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Do We Need Mother Tongue Language Maintenance in Aceh? Voices from the School Settings

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Abstract

There is a possibility that the Acehnese language and other locally used languages in Aceh Province could become threatened if the locals do not make efforts to maintain them. This study aims to explore teachers' perspectives on maintaining the Acehnese mother tongue in schools. Employing a mixed-methods research design, data was collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews. The survey was distributed via Google Forms to 217 schoolteachers selected through voluntary sampling in Aceh, while interviews were conducted with seven teachers who willingly participated in the study. The results indicate that most teachers agree on maintaining the use of local languages in schools. However, language maintenance may face challenges e.g., globalization, family role, and youth attitude. Hence, teachers recommend that schools should actively promote the use of local languages by designating a special day for celebrating their use and incorporating the languages into local content lessons. This study intends to provide insightful recommendations for policy development regarding the maintenance of local languages in the school setting, particularly in Aceh. It also suggests educational

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implications, such as integrating these languages into formal schooling and developing educational resources to enhance their use in schools. Furthermore, future research could focus on documenting and preserving local languages, as well as implementing language immersion programs aimed at preserving local languages in Aceh.

Keywords: Acehnese, language maintenance, mother tongue, teachers' perspectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bahasa Indonesia, the national and official language of Indonesia (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014; Musgrave, 2014), is the first language or mother tongue of less than 10% of Indonesians, posing a significant issue in education (Arsendy, 2019). Reports indicate that children who speak a local first language often lack access to schooling compared to those raised in the country's official language. Moreover, if these children do attend formal schooling, they often perform worse on tests than their counterparts fluent in the national language (UNICEF, 2015). Indonesian schools prioritize Bahasa Indonesia as the language of instruction (Sneddon, 2003), with local languages primarily used for social exchanges rather than academic or professional purposes (Arka, 2013; Arsendy, 2019). Additionally, proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia is crucial for socioeconomic advancement in contemporary Indonesia (Arka, 2013).

However, these preferences pose challenges for residents of remote regions in Indonesia. Despite Indonesia's success in preserving over 700 indigenous and regional languages, its linguistic diversity presents numerous obstacles, particularly in education (Arka, 2013; Syofyan, 2023). Many students struggle to adapt to schooling in Bahasa Indonesia as they primarily speak their native languages in daily life, hindering their learning engagement due to difficulties understanding lessons in a rarely used language (Syofyan, 2023).

The prevalence of Bahasa Indonesia throughout Indonesia raises concerns about the endangerment of local languages, as language shift among younger generations becomes more apparent (Farisiyah & Zamzani, 2018; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022). Several studies have highlighted the risk of language loss, with some native languages in Indonesia already endangered or extinct (Arka, 2012; Grimes, 2010; Rusminto et al., 2021). Even though data from *Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh* or Aceh Central Bureau of Statistics shows that Aceh has a population of more than 5 million people (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2022), this does not guarantee the vitality of the Acehnese language, considering that language shift has still occurred, with many families predominantly using Bahasa Indonesia at home instead of their mother tongue (Alamsyah et al., 2011; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022). Addressing this language shift is crucial to prevent language loss in Aceh, with language maintenance being one potential solution (King, 2001).

While various studies have explored local languages in Aceh on different topics, such as parental language ideology and language shift among Acehnese speakers, limited research has focused on the educational significance of Acehnese local languages (Al-Auwal, 2017; Aziz & Amery, 2016; Aziz et al., 2020; Hidayati et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a research gap in understanding the role of Acehnese local

languages in education. While some studies have addressed this gap, such as [Hawa et al. \(2021\)](#), which focused on the roles of mother tongue usage in the classroom, further investigation into the educational aspects of local languages in Aceh, particularly teachers' perspectives on language maintenance, is needed. Teachers play a crucial role in language maintenance as they directly impact language instruction and influence students' attitudes ([Ansó Ros et al., 2021](#)). Accordingly, the study poses several research questions:

1. What are teachers' opinions towards mother tongue language maintenance in Acehese schools?
2. What are the challenges towards mother tongue language maintenance in Acehese schools?
3. What are the possible solutions for mother tongue language maintenance in Acehese schools?

By investigating teachers' perspectives, this study aims to provide insights into mother tongue language maintenance in Acehese schools. The results of this study seek to inform future policies and practices, enhancing understanding and promoting linguistic diversity in the region.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Local Languages as Mother Tongues in Aceh

Mother tongue, or native language, is the first language that an individual speaks since birth or in early childhood ([Bloomfield, 1994](#); [UNA–UK, 2022](#)). In a more specific definition, [UNESCO \(1953\)](#) describes the mother tongue as “the language which a person acquires in early years and which normally becomes his natural instrument of thought and communication” (p. 46). In the context of Aceh, Acehese people live in a multicultural and multilingual community, as there are 13 local languages spoken in 23 districts ([Nurdin, 2019](#)). The people are mostly bilingual, as they can speak Bahasa Indonesia as well as the local languages where they grew up and live. Therefore, the local languages are the mother tongue of the Acehese people, whereas Bahasa Indonesia is the national language, applied as a means of communication in the media, science, and education ([Arka, 2013](#); [Yusuf et al., 2022](#)).

Being one of the provinces in Indonesia with linguistic and cultural richness, Aceh has 13 ethnic groups spread throughout the province, each practicing different local languages. The local languages include Acehese (e.g., in Banda Aceh, Sabang, Aceh Besar, Pidie, Pidie Jaya, North Aceh, East Aceh, Aceh Jaya, West Aceh, Langsa, Lhokseumawe, and Bireuen), Gayonese (e.g., in Central Aceh, Bener Meriah, Gayo Lues, and Southeast Aceh), Aneuk Jamee (e.g., in South Aceh, Southwest Aceh, West Aceh, and Simeuleu), Singkil (e.g., in Aceh Singkil), Alas (e.g., in Southeast Aceh), Tamiang (e.g., Aceh Tamiang and Langsa), Kluet (e.g., in some parts of South Aceh), Devayan, Sigulai, and Leukon (e.g., in Simeuleu), Pakpak (e.g., in Singkil and Subulussalam), Haloban (e.g., in Banyak Island of Aceh Singkil), and Nias (e.g., in some parts of Aceh Singkil) ([Balai Bahasa Provinsi Aceh, 2022a](#); [Nurdin, 2019](#)). Of all these languages, Acehese is widely used, and spoken by the majority of people in Aceh in these regions, totaling approximately 2 million users as of 2022 ([Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2022](#)).

2.2 Language Maintenance and Shift

In simpler terms, language maintenance refers to the continuation of the use of a certain language within a speech community amidst competition from a more dominant language (King, 2001; Mesthrie & Leap, 2009). King (2001) describes that such continued use may not concern speakers of the majority language as they may be unaware of it; however, language maintenance for speakers of minority languages typically involves deliberate attempts and frequently becomes a collective purpose amidst challenging conditions. At the other end of the spectrum is language shift, the substitution of a language for another used as the principal mode of communication in a speech community (Mesthrie & Leap, 2009). In other words, language maintenance is typically a reaction to language shift that prompts some speakers of the minority group to perceive a risk to the language's continued use; thus, their response is to ensure the language's survival (Bradley, 2022). These speakers may apply the threatened language in any sector of society to establish it as the primary language within these areas, despite pressure from the dominant language (Pauwels, 2004).

In a multilingual society such as Aceh, a language shift is bound to happen, as there is a more powerful language, i.e., Bahasa Indonesia, making contact with the native languages (Heinrich, 2015). People may thus face difficult decisions about which language they prefer or should speak when there is language contact (Kandler et al., 2010). Several aspects play a role when language shift occurs, including the economy, demography, status, and institutional support (Holmes, 2013; Mesthrie & Leap, 2009). Modernization, industrialization, and urbanization frequently result in bilingualism in a local language and a more widely spoken national language linked to the economy of a multilingual nation (Holmes, 2013; Mesthrie & Leap, 2009). A disparity of power and prestige, or status, between the native language and the dominant one often becomes a major cause: people opt to discontinue using a less prominent language in favor of another language believed to be more socially prestigious and advantageous to offer better socio-economic opportunities (Holmes, 2013; Kandler et al., 2010; Mesthrie & Leap, 2009).

Furthermore, the demographic aspect indeed plays a role in language shift since the risk of shift and loss is higher in a speech community with a smaller population (Holmes, 2013; Mesthrie & Leap, 2009). Several minority languages in Indonesia have declining numbers of speakers and are experiencing language loss, such as the Lampung language (Rusminto et al., 2021), the endangered Marori language in Merauke, Papua (Arka, 2012), and the extinct Hukumina and Kayeli languages in Maluku (Grimes, 2010).

Support from institutions such as administration, education, religion, or the media boosts the position of the dominant language (Mesthrie & Leap, 2009). In Indonesia, exposure to the national language formally starts at school, where Bahasa Indonesia has been the language of instruction from kindergarten to university per government policy since 1990 (Musgrave, 2014). This policy plays a significant role in language shift: schools emphasize Bahasa Indonesia during the teaching and learning process even in remote regions in Indonesia, although students there mostly speak their local languages (Arsendy, 2019; Syofyan, 2023).

Efforts have been made in Indonesia to support local language maintenance. The government has laid the national language policy framework for language management by establishing *Badan Bahasa* (Language Board) or *Balai Bahasa*

(Language Office) at the regional level to handle language-related matters (Arka, 2013). For Acehese, there are seven publications regarding Acehese language grammar published by Badan Bahasa (Arka, 2013), a number of oral (e.g., *Dodaidi*, *Didong*, *Meurukon*, etc.) and written (e.g., *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, *Palandok*, *Panglima Cimpo*, etc.) literary works in Acehese (Balai Bahasa Provinsi Aceh, 2022b), and an online Acehese dictionary compiled by Balai Bahasa in Aceh (Balai Bahasa Provinsi Aceh, 2022b).

Other factors also contribute to the maintenance of local languages. Pauwels (2004) argues that intergenerational transfer is the key to a language's sustainability. The parental role in transferring the mother tongue to their children as succeeding generations is essential in setting the groundwork for language maintenance (Pauwels, 2004). Another factor is attitudes among the speech community of a less dominant language (Holmes, 2013). A locally used language can be maintained for a longer period if the speech community holds positive attitudes toward their language, i.e., considering it a key component of their ethnic identity, thereby encouraging speakers to use the language in various contexts, e.g., social interactions (Holmes, 2013). Institutional support also affects language maintenance as it does language shift (Holmes, 2013; Mesthrie & Leap, 2009). In the context of educational institutions, schools, for instance, may contribute to flourishing the use of a non-dominant language through minority (or local) language teaching and learning, and bilingual education (Holmes, 2013; Pauwels, 2004).

3. METHODS

3.1 Participants

The participants in this current study were 217 teachers selected through voluntary sampling, working at junior and senior high schools in Aceh Province, Indonesia. They were selected based on the following criteria: teaching in Aceh for more than five years, residing in Aceh for more than five years, and speaking one of the local languages in Aceh. The participants came from various regions in Aceh, such as Banda Aceh, Bener Meriah, Bireuen, Aceh Besar, Gayo Lues, Lhokseumawe, Pidie, West Aceh, North Aceh, East Aceh, South Aceh, Sabang, Subulussalam, Northwest Aceh, Aceh Singkil, Aceh Tamiang, and Southeast Aceh. Additionally, seven individuals participated in the semi-structured interview through voluntary sampling, expressing interest and making themselves available for the interview.

3.2 Research Design and Instruments

This case study utilized a mixed methods approach by disseminating a questionnaire and conducting interviews with the participants. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, p. 116) define a mixed methods case study design as a type of study in which quantitative and qualitative data collection, results, and integration are used to provide in-depth evidence for a case(s) or develop cases for comparative analysis.

The questionnaire used in this study was modified by Muliawati and Yusnida (2022) to meet the needs of the study. It was written in Bahasa Indonesia to facilitate the teachers' understanding of the items. The questionnaire comprised seven different

statements with response options of ‘Yes’, ‘No’, and ‘I do not know’. Two subject matter experts from universities in Aceh, Indonesia, who are lecturers and researchers in English language teaching, first reviewed the questionnaire statements for face validity. Before distribution to the participants, the subject matter experts reviewed the questionnaire, suggested changes, and made any necessary modifications.

Additionally, the study employed an interview guide to obtain insights from the teachers regarding the maintenance of the mother tongue in Aceh. The interview guide included follow-up questions that further probed the participants’ responses to the questionnaire on the matter of maintaining the mother tongue in Aceh. The results of the questionnaire served as the basis for the interview questions, enabling them to be supported, validated, and triangulated (Creswell, 2012).

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Before conducting the study, informed consent was obtained from the participants via the questionnaire. Due to the large geographical distances between different parts of Aceh, the questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms. The authors reached out to a number of teachers from various regions in Aceh to help disseminate the online form. Data collection for quantitative analysis took place over more than one month.

For qualitative data, seven individuals who were willing to participate in the study were interviewed remotely via WhatsApp. The interviews, each lasting about 15 minutes, were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure that all participants could understand and respond appropriately to the questions. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and took place over approximately one week. They were recorded and transcribed so that the responses could be analyzed afterward.

3.4 Data Analysis

The questionnaire’s quantitative data were analyzed through simple percentage analysis, computed by dividing the frequency in each category by the total number of participants and multiplying it by 100% (Sudijono, 2009). The data were categorized based on survey statement characteristics, while interview data were analyzed using verbatim transcripts. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative information (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014). Initially, the interview data in Bahasa Indonesia were transcribed and then translated into English. The information was coded and categorized according to the recurring topics that emerged from the interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). The interviewees were identified as P1 through P7 (Participant 1 through Participant 7). Including questionnaire responses in the qualitative data, interpretation helped link the quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more holistic perspective.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The following section presents the data that support the findings of this study, from both the questionnaire and interviews. Several categories were developed based on the statements in the questionnaire. They are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' opinions on mother tongue language maintenance.

| No. | Statement | Responses (%) | | |
|-----|---|---------------|------|--------------|
| | | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 1. | It is important to use the mother tongue (i.e., Acehnese) for daily communication. | 95.4 | 0 | 4.1 |
| 2. | It is important to learn the mother tongue for language maintenance. | 99 | 0.9 | 0 |
| 3. | Students often communicate in their mother tongue in schools. | 74.3 | 6.4 | 18.8 |
| 4. | Students seem to have good competence in their mother tongue. | 85.8 | 0 | 14.2 |
| 5. | Schools should have a responsibility to maintain the mother tongue. | 67 | 5.5 | 27.5 |
| 6. | Local content in the school curriculum should include the mother tongue. | 60.1 | 10.6 | 29.4 |
| 7. | There will be a negative impact on mother tongue maintenance if schools provide no contributions. | 41.7 | 13.8 | 44.5 |

Table 1 shows the teachers' opinions on mother tongue language maintenance. The responses are presented as percentages for statements regarding the importance of using the mother tongue for daily communication, learning the mother tongue, students' communication in schools, students' competence in their mother tongue, schools' responsibility in maintaining the mother tongue, inclusion of the mother tongue in the curriculum, and the impact of schools' contributions on mother tongue maintenance. These answers are further elaborated in the next subsections with additional data from interview results.

4.1 Teachers' Opinions on Mother Tongue Language Maintenance

4.1.1 *The importance of using mother tongue in daily communication for the younger generation*

The teachers considered that students should speak in their first language for everyday communication. One teacher (P1) stated in the interview that the importance of speaking in local languages is:

- (1) "...to keep the language from becoming extinct". (P1)

Table 1 depicts that over 95% of teachers believe that this is central; none of them think otherwise, while only 4% had no idea about the importance of using the mother tongue language to young generations. As such, the use of the mother tongue (e.g., Acehnese, Gayo, Alas, Kluet, etc.) for communication among students in Aceh can be one of the efforts to maintain the mother tongue.

4.1.2 *The importance of learning the mother tongue for language maintenance*

As widely known, the mother tongue has been our first language since childhood. The responses from 217 participants revealed that nearly all of them are optimistic that learning the mother tongue is vital for language maintenance. In the interview, one teacher (P6) considered learning the mother tongue to be highly necessary because:

(2) "...it is an asset and identity of the nation". (P6)

This is in line with the findings of [Begi \(2014\)](#), which suggest that culture can be passed down from one generation to the next if schools adhere to a policy that mandates the use of students' mother tongue as the language of instruction. Moreover, it is also crucial to incorporate the mother tongue into learning to advance children's cognitive, moral, and emotional growth ([Noormohamadi, 2008](#)).

4.1.3 Promoting regular communication in the mother tongue among students in the school environment

In a school environment, most students typically communicate in the national language, as schools in Indonesia prioritize the use of Bahasa Indonesia as the language of instruction ([Sneddon, 2003](#)). However, they also use regional languages for their daily conversations and social interactions ([Arka, 2013](#); [Arsendy, 2019](#)). In the interview, one teacher (P5) stated that speaking in mother tongue is frequent among students, as shown below:

(3) "... [the students] typically use Bahasa at school, and also their mother tongue when interacting with one another". (P5)

Table 1 shows that approximately 74% of the teachers are aware that students frequently use their native languages to communicate with their peers outside class. Such usage is significant because local languages can still be maintained when students engage in social interactions with their peers.

4.1.4 Students' competence in using their mother tongue

Based on the results of statement no. 4, it appears that the students are proficient in their mother tongue, as highlighted in Table 1, with approximately 85% of the teachers' responses indicating so. However, the remaining 14.2% are uncertain about this matter. The following excerpt from one teacher (P7) reflects the finding:

(4) "Living in such a remote area [in Aceh], the students here conveniently use their local language [i.e., Kluet] at every turn". (P7)

It is crucial to preserve the mother tongue language, as its neglect could lead to undesirable statements, such as "In Aceh Province, some students can speak their mother tongue, while others cannot." This maintenance will assist the younger generation in mastering their mother tongue, primarily through spoken language, even though they might be less proficient in written language.

4.1.5 The role of schools in mother tongue language maintenance

The mother tongue, also known as the regional language, plays a crucial role in preserving regional culture, serving as a communication tool since the beginning of humankind. It is important to maintain regional languages as a means of promoting unity in society. Students should feel proud of their regional languages and utilize them with their friends, teachers, and staff who are fluent in the language, especially within

the school environment. Based on Table 1, over 65% of teachers believe that schools should be responsible for preserving the mother tongue, while nearly 28% are not yet aware of this responsibility. This finding supports [Ganuza and Hedman's \(2019\)](#) belief that the utilization of the native language within the classroom setting has the potential to enhance students' proficiency in both their mother tongue and the target language. Hence, there is no doubt that using and learning the mother tongue at school is not only advisable but highly recommended. One teacher (P3) argued that school has a major role in maintaining mother tongue, as described below:

- (5) "The school bears the responsibility of preserving the mother tongue, which is extremely important because the school is an institution where students' knowledge expands". (P3)

It is the responsibility of schools to organize meaningful activities and programs aimed at preserving the mother tongue language for students. Failure to do so may result in the extinction of the mother tongue. Teachers believe that schools can play a vital role in preserving the mother tongue by incorporating it as local content in the school curriculum.

4.1.6 Incorporating mother tongue as local content in the school curriculum

Table 1 displays that the majority of teachers (63%) agreed that teaching students in their native language is an important component of local content in the classroom, while only about 12% disagreed. Although nearly one-third of teachers admitted ignorance on the topic, many were positive that the mother tongue should be taught in schools as part of local content. The following excerpt from one teacher (P5) supports this idea:

- (6) "If the local languages in Aceh are to remain sustainable, local content lessons must be taught and held in schools". (P5)

Since it can be incorporated as local material in the curriculum, the mother language needs to be adequately conserved so that it does not become extinct. [Manel et al. \(2019\)](#) have suggested that inserting the mother tongue in learning has a positive impact on pedagogical and social functions and can enhance understanding of lessons that are difficult to comprehend when using a second or foreign language. Additionally, [Morales-Obod et al. \(2020\)](#) have indicated that using students' mother language could expedite the students' grasp of the material. In a similar vein, this will help minority language students feel more at ease while they learn ([Culver, 2020](#)).

4.1.7 The negative impact of schools providing no contributions to language maintenance

For the next generation to maintain their native language, schools should take part in assisting them to learn it properly ([Holmes, 2013](#); [Pauwels, 2004](#)). In the interview, one teacher (P2) pointed out the adverse impact of the lack of language maintenance:

- (7) "If maintenance efforts are not implemented, the mother tongue may cease to be used and become extinct, resulting in the loss of our identity". (P2)

Failure to do so might lead to negative consequences, as indicated by nearly 42% of the teachers. However, almost 45% of the teachers were unsure if such adverse impacts might occur, while approximately 13% of them did not think it would happen at all (see Table 1).

4.2 Challenges in Maintaining Mother Tongue Language in Aceh

Challenges in maintaining the mother tongue potentially exist wherever the language exists. The presence of a variety of languages has posed several challenges, particularly within education (Arka, 2013; Syofyan, 2023). The data in this theme are to answer the second research question: What are the challenges in preserving the mother tongue language? The interview findings are divided into several themes as follows.

4.2.1 Globalization

These days, globalization has penetrated every industry worldwide, including education. The younger generation is arguably the most susceptible to being influenced by various effects brought about by globalization, particularly concerning the sociocultural aspect of the phenomenon (Holmes, 2013; Mesthrie & Leap, 2009). Modern society is concerned that its children will not be able to compete successfully at the national and global levels. Consequently, parents are urging their children to adapt to the rapid pace of globalization by studying foreign languages rather than focusing on mastering their native tongue. Some participants see this as a challenge due to the reasons stated above:

- (8) "...the influence of globalization today, which causes a shift in people's focus, including the use of mother tongue. Today's society is too worried that their children will not be able to compete if they are not equipped with mastery of the national language from childhood or even mastery of foreign languages. Therefore, unconsciously, this poses a threat to the maintenance of the mother tongue, which eventually has the potential to be lost or become extinct and not be used at all". (P2)

Hence, based on the findings of the study, it can be confirmed that preparing the young generation for today's globalization is widely viewed as positive, yet it does not necessarily involve disregarding the native language.

4.2.2 The role of the family

Family, namely parents, make a significant contribution towards the maintenance of the heritage language. Some parents may prohibit their children from using their mother tongue and instead encourage them to solely use the national language or even prompt them to learn a foreign language instead of their mother tongue. Consequently, children are exposed to Bahasa Indonesia or the national language both at home and at school, as parents believe that using the national language will facilitate their children's socialization at school, and learning a foreign language can enhance their children's competitiveness in the world. The following are some interview excerpts:

- (9) "Parents. As I have observed in big cities, many parents prohibit their children from speaking their mother tongue at home, especially if they attend school where speaking Indonesian is mandatory.

However, even when they return home, they are also prohibited from using their mother tongue. The mindset of people living in the city is that speaking their mother tongue will make them appear less elite, despite the importance of maintaining the mother tongue. Speaking the mother tongue does not diminish a person's status; the most significant obstacle is actually the community's mindset regarding the importance of preserving the mother tongue". (P6)

- (10) "The obstacle is that parents teach children to use a second language other than their mother tongue. Consequently, when someone speaks their mother tongue, children may not understand because they have been taught a second language. When families or relatives visit the child's home, most of them do not understand the mother tongue used. Therefore, parents must teach their children the mother tongue so that they understand their linguistic heritage". (P7)

These findings are in line with previous studies that found families in Aceh primarily utilize Bahasa Indonesia as their primary language within the domestic setting, instead of their native languages (Alamsyah et al., 2011; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022). Thus, families also play a vital role in maintaining the heritage language within their households to ensure that their mother tongue persists from generation to generation.

4.2.3 Attitudes of youth towards their mother tongue

Younger generations should make positive contributions towards the maintenance of their mother tongue. However, a few teachers believe that today's youth pay little attention to the use of their mother tongue for various reasons:

- (11) "Some say using the regional language is still considered *kampung* or plebeian, so many young generations now do not want to use the Acehese language (an example of a mother tongue) in social environments". (P1)
- (12) "The biggest challenge is that almost 90% of Aceh's young generation, especially in the era of Industry 4.0, no longer use the Acehese language in daily communication". (P4)

Hence, based on the responses from the interviews above, most challenges stem from negative attitudes towards the mother tongue, as many consider it less prestigious and traditional to use. Similar findings were shown in Al-Auwal's (2017) study, where Acehese youth preferred to use Bahasa Indonesia over Acehese local languages due to their negative opinions, such as Acehese sounding rude.

4.3 Solutions for Mother Tongue Language Maintenance in Aceh

The data in this section are to answer the third research question: What are the solutions to preserving the mother tongue language? The data were collected from seven participants in the structured interview via audio recordings on the WhatsApp application. Additionally, there was some supporting data from the questionnaire related to this notion.

4.3.1 Involvement of government and stakeholders

The notion of involving the government and all stakeholders in mother tongue maintenance is highly urged by some participants, as they believe that these

collaborations are powerful for organizing programs related to the maintenance of inherited languages. This sentiment is echoed in the interview findings below:

- (13) “In my opinion, the government must promote mother tongue maintenance programs, both in schools and in the community, especially in schools because they play an important role in educating children about what they should and should not do. Therefore, the government needs to promote mother tongue maintenance programs in schools or educational institutions”. (P6)
- (14) “All elements of society, including parents, schools, village officials, government office holders, special regional language maintenance agencies, and all stakeholders of the state civil servant, must immediately take part in the maintenance of regional languages, especially the Acehese language”. (P4)

These findings align with the suggestion made by [Poudel and Choi \(2022\)](#) that failure to uphold language policies may result in a diminished capacity to utilize regional languages within educational settings, posing a significant risk to the maintenance and vitality of regional languages, as exemplified by the case of Kenya. Furthermore, [Ganuza and Hedman \(2019\)](#) have observed that prioritizing the national language in the context of economic globalization, while disregarding local circumstances, contributes to the marginalization of indigenous languages.

4.3.2 Incorporating mother tongue as local content in the school curriculum

Integrating mother tongue as local content in the school curriculum may help students improve other academic skills, as pointed out by [Manel et al. \(2019\)](#). The inclusion of the mother tongue in the learning process yields beneficial effects on both pedagogical and social functions, facilitating the comprehension of complex concepts that may prove challenging when conveyed solely through a second or foreign language ([Manel et al., 2019](#)). At school, students have the potential to be required to learn the mother tongue, which will be helpful for the process of preserving the mother tongue at school and making them accustomed to their inherited language. Some interview excerpts are below:

- (15) “...incorporating the mother tongue into our regional language curriculum, so that academically students are required to learn the mother tongue, and this will be beneficial for the process of preserving the mother tongue in our area”. (P2)
- (16) “There must be local content lessons at school about the Acehese language because children can learn at school. My experience is living in a remote village that uses regional languages, so if there are local content lessons at school, children can learn their mother tongue at school, so they understand their mother tongue”. (P7)

4.3.3 Promoting the mother tongue through a special day at school

Some teachers consider arranging a special day to use the mother tongue at school as a good initiative since it may enhance students’ daily interaction and communication in their mother tongue. The teachers’ responses are as follows:

- (17) “The solution may be to encourage having one day in the Acehese language regardless of the condition. Wherever the place is, there should be one day in Acehese language (at school), for example, every Thursday...”. (P1)

(18) "...the school can make a special day for the use of the mother tongue". (P3)

Most participants in this study responded that the mother tongue should also be incorporated into school competitions, such as speeches, writing short stories, reading poetry, debates, and responding to rhymes, all using the mother tongue. Additionally, the special day could invite local artists (e.g., storytellers, and comedians) to display their talents in local languages. Therefore, based on these findings, it can be stipulated that all elements in the community, including the government and stakeholders, should collaborate to ensure the success of language maintenance in Aceh by implementing meaningful initiatives so that the Acehnese mother tongue will continue to thrive in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explores schoolteachers' opinions on mother-tongue language maintenance in Aceh. Findings reveal that most teachers share a positive understanding of the maintenance of the mother tongue in Aceh. They have also noted that challenges in language maintenance include globalization, family roles, and youth attitudes towards the language. To address these issues, teachers have offered several solutions, such as involving the government and stakeholders in establishing language policies in education, integrating the mother tongue as local content in the school curriculum, and encouraging the use of the mother tongue through a special day at school.

The study also provides several important educational implications. Incorporating the use of the mother tongue into formal schooling helps promote linguistic diversity and cultural identity. Adopting language rules that reflect teachers' opinions can foster an inclusive learning environment and give students access to a wider range of cultural experiences. Acknowledging and actively encouraging the use of local languages highlights the importance of creating an immersive learning environment that may enhance educational outcomes, including increasing students' engagement with their cultural heritage. The development and implementation of educational resources that represent the cultural and linguistic diversity of the local region should be a joint effort of policymakers and educators, emphasizing the significance of education in maintaining and advancing local languages for the betterment of the community.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations, including sample bias generated by voluntary participation, which may lead to an overrepresentation of individuals interested in language preservation. Additionally, due to the small sample size and possible lack of various perspectives from teachers in Aceh, the findings might not be generalizable to other regions. Further research may address language documentation and preservation, as well as language immersion programs aimed at preserving local languages in Aceh.

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