

THE ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN REVITALIZE CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study investigates the importance of the mother tongue and the way it contributes to early childhood cultural knowledge. This research is descriptive qualitative. The data were taken from 25 respondents. The respondents were 23 mothers of kindergarten students aged 4-6 years old and 2 teachers of kindergarten students in Dusun Grunggung, Desa Gunungsari. The data were gathered from July 20, 2024, until July 22, 2024. The researcher collected the data by implementing these steps: the researcher shared an online questionnaire through Google Forms with the respondents, conducted unstructured interviews with respondents, and collected the data. The result shows that most respondents (mothers) agree that teaching children in their mother tongue from an early age is crucial for introducing and expanding their cultural knowledge.

Keywords: *Cultural Knowledge, Early Education, Mother Tongue*

Introduction

Indonesia has a wide range of indigenous languages. Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa Kemendikbudristek RI reported that the total number of local languages in Indonesia currently inventoried by the Kemendikbudristek RI is 718 local languages by 2023. According to data from the Badan Bahasa Kemendikbudristek RI, only 76% of households in Indonesia still use local languages in their homes. The rest use Indonesian and even foreign languages. In 2021, Badan Bahasa Kemendikbudristek RI inventoried 24 mother tongues experiencing decline and threatened with extinction.

Long Form Sensus Penduduk 2020 (LF SP2020), released by the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), indicates that the highest number of local language users is occupied by the pre-boomer generation born before 1945, with a total proportion of 87.13%. Meanwhile, the lowest number in the use of local languages is occupied by the Alpha generation or post-generation Z generation born from 2013 onwards, with a total proportion of 62.94%. The indication of the percentage figures is in line with the statement from the Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa Kemendikbudristek RI that the use of local languages in Indonesia continues to decline from generation to generation. The leading cause of regional language extinction is that native speakers no longer use and pass on their language to the next generation.

There are four factors of language endangerment (Campbell & Belew, 2018). The four factors that cause the problem are more non-linguistic. The first is economic factors. These include, among others, lack of economic opportunities, rapid economic change, shifts in work patterns, resource depletion, forced changes in livelihood patterns, communication with outside areas, resettlement, habitat destruction, globalization, and so on. Second are political and social factors. These include discrimination, repression, official language policies, the level of education available, the expulsion of populations, and so on. Third are attitudinal factors. These include the attitudes of speakers towards languages under threat and towards the official national language and the dominant language surrounding it, the attitudes of mainstream members of society towards minorities and their languages, the prestige and stigma associated with threatened and dominant languages, and so on. Finally, there is the factor of lack of institutional support. This is illustrated by the role of language in education, government, religion, and the media, or even recreational activities such as sporting events, popular culture, music concerts, and so on.

In the context of Indonesians, local languages, in general, for Indonesians, are their mother tongue, which developed as their first language during their early years. Parents noticed the development of children's language since birth (Ardhyantama & Apriyanti, 2021). The mother tongue spoken by a child is the first language spoken by each individual when they begin to talk. According to Kiparsky (Tarigan, 1986), language acquisition is a process by which the child adjusts a series of hypotheses that are getting more and more complicated, or hypotheses that are still latent or hidden are very likely to occur with the mediation of parents until he chooses based on a measure or from the language. Mother tongue plays a vital role in creating our emotions and thoughts since childhood, the most critical phase of people's lives, leaves an imprint on their mother tongue. When people speak in their mother tongue, their heart, intellect, and language work together. People express that they talk in their mother tongue in the context of Indonesian, i.e. regional languages originating from a multiethnic society and followed by interethnic contact, including language contact, which can lead to various linguistic phenomena such as bilingualism (or even multilingualism), which often occurs in minority language groups. Language contact can also result in language shifts, including the issue of regional language extinction.

The declining number of confirmed speakers of local languages and their users within the scope of family, community and daily life requires special attention, especially for Alpha generation children who will be the tip of the horn in the preservation of local languages as a mother tongue in Indonesia. Nowadays, the use of local languages as a mother tongue has begun to be displaced by the Indonesian national language, which is used as a mother tongue by some Indonesians. To revitalize local languages as mother tongues, during the early grades at school (grades 1 to 3), as a transitional period, it is necessary to develop mother tongue-based multilingual education for children. During this transitional period, the mother tongue can be used as a language of instruction to introduce the Indonesian national language.

This can undoubtedly be used as a step in introducing local languages in the context of cultural heritage to children through the scope of education at an early school age before starting an understanding of the Indonesian language. This is important because the mother tongue is the basis of children's character building as well as the basis of the following learning process for children. Mark Heyward outlined another thing that needs to be considered in supporting the use of mother tongue in early grade learning, namely teacher capacity building. According to him, it is necessary to ensure that teachers can teach children who use their mother tongue as a transitional language. Teacher capacity building based on teachers' working groups (KKG) is one proven way, so it needs to be developed. In addition, the availability of books to read in the mother tongue is critical. The mother tongue researched in this study is Java, which is the mother tongue of the respondents from Dusun Grunggung, Desa Gunungsari. Through Java, younger generations can access and inherit knowledge from their ancestors. This language becomes a bridge to transmit cultural values that have been passed from one generation to the next. (Widyonagoro et al., 2023) Because of a decline in the number of mother tongue users and early school children's understanding of their cultural identity, researchers are motivated to conduct this study to revitalize the role of mother tongue in child cultural knowledge in early childhood education.

Research Method

This research is descriptive qualitative. The data were taken from 25 respondents. The respondents were 23 mothers of kindergarten students aged 4-6 years old and 2 teachers of kindergarten students in Dusun Grunggung, Desa Gunungsari. The mothers were selected as respondents because of their relationship with their children. They were career women who only had quality time for family at night. Most of the fathers are labourers who do not stay at home in the morning. At the same time, the teachers were selected as respondents because of

their relationship with the children as their students at school. The data were gathered from July 20, 2024, until July 22, 2024. The researcher aims to understand how the mother tongue is used in early childhood education and its impact on children’s learning and development. The study seeks to gather insight from both parents and teachers to provide a well-rounded view. The researcher wants to prove that the findings correspond to natural phenomena that occur. The researcher collected the data by implementing these steps: the researcher shared an online questionnaire through Google Forms with the respondents, the researcher conducted unstructured interviews with respondents, and the researcher collected the data. After being collected, the data were analyzed using the following procedures: reading and counting the respondents’ responses on Google Forms, classifying the answers, bringing the results into a pie chart, discussing the findings, and drawing a conclusion.

Result

Based on the primary data collected from the questionnaire “The Role of Mother Tongue to Revitalize Cultural Knowledge in Early Childhood Education” through Google Form distributed to respondents and unstructured interviews, the research results can be seen in the following explanation:

The Role of Mother Tongue in The Cultural Knowledge of Children at an Early Age in The Alpha Generation Era

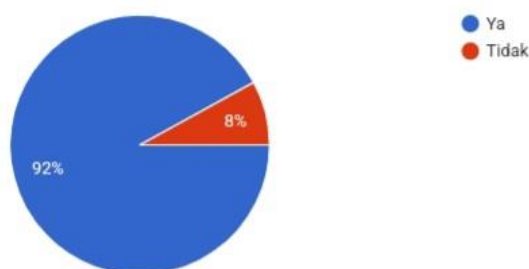


Figure 1. Understanding About Mother Tongue

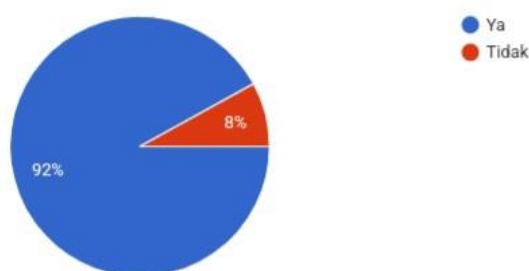


Figure 2. The Use of Mother Tongue in Communicating with Children at Home

Figure 1 illustrates that 92% of respondents understand the term “mother tongue,” which forms most of the chart. This section is highlighted in blue and slightly separated to emphasize its importance. The respondents recognize that the mother tongue is the first language a child learns from birth, often tied to the regional language in the Indonesian context. This widespread understanding suggests positive implications for cultural preservation, educational policy, and social awareness. Conversely, 8% of respondents do not understand the term “mother tongue,” represented by a smaller red segment on the chart. This indicates that a minority lacks familiarity with the concept, pointing to a need for further educational initiatives to ensure a broader understanding. Figure 2 supports the findings of Figure 1, showing that 92% of

respondents use their mother tongue when communicating with their children at home. The remaining 8% do not use their native language in family communication. The correlation between Figures 1 and 2 suggests that mothers of young children not only understand the concept of the mother tongue but also actively use it in daily life, reinforcing cultural connections within the family.

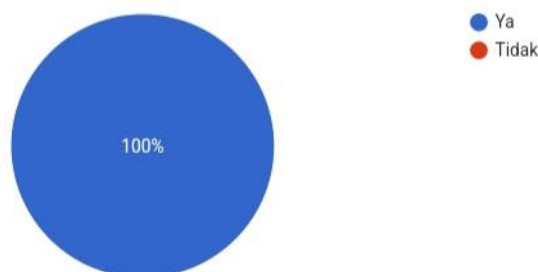


Figure 3. The Importance of The Mother Tongue to Be Taught to Children

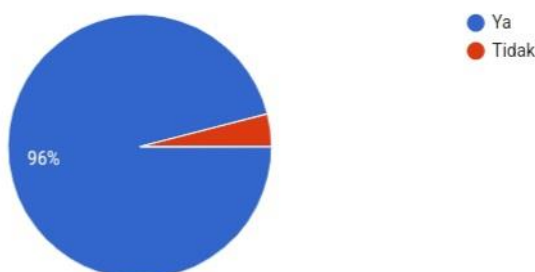


Figure 4. The Influence of Mother Tongue on a Child's Cultural Knowledge

The diagram in Figure 3 depicts the respondents' complete agreement on the necessity of teaching children in their mother tongue. All respondents agreed that children must learn their original language. This consensus emphasizes the need to retain cultural identity, improve cognitive development, and encourage more excellent communication within families and communities. The homogeneity of responses demonstrates a strong, shared belief in the benefits of mother tongue education. Figure 4 shows that a large majority of respondents, 96%, agree on the importance of a mother tongue in a child's cultural understanding. This high percentage suggests that respondents strongly agree on the value of a child's native language in influencing their awareness and appreciation of their cultural heritage. This finding implies that the mother language plays an essential role in passing down cultural values, customs, and conventions to the next generation, building a more vital link to their cultural identity. The overwhelming agreement among responders emphasizes the importance of the mother tongue in shaping a child's cultural understanding. This consensus is confirmed by significant research, which demonstrates that the native language is an essential medium for cultural transmission, identity formation, and cognitive development. Educational systems and policies that support mother tongue education not only conserve cultural heritage but also enhance academic success and social harmony.

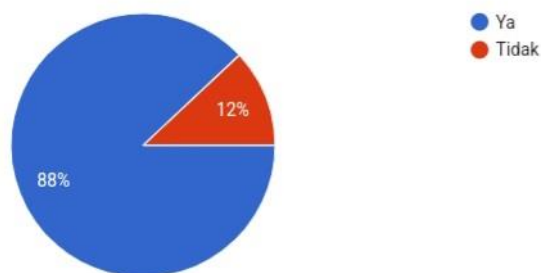


Figure 5. The Child's Familiarity and Interest in Traditional Stories, Songs, or Games in Their Mother Tongue

Figure 5 depicts participants' responses to a child's familiarity and interest in traditional stories, music, and activities in their mother tongue. A large majority (88% of respondents) believe that children are familiar with and interested in these cultural elements. This high percentage implies that traditional narratives, music, and games continue to play an essential role in children's artistic development, demonstrating cultural solid preservation and transmission among families or groups. Conversely, 12% of respondents disagree with this sentiment. This minority may imply that traditional artistic traditions are less emphasized in some households or groups, either because of modernization, cultural influence, or a shift towards more current forms of entertainment or education.

Attempts to Revitalize the Mother Tongue in The Framework Of Cultural Heritage in Early Childhood Education

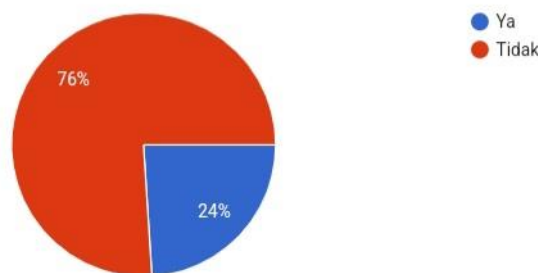


Figure 6. Special Rules Regarding the Usage of Mother Tongue at Home

Figure 6 depicts the respondents' perspectives on specific restrictions governing the use of their mother language at home. According to the data, a large majority, 76%, support having special restrictions for using the mother tongue in the household. This shows that most respondents perceive a benefit in establishing guidelines for mother tongue use, maybe to conserve cultural heritage, improve language competency, or maintain effective family communication. On the other hand, 24% of respondents oppose imposing these kinds of restrictions. This minority may argue that language use at home should be more adaptable and natural, with no enforced restrictions. They may believe that implementing standards will impede spontaneous conversation or that it is unnecessary to regulate language use in the private realm.

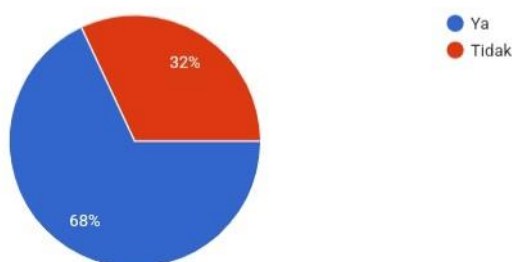


Figure 7. Use of Mother Tongue as an Introductory Language in Schools

Figure 7 depicts the results of a survey on the usage of the mother tongue as an introduction language in school. According to the research, 68% of respondents support using the mother tongue as the primary language for beginning education, while 32% oppose the idea. The majority (68%) of those who support the use of the mother tongue believe that beginning education in a language that children are already familiar with can considerably improve their learning process. This strategy can smooth the transition to formal schooling and help students grasp fundamental concepts more quickly. It can also help students develop a greater connection to their cultural background, thereby enhancing engagement and motivation.

Furthermore, learning in a familiar language may promote greater comprehension and retention of educational content, perhaps leading to increased academic performance. Conversely, 32% of those who disagree may have a variety of reasons for their position. They may be concerned about potential problems such as the need for more resources, teacher training, or integrating the home tongue into a national or global language curriculum. They may also claim that competency in a widely spoken language, such as English, is essential for future academic and professional prospects. Teaching this language early on may be more advantageous to kids' long-term performance.

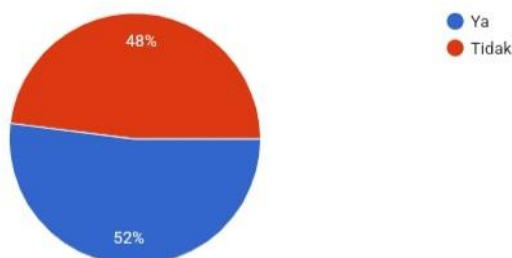


Figure 8. Special Programs or Curriculum in Children's Schools Which Encourage the Use of Mother Tongue in Learning

According to the research results, 52% of respondents support the use of the mother tongue in children's education, while 48% are opposed. Supporters feel it promotes better comprehension, cultural preservation, and inclusivity. Opponents are concerned that it may impede proficiency in internationally dominant languages such as English while also highlighting practical obstacles and expenses. The virtually even divide indicates that policymakers should carefully evaluate both perspectives and seek additional research and stakeholder involvement to develop balanced educational policies.

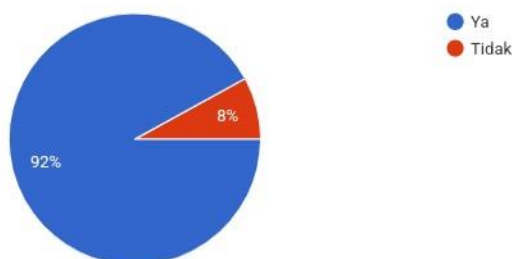


Figure 9. The Importance of Mother Tongue in Children's Education

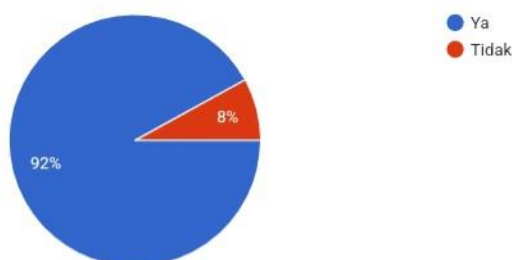


Figure 10. Changes or Developments in Children Who Are Actively Exposed to Their Mother Tongue at School.

The figures depict the findings of a survey on the role of mother language in children's education. According to the findings, a large majority of respondents (92%) believe that mother language plays an essential part in children's education. In comparison, only 8% of respondents disagree with this viewpoint. This overwhelming support demonstrates the broad conviction in the advantages of utilizing the mother tongue as a medium of teaching in early childhood education, which can include improved understanding, cognitive development, and cultural preservation. The correlation between Figure 9 and Figure 10 implies that those who respect their mother tongue are more likely to believe in its benefits when actively used in schooling. This strong association highlights the importance of having a common understanding of the mother tongue's function in promoting educational progress.

Discussion

The Role of Mother Tongue in the Cultural Knowledge of Children at an Early Age in The Alpha Generation Era

According to the results of the questionnaire, the role of the mother tongue is critical to shaping the development of cultural knowledge in children at this age. At this point, children will absorb all the information in their environment, and their mother tongue, or the local language, can be used as a tool to introduce them to their surroundings. Speaking their mother tongue also allows children to establish a strong sense of belonging and identity. It connects children to their family history and community, establishing a sense of pride and continuity. Most parents claim to communicate with their children at home in their mother tongue, but the intensity of the language use is limited. In practice, Indonesia's national language remains embedded in mother-tongue interactions, preventing children from adequately understanding and using their mother tongue. For example, when conversing with a buddy, children in the Alpha era use the Indonesian national language more fluently than their mother tongue or local language. Generation Alfa is the child of millennial generation parents. This generation is very closely related to gadgets because technology and the development of gadgets are high-speed at these times. Preschool-age children can surf in cyberspace, play online games, play videos

on YouTube, and communicate using gadgets. The upbringing and development of this generation are certainly very different from the previous generation. Many challenges in the virtual world play a role in determining children's development. If not directed, children will fall into the virtual world and the pleasures of technology, including the use of language.

On the other hand, their cultural knowledge is adequate because parents gradually introduce them to culture, either through educational media or in person, so that the child can immediately feel the mother tongue, which is rich in local cultural information. Family and community involvement are also important. Families should actively use their mother tongue at home and participate in cultural activities that need it. Community programs, such as cultural festivals and language clubs, can help children feel more supported and motivated to use their mother tongue.

Attempts to Revitalize the Mother Tongue in The Framework of Cultural Heritage in Early Childhood Education

According to the results of questionnaires and unstructured interviews, one of the reasons why children do not fully and easily speak their mother tongue at home is that there are no specific regulations for doing so. Parents only initiate talks in their mother tongue, but they do not need their children to respond in the same language. The influence of technology and existing trends also makes the Alpha Generation's children feel compelled to keep up with the evolution of a more modern and non-antique language, such as the mother tongue passed down from generation to generation. Early childhood education plays a vital role in this regard. Teachers can provide instruction that incorporates the values of the mother tongue in order to re-establish its use. One method is to employ the mother tongue as an introductory language in the child's schoolwork. Teacher initiative is required because there is currently no curriculum that controls the use of mother tongues in the learning of children at school from an early age. According to the reality, in one of the kindergartens near the study site, teachers incorporate the mother language into the child's learning through singing and short discussions. So, at least, the children will learn cultural knowledge in their mother tongue at school. Parents and teachers must collaborate to teach children in their mother language so that they can learn about their cultural identities and carry on their ancestor's cultural legacy. Cultural identity is understood as a cultural feature that distinguishes a nation or group of people from other groups. (Sutopo et al., 2019)

Conclusion

Mother language has a vital role in shaping cultural knowledge among children in the Alpha Generation era, but it faces practical obstacles. While parents understand its relevance and try to utilize it at home, the prevalence of Indonesia's national language in daily contact creates a barrier. This linguistic landscape, combined with the fast integration of technology into children's lives, emphasizes the necessity for collaborative efforts in early childhood education. Revitalizing the mother tongue within the context of cultural heritage in education appears to be a promising solution. Teachers have an essential role in incorporating the mother tongue into educational procedures, such as employing it as an introductory language during school events. This strategy not only promotes cultural identification but also enhances family and community ties. However, the lack of formal norms and curriculum directions remains a concern, requiring educators to take proactive measures and collaborate with parents. To summarize, while the Alpha Generation values technology breakthroughs, protecting and promoting the mother tongue as a conduit for cultural knowledge necessitates purposeful interventions. By leveraging both the home and educational environments, stakeholders may guarantee that children develop a firm grasp of their cultural history, creating pride and continuity throughout generations.

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