Indonesian Journal of Applied Community Research
Vol. 1, No. 1, March 2026, pp. 28~35
ISSN: 3163-3285, DOI:

Co-designing a local language learning program for indigenous youth: a linguistic sustainability initiative

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Feb 15, 2026
Revised Mar 12, 2026
Accepted Mar 20, 2026

Keywords:

community engagement;
Indigenous youth;
language revitalization;
linguistic sustainability;
participatory design.

ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesia's Indigenous languages face increasing decline among youth due to limited intergenerational transmission and marginalization within formal education, necessitating community-based revitalization initiatives. **Objective:** This program aimed to co-design a local language learning model to strengthen Osing language use, confidence, and sustainability among Indigenous youth in Banyuwangi, East Java. **Method:** A participatory approach was implemented involving youth, cultural elders, teachers, and local institutions through workshops, practice-based learning, mentoring, and mixed-method evaluation. **Results:** The program increased active oral use of the Osing language, improved speaking confidence, and fostered positive language attitudes, alongside the emergence of youth-generated materials and language clubs supported by institutional endorsement and intergenerational collaboration. **Implication:** These findings suggest that community-driven, participatory models can effectively revitalize Indigenous languages by fostering youth engagement and sustainable intergenerational transmission. **Novelty:** The program introduces a co-design-based model that integrates youth agency, linguistic sustainability, and low-cost community empowerment as a scalable strategy for local language revitalization.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's linguistic landscape is among the most diverse in the world, with more than 718 living local languages; yet this diversity is under increasing threat. National and international reports indicate that at least 11 Indonesian local languages have become extinct, while approximately 25% are classified as endangered due to weakening intergenerational transmission. In Banyuwangi, East Java, the Osing language remains symbolically visible in ritual practices and cultural performances, but its functional use among adolescents has declined sharply. Preliminary community surveys reveal that over 60% of Osing youth primarily use Indonesian in daily interaction, and fewer than one-third demonstrate active competence in Osing. This erosion is intensified by formal education systems that privilege Indonesian and standardized Javanese, marginalizing local languages in classrooms and digital spaces. Without immediate, community-based intervention, Osing risks becoming a heritage language detached from everyday youth practice, underscoring the urgency of a linguistically grounded and socially embedded community service initiative.

Existing literature on language maintenance and revitalization highlights the effectiveness of community-centered and participatory approaches, particularly in Indigenous and minority language contexts [1], [2], [3]. Previous community service programs in Indonesia have focused on documentation, extracurricular language classes, or cultural festivals to raise awareness of local languages [4], [5], [6]. While these initiatives contribute to symbolic preservation, they often remain top-down, short-term, and weakly

integrated into youth learning ecologies. Studies show that many programs fail to involve young speakers as co-creators of learning materials [6], [7], [8], resulting in limited ownership and sustainability. Moreover, pedagogical designs frequently overlook the intersection of language, identity, and everyday communicative practices, especially in digitally mediated youth environments [9], [10], [11]. What remains underexplored is a co-design-based language learning model that actively positions Indigenous youth, local teachers, and cultural elders as equal partners in shaping curriculum content, learning methods, and evaluation criteria. This gap in community engagement practice provides the rationale for the present program.

Against this backdrop, the present community service program aims to co-design a local language learning initiative for Osing youth aged 12–18 in Glagah and Licin subdistricts of Banyuwangi. The program addresses two interrelated community challenges: declining active use of the Osing language among adolescents and the absence of contextually relevant, youth-oriented learning models. Specifically, the program seeks to strengthen linguistic competence, cultural confidence, and community ownership through participatory workshops, practice-based language sessions, and sustained mentoring. The guiding questions of this initiative are: how can Osing youth be meaningfully involved in designing their own language learning experiences, and to what extent can co-design enhance sustained language use beyond formal sessions? By integrating storytelling, dialogue, and culturally grounded activities, the program aims to reposition Osing not merely as a heritage symbol, but as a living medium of communication for young speakers.

The anticipated implications of this program extend beyond individual language proficiency. At the individual level, increased oral competence and confidence in using Osing are expected to foster positive language attitudes and identity affirmation among participants. At the collective level, the formation of youth-led language learning communities is projected to strengthen social networks that normalize local language use in everyday settings. Institutionally, the program offers a reflective model for schools and cultural centers to reimagine local language education as participatory and practice-oriented rather than purely curricular. More broadly, this initiative contributes to discussions on linguistic sustainability by demonstrating how co-design can function as both a pedagogical strategy and a community empowerment mechanism. The outcomes of this program thus provide a foundation for evaluating scalable, community-driven language revitalization efforts in other Indigenous contexts facing similar pressures.

2. METHOD

This community service program adopted a participatory planning approach grounded in the sociolinguistic realities of Osing-speaking communities in Glagah and Licin, Banyuwangi. Planning began with collaborative consultations involving local schools, cultural studios, youth representatives, and community elders to ensure contextual relevance. The rationale was to align program activities with existing cultural practices while addressing the documented decline in youth language use. Table 1 presents the comprehensive activity framework developed during this phase, outlining objectives, actors, instruments, timelines, and expected outputs. Such structured planning is consistent with best practices in community-based language revitalization, which emphasize alignment between local knowledge systems and program design [12], [13], [14]. This phase concluded with a shared agreement on priorities, roles, and feasible outcomes.

The program design was informed by a needs-mapping process combining survey data, focus group discussions, and informal ethnographic observation. This triangulated approach allowed the team to identify linguistic gaps, motivational barriers, and sociocultural constraints affecting Osing language transmission. Based on these findings, the program strategy emphasized co-design, experiential learning, and sustained mentoring rather than isolated training sessions. Activities were sequenced progressively, starting from awareness-building to active language use and community formation. Literature on participatory action research and Indigenous language education supports this design [15], [16], [17], highlighting that youth engagement and local ownership are critical for sustainability. Consequently, planning moved beyond logistical scheduling toward the formulation of an adaptive, community-responsive intervention model.

Implementation relied on multiple sources of information to ensure inclusivity and validity. Primary sources included Osing youth participants aged 12–18, local teachers, cultural practitioners, and village leaders who contributed linguistic and cultural knowledge. Facilitators consisted of university community service staff with expertise in linguistics, education, and participatory methods. Secondary sources comprised local curriculum documents, cultural archives, prior community service reports, and policy guidelines on local language education. The integration of these sources enabled the program to bridge academic knowledge and community wisdom. Such multi-actor engagement aligns with community service literature emphasizing that diverse knowledge sources enhance program legitimacy and contextual accuracy [18], [19].

Program execution followed clearly defined stages: socialization, co-design workshops, practice-based language sessions, and mentoring. Participatory methods such as storytelling, role-play, dialog construction, and language games were employed to encourage active oral use of Osing. Mentoring was

conducted through youth language clubs and cultural activities over four to six weeks, reinforcing learning continuity beyond formal sessions. Facilitators adopted a dialogic and reflective stance, positioning participants as co-creators rather than passive learners. This intervention model reflects contemporary community engagement approaches that prioritize empowerment, experiential learning, and culturally embedded practices, ensuring that language learning remains meaningful and socially situated [20], [21].

Table 1. Planning and activity framework of the program

Phase	Activity	Participants	Instruments	Timeframe	Expected Output
Planning	Community consultation	Elders, teachers, youth	FGD guide	Week 1	Mapped needs & assets
	Language attitude survey	Youth	Questionnaire	Week 1	Baseline data
	Co-design workshop	Youth, facilitators	Story cards, prompts	Week 2	Draft materials
Implementation	Practice-based classes	Youth	Dialog scripts, audio	Weeks 3–5	Oral competence
	Mentoring & clubs	Youth leaders	Activity logs	Weeks 3–6	Sustained language use
Evaluation	Pre–post assessment	Participants	Rubrics, interviews	Week 6	Impact measurement

Evaluation was conducted through formative and summative stages to capture both process and outcome dimensions. Formative evaluation occurred throughout implementation via observation logs, facilitator reflections, and participant feedback. Summative evaluation involved pre–post assessments of linguistic competence and language attitudes, complemented by interviews and focus group discussions. Indicators included frequency of Osing language use, oral confidence, and participation consistency. This mixed-method evaluation design is supported by community service scholarship, which recommends combining quantitative indicators with qualitative insights to assess social change [22], [23]. Overall, the evaluation framework enabled evidence-based reflection on program effectiveness and informed recommendations for future replication.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Planning outcomes: community consultation & language attitude survey

This section presents the planning outcomes derived from a backward approach, emphasizing alignment between desired linguistic sustainability outcomes and concrete program design decisions. Rather than beginning with activities, planning focused on identifying long-term changes in youth language use, attitudes, and community engagement. Baseline data were collected to determine gaps between current conditions and intended outcomes, ensuring that program components directly addressed documented needs. As shown in Table 2, this results section demonstrates how empirical planning evidence informed the formulation of learning strategies, stakeholder roles, and evaluation indicators. By foregrounding outcomes during the planning phase, this program established a coherent logical chain linking community challenges, intervention design, and measurable impact.

Table 2. Comprehensive planning results

Outcome	Indicator	Source	Baseline	Decision	Alignment
Language use	Oral frequency	Survey	62% rare	Oral focus	Practice
Ownership	Design participation	FGD	18% exp.	Co-design	Participatory
Knowledge	Cultural content	Mapping	70% low	Involve elders	Cultural
Relevance	Material rating	Scale	<2.5/5	Youth-made	Local
Feasibility	Resources	Matrix	Limited tools	Low-cost	Sustainable
Continuity	Follow-up interest	Form/interv.	55%	Youth clubs	Continuity
Evaluation	Indicators	Validation	None	Set pre–post	Evidence

Table 2 summarizes seven core planning outcomes derived from baseline assessments involving 30–40 Osing youth participants. Survey data indicate that 62% of respondents rarely used Osing in daily oral communication, while only 30% reported moderate to high confidence in speaking the language. Participation records show that merely 18% had prior involvement in language-related program design. Cultural mapping revealed that approximately 70% of participants were unfamiliar with locally recognized

Osing folktales. Existing learning materials were rated below 2.5 on a five-point relevance scale, signaling low contextual fit. Despite limited instructional resources, stakeholder mapping identified strong social capital and community willingness to contribute. Commitment forms further indicated that 55% of participants expressed readiness to engage in follow-up language activities, providing a basis for continuity-oriented planning.

These planning results highlight the critical role of outcome-oriented design in community-based language programs [2], [5], [7]. From a theoretical perspective, the findings support participatory and sociocultural learning theories, which emphasize learner agency, relevance, and community mediation in sustaining language practices. The low baseline of active language use and material relevance underscores the limitations of conventional top-down language preservation efforts. Practically, the backward design process enabled the program to translate abstract goals—such as linguistic sustainability and youth empowerment—into operational planning decisions, including co-design workshops and practice-based pedagogy. The identification of strong social capital alongside limited material resources suggests that sustainability depends more on relational networks than on formal infrastructure. Overall, this finding demonstrates that rigorous planning grounded in empirical community data is foundational for effective, scalable, and context-sensitive language revitalization initiatives [6].

3.2. Implementation outcomes: co-design workshops and practice-based classes

This section presents the outcomes of program implementation, focusing on how the backward design framework was operationalized through participatory and practice-based activities. Implementation was intentionally aligned with the outcomes identified during the planning phase, ensuring coherence between program design and field execution. Rather than measuring success solely through task completion, this phase emphasized process indicators such as participation intensity, material production, and interaction quality among youth, facilitators, and cultural elders. As shown in Table 3, the results highlight how abstract planning intentions—youth agency, cultural relevance, and sustainability—were translated into concrete learning experiences. This section demonstrates the extent to which the implementation phase functioned as a mediating layer between planning logic and anticipated long-term linguistic change.

Table 3. Implementation results

Outcome	Component	Indicator	Method	Result	Output	Link
Oral use	Practice sessions	Attendance	Logs	83%	Practice	Competence
Ownership	Co-design	Materials	Analysis	26 texts	Materials	Agency
Relevance	Storytelling	Local content	Coding	78%	Modules	Identity
Engagement	Elder–youth	Involvement	Observation	6/8 sessions	Transfer	Continuity
Consistency	Mentoring	Retention	Tracking	65% ≥75%	Clubs	Sustainability
Confidence	Oral tasks	Score	Rubric	2.6→3.9	Fluency	Daily use
Feasibility	Resources	Cost ratio	Budget	<USD 3	Model	Scalability
Governance	Multi-actor	Roles	Matrix	5 actors	Ownership	Support

Table 3 illustrates that implementation activities involved 30–40 youth participants across multiple sessions, with an average attendance rate of 83%. Co-design activities resulted in the production of 26 youth-generated learning artifacts, including dialogues, short narratives, and oral performance scripts. Content analysis indicated that 78% of these materials incorporated locally specific cultural references. Cultural elders participated in six out of eight core sessions, supporting intergenerational knowledge exchange. Participation tracking revealed that 65% of participants attended at least 75% of scheduled activities. Oral performance assessments showed an increase in mean speaking confidence scores from 2.6 to 3.9 on a five-point rubric. Budget analysis confirmed low-cost implementation, averaging under USD 3 per participant, while stakeholder mapping identified active involvement from five distinct partner groups.

The implementation results affirm the value of backward design as an organizing principle for community-based language programs [8], [24], [25], [26]. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings resonate with sociocultural and experiential learning frameworks, which argue that language competence develops through meaningful participation in socially embedded practices. High attendance rates and sustained engagement suggest that co-design and cultural grounding enhanced learner motivation and ownership. The significant increase in speaking confidence underscores the effectiveness of practice-oriented, low-anxiety learning environments. Practically, the production of youth-generated materials demonstrates a shift from consumption-based learning to participatory knowledge creation, strengthening both relevance and sustainability. The active involvement of elders further reinforces the program's role as a bridge between generations.

3.3. Monitoring and evaluation outcomes: pre–post assessment and digital supports

This section reports the monitoring and evaluation outcomes, examining the extent to which the implementation phase achieved the long-term goals articulated during the planning stage. The evaluation focused on measurable linguistic, attitudinal, and participatory changes rather than short-term activity outputs. Both formative and summative evaluation mechanisms were employed to capture behavioral shifts, learning continuity, and community-level engagement. As shown in Table 4, this section synthesizes quantitative indicators—such as language use frequency and oral competence—with qualitative evidence derived from observation, interviews, and documentation review. By linking evaluation data directly to intended outcomes, this section provides an evidence-based assessment of program effectiveness and its potential for sustainability and replication.

Table 4. Monitoring and evaluation results

Outcome	Indicator	Instrument	Pre	Post	Change	Evidence	Implication
Oral use	Daily use	Log	38%	71%	+33%	Quant	Habit
Competence	Speaking score	Rubric	2.6	4.0	+1.4	Quant	Proficiency
Attitude	Pride index	Survey	2.9	4.2	+1.3	Quant	Identity
Continuity	Attendance	Tracker	45%	68%	+23%	Quant	Retention
Interaction	Youth–elder	Checklist	Low	Regular	↑ Qual	Qual	Transfer
Ownership	Leadership	Mapping	Facilitator	Youth-led	Shift	Qual	Governance
Institution	Commitment	Interview	Informal	Formal	↑ Qual	Qual	Anchoring
Scalability	Model clarity	Audit	Fragmented	Complete	High	Mixed	Scale

As presented in Table 4, regular daily use of the Osing language increased from 38% at baseline to 71% at endline, reflecting a 33% gain. Mean oral performance scores improved from 2.6 to 4.0 on a five-point rubric. Language attitude measurements showed an increase in the language pride index from 2.9 to 4.2. Participation tracking indicated that the proportion of participants attending at least 75% of sessions rose from 45% to 68%. Observation records documented a shift from sporadic to regular youth–elder interaction across six to eight sessions. Leadership mapping revealed a transition from facilitator-led activities to youth-led language clubs. Stakeholder interviews confirmed movement from informal to formal institutional support, while documentation audits indicated readiness for replication through a complete program toolkit.

The evaluation results demonstrate that backward design provides a robust framework for aligning community service processes with sustainable outcomes. Theoretically, the observed improvements support sociocultural and ecological models of language learning, which posit that competence and attitudes develop through repeated, socially meaningful practice. The increase in language pride and usage frequency suggests that the program successfully reframed Osing as a viable communicative resource rather than a symbolic artifact. From an applied perspective, the emergence of youth-led structures and formal institutional endorsement signals a shift toward local ownership and governance—key conditions for sustainability. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence further validates the program's mixed-method evaluation strategy. Overall, Results C confirms that systematic monitoring and evaluation grounded in backward design can generate actionable insights for refining, scaling, and institutionalizing community-based language revitalization initiatives.

4. DISCUSSION

The first major implication of this community service initiative lies in its capacity to reposition the Osing language from a symbolic cultural marker to a functional medium of everyday youth interaction. Increased oral use and confidence among participants demonstrate that language revitalization can operate effectively within informal, practice-oriented learning spaces embedded in community life. Socially, this shift challenges the prevailing perception that local languages are irrelevant to contemporary youth aspirations. Practically, the program functioned as a corrective to formal educational settings that marginalize Indigenous languages, offering an alternative pathway for linguistic engagement grounded in lived experience. However, the initiative also revealed latent disfunctions, particularly the uneven readiness of institutions to accommodate flexible, community-driven models. These findings align with broader community engagement literature [1], [2], [3], which suggests that revitalization efforts are most impactful when they address both communicative competence and social meaning, while remaining sensitive to local institutional constraints.

Underlying these outcomes is a set of structural mechanisms related to participation, relevance, and agency. The program's emphasis on co-design enabled youth to actively shape learning materials and practices, fostering a sense of ownership that conventional language programs often fail to generate. This

participatory structure disrupted hierarchical knowledge flows, positioning young speakers not as passive recipients but as legitimate contributors to linguistic knowledge. The mechanism at work reflects sociocultural learning theory, which emphasizes that language acquisition is inseparable from social participation and identity negotiation. Furthermore, the integration of cultural narratives and dialogic practices functioned as a mediating tool between linguistic form and social meaning [4], [8]. The consistency of participation observed throughout the program suggests that motivation was sustained not through external incentives, but through alignment with youth interests and community values. This pattern reinforces evidence from Indigenous education studies that agency-driven design is central to sustained engagement.

A second set of implications emerges from the program's success in facilitating intergenerational interaction and cultural transmission. The active involvement of cultural elders alongside youth participants contributed not only to linguistic input, but also to the reactivation of social relationships weakened by generational and institutional divides. In practical terms, this interaction created spaces where cultural authority was exercised dialogically rather than prescriptively, allowing youth to negotiate meanings rather than merely inherit them. Socially, the program strengthened communal bonds and reaffirmed the role of elders as living knowledge holders rather than ceremonial figures. Nonetheless, the initiative also exposed the fragility of such engagement, as elder participation depended heavily on personal availability rather than institutionalized roles. This duality reflects a broader tension in community-based programs between relational richness and structural vulnerability, particularly in contexts lacking formal support mechanisms [24], [25].

The mechanisms underpinning these intergenerational outcomes are rooted in relational pedagogy and ecological models of language learning. By situating learning activities within culturally meaningful practices—such as storytelling and oral performance—the program activated what ecological linguistics describes as "affordances" for language use within social environments. Elder participation enhanced authenticity and legitimacy, reinforcing language use as a socially valued act rather than an academic exercise. At the same time, the informal structure allowed youth to engage without the pressure often associated with formal instruction, reducing affective barriers to speaking. However, the absence of formalized roles for elders highlights a structural gap that may affect long-term continuity. This pattern suggests that while relational mechanisms are powerful, their sustainability depends on institutional scaffolding that can translate personal commitment into collective responsibility [27], [28], [29].

A third important implication concerns the emergence of youth-led language initiatives and their potential for sustainability beyond the program timeframe. The formation of language clubs and the transfer of leadership roles to participants indicate a shift from externally facilitated intervention to locally governed practice. Practically, this transition reduces dependency on external actors and increases the likelihood of continued language use within peer networks. Socially, it signals a reconfiguration of power relations, where youth assume responsibility for cultural continuity rather than positioning it as an inherited obligation. However, this transition also surfaced challenges related to organizational capacity and access to resources, revealing that empowerment does not automatically translate into stability. These findings resonate with community development scholarship [30], [31], which emphasizes that empowerment outcomes are most durable when accompanied by structural support and capacity-building measures.

The mechanisms driving youth leadership and continuity are closely linked to outcome-based principles embedded throughout the program [29], [32]. By articulating clear long-term outcomes from the outset, the initiative created evaluative clarity that guided both facilitation and participant action. Youth leadership emerged not incidentally, but as a logical extension of a design that treated participants as future custodians of the program. The availability of simple, low-cost tools and documented learning materials further enabled this transition by lowering barriers to continuation. At the same time, institutional endorsement from schools and village authorities functioned as a legitimizing mechanism, reinforcing youth initiatives within broader governance structures. Together, these mechanisms illustrate how intentional design, material accessibility, and institutional alignment interact to transform short-term community service activities into sustainable social practices.

5. CONCLUSION

This community service program demonstrates that co-designed, practice-based language learning can effectively strengthen linguistic sustainability among Indigenous youth. The most salient lesson from this initiative is that meaningful language revitalization emerges when young speakers are positioned as active designers rather than passive recipients of instruction. The program's primary strength lies in its integration of backward design, participatory pedagogy, and cultural grounding, enabling the Osing language to function as a living communicative resource within everyday youth interaction. By combining youth agency, intergenerational collaboration, and low-cost implementation strategies, the program contributes a replicable empowerment model that advances contemporary community engagement practices, particularly in minority language contexts facing institutional marginalization.

Despite these achievements, several limitations remain. The program was conducted within a limited timeframe and involved a relatively small participant group, constraining the generalizability of outcomes. Elder participation and institutional support, while impactful, relied heavily on informal commitment rather than formalized structures. These limitations indicate the need for follow-up programs that extend mentoring duration, strengthen institutional integration within local curricula, and expand digital support for youth-led language initiatives. Future community service efforts should prioritize longitudinal engagement, policy alignment with local education authorities, and inter-community replication to ensure sustained linguistic vitality and broader social impact.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges indigenous community members, colleagues, and academic partners for their support and collaboration in this initiative.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Authors state no funding involved.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Tiurma Putri: conceptualization (lead), program design (lead), community collaboration (lead), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (lead).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This manuscript related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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