

The Loss of Mother Tongue Among Youth: A Threat to Culture and National Identity

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: May 22, 2025 Revised: June 9, 2025 Published: June 15, 2025	<i>The loss of mother tongue among youth has become a pressing issue worldwide, particularly in linguistically diverse nations. This phenomenon threatens not only the survival of native languages but also the preservation of cultural heritage and national identity. This article examines the causes and implications of mother tongue decline among young generations through a comprehensive literature review and theoretical analysis. Factors such as globalization, educational policies, urbanization, and negative language attitudes are identified as key drivers of this trend. The study highlights the profound cultural and social consequences of mother tongue loss, including cultural erosion and weakened national unity. Recommendations are provided to promote mother tongue preservation through education, community engagement, positive language attitudes, technology, and supportive language policies. Preserving mother tongues is essential for sustaining cultural diversity and strengthening national identity in an increasingly globalized world.</i>
Keywords Mother tongue loss; Cultural preservation; National identity; Language shift	

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital carrier of cultural identity and national heritage. The mother tongue, or first language, is more than just a means of communication; it embodies the history, traditions, and collective values of a community. In many countries, particularly those with rich linguistic diversity such as Indonesia, the mother tongue plays a crucial role in shaping both individual and national identity. In recent decades, however, the use of mother tongue among youth has been declining sharply. This trend is largely attributed to globalization, urbanization, and the increasing dominance of international languages like English and national lingua francas. Young people often prioritize these dominant languages for educational and economic advancement, which inadvertently leads to the marginalization of their native languages.

The loss of mother tongue among youth is not merely a linguistic issue but a profound cultural concern. It threatens the transmission of cultural knowledge, traditions, and values, ultimately weakening national identity and social cohesion. This article explores the causes and implications of mother tongue loss among youth through a comprehensive literature review and theoretical analysis, highlighting the urgent need for preservation efforts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative literature review and theoretical analysis approach. It synthesizes existing academic research, reports from international organizations such as UNESCO, and relevant linguistic theories to examine the phenomenon of mother tongue loss among youth. The literature review focuses on studies related to language shift, language endangerment, and cultural identity, providing a broad understanding of the factors influencing language use among younger generations.

The theoretical framework draws primarily on Joshua Fishman's theory of language shift and maintenance, which explains how sociopolitical and economic pressures contribute to the decline of minority languages. Additionally, the research considers sociolinguistic perspectives on language attitudes, identity formation, and the role of education and policy in language preservation. By integrating these sources, the study aims to present a holistic view of the challenges posed by mother tongue loss and its broader cultural and national consequences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Causes of Mother Tongue Loss Among Youth

The literature reveals several interrelated factors driving the decline of mother tongue use among youth:

Globalization and Language Dominance

Globalization has intensified the spread and prestige of dominant international languages, particularly English. These languages are often perceived as gateways to better education, employment, and social mobility, encouraging youth to adopt them at the expense of their mother tongues.

Educational Policies and Practices

In many countries, formal education systems prioritize national or global languages as mediums of instruction. This approach marginalizes native languages, limiting their use in academic settings and reducing opportunities for youth to develop proficiency and pride in their mother tongue.

Urbanization and Social Integration

Migration to urban centers often necessitates the use of dominant languages for social integration. Youth living in cities may abandon their mother tongue to fit into mainstream society, leading to language shift within families and communities.

Negative Language Attitudes and Stigma

Some youth perceive their mother tongue as less prestigious or useful, associating it with rural or less modern identities. This stigma discourages active use and transmission of native languages.

Implications for Culture and National Identity

The loss of mother tongue has profound implications that extend beyond language proficiency:

- **Cultural Erosion**
Languages are repositories of cultural knowledge, including folklore, rituals, and indigenous wisdom. When a language declines, these cultural elements risk being forgotten, resulting in cultural homogenization.
- **Weakening of National Unity**

In multicultural nations, linguistic diversity is a source of strength and unity. The erosion of mother tongues undermines this diversity, potentially weakening social cohesion and national identity.

- **Loss of Intergenerational Communication**

Mother tongues facilitate communication between generations. Their decline can create cultural and emotional gaps within families and communities.

Role of Technology and Educational Strategies

Modern technologies and interactive designs offer promising avenues for mother tongue preservation. Digital platforms, mobile applications, and multimedia content can engage youth by making language learning accessible and enjoyable. Experiential activities in schools, such as cultural events and storytelling, also foster language use and cultural pride among ethnic minority students.

Educational institutions are encouraged to adopt bilingual or mother tongue-based education programs to balance the need for global language proficiency with the preservation of native languages. Community involvement and supportive language policies are essential to sustain these efforts.

Theoretical Perspectives

Joshua Fishman's (1991) theory of language shift explains that language loss occurs when minority languages are replaced by dominant languages due to economic, social, and political pressures. Fishman emphasizes the importance of intergenerational transmission for language maintenance. Without active use by younger generations, languages face extinction. Sociolinguistic studies also highlight the role of language attitudes in shaping language use. Positive attitudes toward the mother tongue encourage its preservation, while negative perceptions accelerate its decline.

CONCLUSION

The loss of mother tongue among youth is a critical threat to cultural heritage and national identity. Driven by globalization, educational practices, urbanization, and negative language attitudes, this phenomenon leads to the erosion of linguistic diversity and cultural richness. The decline of native languages jeopardizes the transmission of cultural knowledge and weakens the social fabric of multicultural nations. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that recognizes the intrinsic value of mother tongues and promotes their use in education, media, and community life. Preserving mother tongues is essential not only for maintaining linguistic diversity but also for safeguarding cultural identity and national unity.

RECOMMENDATION

To counteract the loss of mother tongue among youth, the following strategies are recommended:

- **Incorporate Mother Tongue Education**
Educational systems should integrate mother tongue instruction, especially in early education, to strengthen language skills and cultural awareness.
- **Promote Positive Language Attitudes**
Awareness campaigns and cultural programs should highlight the value of mother tongues, reduce stigma and encourage pride in linguistic heritage.
- **Leverage Technology and Media**
Develop digital platforms, social media content, and entertainment in native languages to engage youth in contemporary contexts.

- Support Community-Based Language Revitalization
Encourage local initiatives that foster mother tongue use in daily life, cultural events, and intergenerational communication.
- Formulate Supportive Language Policies
Governments should enact policies that protect and promote linguistic diversity, providing funding and legal frameworks for minority language preservation.

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