

# Integrating *Tamiang* Malay Language Preservation into Local Content Curriculum: A Case Study of SMA Negeri 1 Seruway

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## ABSTRACT

The declining ability of younger generations to understand and use regional languages is a growing concern, driven by globalization and the dominance of national languages in formal education. In Pesisir Timur Aceh, the Tamiang Malay language, which plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity and transmitting local wisdom, is increasingly marginalized. This study investigates the integration of Tamiang Malay into the local content curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway as a strategy to address this linguistic decline. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, involving classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and community leaders, and documentation analysis of teaching materials. Data were analyzed through reduction, categorization, and verification, with triangulation to ensure credibility. The findings reveal that Tamiang Malay integration is implemented contextually through the use of textbooks, modules, and digital media infused with cultural values. Teaching strategies emphasize communicative and experiential learning, including dialogue sessions, pantun (rhyme) competitions, and folk theater performances. These methods have improved students' comprehension of traditional vocabulary such as *sidu*, *leren*, *tibun/laboh*, *gemane*, *nyambat*, and *pedeh*, which were previously at risk of disappearing. This study concludes that integrating regional languages into the school curriculum, supported by culturally responsive pedagogy, is an effective approach to revitalizing local language use. The initiative at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway demonstrates the critical role of formal education in sustaining linguistic and cultural heritage in an increasingly globalized society.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Regional language is an important element in the cultural identity of a society. This language functions as a means of communication and as a forum representing the history, values, and local

wisdom passed down from generation to generation (Fitriasti, Setyaningsih, & Sulistyawati, 2024). In every word and expression of the regional language, there is a unique heritage of knowledge, customs, and life views of the local community (Mulyani et al., 2024). Therefore, the existence of regional languages is essential in shaping a community's identity, as well as maintaining the sustainability of traditions that have existed since ancient times.

In Indonesia, which is known as a country with cultural and linguistic diversity, the preservation of regional languages has a strategic role in maintaining the nation's diverse cultural identity. However, the challenges faced in this preservation are increasingly complex, especially with the emergence of the degradation of the Malay Language on the East Coast of Aceh. This degradation is triggered by various factors, including the dominance of national and foreign languages in formal education (Nasir & Subet, 2019). In addition, the social changes due to modernisation and globalisation have also shifted the use of regional languages in daily communication, reducing the opportunity for the younger generation to know and use their native languages. (Jehwae, 2019).

On the East Coast of Aceh, the Malay language plays a role as a daily communication tool and as a medium that contains local wisdom values. (Rahim & Alizuddin, 2016). This language reflects the local community's rich traditions, customs, and social values. Every expression, word, and idiom in Malay contains a deep meaning, which not only describes the way of life but also the philosophy and principles held by the people of the East Coast of Aceh (Halimatussakdiah, Sibarani, Pujiati, & Dardani, 2023). Therefore, the Malay language is important in preserving and passing on cultural heritage from generation to generation.

In recent decades, the use of Malay has declined among the younger generation. The main factor that caused this decline was the process of modernisation and globalisation, which was getting stronger. The dominance of Indonesian as the national language and the use of foreign languages in formal education put pressure on the existence of this regional language (Rahman & Riyani, 2020). The younger generation prefers to use Indonesian or foreign languages, considered more modern and relevant to the demands of the times (Muda & Hamzah, 2021). If this condition is not addressed immediately, the sustainability of the Malay language as part of the cultural identity of the people of the East Coast of Aceh will be increasingly threatened, which may ultimately result in the loss of cultural wealth inherited for centuries.

The use of education as a strategic medium to preserve and strengthen the use of Tamiang Malay in Pesisir Timur Aceh has not been optimal. Formal education in this region still focuses on the national curriculum that prioritizes mastery of Indonesian and foreign languages, which are considered more relevant for students' academic and career development (Prasetyo, Rahman, & Anis, 2024). As a result, Tamiang Malay has received less space in the learning process, so it has slowly degraded. Regional languages are often considered merely non-essential complements in education, which directly impacts the younger generation's declining ability to understand and use the language and cultural values contained therein.

The lack of integration of regional languages into the education curriculum impacts the fading of students' understanding of the traditions, customs, and philosophy of life of the Tamiang Malay community. Language is a means of communication and of inheriting local wisdom and cultural identity (Malik, 2019). Therefore, a systematic educational approach is needed, both through formal education in schools and non-formal education in the family and community environment, to revive the use of Tamiang Malay while simultaneously elevating local cultural values in the classroom (Prasetyo & Kumalasari, 2021).

In the research, Toha (2016, entitled "Retention and Phonological Innovation of Malay Protolanguage in Tamiang Malay," has made an essential contribution to revealing the phonological and historical aspects of the language's development. The study focuses on how the sound elements in Tamiang Malay maintain Malay protolanguage's characteristics and experience changes over time. Unlike previous research on historical linguistic aspects, this study takes an education-oriented approach, namely, how Tamiang Malay can be integrated into local content learning, especially in SMA Negeri 1 Seruway, and to what extent the process can prevent vocabulary degradation and language use.

Based on this, this study aims to identify and describe two main things, namely (1) what Tamiang Malay vocabulary has been degraded and has been integrated into local content learning, and (2) how the process of integrating Tamiang Malay into local content learning is implemented at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway. This study is expected to provide practical and academic contributions in preserving regional languages through education and be a reference for developing local content education policies that are more responsive to cultural wisdom and local needs.

## 2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the degradation of Tamiang Malay vocabulary and its integration into local content learning at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway, Aceh Tamiang Regency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The informants consisted of 2 local content teachers, 20 students from grades X–XII, and 5 community leaders who were knowledgeable about Tamiang Malay culture and language. They were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research objectives. Data were collected through classroom observation, in depth interviews, and documentation of teaching materials such as syllabi, textbooks, and modules.

The data analysis involved reduction, coding to identify themes, presentation, and conclusion drawing, supported by triangulation of sources and methods to ensure credibility. Member checking was also applied to validate interview findings. Ethical approval was obtained from the school authorities, and all participants gave informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and participants were informed of their rights, ensuring that the research complied with accepted ethical standards.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Profile of Tamiang Malay Community

Some scholars give different views on Malay as a cultural and political identity. Some consider the Malays to be an ethnicity, while others see them as a 'nation.' Anthony Milner, a historian, argues that Malays are more appropriately seen as a nation. According to Milner, the Malays have a history and a system of political power that shows the characteristics of an established nation, especially in the context of traditional Government in the Southeast Asian region in the past (Ali, Farhan, & Mahadhir, 2024). In this view, the Malays cover a wide area, not only covering the Malay Peninsula but also parts of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries that have Malay cultural influences.

In contrast, some other scholars, such as Bernard, consider Malay an ethnicity with special characteristics, including language, customs, and religion. In this view, Malay identity is more related to cultural and ethnic elements inherited from generation to generation (Fathi, 2023). The Malay language is an important element in this definition of ethnicity, as it serves as a means of communication and a symbol of cultural identity that distinguishes Malays from other ethnic groups in Southeast Asia.

Although there are differences of opinion among scientists, several elements are generally recognised as markers of Malay identity. Simbolon, Husin, Margaretha, & Siburian, (2023) mentioned that Malays are Muslims, use Malay in daily conversation, and follow Malay customs. These three elements are considered the main pillars that form the Malay identity, where Islam plays a central role as a unifying factor in the Malay community. Thus, Malay identity is often seen not only from the cultural side but also from the religious side, which is the basis of the social life of the Malay community.

The influence of traditional Malay Culture and power has been recorded for a long time in the history of Southeast Asia. One of the important records comes from Anderson, who visited the East Sumatra region in 1823. He noted that traditional Malay power centres were usually located along river banks and estuaries and followed the river routes that connected the territories (Kheng, 2024). The river

is the centre of economic, political, and cultural activities for the Malay community because the river is not only the main transportation route but also a symbol of power and a source of life for the Malay community. This shows that geography played an important role in developing Malay civilisation, especially in coastal areas with direct river access.

These views show the complexity of Malay identity that can be seen from various perspectives, both as a nation and as an ethnicity. On the one hand, Malay has political characteristics that allow it to be considered a nation with a wide area of influence. On the other hand, cultural elements such as language, customs, and religion remain the main determinants in defining what is referred to as Malay. This debate on Malay identity shows that the concept of Malay is dynamic and continues to evolve in line with social, political, and cultural changes in the Southeast Asian region.

In the observation of researchers while in the field, it was found that the Malay ethnic community in Aceh tends to live along the river flow, especially around the Tamiang and Kuruk rivers. This area stretches from the upstream area of the river to the estuary, which leads to the east coast of Aceh. Their existence around this river is not without reason because the river has been the centre of the life of the Malay community since the time of their ancestors. The river is not only a source of water and a transportation route but also the heart of the social, economic, and cultural activities of the Malay community in the region.

A local youth leader, Ishak (35), said that the lives of his ancestors were very dependent on these rivers, starting from the upstream area known as Tamiang Hulu to the lower part, which is often referred to as Coastal Malay. The Seruway coastal area is an integral part of the identity of the Malay people, and their lives are always connected to river and sea ecosystems. Activities such as fishing, trading, and using rivers as the main transportation route have become an integral part of Coastal Malay culture.

The identity of the Malay community in this region is also coloured by distinctive designations that reflect their lifestyle and characteristics. The Malays who live along the rivers and coasts are often called "orang many-many" or "orang kefir." The term refers to those who lead a daily life that is closely related to waters, both rivers and seas. The designation reflects their adaptation to the natural environment, which is part of their identity as a coastal society.

Adaptation to rivers and seas is about how to make a living and is related to the cultural values that develop around river life. Many of the beliefs, customs, and traditional ceremonies of the Coastal Malay community are rooted in the experience of living on the banks of rivers and coasts. For example, there are traditional traditions related to water resource management, such as rituals begging for abundant fish catches or river water purification ceremonies. These traditions show how strong the Malay people's relationship with nature reflects local wisdom passed down from generation to generation.

Thus, field observations show that the existence of rivers and seas not only shapes the Malay people's physical life but also their identity and Culture. The life around the river mirrors their way of life and values, which persist despite the changing times. The Coastal Malay community maintains This tradition and identity, even though the challenges of modernization and globalization are getting bigger.

### **3.2. Tamiang Malay Culture**

Malay Culture has values rooted in every basic aspect of the Indonesian Malay ethnicity. The term Malay, in a broad sense, refers to the ethnic groups of Aceh, Bugis, Bali, Batak, Banjar, Java, Kerinci, Lampung, Minangkabau, Makassar, Mandailing, Madura, Manado, Sunda, Toraja, and others. In a narrow sense, the term Malay concerns ethnic groups in the Riau region, the east coast of Sumatra, and extends to the eastern part of Aceh, where Malay is spoken. Since then, such values have been introduced to the community, with the term Malay being defined based on the Malay meaning (Ismail, Akhir, & Rahman, 2023). Malay is an entity that certainly has its cultural pattern and has a very distinctive concept in the eyes of people outside Malay (Hasiholan-Sidauruk, Hasiholan-Sidauruk,

Hasiholan-Sidauruk, Windreis, & Sidauruk, 2024). In the context of Malay Culture, it must be seen dynamically, considering these various definitions of Malay identity. This dynamic view of Malayness will give a holistic perspective. In this case, anthropology will look at the dynamics that today or the present that will be rooted in the past can be traced through cultural elements. One of the elements is language, a tool of customs and tradition as a form of traditional knowledge. Through this local (regional) language, Malay cultural reconstruction will be realised as the capital for the Malay identity.

Anthropology discusses the Culture of all tribal components during this earth event. Culture in the plural sense is universally interpreted as the creation, taste and karst in humans. So, it can be said that Culture for humans is an instrument that is inherent in their life patterns because humans are the ones who create Culture (Murphy, 2016). This cultural form will determine the pattern of thought, way of thinking, action, and material Culture's results (Koentjaraningrat, 2002; Sutrisno, Akob, Navia, Nuraini, & Suwardi, 2020). The same also happened to the Malay tribes in the Aceh Tamiang area, especially in the Seruway District. The characteristic form of life pattern is different from that of other tribes in Aceh, even though it is in the territory of Aceh Province. They have a different government organisational order from those of other Aceh regions. The culture of dance, carving, poetry performances, and ritual traditions have distinctiveness and are similar to Malay in Sumatra. This was conveyed by a traditional leader Datuk Gelung (57) that "*Kmi ne ughang Melayu Tamiang punye budaye Ngan susonan pemerintah kampong, macam sandiwara, kerje, kaum sedare bede dengan ughang Aceh Nang laen*". Meaning that we Seruway Malays have a cultural order and village government structure, such as in performing arts, livelihoods, kinship relationships are different from other Acehs.

In the sociological dictionary of degradation, degradation is defined as a setback (Conerly, Holmes, & Tamang, 2024). From the results in the field, it is stated that Malay culture has talents in daily life. Language as a means of communication has a very important role because from birth to adulthood, speech or speech becomes a tool for symbols in expressing a desire. Language is also one part of the cultural elements owned by each ethnic group. Culture will gradually weaken and even disappear if there is no transfer from generation to generation. In line with this, Koentjaraningkat said that culture is the entire system of ideas, actions and works of human beings in the context of community life that is made human property by learning (Sutrisno, Suwardi, Navia, Baihaqi, & Fadhillah, 2021).

### 3.3. Tamiang Malay Vocabulary

In the sociological dictionary of degradation, degradation is defined as a setback (Conerly et al., 2024). From the results in the field, it is stated that Malay culture has talents in daily life. Language as a means of communication has a very important role because from birth to adulthood, speech becomes a tool for symbols in expressing a desire. Language is also one part of the cultural elements owned by each ethnic group. Culture will gradually weaken and even disappear if there is no transfer from generation to generation. In line with that, Koentjaraningkat said that culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and works of human beings in the context of community life, which is made human property by learning (Yuhansil, 2019).

**Table 1.** Old and New Vocabulary in Tamiang Malay Ethnic Group

Old Malay	Born in the 90s	New Language
<i>sidu</i>	Do not know	<i>sendok</i>
<i>leren</i>	Do not know	<i>sepeda</i>
<i>kelambe</i>	Do not know	<i>kelapa</i>
<i>Tibun/laboh</i>	Do not know	<i>jatuh</i>
<i>gemane</i>	Do not know	<i>bagaimana</i>
<i>nyambat</i>	Know a little	<i>Gotong-royong (rewang)</i>
<i>teek</i>	Know a little	<i>malas</i>
<i>pedeh</i>	Know a little	<i>sakit</i>
<i>ile</i>	Do not know	<i>berangkat ke laot</i>

The data presented in Table 1 illustrate the extent of vocabulary shift among the younger generation of the Tamiang Malay ethnic group. Words that were once commonly used in daily communication are now either unknown or partially recognized, particularly by those born in the 1990s and later. This shift reflects not only a decline in linguistic competence but also a gradual loss of cultural expressions embedded in the vocabulary. The reduced familiarity with these terms highlights how modernization and exposure to dominant languages, such as Indonesian, have contributed to weakening the role of Tamiang Malay in everyday interactions. Consequently, the erosion of vocabulary is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also signals a cultural setback that threatens the continuity of local identity and traditional knowledge.

From the table above, it can be seen that there are several words in the Malay language Seruway that have experienced degradation or a shift in speech. This suggests that some local vocabulary is starting to disappear or that the way it is pronounced has changed among the public. According to the initiator of Malay culture, Seruway, this degradation is caused by the penetration of modern technology that opens up free access to information. The presence of technology has made communication spaces wider and global, so local languages are often considered outdated or archaic by the younger generation. As a result, the Seruway Malay language, which used to be a local cultural identity, began to lose its popularity, especially among the millennial generation born in the 1990s. They tend to no longer know or use the local language vocabulary that was once commonly used by their ancestors.

However, there are still some coastal villages that maintain the use of the local Malay language, Seruway, very strongly. For example, Pusong Kapal Village has a local language proficiency rate of up to 99 per cent, while Geelong and Sungai Kuruk I Villages (SK 1) reach around 98 per cent. Sungai Kuruk II (SK 2) and Sungai Kuruk III (SK 3) villages also show a high local language proficiency rate, which is around 98-99 per cent. These villages are located in coastal areas, which allows them to stay connected to local traditions and culture despite facing the tide of modernisation. The use of local languages in these coastal villages is still very much alive, which shows the commitment of the local community to maintaining the language as part of their cultural identity.

However, different conditions occur in villages that are farther from the coast or are in urban areas and plantations. Villages such as Pekan Seruway, Tangsi Lama, Gedung Biara, Binjai, and Pantai Balai only command about 60 per cent of the local Malay language of Seruway. Meanwhile, villages in plantation areas such as Sidodadi, Tanah Merah, and Block 11 are even lower, with local language proficiency only around 20-25 per cent. The low level of local language mastery in these villages is caused by the polarisation of the community due to the arrival of ethnic immigrants such as Javanese, Batak, Karo, and Banjar. Intense social interaction with these ethnicities affects the use of local languages, so Seruway Malay tends to be replaced by other languages that are more dominant in the region. This phenomenon shows that urbanisation and cultural mixing also accelerate the loss of local languages in certain areas.

Meanwhile, the life of the Seruway Malay community in Langsa City and villages in East Aceh Regency shows a higher level of language degradation compared to other coastal areas. Based on the statement of Ukok (48), a resident of Gampong Java, Langsa City, the use of Indonesian has become more dominant in daily life. This phenomenon occurs because the surrounding environment does not support the use of local Malay, both in the public sphere and in social interaction. This unsupportive environmental factor causes the Seruway Malay language to be increasingly marginalised, especially among the younger generation, who are more often exposed to the Indonesian language through the media and formal education.

The role of parents as the main speakers of the Malay language in the family is dysfunctional, which means that they fail to preserve the language in the household environment. Many parents prefer to use Indonesian for practical reasons or because they feel that the language is more suitable for their children's educational demands. This condition causes children not to get enough opportunities to hear and speak Seruway Malay from an early age, so they grow up with limitations in mastering the local

language. The loss of the role of parents as guardians of this language tradition is one of the main factors that accelerate the degradation of the Malay language in urban areas such as Langsa City.

A similar condition also occurs in East Aceh Regency, where Seruway Malay is increasingly rarely used in daily communication. Urbanisation and social change factors in the region have also put pressure on the sustainability of the Malay language. People in this region prefer to use Indonesian, especially in official and educational contexts, because it is considered more prestigious and relevant to modern life. This mindset causes the younger generation to move away from the local language, which in turn affects the sustainability of the traditions and local wisdom inherited through the language. Thus, the degradation of the Malay language in this region not only threatens the cultural identity of the community but also affects the valuable cultural heritage for future generations.

### **3.4. Integration of Tamiang Malay Language Through Local Content Learning at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway**

To preserve regional languages, especially Tamiang Malay, the Aceh Government, through Aceh Governor Regulation Number 7 of 2022, has stipulated the Aceh Local Content Curriculum as part of the high school and vocational school education curriculum. This regulation allows schools to develop learning based on culture and local wisdom, including teaching local languages. At SMA Negeri 1 Seruway, implementing this policy is a strategic step in integrating Tamiang Malay into formal education to prevent language degradation and strengthen the cultural identity of the local community.

The planning of Tamiang Malay language learning at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway begins with preparing a local content program in line with Aceh Governor Regulation Number 7 of 2022. The school stipulates Tamiang Malay as one of the local content subjects taught as a complement to the national curriculum. In the planning stage, coordination was carried out with the Aceh Education Office, Tamiang Malay traditional and cultural figures, and local language and history teachers to prepare teaching materials for student needs.

The designed curriculum includes linguistic and cultural aspects, such as the structure of the Tamiang Malay language, vocabulary, grammar, and proverbs, as well as oral literature such as pantun and saga. Some typical Tamiang Malay vocabulary that is being introduced in learning includes *Sidu*, *Leren*, *Kelambe*, *Tibun/Laboh*, *Gemane*, *Nyambat*, *Pedeh*, and *Ile*. Apart from that, learning is also linked to local wisdom values so that students not only understand the language but also know the culture, customs, and history of Tamiang Malays. This learning material is prepared in the form of textbooks, modules, and digital media so that it can be delivered in an interesting and contextual manner according to current developments.

Tamiang Malay is taught through various interactive and practice-based methods in implementing learning. The teachers use a communicative approach, where students are invited to speak, write, and understand Malay Tamiang texts in everyday life. Extracurricular activities, such as art studios, pantun reading competitions, and Malay folk theater performances, are also used to strengthen students' language skills naturally.

For example, in one of the learning sessions, students are invited to have a dialogue using Tamiang Malay. This learning process is supported by periodic evaluations through project assignments, oral exams, and essay writing in Tamiang Malay. In addition, students are also invited to conduct small research related to the use of Malay in their community, so that learning not only takes place in the classroom but also interacts directly with the community.

Based on interviews and observations of teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway, most teachers stated that integrating Tamiang Malay in local content learning still faces several challenges, such as the lack of standard teaching materials and the lack of training for teachers in teaching regional languages. Several teachers also said that students tend to be more comfortable using Indonesian in everyday interactions, so a more innovative approach is needed to make them more interested in using Tamiang Malay.

The results of interviews with students of SMA Negeri 1 Seruway revealed that they understand Tamiang Malay, but only a few actively use it in daily communication. Most students consider Tamiang Malay less relevant to their academic and professional needs, so the motivation to learn it is still low. However, after participating in the local content program, students gained a better understanding of *Tamiang* Malay vocabulary and grammar and appreciated their cultural heritage.

The integration of *Tamiang* Malay into local content learning at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway is also consistent with findings from previous studies that highlight the strategic role of education in preserving local languages and cultural identity. Malik (2019) emphasized that language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values and local wisdom, while Rahman and Riyani (2020) noted that community-based efforts are crucial in sustaining cultural heritage in Aceh Tamiang. Similarly, Prasetyo and Kumalasari (2021) demonstrated that incorporating local traditions into education strengthens students' understanding of cultural values and history. These studies reinforce the importance of integrating regional languages into formal education, supporting the argument that the contextual and practice-based approaches applied at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway, such as dialogues, pantun competitions, and folk theater, are effective strategies for revitalizing Tamiang Malay while simultaneously enhancing students' cultural appreciation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Integrating the Tamiang Malay language in local content learning at SMA Negeri 1 Seruway is a strategic step in conserving regional languages in line with the implementation of Aceh Governor Regulation Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Local Content Curriculum. The learning process is contextually designed using textbooks, modules, and digital media linked to local cultural values. The approach is communicative and practice-based, including dialogue, pantun competitions, and folk theatre, which have been proven to improve students' understanding and language skills. Several typical Tamiang Malay vocabularies, such as *sidu*, *leren*, *kelambe*, *tibun/laboh*, *gemane*, *nyambat*, *pedeh*, and *ile*, have begun integrating into the teaching materials. Implementing this program still faces several obstacles, including the lack of standardized teaching materials, inadequate teacher training, and low student motivation in using regional languages. Therefore, a more innovative and collaborative approach is needed in designing learning, along with stronger policy support from the local government through resource allocation, curriculum development, and ongoing teacher training. This study highlights the significance of local content in preserving language and culture within the education system, as well as a policy instrument that fosters regional cultural identity through formal channels. The limitations of this study lie in its scope, which only covers one school, namely SMA Negeri 1 Seruway; therefore, the generalizability of the findings to other school contexts is still limited. In addition, this study has not conducted an in-depth analysis of the involvement of other educational actors, such as supervisors and curriculum policymakers. Therefore, further research is recommended in the future to cover more schools and regions, and to examine the long-term impact of local content learning on students' attitudes and language competencies.

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