at an early age. A commitment to instruction places a responsibility on teachers to examine and improve their teaching strategies and to help students achieve learning objectives.

The findings show that the teachers have situational awareness, meaning they can perceive, understand, and respond effectively to the challenges of Javanese teaching and learning. Vernacular learning is a process of mastering linguistic components, such as Javanese speech levels, vocabulary,

and orthography, as well as non-linguistic elements, including gestures and facial expressions, to be a good interlocutor. Nonetheless, Javanese is potentially endangered. A vernacular language is considered potentially endangered when it is under considerable pressure from the dominant language, and the younger generations rarely use it and tend to switch to the main language. The secretary of the provincial government of Yogyakarta stated three (3) main causes of the downward trend of the number of Javanese speakers, namely (1) the domination of Bahasa Indonesia, (2) the predominance of Javanese mainly in rural areas, and (3) the decline in the ability of young generations to use the vernacular (Nasution & Aryono, 2023).

Provincializing vernaculars in Indonesia is associated with rural areas. Generally, it is a real challenge for people in urban neighborhoods, especially the young generations, to speak vernaculars. Such areas tend to be heterogeneous, for example, in terms of class, race, language, education, and community of interests. Bahasa Indonesia has been chosen as a medium to define the feature of community identity as it facilitates communication and fosters social cohesion within the community. Individuals can connect with their fellow community members and reflect on national identity.

In the case of the Javanese in Yogyakarta, the provincial government prioritizes the language and implements it consciously. There is greater political will to implement Javanese than other languages, as the vernacular is an integral part of Yogyakarta's rich cultural heritage, and preserving the language helps maintain the region's unique identity. Apart from provincial rules, grassroots activities through civil society organizations (CSOs) help address the declining ability of urban youth to speak the vernacular. A more welcoming and supportive atmosphere for grassroots voices has encouraged efforts to address the problem.

Additionally, with support from Balai Bahasa (the Center for Language of Yogyakarta) and other concerned groups, such as Javanese language scholars, legal officers, and policymakers, the teachers are better able to share their professional knowledge and experiences to develop solutions to problems related to Javanese language preservation.

Feeling proud of being a Javanese teacher as a profession enables the informants to impart knowledge, skills, beliefs, and values to their students and motivates them to enhance their teaching skills. One strategy is to foster a direct teaching approach and a positive classroom culture. The teachers not only focus on the students' communicative competence but also on cultural competence and a sense of belonging to the Javanese culture. The use of Javanese children's songs, for example, leads students to become aware of the importance of expressing their feelings of belonging to the Javanese ethnic group. One of the research informants made the following claim on the importance of learning Javanese culture:

"I develop class activities with the sixth graders, allowing them to learn more of the Javanese culture through class discussions. I use traditional songs, such as Cublak-Cublak Suweng and Gundhul-Gundhul Pacul."

—FT17, aged 52, interview, June 13, 2023

Traditional Javanese songs are steeped in culture. They unite the teachers and students and serve as a bridge that connects the students to their cultural heritage and enables them to express their identity. The students also learn moral values, such as faithfulness and sincerity.

FT17's (aged 52, interview, June 13, 2023) approach to incorporating traditional Javanese songs in class highlights the role of cultural artifacts in language teaching and identity formation. Thematic analysis reveals that these songs serve as a conduit for cultural transmission, fostering unity and connection to heritage, echoing Turino's (2008) notion that music is a powerful medium for cultural

expression and identity negotiation.

The incorporation of moral values like faithfulness and sincerity also suggests that language teaching is intertwined with character education, aligning with UNESCO's (2012) emphasis on cultural heritage in education. This underscores the potential of vernacular language instruction to promote holistic learning and cultural rootedness.

Resilience through the Yogyakarta Provincial Administration

Javanese language learning resilience in Yogyakarta and its continued relevance alongside the national language are mostly attributed to its substantial role and position under the Dutch rule. The Dutch tried to consolidate their power and status by initiating a good relationship with the Javanese *priyayi* elite through Javanization, which meant implementing specific elements of Javanese *hormat* (norms of respect), such as language etiquette and speech levels, as the most effective form of social control (Van der Meer, 2020).

In traditional Javanese society, *priyayi* comprised the elite class in contrast to the commoner class or *wong cilik*. The Javanese had significant sociopolitical standing, influencing public conduct marked by deference to elite groups. The Dutch worked closely with the *priyayi* to prevent commoners from rising against them. In fact, Dutch scholar C.C. Berg proposed that the Javanese language be made the national language; however, the Javanese themselves opposed the idea because the language is complex. It is not an easy task for speakers of other languages to learn Javanese (Alisjahbana, 1962).

Furthermore, this could have been a deliberate strategy to preserve Javanese as a symbol of elite or *priyayi* status. In this modern era, the position of Javanese remains vital in the national language development because Bahasa Indonesia has absorbed many loanwords from Javanese, such as *unggah*; *mengunggah* (verb; noun: upload), *unduh*; *mengunduh* (verb; noun: download), and *jejaring* (verb; noun: network).

The role of cultural conservationists is also essential in Javanese language preservation. Nationalism in Indonesia was led by Javanese elites. Raden Mas Soewardi Soeryaningrat, for example, a Javanese *priyayi* from Yogyakarta who changed his name to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, introduced educational slogans grounded in Javanese wisdom. This includes proverbs, such as *ing ngarsa sung tuladha* (in front should set an example), *ing madya mangun karsa* (in the middle should take initiative and be cooperative), and *tut wuri handayani* (at the back should give support). Dewantara believed that an ideal school environment can be created when stakeholders in schools, especially teachers, incorporate Javanese values in the classroom (Darmawan & Sujoko, 2019; Wiryopranoto et al., 2017). The third proverb, *tut wuri handayani*, became the motto of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia. This demonstrates the cultural borrowings from Javanese into Indonesia's national education philosophy.

Moreover, the cultural schema of Yogyakarta has been developed with a focus on preserving Javanese language and culture, especially through the education sector, by implementing culture-based education (CBE). This is an approach in which teaching and learning are grounded in traditional values, norms, beliefs, and practices that form the foundation of Javanese culture. The province has adopted a cultural schema to sustain Javanese as a core element of Yogyakarta's culture and identity. Thus, the cultural schema adds value to citizens' sense of loyalty, respect, and compliance that, in turn, helps unite not only Javanese speakers but also Indonesians. It creates a high culture characterized by refined etiquette, reflecting social hierarchy and respect, associated with the elitism of *priyayi* culture. Javanese is perceived as embedded in high culture, compared to other provincial languages, which are viewed as of lesser status, because it is widely used in formal and ceremonial contexts, such as traditional arts and royal courts, thereby reinforcing its eminent status.

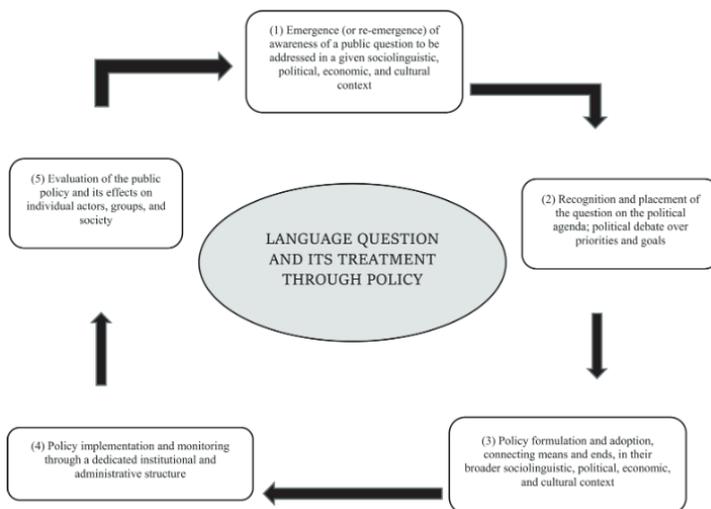
Model of Javanese Language Revitalization in Yogyakarta Province

There are three models, A, B, and C, of vernacular language revitalization provided by the Indonesian government: (a) Intergenerational language transmission is conducted through the education sector. This model is designed for the vernacular with a great number of speakers and is still used for daily communication (e.g., Javanese and Sundanese); (b) This model is suitable for vernacular languages with a sufficient number of speakers, yet is potentially under pressure. This intergenerational language transmission concept could be initiated through community-based language learning; (c) The third model is created for certain vernacular languages with a limited number of speakers who tend to shift to other languages. Through this model, the intergenerational language transmission approach could be initiated by appointing two or three families whose members are active speakers of the vernacular as role models, or by designating community centres where community members gather for group activities. The Javanese language teaching and learning process described in this article can be categorized as model A of language revitalization.

As our research indicates, we advocate for a realistic model A of Javanese language revitalization, characterized by a bottom-up approach that incorporates multi-stakeholder participation. The concept is based on a framework of the language policy cycle proposed by Gazzola et al. (2023), which can be used as an instrument to examine and explain reality and to provide direction for language policy creation, preservation, and promotion, including vernacular languages. The suggestions are based on sociolinguistics and stakeholders' perspectives. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the rural school teachers we interviewed reached a consensus with the students on how to use Javanese properly.

Figure 1

The Language Policy Cycle Framework (Source: Gazzola et al., 2023, p. 7)



From Figure 1, it is vital that, in the first step of the language policy-making process, raising awareness of language issues be addressed and viewed from various perspectives, including sociolinguistic, political, economic, and cultural perspectives. Finding an answer to language issues from a sociolinguistics perspective refers to the sociological aspect of the examination of language, how social factors, including age, gender, race, geographical location, and profession, influence the way speakers use a language in communication. Socio-political perspectives on language policy-

making, on the other hand, focus on how a language plays a crucial role in the formation of the nation and is used to achieve socio-political objectives. Subsequently, investigating cultural aspects during the language policy-making process means that a language is not merely seen as a means of communication; rather, it is an instrument for expressing social identity and forming sociocultural relationships.

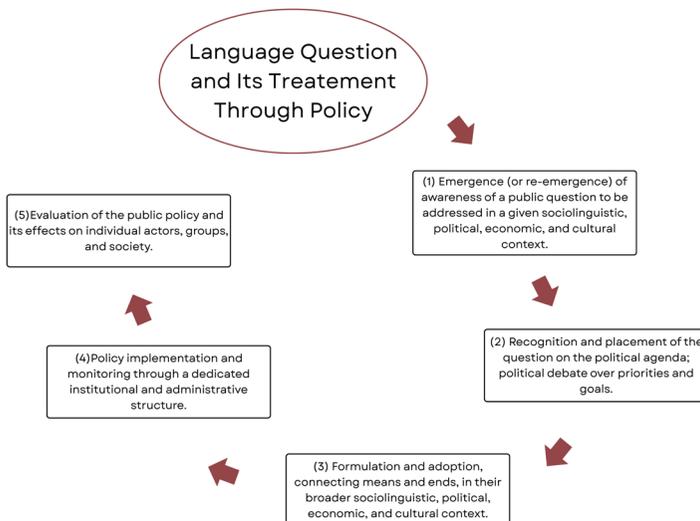
In the second step, determining priorities and goals resulting from discussions among actors involved in the policy process is imperative. Thereafter, formulating and adopting policies for broader sociolinguistic, political, economic, and cultural contexts is essential, followed by policy implementation and monitoring through the chosen institutional and well-established bureaucratic procedures. The last step is evaluating the policy and its effects on individual actors, the community of users, and society at large.

Stakeholders should work together to develop vernacular language policies. For example, the Javanese teacher network, the Center for Language of Yogyakarta Province, and the Education, Youth, and Sports Office of Yogyakarta Province can discuss strategic priorities to preserve the Javanese language. Following up on this, the Yogyakarta Regional People’s Representative Council can formulate the Javanese language policy. Afterward, elementary and secondary education levels implement these policies, and the Education, Youth, and Sports Office of Yogyakarta Province evaluate their implementation.

Figure 2 depicts the realization of the language cycle policy framework. The findings could serve as a starting point for introducing changes to vernacular teaching strategies in the future. They might attract the attention of the provincial government of Yogyakarta to regulate and plan actions to preserve and promote the Javanese language and culture through the education sector.

Figure 2

The Realization of the Language Cycle Policy Framework (Source: Derived from the Author’s Synthesized Data)



The Javanese teacher network is a non-structured organization established in accordance with the guidelines of the Directorate General of Elementary and Secondary Education, which enables Javanese language teachers to improve their professionalism, share initial ideas, and voice their opinions and concerns about vernacular teaching quality. The Center for Language of Yogyakarta is an institution under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology with responsibilities to standardize and regulate Bahasa Indonesia, as well as maintain the vernacular languages of the country.

The Education, Youth, and Sports Office of Yogyakarta Province is a provincial organization with three main tasks, namely (1) initiating, supervising, and monitoring education, youth, and sports programs to ensure their effectiveness; (2) initiating regulations in the field of education, youth, and sports; (3) ensuring budgetary control and fostering curriculum, infrastructure, teachers, as well as school administrators' quality. The responsibilities of the Yogyakarta Regional People's Representative Council are to draft laws in coordination with the governor for joint approval, deliberate, and subsequently approve or reject regional regulations instead of laws.

Indonesia fosters vernacular language maintenance through the education sector, and a bottom-up approach to vernacular language preservation should be applied nationwide. Local communities and vernacular speakers play a crucial role in supporting the government in providing native-language instruction. This approach is in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007, pp. 12-13), Article 11 (3), which states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop, and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems, and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places, and persons.

As such, with the support of their government, vernacular speakers have the right to retain and learn their language in both formal and informal settings, for example, by establishing and managing their own educational system. In the case of Indonesia, including vernacular languages in the national curriculum as a local content subject, referring to an educational program with content and teaching media closely linked to local cultural characteristics and regional needs, is a fundamental step in realising the UN declaration. However, this concept requires careful implementation, as the national education sector is a vital tool for conveying the values of multiculturalism, cooperation, and respect.

Furthermore, it is not easy to decide on the type of single-stream education system and the language to be used as the medium of instruction in multilingual and multicultural countries. The local government's commitment to promoting vernacular languages and empowering citizen participation to strengthen their position amid Bahasa Indonesia and foreign languages is key to preserving vernacular languages, which form an essential component of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage.

Managing Challenges in Vernacular Language Education

Indonesia recognizes that positioning vernacular language within the education system is vital. In 2003, the government attempted to transform the country's education system into a school-based management (SBM) or decentralized education system, empowering schools with the autonomy to improve the quality of education. Unlike Yogyakarta, most provincial governments are reluctant to support a decentralized curriculum, fearing it may threaten Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction (Amirrachman, Syafi'i, & Welch, 2008; Indrayadi, Anggita, & Utami, 2025; Samuel, 2025).

In West Sumatra province, despite more than 6 million Minangkabau speakers, the language remains excluded from the elementary school curriculum. The local government provides a special space for Minangkabau culture by offering budaya alam Minangkabau (Minangkabau natural culture)

as a local content subject for fourth- to sixth-grade students. Thus, the Minangkabau language is not learned in formal settings (Thamrin, 2018).

Banjarese, spoken in South Kalimantan province along with Bahasa Indonesia as the language of everyday communication, faces challenges in survival due to lack of stakeholder support (Yamin et al., 2020). In the education sector, for example, the vernacular is not included in the curriculum and the provincial government tends to ignore the importance of language policy.

Banjarese, spoken in South Kalimantan province alongside Bahasa Indonesia as the language of everyday communication, faces challenges to its survival due to a lack of stakeholder support (Yamin et al., 2020). In the education sector, for example, vernacular is not included in the curriculum, and the provincial government often overlooks the importance of language policy.

Sundanese, another vernacular language in Indonesia, faces challenges of intergenerational transmission. Urbanization is associated with a decline in the number of Sundanese speakers, as they tend to shift to Bahasa Indonesia. In urban areas, a shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate learning materials threatens students' opportunities to learn the vernacular. Consequently, children tend to be less fluent in Sundanese, since Bahasa Indonesia is the language of instruction for other subjects and is widely used in daily communication (Darmayanti et al., 2019; Krishandini, Defina, & Wahyuni, 2019; Kurniawati, Emzir, & Akhadiah, 2021).

Vernacular language maintenance also becomes a responsibility of provincial governments, which rely on effective, knowledgeable staff to initiate collaborative work with stakeholders on language policy for regional needs. A synergy between central and local governments would be beneficial for effective and efficient vernacular language preservation. Learning best practices from other provinces is also essential, and Yogyakarta can be seen as a barometer for vernacular language learning.

Moreover, the government tends to focus more on promoting Bahasa Indonesia at national and international levels, as mentioned in Article 44 (1) of the Decree No.24 / 2009, in reference to the national flag, language, emblem, and anthem that: *Pemerintah meningkatkan fungsi Bahasa Indonesia menjadi bahasa internasional secara bertahap, sistematis, dan berkelanjutan* (the Indonesian government expands the function of Bahasa Indonesia as an international language gradually, systematically, and sustainably).

The government sought to promote both nationalism and multiculturalism through the motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), and the third principle of the country's philosophical foundation, the Pancasila. The latter, derived from two Old Javanese words rooted in the Sanskrit, namely 'pañca' (five) and 'sila' (principle), call for belief in a supreme God, humanitarianism, national unity, democracy, and social justice.

The two principles are opposite binaries and seem incompatible in managing language and cultural diversity. However, they can be complementary or combined as multicultural nationalism that shares common values, such as respect for diversity and tolerance. In short, the concept of multicultural nationalism emphasizes cultural diversity while maintaining a shared national identity.

Bahasa Indonesia serves as a liaison language for more than 300 ethnic groups and as a symbol of national pride and identity. On the other hand, multiculturalism is an approach to depict the degree to which the Indonesian people appreciate diversity and value, accept, and maintain cultural differences. With multicultural nationalism, Indonesia implements the concept of nation-state as a common sense of belonging to a shared historical past as promoted by Soekarno, the founding father of the country,

and strengthened by Sumpah Pemuda (the Youth Pledge) of 1928, when the Indonesian youth aimed for the unification of Indonesia through the trinity of *tanah, bangsa, bahasa* (one land or territory, nation, language) (Abdurrahman & Marasabessy, 2020; Foulcer, 2000).

National cohesion is the foundation for national solidarity, leading to trust, peaceful interaction, and the possibilities of cooperation among citizens of a country regardless of their socio-economic, religious, ethnic, and language groups. Language experts Alexandre Duchêne and Monica Heller coined the term “language as pride” to describe how language is legitimized and used as a means of identity-making (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023, p. 393).

Thus, language as pride may lead to a sense of pride among users of a certain language, on the one hand, and to prejudice, on the other, particularly when language users are exposed to linguistic, ethnic, and value differences. However, when they have the same understanding that ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness, for example, should be regarded as the country’s cultural richness and national pride, it would be less challenging for governments to promote multicultural nationalism.

Sources of national pride are either ideational or material. Examples of ideational elements of national pride are political values or systems, leaders, citizenship, togetherness, and the military. Material-based sources of pride are science and technology, economy, national power, culture and arts, history, and heritage (Ni, Wang, & Quek, 2024). Our data reveal that the informants’ sources of national pride are largely material in nature. At the national level, the Indonesian government tends to combine both ideational and material factors to enhance the citizens’ national pride.

Regardless of the current socio-political and economic turmoil, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and Pancasila are used to shape the national pride of its citizens; Indonesia respects people regardless of their backgrounds and celebrates differences through tolerance. Thereafter, practical actions, such as learning national history, arts, and culture, including vernacular languages, in both formal and informal settings, are viewed as manifestations of national pride.

Multiculturalism should be regarded as a form of national belonging that plays a crucial role in establishing national unity. In other words, multiculturalism is an essential constituent of nationalism, as it emphasizes the nation and national identity while simultaneously celebrating the existence of multiple cultures. In the education sector, teachers play a pivotal role in shaping children’s mindset towards cultural and linguistic diversity, as this is a multifaceted and increasingly essential aspect of the modern Indonesian setting. In a globalized world, language and ethnic identity may be a source of prejudice. Thus, promoting multiculturalism and nationalism as two sides of the same coin is important for future generations of Indonesia as they relate to both belonging and identity within the nation.

Exposure to diverse cultures in practical ways helps children develop intercultural sensitivity. Moreover, commitment from both national and regional authorities and non-government institutions is essential in shaping future generations with an open-minded attitude. In Makassar, South Sulawesi province, for example, there is KITA *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, a private organization that provides professional development programs for educators across Indonesia. One of its programs is Education for Peace (EFP), initiated in 2017. Through the EFP program, teachers have opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills in managing diversity in learning environments, addressing hate and intolerance in the classroom, and promoting peace and anti-violence.

Initiating family language practices and policy by introducing a vernacular language in a family setting and positioning parents as language coaches when communicating with their children daily is considered a crucial step in preserving vernacular language at the micro-level. At the meso-level,

the role of the indigenous community is essential in maintaining their traditional customary rights, including their vernacular languages and culture. Organizing cultural events while maintaining vernacular language is viewed as a fundamental effort to create and shape cultural environments.

Additionally, religious communities may support cultural and linguistic diversity by using a particular vernacular language in their religious services. For example, a Roman Catholic church in Yogyakarta, located approximately 3 kilometers from the Sanjaya Tritis Elementary School, uses the Javanese for the liturgy as the central act of worship on the fourth week of each month. The first author of this paper, who participated in the religious services at this church as part of the fieldwork, obtained the following prayer source in Javanese (Figure 3).

Figure 3

A Sample Page of Sunday Missal of Saint John the Apostle Church (Source: Fieldwork, 2023)

**KIDUNG PAMBUKA
TANDA SALIB LAN SALAM**

I : Konjuk ing Asma Dalem Hyang
Rama, saha Hyang Putra tuwin
Hyang Roh Suci

U : Amin

I : Sih nugraha Dalem Gusti Yésus
Kristus, Asih tresna Dalem Allah
Hyang Rama lan Hyang Roh
Suci, tansah manunggal

U : Kaliyan kula sadaya

It is also common for vernacular to be used during Friday prayer when Muslims gather for congregational worship in some regions of the Yogyakarta province. Religious worship in Java can be considered an instance of the self-actualization of Javanese identity. Indeed, the Javanese community in Yogyakarta shows innovative creativity by developing new ideas to express their cultural identity in religious spheres, which may increase a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their lives.

If we put the Javanese learning processes in a broader context and view them from a different perspective, we would say that learning the vernacular is a small step toward two larger goals. Firstly, preventing linguistic chauvinism that the Javanese, as the largest ethnic group and the country's vernacular language, with approximately 80 million speakers, has greater prestige than others. Secondly, preparing future generations with an Indonesia-centric mindset.

Assisting children to adopt an open mindset that Indonesia is rich in culture, with hundreds of distinct languages and traditions, is one of teachers' roles as leaders, as a foundation for preventing cultural prejudice. The Indonesian national vision of multi-ethnic coexistence, as embodied in the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, should be considered an endeavour to strengthen Indonesia's position as a multicultural country.

Understanding the intersections between ethnic pride and nationalism may foster respect for diversity in multicultural Indonesia. Balancing identities, which means ensuring that ethnic pride does not lead to exclusion or conflict with other groups within the country, can contribute to a vibrant

national identity. In other words, when ethnic pride aligns with national identity, it is possible to foster a sense of belonging to both the ethnic group and the nation. Indonesia can lead the way as a good example of managing diverse languages and their survival despite an official national language policy.

Additionally, the Javanese case offers many insights for emulation, for example, the role of provincial governments, as well as training and sensitizing programmes for vernacular language teachers. Yogyakarta's adoption of a cultural schema is exemplary for other vernaculars and for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The concept of multicultural nationalism highlighted in this paper is useful for navigating or juxtaposing vernaculars with the national language in Indonesia and elsewhere in the region.

Conclusion

This study highlights the interplay between ethnic pride and nationalism in Javanese language maintenance, with implications for language planning in Indonesia. Key findings show that vernacular language teachers' ethnic and national identities shape their pedagogical approaches, and that multicultural nationalism can foster language acquisition and cultural appreciation.

To strengthen Javanese language maintenance, a micro-level, bottom-up approach is recommended, with potential applicability to other major vernacular languages in Indonesia. The concept of multicultural nationalism offers a framework for balancing regional diversity with national unity. However, this study's limitations include a focus on Javanese language teachers and a lack of perspectives from other stakeholders.

Future research should incorporate diverse voices, including students, parents, community members, and policymakers. This would offer a more comprehensive understanding of Javanese language maintenance.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

AI Disclosure

We declare that this manuscript was prepared without the assistance of artificial intelligence. Hence, the content of this paper is original.

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