

SACRIFICING THE MOTHER TONGUE: YOUNG ACEHNESE PARENTS AND THE DILEMMA OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION

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ABSTRACT: This descriptive qualitative study investigates the underlying reasons and motives of young Acehnese parents in Lhokseumawe City, Indonesia, who consciously choose to teach Indonesian to their children despite being fully proficient speakers of their heritage language, Acehnese. Fourteen parents who met stringent criteria participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that parents' language choices are driven by a complex interplay of instrumental motivations, deeply internalized language ideologies, social norms, and generational shifts in linguistic practice. Parents perceive Indonesian as indispensable capital for children's educational achievement and socioeconomic mobility, view it as inherently more prestigious and modern than Acehnese, and have normalized its use within the family domain to such an extent that heritage language transmission now feels marked and unnatural. Besides, parents express genuine regret about Acehnese potential loss, yet feel compelled by structural pressures and ideological convictions to prioritize Indonesian, framing their choice as a necessary sacrifice for their children's future rather than as a rejection of cultural heritage. The findings underscore that language revitalization efforts must address not only linguistic competence but also the language ideologies that devalue heritage languages while acknowledging parents' legitimate concerns about their children's educational and economic prospects.

Keywords: Acehnese Language, Family Language Policy, Heritage Language Maintenance, Indonesian Language, Language Shift

INTRODUCTION

Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a foundational element of cultural identity, heritage, and intergenerational connection. Proverbs in the Acehnese language, for instance, convey cultural values, emphasizing themes like hard work, cooperation, honesty, and responsibility (Ibrahim & Usman, 2021). Language is essential for recognizing social groups, cultural values, and ethnicity; losing a language equates to losing a carrier of identity (Dastgoshadeh & Jalilzadeh, 2011). The loss of language results in the loss of memory, identity, culture, and knowledge, adversely impacting the health of indigenous people (Whalen et al., 2016).

In light of the critical importance of language preservation, the evolution of minority languages must be carefully guided to ensure their continuity. These languages must be maintained and transmitted to future generations, with particular emphasis on the family's role in this process. In multilingual contexts, parental decisions regarding which language(s) to pass on to their children have significant consequences for the vitality and sustainability of minority languages.

The family domain serves as the critical battleground for language maintenance or shift, as it represents the primary site where intergenerational transmission either succeeds or fails (Lane, 2024). Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on family

language policy (FLP) as a framework for understanding how parental ideologies, practices, and management strategies shape children's linguistic development and, consequently, the long-term vitality of minority languages (Wang & Liu, 2025). The decisions made within the home environment, often seemingly personal and private, collectively determine whether a language will survive into subsequent generations or gradually recede from active use.

Aceh province presents a particularly compelling case for examining language shift dynamics. As a special autonomous region located at the northwestern tip of Sumatra Island, Aceh has experienced decades of armed conflict with the Indonesian government, followed by the devastating 2004 tsunami and the subsequent peace accord of 2005 (Al-Auwal et al, 2024). These profound historical events have reshaped Acehnese society in myriad ways, including its linguistic landscape.

Recent research by Al-Auwal et al (2024) has documented a significant and accelerating shift away from Acehnese intergenerational transmission, noting that while ideological identification with Acehnese remains strong, actual language practices increasingly favor Indonesian. Their study revealed that the phenomenon of Indonesian being transmitted within families began emerging as early as the 1970s and 1980s, became more common in the 2000s, and peaked following the tsunami and peace agreement (Al-Auwal et al, 2024). A similar research by Yusuf et al. (2022) also confirms that Acehnese youth today are often not encouraged by their parents to engage with the Acehnese language, resulting in a loss of heritage language acquisition. Increasingly, Acehnese-speaking parents are opting to teach their children Indonesian or foreign languages like English as their primary language, neglecting the Acehnese language.

The doctoral dissertation of Al-Auwal (2024) provides further depth to our understanding of this language shift, specifically examining young Acehnese-Indonesian bilingual adults across multiple cities in Aceh, including Lhokseumawe. Through surveys, matched guise tests, diary studies, and interviews, this comprehensive research demonstrated that Indonesian has become the dominant language among young Acehnese adults across various sociological variables and domains, with Acehnese increasingly marginalized and associated with negative stereotypes of being old-fashioned, complicated, and harsh.

Critically, the case studies revealed a prevailing preference for Indonesian in parent-child interactions, leading to disrupted intergenerational transmission of Acehnese. Perhaps most striking was the observed inconsistency between parents' stated pride and deep devotion to Acehnese and their actual language practices, as all participating parents chose to intentionally teach Indonesian to their children (Al-Auwal, 2024).

The choice of Lhokseumawe City as the research site for the present study is particularly strategic. Lhokseumawe's demographic composition—characterized by a relatively homogeneous population predominantly of Acehnese ethnicity where the Acehnese language remains widely spoken and understood—creates a unique paradox. Unlike contexts where parents shift to a dominant language out of necessity due to limited proficiency in the heritage language, the parents in this study are fully proficient in Acehnese. Their decision to prioritize Indonesian represents a conscious ideological and practical choice that merits in-depth qualitative exploration.

Recent research in Banda Aceh has further illuminated that the shift in Acehnese language use begins within the family environment, driven by a lack of awareness among parents to transmit the language to their children. This

failure in cultural transmission is compounded by educational policies that prioritize Indonesian as the medium of instruction and by the sociolinguistic pressures of urban environments where Indonesian serves as a lingua franca accommodating diverse populations (Nurhayati & Zulfadli, 2024). These findings underscore the importance of examining the micro-level dynamics within families to understand the macro-level patterns of language shift.

The novelty of the present study lies in its focused examination of young parents in Lhokseumawe who meet stringent criteria. By selecting participants for whom the choice of Indonesian is not necessitated by linguistic inability but represents a deliberate decision, this research aims to uncover the nuanced motivations, ideologies, and rationales that drive family language policies favoring the dominant national language over the heritage language.

While previous research has identified prestige, modernity, education, and socioeconomic factors as primary drivers of language shift in Aceh (Al-Auwal et al., 2024). These findings emerge from broader survey and focus group methodologies. The present study's qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews, will allow for deeper exploration of how these factors manifest in individual parents' lived experiences, decision-making processes, and aspirations for their children. It seeks to understand not merely what factors correlate with language shift, but how parents themselves articulate and rationalize their linguistic choices, how they navigate the apparent contradiction between ethnic pride and language practice, and how they envision the role of Acehnese and Indonesian in their children's futures.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic contribution to encompass practical implications for language maintenance efforts.

Understanding the specific motivations that lead Acehnese parents to abandon intergenerational transmission of their heritage language is essential for designing effective interventions, whether through educational policy, community awareness programs, or grassroots revitalization initiatives. As Lane (2024) demonstrates in the context of Sámi language reclamation in Norway, breaking the cycle of silence and disrupting the colonial heritage requires understanding the motivations and experiences of parents who choose to speak their heritage language with their children. Conversely, understanding why parents choose the dominant language is equally critical for addressing language shift at its source—the family domain.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader international literature on family language policy in indigenous and minority language contexts. Recent comparative research across Galicia, Navarre, and Buenos Aires has highlighted the crucial role of "new speaker" parents who make conscious decisions to transmit minority languages they did not acquire through family transmission (Nandi et al. 2022). The Acehnese context presents an inverse situation requiring investigation: parents who possess full proficiency in the heritage language yet choose not to transmit it. Understanding this phenomenon enriches theoretical frameworks of language shift and revitalization by illuminating the factors that lead to intergenerational disruption even when linguistic resources are abundant.

In the context of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in China, research has demonstrated how macro-level language education policies significantly impact family language planning, with Nuosu families increasingly prioritizing Putonghua and English while the Nuosu language practice in the family domain decreases across generations (Wang & Liu, 2025). This parallel situation underscores the

importance of examining how national language policies, educational systems, and socioeconomic pressures intersect with parental ideologies to shape family language practices. The Acehnese case, situated within Indonesia's complex multilingual landscape, offers valuable comparative insights into how minority language communities navigate the tensions between heritage preservation and the perceived necessities of modernization and national integration.

By focusing on young parents in Lhokseumawe, this research captures a generation whose child-rearing years coincide with the period when, according to recent scholarship, Indonesian intergenerational transmission has become increasingly common and well-established (Al-Auwal et al., 2024). Their perspectives and practices will shape the linguistic future of Aceh for decades to come. Understanding their motivations is therefore not merely an academic exercise but an urgent necessity for anyone concerned with linguistic diversity, cultural heritage, and the rights of minority language communities to maintain their distinct identities while participating fully in national life.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Context

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the underlying reasons and motives of young parents in Lhokseumawe City for teaching the Indonesian language to their children. A qualitative approach is ideal for this inquiry as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of participants' subjective meanings, experiences, and perspectives within their sociolinguistic context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive nature of the study aims to provide a detailed, contextualized portrayal of family language practices rather than to establish causal relationships or generalize findings to a larger population.

Lhokseumawe City was purposively selected as the research site due to its unique linguistic landscape. As a city characterized by a relatively homogeneous population predominantly of Acehnese ethnicity, where the Acehnese language remains widely spoken and understood, the observed parental preference for transmitting Indonesian presents a compelling case for investigation. This phenomenon, as recent research in Aceh has documented, reflects a broader and accelerating shift away from Acehnese intergenerational transmission that began in the late 20th century and has become increasingly prevalent in the post-conflict and post-tsunami era. The selection of this specific location enables the research to closely examine the local manifestations of this macro-level language shift at the micro-level of family decision-making.

Participant Selection

The participants in this study consist of 14 parents, each representing a distinct family unit residing in Lhokseumawe City. The number of participants is consistent with qualitative research recommendations, focusing on depth and theme saturation instead of statistical generalization (Smith & McGannon, 2018). The selection of participants was carried out using a purposive sampling strategy, ensuring that all individuals met a set of predetermined criteria relevant to the research focus. These criteria were: (a) having been married for approximately ten years, (b) having one or more children, (c) actively teaching Indonesian to their children and using it as the primary language of communication at home, (d) both parents are ethnic Acehnese, and (e) both parents are proficient speakers of the Acehnese language.

The latter two criteria are critical, as they establish that the choice to use Indonesian is not a necessity born from an inability to communicate in the parental native language, but rather a

conscious ideological and practical decision. This family language policy, where parents opt to speak the national language instead of their native tongue to their children, aligns with the concept of language shift occurring within the domestic sphere. As highlighted by Al-Auwal et al. (2024), this practice of Indonesian intergenerational transmission has become a common phenomenon among Acehnese families, driven by factors that this study seeks to uncover from the parents' own perspectives.

Data Collection Techniques

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, a technique that offers both focus and flexibility as it effectively explores participants' perspectives, experiences, and the meanings they assign to their practices (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). This method is particularly effective in qualitative research as it allows the researcher to guide the conversation with a pre-determined set of topics and questions while simultaneously providing the latitude for participants to elaborate on their experiences, introduce unanticipated themes, and express their views in their own words. The use of semi-structured interviews will enable the researcher to delve deeply into the personal narratives of the 14 parents, exploring the nuanced reasons behind their language choices.

The interview protocol will be designed to explore several key areas: (a) the parents' awareness of their own bilingualism (Acehnese-Indonesian), (b) their language ideologies and attitudes towards both Acehnese and Indonesian, (c) their conscious or unconscious motives for prioritizing Indonesian in the home environment, (d) their perceptions of the role and status of Acehnese in the future, and (e) their observations of similar language practices within their community and social networks. Interviews are expected to last between 25 and 40 minutes and will be conducted in a language comfortable for the

participants, likely a mix of Indonesian and Acehnese, to ensure nuanced expression and accurate data capture. All interviews will be audio-recorded with the explicit informed consent of the participants and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the transcribed interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This widely used method in qualitative research involves a systematic process of identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set. The analysis will follow the six-phase guide outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), which includes: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts, (2) generating initial codes by highlighting significant statements and ideas related to the research questions, (3) searching for themes by collating codes into potential broader patterns, (4) reviewing and refining the identified themes to ensure they accurately represent the data set, (5) defining and naming the final themes, and (6) producing the final report with compelling interview excerpts as evidence.

The analysis is both inductive, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data, and deductive, being sensitive to concepts prevalent in the literature on language shift and family language policy, such as language ideology, prestige, and socioeconomic mobility. Themes related to the perception of Indonesian as a key to educational and economic success, or its role as a symbol of national identity, for instance, are closely examined in relation to the participants' accounts. The goal is to construct a rich, detailed, and nuanced explanation of the motivations driving these young Acehnese parents in Lhokseumawe to transmit Indonesian to the next generation, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the micro-level processes that underpin macro-level language shift.

To improve the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis, member checking was utilized, allowing preliminary interpretations and themes to be shared with a select group of participants for their verification and feedback, as highlighted by Creswell & Poth (2018). In addition, the researcher kept a reflective journal aimed at bracketing potential biases and documenting the analytical decisions throughout the study. This practice effectively contributed to the auditability of the research process, thereby enhancing transparency and reliability in the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of semi-structured interviews with 14 young Acehese parents in Lhokseumawe City revealed several interconnected themes that explain their motivations for transmitting Indonesian to their children despite their own fluency in Acehese. These findings illuminate the complex interplay of language ideologies, socioeconomic aspirations, and practical considerations that shape family language policies in this context. The discussion situates these findings within the broader scholarly discourse on language shift, family language policy, and heritage language maintenance in Indonesia and beyond.

Instrumental Motivations: Indonesian as Capital for Educational and Economic Success

The most prominent theme emerging from the interviews was the perception of Indonesian as essential capital for children's educational achievement and future socioeconomic mobility. All 14 parents explicitly articulated that proficiency in Indonesian constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for academic success, given that Indonesian serves as the sole medium of instruction throughout the national education system.

One parent articulated this perspective clearly: "From kindergarten

through university, all textbooks and teaching are in Indonesian. If children do not master Indonesian well, they will struggle to understand lessons and fall behind their peers." This concern reflects what Pramuniati et al. (2025) identified in their study of language shift across North Sumatra, where parents deliberately chose to raise their children in Indonesian despite having to "sacrifice" their regional language, driven by the conviction that Indonesian proficiency determines educational outcomes. A study on Javanese by Fitriati (2023) also confirms that young parents exhibit favorable language attitudes towards both Indonesian and English, while their attitude towards Javanese is comparatively less positive.

This instrumental orientation extends beyond schooling to encompass broader economic aspirations. Parents consistently framed Indonesian mastery as a non-negotiable requirement for accessing formal employment, professional advancement, and full participation in modern economic life. As one participant explained, "When my child grows up and applies for jobs, whether as a civil servant, in a bank, or in any company, the interview and all work communications will be in Indonesian. Acehese will not help them get a good job."

This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, wherein language functions as a form of symbolic capital that can be converted into economic and social advantage (Lutfiah et al., 2025). In the Indonesian context, where the national language dominates all formal institutional domains, Indonesian undeniably constitutes the most valuable linguistic capital parents can bestow upon their children.

The findings resonate with those of Pramuniati et al. (2025), who analyze the language shift occurring in North Sumatra Province, Indonesia, particularly within middle-class communities, and evaluate how parental

influence affects children's preferences for regional languages versus Indonesian. They found that in Indonesia, language shift is prevalent due to the dominance of influential languages like Indonesian and Javanese, overshadowing many weaker vernacular languages. Importantly, the parents in Lhokseumawe did not express this as a rejection of Acehnese identity but rather as a pragmatic calculation about which language would best serve their children's prospects. This pragmatic orientation represents what Idaryani and Fidyati (2023) describe as the tension between affective attachment to heritage language and instrumental orientation toward the national language in Acehnese parents' language attitudes.

Language Ideologies: Prestige, Modernity, and National Identity

Beyond instrumental motivations, parents articulated deeply held language ideologies that positioned Indonesian as inherently more prestigious, modern, and appropriate for raising successful children. Several participants characterized Acehnese as "old-fashioned," "village language," or "language for the past," while describing Indonesian as "modern," "sophisticated," and "language for the future."

One parent's reflection captured this ideological positioning: "When I speak Acehnese to my children, it feels like I am holding them back, like I am teaching them to live in the past. Indonesian opens doors; Acehnese keep them closed." This perception aligns with Auwal's (2024) doctoral research, which found that young Acehnese adults associated Acehnese with negative stereotypes of being old-fashioned, complicated, and harsh, while Indonesian was positively valued.

This ideological dimension of language shift is particularly significant because it operates at the level of unconscious belief systems that shape daily practices. As Lane (2024)

demonstrates in her study of Sámi language reclamation in Norway, interrupting language shift requires not merely behavioral change but fundamental transformation of the ideologies that associate minority languages with backwardness and dominant languages with progress. The parents in this study have internalized broader societal discourses that privilege Indonesian as the language of modernity, nationalism, and progress—discourses that have been systematically propagated through education, media, and government policy since Indonesian independence.

The ideology of Indonesian as the language of national unity also featured prominently in parents' accounts. Several participants expressed that using Indonesian at home prepared children for participation in the multiethnic Indonesian nation-state. As one parent noted, "Indonesia is diverse, with hundreds of languages. If my child only speaks Acehnese, they cannot communicate with people from Java, Sumatra, or Sulawesi. Indonesian unites us all." This perspective reflects what Lutfiah et al. (2025) identify as the Indonesian government's enduring policy framework of "prioritizing national language, preserving local language, and mastering foreign language," which positions Indonesian as the essential linguistic tool for national integration while relegating local languages to the domain of cultural heritage.

The Paradox of Affection and Practice

A particularly striking finding was the profound emotional ambivalence parents expressed regarding their language choices. Despite consistently prioritizing Indonesian, all 14 parents articulated deep affection for Acehnese and expressed regret that their children might not acquire the language fully. This paradox—what might be termed "affective loyalty without intergenerational transmission"—emerged repeatedly in the interviews. One parent's words exemplify this

tension: "I love Acehese. It is the language of my parents, my grandparents, my ancestors. When I hear Acehese poetry or traditional songs, I feel deep emotion. But I still speak Indonesian to my children. It breaks my heart, but what else can I do?"

This finding precisely mirrors what Al-Auwal (2024) documented in his case studies of young Acehese adults: parents demonstrated inconsistency between stated pride and devotion to Acehese and their actual language practices, with all participating parents choosing to intentionally teach Indonesian to their children. This disconnect between attitude and practice suggests that language ideologies favoring Indonesian operate with such power that they override even strong affective attachments to the heritage language. The parents are not indifferent to Acehese; rather, they perceive themselves as having no viable alternative given the structural pressures favoring Indonesian in education, employment, and social mobility.

Idaryani and Fidyati (2023) provide crucial insight into this paradox through their study of Acehese parents' attitudes toward heritage language transmission. They found that while parents maintained positive attitudes toward Acehese and expressed desire for its preservation, these attitudes did not translate into active transmission practices in the family domain. The present study's findings extend this work by revealing the specific rationalizations parents employ to reconcile their affection for Acehese with their decision not to transmit it: they frame Indonesian transmission as an unfortunate but necessary sacrifice for children's future success, positioning themselves as loving parents making difficult choices rather than as agents of language shift.

The Role of Social Networks and Community Norms

Parents consistently reported that their language choices were reinforced by observing similar practices within their social networks and the broader Lhokseumawe community. As one participant explained, "Almost all my friends, my neighbors, my relatives—they all speak Indonesian to their children. It has become normal. If I spoke Acehese to my child, people would wonder why, and would think I was strange or old-fashioned." This observation reveals how language shift operates through the normalization of new practices within communities, creating what might be termed "new linguistic norms" that render heritage language transmission increasingly marked and deviant.

This social dimension of language shift aligns with findings from Candrasari et al. (2025), who documented Gen Z's declining knowledge of Acehese culinary lexicon, reflecting a broader weakening connection between younger generations and Acehese linguistic heritage. The process is cumulative and self-reinforcing: as more families adopt Indonesian in-home domains, the community norm shifts, making it increasingly difficult for individual families to maintain Acehese without their children feeling linguistically different from peers. One parent's account illustrated this dynamic powerfully: "When my oldest child started kindergarten, she came home asking why we spoke Acehese at home when all her friends spoke Indonesian. She felt embarrassed, different. After that, we switched completely to Indonesian."

This peer pressure dynamic operating through children themselves represents a critical mechanism accelerating language shift. Sumartini (2025), in her analysis of Generation Alpha's linguistic development in the digital era, notes that children born after 2010 have grown up entirely in a technology-driven environment where

Indonesian—and increasingly English—dominate digital content, further reinforcing the marginalization of regional languages. The parents in this study, while not themselves digital natives, are raising children who are, and they perceive digital media as another domain where Indonesian proficiency is essential and Acehese is largely absent.

Generational Discontinuity and the Naturalization of Indonesian

Several parents' accounts revealed a significant generational pattern: they themselves had been raised in Acehese-speaking homes but had gradually shifted to Indonesian as their primary language in adulthood, particularly after having children. This pattern suggests that the current generation of young parents represents a transitional cohort—the last generation to acquire Acehese naturally in the home and the first to actively choose not to transmit it. As one parent reflected, "My parents spoke only Acehese to me. I learned Indonesian at school, but Acehese was my home language. Now, with my children, it is the opposite. Indonesian is home, and Acehese is something they might hear from grandparents."

This generational discontinuity documented significant shifts in language usage, especially among the younger generation. It identified that strategic interventions in education, media, and communities are required to maintain Acehese continuity. Exposure to authentic language and situated learning through social media enhances knowledge in information literacy, target language culture, and sociocultural learning in both online and in-person settings (Yeh & Mitric, 2023). The present study's findings suggest that such interventions must target the family domain specifically, as this is where the critical decision about intergenerational transmission occurs.

The naturalization of Indonesian as the default home language was

evident in how parents described their language choices. Many struggled to articulate explicit reasons for choosing Indonesian, suggesting that the practice had become so normalized that it no longer required conscious justification. As one parent stated, "I don't really think about it. It just feels natural to speak Indonesian to my children. Speaking Acehese would feel strange, forced." This naturalization represents the endpoint of language shift at the individual level—when the dominant language comes to feel intuitive and the heritage language feels marked and artificial in contexts where it was once natural.

Implications for Language Maintenance and Revitalization

The findings of this study carry significant implications for efforts to maintain Acehese as a living language transmitted across generations. First, they underscore that language shift in Aceh is not primarily driven by inability to speak Acehese—all parents in this study are fully proficient—but by ideological and structural factors that position Indonesian as necessary for children's success while Acehese is positioned as optional or even detrimental. This suggests that revitalization efforts must address not only linguistic competence but also the language ideologies that devalue heritage languages and privilege dominant languages.

Second, the findings highlight the critical importance of the family domain as the site where language shift either progresses or is interrupted. As documented in the case of the Simolol language in Simeulue Regency, where usage has declined dramatically across generations, once intergenerational transmission is disrupted in the family, reversing language shift becomes exponentially more difficult (Amri et al., 2025). The Indigenous preservation strategies documented in that context—*nanga-nanga* (lullabies) and *inafi* (storytelling)—offer potential models for

creating natural transmission contexts within Acehnese families, but such strategies require active cultivation and support.

Third, the emotional ambivalence expressed by parents suggests potential openings for revitalization interventions. Parents who love Acehnese but feel compelled to prioritize Indonesian might be receptive to programs that help them integrate Acehnese into family life alongside Indonesian, rather than requiring them to choose between the two. As Indarti and Manara (2025) found in their study of language attitudes in regional intermarriage families, bilingual outcomes are possible when families receive support for maintaining heritage languages while also ensuring proficiency in the national language.

The Acehnese case parallels findings from other minority language contexts globally. Wang and Liu's (2025) research on Nuosu families in China's Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture documented similar patterns of families prioritizing Putonghua over their heritage language due to educational policies and socioeconomic pressures. Lane's (2024) work on Sámi language reclamation demonstrates that breaking cycles of silence requires understanding parents' motivations and supporting them in making active choices to transmit heritage languages. For Aceh, this suggests that revitalization efforts must engage directly with parents' concerns about their children's futures while providing concrete support for incorporating Acehnese into daily family communication.

The convergence of findings across multiple recent studies in Aceh—Al-Auwal (2024), Idaryani and Fidyati (2023), Candrasari et al. (2025), and the present research—paints a concerning picture of accelerating language shift. Yet this very convergence also provides a robust evidence base for designing interventions. Understanding that parents' choices are driven by perceived necessities rather than indifference, that ideological devaluation of Acehnese

operates alongside affective attachment, and that community norms powerfully reinforce language practices provides multiple points of potential intervention for those committed to maintaining Acehnese as a living language for future generations.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study set out to explore the underlying reasons and motives of young Acehnese parents in Lhokseumawe City who, despite being fully proficient in their heritage language, consciously choose to teach Indonesian to their children and use it as the primary language of home communication. The findings reveal that parental decisions are not arbitrary but are shaped by a powerful interplay of instrumental motivations, deeply internalized language ideologies, social norms, and generational shifts in linguistic practice.

Parents perceive Indonesian as indispensable capital for their children's educational success and socioeconomic mobility, view it as inherently more prestigious and modern than Acehnese, and have normalized its use within the family domain to such an extent that heritage language transmission now feels marked and unnatural. Perhaps most significantly, the study uncovered a profound paradox: parents maintain strong affective attachment to Acehnese and express genuine regret about its potential loss, yet they feel compelled by structural pressures and ideological convictions to prioritize Indonesian, framing their choice as a necessary sacrifice for their children's future rather than as a rejection of their cultural heritage.

The implications of these findings are substantial for both theoretical understanding and practical intervention. The study contributes to family language policy scholarship by documenting a distinctive pattern wherein linguistically proficient parents deliberately choose not to transmit their heritage language, thereby enriching theoretical frameworks that have largely

focused on contexts where shift occurs due to limited proficiency or intermarriage. This Acehese case demonstrates that language shift can proceed rapidly even when the heritage language remains widely spoken in the community, driven primarily by ideological devaluation and instrumental calculations rather than by linguistic attrition.

For language maintenance and revitalization efforts, the findings underscore that interventions cannot focus solely on teaching Acehese or documenting its grammar; they must directly address the language ideologies that position Acehese as backward and Indonesian as progressive, while simultaneously acknowledging and responding to parents' legitimate concerns about their children's educational and economic futures. The emotional ambivalence expressed by parents suggests potential receptivity to programs that support bilingual outcomes rather than demanding an either-or choice between heritage and national languages.

For future research, several promising directions emerge from this study. First, longitudinal research is needed to track whether the children of these parents, now being raised in Indonesian, subsequently acquire Acehese later in life or whether the intergenerational disruption proves permanent. Second, comparative studies across different urban centers in Aceh, as well as between urban and rural contexts, would illuminate how community demographics and proximity to Acehese-speaking networks influence family language policies.

Third, research focusing specifically on the role of grandparents and extended family members in heritage language transmission could reveal whether these figures serve as potential resources for maintaining Acehese exposure despite parental choices. Fourth, intervention-based research that develops and evaluates programs designed to support bilingual

family language practices, perhaps drawing on Indigenous preservation strategies such as storytelling and lullabies documented elsewhere in Aceh, would provide practical guidance for revitalization efforts.

Finally, as Lane (2024) emphasizes in the context of Sámi language reclamation, understanding how to break cycles of silence requires research that not only documents language shift but actively engages communities in imagining and creating alternative linguistic futures. Future studies might therefore adopt participatory action research methodologies that involve parents themselves in designing culturally appropriate strategies for heritage language maintenance within the constraints and opportunities of contemporary Acehese society. Such research would honor the complexity of parents' positions—their love for Acehese and their aspirations for their children—while working toward the urgent goal of sustaining linguistic diversity for generations to come.

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