

STUDENTS' LANGUAGE ATTITUDES TOWARD INDONESIAN, ENGLISH, AND LOCAL LANGUAGES ON CAMPUS: LANGUAGE CHOICE, PRESTIGE, AND MAINTENANCE IN A MULTILINGUAL UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

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Abstract: *Indonesia's multilingual higher education context requires students to navigate Indonesian, English, and local languages across diverse communicative domains. Yet, positive attitudes toward multilingualism may not translate into sustained language practices. This study investigates undergraduate students' attitudes toward these languages, focusing on language identity, choice, perceived prestige, and local language maintenance. A descriptive mixed-methods design involved ten students in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. Data were collected through a 20-item five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and five open-ended questions, analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings reveal positive attitudes across all dimensions, with language identity receiving the highest mean (4.44), followed by maintenance (4.06), choice (3.84), and prestige (3.36). Indonesian dominated cross-regional interaction, English served academic and professional purposes, while local languages were largely confined to same-region peers. The study reveals an attitude-practice gap and contributes evidence for multilingual policies that create meaningful domains for sustained language use.*

Keywords: Language Attitudes, Language Identity, Language Practices, Local Language Maintenance., Multilingualism

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the world's most linguistically diverse societies, where hundreds of local and regional languages coexist with Indonesian as the national language and English as an increasingly influential international language. This multilingual ecology is particularly evident in higher education, where students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds interact within the same institutional setting. Universities therefore constitute important sociolinguistic spaces in which students negotiate communicative needs, linguistic identities, social relationships, and future aspirations. For students enrolled in English education programs, this situation is particularly complex because English functions simultaneously as an academic subject, a professional resource, and a means of international communication.

The coexistence of Indonesian, English, and local languages does not imply that these linguistic resources have equivalent social functions. Indonesian generally serves as a lingua franca that enables communication among students from different linguistic backgrounds. English is commonly associated with academic development, professional advancement, and global communication, whereas local languages frequently function as resources for regional identity,

cultural affiliation, and interpersonal solidarity. Language choice in multilingual university settings is therefore shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by interlocutors, communicative domains, perceived usefulness, identity, and social expectations. Understanding these dynamics requires attention to both students' attitudes toward languages and their reported language practices.

Language attitude is an important concept for examining how individuals evaluate and position different linguistic resources. Garrett (2010) explains language attitudes as involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, encompassing individuals' beliefs about languages, emotional responses toward them, and behavioral tendencies associated with language use. Importantly, positive attitudes do not necessarily lead directly to frequent or sustained language use. Students may value a particular language for cultural or identity reasons while using another language because it is more practical, widely understood, or institutionally preferred. This distinction is especially important in multilingual contexts where language maintenance depends not only on speakers' positive evaluations but also on the availability of meaningful opportunities for actual use.

Previous research in Indonesia provides evidence of this attitude–practice complexity. Fitriati and Wardani (2020) found that university students in Yogyakarta expressed appreciative attitudes toward Indonesian, English, and local languages, although Indonesian remained the dominant language of communication. Similarly, Hariyanto (2021), in research involving 386 students from eight higher education institutions in Bangka, reported generally positive attitudes toward Indonesian. These findings suggest that positive evaluations of multiple languages can coexist with unequal patterns of language use, reflecting the different communicative functions assigned to national, international, and local languages.

The tension between language attitudes and actual language practices is particularly relevant to the maintenance of local languages. Haerudin et al. (2024) reported that ethnic-language fluency among Indonesian university students was influenced by domestic language use and parental encouragement, whereas factors such as cross-ethnic marriage and relocation were associated with reduced fluency. Such findings indicate that language loyalty and positive attitudes alone may not be sufficient to sustain heritage-language use when opportunities for regular

interaction decline. Consequently, language maintenance should be understood as a social practice requiring supportive interpersonal, familial, and institutional environments.

English occupies a distinctive position within this multilingual configuration. As the dominant international language in many educational and professional domains, English is frequently associated with academic achievement and future employability. Santoso et al. (2024), for instance, found that Indonesian university students perceived English-medium instruction as beneficial for developing English proficiency and improving employment prospects, while simultaneously recognizing the value of other languages for supporting academic comprehension and participation. This suggests that the increasing importance of English does not necessarily eliminate the functional relevance of Indonesian or local languages. Rather, students may assign different roles to different linguistic resources depending on the communicative context.

Similar patterns have been identified in other Indonesian multilingual university contexts. Research involving university students in Bali has shown positive attitudes toward Balinese, Indonesian, and English, although their actual language practices differed across contexts. Likewise, research among EFL students in Lampung has indicated strong appreciation for local languages despite the dominance of Indonesian and limitations in local-language proficiency. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that multilingual students do not simply select one language over another. Instead, they negotiate among multiple linguistic resources according to communicative purposes, interlocutors, institutional expectations, identity, perceived prestige, and opportunities for language use.

Despite these contributions, an important gap remains in the literature. Much previous research has examined attitudes toward Indonesian, English, or local and heritage languages separately, or has focused primarily on language proficiency, language loyalty, or language choice. Less attention has been given to how Indonesian, English, and local languages are simultaneously positioned within the everyday linguistic experiences of English education students in a multilingual university environment, particularly in South Sulawesi. This gap is significant because English education students occupy a distinctive position: they are future English teachers who are expected to develop strong English competence while simultaneously participating in Indonesia's multilingual social and cultural environment.

The present study addresses this gap by examining students' attitudes and reported language practices involving Indonesian, English, and local languages at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. Rather than treating the three languages as competing linguistic alternatives, the study considers them as complementary resources that may serve different communicative and symbolic functions. Specifically, the study examines four dimensions of language attitudes—language identity, language choice, perceived language prestige, and local language maintenance—and relates these dimensions to students' reported patterns of language use across campus contexts. This integrated approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how national, global, and local linguistic resources coexist within a multilingual university environment.

The study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to sociolinguistic research by demonstrating the importance of distinguishing language attitudes from actual language practices in multilingual higher education. In particular, it highlights how positive evaluations of local languages may coexist with restricted opportunities for their everyday use. Empirically, the study provides evidence from a relatively underexplored multilingual university context in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Practically, the findings may inform university language planning by encouraging a complementary multilingual approach in which Indonesian continues to function as a shared national language, English is supported as a resource for academic and global communication, and local languages are provided with

I. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative component examined students' attitudes using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, while the qualitative component explored students' experiences and explanations through open-ended questions.

The four dimensions examined were:

1. Language Identity
2. Language Prestige
3. Language Choice
4. Language Maintenance

The qualitative data were used to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative patterns. The participants were ten undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. Convenience sampling was employed because the questionnaire was distributed through the researchers' class network. Seven participants were female (70%) and three were male (30%). Participants ranged from 18 to 23 years old, with a mean age of 20.9 years. Students represented several semester levels, namely semesters 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10. The linguistic backgrounds of the participants were diverse. Five respondents reported competence in Makassarese, while others reported knowledge of Duri, Enrekang/Massenrempulu, Alor, Mandar, or no local language. The questionnaire contained 20 Likert-scale statements divided equally among four dimensions. Responses ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Five open-ended questions explored:

1. the language most frequently used on campus;
2. situations in which English was used;
3. obstacles to English use;
4. the importance of local language to personal identity; and
5. students' recommendations for supporting multilingualism on campus.

Data were collected electronically in late July 2026 using Jotform and Google Forms. Respondents completed the questionnaire and open-ended questions in a single sitting. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the data would be used for academic purposes. Identifying information was excluded from the analysis. Quantitative responses were coded from 1 to 5. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were calculated for individual questionnaire items and the four dimensions. Qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Recurring ideas were identified and organized into themes corresponding to the research questions.

II. RESULTS

Overall Language Attitudes

The findings indicate generally positive attitudes toward Indonesian, English, and local languages.

Dimension	Mean
Language Identity	4.44
Language Maintenance	4.06
Language Choice	3.84
Language Prestige	3.36
Overall Mean	**3.93**

Language Identity produced the highest mean score (4.44), indicating that students strongly connected language with personal and national identity. Language Maintenance also received a high mean score (4.06), demonstrating strong support for preserving local languages. Language Choice obtained a moderately high score (3.84), indicating that students recognized the situational nature of language use. Language Prestige obtained the lowest score (3.36), suggesting that students were less likely to interpret English primarily in terms of social status.

Indonesian and English as Important Linguistic Resources

The strongest questionnaire responses were related to Indonesian identity and the future value of English.

The statement that Indonesian is an important component of national identity received a mean of 4.7. Similarly, students strongly agreed that they enjoyed learning and using English ($M = 4.7$), while the perceived importance of English proficiency for their future obtained a mean of 4.6.

These results indicate that students do not perceive Indonesian and English as competing linguistic resources. Instead, each language fulfills a different function. Indonesian represents national identity and academic communication, whereas English represents academic development and future professional opportunities.

Perceived Prestige of English

The Language Prestige dimension showed a more moderate pattern. Students moderately agreed that English has high prestige on campus ($M = 3.5$). However, they were less likely to agree that English speakers are considered more educated ($M = 3.1$) or that fluent English speakers receive greater respect from others ($M = 2.7$). The lowest mean score in the entire questionnaire was therefore associated with the assumption that English fluency automatically produces greater interpersonal respect. This finding suggests that English is viewed primarily as an instrumental competency rather than a strong status marker.

Language Choice

Indonesian was the most frequently used language in campus communication. Students strongly agreed that they used Indonesian during lectures ($M = 4.2$). Local languages were used mainly in informal communication with close friends ($M = 3.5$), while English was used particularly when discussing academic materials ($M = 3.8$). Students also reported mixing Indonesian and English in everyday conversations ($M = 3.7$). The statement that language choice depends on the person being addressed obtained a mean of 4.0. These findings demonstrate that students' language choices are highly contextual rather than random.

Interview Findings

The interview data provide additional explanations for the questionnaire results.

First, Indonesian was the dominant campus language. Nine of the ten respondents identified Indonesian as their primary campus language. The main explanation was the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the student population. Indonesian enables students from different regions to communicate effectively.

Second, English was associated primarily with academic contexts. Students reported using English in English-medium courses, presentations, assignments, and interactions with lecturers. Some participants also used English in journaling, gaming, social media, and communication with foreign contacts.

Third, English use was constrained by linguistic and psychological barriers. Limited vocabulary was the most frequently mentioned obstacle, followed by low confidence and pronunciation difficulties. Several students described anxiety when speaking publicly.

Fourth, local languages were strongly associated with identity. Nearly all respondents viewed their local languages as important markers of cultural origin, family heritage, and regional identity.

Fifth, students wanted stronger institutional support for multilingualism. Suggested strategies included language clubs, multilingual cultural events, multilingual campus signage, and organized opportunities to use different languages.

III. DISCUSSION

The Attitude–Practice Gap

The most significant finding is the gap between positive attitudes and actual language practices. Students expressed strong support for local language preservation, with a mean of 4.3 for the statement that local languages should be continuously preserved. However, local languages were not dominant in everyday campus interaction. This pattern is consistent with recent Indonesian research. Haerudin et al. (2024) found that students' ethnic-language fluency was strongly associated with domestic use and parental encouragement, demonstrating the importance of actual opportunities for language use. Similarly, recent research involving EFL students has identified a discrepancy between positive attitudes toward heritage languages and their limited active use. The present study therefore suggests that language maintenance initiatives should not focus exclusively on changing attitudes. Students already demonstrate positive attitudes. The more pressing issue is creating functional domains in which local languages can actually be used.

Indonesian as the Campus Lingua Franca

Indonesian occupies the strongest functional position in the present study. This dominance is largely explained by the multicultural composition of the student population. Indonesian allows students from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate without requiring mastery of each other's local languages. Thus, Indonesian functions not only as the national language but also as an important practical resource for campus interaction. This finding is consistent with Fitriati and Wardani (2020), who found that Indonesian remained the preferred language of communication among students in Yogyakarta despite positive attitudes toward local languages. The dominance of Indonesian should therefore not necessarily be interpreted as negative. Instead, it demonstrates the important role of a shared national language in facilitating communication within a linguistically diverse university.

English as an Instrumental Rather Than Status Language

Another important finding concerns students' perception of English prestige.

Students recognized the importance of English for their future, and the mean score for the statement concerning future English proficiency was 4.6. However, they did not strongly believe

that English proficiency automatically generated social respect. This finding suggests a distinction between instrumental motivation and social prestige. Students value English because it provides access to education, employment, global communication, and professional development, rather than simply because English speakers are perceived as socially superior. This interpretation is consistent with Santoso et al. (2024), whose participants viewed English-medium instruction primarily as a means of improving English proficiency and accessing employment opportunities. The result is also important because the participants were English education students. For them, English competence may be perceived as a normal professional expectation rather than an exceptional social characteristic.

Language Choice as Domain-Sensitive Behavior

The distribution of Indonesian, English, and local languages corresponds closely with Fishman's domain framework. Indonesian dominates formal and cross-regional communication. English is concentrated in academic and selected digital contexts. Local languages are mainly used among close friends who share the same regional background. Thus, the three languages do not necessarily compete for the same communicative functions. Instead, students employ them according to the communicative requirements of particular situations. This pattern also resembles findings from multilingual university contexts in Bali, where positive attitudes toward Balinese, Indonesian, and English coexisted with different patterns of actual language practice.

Implications for Language Maintenance

The findings have important implications for university language policy.

For Indonesian, the results confirm the continuing importance of the national language as a shared medium of communication. For English, the findings suggest that students require more opportunities for low-stakes communicative practice. Because students already have positive attitudes toward English, institutional interventions should prioritize vocabulary development, pronunciation practice, speaking confidence, and authentic communication rather than simply promoting positive attitudes. For local languages, the challenge is more fundamental. Students value their local languages but have limited opportunities to use them on campus. Universities could therefore establish:

1. local language clubs;
2. multilingual cultural festivals;
3. multilingual campus signage;
4. student-led language communities;
5. local-language storytelling or cultural events;
6. multilingual student publications; and
7. opportunities to incorporate local cultural and linguistic resources into selected learning activities.

Such initiatives would transform local languages from languages that are merely valued symbolically into languages that are used functionally.

IV. Novelty and Contribution

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated examination of language identity, language choice, language prestige, and language maintenance within the same multilingual university context. Previous studies have frequently examined one dominant issue, such as English attitudes, ethnic-language loyalty, or local language maintenance. The present study brings these dimensions together to demonstrate that students' linguistic orientations are layered rather than mutually exclusive.

Three contributions emerge.

First, the study demonstrates that students can simultaneously possess strong attachment to Indonesian, positive instrumental orientations toward English, and emotional attachment to local languages.

Second, the findings reveal that the most important sociolinguistic issue is not necessarily negative attitudes toward local languages but the limited availability of domains in which students can use them. Third, the study demonstrates that English prestige should not automatically be equated with social superiority. Among English education students, English appears to function primarily as a professional and academic resource. Therefore, the study contributes to a more

nuanced understanding of multilingualism in Indonesian higher education by distinguishing language value, language function, and language practice.

V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that university students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar hold generally positive attitudes toward Indonesian, English, and local languages, although these languages occupy distinct functional and symbolic roles. Indonesian functions as the primary lingua franca for interaction among students from diverse linguistic and regional backgrounds. English is valued mainly as an instrumental resource for academic development and future professional opportunities, while local languages retain strong emotional, cultural, and identity-related significance but are predominantly used among students who share the same regional background. The central finding is the clear gap between students' positive attitudes toward local language maintenance and their limited everyday use of local languages. This suggests that positive attitudes alone are insufficient to ensure sustainable language maintenance; meaningful opportunities and supportive institutional environments are also necessary. The findings further indicate that English is not necessarily perceived as a marker of social superiority but rather as a resource for academic and professional advancement. Overall, the study demonstrates that Indonesian, English, and local languages can function complementarily rather than competitively. A sustainable multilingual university environment should maintain Indonesian as a shared national language, strengthen English for academic and global communication, and create institutional spaces that encourage the visibility, use, and transmission of local languages.

VI. Limitations and Recommendations

The primary limitation of this study is the small sample size of ten participants from a single study program and institution. The use of convenience sampling also limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study relies on self-reported data, which may not completely represent participants' actual language behavior.

Future research should involve larger samples across different universities, study programs, ethnic backgrounds, and regions of Indonesia. Comparative research between urban and rural universities would also be valuable. Longitudinal studies could further investigate whether

institutional language-maintenance programs lead to changes in students' actual use of local languages over time.

Future research could also employ classroom observations, recorded interactions, or language-use diaries to complement self-reported questionnaire data. Such approaches would allow researchers to examine the relationship between stated attitudes and actual linguistic behavior more directly.

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