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REGIONAL LANGUAGE EXCLUSION IN DIGITAL LEARNING: THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE POLICY ON EDUCATION ACCESS IN REMOTE AREAS

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Abstract

Perkembangan teknologi informasi dan komunikasi telah mendorong transformasi pendidikan menuju sistem pembelajaran digital. Namun, perkembangan ini tidak selalu diikuti oleh pemerataan akses dan keterjangkauan bagi seluruh lapisan masyarakat, khususnya di daerah terpencil. Salah satu faktor penghambat signifikan adalah kebijakan bahasa yang digunakan dalam platform pembelajaran digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji berbagai bentuk pengecualian bahasa daerah dalam konteks pembelajaran digital serta implikasinya terhadap kebijakan bahasa dan akses pendidikan di wilayah terpencil. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah penelitian kepustakaan (library research) dengan menelaah secara mendalam berbagai jurnal ilmiah, buku, dan dokumen kebijakan yang relevan dalam kurun waktu sepuluh tahun terakhir. Temuan kajian menunjukkan bahwa eksklusi bahasa daerah tercermin dalam beberapa aspek, antara lain tidak tersedianya konten pembelajaran dalam dua bahasa, minimnya pelatihan guru terkait pemanfaatan bahasa lokal, dan kurikulum yang dirancang secara terpusat tanpa mempertimbangkan keragaman linguistik lokal. Hal ini berdampak pada meningkatnya ketimpangan pendidikan, khususnya di daerah 3T, di mana siswa kesulitan memahami materi karena perbedaan antara bahasa pengantar dan bahasa ibu. Penelitian ini menguatkan perspektif teori konstruktivisme sosiokultural serta pendekatan literasi multilokal, dan menunjukkan adanya hubungan erat antara eksklusi linguistik dan ketimpangan akses pendidikan digital. Tidak hadirnya bahasa daerah dalam pembelajaran digital berdampak lebih luas, tidak hanya pada pemahaman siswa tetapi juga pada identitas budaya dan partisipasi mereka dalam pembelajaran. Sebagai bentuk solusi, penelitian ini merekomendasikan penerapan strategi pembelajaran digital yang berbasis budaya dan kontekstual, seperti pembuatan konten dwibahasa, pelatihan guru dalam pendekatan translingual, serta kebijakan pendidikan yang fleksibel dan responsif terhadap keberagaman bahasa. Integrasi bahasa daerah dalam sistem digital diyakini mampu menciptakan pendidikan yang lebih adil, inklusif, dan relevan. Kontribusi utama dari penelitian ini terletak pada penguatan arah kebijakan dan praktik pendidikan yang mengedepankan keadilan sosial dan budaya di era digital.

Kata Kunci: Eksklusi bahasa, pembelajaran digital, kebijakan bahasa, akses pendidikan, daerah terpencil

Abstract

This research aims to examine various forms of regional language exclusion in the context of digital learning and its implications for language policy and access to education in remote areas. The approach employed is library research, involving a thorough review of various scientific journals, books, and relevant policy documents from the past decade. The study's findings indicate that regional language exclusion is reflected in several aspects, including the unavailability of learning content in local languages, a lack of teacher training related to the use of local languages, and centrally designed curricula that do not consider local linguistic diversity. This has resulted in increasing educational inequality, especially in 3T areas, where students struggle to understand the material due to the language of instruction being different from their mother tongue. This research reinforces the sociocultural constructivist perspective and a multilocal literacy approach, demonstrating a strong relationship between linguistic exclusion and disparities in access to digital education. The absence of regional languages in digital learning has broader implications, not only for students' understanding but also for their cultural identity and participation in learning. As a form of solution, this research recommends the implementation of culturally and contextually based digital learning

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strategies, such as the creation of bilingual content, teacher training in translingual approaches, and flexible and responsive educational policies to linguistic diversity. The integration of regional languages into digital systems is believed to create a fairer, more inclusive, and relevant education. The main contribution of this research lies in strengthening the direction of policies and educational practices that prioritize social and cultural justice in the digital era.

Keywords: Language exclusion, digital learning, language policy, educational access, remote areas

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with high cultural diversity in each region and occupies the second position in the world in terms of the number of regional languages, which is 652 languages according to data from the Language Development and Development Agency, not including a variety of dialects and subdialects that are widely spread in various regions (Supriadin, 2023). In terms of policy, the government and stakeholders in the education sector need to encourage the acceleration of the provision of digital infrastructure evenly in all schools, especially in areas that are still lagging (Tamara & Susilo, 2025).

Although the use of regional languages in daily life contributes to their preservation, technological advances in the digital era that change lifestyles and education systems have contributed to the elimination of regional languages from learning spaces (Aina Mulia Rizky et al., 2025). The phenomenon of language exclusion occurs when regional languages are ignored in the material and learning platforms, which has an impact on the difficulty of native speakers in understanding national or foreign language materials (Kaharuddin & Kaharuddin, 2024). The threat of extinction or marginalization of regional languages is also increasingly real, although it is not certain which language will experience this process first (Astawa et al., 2021).

This condition is exacerbated by inequality of access to and use of technology, which hinders effective community engagement in digital education, especially for groups that have long experienced social marginalization (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2023; Loh & Chib, 2017). One concrete example can be seen at SDN 03 Gunung

Tuleh, West Pasaman, where as many as 60% of students have difficulty understanding standard Indonesian due to the dominant influence of their mother tongue in their daily lives (Agustina et al., 2021).

Regional languages have an important role in the learning process, especially as a bridge to help students understand the material presented in the national language. The use of regional languages in the teaching-learning process not only facilitates understanding but also strengthens students' cultural identities and increases their participation in classroom activities (Patintingan, 2024). This is in line with findings that show that the use of regional languages as an introduction in Indonesian learning in primary grades can improve students' understanding of teaching materials (Julaiha Juli, Nurul Farhaini, Rollin Fadilah Hasibuan, 2022).

The use of regional languages has also been proven to support the smooth learning process by increasing student involvement in grade IV of elementary school (Siagian & Noviyanti, 2022). In addition, in order to establish a more personal relationship, one often chooses to understand the local language, either in small amounts or in depth (Julianti & Siagian, 2023).

The integration of regional languages in digital learning can not only increase the effectiveness of learning but also serve as a means of preserving local culture. One example is the use of online applications with Lontara characters as an interactive learning medium for local content teachers, which has been proven to be successful in increasing students' interest and motivation to learn (Diputera, 2021).

In Banyuwangi, using language-based digital teaching materials is also effective in improving language skills in elementary school students

(Javanti & Muharomah, 2024). Technology has great potential to expand access to regional language learning, especially for the younger generation, but the success of these efforts is highly dependent on the extent to which local cultural values are integrated into their content (Oliviatika et al., 2024). In addition, the use of regional languages in student reading books published by the Ministry of Education and Culture also contributes to the preservation of regional languages, as well as helping students understand the material better (Fadhilah & Rahmawati, 2020).

Social media and digital platforms can also be used to promote local cultural knowledge among indigenous peoples who are experiencing displacement or migration (Botangen et al., 2017). National language policies that are not adaptive to regional language diversity have also strengthened linguistic injustices, especially in marginalized areas. Language is not only a set of words or grammatical rules, but it also reflects the rich culture, thought, and knowledge of a community. Therefore, the extinction of a language means the loss of the intellectual and cultural heritage of its speakers (Rohana et al., 2024).

Realizing the importance of preserving regional languages, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through the Language Development and Development Agency has prioritized the revitalization of regional languages in the Merdeka Belajar program as an effort to encourage the younger generation to actively and freely learn and use regional languages in daily life (Ministry of Education and Culture & Merdeka Belajar, 2022).

However, education policies in remote areas often do not fully pay attention to the relevance of the language of instruction to the local context and culture of the local community. The use of mother tongue as a learning medium in the early stages of basic education has proven to be the key

strengthening literacy, numeracy. educational participation. Remote areas face various challenges in the implementation of digital learning, such as limited infrastructure, human resources, and language diversity.

One of the causes of digital learning failure in the region is the incompatibility of teaching materials with the local language used by students. Therefore, digital literacy skills are very important in the world of education, so that teachers and students are able to understand, access, assess, and utilize information from digital media appropriately, while supporting effective communication between the two (Hasan et al., 2024). In this context, innovative and creative digital learning media also play a role in strengthening cultural literacy through the learning of regional languages, scripts, and literature (Dwipayana et al., 2022).

Digital transformation, which is in line with the era of smart society 5.0, can even be a strategic means to teach and preserve regional languages, literature, and culture more broadly and deeply, while elevating their existence to the global realm (Srihilmawati & Nurjanah, 2023). Digital thematic teaching materials based on local culture can also be used as a supporting medium in the learning process, because they can adapt to the social context and language of students (Samino et al., 2024). In addition, digital teaching materials that are in harmony with local cultural and linguistic values have been proven to be able to answer the challenges of learning gaps, especially in suburban areas (Jayanti & Muharomah, 2024).

The urgency of this research lies in the need for an inclusive digital education strategy for regional language diversity, especially in remote areas. Although digitalization promises to expand access to learning, the reality is that many students in marginalized areas are marginalized due to learning content that does not take into account linguistic limitations. This inequality not only affects learning outcomes but

also threatens the sustainability of local cultural identity.

Various studies show that the use of regional languages in learning can increase student participation, expand access through technology, build awareness of cultural preservation, and even encourage the use of regional languages as a language of instruction at the early stages of education, and regional language protection policies in the face of cultural change. Therefore, this research is expected to make a conceptual and practical contribution to the development of contextual digital learning and support the preservation of regional languages sustainably.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of regional language preservation in digital learning policies and practices in remote areas that have received less attention. In addition to raising linguistic exclusion as an educational barrier, this study proposes a framework that combines aspects of language, technology, and social justice. For example, several studies have developed mobile applications for learning the East Sumba language as an effort to preserve the nation's cultural heritage (Hatti et al., 2024). Developing an interactive multimedia multilingual learning model for the concept of learning Sulawesi regional languages (Agung et al., 2022). Implementing a multilingual learning module at SDN 351 Tanah Towa for the preservation of the Konjo Language and the culture of the Indigenous Tribes of Tanah Towa Kajang (Saiful et al., 2023). In contrast to the previous research, this study discusses regional languages as an important element in increasing learning engagement and strengthening students' identities. cultural thereby making contributions to inclusive digital education and equitable learning ecosystems.

2. METHOD

This study uses the library research method, which is qualitative descriptive. The purpose of this approach is to examine in depth various

literature sources related to the issue of regional language exclusion in digital learning and its impact on access to education in remote areas. The process of preparing a literature review consists of six main stages that need to be carried out sequentially, namely: determining the research topic, searching the relevant literature, formulating arguments, conducting a review of these sources, critically evaluating the content of the literature, and compiling the results of the study in the form of systematic writing (Mahanum, 2021). The criteria for selecting literature include publications published in the last ten years (2015–2025), with priority given to literature that discusses regional language topics, digital learning, language justice, and education policies in marginalized areas.

The analysis approach used is thematic, by grouping data based on main themes, such as: (1) exclusion of regional languages in digital learning; (2) the impact of language policy on access to education; (3) the role of teachers and digital media in supporting local linguistic literacy; and (4) culturally and contextually-based digital learning strategies. With this approach, the research not only presents the existing findings but also compiles a critical synthesis of the literature studied, resulting in a deeper and contextual understanding of digital education policies that are more inclusive and contextual.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Exclusion of Regional Languages in Digital Learning

The exclusion of regional languages in digital learning is evident in several key aspects, such as the availability of digital content that only uses Indonesian or foreign languages without providing regional language options, the lack of teacher training in using regional languages as a bridge to digital learning, and the lack of development of educational applications that support the use of regional languages. The impact of this exclusion is very significant, ranging from

students' low understanding of the material, decreased motivation to learn, to widening the educational gap between remote and urban areas. Students at SDN 03 Gunung Tuleh, West Pasaman 60% have difficulty understanding standard Indonesian due to the influence of their

mother tongue (Agustina et al., 2021). This shows that linguistic barriers are a real problem that has not been solved in the national digital learning ecosystem.

Table 1. The Realization of Regional Language Exclusion in Digital Learning

No	Exclusion Aspect	Exclusion Description	On-the-Ground Embodiment	Source
1.	Limited Access to Digital Technology	Regional language communities in remote areas find it difficult to access digital learning due to a lack of infrastructure.	Students in language minority areas are unable to attend online learning due to weak signals and limited devices.	(Pasondi, 2024)
2.	Neglect of Local Languages in Digital Content	Digital learning tends to be only available in Indonesian or foreign languages, with no local language versions.	There is no regional language option in school e-learning; Students have difficulty understanding the material.	(Srihilmawati & Nurjanah, 2023)
3.	Absence of Local Cultural Integration in Digital Platforms	Cultural values and local contexts are not incorporated into the digital learning media.	The teaching materials do not reflect the local culture, so students do not feel represented.	(Oliviatika et al., 2024)
4.	Inequality in Local Language Use in Digital Schools	Regional languages are not used as a medium or part of online learning activities.	Teachers are not trained to insert local languages when teaching online.	(Kadaruddin et al., 2024)
5.	Linguistic Exclusivity in Formal Education	The digital education system only accommodates the dominant language, leaving aside linguistic diversity.	Students from the local community are reluctant to participate because the teaching language feels unfamiliar.	(Sari et al., 2024)

The Impact of Language Policy on Access to Education

A game-based learning approach (gamification) in vocabulary teaching can be a very effective and influential strategy in children's learning experiences (Siosan et al., 2021). Regional language-based learning that is packaged in an interactive manner turns out to have great potential not only in preserving local languages but also in improving the quality of education in the region. In addition, research at

MIN 04 Hulu Sungai Tengah on the use of regional languages has a positive effect on Indonesian learning achievement, even though the contribution is relatively small (0.27%) (Fitriani, 2021). These findings confirm that the integration of regional languages in digital learning needs to be combined with other factors, such as appropriate pedagogical design, to produce optimal learning outcomes.

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The impact of linguistic exclusion in digital education is also closely related to the language policy implemented nationally. The emphasis on the use of Indonesian as the only language of instruction in the education system reinforces linguistic inequities and increases the likelihood of academic failure of students in remote areas. The use of mother tongue in the school environment during the learning process, especially in Indonesian learning, can trigger

code mixing that ultimately reduces the effectiveness of learning Indonesian and other subjects (Suttrisno, S., Apriono, D., 2023). If language policies continue to be centralized and not adaptive to local language diversity, then equitable access to education will be difficult to achieve, especially for people in marginalized areas.

Table 2. The Impact of Language Policy on Access to Education

No	Language Policy Aspects	Description	Impact on Access to Education
1.	Prioritization of the	Exclusive use of Indonesian in	It is difficult for students in remote areas
	National Language as the	formal learning in all regions,	who use their mother tongue as their
	only Language of	including multilingual areas.	primary language, hindering the
	Instruction	2 2	understanding of teaching materials.
2.	Not Accommodating	The curriculum does not	Limiting students' spaces to learn and
2.	Regional Languages in the	require the learning of	express their local cultural and linguistic
	Official Curriculum	-	
	Official Curriculum	regional languages at all levels	identity at school.
_		of education.	
3.	Centralistic Policy without	Policies are made nationally	Resulting in incompatibility of learning
	Local Context	without taking into account	materials and methods with local reality,
		regional linguistic and	leading to low learning participation.
		sociocultural variations.	
4.	Lack of Policy Support for	Teachers are not given	Teachers are unable to bridge national and
	Bilingual Teachers	training or support to teach	local languages in the learning process,
	2	with a multilingual approach.	widening the learning gap.
5.	Lack of Regional	There are no books,	Limiting students' access to easy-to-
	Language-Based Learning	applications, or digital content	understand teaching materials, especially
	Media	available in regional	in language minority communities.
	Media	· ·	in language inmority communities.
		languages that are in	
		accordance with the	
		curriculum standards.	

The Role of Teachers and Digital Media in **Supporting Local Linguistic Literacy**

Nevertheless, the implementation of digital learning in remote areas faces major challenges. Limited infrastructure, internet networks, and human resources also hinder the effectiveness of digital learning programs. This problem is even more complex because the majority of the content available does not consider the local language, so it is less in line with the linguistic reality of the

students. Education policies in Pasuruan District highlight that despite infrastructure improvements and incentives for teachers, they have not touched on linguistic aspects relevant to local communities (Regency & Java, 2025). As a result, digital education that claims to be inclusive has not fully reached minority linguistic groups fairly. Here are some of the roles of teachers and digital media in improving literacy (Mozin, 2025):

Learning Facilitator

Teachers create a fun and effective learning atmosphere by utilizing appropriate visual and digital media, so that students' understanding can improve.

Developer of Media-Based Learning Strategies

Teachers develop creative learning strategies and encourage students to think critically and actively, especially in Indonesian learning using digital media.

Learning and Media Resource Manager

Teachers choose and use a variety of learning media such as projectors, picture stories, educational games, and illustrations to support student literacy.

Value and Culture Inserts through Media

Teachers insert local cultural and language values through the learning media used, so that students are connected to their cultural identity.

Driving School Literacy Culture

Teachers are active in developing a literacy culture in schools, such as through the "reading corner" program and the School Literacy Movement, which is combined with the use of digital media.

Culturally and Contextually-Based Digital Learning Strategies

Based on a study of several journals and cutting-edge research, there are a number of strategies that can be taken to bring language justice in digital learning. These strategies include the development of bilingual digital content (regional languages and Indonesian), the involvement of local communities and linguists in the preparation of teaching materials, teacher training in a translingual approach, the use of adaptive technology based on local languages such as gamification applications in West Kalimantan, and the adjustment of flexible digital

education policies according to the linguistic context in remote areas. As exemplified in the study. Mobile applications for learning East Sumba Language, local cultural engagement in digital content, have been proven to strengthen student engagement and cultural preservation (Hatti et al., 2024). Here are some strategies that can be applied in digital learning that are culturally and contextually based:

Bilingual Digital Content Development

The teaching materials are prepared and presented in two languages, namely regional languages and Indonesian. This strategy allows students to stay connected to their native language while strengthening their mastery of the national language.

Local Community Engagement and Linguists

In the process of developing locally based digital teaching media, teachers and content developers should collaborate with traditional leaders, cultural experts, and regional linguists. This collaboration is essential to ensure the accuracy of terms, idioms, and cultural contexts in the content created.

Teacher Training in Translingual Approaches

Teachers are trained to adopt a translingual approach, which is an approach that allows students to change languages (code-switching) flexibly during the learning process. Teachers are taught to combine the use of regional languages and Indonesian in the context of digital learning.

Utilization of Adaptive Technology Based on Local Language

Technology is used to develop learning applications or educational games that contain regional language content, such as basic vocabulary, daily dialogue, or folklore. One example is the East Sumba language learning application, which is designed as a medium for local cultural preservation.

Contextual Digital Policy Adjustments



Digital learning policies at the central and regional levels need to be adapted to local linguistic and cultural realities. Not all regions have the same access or needs, especially when it comes to language. Therefore, the curriculum and online learning system must provide a space for flexibility so that teachers can adapt the material according to the local context.

Overall, the exclusion of regional languages in digital learning has created serious barriers to access and quality of education in remote areas. The mismatch between the language of instruction and the student's mother tongue leads to low understanding of the material, decreased motivation to learn, and increasing educational gaps. Overly centralized national language policies exacerbate these inequalities and weaken social and linguistic justice at the grassroots level. Therefore, an inclusive language policy and the development of digital learning that are adaptive to linguistic diversity are needed. The integration of regional languages in the digital ecosystem can not only improve the quality and equity of education but also be an important strategy in preserving local culture and strengthening student identity. This approach is in line with the spirit of fair, contextual, and sustainable education in the era of digital transformation.

DISCUSSION

This study confirm that regional languages have received limited attention within the digital learning ecosystem, both in terms of policies, teaching materials, and teaching practices. The absence of bilingual content and the low competence of teachers in incorporating local languages are the main contributing factors to linguistic exclusion. Students at SDN 03 Gunung Tuleh have difficulty understanding Indonesian due to the dominance of their mother tongue, which has an impact on their motivation and learning identity (Agustina et al., 2021). This phenomenon reinforces Vygotsky's sociocultural constructivist theory, which emphasizes the role of language as a cognitive mediation tool, where

the use of a familiar language can accelerate students' understanding of concepts.

The results of this study also align with Cope and Kalantzis's multilocal literacy approach, which emphasizes the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity in 21st-century learning (Wibowo et al., 2025). Previous studies have shown that the use of regional languages in the early stages of education not only improves student engagement but also strengthens their cultural identity (Julaiha Juli, Nurul Farhaini, Rollin fadilah Hasibuan, 2022; Patintingan, 2024). This demonstrates that integrating regional languages is not merely about cultural preservation but is also a pedagogical strategy for improving learning quality. Consequently, excluding regional languages from digital learning risks exacerbating educational inequality, particularly in 3T (frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged) regions.

In comparison with earlier research, the present study offers a different focus. While studies concentrated on developing local culturebased materials to improve language skills, this study combines language policy considerations with the design of digital learning strategies that are adaptive to linguistic diversity (Jayanti & Muharomah, 2024; Oliviatika et al., 2024). This integrated perspective has produced concrete recommendations, including the development of bilingual digital content, teacher training in translingual approaches, and adjustments to digital education policies that are more contextually relevant. These strategies are expected to bridge the gap between central policies and local realities.

From a policy perspective, the findings of this study challenge the centralized approach that positions Indonesian as the sole medium of instruction without considering local linguistic contexts. This observation is in line with, who argue that the use of the mother tongue in learning may lead to code-mixing, which is not necessarily detrimental but can be pedagogically leveraged to



optimize language transition (Suttrisno, S., Apriono, D., 2023). Therefore, language policy should be more flexible and responsive to regional linguistic diversity to ensure equitable access to education for all communities, particularly those in marginalized areas.

The study also reinforces the argument that teachers and digital media play a strategic role in fostering local linguistic literacy. As highlighted, teachers are not only facilitators of learning but also cultural preservation agents through the selection of appropriate media and teaching strategies (Mozin, 2025). The use of adaptive technology based on local languages, such as the East Sumba language learning application, or local wisdom-based e-comics has proven effective in enhancing student engagement while maintaining the vitality of regional languages (Hatti et al., 2024; Kadek Icahayati et al., 2024).

Ultimately, this study emphasizes that integrating regional languages into digital learning is an urgent necessity rather than a mere option. In addition to addressing educational disparities in 3T regions, such integration aligns with the vision of sustainable, inclusive education rooted in social justice. This argument resonates view that digital transformation should be harnessed to elevate regional languages to the global stage (Srihilmawati & Nurjanah, 2023). Therefore, developing policies and practices in digital learning that accommodate regional languages represents a long-term investment in both national educational quality and the preservation of cultural heritage.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the exclusion of regional languages in digital learning significantly affects both the accessibility and quality of education in remote areas. The absence of bilingual content, limited teacher training in translingual pedagogy, and centralized language policies have created substantial barriers to student comprehension and cultural identity

preservation. These challenges not only hinder students' academic performance but also weaken their connection to their linguistic heritage. Therefore, culturally and contextually responsive digital learning strategies, such as the development of bilingual materials, teacher training, and adaptive policies, are essential to ensure equitable, inclusive, and relevant education in the digital era.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. As a library research, the findings rely heavily on secondary data and literature synthesis, without empirical testing in real classroom settings. This limits the ability to generalize the recommendations to all regional contexts. However, the research makes a significant contribution by offering an integrated framework that combines language policy, digital learning design, and cultural preservation in addressing linguistic exclusion. It also provides practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, and content developers to create a fairer and more culturally grounded digital education ecosystem.

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