

The Role of Language in Identity Formation: A Linguistic Perspective in Education

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62872/x7ta403>

Abstract

Language plays an important role in the formation of individual and group identities in educational settings. This research aims to understand how language influences student identity from cultural, social, academic and digital perspectives. Using a qualitative approach and case study design, data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation and document analysis. The research subjects included 30 informants from three schools with diverse cultural and social backgrounds. The results show that local languages strengthen students' cultural identity, despite being pressured by the dominance of national and foreign languages due to globalization. In the social context, language functions as a tool for status negotiation and group dynamics. Teaching foreign languages, such as English, increases students' global competence but risks reducing appreciation for local languages. In the digital age, language use on social media reflects students' creative identities but often clashes with formal language norms in schools. This research emphasizes the importance of a balanced language education policy to support global language acquisition while preserving local languages. With this approach, education can help students build an inclusive identity, integrate local values in a global context, and strengthen their cultural connections holistically.

Keywords: *Language Identity; Linguistic Education; Cultural and Social Values.*

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Received October 12, 2024, Accepted November 27, 2024, Published December 24, 2024

Introduction

Language plays an important role in the formation of individual and group identity in society. In the context of education, language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a means of shaping cultural, social and personal values. Language reflects who a person is, where they come from, and how they interact with the world around them. Therefore, the role of language in identity formation is very important to understand from an educational perspective. Language learning in schools not only teaches linguistic skills, but also facilitates the development of students' cultural, social and academic identities (Sugianto, 2022). In this context, education becomes a strategic platform to shape and strengthen identities, which are often influenced by different social and cultural factors.

One important phenomenon that can be observed in identity formation through language is the role of language in maintaining local cultural values and national identity. In the midst of globalization that brings foreign cultural influences, local languages are often marginalized, even almost extinct. In



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education, teaching local languages in schools can be an effective means to preserve culture and strengthen local identity (Mulyani et.al., 2024). This phenomenon shows how important language is as part of a nation's cultural pride. In addition, Indonesian also acts as a unifying tool for a nation that has cultural and linguistic diversity. Through the Indonesian language, every individual, regardless of their cultural background, can communicate and understand each other. Therefore, language education must pay attention to this cultural diversity in order to form an inclusive national identity.

In addition to language as a tool for shaping cultural identity, language also plays a significant role in shaping social identity in the educational environment. In the classroom, students often use language to negotiate their social status, both through formal and informal language use. These language choices reflect their social standing among peers and teachers (Arman et.al., 2023). For example, the use of slang can indicate a sense of community or closeness to a particular group, while the use of formal or standardized language often indicates respect or higher status. In this case, language becomes a mirror of the social relationships formed within the educational community. This phenomenon shows that language is more than just a means of communication; it is a means of shaping and maintaining social position in daily interactions. Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply how language is used to shape and negotiate social identities in schools.

The influence of educational policies on the languages taught in schools also has a major impact on the formation of students' identities. Curricula that contain various language subjects, such as Indonesian, local languages and foreign languages, contribute to shaping students' mindsets and worldviews. For example, the teaching of English in Indonesian schools opens up opportunities for students to access global information and form an identity as part of the international community. However, on the other hand, foreign language teaching also risks reducing attention to local languages and cultures (Insani, 2022). This phenomenon suggests that language education policy should be balanced, by providing sufficient space for the development of Indonesian and local languages, as well as introducing foreign languages as windows to the world without forgetting local identity. Thus, the right language education policy can help students to develop a strong identity, both locally, nationally and globally.

In the development of information and communication technology, language also plays an important role in shaping students' digital identity. In this digital era, students often interact through social media platforms, which provide a space for them to express themselves and interact with others. Language use on social media can reflect an individual's personality and values, while also revealing their social and cultural identity. Phenomena such as code-switching or the mixed use of Indonesian and English among teenagers are common on social media. This shows how flexible language is in creating an identity that suits the needs of communication in the digital world. On the other hand, the digital language used can also reflect how strongly a person identifies with global or local culture (Cahya & Ramadhan, 2023). In this context, education also has a role to direct students to use digital language wisely and pay attention to its impact on the formation of their identity.

The phenomenon of digital identity can also be seen from the way students build their self-image in cyberspace. Social media, as one of the most widely used digital spaces, provides a platform for freer self-expression. Language use in the digital world is not only limited to everyday conversations, but also includes the creative ways students interact with content, be it through text, images or videos. In this case, language becomes a very important tool in shaping an identity that is not only connected to the local community, but also to the global community. However, this digital identity is often influenced by language trends that develop in cyberspace, such as the use of slang or popular memes (Pitrianti & Maryani, 2023). Therefore, it is important for education to equip students with linguistic skills that can help them manage their digital identities more wisely.

From an educational perspective, the influence of language on identity formation occurs not only in the classroom, but also in social interactions outside the classroom. Students often use language to shape and negotiate their identities in relationships with peers. For example, the use of local languages

in daily conversations in the school environment can demonstrate the strength of social bonds formed based on a common cultural background. In contrast, students who use foreign languages or Indonesian in their communication may want to assert themselves as more educated or connected to the outside world (Rianita, 2024). This phenomenon shows that language does not only function as a communication tool, but also as a tool to build identities related to certain social groups. In the context of education, this challenges us to think about how language is used in the process of socialization and identity formation in schools.

Overall, the role of language in students' identity formation is complex and multidimensional. Language not only shapes individual identity, but also reflects the cultural, social and academic values that exist in the educational environment. Therefore, it is important to dig deeper into how language education can contribute to strengthening students' identities, both at the local, national and global levels. In addition, a deep understanding of language use in social, digital and cultural contexts will help create educational policies that are more inclusive and responsive to students' needs. In this case, the role of language in education is not only limited to the teaching of language itself, but also to how language is used to enrich the educational experience and the formation of a more holistic student identity

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the role of language in identity formation in an educational environment. The research subjects consisted of 30 people, namely 20 students and 10 teachers and school officials from three schools with diverse cultural and social backgrounds. The data collection techniques used included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with students, teachers, and school officials to explore their views on the role of language in identity formation. Participatory observation was conducted to observe language use in social interaction and learning at school, while document analysis related to language education policies was conducted to understand the influence of policies on student identity.

The data collection process is carried out in several stages: selection of research locations and subjects, interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data collected will be thematically analyzed to identify key themes related to identity formation through language. To ensure data validity, this research uses data triangulation and member checking. This research also pays attention to ethics by maintaining the confidentiality of information and giving informants the right to choose to participate. Hopefully, this research can provide a deeper understanding of the role of language in identity formation in schools.

Result and Discussion

This research identified several important findings related to the role of language in identity formation in the educational environment. Based on in-depth interviews with students, teachers and school authorities, as well as participatory observation, it was found that language has a very significant role in the formation of students' cultural, social and academic identities.

1. Cultural Identify Formation through Language

For students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, local languages become a way to strengthen their identity. The use of local languages in social interactions at school gives them a deep sense of pride. They feel that the local language is a heritage that must be maintained and passed on to the next generation. By using local languages, they can feel close to families and communities that share the same cultural values. Local languages also help students to remember and appreciate the traditions and customs that exist in their family life. In addition, local languages can be a tool to build solidarity and a sense of community with friends who come from the same culture. In this situation, the local language serves as a strong symbol of identity that is not only used for communication, but also to emphasize the diversity and richness of existing cultures (Putri et.al., 2024). As a result, students feel more connected to their cultural roots even though they study in an environment that predominantly uses Indonesian or foreign languages.

However, students who face pressure to master more Indonesian or foreign languages often feel torn between two different worlds. They realize that their local language brings them closer to their

family and community, but they also understand that mastering Indonesian or a foreign language can open up wider opportunities in education and employment. Some students feel that Indonesian, as the official language of the country, has more value in school and in the professional world. In addition, foreign language ability is often considered a highly valued skill in an increasingly connected, globalized world. Therefore, some students feel the need to conform to existing social expectations, even if they have to sacrifice the use of the local language. This conflict shows how complex the relationship between language, cultural identity and social status is. For some students, the use of Indonesian or a foreign language may be perceived as a way to be more accepted in the wider society, while the local language remains a symbol of attachment to the past and family. This raises the dilemma of how to maintain cultural diversity amidst the demands of adapting to globalization and modernity.

2. The Influence of Language on Social Identity

In the school environment, social interactions between students show the great influence of language in shaping their social identity. Students who actively use slang or language that is more popular among peers feel more accepted in their social groups. Language becomes an important tool to show social status and closeness between individuals. Language also plays a role in the process of social inclusion and exclusion, where students who do not master certain forms of language, such as slang or foreign languages, feel marginalized. The use of local languages can play a significant role in shaping individual and group social identities in a multicultural society such as Indonesia. In addition, the development of information technology and social media can also cause shifts in people's behavior patterns, including in language use. The use of popular language on social media, such as slang, can be an indicator of social status and acceptance in certain groups (Alfian et.al., 2024).

In a broader context, language can also be a tool to express one's cultural and ethnic identity. The use of local language or mother tongue can be a marker of social and cultural identity for certain individuals or community groups. This can be seen in social interactions in a heterogeneous society, where the use of local language or mother tongue can be an indicator of group affiliation. In addition, language can also be a tool to maintain or fight for the social and political identity of a community group. Minority or marginalized groups often use language as a tool to assert their existence and rights in society. The use of local languages or mother tongues can be a symbol of resistance to the dominance of the majority culture and an attempt to maintain their social identity (Arifin & Harpiani, 2023).

Changes in language use can also reflect changes in social structures and power relations in society. In the context of colonialism or domination of a particular culture, language can be a tool to assert the social and political identity of the dominated group (Azhim, 2022). On the other hand, globalization and migration processes can also affect language use and social identity formation (Hasan et.al., 2024). Intercultural interaction and language mixing can create new forms of language, such as creole or pidgin languages, which reflect hybrid or mixed social identities. Overall, language plays an important role in the formation of individual and group social identities in society. Language use can be an indicator of social status, group affiliation, and an expression of cultural and political identity. Understanding the influence of language on social identity can help us understand the complex social and cultural dynamics in an increasingly diverse society.

3. Academic Identity and Language in Education

Language has a very important role in the formation of academic identity, especially in the context of formal education. Indonesian, as the national language, is used as the main means of learning and communication in the school environment. This language marks students' collective identity as part of the Indonesian nation (Bulan, 2019). However, the influence of foreign languages, especially English, presents different dynamics in the formation of students' academic identity.

Observations show that English is not only seen as an international communication tool but also as a symbol of social status and intellectual ability. In the process of learning English, students often feel a shift to a more global identity. Mastery of this language gives them a sense of confidence, which is not only related to their academic ability but also to their ability to compete globally. Students who master a foreign language, especially English, are often perceived as having higher academic achievement and being better prepared to face the challenges of the modern world.

In addition, mastery of English is often associated with intelligence and better adaptability in various situations. This can be seen in how students perceive the added value of foreign language acquisition in improving their future opportunities, such as access to quality colleges, scholarship

opportunities and international career prospects. The identity of being a foreign language learner makes them feel more competitive, both locally and globally. However, this dynamic also poses challenges for formal education in Indonesia. As a country rich in cultural diversity and regional languages, the dominance of foreign languages such as English in education can reduce appreciation of local languages and cultures (Ananda, 2023). Therefore, a balanced educational approach is needed, which not only encourages the acquisition of foreign languages for global needs but also maintains national identity through the learning of Indonesian and local languages.

In this context, it is important for educators and policy makers to design a curriculum that is not only oriented towards global needs but also strengthens local values. Thus, students will not only be able to compete internationally but also still appreciate and uphold their cultural identity as part of Indonesian society. Students' academic identity should reflect a balance between openness to the global world and respect for their local cultural roots.

4. The Role of Social Media in Digital Identity Formation Discussion

This research found that social media has a significant role in shaping students' digital identities. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Twitter provide a space for students to express themselves freely, creating an identity that is often different from the formal identity they present in the school environment. This digital identity is formed through their interactions in cyberspace supported by the use of language typical of the digital generation. The language used by students on social media tends to be more casual, expressive and contextualized, with a lot of use of slang, memes and contemporary terms. For example, students often adopt viral popular phrases or foreign terms combined with local language styles. This language use is not just a means of communication, but also a means to mark their membership in a particular community on social media (Fitri, 2020). In this space, students feel they have greater freedom to explore different sides of their personality, including their humor, creativity, and aspirations.

However, this flexible pattern of language use often goes against the norms of formal language taught in schools. Formal language, which tends to be more rigid and structured, is considered less relevant in a dynamic digital context (Hamsa et.al., 2024). This creates tension between students' formal identities as learners and their digital identities as individuals active on social media. This tension reflects the different ways students adjust to the demands of the formal world and their need to be accepted in the digital community. In addition, social media also provides space for students to build a certain self-image or persona that they want. The digital identities formed through social media reflect not only who they are, but also how they want to be seen by others (Anna & Setiawan, 2024). Students often utilize certain language and content to highlight sides of themselves that they find interesting or relevant to popular trends. Thus, their digital identity becomes the result of an interaction between personal preferences and external influences from online communities.

On the other hand, this casual and contextual use of digital language can have positive impacts, such as increasing students' creativity and adaptability in the face of technological and cultural changes (Rahayu, 2019). However, it also poses challenges, especially in maintaining students' competence in using formal language that remains important for academic and professional needs. In conclusion, social media plays a dual role in students' digital identity formation: as a space for free expression and as an arena for social interaction that shapes the way students understand and present themselves. In an educational context, it is important to create a balance between recognizing students' digital identities formed on social media and strengthening formal language skills that support them in the academic and professional world.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study shows that language plays a multidimensional role in students' identity formation, covering cultural, social, academic and digital aspects. The use of local languages strengthens students' connection to their cultural roots, despite pressures to adopt national or foreign languages in the interests of modernity and social status. This tension illustrates the challenges of maintaining local cultural heritage in the midst of globalization. In a social context, language acts as both a tool of inclusion and exclusion, creating complex group dynamics. Academically, the acquisition of foreign languages such as English increases students' self-confidence and global competence, but can reduce appreciation for local languages. Students' digital identities are also influenced by social media, where language becomes a means of creative expression as well as shaping their online personas.

Flexible language patterns on social media often conflict with formal language norms at school, creating an identity dilemma. Therefore, it is important for education to encourage a balance between global language acquisition and respect for local languages. By doing so, students can integrate local values in a global context, strengthening their identity holistically.

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