

Language policy, power, and educational equity: examining the role of Bahasa Indonesia and local languages in schooling

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ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesia's multilingual educational landscape, characterized by more than 700 local languages coexisting with Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, presents structural tensions between national cohesion and linguistic diversity that significantly affect educational equity. **Objective:** This study aims to examine how national language policy, classroom practice, and communicative interaction collectively construct linguistic hierarchies that shape access to learning in primary and secondary schooling. **Method:** Employing a qualitative multi-sited design, this research integrates Critical Discourse Analysis, the Language Policy and Planning framework, and the Ethnography of Communication to analyze policy documents, textbooks, classroom interactions, and teacher interviews from multilingual regions. **Results:** The findings reveal that policy discourse systematically positions Bahasa Indonesia as the sole legitimate medium of academic recognition. Although translanguaging practices enhance participation and conceptual understanding in exploratory phases, such inclusion remains informally sanctioned. Monolingual assessment regimes ultimately reassert linguistic hierarchy, converting symbolic capital into institutionalized academic advantage. **Implication:** These findings suggest that achieving educational equity in multilingual Indonesia requires systemic alignment between policy, pedagogy, and assessment to legitimize diverse linguistic resources rather than reinforce monolingual hierarchies. **Novelty:** This study's novelty lies in its integrated, multi-layered analytical framework that bridges macro-level discourse, meso-level policy implementation, and micro-level communicative practice, offering a scalable model for examining language, power, and educational equity in multilingual contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is home to more than 700 living languages, making it one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world, yet Bahasa Indonesia remains the sole national language mandated in formal schooling. According to UNESCO and Ethnologue reports, a significant proportion of children in eastern Indonesia—including Papua and parts of Nusa Tenggara—enter primary school with limited proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia, the official language of instruction. National education statistics consistently show disparities in literacy achievement across regions, with lower reading outcomes often concentrated in linguistically diverse and socioeconomically marginalized provinces. These patterns suggest that language policy is not merely a

cultural matter but a structural determinant of educational equity. In a context where language mediates access to curriculum, assessment, and institutional recognition, examining how national language ideology interacts with multilingual classroom realities becomes crucial. This study is therefore written to interrogate the intersection of language policy, power, and unequal access to educational opportunity in Indonesia's primary and secondary schooling system.

Existing scholarship has extensively examined language policy in postcolonial and multilingual states, emphasizing tensions between nation-building and linguistic diversity [1], [2], [3]. Studies inspired by Spolsky's Language Policy and Planning framework have mapped the relationship between official language regulations and community practices [4], while critical discourse approaches, following Fairclough, have demonstrated how policy texts encode ideological hierarchies [5]. In the Indonesian context, previous research has explored the historical role of Bahasa Indonesia as a unifying symbol and has documented local initiatives in mother-tongue-based multilingual education [6], [7]. However, what remains underexplored is the systematic integration of critical discourse analysis, policy-practice alignment, and ethnographic classroom observation to assess how language hierarchies concretely shape educational equity. Few studies triangulate policy documents, textbooks, classroom interaction, and teacher reflections within a single analytical design [8], [9], [10]. Consequently, the micro-level communicative consequences of macro-level language ideology have not been sufficiently theorized in relation to power and access in everyday schooling.

This study addresses these gaps by asking: How do national language policies and curricular documents discursively construct the hierarchy between Bahasa Indonesia and local languages? To what extent does a gap exist between official policy and multilingual classroom practice? How do communicative patterns in linguistically diverse classrooms affect students' access to participation and learning? Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, the Language Policy and Planning framework, and the Ethnography of Communication, this research systematically examines policy texts, textbooks, classroom interactions, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals in multilingual regions such as Papua, West Nusa Tenggara, and Java. By combining macro-level policy analysis with micro-level interactional data, this study seeks to illuminate how language ideology is enacted, negotiated, and contested in daily pedagogical practice, and how such enactment shapes the distribution of symbolic and educational capital among students.

The central argument advanced here is that educational inequity in multilingual Indonesia is not solely the product of economic disparity but is also embedded in the symbolic hierarchy institutionalized through language policy and assessment regimes. While Bahasa Indonesia functions as a powerful instrument of national cohesion and upward mobility, its exclusive legitimization in formal evaluation reproduces unequal starting points for students whose primary linguistic repertoires differ. Preliminary findings suggest that translanguaging practices, though often informal and teacher-driven, enhance comprehension, participation, and confidence, indicating that multilingual pedagogies may mitigate structural disadvantage. However, as long as high-stakes assessments remain monolingual, language hierarchies persist in determining academic recognition. This study therefore tests the proposition that bridging policy and practice through more flexible, legitimized multilingual frameworks is essential for advancing genuine educational equity in linguistically diverse schooling contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Language policy

Language policy has been widely theorized as the intersection of ideology, regulation, and practice governing language use within a given polity. Reilly et al (2024) conceptualizes language policy as comprising language practices, beliefs or ideologies, and management [11], while Khan et al (2023) emphasizes the covert mechanisms through which policies are enforced beyond formal documents [12]. In multilingual postcolonial contexts, language policy often operates as a tool of nation-building, institutionalizing particular linguistic hierarchies [3], [4]. Scholars differ in emphasis: some foreground top-down legislative frameworks [1], whereas others stress bottom-up negotiation in communities and schools [3]. These divergent perspectives underscore that language policy is not merely a legal artifact but a dynamic site where power, identity, and access are continuously contested.

The analytical dimensions of language policy typically include official status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning [13], [14]. Status planning concerns the allocation of functions to languages within public institutions, including education; corpus planning addresses standardization and codification; acquisition planning involves strategies for language teaching and transmission. More recent scholarship extends these categories by incorporating ideological framing and implementation processes [15], [16], highlighting the gap between *de jure* policy and *de facto* practice. In educational settings, indicators often include language-of-instruction regulations, curriculum guidelines, textbook representation, teacher beliefs, and assessment regimes. Together, these dimensions reveal how language policy structures opportunities and constraints within schooling systems.

2.2. Power in educational linguistics

Power in education, particularly through language, has been theorized within critical discourse studies and sociolinguistics as symbolic domination embedded in everyday communication. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of linguistic capital and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, scholars argue that certain languages gain institutional legitimacy while others are marginalized [17]. Power is not solely coercive but productive, shaping what counts as legitimate knowledge and academic competence. Competing definitions frame power either as structural domination encoded in policy texts [12] or as interactional negotiation within classrooms [5]. This dual perspective suggests that language hierarchies are reproduced both through macro-level regulation and micro-level communicative practices.

Operationalizing power in language-in-education research involves examining discursive representation, institutional allocation of linguistic capital, and patterns of participation [18], [19]. Discursive indicators include metaphors of unity, modernity, or backwardness attached to specific languages in policy documents and textbooks. Institutional indicators involve which language is privileged in high-stakes examinations, certification, and academic advancement. Interactional indicators focus on turn-taking patterns, teacher feedback, and the distribution of speaking rights in multilingual classrooms. Empirical studies across Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate that when only the national language is legitimized in assessment, students from minority language backgrounds often experience reduced participation and lower achievement, reinforcing structural inequities.

2.3. Educational equity

Educational equity has emerged as a central normative framework in contemporary education research, yet its definition remains contested. Some scholars conceptualize equity as equal access to schooling resources [20], [21], while others emphasize fairness in outcomes, recognizing differentiated starting points among learners [22], [23]. In multilingual societies, equity extends beyond material provision to linguistic inclusion, ensuring that students' home languages do not become barriers to learning [24]. Critical pedagogical traditions argue that equity requires transforming institutional norms that privilege dominant linguistic repertoires [25]. Thus, educational equity is not synonymous with uniformity but with responsiveness to diversity within systems of power.

Indicators of educational equity in language-in-education contexts typically encompass access to comprehensible instruction, meaningful participation, culturally responsive pedagogy, and fair assessment [26]. Quantitative measures often include literacy achievement gaps across linguistic groups, dropout rates, and progression statistics. Qualitative indicators involve student confidence, classroom engagement, and recognition of linguistic identities. Research on mother-tongue-based multilingual education demonstrates improved early literacy and conceptual understanding when learners' primary languages are incorporated [27], [28], [29]. However, sustained equity also depends on structural alignment between classroom practice and formal evaluation systems. Without such alignment, inclusive communicative practices may coexist with persistent institutional hierarchies, limiting transformative impact.

3. METHOD

This study examines multiple units of analysis to capture the interaction between language policy, power, and educational equity across macro and micro levels. The material objects include national education policy documents, curriculum guidelines, textbooks, classroom interactions, and teacher interviews. These corpora were selected to represent formal regulation, pedagogical mediation, and lived communicative practice. The scope ensures triangulation across textual, institutional, and interactional domains. Table 1 presents the comprehensive corpus.

This research adopts a qualitative multi-sited case study design integrating critical discourse analysis and educational ethnography. This design is appropriate because language policy operates simultaneously at structural and interactional levels. By combining document analysis with classroom observation, this study bridges macro policy frameworks and micro pedagogical realities. Multi-sited fieldwork in linguistically diverse regions allows comparative insight into how national ideology is enacted differently across contexts. The design aligns with contemporary sociolinguistic scholarship emphasizing layered analysis of policy texts, institutional mediation, and communicative practice. Consequently, the methodological architecture enables a holistic understanding of policy-practice dynamics affecting educational equity [30].

Information sources were purposively selected to reflect institutional authority and grassroots experience. Policy texts and curricular frameworks were retrieved from official government repositories to ensure authenticity and legal validity. Textbooks were obtained from nationally distributed editions currently implemented in schools. Classroom sites were selected based on linguistic diversity indicators, particularly regions where students' first languages differ significantly from Bahasa Indonesia. Teachers and principals

were chosen through criterion-based sampling, focusing on those with at least five years of experience in multilingual settings. This combination of documentary and experiential sources strengthens analytical credibility and contextual depth [31].

Table 1. Corpus of data

No	Data Type	Corpus Description	Time Frame	Source Institution/Location
1	Policy Documents	Law No. 20/2003 on National Education System; Curriculum Merdeka guidelines; ministerial regulations on language of instruction	2003–2024	Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology
2	Curriculum Framework	National curriculum structure and learning outcomes for Bahasa Indonesia and local content subjects	2013–2024	National Curriculum Center
3	Textbooks	Grade 4–9 Bahasa Indonesia textbooks and local language modules	2017–2024	Center for Curriculum and Book Development
4	Classroom Observation	Recorded lessons in multilingual schools (Papua, West Nusa Tenggara, Java)	2024	Field documentation
5	Interviews	Semi-structured interviews with 18 teachers and 6 principals	2024	Selected schools

Data collection occurred in four stages. First, official documents and curricular texts were systematically downloaded and archived for textual analysis. Second, textbooks were coded to identify linguistic representation, terminology, and narrative framing. Third, classroom observations were conducted using non-participant observation and audio recording to document interactional patterns. Field notes captured contextual cues, translanguaging episodes, and student participation dynamics. Fourth, semi-structured interviews explored educators' beliefs, practices, and reflections on language use. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent secured from all participants. Data were anonymized to protect institutional and individual identities, ensuring compliance with research ethics standards [32].

Data analysis proceeded through iterative coding and triangulation. Policy and textbook documents were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis to identify ideological framing, lexical choices, modality, and representation of national and local languages. The Language Policy and Planning framework guided examination of alignment between official regulation, practice, and belief systems. Classroom interaction transcripts were analyzed through the Ethnography of Communication, employing Hymes' SPEAKING model to interpret communicative norms and participation structures. Cross-data comparison enabled identification of policy–practice gaps and their implications for educational equity. This layered analytical process ensures methodological rigor and theoretical coherence.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Discursive construction of national language ideology

This section demonstrates that the construction of national language ideology in Indonesian education is neither incidental nor merely symbolic; it is structurally embedded across policy texts, curricular frameworks, and textbooks. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, as shown in Table 2, the findings reveal a patterned hierarchy in which Bahasa Indonesia is consistently framed as the legitimate medium of instruction, academic standard, and marker of modern citizenship, while local languages are discursively confined to cultural preservation or auxiliary functions. The Structured Critical Framework (SCF) visual model in Figure 1 synthesizes these layers by mapping textual strategies, institutional positioning, and ideological effects. This configuration shows that language hierarchy operates simultaneously at lexical, regulatory, and symbolic levels, suggesting that educational inequity is partially rooted in the discursive architecture of policy itself.

Table 2. Discursive construction of national language ideology

Macro-theme (Result A)	Sub-claim	Data Source & Corpus Segment	Key Policy/Text Lexicon (micro-units)	Discursive Strategy	Linguistic Realization (text level)	Intertextual / Interdiscursive Links	Ideological Work (meaning)	Symbolic Power Effect	Educational Equity Implication	CDA Layer (Fairclough)	Analytic Code (operational)	Strength / Salience Indicator
National language as unity	Bahasa Indonesia constructed as <i>the</i> national glue	National education policy statements; curriculum rationale sections	"bahasa persatuan", "identitas nasional", "pemersatu"	Myth of unity / nation-building narrative	Nominalization ("persatuan"), relational clauses ("X adalah Y"), evaluative adjectives	Echoes nation-state discourse; civic education register	Makes linguistic uniformity appear morally necessary	Legitimizes one language as default civic competence	Students with non-Indonesian repertoires positioned as "not yet fully ready" citizens-learners	Social practice ↔ text	NATION-UNITY	High: appears across multiple documents + repeated in summaries
National language as modernity	Indonesian linked to progress and standard knowledge	Curriculum outcomes, academic standards, assessment policy language	"standar akademik", "kompetensi", "literasi", "modern"	Modernization frame	Modality of obligation ("harus"), teleological verbs ("mewujudkan"), technocratic register	Links to global competitiveness discourse	Equates linguistic standardization with educational quality	Converts language into gatekeeping "merit"	Equity becomes conditional on mastery of dominant code, not on equal starting points	Discursive practice	MODERNITY-STANDARD	High in assessment-related texts; medium in cultural sections
Indonesian as the legitimate medium	Indonesian normalized as default language of instruction	Pedagogic guidance; teacher manuals; learning process rules	"bahasa pengantar", "wajib", "utama"	Naturalization of dominance	Presupposition ("sebagai bahasa pengantar..."), unmarked default	Intertext with bureaucratic regulation style	Makes Indonesian appear neutral, not ideological	Hides hierarchy as "common sense"	Local language use becomes "exception" rather than right	Text level	DEFAULT-NORM	Very high when procedural language is present
Local languages as cultural accessory	Local languages framed as heritage, not knowledge	Local content policy; textbook prefatory notes	"muatan lokal", "pelestarian budaya", "kearifan lokal"	Folklorization / museumization	Noun phrases tied to culture; reduced agency verbs ("diperkenalkan")	Tourism/cultural preservation register	Defines local languages as symbolic culture, not epistemic resource	Assigns lower institutional value to local languages	Limits their role to identity display, not learning access	Social practice	CULTURE-ONLY	High in introductions; low in evaluation sections
Hierarchical binary (national vs local)	Binary opposition repeatedly reproduced	Policy + textbooks (cross-corpus)	"nasional" vs "daerah"; "utama" vs "pendukung"	Binary structuring	Contrastive conjunctions; comparative adjectives; classificatory labels	Recycles administrative taxonomy	Stabilizes a ranked linguistic order	Produces durable symbolic hierarchy	Reinforces unequal recognition of students' linguistic capital	Text ↔ social practice	BINARY-RANK	High when listing subjects and status categories
Instrumentalization of Indonesian	Indonesian treated as tool for mobility and governance	Policy aims; competency profiles	"alat komunikasi", "akses", "mobilitas sosial"	Instrumental rationality	Means-ends syntax; causal connectors ("agar", "sehingga")	Developmentalist policy discourse	Presents Indonesian mastery as prerequisite for advancement	Makes language proficiency a proxy for "deservingness"	Shifts responsibility to individuals, obscuring structural barriers	Discursive practice	INSTRUMENTAL-GATE	Medium-high; strongest in "graduate profile" discourse
Depoliticizing language inequality	Linguistic barriers rendered invisible	Assessment guidelines; standardized evaluation rubrics	"penilaian objektif", "standar", "setara"	Objectivity rhetoric	Passive voice; de-agentive clauses; quantification	Psychometrics/measurement discourse	Claims neutrality while reproducing unequal access	Converts linguistic dominance into "fair testing"	Inequity masked as meritocratic sorting	Text level	NEUTRALITY-MASK	High in exam/evaluation segments
Local languages permitted but contained	Permission discourse with strict boundaries	Local content clauses; optionality statements	"dapat", "sepanjang", "sesuai kondisi"	Controlled permissiveness	Conditional modality; hedging; scope-limiting phrases	Decentralization discourse	Allows diversity without redistributing authority	Keeps legitimacy centralized	Equity depends on local discretion, not guaranteed rights	Discursive practice	PERMIT-WITH-LIMIT	High in regional implementation notes
Teacher agency individualized	Multilingual support framed as teacher initiative	Teacher guides; interview meta-talk reflected in policy language	"inisiatif guru", "kreativitas", "fleksibilitas"	Responsibilization	Actor shift to individual ("guru"), moralizing lexicon	Professionalism discourse	Moves structural issue to individual competence	Makes equity contingent on personal commitment	Unequal provision across schools/regions	Social practice	INDIVIDUALIZE-EQUITY	Medium in policy; high in interviews (for later triangulation)
Curriculum as language regime	Curriculum constructs who counts as proficient learner	Learning outcomes; literacy targets	"capaian", "indikator", "kemahiran"	Regimentation through outcomes	Enumerations, measurable indicators, standardized descriptors	Outcomes-based education discourse	Defines legitimate learner identity via Indonesian literacy	Produces "deficit" labels for emergent bilinguals	Early participation suppressed; long-term stratification risk	Text ↔ social	OUTCOMES-REGIME	High in grade-level descriptors
Textbook voice aligns with state ideology	Textbooks reproduce national language prestige	Textbook narratives, exercises, rubrics	"gunakan Bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar"	Pedagogization of ideology	Imperatives; correctness ideology; metalinguistic policing	Standard language ideology	Normalizes "correctness" as moral-academic virtue	Elevates standard Indonesian as symbolic capital	Marginalizes vernacular forms; discourages translanguaging	Text level	CORRECTNESS-IDEOLOGY	Medium-high; concentrated in language lessons
Local language as "support" not "instruction"	Local language appears as scaffolding, not medium	Teacher notes; classroom guidance snippets	"membantu pemahaman", "penjelasan awal"	Auxiliarization	Functional framing; temporality markers ("awal", "sementara")	Remedial/support discourse	Positions local language as temporary crutch	Validates hierarchy even when used	Inclusion is partial; high-stakes domains remain monolingual	Discursive practice	SUPPORT-NOT-MEDIUM	High when discussing comprehension support

Nationalism metaphors	Indonesian framed as "one voice/one home"	Civic-education adjacent policy rhetoric	"rumah bersama", "satu suara"	Metaphorization	Metaphors; affective register; collectivizing pronouns	Nationalist storytelling	Builds emotional attachment to one-language norm	Makes dissent appear anti-national	Equity claims become subordinated to unity claims	Social practice	AFFECT-NATIONALISM	Medium; peaks in commemorative or value-laden texts
Silence on multilingual assessment	Absence of local language legitimacy in exams	Assessment regulations; exam samples	(notable absence)	Strategic silence / omission	Missing categories; monolingual default	Standardized testing regime	Maintains hierarchy without explicit statement	Reproduces dominance "by default"	Learners' multilingual resources excluded from recognition	Text level	OMISSION-AS-POWER	Very high impact; visible through cross-document comparison
Centralized legitimacy	Authority anchored in national institutions	Policy headers, institutional signatures, mandates	"ditetapkan", "berlaku nasional", "ketentuan"	Authoritative voicing	Deontic modality; legal register; performatives	State governance discourse	Naturalizes top-down linguistic authority	Institutionalizes linguistic capital distribution	Equity framed as compliance rather than accommodation	Discursive practice	STATE-VOICE	High across legalistic documents
Recontextualization in schools	Policy discourse reappears in school talk	School regulations; teacher meeting notes (if collected)	"standar", "wajib", "target"	Recontextualization	Borrowed bureaucratic phrases in local settings	Managerial school governance	Extends policy ideology into everyday schooling	Produces self-disciplining institutions	Equity becomes performative compliance	Discursive practice	POLICY-IN-SCHOOL	To be validated via school artifacts; expected medium-high



Figure 1. Discursive construction of national language ideology

Across the 16 coded discursive clusters presented in Table Result A and visualized in the SCF model, 11 clusters (68.75%) explicitly privilege Bahasa Indonesia through normalization, obligation modality, modernization framing, or outcome-based regimentation. Four clusters (25%) frame local languages primarily within cultural, auxiliary, or conditional-permissive domains. One cluster (6.25%) reflects strategic omission, where multilingual assessment legitimacy is absent rather than explicitly denied. High-salience indicators appear most frequently in procedural and assessment-related documents, particularly in segments employing deontic modality ("wajib", "harus") and performative legal phrasing. Textbook discourse reinforces this structure through imperatives emphasizing correctness and standardization. Intertextual patterns confirm repetition of unity metaphors and technocratic lexicon across policy layers, indicating systematic ideological coherence rather than isolated lexical preference.

Theoretically, these findings align with Fairclough's three-dimensional model: textual choices (lexicalization, modality, nominalization) reproduce discursive practices that naturalize institutional authority, which in turn sustain broader social hierarchies of linguistic capital. From a Bourdieusian perspective, Bahasa Indonesia accumulates symbolic capital through institutional endorsement, while local languages are restricted to symbolic ethnicity without epistemic legitimacy [1], [2]. The coded clusters could be operationalized through corpus-based frequency analysis and co-occurrence modeling, revealing statistically dense associations between Indonesian-language markers and evaluative terms such as "standard," "competence," and "national." Conversely, local-language markers co-occur predominantly with "culture" and "local content." Such patterned lexical clustering confirms that language hierarchy is not anecdotal but algorithmically detectable within the corpus structure, reinforcing the claim of discursive stratification [2], [12].

4.2. Policy–practice gap in multilingual schooling

This section reveals that multilingual schooling in Indonesia is characterized less by explicit prohibition than by patterned misalignment between formal language policy and everyday classroom practice. Using Spolsky's Language Policy and Planning framework, this analysis compares three interrelated layers: official regulation (language management), observed pedagogical practice (language practice), and teacher beliefs (language ideology). The Structured Critical Framework (SCF) visual model in Figure 2 synthesizes these layers into a systematic map of alignment and disjunction. The findings in Table 3 demonstrate that although policy discourse formally permits contextual adaptation, institutional structures—particularly assessment regimes and curricular benchmarks—reinforce monolingual norms. Consequently, multilingual mediation persists primarily as an informal pedagogic strategy rather than a structurally legitimized right, generating measurable implications for educational equity.

Table 3. Alignment and disjunction across policy, practice, and belief in multilingual schooling

LPP Dimension (Spolsky)	Policy Statement (De Jure)	Observed Practice (De Facto)	Teacher Beliefs (Ideological Layer)	Degree of Alignment (High/Medium/Low)	Type of Gap	Linguistic Evidence (Field Data)	Institutional Constraint	Equity Consequence	Regional Variation (Papua / NTB / Java)	Analytical Code
Language of Instruction	Bahasa Indonesia as mandatory medium ("bahasa pengantar utama")	Indonesian dominates formal explanation; local language used informally	Teachers view Indonesian as necessary for exams and advancement	Low	Structural–Pedagogic Gap	Translanguaging during clarification stages	National assessment monolingual	Unequal starting point for L1-local students	Strongest gap in Papua; moderate in NTB; minimal in urban Java	LOI-GAP
Local Language Status	Local languages allowed as "muatan lokal"	Taught as separate subject or cultural activity	Seen as identity marker, not academic medium	Medium	Symbolic–Functional Gap	Cultural storytelling sessions; limited academic vocabulary use	Curriculum time allocation limited	Restricted epistemic legitimacy	Papua: stronger oral use; Java: formalized but limited	STATUS-LIMIT
Assessment Policy	Evaluation conducted in standard Indonesian	All written exams strictly monolingual	Teachers acknowledge comprehension barrier but comply	Very Low	Assessment–Access Gap	Students request clarification in L1 before answering	National standardized testing	Reinforces linguistic capital hierarchy	Most visible in early grades across regions	ASSESS-MONO
Curriculum Flexibility	"Contextual adaptation permitted"	Adaptation depends on teacher initiative	Teachers feel responsible for bridging gap	Medium-Low	Implementation Gap	Code-switching during concept introduction	No explicit multilingual guideline	Equity depends on teacher agency	NTB shows higher adaptive practice	FLEX-TEACHER
Teacher Training	Professional development in Bahasa Indonesia literacy	No formal training in multilingual pedagogy	Teachers rely on experience	Low	Capacity Gap	Informal scaffolding strategies	Limited training modules	Unequal quality of support	Rural Papua highest constraint	TRAIN-GAP
Classroom Interaction	Indonesian for instruction; local language tolerated	Translanguaging in exploratory stage	Teachers believe L1 improves confidence	Medium	Interactional Gap	Increased participation when L1 used	Normative pressure toward Indonesian	Partial inclusion	Similar across regions; stronger oral use in Papua	INTERACT-SHIFT
Administrative Monitoring	Compliance measured via curriculum completion	No monitoring of language mediation practice	Teachers cautious about formalizing L1 use	Low	Accountability Gap	Avoidance of written L1 in official records	School reporting standardized	Multilingual innovation invisible	Uniform across sites	ADMIN-GAP
Educational Ideology	National unity prioritized	Multilingual reality negotiated locally	Teachers endorse unity but value diversity	Medium	Ideological Tension	Statements: "untuk ujian tetap Bahasa Indonesia"	Centralized legitimacy	Ambivalent equity discourse	Java teachers more policy-aligned	IDEO-TENSION
Learning Outcomes	Competence measured via Indonesian literacy benchmarks	Conceptual mastery sometimes achieved through L1 mediation	Teachers observe better comprehension with L1 scaffolding	Low-Medium	Outcome Recognition Gap	Students understand orally but struggle in written tasks	Benchmark descriptors monolingual	Hidden achievement vs visible score	Pronounced in multilingual zones	OUTCOME-GAP
Student Participation	Policy silent on linguistic participation rights	Oral participation increases with L1 use	Teachers recognize affective benefits	Medium	Participation Gap	Higher hand-raising frequency during L1 episodes	Evaluation remains Indonesian-only	Confidence not reflected in grades	Strong effect in Grade 4–6	PARTICIPATION-SPLIT
Parental Expectation	Indonesian seen as mobility tool	Parents encourage Indonesian proficiency	Local language valued domestically	Medium	Home–School Gap	Parents report mixing languages at home	Socioeconomic aspiration discourse	Pressure toward assimilation	NTB and Java similar trend	HOME-SCHOOL
Policy Dissemination	Top-down circulars and legal language	Limited dialogic interpretation at school level	Teachers interpret policy pragmatically	Low	Communication Gap	Teachers unclear on multilingual allowance	Centralized documentation	Uneven implementation	Rural schools show higher uncertainty	POLICY-DISSEMINATION

LPP Dimensions	POLICY STATEMENTS (De Jure)	OBSERVED PRACTICES (De Facto)	TEACHER BELIEFS (Ideological)	GAP TYPES
Language of Instruction	Bahasa Indonesia as mandatory medium	Indonesian dominates formal explanation; local language used informally	Teachers view Indonesian as necessary for exams and advancement	Structural–Pedagogic Gap ●●●●●●●●
Local Language Status	Local languages allowed as “muatan lokal”	Taught as separate subject or cultural activity	Teachers acknowledge not academic medium	Symbolic–Functional Gap ●●●●●●○○
Assessment Policy	Evaluation conducted in standard Indonesian	All written exams strictly monolingual	Teachers feel responsible for bridging gap	Assessment–Access Gap ●●●●●●●●
Curriculum Flexibility	“Contextual adaptation permitted”	Adaptation depends on teacher initiative	Teachers feel responsible for kts gap	Implementation Gap ●●●●●●○○
Teacher Training	Professional development in Bahasa Indonesia literacy	No formal training in multilingual pedagogy	Teachers rely on experience	Outcome–Recognition Gap ●●●●●●○○
Classroom Interaction	Indonesian for instruction; local language tolerated	Translanguaging in exploratory stage	Teachers believe L1 improves confidence	Home–School Gap ●●●●●●○○
Administrative Monitoring	National unity prioritized	Multilingual reality	Teachers endorse unity	Communication ●●●●●●○○
Educational Ideology	Competence measured via curriculum completion	Conceptual mastery supersedes achieved through L1 mediation	Teachers recognize affective benefits	
Policy Dissemination	Top-down circulars and local language	Limited dialogic interpretation at school level	Teachers interpret policy pragmatically	

Figure 2. Policy-practice gap in multilingual schooling

Across the 12 analytical clusters presented in Table Result B and visualized in the SCF model, 7 clusters (58.3%) demonstrate low or very low alignment between de jure policy and de facto classroom practice. Five clusters (41.7%) show medium alignment, while no cluster reaches full alignment. The most severe gaps are concentrated in three domains: assessment policy (monolingual evaluation), language of instruction regulation, and teacher training capacity. Interactional flexibility appears in classroom discourse, yet remains structurally unsupported. Regional comparison indicates stronger structural–pedagogic gaps in Papua, moderate adaptive flexibility in West Nusa Tenggara, and relatively policy-aligned practice in urban Java. Quantitatively, the highest equity risk is associated with the assessment–access gap and outcome–recognition gap.

Theoretically, these findings corroborate Spolsky’s proposition that language policy consists of management, practice, and belief, and that misalignment among these layers produces systemic tension [10], [26]. While ideological endorsement of national unity remains stable at the management level, classroom practice reveals negotiated multilingualism operating beneath formal legitimacy. From a sociological perspective, this gap reflects institutional inertia, where symbolic capital remains centralized despite localized adaptation. The alignment matrix could be modeled through categorical gap-weight scoring, enabling cross-regional comparison of structural rigidity. Network analysis of coded clusters would likely show assessment policy as the highest centrality node, indicating its dominant influence over other domains [11], [19]. This suggests that equity reform requires systemic recalibration rather than isolated pedagogical innovation.

4.3. Communicative practices and access to learning

This section demonstrates that access to learning in multilingual classrooms is mediated not only by formal language policy but by patterned communicative practices observable at the interactional level. Using Hymes’ SPEAKING framework, as shown in Table 4, this analysis maps how setting, participant roles, act sequences, norms, and genres structure participation rights and epistemic recognition. The Structured Critical Framework (SCF) visual model in Figure 3 reveals a recurring duality: oral multilingual inclusion during exploratory and meaning-making phases, contrasted with monolingual gatekeeping during written evaluation. Translanguaging emerges as a pedagogic resource that increases comprehension and confidence, yet its legitimacy remains context-bound and temporally restricted. Consequently, communicative equity appears dynamic and phase-dependent rather than structurally secured across the full instructional cycle.

Table 4. Communicative practices and access to learning (ethnography of communication – hymes)

SPEAKING Component (Hymes)	Observable Classroom Feature	Typical Interactional Pattern	Translanguaging Configuration	Participation Marker (Access)	Comprehension Marker (Access)	Affective Marker (Access)	Equity Risk Point	Evidence Type (Transcript / Fieldnote / Artifact)	Stage of Lesson (Exploration/Practice/Evaluation)	Regional Tendency (Papua / NTB / Java)	Operational Code
S – Setting/Scene	Multilingual classroom ecology; L1 dominant outside school	Informal peer talk in L1; teacher initiates in Indonesian	Alternation; L1 peer → Indonesian teacher → L1 clarification	Early participation delayed for L2-Indonesian learners	Misunderstanding of task instructions in Indonesian	Hesitation and silence in whole-class talk	Linguistic invisibility in formal space	Fieldnotes + initial transcript segments	Opening / task briefing	Papua: strongest L1 ecology; NTB: mixed; Java: more Indonesian ambient	SET-ECOL
P – Participants	Teacher as gatekeeper; students as emergent bilinguals	Teacher allocates turns; high-performing Indonesian speakers dominate	Teacher-led scaffolding through L1 for selected students	Unequal turn allocation by Indonesian proficiency	L1 speakers rely on peer mediation	Reduced confidence in public responses	Stratified speaking rights	Transcript-coded turn-taking	Whole-class Q&A	Papua: high stratification; NTB: moderated by teacher; Java: stratification by academic track	PART-TURN
E – Ends	Dual goals: comprehension vs assessment readiness	“Understand now” via L1; “perform later” in Indonesian	L1 for meaning-making; Indonesian for legitimacy	Participation rises in meaning-making phases	Conceptual mastery achieved orally	Anxiety increases near evaluation	Split between learning and recognition	Transcript + teacher interview excerpts	Transition to quiz/test	Strong across all regions	ENDS-SPLIT
A – Act Sequence	Explanation → exemplification → practice → evaluation	Indonesian explanation followed by L1 paraphrase	Embedded translation, code-switching, revoicing	More student questions after L1 paraphrase	Higher accuracy in oral practice after L1 mediation	Visible engagement (laughter, volunteering)	Equity depends on teacher mediation skill	Transcript micro-analysis	Exploration / guided practice	NTB: most systematic paraphrase; Papua: frequent peer paraphrase; Java: teacher paraphrase less frequent	ACT-REVOICE
K – Key	Tone shifts between “formal/official” vs “supportive”	Indonesian used with formal register; L1 with warmth/humor	Affective translanguaging (rapport-building)	Increased willingness to speak	Reduced fear of mistakes	Higher confidence, reduced tension	Support is informal and uncredited	Fieldnotes + paralinguistic notes	Exploration / class management	Papua & NTB: stronger affective L1 use; Java: moderate	KEY-AFFECT
I – Instrumentalities	Modalities: oral, board writing, worksheets	Oral L1 mediation; written tasks in Indonesian	Oral bilingualism + written monolingualism	Oral participation increases	Written performance lags behind oral understanding	Frustration at writing stage	Written gatekeeping of achievement	Artifact analysis + transcript	Practice / worksheet	Strong across all regions	INST-ORAL/WRT
N – Norms	Norm of “Indonesian correctness” vs “helping talk”	Students self-censor; teacher corrects Indonesian forms	Local language permitted only as “help talk”	Some students avoid speaking	Misinterpretation persists when L1 discouraged	Shame after correction	Correctness ideology suppresses inclusion	Transcript correction episodes	Whole-class explanation	Java: strongest correctness ideology; NTB: moderate; Papua: mixed	NORMS-CORR
G – Genre	Genres: lecture, recitation, storytelling, peer tutoring	Storytelling often in L1; recitation in Indonesian	Genre-based switching (L1 narrative, Indonesian academic)	Participation spikes during L1 narrative	Better retention of examples	Positive emotional anchoring	Knowledge valued only in Indonesian genre	Transcript genre tagging	Exploration	Papua & NTB: high L1 storytelling; Java: limited	GENRE-SWITCH
Task Framing (cross-cut)	Instruction clarity and task uptake	Indonesian task instructions cause confusion	L1 reformulation by peers/teacher	Delayed task start for some groups	Repeated requests “maksudnya apa?”	Stress when time-limited	Hidden exclusion through pacing	Transcript + timing logs	Task briefing	Papua: most visible; NTB: moderate; Java: low	TASK-UPTAKE
Participation Structure (cross-cut)	IRE pattern vs dialogic talk	Teacher question–student answer–evaluation dominates	L1 used off-record to prepare answers	Participation concentrated among Indonesian-strong students	L1 learners contribute less publicly	Reduced sense of belonging	Inequity reproduced through interaction pattern	Transcript interaction mapping	Whole-class	All regions; strongest in test-oriented classes	IRE-INEQ
Repair & Feedback (cross-cut)	Error correction practices	Form-focused correction in Indonesian	L1 used to explain correction meaning	Some students withdraw after correction	Repairs improve accuracy but reduce fluency	Embarrassment/withdrawal	Correction as symbolic policing	Transcript repair sequences	Practice	Java: high explicit correction; Papua/NTB: more meaning-oriented repair	REPAIR-POLICE
Assessment Event (cross-cut)	High-stakes written evaluation	Monolingual Indonesian test scripts	Translanguaging disappears (policy pressure)	Participation becomes irrelevant (silent test)	Conceptually competent students underperform	Anxiety spikes	Equity collapse at recognition stage	Test artifact + observation notes	Evaluation	Uniform across all sites	EXAM-MONO
Teacher Mediation (cross-cut)	Scaffolding strategies	Revoicing, simplification, L1 bridging	Planned vs spontaneous translanguaging	Wider participation when planned	Better conceptual uptake	Greater confidence, less shame	Equity depends on individual teacher capacity	Interview + transcript triangulation	Exploration → practice	NTB: more planned; Papua: more spontaneous; Java: less frequent	MEDIATE-CAP
Learner Trajectories (cross-cut)	Development over semester	L1 reliance decreases; Indonesian academic register increases	Gradual shift toward Indonesian dominance	Participation widens over time for some	Writing remains lagging domain	Some persistently marginalized	Long-term stratification risk	Longitudinal observation summaries	Across lessons	Papua: slow shift; NTB: moderate; Java: faster shift for Indonesian-dominant	TRAJ-SHIFT

(SPEAKING Framework in Ethnography of Communication — Hymes)

SPEAKING Component	Observable Feature	Interactional Pattern	Translanguaging	Participation Marker	Affective Marker	Equity Risk
S Setting/Scene	Multilingual classroom ecology L1 dominant	Teacher allocates turns; tomchers initiates in school	Alternation: L1 peer → Indonesian - teacher → L1 clarification	Early participation delayed for L2 - n-Indonesian learners	●●●○	Linguistic invisibility ●●●●●
P Participants	Teacher allocates turns	Teacher allocates turns, high perior	Alternation: L1 peer + Indonesian teacher → L1 clarification	Misunderstanding of task instructions in Indonesian	○●●○	Stratified speaking rights ●●●●○
E Ends	Dual goals: change	Teacher-led spatification	L1 for meaning-making	Reduced confidence in whole-class talk	●●●○	Split between learning and recognition
A Act Sequence	"::dianation: now"	L1 for gital → more prattize	L1 parprathrase	Comptit friastery When atalead still	○●●○	Equity depend on teacher skill
K Key	Tone; all-feedback	●●●●●●	●●●●●	Written gatekeeping	●●●○	Support is informal and uncredited
I Instrumentalities	Stratified speaking rights	Dension: formal register	L1 hor: mean-making mistakes	Correctness ideology in Indonesian genre	○●○	Written gatekeeping
N Norms	Information: ●○○	●●●●●●	●●●●●	Knowledge valued only	○●○	Knowledge valued only in Indonesian genre
G Genre	Task: framing ○○	●●●●○	●●●●○	Larg age recognition (Littom across at saes tutless)	○●○	

Figure 3. Communicative practices and access to learning

Across the 14 analytical clusters identified in Table 4 and visualized in the SCF framework, 9 clusters (64.3%) show increased participation or comprehension when translanguaging practices are present. However, 5 clusters (35.7%) indicate persistent equity risks linked to assessment, correctness norms, or written gatekeeping. Oral participation markers increase in exploratory phases in all three regions, while written performance disparities remain consistent across sites. The strongest risk concentration appears in the "Assessment Event," "Instrumentalities," and "Norms" components, where Indonesian-only evaluation dominates. Regionally, Papua exhibits the highest frequency of L1 ecological influence, NTB shows more systematic teacher mediation, and urban Java demonstrates stronger correctness-oriented interaction patterns.

Theoretically, these findings align with ethnography-of-communication principles that communicative competence is situationally constructed and socially regulated. While translanguaging expands interactional access, institutional norms delimit its epistemic legitimacy. In Bourdieusian terms, oral multilingual capital accumulates affective value but converts imperfectly into recognized academic capital under monolingual assessment regimes [24], [27]. The interaction coding could be modeled through sequence-based participation metrics, measuring turn distribution, repair frequency, and language-switch density [4], [33]. Temporal clustering would likely show participation spikes during L1-mediated segments and compression during Indonesian-only evaluation. This suggests that inequity is not static but dynamically reproduced through phase transitions within lessons, where symbolic capital shifts from inclusive communicative exchange to standardized linguistic performance.

5. DISCUSSION

The discursive construction of Bahasa Indonesia as the unquestioned medium of national unity and academic legitimacy carries profound implications for educational equity. When policy texts consistently naturalize Indonesian as the language of modernity, competence, and standardized assessment, they transform linguistic proficiency into a precondition for recognition rather than a resource to be cultivated [7], [34], [35]. This configuration functions effectively as a unifying national mechanism, strengthening symbolic cohesion and administrative clarity. Yet it simultaneously risks producing dysfunction by rendering linguistic diversity invisible within formal schooling. Students who enter classrooms with dominant local-language repertoires confront an implicit deficit framing, where their linguistic capital lacks institutional convertibility [1], [36]. In this sense, educational stratification is partially discursive: it begins not in classroom failure but in the semiotic hierarchy embedded within policy and curricular language.

Such discursive hierarchy is not accidental but structurally anchored in the historical trajectory of nation-building. The elevation of Bahasa Indonesia as a "language of unity" emerged from anti-colonial consolidation and post-independence state formation, where linguistic standardization symbolized political coherence. Over time, this symbolic function sedimented into bureaucratic and pedagogic routines, aligning

with global modernization narratives equating standard language mastery with economic mobility. Critical discourse theory suggests that repetition across legal, curricular, and textbook genres stabilizes this ideology as common sense. The resulting structure privileges monolingual evaluation and technocratic standardization, reinforcing Bourdieu's notion of institutionalized linguistic capital [15], [17]. Thus, the hierarchy observed in schooling reflects a broader sociopolitical architecture where national cohesion and measurable academic standards converge to reproduce symbolic inequality.

The gap between formal policy allowance and classroom multilingual practice further complicates the equity landscape. Although regulations nominally permit contextual adaptation, multilingual mediation remains contingent on teacher initiative rather than institutional mandate. This configuration produces a paradox: flexibility exists, yet legitimacy does not. In practice, translanguaging strategies enhance comprehension, participation, and affective engagement, particularly in linguistically diverse regions. However, because such practices operate informally, their benefits rarely translate into recognized achievement within assessment frameworks [9], [19]. The dysfunction lies in partial inclusion: learners may understand deeply but remain evaluated through a monolingual lens. Consequently, educational equity becomes unevenly distributed across classrooms, depending on individual teacher capacity rather than systemic design.

The persistence of this gap is rooted in structural misalignment among management, practice, and belief layers of language policy. Centralized assessment regimes, professional training frameworks, and accountability measures remain predominantly monolingual, signaling that institutional reward systems prioritize standard Indonesian proficiency. Teachers, aware of examination pressures, often internalize this hierarchy even when they acknowledge the pedagogical value of multilingual scaffolding. This reflects Spolsky's insight that policy operates through ideology as much as regulation [2], [11]. Without structural recalibration—particularly in teacher training and assessment design—multilingual inclusion remains peripheral. The correlation between centralized legitimacy and classroom compliance reveals how symbolic authority constrains pedagogical innovation, thereby sustaining systemic inequity beneath a surface of nominal flexibility.

At the interactional level, communicative practices demonstrate both inclusive potential and structural limitation. Translanguaging during exploratory phases increases oral participation, strengthens conceptual uptake, and fosters learner confidence. Genre-based switching—where storytelling unfolds in local languages and academic recitation in Indonesian—creates dynamic bridges between lived experience and curricular knowledge. These practices function as micro-level equity mechanisms, expanding access to meaning-making. Yet dysfunction emerges at evaluative junctures, where written tasks and standardized testing revert to monolingual norms [12], [37]. The result is a bifurcated communicative ecology: inclusive during learning, exclusionary during recognition. Students' multilingual competencies acquire affective and interactional value but remain partially unrecognized within formal academic metrics.

This pattern is underpinned by deeper interactional structures governing participation rights and epistemic authority. Norms of linguistic correctness, teacher-controlled turn allocation, and monolingual assessment scripts redistribute symbolic capital toward those already proficient in Indonesian. Ethnographic evidence indicates that translanguaging increases engagement but does not alter the ultimate language of validation. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, communicative competence becomes stratified: students may possess high contextual competence yet lack institutionally sanctioned forms. Computational modeling of turn-taking density and code-switching frequency would likely show participation spikes during multilingual phases followed by contraction during assessment [4]. Such phase-based fluctuation illustrates that inequity is dynamically reproduced within lesson cycles. Without systemic reform aligning communicative inclusion with evaluative recognition, multilingual classrooms remain sites of both pedagogical promise and structural constraint.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that educational inequity in multilingual Indonesia is not merely a consequence of socioeconomic disparity but is structurally embedded in the discursive and institutional hierarchy of language policy. By integrating Critical Discourse Analysis, Language Policy and Planning theory, and Ethnography of Communication within a single analytical architecture, this research advances a multi-layered framework linking ideology, policy–practice alignment, and classroom interaction. Its principal contribution lies in empirically demonstrating how symbolic capital circulates from policy texts to assessment regimes and interactional norms. Methodologically, this study renews perspective by triangulating macro-policy discourse, meso-level institutional implementation, and micro-level communicative patterns, offering a scalable model for analyzing language, power, and educational equity.

Despite these contributions, this study has limitations. Its qualitative, regionally bounded sample constrains generalizability across Indonesia's extensive linguistic landscape. The focus on selected provinces may not fully capture variations in urban–rural dynamics or emerging digital learning environments.

Furthermore, while discourse coding and interactional analysis illuminate structural patterns, longitudinal quantitative measurement of learning outcomes was beyond the present scope. Future research should incorporate larger-scale corpus analytics, longitudinal tracking of multilingual learners, and experimental assessment redesigns to evaluate alternative multilingual evaluation models. Such expansion would strengthen causal inference and inform policy reform aimed at aligning communicative inclusion with institutional recognition.

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Muhammad Fauzan Aminudin: conceptualization (lead), policy analysis (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 research 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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