

## EXPLORING LANGUAGE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG INDONESIAN GENERATION Z

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**Abstract:** Since Indonesia consists of hundreds of local languages, exposed to globalization and technological development, all of these make Generation Z face the complex situation of multiple languages. This complex situation encourages the generation Z to decide which language should be prioritized in their daily activities. Because of this situation, this study aims to explore what languages are used by Generation Z and what are the language attitude or perception of this generation created especially for local language and connect with their perception about the language related to cultural identity. A survey-based approach is used to examine the language attitude and perception by Generation Z towards their local language in Indonesia. This study used random sampling method in selecting the participants. It can reach 202 participants of Generation Z at Universitas Negeri Malang, East Java. In collecting the data, survey and in-depth interview are using in this study. The findings are most participants use Indonesia, English and their local language in their daily conversation. Related to language use by Generation Z, it can be also found that Javanese participants have the higher percentage in using the local language compare with the non-Javanese participants. It is also shown that mostly the participants do not agree that the ability in using local language is a determinant of the ethnic identity. Other factors should be considered for this case, for example how the participants practicing the ethnicity, understanding the history of the culture and contributing in the cultural activities.

**Keywords:** *Ethnic identity; generation z; language attitude.*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has thousands of islands, and there is a great deal of linguistic variation in Indonesia. Every island usually consists of some ethnics and they also have their ethnic language. The condition makes most people fluent in more than two languages: Indonesian as the official language and one ethnic language. That is why Indonesia can be considered bilingual or multilingual because around 700 regional languages are spoken in many parts of Indonesia. These regional or ethnic languages can be found on all islands of Indonesia, starting from the largest to the smallest one.

The diversity of local languages made Generation Z, born between 1990 and early 2010, face complex linguistics because of the variety of local languages combined with globalization and technological development, which can impact their attitudes toward language use (Maqfirah & Mokodenseho, 2023; Abduh et al, 2021). Technological development through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Instagram made Generation Z consistently exposed to other languages frequently (Karimah, 2021; Lisdawati, 2021; Zuhriyah & Basith, 2023). This generation also mainly grows in bilingual and multilingual environments. The exposure to the

environment will be different for each individual, it depends on where they spend their time. These two exposures can influence the understanding of this generation in understanding and mastering their local language.

Jakarta can be seen as monolingual because local languages are hardly spoken there. However, there is a phenomenon where young people mix their language with English, which is known as *Bahasa Jaksel* (Rusydah, 2020; Wicaksono et al., 2022). It is quite famous in Generation Z and spread out outside Jakarta via social media (Balqis et al, 2022). However, most people on Java Island speak Bahasa Indonesia as their national language and Javanese language as their local language. On the other hand, residents on Sumatera Island, especially in Medan, speak more than one language; they may speak the local language in addition to the national tongue and maybe another language spoken by a different ethnic group.

Bahasa Indonesia is the dominant language in Indonesia as the position as the official language of the country (Sari et al, 2019). Recently, there has been a noticeable shift in the local language usage phenomena as young people are now exposed to languages other than Indonesian, including English and the local tongues (Sari et al, 2020). Beginning

in the first grade, English is taught in schools (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2019). It significantly impacts how young people view language use in day-to-day activities (Sari et al, 2019). Korean is another language that has an impact on youth. Due to their interest in Korean dramas, many young people are exposed to this language early. This may be because young people today admire Korean actors and actresses, boybands and girl bands, and other Korean entertainment. Young people are now more likely to be willing to comprehend Korean or, at the very least, to learn it passively. Surprisingly, this does not only happen in Indonesia; another South East Asian country, Malaysia, also has this exposure to the Korean language, which is considered the second language in their country. Their attitudes toward the language have increased because of their exposure to Korean entertainment (Nikitina et al., 2020). This occurrence may cause their indigenous language to vanish, making them lose interest in learning their local language.

So far, the government, especially the education ministry, has prioritized English and Bahasa Indonesian at school, and it shows that the language policy created by the government is only focused on those two languages. The way those languages are taught from early childhood education through graduate school gives some indication of it. Still, studying the local language is less important in Indonesia than learning other languages. The fact that this language is taught in schools and that the educational ministry removed it from the curriculum in certain years is evidence of this. This phenomenon demonstrates that excessive exposure to languages other than English and Bahasa can harm a language's survival. For the local language to be preserved, it must originate from the speakers' consciousness. People must be proud of using the language and think it is part of their identities. So, even if the country is exposed to other languages that are not part of it, they will never have left their local language and can still maintain it.

Indonesia also has a specific environment where the community is created with diverse people from some countries. This situation can be found in international schools in some big cities in Indonesia. The people can be identified as Chinese Indonesians, students who were born abroad but grew up in Indonesia with a special setting and environment where they were mostly exposed to English at school and outside school, and the last one is students who were born and

grew up outside Indonesia. The students mostly have a positive attitude toward their first language (Sukamto et al., 2021), although they are not in the place where their first language is used. People will always consider the first language or the home language because they were born with the language, and the ideology towards the language has been developed during their entire lives (Ianos et al., 2023).

The consciousness of maintaining language can be seen through people's attitudes towards the local language and their first language or, in this case, young people's attitudes towards the local language. The previous research reports show that language is maintained through how it is taught at school (Khofifah et al.; Nasmilah, 2023; Rahmadani, 2023). The reports show that teachers, curriculum, and other aspects of teaching the language formally at school can improve the student's skills in enhancing the language. The earlier the language is learned, the easier the students can create a positive attitude toward the language (Huwari, 2021). So, age is important in deciding why people use language as their ideology or belief (Abdelfattah & Ritt-Benmimoun, 2022).

The previous studies about language attitude mostly discuss about language attitude in the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, and the international language, English. However, the research on language attitudes related to language attitude by Generation Z is still limited. That's why this research was conducted to see the language spoken by Generation Z in their daily activities and their attitudes and perceptions about the local language. The participants of this research are university students who study in Malang, where the Javanese language is the dominant language in this area. The study's significance is that it can give suggestions for the policy of local language education and its strategies for preserving cultural identity.

By exploring the language attitude of Generation Z, it will be easier to understand the young generation's perspective and the way they use the language, and the most important one is how their perspective and implementation of using the local language can impact the sustainability of the local language. In understanding the perspective of young people and their attitude to the local language, the theory of language attitude and sociolinguistics will be the basis of the study. It will also contribute to a deep understanding of language, particularly the complex relationship between language, culture, and identity in

Indonesia.

## METHOD

This study uses a survey-based approach to investigate how Generation Z in Indonesia feels about their local language. The data was collected by distributing the survey using friend-to-friend methods and social media. The surveys have reached members of Universitas Negeri Malang's Generation Z Majoring Department of English, who range in age from 12 to 24 years old and are primarily from the province of East Java. They represent both urban and rural locations. Using stratified random sampling, 202 individuals were chosen for the study to guarantee that they adequately represented Generation Z in this field. In-depth interviews and an online poll were used to gather the data. The outcomes of the in-depth interviews are utilized to investigate individual experiences.

A series of questions are used as survey instruments to collect data regarding respondents' attitudes toward the local language, their experiences speaking it, and their viewpoints on language use. To ensure that the participants could more easily provide answers, the questions were made clearer and simpler, and the selections were the simplest. To find the pattern and trend associated with this problem, the collected data are analyzed by contrasting sociolinguistics and the theory of language attitude. Before being delivered, the surveys were piloted with a small sample of the community to ensure validity and realism. In order to ensure that the survey questions are both pertinent and understandable, they are also assessed by experts in the field. A constraint of the poll is that the sample size is insufficient to reflect the entirety of Indonesia's Generation Z population accurately. Furthermore, the polls are disseminated via friends-to-friend networks and social media, which may introduce bias into the sample.

Since this study focuses on Generation Z, the age range of this study is 12 to 24 years old. From the data gathered, the highest percentage age of the participants is 18 and 19 years old, with a percentage of 39,1 %. The second highest is 20 years old at 16,3%, and the rest is 5,5 %, which covers 16, 17, 21, 22, and 24 years old. The overall age collected in this study is 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 24 years old. To make the data still based on the range of age, there are two participants that are excluded from the data because the participants are not in the range of age of Generation Z.

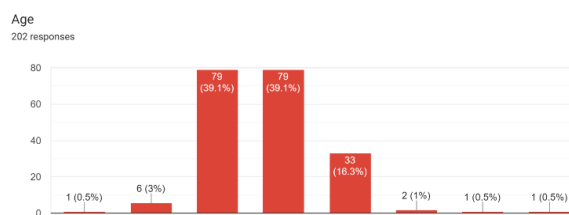


Figure 1. *Participants' age*

Of the 202 participants, 32.18 percent are men and 67.82% are women. It indicates that a higher proportion of participants are female, which may be explained by the fact that women make up the bulk of new students to Universitas Negeri Malang's English Department.

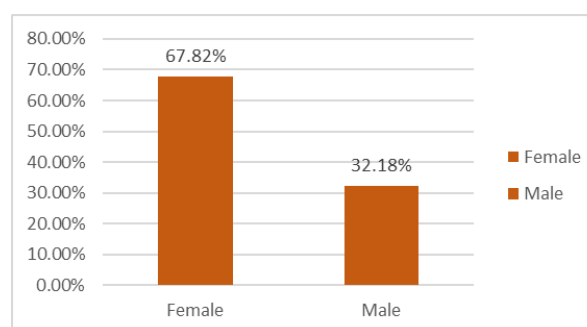


Figure 2. *Participants' gender*

Following the completion of the survey and interview processes, PivotTable was used to categorize the data. The incomplete answers are completed by considering the answers given by the respondents. Graphs were then used to compute and present the data. After comprehending the data's pattern and making connections between it and ideas, the graphs are next evaluated in light of research challenges. The final phase was interpreting the graphs and concluding.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion will be elaborated below by carefully analyzing the survey results.

### *Language spoken by generation Z*

The participants' family backgrounds are varied. Some of them were born from intermarriage parents, and others are from the same ethnic group. From the data in Figure 3 below, the participants' families come from the same ethnic group, which is 79,21 %, and the rest come from intermarriage families, which means they come from different ethnic of parents. The intermarriage families mentioned here are parents who come from different ethnicities, and it is a strong possibility that the participants will be multilingual because, in Indonesia, every ethnicity has its own local language. So, if the participants acquired Bahasa Indonesia and were born in an intermarriage

family, especially to parents from different ethnicities, they would have the ability to be multilingual speakers. It is quite different from other countries where multilingual people will be created through a multilingual environment and formal language at school (Blackwell, 2014). This can also happen through the combination of immigration in the area. So, the uniqueness of the environment setting in Indonesia is hardly found in other areas in other countries because of the existence of ethnic and local diversity.

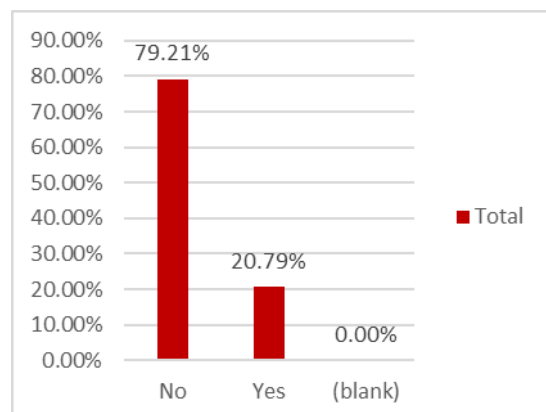


Figure 3. *Family backgrounds of the participants*

The participants were also asked to identify their ethnicity. The result shows that 88.61% of students are Javanese and 11.39% are from other ethnics, namely Balinese, Banjarnese, Bataknese, Betawi, Bima, Dayak, Madurese, Makassarese, Manadonese, Osingnese, Papuanese, Sasak, and Sundanese. Some students from intermarriage families identify themselves by mentioning the two ethnicities they acquired from their parents: Arab-Javanese, Javanese-Madurese, Javanese-Minahasan, and Toraja-Mamsaese. Self-identification is one way of showing the ideology toward ethnicity (Mesthrie & Rajend, 2011). That means the participants agree they are part of the ethnic group. The ability to identify and believe that they are part of the ethnic shows that they are conscious enough that being part of the culture is not only about the language but also about understanding all aspects of the culture.

The participants in the in-depth interview provided a range of responses regarding the aspects of their ethnicity that they found appealing. While some expressed their ethnic group's generosity, others were proud of their ethnic group's distinctive history, culinary customs, and celebrations. A participant expressed that they value their ethnic group's friendliness and humility, while others highlighted their high degree of tolerance. All of the participant responses demonstrate a thorough awareness of their cultural history. They have the

perspective that identity is not only about how they acquire the local language of their ethnicity but also how they understand all the aspects they have in their ethnicity.

The outcome demonstrates how well the participants could identify with their ethnic group. It also shows they have self-confidence in identifying with certain ethnic groups. However, by examining the additional details in the following paragraph, it is possible to draw conclusions about how they are identifying themselves. The degree to which they are aware of their culture serves as evidence that they belong to an ethnic group. Occasionally, people want to identify themselves as belonging to a certain ethnic group just because they share the same ethnic background as their parents, even though this is simply a symbolic ethnicity (Slootman, 2018). People who identify as belonging to a symbolic ethnicity do so even though they are unaware of all the components of the culture or ethnicity. So, it is more about the external social factors, where the outside factors of their selves, such as parents' ethnic background and social environments, bring them to the decision to claim their selves as part of the ethnic group.

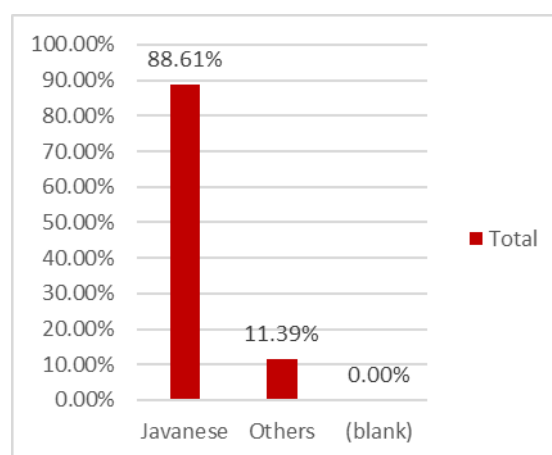


Figure 4. *Participants' ethnicity*

The capacity to use the local language is good, as seen in Figure 3. Although it is sometimes mixed with different languages, participants speak their local language most of the time. According to the data, 45.05% of participants use a combination of English, Indonesian, and their local language (Ou & Gu, 2020); 32.18% of participants said they use Indonesia and their local language most often, and 3.96% of participants said they speak their local language in daily conversation. In terms of proficiency in the local language, it may be inferred that 81.19% of participants utilize the language in their day-to-day interactions. Additional findings indicate that the participant's



proficiency in utilizing Indonesia is at its greatest since they must use it in official contexts like schools and when conversing with non-native speakers of their own local language (Syahputra et al., 2022). In relation to English, the participants in this study are Department of English students, and they are more likely than other students or Generation Z students to use English in their daily activities (As Sabiq, 2020; Fransisca & Subekti, 2022; Ilyosovna, 2020). English's share of the job is 82.68%, the same as the local language. It is different with some countries around the world where English cannot have the same position with the local language (Yi, 2023). Participants' language choices indicate that they are attempting to modify their identities in response to their surroundings (Fitriati et al., 2020). It shows the positive attitudes the cultural identities toward the colloquial languages (Polamarachetty & Riget, 2023), which are Indonesia, local language, and English.

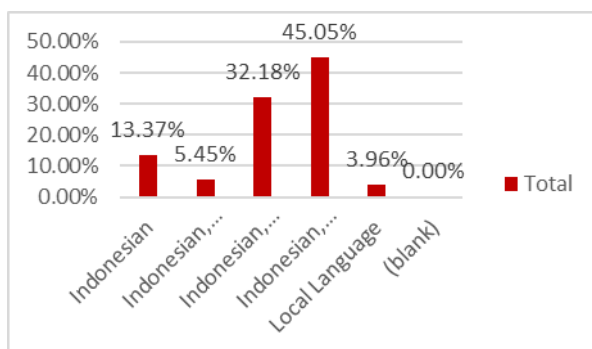


Figure 5. *Languages spoken by Generation Z*

Given that 179 out of 202 participants are Javanese, they make up the majority of the participants. Observing their language use will be fascinating. Every student's surroundings speak Javanese in everyday interactions. This implies that they will be more likely than others to speak the local language. The opinions are not shown by the findings, either. The data indicates that, among the participants, participants speak Indonesian the most frequently (96, 08%), followed by local language (86, 03%) and English (52, 52%). It demonstrates that participants are more likely to feel at ease communicating in Indonesian since it is the official language and is widely understood (Sukamto et al., 2021). The understanding of the local language, in this case, the Javanese language, shows their cognitive attitude toward the local language (Arifin, 2023). However, the data shows that the cognitive attitude is higher in Indonesia than in the local language, which is Javanese (Andriyanti, 2019).

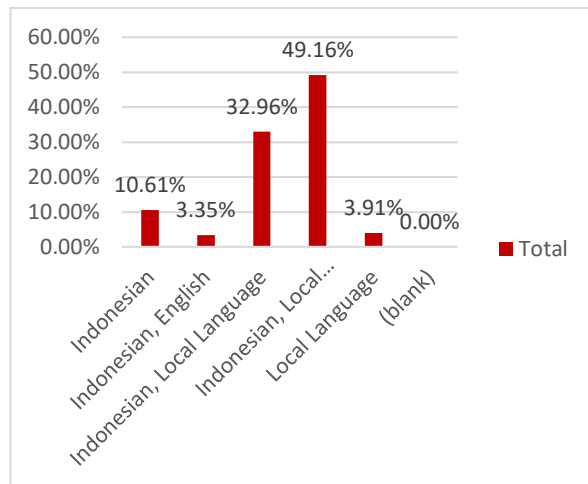


Figure 6. *Languages spoken by Javanese participants*

Overall, twenty-three participants are not from Java. Arabian, Betawi, Sasak, Papuanese, Bima, Madurese, Sundanese, Toraja, Mbojo, Minahasan, Batak, Manadonese, Banjarese, and Osingese are among the numerous ethnic groups from which they originate. Similar findings were made for the Javanese speakers mentioned above, showing that non-Javanese speakers speak Indonesian as their first language (96,65%), followed by local language (43,48%), and English (34,78%) (It can be seen in the graph below). The outcomes for speakers of Javanese in the local language are much different. The percentage of Javanese participants who speak their local language is 86.03 percent, compared to only 43.48 percent of non-Javanese ethnic participants. That means the willingness of Javanese participants to maintain their local language consciousness or unconsciousness is higher than that of non-Javanese participants. The Javanese participants show active roles in preserving their local language (Alfian., 2021).

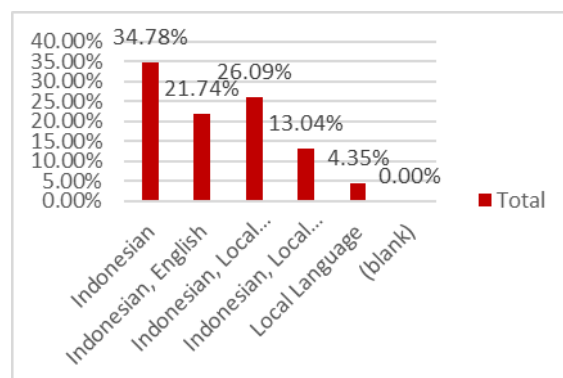


Figure 7. *Languages spoken by non-Javanese participants*

In conclusion, the findings explore the difference between Javanese participants and non-

Javanese participants in using and preserving the local language. Although some Javanese speakers mostly use Indonesia in their daily conversation, the participants are willing to preserve their local language, with 86,03 % speaking in their local language. It shows that the Javanese participants are more conscious of their local language, and they also actively preserve their local language. The finding also shows that the language users are also affected by ethnic background, where the Javanese participants tend to use their local language in day-to-day interaction. The findings will give important implications for education and language preservation, focusing on the need to support language diversity from all ethnic groups.

Generation Z's attitude and perception of their local language. We asked the participants if they could speak their original language to prove that they belonged to an ethnic group. The findings show that 50,99% of participants think they don't actually utilize their local language to show that they are a member of their ethnic group. Of those surveyed, 41,09% felt that it proves their belonging to their ethnic group. The remaining 7,92% said it's not to prove they belong to a certain ethnic group. Social factors may contribute to the majority of participants' perceptions that they do not actually utilize the local language to demonstrate their ethnic group membership. It can be due to the linguistic transition they are experiencing, the mingling of cultures, or the influence of certain languages. Even while someone speaks a certain language, they may not always wish to identify as a member of that ethnic group (Peter et al., 2017). Some participants concur that their command of the local language indicates their membership in the ethnic group, even though some participants do not use it to prove they are members of the ethnic group. This implies that the way people use language can influence how they feel about language, or it could be that their ethnicity encourages them to learn and use a language for everyday communication. The lowest percentage shows that the participants utilize the language not to show that they are part of the ethnicity. Same with the previous explanation, it might be because of the influence of the environment or other languages around them.

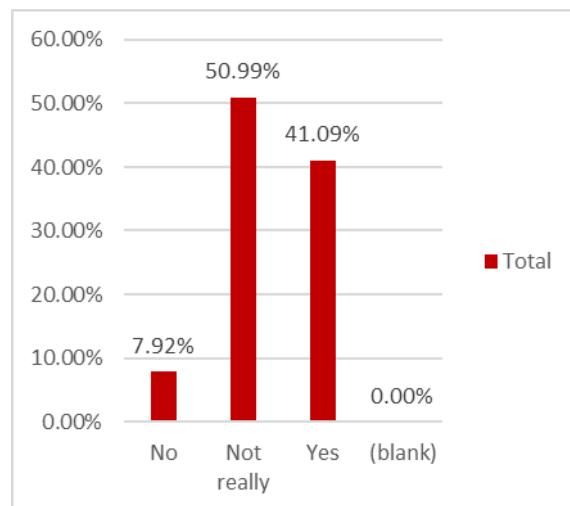


Figure 8. *Participants' perception that they speak their ethnic group language to show that they belong to that ethnic group*

It should be the responsibility of the individual to maintain the local language. Since the local language is not really studied in school or in other formal education, the individual's perspective that views it as a communal identification marker should also be given priority. The data presented below illustrates how the participants felt that their native language defined their ethnic identity. Of the participants, 1,49 disagreed, 32,67 did not really agree, and 65,84% agreed with this viewpoint. Most participants concur that, in addition to being consistent with sociolinguistic theory, the local language serves as a sign of ethnic identity. It should be the responsibility of the individual to maintain the local language. In addition to serving as a means of communication, learning and speaking a language serves to represent one's ethnicity or to demonstrate one's membership in a specific ethnic group (Kirkpatrick et al., 2019). The high percentage further demonstrates the participants' positive attitudes regarding their ethnic or local language, which is a source of pride in the language. This is consistent with earlier research, which showed that individuals spoke Indonesian first, then the native tongue, and last English. It is evident from the participants' good attitudes about both the local language and English, the worldwide language, that they feel at ease using Indonesian in everyday conversations (Sukamto et al., 2021b). Since the participants' major at their institution is English, English is in a unique position in this instance.

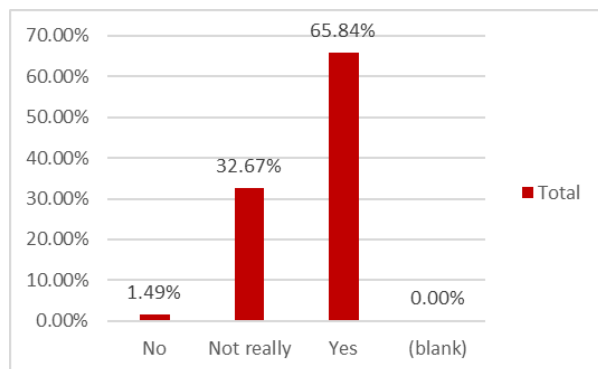


Figure 9. *The importance of mastering an ethnic language because it is the identity marker of our ethnic group*

When asked if they feel excluded from their ethnic group when they are unable to communicate in their local language, the participants respond negatively. According to the results, 52.48% of participants did not truly agree with this opinion, 26.48% agreed, and 21.9 percent did not agree. It is evident that the majority of participants do not believe that being able to communicate in their local language determines one's ethnicity. Mostly, the participants do not agree with the opinion that understanding and ability to use local language is the identity marker of their ethnic group. Based on theory, the ability to use the local language is really related to ethnic identities, where people are tied together in the same cultural practice and bound in the same practice of culture. Not only that, but it can also create solidarity and brotherhood by speaking the same language in the same community (Fishman, 1999).

Naturally, one cannot escape being exposed to languages other than the local language, particularly if the local language is not taught in schools or is not spoken in formal settings. Talk about the study's circumstances: In addition to using Indonesian in formal settings, students are expected to utilize English in the classroom. When they have to communicate with university officials and students from different ethnic backgrounds or when they need clarification in class—where the instructor and students occasionally switch to Indonesian—this may be considered a formal environment. Their frequent use of the internet and social media, where English and Indonesian are the most common languages, exposes them to additional information. All of these experiences may lead one to believe that proficiency in the local language is unrelated to identification markers. However, in keeping with the earlier justification, the language itself is consistent with the identification marker. Therefore, even when individuals are exposed to languages other than

their native tongue, it is best to prevent them from failing to recognize these languages as belonging to their ethnic group or from continuing to speak their native tongue, which is an integral element of their ethnic identity (Roostini & Manara, 2021).

The participant retorted that membership in an ethnic group is not determined by one's proficiency in one's native tongue. It is very unexpected, yet it may arise from taking into account other elements when defining ethnic identity. Additional influences can include their cultural practices, historical understanding, and self-connection (Li & Wei, 2022). The participants may believe that membership in the ethnic group cannot be established solely on the basis of language proficiency. They aspire to identify as members of the ethnic group and assert that they understand the entire culture, not just a portion of it.

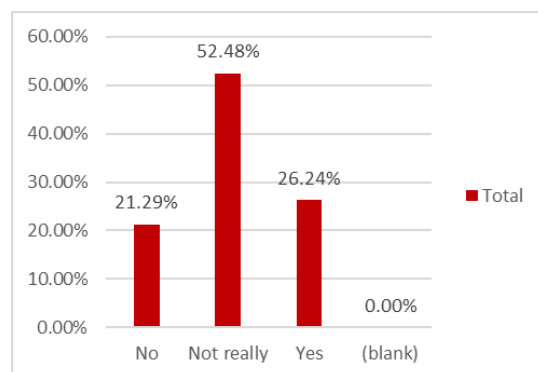


Figure 10. *The participants cannot speak in their ethnic language, so the participants do not feel they belong to the group*

Based on the findings above, it can be summarized that participants do not agree that the ability to use a certain language, or in this case, local language, is a determinant that they are part of the ethnic group. That means that although the local language is one of the aspects of identities, it is not the only aspect that can be a determinant of what ethnicity is included. The conclusion is influenced by other aspects such as social context, cultural practice, and understanding of ethnic history, which will finally contribute to their understanding of the relation between language and identity.

Based on the results, the participants have to balance the importance of the local language compared with the exposure of other languages around them. Exposure to other languages, such as Indonesian and English, in formal settings such as school, might make them come to the conclusion that understanding the local language is not part of identity. The participants also need to maintain the local language since it can be the pride language

that cannot be found in other areas.

Overall, there is a complex aspect in determining the ethnic identity. Understanding the local language is not the only way to determine which ethnic the participants are. There are other aspects that should be considered. The perspective of the participants shows that one aspect cannot be the determiner of being included in certain ethnic groups; some aspects need to be considered, and it is not as simple as speaking and understanding the language.

## CONCLUSION

This study comes to the conclusion that the ability to speak in the local language is not the only determiner of ethnic identity. Even though the ability to use the local language is crucial in cultural identity, other aspects such as practicing the culture, understanding the culture, and relation with the culture will also need to be considered as a determinant of ethnic identity. The results show that the participants disagree that the ability to use the ethnic language is the identity marker of their ethnicity. Otherwise, they stress that maintaining the ethnic language is important as a primary source of language and cultural identity. It is suggested that a more complex and detailed analysis should be conducted for the next study related to this study to see the relationship between language and identity in a detailed and complex way.

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