

# LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES IN MULTILINGUAL SETTING: CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BALI

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## ABSTRACT

*The research aimed to investigate the language attitudes and practices of English Literature Study Program students in Bali towards Balinese, Indonesian, and English. Furthermore, this research also sought to determine whether the students' attitudes affect their language practices daily. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, the present research used a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to collect data from the 100 participants. Results from the collected data reveal that the participants have similarly positive attitudes towards Balinese, Indonesian, and English. However, their language practices differ significantly: they practice Indonesian positively, while practices for Balinese and English are negative. It highlights a complementary relationship between language attitude and practice for Indonesians but a contradictory relationship between Balinese and English. Notably, this research identifies a generational shift in the practice of Balinese and a potential replacement by English among the cohort in particular and the young generation in Bali generally. These findings underscore the urgency of promoting and preserving the practice of Balinese. This research contributes novel insights into the impact of English on the linguistic dynamics of youth in Bali, especially those who enroll in English Language Programs at universities in Denpasar.*

**Keywords:** language attitude, language practice, Balinese, Indonesian, English, multilingualism

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with more than 700 local languages and one national language, is considered one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world (Cohn & Abtahian, 2017). In addition, English is a compulsory subject in Indonesian schools (Aeni & Khairuddin, 2023), contributing further to the country's multilingualism. Traditionally, Indonesians acquire their local language before the national language or master both languages simultaneously. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in this situation, where people begin to learn Indonesian first or, on the rarest of occasions, English before their local languages (BRIN, 2023).

In Bali, where the current research takes place, English is not only taught within the classrooms but also widely used in many areas of the island due to its

status as a global tourist destination, a tourist island (Wisnumurti, Darma, & Putra, 2020). This extensive use of English has led many young individuals to pursue degrees in the English language as they want to improve their career opportunities in the future. Consequently, these students navigate their daily lives using three languages: Balinese (their local language), Indonesian (the national language), and English (the foreign language of their choice).

This multilingual environment raises questions about the attitudes and practices of the said group towards those three languages. Yet, despite the importance of the issue, the research on language attitudes and language practice among students, especially those who enroll in English language programs, is almost nonexistent. In fact, the situation, in particular, is very Java-centric as there are barely any studies outside the main island, leaving a significant

research gap on Bali's unique linguistic dynamics.

Language attitude refers to evaluative reactions to language (Dragojevic et al., 2021) or a set of beliefs, ideas, and assessments individuals hold towards a language or its speakers. Language practice, on the other hand, is the observable behaviors and choices (Spolsky, 2009) of people's linguistic repertoire or any regular, goal-oriented activity that involves the use of a given language or languages, whether the activity is performed with the intentional aim of improving the knowledge of those languages or not (Storto, Haukås, & Tiurikova, 2023). In other words, language practice is the actual usage of a language in everyday situations.

Previous studies have explored language attitudes and practices in various Indonesian contexts (e.g., Fitriati & Wardani, 2020; Herawati, 2022; Prastiti & Sudarwati, 2020; Umam, 2020), highlighting two main types of relationships between these two concepts: complementary and contradictory relationships. In a complementary relationship, language attitude and practice are aligned, which can be positive or negative. Positive attitudes towards a specific language manifest in regular or daily language practice (Alfian, 2021; Kumala, 2021; Seli, Arma, & Syafitri, 2021), whereas negative attitudes are reflected in reluctance or avoidance of practicing a language (Menggo & Suastra, 2020). In a contradictory relationship, language practice contradicts language attitudes and can manifest as drastic or mild contradictions. In a drastic contradiction, people exhibiting a positive attitude towards a language may not engage in daily practice, potentially resulting in avoiding the language completely (Zitouni, 2023). On the other hand, individuals with a negative attitude towards a language may continue to engage in regular or daily language practice, a phenomenon notably observed in colonised communities (Kammampoal, 2022; Rani, 2022). Mild contradictions occur when neutral language attitudes shift towards positive or negative language practices. Despite these insights, there is a notable lack of research focused on the multilingualism of youth in Bali, particularly those studying the English language in universities.

This research's main objective is to fill this gap by investigating the language attitudes and practices of English Literature study program students at universities in Denpasar towards Balinese, Indonesian, and English. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the attitudes of these students towards Indonesian, Balinese, and English? (2) In what domains do the students practice their languages?

To sum up, this research addresses a significant gap in the literature by focusing on language attitudes and practices of Balinese youth, especially those who enroll in English language programs at universities in Denpasar, towards Balinese, Indonesian, and English. It offers a new perspective on the relationship between the attitude and practice of those three languages, which will influence the teaching and learning of the languages and the preservation efforts. Furthermore, it

will contribute to understanding the general linguistics situation in Indonesia.

## METHODS

The research employs a qualitative case study approach, which is suitable for an in-depth study of a phenomenon (Priya, 2021). This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the multilingualism of youth in Denpasar, Bali, by exploring their attitudes and practices of Balinese, Indonesian, and English in detail.

Purposive sampling is employed in this research, a commonly used technique in qualitative studies to select participants who meet specific research objective criteria (Hassan, 2024). Within this framework, this research focuses on 100 Balinese students enrolled in English Literature study programs across several universities in Denpasar, Indonesia. The participants are selected based on their enrolment in these programs, ensuring they are actively engaged in an environment where English is used daily, i.e., in classrooms.

This research utilizes primary and secondary data. The primary data are collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The secondary data, on the other hand, includes relevant studies on language attitude and practice.

The questionnaire used in this research is a modified version of Coronel-Molina's (2009) questionnaire, which is divided into three sections: linguistic background, language attitudes, and language practices. The linguistic background section is used to obtain information on the participants' and their parents' first languages. The language attitudes section assesses the participants' attitudes towards Balinese, Indonesian, and English. The last section, language practices, explores where and when the participants practice those three languages.

The data collection process involves some steps. Firstly, the questionnaire is distributed to the participants. By filling out all the questions in the questionnaire, the participants provide their linguistic background, language attitudes, and language practices. Lastly, after finishing the questionnaire, some participants are randomly selected for semi-structured interviews. These interviews supply qualitative data to support and elaborate on the questionnaire data. All questions in the questionnaire are written in Indonesian, and, when needed, so are the oral explanations. The semi-structured interviews are also conducted in Indonesian because it is considered a neutral language to attain more honest responses.

The collected data are then analyzed thematically. The data from the questionnaire are divided into four themes: linguistic background, language attitudes and practices of Balinese, language attitudes and practices of Indonesia, and language attitudes and practices of English. The linguistics background illustrates the participants' and their parents' first language,

while the next three themes of language attitudes and practices show how the participants view Balinese, Indonesian, and English and describe the participants' current language practices, with potential implications for future language practices. The data from semi-structured interviews are transcribed and analyzed to identify recurring patterns that support and elaborate the data from the questionnaire. Excerpts from the semi-structured interviews are incorporated into the analysis to provide a richer context and validate the data from the questionnaire.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part of the research thoroughly explains the participants' language attitudes and practices towards Balinese, Indonesian, and English. The results are organized into themes derived from the questionnaire, while the discussion contextualizes these results by integrating the excerpts from their interviews and comparing them with existing literature, highlighting their significance and addressing the gaps in the current situation of language attitude and practice in Indonesia. The participants' linguistic backgrounds are collected in the first section of the questionnaire. It aims to identify the first languages of this research's participants and their parents (see Figure 1).

The results show that Indonesian is the first language for the majority of the participants, despite both of their parents' first language being Balinese (64%) or only one of the parents (14%). Moreover, a small proportion of the participants also report that their first language and their parents are Indonesian (4%). In total, 82% of the participants' first language is Indonesian. On the other hand, Balinese as the first language for the participants and their parents is less prevalent (18%). None of the participants or their parents report English as their first language.

In the second section of the questionnaire, seven statements are given to the participants in order to

understand their attitudes towards Balinese, Indonesian, and English. The distribution of participants' language attitudes is represented in Figure 2.

- Respondents and Their Parents Speak Balinese as First Language
- Respondents Speak Indonesian as First Language while The Parents Speak Balinese
- Respondents Speak Indonesian as First Language while One of The Parents Speak Balinese
- Respondents and Their Parents Speak Indonesian as First Language

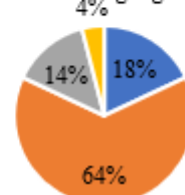


Figure 1 First Language of Participants and Their Parents

For Balinese, more than 80% of the participants agree with statements 1 (I like and am proud of this language), 3 (When I have a child, I will encourage them to learn this language), 6 (This language gives me the sense of identity), and 7 (Knowledge of this language is a symbol of prestige and social status). However, less than half of them agree with statements 2 (I can express myself best in this language), 4 (I feel comfortable using this language), and 5 (Knowledge of this language is important for national unity). Overall, their attitudes towards Balinese are positive.

For the Indonesian language, the participants' attitudes are very positive. More than 90% of them agree with statements 1, 2, 4, and 5 from the questionnaire. The numbers for statements 3 and 6 are



Figure 2 Language Attitudes towards Balinese, Indonesian, and English

more than 85%. The only statement with a percentage below 80% is statement 7, which is still fairly high (77%).

The questionnaire shows that the participants' attitudes towards English are predominantly positive. As shown in Figure 2, more than 80% of the participants agree with statements 1, 3, and 7. Then, more than half agree with statements 2 and 6. Statements 4 and 5, on the other hand, are below 50%.

The third section of the questionnaire explores the domains where the participants practice Balinese, Indonesian, and English. Four domains are given to them: home, neighborhood, religious places, and university, as shown in Figure 3.

Religious places are the only domain where more than half of the participants practice the Balinese language exclusively (52%), confirming its close association with the Hindu religion of Bali. The number declines sharply in the Home (26%) and University (15%) domains. None of the participants reported exclusive practice of the language in the neighborhood domain (0%). Additionally, many participants prefer a combination of Balinese and Indonesian in the home and neighborhood domains (31% and 56%, respectively).

Regarding Indonesian language practice, as many as 44% of the participants practice the national language exclusively in the neighborhood domain. For the other domains, home, religious places, and university, the percentages are 31%, 39%, and 34%, respectively.

In terms of English, the only domain where the participants exclusively engage in the practice of the language is the university, with 5% of the participants reporting it. Additionally, within the university domain, 33% of the participants reported practicing

English, albeit in combination with Indonesian. The combination of English and Indonesian is also reported in the home domain by 2% of the participants.

Based on these results, the participants in this research believe that Balinese gives them a sense of identity, as shown in statement 6 of Figure 2. During the semi-structured interview, this view towards Balinese is explored further, and the consensus is that they regard the language as the marker of their local identity, as expressed by one of the participants.

### Extract 1

Interviewer (I): “Kenapa bahasa Bali penting menurutmu?”

Participant (P): “Karena itu identitas kita sebagai warga Bali.”

I: “Why Balinese is important to you?”

P: “Because that (Balinese language) is (a marker of) our identity as a Balinese person.”

Extract 1 shows how the Balinese language is perceived as a local and cultural identity symbol. It is also presumably related to the idea that the Balinese language provides higher social status and prestige to the users (Statement 7 of Figure 2). Balinese, one of the local languages with the most speakers in Indonesia (Saputra, 2022), is quite similar to Javanese and Sundanese, which have speech levels. The speech levels of the Balinese language are divided into *halus* or refined, *madya* or middle, and *kasar* or low (Praminatih, 2021). The Balinese speech levels are closely related to the Hindu social class system in Bali. Those classes consist of *Brahmana*, *Ksatria*,

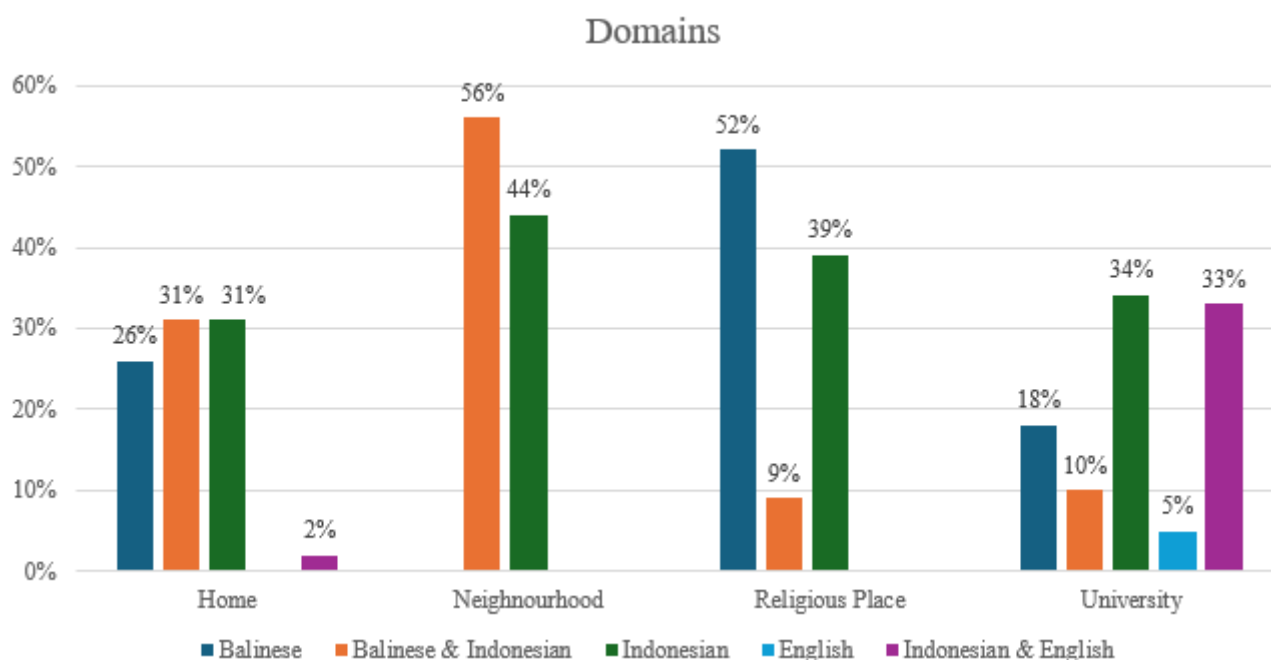


Figure 3 Language Practices of Balinese, Indonesian, and English

*Waisya*, and *Sudra* (listed from highest to lowest caste). Traditionally, people from the highest class use the highest level of Balinese daily. Hence, the ability to use that language level is considered a marker of high status in Balinese society. These findings align with previous studies on language attitudes in various areas of Indonesia. Participants in these studies have expressed pride in their local languages (Prastiti & Sudarwati, 2020) and how their local languages give them a sense of identity (Andriyanti, 2019; Muliana, Made, & Gede, 2021).

In terms of its practice, lower-class people in Bali also use the highest level of Balinese, although not daily. They would normally use that level to speak with people from higher classes to show their respect. One of the participants has indicated it in Extract 2.

### Extract 2

*“Bahasa Bali penting...kalau ke pura, griya, gitu kan.”*

“Balinese is important (to be used) ...if (we go to) temples, (or) *griya*, right.”

The participant in Extract 2 has mentioned that Balinese is important when visiting *griya*. *Griya* is the house of Brahmana, the highest class in Balinese Hindu. Not only *griya*, but the participant has also mentioned that the language is important to be used in temples.

Furthermore, the Balinese language is also used as the main language of communication in *banjar*, as one of the participants indicates in Extract 3.

### Extract 3

*“Ya, penting. Kan kadang kalau kita pergi ke banjar.”*

“Yes (Balinese language) is important. Because sometimes (it is used) when we go to *banjar*.”

*Banjar*, mentioned by the participant in Extract 3, is a local community group that acts as a village government system and council. In the building of *banjar*, the local people hold many religious and cultural activities. These findings on the practice of Balinese indicate how closely the language is related to the Hindu religion of Bali and the people’s social and cultural lives. In other words, the language of cultural ceremonies and activities (Putra & Gorda, 2021). It also shows loyalty, pride, and awareness towards the local language (Hasibuan, Gurning, & Husein, 2019). Hence, many participants practice Balinese exclusively in the domain of religious places, as shown in Figure 3.

For the Indonesian language, it is the only language for which at least 75% of the participants expressed their agreement across all of the seven statements in Figure 2. The semi-structured interviews reveal that the status of Indonesian as the national

language is a key factor that makes the participants view the language positively. One of the participants has stated it in Extract 4.

### Extract 4

I: *“Kenapa kamu menganggap bahasa Indonesia penting?”*

P: *“Karena, kan, bahasa kita di Indonesia.”*

I: “Why do you feel Indonesian is important?”

P: “Because (Indonesian) is our language in Indonesia.”

Moreover, as the national language of Indonesia, Indonesian is used in most situations and contexts, such as business, government, entertainment, education, and wider communication in general (Simpson, 2007). This pervasive use of Indonesian contributes to the positive perception of the participants in this research. One of them has said it in Extract 5.

### Extract 5

*“Penting. Karena kebanyakan orang di lingkungan saya ngomongnya bahasa Indonesia. Dipakai di mana-mana juga.”*

“(Indonesian is) important. Because many people around me speak using Indonesian. (And it is) used everywhere too.”

Extracts 4 and 5 explain why many participants agree with statements 5 and 6. As the national language, Indonesian is seen as an important element of national unity and gives a sense of identity, specifically their national identity.

Regarding its practice, at least 30% of the participants are reported using Indonesian exclusively in all four domains, placing the language in either the first or second position. There are two main reasons for the preference of Indonesian among the participants. The first one is the widespread use of the language, emphasizing its prevalence, as indicated by the participant in Extract 5. The second one is the ease of use of the language. A participant succinctly expresses this by stating it in Extract 6.

### Extract 6

*“Saya lebih suka pakai bahasa Indonesia, sih... lebih mudah... iya, dipahami, dan diucapkan juga.”*

“Well, I prefer the use of the Indonesian language... it’s easier... yes, to understand, and to speak it too (compared with Balinese and English languages).”

One thing that needs to be considered is the practice of a combination of Balinese and Indonesian (see Figure 2). At a glance, it implies an extensive

practice of Balinese in the home and neighborhood domains. However, when asked during the semi-structured interview, many of those participants admit that, in reality, they mainly practice Indonesian and only occasionally insert some Balinese words here and there. One of the participants has stated in Extract 7.

#### Extract 7

*“Lebih banyak Indonesianya, sih... bahasa Bali kadang kalau misalnya ada istilah tertentu.”*

“(I speak) more Indonesian, really... (I speak) Balinese sometimes when there are specific terms (that are unavailable in Indonesian).”

Thus, if both practices—a combination of Balinese and Indonesian, and Indonesian exclusively—are combined as a practice of Indonesian, the total percentages of Indonesian usage in all four domains are exceptionally high: 62% in the home domain, 100% in the neighborhood domain, 48% in the religious places’ domain, and 38% in the university domain. Extracts 6 and 7 support statements 2 and 4 in Figure 2, where more than 90% of the participants express their agreement. This perspective on the ease and comfort of using the Indonesian language aligns with a discovery in Mulyaningsih’s research (2017). She discovers that university students in Cirebon show more comfort and confidence in practicing Indonesian than in their local languages. This similarity in findings highlights a recurring theme among diverse linguistic contexts in Indonesia: the ease of using Indonesian among youth.

For English, the majority of the participants agree with statements 2 and 7, in which they like the language and also believe that It is a prestigious language to master. A prevalent rationale for this, repeatedly emphasized during the semi-structured interviews, is the belief that English opens up opportunities for future employment, as some of the participants have stated in Extracts 8, 9, and 10.

#### Extract 8

*“Bahasa Inggris? Ya, jelas penting... Kan, untuk nanti. Makanya saya belajar sekarang.”*

“English? Yes, it is important... For the future. That is the reason why I study it now.”

#### Extract 9

*“Dipakai untuk bekerja, sih... Jaman sekarang, kan, semuanya pasti perlu.”*

“(English) is used for working... Nowadays, everything requires (English).”

#### Extract 10

*“Bisa dipakai di luar negeri... Ya, kan maunya begitu.”*

“(English language) can be used abroad... Yes, I want to (work abroad).”

The participants in this research believe that the status of English as the preeminent lingua franca, which is employed across global contexts and even regarded as the greatest common language spoken universally (Nishanthi, 2018), can give them more employment opportunities in the future. However, when it comes to using the language, only fewer than 60% of the participants agree that they can express themselves best in English (see statement 2 in Figure 2). Moreover, only 39% of the participants feel comfortable using the language, as shown in their response to statement 4 in Figure 2. This sentiment translates into their daily language practice, where it is very rare for the participants to practice English exclusively in various domains. This finding, the reluctance to practice English daily as the participants feel uncomfortable doing it, aligns with previous studies where youth in various regions of Indonesia also express similar views, primarily due to a lack of confidence (Octaberlina, Mushimin, & Rofiki, 2022; Wulandari, Piscioneri, & Ikram, 2021; Yosintha, 2020; Yunus et al., 2023).

From these discussions, the relationship between language attitude and practice for Balinese and English is contradictory, in which positive attitudes towards these languages are not followed by regular or daily practices. Meanwhile, Indonesian falls into a complementary relationship, where the participants not only hold positive attitudes towards the language but also engage regularly in its practice across various domains.

Another interesting observation lies in the response to statement 3 in Figure 2, where 93% of the participants agree that they will encourage their hypothetical children to learn this language, outnumbering both Balinese (85%) and Indonesian (88%). This suggests that more participants are concerned about utilizing English in the future than Balinese or Indonesian.

Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that 82% of the participants’ first language is Indonesian, despite both of their parents or just one of them having Balinese as their first language. This finding aligns with previous studies conducted in other areas of Indonesia (Fitriati & Wardani, 2020; Paranoan, 2022), which found that the first language of youth in those areas is predominantly Indonesian, even though most of their parents speak local languages as their first language. This consistency in results across studies highlights the difference in the linguistic background of young and old generations in Indonesia. In other words, there has been a generational shift in using local languages and Indonesian as the first language, possibly due to the installation of Indonesian as the national language in 1945 (Musgrave, 2014). Combining these findings indicates that the practice of Balinese will continue to decrease and may be replaced by the practice of English in the future.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research aims to investigate the language attitudes and practices of English Literature/study program students in Denpasar toward Balinese, Indonesian, and English. Furthermore, it will determine whether the students' attitudes affect their daily language practices.

The findings reveal that the participants exhibit positive attitudes towards all three languages. Balinese is perceived as a marker of their ethnic identity and integral to cultural ceremonies and activities, Indonesian is the national language and a means of wider communication, and English is key for better employment in the future. However, in terms of language practices, Indonesian is the only language they practice regularly across all domains, while Balinese and English are rarely practiced and are only practiced in specific domains. This indicates a complementary relationship for Indonesians, where a positive language attitude aligns with positive language practice. In contrast, Balinese and English exhibit contradictory relationships, as positive attitudes towards those languages do not translate into regular language practices.

A notable generational shift in the practice of the Balinese language is also observed. While most participants' parents' first language is Balinese, the majority of the participants reported that Indonesian is their first language. Furthermore, the findings suggest a possible scenario in which English may replace Balinese in future language practices in Denpasar. This inference is drawn from the inclination of more participants to prioritize English over Balinese for their hypothetical children. This raises an important question: Will the people in Denpasar, Bali, develop sustainable multilingualism, or will there be a shift in their bilingualism, dominated by Indonesian and English, in the future?

These findings have significant implications for language policy and education in Bali. Understanding the factors driving the shift from Balinese to Indonesian, and potentially English, can help formulate strategies to preserve and maintain Balinese as an integral part of the Balinese people's ethnic identity. Educators and policymakers can benefit from these insights to promote a balanced multilingual environment that values and promotes all three languages.

However, this research has certain limitations. The focus on English Literature/Study program students in Denpasar might not represent the language attitudes and practices of all youth in Bali. Therefore, further research is needed across different areas of Bali and among various age cohorts. Such research, whether contemporaneous or in the future, can better comprehend bi/multilingualism in Bali and contribute to understanding the linguistic phenomenon and dynamics in Indonesia.

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