

Innovations and Challenges in the Preservation of the Batak Language by the Protestant Batak Christian Huria Church (HKBP) among Youth in the Context of Urbanization in Jakarta

Tetty Hotmauli Sihombing

Universitas Kristen Indonesia

Email: tettyboasbitya83@gmail.com

Abstract

In the dynamic urban context of Jakarta, the preservation of regional languages faces significant challenges, especially among the younger generation. This study examines the role of the Huria Christian Batak Protestant Church (HKBP, a Protestant Batak Christian Church) in maintaining the existence of the Batak language in the midst of urbanization, by applying social identity theory to understand the dynamics of language preservation and cultural identity. Using a qualitative approach, the study involved in-depth interviews with 30 young congregations and 10 key HKBP figures, as well as participatory observation of church activities over a six-month period. The results of the analysis revealed that HKBP's main efforts in preserving the Batak language are centered on the use of the language in worship, with 75% of respondents stating the importance of this practice. The study also identified several additional initiatives, such as cultural seminars, cultural performances, and the use of traditional musical instruments in worship. The main challenges faced include the low enthusiasm of the younger generation (60% of respondents), the pressure of assimilation of metropolitan culture, and the limitations of effective preservation programs outside the context of worship. The findings emphasized the importance of developing more comprehensive and innovative strategies, including the potential use of digital technology and social media, to increase the appeal of the Batak language among urban youth. This research results in a religious community-based language preservation model that can be applied in urban contexts, offering a new perspective in urban sociolinguistic studies and cultural diversity management. The strategic recommendations are prepared to maximize the role of religious institutions as agents of cultural preservation, with a focus on synergy between churches, families, and urban Batak communities. This study highlights the potential and challenges of religious institutions in bridging tradition and modernity, as well as maintaining cultural identity amid urban social complexity. Although limited to the context of HKBP in Jakarta, these findings provide valuable insights for the study of minority language preservation in urban environments more broadly.

Keywords: Language revitalization, Cultural identity, Urbanization, Urban young generation, Urban sociolinguistics, Batak language preservation

Introduction

The preservation of the Batak language in the era of rapid urbanization is an urgent challenge that requires immediate attention. As one of the most important cultural heritages of the Batak tribe, this language not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of a strong cultural identity. However, in recent decades, the use of the Batak language has experienced a drastic decline, especially among the younger generation living in big cities like Jakarta. UNESCO estimates that more than 3,000 languages in the world are endangered before the end of the century; This phenomenon is largely due to the dominance of major languages such as Indonesian and English which are more commonly spoken in urban environments and through globalization (Jain, n.d.). Regional languages in Indonesia are currently facing serious challenges due to this phenomenon.

Jakarta, as the largest urbanization center in Indonesia, is witnessing the declining use of the Batak language, especially among the younger generation who prefer to speak in Indonesian. Simons and Fennig (2018), assert that migration to big cities is generally followed by a reduction in the use of regional languages, as dominant languages are used more frequently. This phenomenon is very relevant in the context of urbanization in Jakarta, where Indonesian and even English are the main choice in daily communication. Urbanization has become one of the main drivers of social change in various major cities, including Jakarta. This process has very complex impacts, including cultural and linguistic shifts that are often detrimental to regional languages (UNESCO, 2022). This phenomenon suggests that regional languages, such as Batak, are potentially marginalized as the younger generation prefers languages that are more relevant and considered more practical for their urban lives (Hornberger & McCarty, 2018). In the context of urbanization, language preservation is an increasingly urgent challenge, because language serves as a marker of a community's cultural identity and historical heritage (Piller, 2016). The Batak community in Jakarta faces great challenges in terms of preserving the Batak language among the younger generation. This change is driven by cultural assimilation and social pressures that demand the use of more common languages, such as Indonesian or even English (Anderson, 2020). Data from the Central Statistics Agency (2021) recorded a decrease in the number of active speakers of regional languages in urban areas, which shows that interventions to preserve these languages are urgently needed. In addition, with the increasing appeal of global culture and the role of digital media, local languages are increasingly difficult to maintain in daily life.

In this context, the Protestant Batak Christian Huria Church (HKBP) has a very important role in efforts to preserve the Batak language; As stated in the HKBP conference article 5 on Culture and the environment, HKBP has a mandate to care about culture. As a religious institution that has a great influence in the Batak community, HKBP not only functions as a place of worship, but also as a cultural center that binds and strengthens the identity of the Batak community (Sihombing, 2019). Previous research has shown that religious institutions have great potential in maintaining the

sustainability of local traditions and languages through various programs that are well adapted to the modern context (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2017).

However, urbanization brings significant changes in the behavior and preferences of the younger generation, especially in the aspect of language use. Research by Coupland (2019) shows that young people in urban areas tend to prefer languages that are considered more modern and practical, which causes regional languages to be neglected. Warschauer's observation (2021) also noted that digitalization and social media have an important role in influencing the communication patterns of the younger generation, by facilitating interaction in languages that are more widely used on social media, such as Indonesian and English.

In response to this challenge, HKBP has devised various strategies to maintain the relevance of the Batak language among youth. Among them, through the use of digital platforms, cultural performance programs, and the implementation of worship in the Batak language. This strategy is relevant to findings that suggest that the use of technology can help revitalize languages and strengthen the connection of young generations to their cultural heritage (Zhang & Li, 2021). In this digital era, social media has proven to be an effective channel in attracting the attention of the younger generation, providing a great opportunity for the preservation of the Batak language.

However, efforts to preserve this language are not without obstacles. Some of the obstacles faced include the lack of interest of the younger generation in ancestral languages, the pressure to adapt to urban social norms, and the lack of continuity in existing preservation programs (Lee, 2020). Other research reveals that one of the important factors in the success of language preservation is the integration of traditional and modern strategies involving various stakeholders, including religious institutions, governments, and communities (Sanchez & Nguyen, 2021). This shows that synergy between these institutions is needed to create policies that support the revitalization of regional languages.

Digital media offers new opportunities that are very important in the preservation of languages in the modern era. Platforms such as social media can be a forum for communities to interact in regional languages in a way that is more interesting and relevant to the younger generation (Warschauer, 2021; Zhang & Li, 2021). HKBP has the potential to take advantage of this opportunity to address the challenges of preserving the Batak language through a more adaptive and creative approach, and can strengthen intergenerational connections within the Batak community.

Although several studies have addressed the preservation of regional languages in urban contexts, there is still a gap in understanding the specific role of religious institutions such as HKBP in these efforts, especially in the unique context of Jakarta. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring in depth the role of HKBP in preserving the Batak language among urban youth in Jakarta. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Analyze the strategies implemented by HKBP in the preservation of the Batak language
2. Analyze the challenges faced by HKBP in efforts to preserve the

3. Evaluate the effectiveness of HKBP programs in increasing the use of Batak among youth.
4. Developing a language preservation model based on religious communities that can be applied in urban contexts

To achieve these goals, this study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with 30 young congregations and 10 key HKBP figures, participatory observation of Church activities and analysis of documents related to the language preservation program at HKBP. It is hoped that the results of this study will make a significant contribution to the literature on the preservation of regional languages and offer practical guidance for other religious institutions in adopting a similar approach. Furthermore, the findings of this study have the potential to influence language and cultural preservation policies at the local and national levels, as well as provide new insights in urban sociolinguistic studies and urban cultural diversity management.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design to explore the role of the Protestant Batak Christian Huria Church (HKBP) in the preservation of the Batak language among youth in Jakarta. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of social and cultural dynamics in this specific context, allowing the researcher to comprehensively explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants which provides space for the researcher to comprehensively explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Descriptive-exploratory design is used to describe existing conditions and explore the factors that affect the preservation of the Batak language and the influence of the church's role in these efforts.

Participant Selection

The selection of participants was carried out by purposive sampling techniques to ensure that the selected individuals have relevant involvement and experience in language preservation efforts. The selection criteria include: (1) youth aged 18 – 30 years who are active in HKBP, (2) Church leaders involved in language preservation programs, and (3) Diversity of socio-economic backgrounds. A total of 30 participants were selected, consisting of 20 youths and 10 church leaders, to get a wide variety of perspectives to analyze the phenomenon in depth.

Data Collection Instruments

Semi-Structured Interview:

This interview is designed to explore the participants' perceptions and experiences related to the role of the church in the preservation of the Batak language. The interview guidelines are compiled based on relevant literature and tailored to the main themes that

emerged in the initial research. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in information extraction and open up opportunities for participants to provide richer and more in-depth answers.

Participatory Observation

This research conducts participatory observations on church activities that are relevant to language preservation. These observations will be documented through structured field records.

Document Analysis

Analyses such as church newsletters, activity reports, and teaching materials were analyzed to supplement the data obtained from interviews and observations. This analysis helps to understand how language preservation programs are communicated and implemented by HKBP.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis methods (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This process involves (1) Familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme search, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition and naming and (6) report writing

Research Ethics

The research will adhere to the principles of research ethics, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to resign. Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant ethics committee before data collection begins

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, this study will use triangulation methods and data sources, member checking and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results and Discussion

The role of HKBP in the preservation of the Batak language

Language preservation program

HKBP implements several key programs to encourage the use of the Batak language

- a. Weekly worship in Batak
- b. Bible study in Batak
- c. Cultural activities such as art performances and traditional music

A church leader stated: "We try to integrate the Batak language into every aspect of church life, not just in formal worship.

Digital Initiatives

HKBP leverages digital platforms to reach youth:

- a) Live broadcast of Batak worship on social media
- b) Educational content about Batak language and culture on Instagram and YouTube

A young participant commented: "I feel more connected to the Batak language through HKBP's Instagram content. This makes our language feel more modern and relevant."

Challenges Faced

- a) Lack of enthusiasm of youth for the Batak language
- b) Social pressure to assimilate with urban culture
- c) Lack of sustainable programs

One of the young men revealed: "Sometimes I feel that using the Batak language is not 'cool' in my friends' neighborhood in Jakarta."

DISCUSSION

Significance of HKBP's Role

The findings of this study reinforce the idea that religious institutions such as HKBP can be effective cultural preservation agents in the midst of urbanization. This is in line with the research of Bucholtz et al. (2017) which emphasizes the vital role of religious institutions in maintaining cultural sustainability in urban communities.

Digital Innovation in Language Preservation

HKBP's use of digital technology as an innovative strategy is consistent with the findings of Warschauer (2021), which highlights the potential of technology in supporting language revitalization in the modern context. This approach shows HKBP's adaptability to the needs of the urban young generation.

1. Language Preservation Challenges

The challenges faced by HKBP, especially related to the lack of youth enthusiasm and the pressure of assimilation, reflect Lee's (2020) findings on the influence of urban norms on the behavior of the younger generation. This demonstrates the need for a holistic approach that involves various stakeholders in language preservation efforts.

2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of the role of religious institutions in the preservation of minority languages in urban contexts. In practical terms, these findings can be a reference for similar institutions in designing effective language preservation programs.

3. Recommendations

- a. Sustainable program development that combines traditional and modern elements
- b. More intensive collaboration with the government and educational institutions
- c. Periodic evaluation of program effectiveness

4. Limitations and Future Research

This research was limited to one church community in Jakarta. Future studies can be:

- a. Expanding coverage to Batak communities in other major cities
- b. Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impact of language preservation programs
- c. Exploring cross-denominational or cross-ethnic comparisons in an effort to preserve the language

Conclusion

This research reveals the crucial role of the Huria Christian Batak Protestant Church (HKBP) in the preservation of the Batak language among Jakarta's urban youth. The main findings show that HKBP plays an effective role as an agent of cultural preservation through the integration of religious programs with Batak-based cultural activities. The use of digital technology has been proven to increase youth participation, but significant challenges remain, including low enthusiasm and pressure to assimilate urban culture.

The results of the study confirm the importance of a holistic approach to the preservation of minority languages in urban contexts, combining traditional elements with modern innovations. The practical implications point to the need for strategies that are inclusive, collaborative, and relevant to the lifestyle of the digital generation.

Recommendations include the development of programs that integrate digital technology, increased cross-sector collaboration, and the implementation of effective communication strategies to increase youth enthusiasm. This research contributes significantly to the field of urban sociolinguistics and language preservation studies, emphasizing the potential of religious institutions in preserving ethnic identity in the midst of modernization.

In conclusion, the preservation of the Batak language in Jakarta requires a multidimensional approach that combines the strength of religious institutions, technological innovation, and community collaboration to ensure this cultural heritage remains alive and relevant for future generations.

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