

The Impact of Regional Language Use on Student Interaction in Higher Education: Evidence from UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT

The use of regional languages in academic settings remains a complex sociolinguistic issue, as it can both foster cultural identity and influence the quality of student interaction in higher education. This study aimed to examine the effect of regional language use on classroom interaction among first-semester students in the Indonesian Language Education Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu. Using a quantitative quasi-experimental design with nonequivalent control groups, data were collected from 51 students through a validated questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS version 25, including normality, homogeneity, and paired-sample t-tests. The results indicated that the experimental group exposed to regional language integration in classroom discourse demonstrated significantly higher levels of interaction, confidence, and engagement compared to the control group using only standard Indonesian. These findings highlight that regional language use, when strategically integrated, enhances students' participation and strengthens sociocultural bonds without undermining academic objectives. The implication of this research is that incorporating regional languages into higher education practices can serve as a valuable pedagogical strategy to enrich classroom interaction, promote multilingual competence, and support language policy development in multicultural academic contexts.

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Introduction

Language plays a central role in shaping identity, mediating social interaction, and fostering national cohesion, particularly in multilingual societies such as Indonesia. As the national language, Bahasa Indonesia serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a unifying symbol across the nation's diverse ethnic and linguistic groups (Nursanti & Andriyanti, 2021; Syam et al., 2023; Wirza et al., 2024). At the same time, regional languages remain vital markers of cultural heritage and interpersonal solidarity, often used in informal domains of communication such as family life, peer interaction, and community activities (Aljarelah, 2024; GILES & JOHNSON, 1987; Mona, 2024). The coexistence of a national language alongside hundreds of regional languages creates both opportunities and challenges

for higher education institutions, where students are expected to navigate formal academic discourse while maintaining their cultural identities.

The use of regional languages in student interactions has become a recurring sociolinguistic phenomenon in Indonesian universities. On one hand, research has shown that regional languages promote a sense of belonging, solidarity, and self-confidence, thereby supporting students' participation in learning and social life (Agustine et al., 2021; Ishak et al., 2024; Winadia & Siagian, 2023). On the other hand, excessive reliance on regional languages can hinder the mastery of formal Bahasa Indonesia, reduce inclusivity in academic contexts, and create barriers for inter-ethnic communication (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Tiawati et al., 2024; Zein et al., 2020). Similar findings in other multilingual contexts highlight that when local languages dominate peer interaction, students may struggle to transition into formal or academic registers required for classroom communication (Tai, 2022, 2024; Wagner, 2021). Thus, the balance between promoting linguistic diversity and ensuring effective use of the national language for academic success remains a critical issue.

In higher education, interaction is more than casual conversation; it constitutes a key component of collaborative learning, peer support, and intellectual engagement. Studies in sociolinguistics and educational psychology emphasize that classroom interaction patterns directly influence students' comprehension, critical thinking, and participation (H. Li, 2024; Nur & Butarbutar, 2022; Parmar et al., 2024). In Indonesian university classrooms, particularly in language education programs, the tendency of students to use regional languages during lectures, group discussions, and informal exchanges can both enrich and complicate the learning process (Council, 2023; Kholiq, 2024; Nation & Newton, 2008). For example, while regional languages may help clarify concepts among students from the same background, they may also marginalize peers from different regions who lack competence in that language, thereby reducing inclusivity and mutual understanding.

The interplay between regional language use and academic interaction has also been studied in cross-cultural educational settings. Research in multilingual African, European, and Southeast Asian contexts reveals that regional or minority languages provide valuable resources for identity expression but often challenge the role of national or official languages in educational settings (Hossain, 2024; Tafazoli, 2024; Wilczewski et al., 2024). In Indonesia, although several studies have examined language shift, code-switching, and language attitudes among university students, few have systematically investigated the direct impact of regional language use on academic interaction and peer collaboration in lecture environments (Aditiawarman et al., 2024; Kholiq, 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2024). This lacuna is particularly significant given that the Ministry of Education has emphasized the importance of student-centered learning characterized by interactive, integrative, and collaborative approaches (Che Mat & Jamaludin, 2024; Rezai et al., 2024; Subhan, 2024).

Despite the importance of this issue, previous studies tend to focus either on sociolinguistic aspects of regional language maintenance or on the role of Bahasa Indonesia as the national identity marker, without exploring how regional language practices shape actual academic interactions in university classrooms. Moreover, few studies address the psychological and pedagogical implications of such practices, such as their influence on students' motivation, confidence, and comprehension of lecture material. Thus, there remains

a clear research gap in examining the concrete relationship between the use of regional languages and the quality of student interactions in academic settings, particularly in teacher education programs where language proficiency is directly tied to professional competence.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the influence of regional language use on student interaction during lectures at Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu. Specifically, it seeks to measure the extent to which the use of regional languages affects the dynamics of communication, collaboration, and comprehension among students, while also identifying potential benefits and drawbacks of these practices. By doing so, this research not only contributes to the growing literature on multilingualism and education in Indonesia but also provides practical insights for educators and policymakers in balancing the promotion of cultural identity with the need for academic inclusivity and national language competence.

Methods

This research employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design to examine the influence of regional language use on student interaction during lectures at Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu. The study involved 51 first-semester students of the 2024 cohort enrolled in the Indonesian Language Education program, divided into experimental and control groups. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 items measured on a four-point Likert scale, designed to capture students’ patterns of language use and interaction both inside and outside the classroom. The instrument was validated through expert judgment and pilot testing to ensure clarity, reliability, and construct validity. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, applying tests of normality, homogeneity, and paired-sample t-tests to assess differences between pretest and posttest scores in the two groups. The analysis emphasized not only the statistical significance of differences but also the practical implications of regional language use for academic communication and student engagement. To ensure research rigor, steps were taken to minimize external biases by employing a nonequivalent control group design, maintaining comparable conditions across groups, and carefully monitoring the treatment implementation. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining institutional approval, ensuring informed consent from participants, maintaining confidentiality, and limiting data use strictly for academic purposes.

Results and Discussion

Test of Normality

Prior to hypothesis testing, data were examined for distribution using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results, as shown in Table 1, indicate that both the experimental and control groups met the assumption of normality, with significance values greater than 0.05. This confirms that the data are normally distributed and suitable for parametric testing.

Table 1. Normality Test Results

Group	Sig. Value	Interpretation
Experimental	0.129	Normal distribution

Group	Sig. Value	Interpretation
Control	0.142	Normal distribution

The findings confirm that both groups demonstrated comparable initial data distributions, enabling further comparative analysis using independent and paired t-tests.

Test of Homogeneity

The homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene’s test, as displayed in Table 2. The results show significance values greater than 0.05, which indicates that the variances between the experimental and control groups were homogeneous.

Table 2. Homogeneity Test Results

Levene Statistic	Sig. Value	Interpretation
1.241	0.267	Homogeneous variance

This result validates that the data from both groups are comparable, reinforcing the robustness of the experimental design.

Pretest and Posttest Scores

The comparison between pretest and posttest scores is presented in Table 3. The experimental group, which was exposed to regional language integration in classroom interactions, showed a substantial improvement in posttest scores compared to the control group, which used standard Indonesian exclusively.

Table 3. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Scores

Group	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain	Sig. (p)
Experimental	68.21	82.47	14.26	0.000
Control	67.94	74.18	6.24	0.031

The data reveal that the experimental group achieved a higher mean gain (14.26) compared to the control group (6.24). Statistical analysis confirmed a significant difference ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the use of regional language during lectures positively influenced student interaction and engagement.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the integration of regional language in classroom interaction significantly enhances student engagement and communication, as reflected in the greater improvement of the experimental group compared to the control group. These results are consistent with the work of Ma (2024), who argued that translanguaging practices in bilingual classrooms strengthen participation and meaning-making. Similarly, research by Balalle (2024) highlighted that incorporating students’ linguistic repertoires fosters inclusivity and facilitates deeper learning. In the Indonesian context, D. Li et al. (2024) also reported that regional language use strengthens cultural identity and encourages active involvement in the learning process.

Moreover, the current study aligns with studies by Wang (2024), who demonstrated that multilingual approaches enrich classroom interaction by allowing students to access and express knowledge in more authentic ways. It also resonates with the findings of Ulum (2024), which confirmed that regional languages can function as effective scaffolding tools in university-level instruction. By confirming these perspectives, the present research contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting the pedagogical value of multilingual practices in higher education. The study's novelty lies in its exploration of first-semester university students in Bengkulu, Indonesia, a context in which the systematic integration of regional language into lecture interactions has not previously been tested empirically. This marks a significant departure from prior studies, which have predominantly examined bilingualism either in primary and secondary schools or in multicultural, urban contexts where global languages such as English intersect with national and local languages. By situating the analysis within higher education, this study addresses a gap in sociolinguistic research and highlights the pragmatic impact of regional language use on students' interactional patterns, confidence, and engagement during lectures. Such a contextual focus enriches sociolinguistic scholarship by demonstrating that regional languages, often marginalized in academic discourse, can serve as powerful complementary tools to national language policies, particularly in promoting inclusivity and cultural identity in universities.

The implications of these findings are twofold. Theoretically, they reinforce and extend sociolinguistic frameworks that conceptualize language choice not only as a communicative act but also as an educational and cultural practice, thereby broadening the scope of multilingual pedagogy in Southeast Asian higher education. This theoretical contribution suggests that the use of regional languages in classrooms can reshape understandings of identity, solidarity, and knowledge transmission in ways that national language alone may not achieve. Practically, the findings imply that higher education institutions could benefit from strategically integrating regional languages into teaching practices to enhance classroom interaction, foster student participation, and reduce communication barriers. Such practices could also support the development of institutional policies that value linguistic diversity, contributing to a more inclusive learning environment and aligning with Indonesia's broader vision of maintaining unity while respecting cultural plurality.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the strategic integration of regional languages in higher education classrooms significantly enhances student interaction, participation, and confidence, while simultaneously preserving cultural identity within academic discourse. The findings demonstrate that when regional languages are used alongside standard Indonesian, students engage more actively in discussions, develop stronger sociocultural bonds, and display higher levels of communicative competence compared to peers in monolingual settings. The novelty of this research lies in its application of a quasi-experimental design to measure the impact of regional language use in a university context, an area that has been underexplored in Indonesian sociolinguistic scholarship. The results imply that incorporating regional languages into classroom practices provides not only theoretical contributions to multilingual education and sociolinguistics but also practical implications for curriculum design and

language policy in multicultural academic settings. Nonetheless, the study acknowledges its limitations, including the relatively small sample size and focus on a single institution, thereby suggesting that future research should expand to diverse contexts, larger cohorts, and mixed-method designs to validate and deepen the understanding of regional language use in higher education.

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