

MULTILINGUALISM IN EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF LOCAL LANGUAGES ON THE MASTERY OF INDONESIA LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

Indonesian has a strategic role in the world of education as the main language of instruction as well as a means of developing students' cognitive and character. However, the reality at SDN Teta, Lambitu District, shows that students' mastery of Indonesian is still low due to the dominant use of Lambitu and Bima languages in daily interactions. This study aims to analyze the impact of the use of regional languages on mastery of Indonesian language material and the multilingual learning strategies implemented by teachers. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of interviews, observations, documentation studies, and focus group discussions (FGD). The findings reveal that local languages play a positive role in improving students' mastery of the Indonesian language subject at SDN Teta. The results of the study showed that students had difficulty understanding academic vocabulary, sentence structure, and Indonesian pronunciation, but the use of regional languages actually helped understanding the material through translanguaging and code switching strategies. Teachers utilize a contextual approach based on local culture so that students are more active and involved in learning. In addition, parental support and school policies also play a role in optimizing bilingual strategies in the classroom. In conclusion, regional languages play a dual role, namely as an obstacle because they give rise to linguistic interference, but at the same time, they are an effective bridge towards mastering Indonesian. This study emphasizes the importance of an integrative, contextual, and inclusive multilingual approach in improving the quality of Indonesian language learning in multilingual areas.

Keywords: Multilingualism; Regional Languages; Indonesian; Contextual Learning; Elementary School

Abstrak

Bahasa Indonesia memiliki peran strategis dalam dunia pendidikan sebagai bahasa pengantar utama sekaligus sarana pengembangan kognitif dan karakter siswa. Namun, realitas di SDN Teta, Kecamatan Lambitu, menunjukkan bahwa penguasaan Bahasa Indonesia siswa masih rendah akibat dominasi penggunaan Bahasa Lambitu dan Bahasa Bima dalam interaksi sehari-hari. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dampak penggunaan bahasa daerah terhadap penguasaan materi Bahasa Indonesia serta strategi pembelajaran multibahasa yang diterapkan guru. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara, observasi, studi dokumentasi, dan focus group discussion (FGD). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Bahasa daerah memiliki peran positif terhadap peningkatan penguasaan materi pada mata Pelajaran Bahasa Indonesia di SDN Teta. siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami kosakata akademik, struktur kalimat, dan pelafalan Bahasa Indonesia, namun penggunaan bahasa daerah justru membantu pemahaman materi melalui strategi translanguaging dan alih kode. Guru memanfaatkan pendekatan kontekstual berbasis budaya lokal sehingga siswa lebih aktif dan terlibat dalam pembelajaran. Selain itu, dukungan orang tua dan kebijakan sekolah turut berperan dalam mengoptimalkan strategi bilingual di kelas. Kesimpulannya, bahasa daerah berperan ganda, yakni sebagai penghambat karena memunculkan interferensi linguistik, tetapi sekaligus menjadi jembatan efektif menuju penguasaan Bahasa Indonesia. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan multibahasa yang integratif, kontekstual, dan inklusif dalam meningkatkan mutu pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia di daerah multibahasa.

Kata Kunci: Multibahasa; Bahasa Daerah; Bahasa Indonesia; Pembelajaran Kontekstual; Sekolah Dasar

Received : 2025-08-29

Approved : 2025-10-28

Revised : 2025-10-27

Published : 2025-10-31



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Introduction

Indonesian plays a strategic role in the national education system as a means of scientific communication, cognitive development, and character building. At the elementary level, proficiency in Indonesian is a crucial foundation for understanding various subjects, as the language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as the main medium for conceptual learning. Language acquisition theory states that the age of initial acquisition, social interaction, and first language background significantly influence students' language abilities (Basuki et al., 2017; Farisia et al., 2024; Humairoh & Agustina, 2021). In this context, comprehensive mastery of the Indonesian language is essential.

However, field realities show that students' mastery of Indonesian at SDN Teta remains low. This is due to the dominance of Lambitu and Bima languages in students' daily interactions, which makes Indonesian feel foreign and difficult to understand, both in oral and written communication (Nataprawira & Carey, 2020; Saputri, 2023). Learning that is overly text-oriented and lacks contextual approaches, combined with limited innovative media and methods, further widens students' linguistic gap with Indonesian (Hendarti, 2024). This phenomenon creates difficulties in understanding learning instructions and other subject matter, ultimately affecting students' overall academic performance.

As a solution to this issue, a multilingual pedagogical approach that incorporates the mother tongue (Lambitu) and regional language (Bima) into the learning process can serve as a bridge toward more effective mastery of Indonesian. Using familiar languages from the beginning enables a more natural transition to Indonesian, while also supporting cognitive development and cultural identity (Bisai & Singh, 2020; Nwachukwu et al., 2024). This approach also allows teachers to apply more inclusive and contextual strategies while enhancing student engagement. In addition, integrating local cultural elements and translanguaging literacy can enrich learning experiences and foster critical thinking skills (Purbarani & Muliastuti, 2023).

Previous studies have indeed highlighted the importance of mother tongue-based learning and multilingual education in broader contexts. UNESCO (2025) emphasizes that the use of mother tongues in learning can improve learning outcomes, particularly in basic literacy and numeracy, and support smoother transitions from home to school environments. A quasi-experimental study by Bularon (2025) demonstrated that the use of the mother tongue in English language learning significantly improved student achievement. These findings affirm that integrating the mother tongue into learning strategies can strengthen the mastery of second or foreign languages. However, to date, no previous studies have specifically examined the influence of using the Lambitu and Bima languages on the mastery of Bahasa Indonesia in elementary schools. Most prior research has only discussed bilingualism in the Java region (Suhartono, 2021) or general studies on language attitudes in schools (Rahardi, 2020), without highlighting the local linguistic context of Nusa Tenggara Barat, particularly in Teta Village. research specifically exploring the influence of Lambitu and Bima languages on Indonesian mastery at the elementary school level remains very limited. Moreover, implementation challenges—such as a lack of teacher training and education policies that continue to emphasize the dominance of Indonesian—also hinder the effective application of multilingual strategies (Dewi, 2023; Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024). Therefore, more in-depth contextual research is needed to address this gap, particularly in regions such as Lambitu District, which has distinctive linguistic characteristics.

This study seeks to examine the pedagogical practices employed by teachers in managing multilingual classrooms in rural areas. Accordingly, it provides an empirical contribution to the development of translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014) and the concept of contextual language pedagogy (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021) within the uniquely diverse linguistic context of Indonesia. This approach not only broadens the application of global educational linguistics theories but also offers a new perspective on how local languages can be productively integrated into the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia at the elementary school level.

This study is important in addressing these challenges and supporting the development of contextual multilingual-based strategies for Indonesian language learning. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the integration of Lambitu and Bima languages, as part of a multilingual learning approach, can enhance students' mastery of Indonesian at SDN Teta. This research is also expected to contribute to more inclusive language education policies and serve as an empirical reference for curriculum development and teacher training in multilingual regions.

Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth description of the practice of using three languages Lambitu, Bima, and Indonesian, in the learning process at the elementary school level and their impact on students' comprehension. The research was conducted over one month, from July 15 to August 18, at SDN Teta, Lambitu District, Bima Regency, a region with a distinctive sociolinguistic background characterized by the use of multiple languages in daily life. The research subjects included 2 classroom teachers, 14 students, parents, and the school principal, who were purposively selected based on their involvement in multilingual learning practices.

Data collection was carried out through several techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, documentation study, and focus group discussions (FGD). Interviews were conducted with teachers, the school principal, and parents to obtain information about language use practices and their perceptions of the impact of language use on students' comprehension. Classroom observations were conducted to directly examine patterns of language interaction between teachers and students during learning activities. The documentation study involved analyzing lesson plans (RPP), teaching materials, and students' learning outcomes to assess the extent to which the three languages were used in the learning process. In addition, FGDs were conducted to further explore the strategies applied by teachers and parents in addressing linguistic challenges in the classroom.

The instruments used in this study included interview guides, observation sheets, and document analysis formats designed based on linguistic and pedagogical indicators, such as the suitability of the instructional language to students' backgrounds, frequency of language use, students' level of comprehension of the material, and teachers' strategies in overcoming language barriers. The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which involved data transcription, coding, categorization into main themes such as challenges in using Indonesian, the role of Lambitu and Bima languages, and multilingual teaching strategies employed by teachers. To ensure data validity, source and technique triangulation were applied, along with member checking to confirm that the researcher's interpretations aligned with the information provided by the informants.

Results and Discussion

Based on the findings, the data obtained through interviews, observations, documentation studies, and FGDs are presented and analyzed. The following table summarizes the key results of classroom observations.

Table 1. Observation of Teacher–Student Interaction

Date	Learning	Key findings
July 16	Teacher explaining the lesson	Teacher used indonesia then repeated in bima; studenst showed better understanding
July 25	Group discussion	Students mostly used lambitu in their discussion
August 5	Teacher giving story -based questions in indonesia	Students were confused with formal vocabulary: teacher bridged with local language
August 12	Teacher reviewing material using local language	Student participation increased when local languages were used

Based on Table 1, the results of teacher–student interaction observations show that the teaching practices at SDN Teta take place within a dynamic multilingual context, involving the alternating use of Indonesian, Bima, and Lambitu languages depending on communicative needs. Indonesian continues to be used as the formal language in line with the curriculum, while local languages are employed to bridge students’ understanding of difficult concepts. This aligns with the idea of *translanguaging*, which emphasizes the flexible use of languages to facilitate students’ comprehension and interaction (García & Wei, 2014).

The dominance of local languages does not necessarily act as a barrier. According to Cummins’ (2000) Interdependence Hypothesis, first language proficiency can serve as a foundation for mastering a second language when used appropriately. However, limited exposure to the formal instructional language contributes to students’ difficulties in understanding lessons (Basuki et al., 2017). This is consistent with the results of interviews conducted with teachers, the school principal, and parents. The following section presents a summary of the interview findings.

Table 2. Interview Results with Teachers, Principal, and Parents

Informant	question	Key findings
Teacher 1	How is language used in teaching?	Frequently uses code-switching between indonesia, Bima and Lambitu
Teacher 2	How do you address students ‘language difficulties?	Provides concrete examples in Lambitu before transitioning to Indonesia
principal	What is the school’sview on multilingual learning ?	Supports multilingual practices, but Indonesia remains the prioriti
parent 1	What is your opinion about the use of local languages in school?	Proud, as the use of local languages makes children more confident
parent 2	Do children understand lessons more easily with the mother tongue?	Children understand faster when the teacher begins with their mother tongue

This can be observed in the teaching practices at SDN Teta, where teachers employ translanguaging and code-switching strategies to bridge students' understanding. The importance of multilingual pedagogy in fostering educational inclusion has been emphasized (Nwachukwu et al., 2024). Likewise, the role of the first language in children's cognitive and linguistic development is crucial (Humairoh & Agustina, 2021). Teachers' strategies of combining Indonesian with local languages also support language acquisition theories that highlight the significance of social interaction and the mother tongue in the early stages of child development (Humairoh & Agustina, 2021). The following section presents a summary table of the document analysis results.

Table 3. Summary of Document Analysis Results

Document	Analysis results
Grade V lesson plan (RPP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language of instruction entirely in Indonesian • Learning model applied: contextual teaching and learning (CTL) • Teaching methods include discussion Q & A and assignments
Teaching materials	No equivalents or translation of terms provided in local languages
Test results	Students' scores improved after the implementation of bilingual strategies, from an average score of 45 and average score of 83
Student notes	Many notes contained translation of difficult vocabulary from Indonesian

The document analysis results show that lesson plans (RPP) and written teaching materials at SDN Teta are entirely delivered in Indonesian as the language of instruction. No equivalents or translations into local languages (Lambitu and Bima) were found in official learning documents. This indicates the dominance of Indonesian in lesson planning, as mandated by national policy, which designates Indonesian as the official language of education (Kemendikbud, 2013).

However, students' test results and notes reveal that they still rely on their mother tongue as a tool to comprehend the material. Student notes often contained translations of difficult vocabulary from Indonesian into Lambitu. This phenomenon reflects a self-directed learning strategy based on translanguaging, where students actively utilize local languages to build academic understanding. Moreover, teachers' strategies also reflect the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) concept, which links lesson content to students' real-life experiences. Overly text-oriented instruction tends to create difficulties for students, but by incorporating Lambitu and local culture, teachers at SDN Teta can contextualize lessons in ways that are more familiar and accessible (Hendarti, 2024).

In terms of learning outcomes, the findings indicate that students' comprehension improved when local languages were used to support instruction. Students became more active in discussions, achieved higher academic scores, and showed better reading comprehension when teachers adopted bilingual approaches. This is in line with the study by Farisia et al. (2024), which found that multilingual-based approaches can reduce comprehension gaps between students from local language backgrounds and the demands of an Indonesian-language curriculum.

Despite the many benefits, the use of Lambitu and Bima also presents challenges. One of the main issues is students' tendency to mix sentence structures across languages, producing sentences that do not conform to standard Indonesian grammar. The dominance of local languages may weaken students' ability to use Indonesian in its standard form (Rahmi &

Syukur, 2023). The gap between formal documents (which use only Indonesian) and students' actual practices (which involve local languages) highlights the need for adaptive and contextual teaching materials.

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis, focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with teachers, parents, and the school principal. The summary of the FGD results is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Summary of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Result

Participant	Discussion Topik	Key Findings
Teacher	Strategies to overcome language barriers	Agreed that the best strategies are code-switching and creating a simple glossary
Parents	Impact of using the mother tongue on students	Children become more confident, courageous, and active when the mother tongue is used.
Principal	Language policy in schools	A balance is needed between preserving local languages and mastering Indonesian



Figure 1. Fokus Group Discussion (FGD)

Teachers emphasized the importance of adaptive strategies such as code-switching and the development of simple glossaries to help students understand academic terminology. This strategy represents the application of *language-responsive pedagogy*, which adjusts the language of instruction to students' needs. Teachers in multilingual schools in Indonesia tend to combine the mother tongue and the national language to increase student engagement (Hamied & Lengkanawati, 2022).

Parents observed that the use of the mother tongue enhances students' confidence, courage, and classroom participation. Mother tongue-based learning strengthens children's identity, social connectedness, and motivation to learn (UNESCO, 2022). This demonstrates that parents not only support but also recognize the tangible impact of multilingual practices on their children's development.

The school principal highlighted the need for a balance between preserving local languages and mastering Indonesian as the national language. This perspective reflects the broader dilemma of language policy in Indonesia, which often prioritizes Indonesian while local languages serve as reinforcers of local identity (Siregar, 2021). In this context, the principal acts as a micro-level policymaker, attempting to balance national regulations with local needs.

Thus, the FGD results show that all stakeholders agree on the strategic value of multilingualism, albeit with different emphases: teachers focus on pedagogical strategies,

parents on students' psychological outcomes, and the principal on policy aspects. This aligns with the concept of a *whole-school approach to multilingual education* (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021), where collaboration among stakeholders is key to successful multilingual learning.

Beyond academic benefits, the use of local languages in learning also contributes to strengthening students' cultural identity. As Purbarani and Muliastuti (2023) point out, integrating local culture into language learning can enrich learning experiences and foster critical thinking skills. This is especially significant in multilingual areas such as Lambitu, where education serves not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a medium for preserving local wisdom.

In conclusion, the use of a multilingual approach at SDN Teta produces two major impacts: (1) enhancing students' comprehension and mastery of Indonesian through the use of local languages as a bridge, and (2) reinforcing students' cultural identity by recognizing the role of the mother tongue in the classroom. The practical implications of these findings are the need for teacher training in multilingual strategies and the development of a more inclusive curriculum so that Indonesian language learning can be effective without neglecting the role of local languages.

Although the bilingual strategy implemented at SDN Teta has shown positive results, its implementation faces several structural and national policy limitations, including:

1. National language policy remains monolingual.

The curriculum and textbooks in Indonesia are generally oriented solely toward Bahasa Indonesia, without providing pedagogical guidelines for multilingual classrooms. Teachers in rural areas often hesitate to use local languages because they fear being considered "noncompliant with the curriculum" (Mahsun, 2019).

2. Limited teacher training in multilingual pedagogy.

Many teachers rely on linguistic intuition rather than formal training, reflecting weak institutional support for *language-responsive teaching* (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

3. Short research duration.

This study was conducted over a one-month period, which was insufficient to capture the long-term effects of *translanguaging* on literacy development.

These reflections highlight the need for education policy reform that is more linguistically inclusive, recognizing local languages as valuable learning assets. Monolingual policies tend to overlook regional linguistic complexity, whereas multilingual approaches have been proven to enhance early literacy (UNESCO, 2022).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the dominance of Lambitu and Bima languages in the daily lives of students at SDN Teta has a significant impact on their mastery of Indonesian. Students continue to face difficulties in understanding academic vocabulary, constructing sentences, and pronouncing words in Indonesian due to the strong influence of local languages. However, the findings also reveal that local languages can serve as an effective transitional bridge toward mastering Indonesian.

Pedagogical strategies implemented by teachers, such as *translanguaging* and *code-switching*, proved effective in helping students comprehend the material, increasing classroom participation, and strengthening learning engagement. The use of contextual and integrative approaches that connect lessons to local culture further facilitated student understanding and acceptance of learning.

Beyond the role of teachers, parents and school principals also play a vital role. Parents, although they predominantly use local languages at home, support their children in learning Indonesian. Meanwhile, the school principal provides teachers with the flexibility to apply bilingual strategies, even though national education policy continues to emphasize the dominance of Indonesian. Future research can focus on longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of local language use on students' literacy development and character formation. Comparative studies across multilingual regions are also needed to identify patterns of success and challenges in implementing multilingual-based education in Indonesia. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing contextual, inclusive, and linguistically equitable language education policies.

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