

Revitalizing The Mother Tongue As An Effort To Form The Social Identity Of Elementary School Children

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the role of mother tongue revitalization (regional language) in the formation of children's social identity in elementary schools and its potential to prevent cultural loss due to modernization and globalization. As the first language learned, the mother tongue plays a crucial role in shaping children's social and cultural identity. However, its use is increasingly declining, especially among younger generations who tend to prefer Indonesian or foreign languages in daily communication. This research employed a qualitative, descriptive narrative approach to explore the perspectives, experiences, and practices of teachers, parents, and students in elementary schools that incorporate regional languages into their curriculum. Data were collected through questionnaires, observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that revitalizing the mother tongue in elementary schools not only supports the preservation of regional languages but also strengthens children's social and cultural identity. The study highlights the need for more comprehensive education policies that prioritize the preservation of regional languages from an early age, ensuring that the cultural values embedded in mother tongues are maintained.

Keywords: mother tongue revitalization, social identity, cultural preservation, elementary schools, regional languages.

INTRODUCTION

Mother tongue, as the first language learned by children, plays a crucial role in shaping their social and cultural identity. In Indonesia, the mother tongue not only serves as a tool for communication but also as a medium that reflects the social and cultural values passed down thru generations. Therefore, the mother tongue becomes an integral part of a nation's identity, reflecting the local wisdom, traditions, and worldview of the community. The preservation of mother tongues, particularly regional languages, is crucial in maintaining Indonesia's cultural diversity, especially amidst the challenges of globalization and modernization that increasingly threaten their sustainability (Simanungkalit et al., 2025). Although Indonesian has been regulated in Law No. 24 of 2009 as the national language that must be used in official communication, the use of mother tongues, especially regional languages, is becoming increasingly marginalized in daily life. The dominance of Indonesian in almost all sectors of life, as well as the popularity of foreign languages considered more "international," leads many young generations to prefer communicating in Indonesian or foreign languages rather than their mother tongue. As a result, the number of native speakers of regional languages is declining, potentially threatening the loss of local cultural identity inherent in those languages (BPS, 2022).

This phenomenon is influenced not only by social and cultural changes, but also by the impact of globalization, which is changing children's perspectives on their own culture. Today's younger generation is more likely to view their mother tongue as less relevant in daily life, leading to a weaker connection with local culture. In fact, understanding and using their mother tongue is key to connecting them with their social identity. Therefore, the preservation of regional languages becomes very important in order to maintain local customs and culture as part of the identity of the Indonesian nation. Belitung Regency Regional Regulation Number 2 of 2013 concerning the Preservation of Customs and Empowerment of the Belitung Malay Customary Institution provides a strong legal basis for this preservation effort, where customary institutions play an important role in maintaining and preserving local traditions and culture, including the local language (Belitung Regent, 2013).

One of the local languages facing a real threat of extinction is the Belitung Malay language. The use of this language continues to decline, especially among the younger generation, resulting in a loss of understanding of the rich Belitung Malay proverbs, which are full of cultural meaning. Bimantoro (2024) and Hirata (2024) emphasize the importance of integrating regional languages into the education curriculum and utilizing digital technology to support their preservation. In line with this, Regional Regulation of Bangka Belitung Islands Province Number 5 of 2024 concerning the Development, Guidance, and Protection of Regional Languages and Literature aims to strengthen the use of regional languages in community life, especially in education, in order to support existing cultural diversity (Language Development and Guidance Agency, 2022).

Various previous studies have shown that the mother tongue plays an important role in the formation of social identity. Setiawan (2024) revealed that mastery of the mother tongue plays a role in children's cognitive and social development, as well as strengthening social bonds within the community. This research also supports previous findings indicating that the mother tongue enriches cultural experiences and strengthens cultural identity. Masyita (2025) adds that the mother tongue serves as an important symbol in the formation of social identity, particularly in multicultural societies like Indonesia, where language variation signifies social membership. However, most previous studies have focused more on the macro level, such as the use of mother tongue in the context of globalization and multiculturalism in general. These studies have not extensively examined the implementation of mother tongue use in everyday social interactions at the micro level, especially in primary education settings (Setiawan, 2024).

Although many studies recognize the importance of mother tongue in shaping social identity, very few delve deeply into how the process of preserving mother tongue is carried out at the elementary school level in Indonesia, especially in schools affected by globalization such as SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan. This research fills that gap by focusing on the revitalization of mother tongue at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan as an example of mother tongue preservation in elementary education. This research offers a new perspective by combining cognitive and social development theories, as proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky, with a study of mother tongue preservation in everyday school practices. Furthermore, this research provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by mother tongues in the context of modernization and globalization, as well as identifying educational policies that can support the preservation of regional languages in school environments.

Thus, while previous research has provided a good understanding of the role of mother tongue in multicultural societies, this study introduces innovation in examining the role of mother tongue in the context of primary education. This research also provides practical recommendations for education policies to support the preservation of regional languages in the face of globalization challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to explore a deeper understanding of mother tongue preservation, specifically the Belitong Malay language, within the context of primary education at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan. This research approach uses a qualitative method with a descriptive narrative design, which was chosen because it allows the researcher to describe in detail the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by various parties, including teachers, students, and parents, in the preservation of mother tongues in elementary schools. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative research is highly suitable for exploring social phenomena in depth thru direct interaction with participants, allowing researchers to understand the meanings constructed by individuals within specific contexts. Narrative descriptive designs, as articulated by Riessman (2008), emphasize the importance of narratives in holistically uncovering participants' experiences and perspectives.

This research was conducted at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan, Belitong Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province, which was chosen due to the phenomenon of declining use of Belitong Malay, particularly among the younger generation. This makes the school a relevant

example for studying the preservation of mother tongues in the context of primary education, as well as the challenges faced in efforts to maintain the local language. The participants in this study consisted of three main groups who play a crucial role in the process of mother tongue preservation in schools: teachers, students, and parents of students. Three teachers representing grades 4, 5, and 6 were selected based on their involvement in learning processes that incorporate the mother tongue, as well as their experience in facing the challenges of mother tongue preservation in the classroom. Six students from grades 4, 5, and 6 were selected based on their use of the mother tongue in daily interactions at school. They were asked to reveal how their mother tongue is used in the school and home environment. Three parents of students were also interviewed to gain their perspectives on the importance of their mother tongue in their children's daily lives and the support provided for preserving their mother tongue at home.

Data in this study were collected using various data collection techniques, namely direct observation, direct interviews, and indirect interviews. Direct observation was conducted to observe the application of mother tongue in the classroom learning process, particularly in grades 4, 5, and 6. The researcher observed how mother tongue was applied in daily interactions within the school environment. Direct interviews were conducted with the three main participant groups: teachers, students, and parents, to explore their perspectives, experiences, and challenges related to mother tongue preservation. Indirect interviews were conducted through the collection of relevant documentation, such as syllabi, teaching materials, and school policies related to mother tongue preservation. By using these three techniques, researchers can obtain rich, contextual, and in-depth data to comprehensively describe the phenomenon of mother tongue preservation at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan.

Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting participants, in accordance with Patton's (2015) recommendation that participant selection in qualitative research is based on the relevance and depth of information that can be provided. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), which emphasizes the process of coding and identifying the main themes from qualitative data. The analysis process begins with transcribing all interviews to facilitate analysis, followed by coding the emerging main themes, such as the challenges of mother tongue preservation, the implementation of mother tongue in learning, and the roles of teachers, students, and parents. Relevant data will be grouped into categories to facilitate further analysis, and the results will be presented in the form of thematic narratives to describe the findings related to mother tongue preservation at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan.

As an effort to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the researcher used several techniques, such as source triangulation to ensure the accuracy and consistency of information, member checking to verify the findings with participants, and an audit trail to allow others to evaluate the reliability of the findings thru detailed records of the data collection and analysis process. This research adheres to the principles of research ethics by ensuring that all participants understand the research objectives, their rights, and provide written consent before participating. Participant identities will be kept confidential, and the data obtained will only be used for research purposes. This research was conducted from August 23rd to October 22nd, 2025. Thru in-depth data analysis, this research aims to evaluate the implementation of mother tongue in learning, identify challenges faced by teachers, students, and parents, and assess their respective roles in supporting the preservation of mother tongue in the school environment. The research also aims to analyze existing school policies in supporting mother tongue preservation and provide recommendations for more effective policies for regional language preservation in the future. Thus, although this research is limited to SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan, the results of this study are expected to provide a clearer picture of the challenges and efforts to preserve mother tongues at the primary education level, and can serve as a reference for further research in other schools with similar conditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research on the revitalization of mother tongue as an effort to shape the social identity of elementary school children at SDN 46 Tanjungpandan aims to understand the role of mother tongue in building students' self-identity and social identity. In Indonesia, a country rich in diversity, one's mother tongue is not just a means of communication, but also a link to local cultural values passed down from generation to generation. The research results show that although Indonesian is used as the main language of instruction in schools, the mother tongue, such as Belitung Malay, still plays an important role for students. One of the interview results with a teacher at SDN 46 Tanjungpandan stated the following.

“Although we teach Indonesian as the primary language, children still use the Belitung language at home and in daily interactions, which strengthens their sense of connection to local culture”(Personal interview with Miss Purnama, October 17, 2025).

The results of this interview illustrate how, despite Indonesian being used as the primary language of instruction in schools, the mother tongue, namely the Belitung language, remains an important part of students' daily lives at SDN 46 Tanjungpandan. Children in the

area continue to use the Belitong language in their social interactions, both at home and within the community. Mother tongue not only serves as a tool for communication but also as a cultural symbol that strengthens students' sense of connection to their local identity. This indicates that the Belitong language plays a very important role in preserving local cultural traditions and values passed down thru generations, even tho they also learn Indonesian in school.

Mother tongue learning at SDN 46 Tanjungpandan provides students with the opportunity to better understand their local culture and traditions, while also strengthening their sense of pride in their identity as part of the Belitong community. Activities that involve the mother tongue, such as storytelling, singing, and discussions, have been proven not only to improve students' communication skills but also to strengthen social bonds among them. These activities create space for students to learn about their cultural values in a fun and interactive way. Thus, the mother tongue not only enriches academic learning but also plays a crucial role in shaping students' social and cultural identities, as well as strengthening their connections with the local community. The literacy activities carried out as a strengthening of mother tongue literacy at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan serve as a concrete example of how the mother tongue can facilitate the strengthening of students' social identity. The use of the mother tongue as part of daily learning activities helps students feel more connected to their cultural heritage and fosters a sense of pride in their identity as members of the Belitong community.



Figure 1. Multiliteracy Activities in the Mother Tongue Strengthening Program at School.

The Wednesday Morning Literacy Program held at SDN 46 Tanjungpandan is a multiliteracy program aimed at channeling students' language interests and talents. One of the main focuses of this program is the revitalization of mother tongues, particularly the local Belitong language. This multiliteracy activity is packaged in various interesting activities, such as storytelling, speeches, discussions, and language learning thru games and regional art performances. Some of these activities include *doel moluok*, exchanging *pantuns* (*campak darat*), and participating in the provincial mother tongue seedling festival.

In the fall semester of 2025, SDN 46 Tanjungpandan will also implement the local content program (*mulok*) for Belitung Language thru integrated learning within the school curriculum. This local content program is designed to introduce, instill, and preserve the Belitung language and culture for all students. Thus, students can grow with a sense of pride in their local identity and be able to preserve regional cultural heritage amidst the rapid current of modernization. Beside enhancing students' literacy and communication skills, this series of activities also strengthens social bonds, enriches cultural knowledge, and preserves the mother tongue within the school environment.

Geographically, SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan is located at the entrance to the district city, making it vital for reaching children living outside the city center area. This school provides better and more equitable educational opportunities for those living in peripheral areas, making a significant contribution to efforts to improve the quality of education in the Tanjung Pandan sub-district. The existence of this school is very important for educating the young generation who will later play a role in the development and progress of the region.

In addition, based on the various activities and achievements, SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan's educational quality meets national standards. With the presence of this school, it is hoped that it can have a positive impact on improving the quality of education and introducing students to the importance of preserving their local culture, including thru mother tongue learning, such as the Belitung language. This is part of an effort to preserve and develop local cultural diversity within the context of inclusive and sustainable education.

As a research center for 4th, 5th, and 6th-grade students, SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan has a total of 91 students. Here is a table showing the distribution of students by class and gender.

Table 1. Student Distribution

Class	Male	Women
4	16	17
5	15	15
6	15	13
Total Students	46	45

At SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan, the distribution of students in grades 4 thru 6 shows a balance between the number of male and female students. In grade 4, there are 16 male students and 17 female students, with a total of 33 students. In grade 5, the number of male and female students is equal, with 15 students each, bringing the total number of students in this class to 30. Meanwhile, in grade 6, there are 15 male students and 13 female students, with a total of 28 students. Overall, the number of students in grades 4 thru 6 consists of 46 male students and 45 female students, making the total number of students 91. Although there is a slight difference between the number of male and female students in each class, the proportion of both remains very balanced, creating an inclusive learning environment in this school.

Additionally, this school is also attended by students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the diversity present in the surrounding area. Its strategic location on the outskirts of the city, which serves as the gateway to a developing regency town, makes this school home to students from various ethnic backgrounds. Here is a diagram illustrating the percentage of students based on their ethnic background.

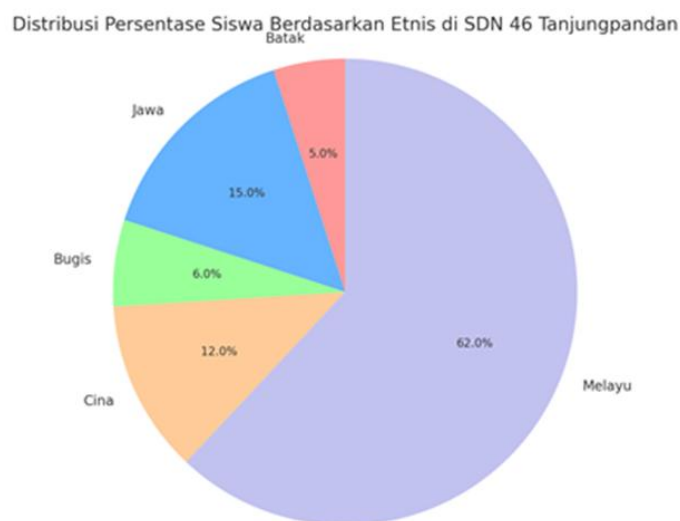


Figure 1. Student Distribution Diagram by Ethnicity

The ethnic diversity reflected in the student composition further emphasizes the importance of mother tongue instruction in schools as an effort to strengthen students' social and cultural identity. Amidst this diversity, the majority of students actively use the Belitung language in their daily lives, both at home and in the school environment. Many students reported frequently hearing their parents speak Belitung at home and feeling comfortable using the language in social interactions, including when communicating with friends at school. One of the student's parents stated the following.

"We always teach our children to remain proud of the Belitung language. Even tho they also learn Indonesian at school, the Belitung language remains an inseparable part of their daily lives," (Interview with Mr. Nadar, parent of a 4th-grade student, October 8, 2025).

The use of the Belitung language in schools, especially in informal situations, demonstrates the importance of mother tongue in strengthening understanding of lesson material. Most students find it easier to understand lessons when using the Belitung language, as it is closer to their experiences and daily lives. A student stated, "Yes, to understand it better, as well as to preserve the Belitung language," (5th Grade Student, October 14, 2025). This statement confirms that the mother tongue not only facilitates the learning process but also serves as a means of preserving local culture.

Although some students are accustomed to using Indonesian, the majority still consider the Belitung language important to learn and preserve as part of their cultural identity. Many of them are also interested in reading books or stories in the Belitung language, such as folklore and local works. This shows that the mother tongue plays a role in strengthening the relationship between students and local culture. A student said, "Yes, like the books Padang Buang Anak and Pinang Gading," (6th Grade Student, October 14, 2025). Additionally, they are able to use the Belitung language correctly and understand polite expressions in social interactions, such as "Thank you, how are you, where are you from, excuse me, I'll go first," (4th Grade Students, October 14, 2025).

Based on these findings, the role of the Belitung language appears very vital in shaping students' social identity. Mother tongue is not only a tool for daily communication, but also a means of strengthening cultural identity amidst social diversity. Students' expectations of the school and teachers are also quite high. Many students suggested that the Belitung language be integrated more frequently into learning, for example, by playing songs, showing local films,

or holding Belitung language competitions. They also hope to gain more knowledge about the Belitung language so they can understand the region's culture and customs more deeply.

Thus, this research affirms the importance of revitalizing mother tongues at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan, particularly the Belitung language, as a strategy to strengthen students' social identity. The preservation of mother tongues in elementary schools not only strengthens students' identities but also makes a tangible contribution to the sustainability of Indonesia's cultural diversity amidst the tide of globalization. The revitalization of indigenous languages is expected to foster a sense of pride in local culture while also strengthening the competitiveness of the younger generation in facing global challenges.

The research findings at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan indicate that the mother tongue, particularly Belitung Malay, still plays an important role in shaping children's social and cultural identity, even tho Indonesian is used as the primary language of instruction in schools. This phenomenon aligns with Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which emphasizes that children learn and build their understanding thru direct, concrete experiences. Piaget (1972) argued that knowledge develops as children interact with their surrounding world, and their native language serves as a medium that allows them to organize and structure knowledge based on their experiences. Mother tongue brings the subject matter closer to children's daily experiences, enabling them to internalize more relevant and meaningful knowledge. This creates "schemas" that make it easier for them to understand the world around them, both in social and academic contexts. For example, children who interact using the Belitong language tend to understand certain concepts in lessons in a more intuitive and contextual way, reflecting the application of concrete experiences in learning.

On the other hand, Vygotsky's theory (1978) provides a more social perspective on the role of the mother tongue in child development. Vygotsky proposed that the mother tongue is an essential tool in the social processes underlying children's cognitive development, known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept. According to Vygotsky, social interaction mediated by language helps children overcome their cognitive limitations and facilitates higher-level learning. In this case, the mother tongue serves as scaffolding or support for a child's cognitive development, enabling them to understand and process information in social interactions with adults and peers. Therefore, the use of the Belitong language in daily interactions, both at home and at school, has a significant impact on strengthening the cultural and social identity of these children, as well as providing a solid foundation for their cognitive development.

Thus, the mother tongue not only serves as a tool for communication but also as an important means of strengthening social bonds, developing cultural identity, and supporting more effective and meaningful learning processes. Mother tongue-based learning, especially in school settings, can enrich children's learning experiences by connecting new knowledge to their social and cultural contexts, and encouraging them to understand the world around them thru the lens of their local culture.

Challenges of Mother Tongue in the Context of Modernization and Globalization

Although mother tongues like Belitung Malay are still very vital in shaping students' social identities, their use faces various serious challenges in the era of modernization and globalization. In Indonesian society, which is increasingly developing and connected to the outside world, globalization has a significant impact on local language and culture. The dominance of Indonesian as the national language, as well as foreign languages like English which are increasingly considered international languages opening up economic and educational opportunities, is causing regional languages, including mother tongues, to become increasingly marginalized. Bourdieu (1991) explains that language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a symbol of power and status. In this context, Indonesian and foreign languages are more often seen as symbols of higher social status, while mother tongues are increasingly considered less relevant in the modern world. This phenomenon is accelerating the erosion of regional languages rich in local cultural values.

According to Setiawan (2024), one of the implications of mother tongue marginalization is the loss of children's connection to their cultural heritage. Mother tongue is not just a tool for communication, but also a carrier of the values, customs, and traditions contained within a society. When young generations begin to neglect their mother tongue, they not only lose the ability to communicate in that language, but also their social and cultural identity contained within it. This is becoming increasingly concerning because the mother tongue plays a crucial role in preserving the social and cultural values that characterize a community.

With the increasing influence of globalization, a major challenge for mother tongues is how to maintain their relevance amidst the dominance of foreign languages and more widely accepted national languages. This highlights the tension between two major forces: globalization, which brings new values, and locality, which seeks to survive by preserving its cultural identity. Therefore, more strategic efforts are needed to preserve indigenous languages, such as integrating them into the education system, media, and socio-cultural activities to ensure their sustainability and relevance in the future.

Education Policy to Support the Preservation of Regional Languages

To address these challenges, educational policies that support the preservation of mother tongues in schools are crucial. This research shows that integrating the mother tongue into the education curriculum should be prioritized as part of the local content. As stated by Setiawan (2024), mother tongue instruction not only strengthens cultural identity but also enhances children's cognitive and social skills. Mother tongue, according to Setiawan, provides a direct connection to children's personal and cultural experiences, allowing them to understand the subject matter better. Additionally, the mother tongue can serve as a bridge to foster a sense of pride in local cultural heritage, which is crucial in this increasingly interconnected and globalized world.

Bimantoro (2024) also stated that integrating local languages into the primary education curriculum can help children develop a sense of belonging to their culture, which in turn supports cultural diversity. This is also in line with Belitung Regency Regional Regulation Number 2 of 2013, which provides a legal basis for the preservation of customs and traditions, including local languages. Education policies that support the preservation of mother tongues thru the teaching of regional languages as local content are key to preserving regional languages and local cultures in schools.

Effective revitalization of indigenous languages must be based on an understanding of theories of child cognitive and social development, as explained by Piaget and Vygotsky. This approach should encompass broader educational policies that integrate mother tongues into the curriculum and school life as part of everyday learning. In the face of the challenges of globalization and modernization, policies that support the preservation of mother tongues in schools can strengthen children's social identities and ensure that mother tongues remain relevant as part of their cultural identity. As stated by Bimantoro (2024), preserving mother tongues in schools not only strengthens children's social and cultural identity but also helps them build a sense of pride in their rich cultural heritage. By integrating mother tongues more widely into education, it is hoped that future generations will become increasingly aware of the importance of preserving local languages and cultures, and will be able to maintain their cultural identity amidst the influence of globalization. This policy is not only important for preserving mother tongues, but also for enriching students' learning experiences, facilitating their cognitive development, and strengthening social connections with their community and cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the revitalization of the mother tongue, particularly the Belitung Malay language, plays a very important role in shaping children's social and cultural identity at SD Negeri 46 Tanjungpandan. Although Indonesian is used as the primary language of instruction, the use of the mother tongue remains deeply ingrained in students' daily lives, both at home and in social interactions at school. Multiliteracy activities that integrate the mother tongue, such as storytelling, speeches, and discussions, have been proven to improve students' communication skills while strengthening their sense of pride in local culture. This indicates that the mother tongue serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a means of connecting cultural values passed down thru generations, which plays a crucial role in shaping their social identity.

However, amidst the challenges of modernization and globalization, mother tongues, including Belitung Malay, face serious threats due to the dominance of Indonesian and foreign languages. This reduces the relevance of the mother tongue among the younger generation, who prefer the national or foreign language in their daily lives. Therefore, it is important to integrate the mother tongue into the basic education curriculum, as stipulated in the local content policy in schools. This policy can strengthen students' ties to their local culture and make their mother tongue an integral part of the learning process, which not only supports language preservation but also shapes their cultural identity.

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