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THE IMPORTANCE OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AMONG TEENAGERS

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ABSTRACT (10 PT)

This study investigates challenges confronting the Indonesian language among teenagers, focusing on declining formal linguistic competence caused by slang dominance, excessive code-mixing, and historical disconnect from its philosophical foundation as a unifying national identity. Using qualitative library research, the analysis of scholarly sources reveals four critical impacts: (1) disrupted learning processes as linguistic errors become normalized; (2) marginalization of Indonesian amid preference for exclusive slang; (3) communication barriers in formal contexts due to register confusion; and (4) diminished dignity as the language is perceived as outdated. Revitalization requires a holistic strategy: contextual education fostering critical awareness of language appropriateness, strengthening digital ecosystems with quality Indonesian content, reconnecting youth with the 1928 Youth Pledge's inclusive philosophy through relevant narratives, and multisectoral synergy among families, schools, and government under the principle "Prioritize Indonesian, Preserve Regional Languages, Master Foreign Languages." While linguistic evolution is natural, mastering standard Indonesian remains essential for effective cross-context communication and sustaining national identity in the digital era.

Keywords : *Indonesian language; youth; slang; language preservation; linguistic competence*



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian was born from a long historical process rooted in Malay as a lingua franca in the archipelago since the 7th century, which was then confirmed as a symbol of national unity through the Youth Pledge on October 28, 1928 when the youth of the archipelago for the first time officially used the term "Bahasa Indonesia" as a unifying language. Constitutional confirmation occurred in 1945 through Article 36 of the 1945 Constitution which established it as the national language, while strengthening its role as a unifier of hundreds of ethnic groups and regional languages in Indonesia. As a language deliberately chosen because of its neutral nature not originating from a particular majority ethnic group, Indonesian represents national awareness that is the foundation of unity in diversity, then continues to develop through standardization of spelling, expansion of vocabulary from regional and foreign languages, and adaptation to socio-cultural dynamics until now it has become a living language that serves as a bridge between cultures as well as Indonesia's national identity.

However, proper and correct Indonesian is currently fading. Many problems are emerging, such as the inability of teenagers to use proper and correct Indonesian and to apply it in context. Furthermore, today's teenagers often experience a decline in formal linguistic competence, with their ability to write standard sentence structures, spell correctly, and use formal vocabulary drastically declining due to the dominance of social media slang ("*gws*", "*gabut*", "*bucin*") excessive code mixing with English ("*meeting dulu ya*", "*deadline-nya urgent banget*"), and the use of abbreviations and emojis that replace complete verbal expressions. More crucially, a historical disconnect exists: the majority of teenagers fail to understand that Indonesian was deliberately chosen in 1928 as a unifying neutral language, rather than Javanese, Sundanese, or other ethnic majorities, as a form of national compromise to overcome ethnic divisions.

As a result, the language born from the spirit of unity in diversity is now seen as merely a practical communication tool that can be "modified" at will without awareness of its cultural responsibility as a national identity. When teenagers are more fluent in using foreign terms than their Indonesian equivalents ("download" instead of "unduh", "challenge" instead of "tantangan"), there is an erosion of the philosophical value of Indonesian as a bridge between cultures that was created to avoid the domination of foreign cultures. Ironically, precisely in the digital era that demands critical literacy, the values that are the foundation of the Youth Pledge, the ability of teenagers to use Indonesian reflectively and creatively is actually weakening, threatening the function of this language as a glue of national identity that has been fought for by our predecessors.

Despite the ever-growing challenges of language use, consistent efforts to activate the correct and proper use of Indonesian remain an urgent need. In this context, young people have also voiced their collective aspirations: a commitment to preserving and enriching the quality of Indonesian as a unifying force for the nation. Facts on the ground show that in daily interactions, the younger generation still uses Indonesian as their primary medium of communication, despite the increasing penetration of foreign vocabulary, especially English, into their conversations. This spirit of balance aligns with the strategic message of the Language Development and Fostering Agency, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which states: "Prioritize Indonesian, and master international languages."

RESEARCH METHODS

This research falls into the category of library research, a scientific approach conducted through in-depth exploration of various literature and written documents relevant to the study topic. According to (Bado, 2022), library research is conducted by reviewing a number of scientific works or written sources related to the problem being studied, then selectively noting essential sections directly related to the discussion. Data collection in this research relies entirely on sources available in libraries or document repositories, thus eliminating the need for field data collection. As a document-based research method, library research has four distinctive characteristics. The first is the researcher's direct interaction with written texts and numerical data as the objects of analysis, rather than with information or experiences obtained through observation or interviews in the real world. Therefore, the primary focus of this research lies in the critical interpretation of available secondary sources, without involving direct primary data collection from the research subjects.

Second, library research is characterized by "directly usable" data, meaning that researchers are not required to collect data at the research site because the required information sources are readily available and directly accessible in the library or document repository. The third characteristic indicates that the data obtained is generally categorized as secondary sources, where researchers obtain information through intermediaries, namely written works or documents processed by other parties, rather than through direct observation or primary data collection in the field. The fourth characteristic illustrates the flexibility of access to library data, which is not limited by spatial or temporal dimensions; researchers can examine documents from various geographic locations and specific time periods without having to be physically present at the location or time of the event (Anoto, 2024).

Based on the previous description, the data collection process in library research is carried out through in-depth review and systematic exploration of various relevant information sources, including scientific journals, reference books, and documents in both print and digital formats. This research is categorized as a qualitative approach because the presentation of its findings does not rely on statistical calculations, but rather emphasizes efforts to understand, interpret, and uncover the meanings and symbols contained in the data, both explicitly stated and implicitly implied. As emphasized oleh (Mu'jizah et al., 2015), literature study is essentially a series of methodological activities that include collecting literature sources, critical reading activities, selective recording, and processing study materials into analytical synthesis. In contrast to quantitative research that relies on empirical data collection in the field, this literature research is more inclined to process data through a theoretical, descriptive-narrative approach, and philosophical reflection to produce a holistic understanding of the problem being studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesian Among Youth

A literature synthesis reveals a significant correlation between the high frequency of non-standard language use and a decline in formal Indonesian literacy skills among youth (Nurrahma et al., 2025).. In line with this issue, the current dynamics of Indonesian language use among today's younger generation demonstrate a strong tendency toward code-mixing with foreign vocabulary, particularly from English and Korean. This phenomenon contributes to the negative perception among some youth that using standard Indonesian is less attractive or inconsistent with their desired contemporary image. This stigma poses a serious challenge to efforts to preserve and develop Indonesian as a national identity in the era of globalization. In practice, youth language use patterns are contextual and strongly influenced by their social environment. In formal settings such as school or official events, they are generally able to communicate using more structured and standardized Indonesian. However, in informal interactions with peers, the dominance of informal language is very evident, marked by the rise of slang terms, social media abbreviations, and the adoption of vocabulary from global popular culture, particularly Korean culture (K-pop), which has a significant influence on the communication styles of Indonesian youth. It is important to understand that linguistic change is an inherent part of cultural dynamics; language constantly evolves along with social transformations, technology, and intercultural interactions. This adaptation process is natural, although it still requires critical awareness so that language development does not

erode the function of Indonesian as a unifying force for the nation and a vehicle for transmitting national values.

Arisetya, (2025) The decline in formal language skills among the younger generation raises serious concerns in both academic and professional contexts. Hartono (2023) in his meta-analysis of several empirical studies found that the majority of higher education educators observed a decline in the quality of students' academic writing compared to the previous generation. Fitriyah et al., (2022) stated that most employers in Indonesia still consider formal communication skills in Indonesian an important recruitment criterion, especially for positions that require intensive communication. However, Rahadyan's (2023) survey revealed a paradox in the form of a tendency for young people to underestimate the relevance of formal language skills for their future careers. This perception gap is exacerbated by the phenomenon of "register confusion" identified (Fitriyah et al., 2022) where many individuals experience difficulty adjusting their language style according to context due to the dominance of informal language habits, thereby reducing communication flexibility in formal and professional situations.

The use of language that does not conform to linguistic rules by adolescents has a significant impact on their mastery of Indonesian in several dimensions.

1. First, from a learning perspective, the habit of using slang interferes with adolescents' cognitive ability to absorb and remember standard Indonesian language rules in educational settings. This occurs because adolescents tend to rely on non-standard vocabulary that has become ingrained in their daily lives, making it difficult for them to distinguish between correct and incorrect forms of language. As a result, incorrect language use becomes normalized for them without them realizing it, hindering the process of internalizing correct language structure.
2. Second, the existence of Indonesian as a national identity faces the threat of marginalization due to the dominance of slang in everyday conversation. Language reflects the values and norms of a society at its time; if the younger generation continually replaces the use of the national language with non-standard language varieties, Indonesian risks losing its role as a unifying force for the nation. This phenomenon reflects the influence of globalization, which erodes awareness of national linguistic identity. Therefore, early educational intervention is needed to protect the next generation from the erosion of these linguistic values.
3. Third, adolescents who habitually use slang experience communication barriers in various social contexts. Their limited mastery of standard vocabulary makes it difficult for them to express their ideas clearly and precisely, both in academic settings and in formal interactions. The inability to switch to context-appropriate language varieties leaves them disoriented in their use of Indonesian, which in turn reduces the effectiveness of communication and weakens their position in situations that demand formal language competence.
4. Fourth, the rise of slang contributes to the decline of the dignity of Indonesian in the eyes of the younger generation. Exclusive slang understood only by certain groups is perceived as more appealing due to its contemporary and familiar feel, while standard Indonesian is considered stiff, old-fashioned, or irrelevant. This perception erodes appreciation for the aesthetic richness and refinement of Indonesian, leading to a growing abandonment of the

ability to speak well and correctly. Without systematic awareness efforts, this trend has the potential to weaken the function of Indonesian as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values and national identity.

Developing Indonesian among Youth

Sudaryanto, (2018) Developing Indonesian among the younger generation requires an approach that is adaptive, inclusive, and relevant to the realities of their digital lives without sacrificing the language's historical essence as a unifying force for the nation, born of the 1928 Youth Pledge. The main challenge is not the existence of slang or code-mixing itself, as linguistic change is inevitable, but rather the disconnection from historical awareness and the degradation of standard language skills, which threaten the strategic function of Indonesian as a national identity. Therefore, its development must move along four main axes:

1. First, Educational Transformation through a Contextual and Engaging Approach

Learning Indonesian in schools needs to shift from a normative-corrective approach to education that fosters critical awareness. Instead of banning slang, teachers can encourage youth to analyze the differences in function between casual language styles on social media and formal language styles in scientific essays or job application letters, so they understand that linguistic flexibility lies in the ability to choose the appropriate language style according to the context. The integration of contemporary digital content such as educational podcasts, creative TikTok content about spelling, or online platform-based short story writing competitions can make Indonesian a relevant medium of expression, not just a rigid subject.

2. Second, Strengthening the Indonesian Language Digital Ecosystem

The younger generation lives in a digital space dominated by English-language content. To balance this, it is necessary to build a digital ecosystem rich in quality Indonesian-language content, ranging from online educational platforms, local games with Indonesian narratives, and support for young content creators who use Indonesian creatively while maintaining clarity of meaning. Collaboration between the Language Agency, social media platforms, and creative communities can produce campaigns such as #BahasaGaulBijak or #IndonesianPride, which encourage teenagers to be proud of using Indonesian without losing its contemporary appeal.

3. Third, Reconnecting with Historical Philosophy through Inspiring Narratives

The development of the Indonesian language must be reconnected with a national narrative that evokes the emotions of the younger generation. Instead of memorizing the Youth Pledge date, teenagers need to be encouraged to reflect: why did the youth of 1928 choose Malay over Javanese or Sundanese as the language of unity? The answer lies in the spirit of equality and respect for diversity. This narrative is relevant to contemporary issues such as anti-bullying, inclusivity, and diverse identities, ensuring that Indonesian is understood not as a burden on nationalism, but as a tool for building a just dialogue space for all ethnicities, religions, and backgrounds.

4. Fourth, Multisectoral Synergy with the Principle of "Prioritize, Preserve, Master"

The implementation of the Language Agency's slogan "Prioritize Indonesian, Preserve Regional Languages, Master Foreign Languages" must become an operational guideline. Within the family, parents can set an example by using good Indonesian in daily conversations without neglecting regional languages as a cultural heritage. In public spaces, the government and private sector need to consistently use standard Indonesian in both digital and physical public services. Meanwhile, foreign language proficiency should be positioned as a complement, not a substitute, so that adolescents understand that foreign

language skills are even more valuable when supported by a strong command of Indonesian as a foundation of identity.

With this holistic approach, the development of the Indonesian language is no longer viewed as a conservative effort that resists change, but rather as a dynamic process that blends historical heritage with contemporary creativity. Indonesian will remain relevant not because it is imposed, but because the younger generation consciously chooses it as a medium of expression, critical thinking, and collective pride, just as the youth of 1928 chose it as a bridge of unity amidst the diversity of the archipelago.

It is important to recognize that language is essentially a means of communication that constantly experiences dynamics and transformation with changing times. Therefore, the diversity of its forms and variations in use are a natural phenomenon that reflects the social life of society. Nevertheless, mastery of standard language rules remains an essential requirement, as this ability enables the younger generation to adapt their communication methods appropriately and effectively to a variety of situations, both in formal environments such as education and the workplace, and in everyday informal interactions.

The Role of the Environment in Developing Indonesian Language Use

Akhirani, (2026) To address the challenges of Indonesian language use among the younger generation, real collaboration from various stakeholders is required. The government can initiate this effort through the development of strategic policies and the implementation of programs specifically designed to foster adolescent interest in Indonesian. One concrete step that can be taken is to facilitate the availability of Indonesian literature and reading materials that are presented in an engaging manner, relevant to the interests, and appropriate for today's youth. Furthermore, educational institutions also play a central role in fostering appreciation and pride in Indonesian through the development of a contextual, innovative curriculum that connects language learning to students' daily lives (Zahira et al., 2024).

The role of the family and social environment plays a significant role in shaping Indonesian language use patterns among adolescents. Parents, as key figures in the immediate environment, can act as linguistic models by consistently practicing good and correct Indonesian language use in daily interactions at home. Meanwhile, creating a social atmosphere that appreciates and encourages the use of Indonesian whether in schools, communities, or public spaces will strengthen adolescents' awareness of actively using this national language. Support from both environments can synergistically foster positive language habits while fostering a sense of ownership and pride in Indonesian as part of their identity.

The role of the family and social environment significantly influences the formation of Indonesian language usage patterns in adolescents. Parents, as the primary figures in their immediate environment, can serve as linguistic models by consistently practicing good and correct Indonesian language use in daily interactions at home. Meanwhile, creating a social atmosphere that appreciates and encourages the use of Indonesian whether in schools, communities, or public spaces will strengthen adolescents' awareness of actively using this national language. Support from these two environments synergistically fosters positive language habits while fostering a sense of ownership and pride in Indonesian as part of their identity.

Furthermore, it is important to maintain a balanced language use at home by limiting the excessive use of foreign languages or slang, so that children understand the context in which different language varieties are used. Positive reinforcement through appreciation and recognition for children's ability to speak clearly and correctly also plays a crucial role in building self-confidence and pride in using Indonesian.

In addition to the role of the family, external stimulation also supports the development of children's language skills. One effective approach is to familiarize children with reading Indonesian-language books that are appropriate for their interests and age, then interactively discuss the content to improve comprehension and verbal expression. Collaboration between parents and schools is also key to success, as intensive communication can ensure the continuity of language skills development programs between home and school. With this synergy, children not only master Indonesian as a means of communication but also build a positive emotional connection to the national language as part of their identity.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study confirms that Indonesian, born from a long historical process as a result of national compromise through the 1928 Youth Pledge and ratified constitutionally in 1945, now faces serious challenges among the younger generation. The national spirit that underpinned its birth as a neutral language uniting hundreds of ethnic groups is beginning to be eroded by the dominance of slang, excessive code-mixing with foreign languages, and the penetration of social media vocabulary that blurs the boundaries between formal and informal language varieties. This phenomenon is exacerbated by a historical disconnect young people's lack of understanding of the philosophy behind the birth of Indonesian so that the language, which should serve as a bridge between cultures, is instead viewed as merely a practical communication tool that can be modified without cultural responsibility. As a result, there is a degradation of formal linguistic competence in terms of standard sentence structure, spelling, and adequate vocabulary mastery.

The impact of excessive use of non-standard language is manifested in four crucial dimensions. First, the learning process is disrupted because young people have difficulty distinguishing correct language rules due to the normalization of linguistic errors in everyday life. Second, the existence of Indonesian as a national identity is threatened with marginalization when the younger generation prioritizes exclusive slang over an inclusive, unifying language. Third, communication barriers arise in various social contexts due to the inability to adapt language variations to the situation, thus reducing the effectiveness of interactions in academic and professional settings. Fourth, the dignity of Indonesian is being diminished because it is considered outdated and irrelevant, even though its rich aesthetics and refinement are the foundation for inheriting the nation's cultural values.

Efforts to develop Indonesian among youth require a holistic strategy that adapts to the digital reality without ignoring its historical essence. Educational transformation must shift from a corrective approach to building critical awareness through a contextual approach that teaches language flexibility appropriate to the situation. Strengthening the Indonesian language digital ecosystem needs to be done through collaboration between the Language Agency, social media platforms, and content creators to produce a contemporary narrative that brings pride. Reconnecting with the historical philosophy of the Youth Pledge must be

packaged in a narrative relevant to contemporary issues such as inclusivity and diversity, so that youth understand Indonesian not as a burden on nationalism, but as a tool for building equitable dialogue. Multi-sector synergy families as linguistic role models, schools as contextual curriculum developers, and the government as policy makers is key to the successful implementation of the principle of "Prioritize Indonesian, Preserve Regional Languages, Master Foreign Languages."

Ultimately, it is important to recognize that language dynamics and variation are inevitable in cultural evolution, but they must not erode mastery of standard rules that serve as the foundation for effective communication in various life contexts. Indonesian will remain relevant not through normative imposition, but through the collective awareness of the younger generation to choose it as a medium for critical expression, creativity, and pride in identity. With a shared commitment from all stakeholders families, schools, government, and civil society Indonesian can be re-established as a living, dynamic, and dignified unifying force for the nation, as bequeathed by the youth of our time who wisely chose it as a bridge of unity amidst the diversity of the archipelago.

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