

The Urban Gorontalo Language Choice and Language Attitudes, and Implications for Language Maintenance in the Region of Gorontalo Province

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Abstract

In a multilingual society like Indonesia, people often utilize multiple languages, each for different purposes. Their language choice might indicate their attitudes towards each language (Romaine, 2017). This study investigates language choice and language attitudes among the Gorontaloese, who reside in the Gorontalo province of Indonesia. Urban Gorontaloese (n=331) from different age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds participated in an online sociolinguistic survey. The survey explored the following: language use of English, Bahasa Indonesia, and Gorontalo language in different domains, and language attitudes for each. Descriptive statistical analysis showed that Bahasa Indonesia was used predominantly in many different domains by 85.8% of Gorontaloese. Only 39.5% of the participants can create some phrases and simple sentences in Gorontalo language. The study also discovered that most Gorontaloese have positive attitudes towards their mother tongue. More than half of the participants agreed about the importance of: (1) knowing and using their local language, (2) maintaining and teaching the language to their children, (3) acknowledging the language as a part of their identity, and (4) keeping their language alive. This study also described the implications of the community language choices and language attitudes towards the maintenance of the Gorontalo language, and drew into question Indonesia's language education policy, a law that is still imposed even after signing the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Keywords: Gorontalo Language, Language Choice, Language Attitudes, Language Maintenance

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Introduction

The world is linguistically rich, with roughly 7,000 living languages spoken across the globe. Each of these languages links to a distinct culture, identity, and way of knowing. Globalization, immigration, and digitalization have led to multilingualism to expand, with more and more people speaking more than two languages in their daily lives. As language evolves and develops, language is no longer bound to its community speaker in a certain area. The speakers might move to a different place, and their needs also change. In other words, language changes whenever a speaker comes into contact with a new community who speaks a different language.

With more integrated world economy, technology, travel, and increasing human mobility, this will undeniably lead to language contact and language competition. The result of language contact can be the replacement of one language by another, more dominant language. When one language has a lower position, while another has prestige in a community, language endangerment may ensue. The effects of language contact can be seen in different phenomena, including phonological change, language transfer, code-switching, and creole formation (Sankoff, 2001; Winford, 2005). The longer impact of language contact results in multilingualism, language maintenance, language shift, and even language extinction.

Out of 6,500 languages spoken globally, UNESCO (2019) claimed that only some of these languages were being promoted. About five percent were present on the internet, and 2,680 languages were facing language extinction. Moreover, about 40 percent of the world's population do not have access to education in the language they speak. This will significantly impact the quality of teaching and learning minority language groups (Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000; De Angelis, 2011; Moore, 2006; UNESCO, 2019). Additionally, this will also damage the quality of their lives, as well as their linguistics, culture and biodiversity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981; 2013).

Multilingual people have a range of languages in their repertoire that they use in certain situations. Fishman (2001) mentioned interlocutor, social context, and topic as among the reasons behind a speaker's language choice. Additionally, power, size of the speakers, socio-economic factors, prestige, and vitality might also lead a speaker to choose a different language in their lifetime and/or from one generation to the next, along with that speaker's attitudes towards their languages (Dweik & Qawar, 2015).

A number of studies have looked into the language choice and language attitudes among heritage language speakers or minority language speakers in the first-world countries (Altinkamış & Ağırdağ, 2014; Dweik & Qawar, 2015; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). In Indonesia, most of these studies have focused on the local languages with large speakers, such as Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau (Fitriati & Wardani, 2020; Mulyanah, 2017; Thamrin, 2018). However, very few studies investigated the Gorontalo community's language choice and attitudes, and their implications regarding the maintenance of the Gorontalo language in the region.

The present study investigates the language choice and language attitudes of Gorontaloese¹ towards their mother tongue in the urban area of Gorontalo province. Ultimately, this study highlights the implications of the speakers' language choice and attitudes towards the maintenance of the Gorontalo language. It draws into question Indonesia's language education policy, a law that is still imposed even after signing the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Specifically, this study intends to answer the following questions: (1) What is the dominant language used by Gorontaloese people in different domains (i.e., home, public spaces, religious / cultural activities and education)? (2) What are the language attitudes of the Gorontaloese towards their mother tongue?

Methodology

This study was conducted in the Gorontalo municipality. Gorontalo is a province located in the Northern part of Sulawesi Island of Indonesia. This study's participants are 331 Gorontaloese recruited via social media and emails. A purposive sampling strategy was used to determine the participants in that they are Gorontaloese between the ages of 12 and 60 years old, who live in Gorontalo City (municipality). A sociolinguistic survey measured the use of the urban Gorontaloese language in different domains, such as in the home, in school, among government services, and during religious / cultural activities, and their attitudes to each language was developed. The questionnaire consists of 25 items divided into three different sections: demographic background, language use at home, and language attitudes. Data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics that describe central tendencies and variations such as means and percentage.

Results

The Demographic Background of the Participants

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the participants. Females dominate the majority or 66.8% (221) of the participants, with only 33.2% (110) male participants. In terms of age, 28 (8.5%) were between the ages of 12 and 19, 254 (76.7%) were between the ages of 20 and 39, and 49 (14.8%) were between the ages of 40 and 59. There were no participants aged 60 years and above. As to educational background, about half of the participants or 53.2% (176) held a Bachelor's degree, 23.3% (77) were high school graduates, 18.4% (61) have a graduate or postgraduate degree, and only 0.6% (2) of the participants finished up to elementary education. This implies that a large number of the participants were female, belonging to the younger generation, and well-educated.

¹ Gorontaloese refer to the people of Gorontalo ethnic group who live in the Gorontalo province of Indonesia.
The language is called the Gorontalo language or Bahasa Hulondalo.

	FREQUENCY (n=331)	PERCENTAGE (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	110	33.2
Female	221	66.8
<i>Age</i>		
12 to 19	28	8.5
20 to 39	254	76.7
40 to 59	49	14.8
60 +	0	0
<i>Educational Background</i>		
Elementary Education	2	0.6
High school	77	23.3
Diploma certificate	15	4.5
Bachelor's degree	176	53.2
Graduate / Postgraduate degree	61	18.4

Table 1. Demographic data of participants according to gender, age, and educational background

Language Choice In Different Domains

Figure 1 shows the frequency of use of different languages in different domains. In answering this question from the survey, the participants tend to provide more than one answer. In other words, they chose more than one language for specific domains. For instance, when they were asked what language they use at home, over 85% chose Indonesian, then 57.1% chose Gorontalo language, 9.7% chose English, and 6.9% picked other local dialects.

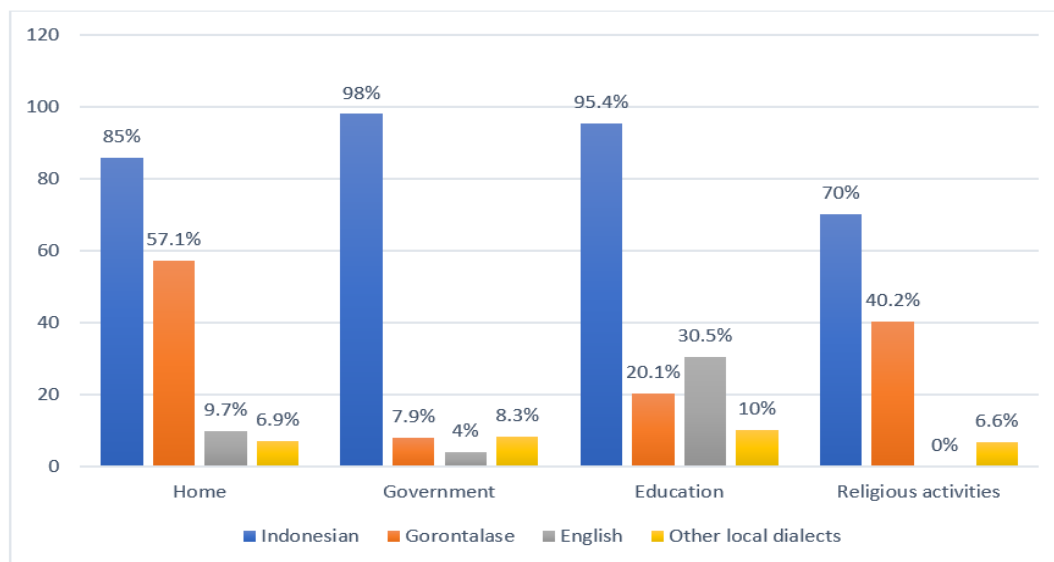


Figure 1. Language use in different domains

Regarding the language used in government services, 98% of the participants chose Indonesian, 7.9% chose Gorontalo, 4% chose English, and 8.4% chose other local dialects. As for education, which particularly measures the language used in school, 95.4% of the participants expressed that educational institutions used Indonesian, 20.14% used Gorontalo, 30.5% used English, and 3% used other local dialects. The

choice of Indonesian as the language used in government and education by majority of the participants may be due to the government and national regulations that require and support the use of Indonesian as the sole official and national language of the country. During religious activities, responses varied again, with Indonesian having the highest percentage of responses at 70%, Gorontalo language came second at 40.19%, and other local dialects at 6.6%.

Language Attitudes towards Each Language

The respondents were asked a series of 10 questions regarding their attitudes towards Indonesian, Gorontalo, and English. Detailed information related to the attitudes of the participants is presented in Table 2.

Questions	Indonesian (%)	Gorontalo (%)	English (%)	Other local dialects (%)
Which is the most useful language in obtaining good employment and education?	82	-	18	-
Which language is the most comfortable to use during conversations?	80	13	7	-
Which is the most prestigious language?	70	-	30	-
Which language is connected to your ethnicity?	-	100	-	-
Which language is the most difficult to learn?	30	41	29	-
Which language do you need to know and use daily?	37	51	12	-
Which language represents your national identity?	100	-	-	-
Which language do you need to maintain and teach to the next generation?	20	80	-	-
Which language will you keep alive?	-	100	-	-
Which language connects you to the international community?	-	-	100	-

Table 2. Participants' attitudes regarding each language

The data revealed that the participants indicated positive attitudes towards Indonesian, Gorontalo and English languages. Despite the participants' ability to speak other local languages, they did not show any positive attitude towards these. Out of 331 respondents, 82% indicated that Indonesian was the most useful language. Majority of the participants (70%) considered Indonesian as the most prestigious language, followed by English. The Indonesian language was also believed to represent their national identity as an Indonesian, and was the most comfortable language to use during conversations. Nevertheless, only 20% of the respondents agreed that this language needs to be maintained and taught to the next generation.

Similarly, a strong sense of positive attitude towards Gorontalo as a language that represents their identity was documented. Participants indicated their desire to learn and use this language daily, and believed that it needs to be maintained and taught to the next generation. However, they also acknowledged that it is the most difficult language to learn. None of the participants responded to the usefulness of the

language to gain employment and bright future, as well as to being a prestigious language.

English, on the other hand, was also positively valued for being the only language that can connect them to the broader, international community. English was the second most prestigious and useful language after Indonesian. However, English was also seen as the second most difficult language to learn and the least comfortable language to use during conversations.

Figure 2 shows the participants' ability to use the Indonesian language. 61.53% of the respondents admitted that they can express almost everything in Indonesian, 33.55% said they could have a conversation about anything using Indonesian language, and only less than 5% acknowledged that they cannot express everything in Indonesian. No respondent answered that they can have conversations in Indonesian only in limited situations, or produce only limited words and sentences in this official language. Likewise, none of the Gorontaloese was not able to speak Indonesian at all.

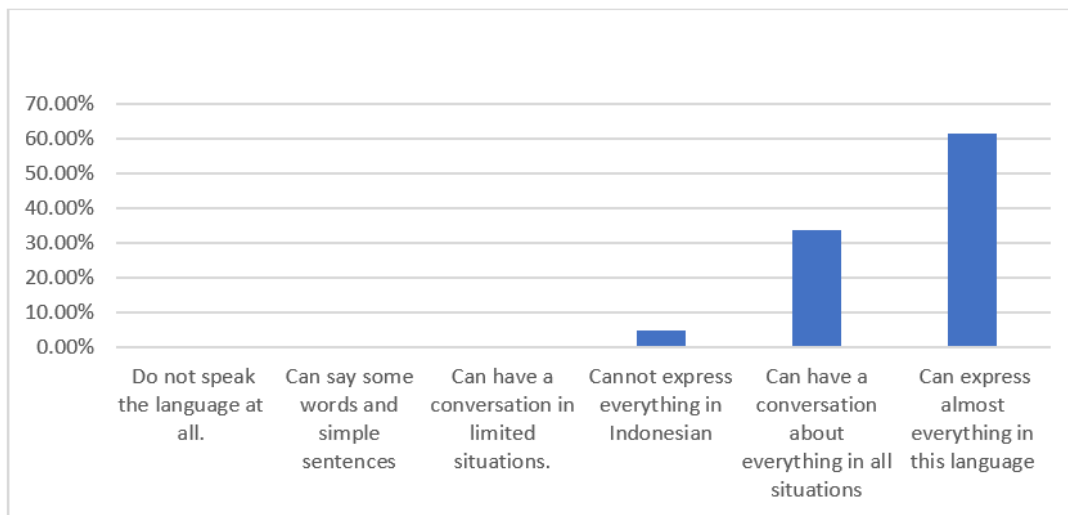


Figure 2. Participants' ability to use Indonesian language

Figure 3 presents the participants' ability to use their native language, Gorontalo. 3.4% of the respondents said that they do not speak the language at all, while only 39.5% can speak some words and simple sentences in that language. Less than 15% of the respondents were able to hold a conversation in limited situations and about 16% claimed that they cannot express everything in their mother tongue. Likewise, less than 15% of the subjects were able to have conversations about anything, and can express almost everything, using the Gorontalo language.

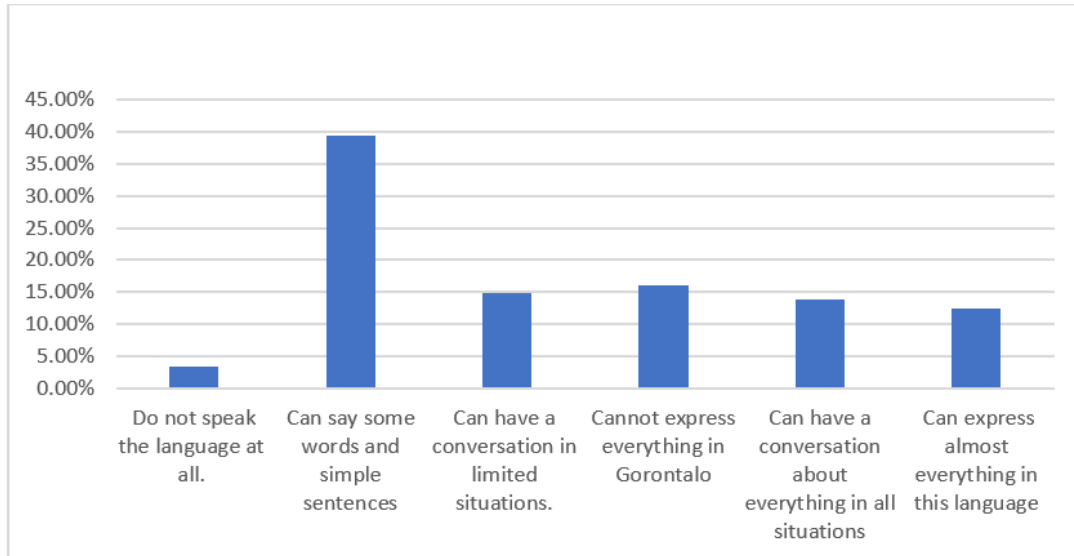


Figure 3. Participants' ability to use Gorontalo language

Figure 4 shows the participants' ability to use the English language. There were fewer than 2% of the participants who do not speak in English, while more than half (53.2%) can say simple English words and sentences. The study revealed that 21% of the respondents can hold conversations in English in limited situations, 6.8% cannot express everything in English, 10% can have English conversations about everything, and 7.4% can express almost everything in this language.

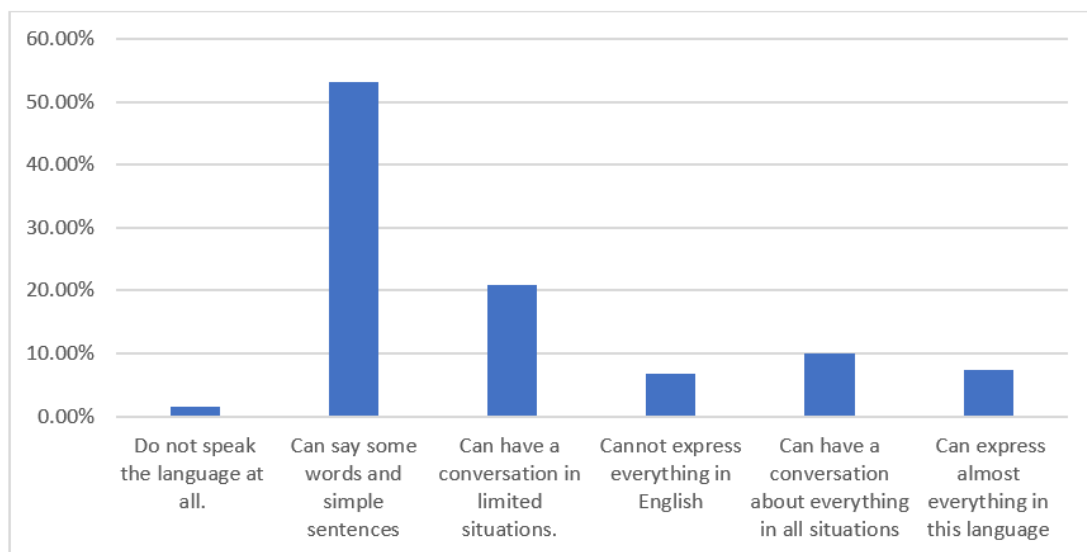


Figure 4. Participants' ability to use English language

Discussion

Based on the information collected from the questionnaires, language choice of the urban Gorontaloese in different domains, such as home, government services, education, and religious activities, were significantly dominated by the Indonesian language. Notably, even in the home, Gorontalo was already replaced by the Indonesian language. The home is where the family interacts, and is the first foundation of language acquisition and language maintenance of minority languages

(Clyne and Kipp, 1999; Canagarajah, 2008; Pauwels, 2016; Fishman, 1991; 2001; Schwartz, 2010). Clyne and Kipp (1999) explained that the home has often been mentioned as a vital component in language maintenance. Therefore if a language is not maintained at home, it cannot be maintained in any other domain.

It is often the parents who decide whether to teach their native language to their children (Fishman, 1991). When children go to school, they are exposed to the dominant language, which often serves as the medium of instruction. Children, therefore, might adapt more easily into the majority language and start losing confidence towards speaking their mother tongue. For language maintenance to take place, the language must be integrated into the home sphere. A family that actively uses the minority language at home can avoid language loss among generations.

As to the language choice for government services and education, it is not surprising that they would be overtaken by the Indonesian language, given the government regulations and the national education policy that mandate the use of Indonesian language in all government services across the country and public educational institutions. In the religious and cultural setting, the study also indicated that the Indonesian language has been favored over Gorontalo and other local dialects. Arabic, which is associated with Islam, has not been listed as a language spoken in the province, even though over 95% of its population are Muslims. This is mainly because the use of Arabic is limited to the daily prayer activities and Qur'an recitation. Recently, the Islamic schools and organizations are continuously promoting the use of the Arabic language.

The overall use of Indonesian, Gorontalo and English at home, for government services, in school, and during religious-related activities depend on various factors. This study found that majority of the respondents have higher proficiency in the Indonesian language. In addition, their proficiency in Gorontalo was even lower than that of English, which is a foreign language. The urban Gorontaloese appear to have lost their fluency in their mother tongue. This indicates that the choice to speak Indonesian is influenced by the speaker's ability to use the language. This result is consistent with the study by Apfelbaum and Meyer (2010), who argued that bi/multilingual people may choose to communicate in a specific language to compensate for their lack of proficiency in another language.

When asked for the language that is vital for educational achievement, employment and formal interactions, the respondents chose Indonesian and English. The participants also viewed English as the language that will benefit them with regards to international communication and advancement of career. This is in line with conclusions made by Holmes (2013), Pillai (2006), Piller (2004), and Ferrer & Sankoff (2004), who explained that language power, prestige, and preference defined language choice in multilingual communities. The choice of using the Indonesian language is because of its official and national status. Ultimately, mastering Indonesian will not only provide economic gain but also benefit intercultural communication between different ethnic groups in Indonesia.

School activities and government-related matters should, undoubtedly, be conducted in Indonesian. Meanwhile, religious ceremonies and rituals can also be held in Indonesian, Gorontalo and other local dialects, depending on the specific purpose. It

can be said that multilinguals have various language choices available in their repertoire, and they are able to choose which language may serve them better in a particular situation (Fasold, 1990; Gumperz, 1964).

The use of Indonesian at home, where Gorontalo was supposed to be mainly used, has strongly indicated a language shift. This study also showed that Gorontalo was the second language most commonly spoken after Indonesian. David, et. al (2009) asserted that continued use of minority languages implies that these languages are alive, and that they can survive only if they are maintained in the home. Unfortunately, the status of Indonesian as the official language, and English as the most spoken international language, led to the perception that learning the mother tongue is less important. When speakers of a speech community do not see any economic significance in using their heritage language, they will shift away from this language to another more dominant, powerful, and prestigious language.

This study also discovered that level of education is another factor influencing language choice. Since majority of the participants have a university degree, the participants' language use is mostly dominated by Indonesian, which is the medium of instruction in all public institutions. It is noticeable that the longer they attend educational institutions, coupled with higher social factors, such as education and social class, the longer their level of exposure to the dominant language has become. The prospect of a shift to another language is feasible (Fishman, 1965; Grenier, 1984; Pendakur, 1990). Furthermore, Fishman (1965; 2001) highlighted that various institutions, such as language schools, libraries, print and broadcast media, religious congregations, social clubs, and ethnic restaurants and shops, served to ensure retention of minority languages within an ethnolinguistic community.

Positive attitudes were attributed by the urban Gorontaloese towards each language in their repertoire, Indonesian, Gorontalo, and English. They considered Indonesian as the most useful, comfortable, and prestigious language, as well as a part of their national identity as Indonesians. Although the participants exhibited positive attitudes towards English as an international language, it was also perceived as not the most comfortable language to use in daily interactions. As a result, they did not think about maintaining and teaching it for the next generation. In contrast, more than half of the participants recognized the importance of knowing and using their local language, and therefore, the need for maintaining and teaching it to their children. They also acknowledged that Gorontalo was a part of their identities, and that they intended to keep it alive. Despite having positive attitudes towards their mother tongue, at home, the Indonesian language was still favored. This study confirmed previous research findings that attitudes towards the heritage language were found to be highly positive, even though the use of the language, and proficiency in it, may be limited or even declining (Edwards, 2011; Slavik, 2001).

Implications on Language Maintenance in Gorontalo

Language endangerment is a reality in Indonesia. With more indigenous language speakers shifting to Indonesian, a quick action is needed to keep the indigenous languages alive. Fishman (1980) stated that the home and community have the greatest impact on language maintenance, followed by educational institutions and government regulations. While there seem to be no single method that has

successfully been discovered to maintain an indigenous language, family and community effort has been seen as the core for language maintenance (Fishman, 1980; Canagarajah, 2008; Pauwels, 2016; Schwartz, 2008). The current study demonstrated that language shift has already taken place in urban areas of the Gorontalo province (the municipality). Therefore, allowing for strengthening of the family language maintenance at home, as well as within the community, are indispensable.

Other than constant use of a language within the family, the use of a language in the school is likewise an important key to preventing language shift and language extinction in indigenous communities (Bear Nicholas, 2009). However, because of the national regulations that recognize only the Indonesian language as the medium of instruction in all levels of public education, Gorontalo children have lost their opportunity to be educated in their native language. Although the Gorontalo language is still taught as a local subject (*mulok*), time and resources allocated to learning this language in school is limited. With only two 35-minute periods in a week, and a lack of textbooks, teaching materials and educators who speak the language, this seems an insignificant amount of time and effort to maintain the language or prevent language loss.

The Gorontalo tribe, as one of the customary people (*masyarakat adat*) in Indonesia, has a full and legal right to be educated in their native language, as stated in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), that was signed and adopted by the Indonesian national government. UNDRIP, which was established as a minimum standard of general framework to ensure indigenous people's rights and protection, was originally signed by 144 countries, including Indonesia (Hanson, 2009). However, this pronouncement seems to not change Indonesian laws, particularly about language use for educational purposes.

Language use in education has been advocated to strengthen language maintenance and prevent language shift. On the other hand, it has been suggested by scholars (Bear Nicholas, 2009; Holmes, 2013; Kalra, 2018; Shaeffer, 2008) that if the dominant language was used for education, ultimately, the use of minority language in other domains will decrease. Therefore, it is important that indigenous languages are used for purposes of education to remain sustainable. To be effectively used for education, the national and regional government should create a policy that guarantees and guides its use. However, in many countries in Asia such as Indonesia, such a policy is often limited to certain levels of education, or does not even exist at all.

In this case, the national and provincial government must be involved in rebuilding Indonesian indigenous languages. Without the involvement of the government, more and more indigenous languages will face language endangerment. The status of Gorontalo language also needs to be raised through the education system, to ensure access, quality, equity, and empowerment. Last but not least, it is important to bear in mind that the support from the government also requires movement and initiation from the community language speakers. The community needs to show a positive attitude towards the language and willingness to initiate grass-root programs to maintain the language. Furthermore, on an individual and family level, the speakers of a minority language should likewise try to maintain their language at home.

Conclusion

In multilingual Gorontalo communities where multiple languages such as the Gorontalo language, Indonesian, Gorontalo Malay, and English coexist, language shift has a bigger chance to take place. The urban Gorontalo have started to lose their mother tongue in favor of Indonesian, and English. This paper presents the results of a study about language use and language attitudes in an urban Gorontalo community in the Gorontalo province. It was found that although the majority of the participants have shown positive attitudes toward the Gorontalo language, language shift has already taken place in the urban Gorontalo community as the language used in daily life has already been replaced by Indonesian and proficiency in the mother tongue has been decreased. Even the family domain, where a minority language or heritage language was used, is now shifting their language use to Indonesian.

Indonesian language is used exclusively in education and government services as mandated by the national regulation, it is also largely spoken in cultural and religious services. As this study was only conducted in an urban area community, further research is needed to discover whether the use of Indonesian language has also penetrated the remote areas in Gorontalo province. Language maintenance and language policy on different scales such as national, regional, community and family are urgently needed to prevent language loss. If Gorontalo language speakers are continuously reduced in numbers, with parents no longer using the language with their children even at home, the language will soon be extinct.

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