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The Effect of Regional Language Proficiency on The Indonesian Language Skills of Class C Geography Education Students of The 2024 Cohort

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is a highly multilingual country with over 700 regional languages coexisting alongside Indonesian as the national language. This study aimed to examine the influence of regional language mastery on Indonesian language proficiency among university students. A quantitative approach with an explanatory design was employed. The sample consisted of 16 students from Class C of the 2024 cohort in Geography Education at Universitas Negeri Medan, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires measuring regional language mastery (8 items) and Indonesian language proficiency (10 items) on a 1–5 Likert scale. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, normality test (Shapiro-Wilk), linearity test, simple linear regression, t-test, and coefficient of determination (R^2). The results showed that the average level of regional language mastery was low (mean = 24.3/40), and Indonesian language proficiency was also low (mean = 29.9/50). The hypothesis test revealed no significant influence of regional language mastery on Indonesian language proficiency ($t\text{-count} = 0.487 < t\text{-table} = 2.145$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.634 > 0.05$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.017$) indicated that regional language mastery contributed only 1.7% to Indonesian language proficiency, while 98.3% was influenced by other factors such as learning motivation, reading habits, campus environment, media exposure, and previous educational quality. This study concludes that regional language mastery is not a primary determinant of Indonesian language proficiency among these students.

Keywords: Regional Language Mastery, Indonesian Language Proficiency, Interference, Bilingualism, Geography Education Students

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a country with an extremely high level of multilingualism. There are more than 700 regional languages that live and develop within society, alongside Indonesian, which functions as the national language and language of unity (Putra & Fajar, 2022). This condition makes most Indonesians bilingual or even multilingual individuals. In linguistic contexts, this phenomenon of mastering two or more languages is known as bilingualism and multilingualism.

However, multilingual conditions do not always run smoothly without challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the phenomenon of interference, which is the insertion of elements from the first language (regional language) into the second language (Indonesian), whether at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, or lexical levels (Chaer, as cited in Nasrullah, 2021). This interference phenomenon has become a serious concern in education. Muhammad et al. (2024) proved that the use of regional languages in educational settings significantly impacts Indonesian language proficiency, particularly in the academic context at Universitas Negeri Medan. Similarly, Nasrullah (2021) showed that adolescent speech in Maros Regency, South Sulawesi, experiences morphological and syntactic interference due to the influence of the Makassarese language.

Research by Rahmatullah, Suryaningsih, & Supryanto (2025) reveals that regional languages have a dual role. On one hand, regional languages can be an obstacle because they cause linguistic interference; on the other hand, they can also serve as an effective bridge toward mastering Indonesian through translanguaging and code-switching strategies. These findings indicate that the relationship between regional languages and Indonesian is dynamic and complex.

Based on the results of a preliminary questionnaire administered to Class C students of the 2024 cohort in Geography Education, it was found that the level of regional language mastery among students is still quite high, and the majority of respondents admitted to being more comfortable using regional languages when communicating with peers from the same region. This condition is the main background for conducting this research. This study aims to: (1) describe the level of regional language mastery, (2) describe the level of Indonesian language proficiency, (3) analyze the significant influence of regional language mastery on Indonesian language proficiency, and (4) calculate the contribution of these variables among Class C students of the 2024 cohort in Geography Education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to explain the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The research was conducted in the Geography Education Study Program, Universitas Negeri Medan, during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The population consisted of 30 students from Class C of the 2024 cohort, with a sample of 16 students selected using purposive sampling. The independent variable was the level of regional language mastery (X), measured using an 8-item questionnaire, while the dependent variable was Indonesian language proficiency (Y), measured using a 10-item questionnaire. Both instruments utilized a 1–5 Likert scale. Data were collected through a Google Form-based questionnaire. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, prerequisite tests (Shapiro-Wilk normality test and linearity test), simple linear regression, t-test, and coefficient of determination (R^2).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study involved 16 students from Class C of the 2024 cohort in Geography Education as respondents. The following tables present the respondent characteristics based on region of origin, regional language mastered, and length of residence in their home region.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics by Region of Origin

Region of Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Medan	3	18.75%
Simalungun Regency	1	6.25%
North Labuhanbatu Regency	2	12.5%
Toba/Toba Samosir Regency	3	18.75%
North Tapanuli Regency	1	6.25%
Deli Serdang Regency	1	6.25%
Asahan Regency	1	6.25%
North Nias Regency	1	6.25%
Balige City	1	6.25%
Riau	2	12.5%
Total	16	100%

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics by Regional Language Mastered

Regional Language	Frequency	Percentage
Batak (Toba/Simalungun)	7	43.75%
Javanese	4	25.00%
Minangkabau	1	6.25%
Nias	1	6.25%
Indonesian (does not master a regional language)	1	6.25%
Combination of 2+ regional languages	2	12.5%

Table 3. Respondent Characteristics by Length of Residence in Home Region

Length of Residence	Frequency	Percentage
Since birth (≥ 18 years)	14	87.5%
11 - 15 years	1	6.25%
5 - 10 years	1	6.25%
Total	16	100%

1. Level of Regional Language Mastery (Variable X)

Table 4. Variable X Scores per Respondent

No.	Respondent Name	Score X	Category
1	Deswita	21	Low
2	Rini Aminarti	20	Low
3	Febiyola Dasuha	30	High
4	Annida akmaliyah	19	Low
5	Reva Leirisa	21	Low
6	Terey Citha	20	Low
7	Angraini	32	Very High
8	Aliyah Nazhifah	27	High

9	Dwi Mayanti R. M.	34	Very High
10	Theresia	28	High
11	Chelsea Siallagan	23	Low
12	Nabila Fajriyah	21	Low
13	Imel Tri U. H.	29	High
14	Muhammad Rizky	18	Low
15	Puput Gloria Zega	23	Low
16	Oka Nelli Hutagaol	36	Very High

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Variable X

Statistic	Value
N (sample size)	16
Minimum Value	18
Maximum Value	36
Mean	24.3
Standard Deviation	5.8

Table 6. Distribution of Regional Language Mastery Categories

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
32.0 - 40.0	Very High	3	18.75%
24.0 - 31.9	High	5	31.25%
16.0 - 23.9	Low	8	50.00%
8.0 - 15.9	Very Low	0	0%
Total		16	100%

The average level of regional language mastery among students was a score of 24.3, which falls into the **Low** category.

2. Indonesian Language Proficiency (Variable Y)

Table 7. Variable Y Scores per Respondent

No.	Respondent Name	Score Y	Category
1	Deswita	30	High
2	Rini Aminarti	23	Low
3	Febiyola Dasuha	27	Low
4	Annida akmaliyah	35	High
5	Reva Leirisa	27	Low
6	Terey Citha	27	Low
7	Angraini	27	Low
8	Aliyah Nazhifah	29	Low
9	Dwi Mayanti R. M.	37	High
10	Theresia	34	High
11	Chelsea Siallagan	28	Low
12	Nabila Fajriyah	34	High
13	Imel Tri U. H.	32	High
14	Muhammad Rizky	25	Low
15	Puput Gloria Zega	31	High
16	Oka Nelli Hutagaol	29	Low

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for Variable Y

Statistic	Value
N (sample size)	16
Minimum Value	23
Maximum Value	37
Mean	29.9
Standard Deviation	4.1

Table 9. Distribution of Indonesian Language Proficiency Categories

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
40.0 - 50.0	Very High	0	0%
30.0 - 39.9	High	8	50.00%
20.0 - 29.9	Low	8	50.00%
10.0 - 19.9	Very Low	0	0%
Total		16	100%

The average Indonesian language proficiency score was 29.9, which falls into the **Low** category (since $29.9 < 30$).

3. Prerequisite Analysis Tests

Table 10. Normality Test Results (Shapiro-Wilk)

Variable	Statistic	df	Sig.	Description
X (Regional Language Mastery)	0.948	16	0.468	Normal (Sig. > 0.05)
Y (Indonesian Proficiency)	0.947	16	0.442	Normal (Sig. > 0.05)

Table 11. Linearity Test Results

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Deviation from Linearity	121.28	15	5.15	0.812	0.612

4. Simple Linear Regression and Hypothesis Testing

Table 12. Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-count	Sig.
Constant (a)	25.9	4.13	6.272	0.000
X (Regional Language)	0.15	0.31	0.487	0.634

Regression Equation: $Y = 25.9 + 0.15X$

Table 13. T-test Results

Description	Value
t-count	0.487
t-table (df=14, $\alpha=0.05$)	2.145
Significance	0.634

Since t-count (0.487) < t-table (2.145) and the Sig. value (0.634) > 0.05, **H₀ is accepted and H_a is rejected**. This means there is **no significant influence** of the level of

regional language mastery on the Indonesian language proficiency of Class C students of the 2024 cohort in Geography Education.

Table 14. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Results

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.131	0.017	-0.053	4.15

The R Square (R^2) value is 0.017 or 1.7%. This indicates that the level of regional language mastery can only explain 1.7% of the variance in students' Indonesian language proficiency. The remaining 98.3% is explained by other variables or factors not examined in this study, such as student learning motivation, the academic and social environment on campus, reading and writing habits, media exposure (television, internet, social media), the quality of previous Indonesian language instruction, and students' code-switching ability.

Discussion

1. The Low Level of Students' Regional Language Mastery

The results showed that the average level of students' regional language mastery fell into the low category (mean = 24.3 out of 40). This finding is interesting because it contradicts the initial assumption that students from North Sumatra (known for the strength of their regional languages such as Batak, Malay, and Nias) would have a high level of regional language mastery. This can be explained by the phenomenon of language shift occurring among the younger generation. As found by Apriliani (2025) in Mataram, the use of Indonesian among youth reached 72%, while among children it reached 93%. Similar findings were reported by Marnita (2011) in Padang, that the young Minangkabau generation tends to use Indonesian more than their regional language.

This phenomenon is caused by several factors. First, Indonesian is perceived as the language of the educated and of modernity. Students, as part of the educated generation, tend to prefer Indonesian because it is considered more prestigious and more suitable for academic contexts. Second, the influence of social media and technology. Today's young generation is more exposed to Indonesian (and even foreign) language content compared to regional languages. Third, the multilingual campus environment. On campus, students come from various regions with different regional languages, so they prefer to use Indonesian as a *lingua franca* to communicate effectively.

2. Students' Indonesian Language Proficiency Remains Low

The results also showed that the average Indonesian language proficiency of students was in the low category (mean = 29.9 out of 50). Although 50% of respondents were in the high category and 50% in the low category, the fact that the average was still below 30 (the minimum threshold for the high category) is an important note. This finding aligns with research by Novilani et al. (2025), which found that students use three language varieties interchangeably: slang, regional languages, and standard Indonesian. In practice, the use of standard Indonesian is often limited to formal academic situations, while in daily life, they predominantly use slang and regional languages.

3. The Absence of a Significant Influence of Regional Language on Indonesian Proficiency

The main finding of this study is the absence of a significant influence between the level of regional language mastery and Indonesian language proficiency, with a

contribution of only 1.7%. This indicates that, in the context of Class C students of the 2024 cohort in Geography Education, regional language mastery is not a primary determining factor for their Indonesian language proficiency. A possible explanation is that even students with a high level of regional language mastery have been able to separate the use of regional languages for informal contexts and Indonesian for academic contexts (*separate underlying proficiency*). Conversely, students with low regional language mastery do not automatically master Indonesian well because Indonesian language proficiency is more determined by other factors such as learning motivation, reading habits, media exposure, and previous quality of education, which collectively explain 98.3% of the variance in Indonesian language ability.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The level of regional language mastery among Class C students of the 2024 cohort in Geography Education at Universitas Negeri Medan is categorized as Low, with a mean score of 24.3 (out of a maximum score of 40). Specifically, 50% of respondents fall into the low category, 31.25% into the high category, and 18.75% into the very high category.
2. The Indonesian language proficiency of the students is also categorized as Low, with a mean score of 29.9 (out of a maximum score of 50). Half of the respondents (50%) are in the high category, while the other half (50%) are in the low category. No respondents achieved the very high category.
3. There is no significant influence of the level of regional language mastery on the Indonesian language proficiency of Class C students of the 2024 cohort in Geography Education. This is evidenced by the t-count value (0.487) being lower than the t-table value (2.145), and the significance value (0.634) being greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is rejected.
4. The contribution of regional language mastery to Indonesian language proficiency is only 1.7% ($R^2 = 0.017$). The remaining 98.3% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study, such as learning motivation, reading and writing habits, the academic and social environment on campus, media exposure (television, internet, social media), the quality of previous Indonesian language instruction, and students' code-switching ability.

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