Retta language revitalization learning materials in Alor Regency

Bahan pembelajaran revitalisasi bahasa Retta di Kabupaten Alor

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KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

learning materials, language revitalization, local language, Retta language

Currently there are various learning materials that are able to motivate younger generations in learning local and indigenous languages. One example is the creation of songs in Retta language revitalization program in Alor Regency. In this regard, this study seeks to explain the process of revitalizing the Retta language and reviewing the effectiveness of revitalizing the Retta language through local language songs as learning materials. This is important because language and culture transmission through songs is a novelty in a language revitalization program. The research method uses a community—based language revitalization model and a descriptive qualitative approach with observational method from the analysis of Retta language songs in the language revitalization program. As a result, the Retta language revitalization in the South Ternate Village using local language songs is effective in increasing the interest of young speakers in the local language. This is based on the impact felt by the language revitalization participants as young speakers and Retta speakers in general. Besides that, the Retta language revitalization program was also able to raise public and local government awareness with evidence of the signing of a memorandum of understanding to preserve the Retta language in the future. Thus, the Retta language revitalization program using local language songs can continue to be developed by the local government.

KATA KUNCI ABSTRAK

bahan pembelajaran, revitalisasi bahasa, bahasa daerah, bahasa Retta

Ada banyak bahan pembelajaran yang dapat menjadi pendukung untuk meningkatkan motivasi penutur muda dalam belajar bahasa daerah. Salah satu contohnya adalah pembuatan lagu berbahasa daerah dalam program revitalisasi bahasa Retta di Kabupaten Alor. Sehubungan dengan hal tersebut, penelitian ini berusaha menjelaskan proses revitalisasi bahasa Retta dan meninjau keberhasilan bentuk revitalisasi bahasa melalui lagu berbahasa daerah sebagai bahan pembelajaran. Hal ini disebabkan transmisi bahasa dan budaya melalui lagu termasuk hal baru dalam program revitalisasi bahasa. Metode penelitian menggunakan model revitalisasi bahasa berbasis komunitas dan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode observasi dari analisis lagu berbahasa Retta dalam program revitalisasi bahasa. Hasilnya, revitalisasi bahasa Retta di Desa Ternate Selatan dengan menggunakan lagu berbahasa daerah efektif meningkatkan minat generasi muda terhadap bahasa daerah. Hal ini berdasarkan dampak yang dirasakan oleh peserta revitalisasi bahasa sebagai penutur muda dan penutur bahasa Retta secara umum. Selain itu, program revitalisasi bahasa Retta juga mampu meningkatkan kesadaran masyarakat dan pemerintah daerah dengan bukti penan- datanganan nota kesepakatan untuk melestarikan bahasa Retta di masa depan sehingga program dapat terus dikembangkan oleh pemerintah daerah setempat.

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Introduction

Currently there are various learning materials that are able to motivate younger generations in learning local and indigenous languages. One example is the creation of a song in an indigenous language during the implementation of Retta language revitalization program in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The Retta language revitalization program is a language revitalization program initiated by the Language Development and Cultivation under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Technology of Indonesia. The project is based on the condition of the Retta language. Since it is classified as an endangered language, a need to preserve the language through revitalization efforts is desperately needed (Lauder & Kurniawati, 2019). Ebenhard et al. (2021) also revealed a similar condition of the Retta language, which falls into the endangered category (Ebenhard et al., 2021). In addition, Grimes (2000) in his book “Ethnologue: Languages of the world” has classified the Retta language as endangered since more than 20 years ago (Grimes, 2000).

Even though the language is endangered, both Retta language speakers and the local government officials have a relatively positive attitude regarding the issue. This can be seen from the findings of research results from Kurniawati (2016). It shows that speakers of Retta language have a positive attitude towards their local language. This is because the process of preserving the Retta language between generations is still carried out in daily communication even though some other speakers have started to leave it altogether (Kurniawati, 2016). Most of the speakers of Retta language are the elderly, meanwhile the youngsters have started to abandon it. In addition, government officials also give their full support towards the preservation efforts of the Retta language. These two factors can be the main propelling idea of preserving the Retta language through various language revitalization efforts. The emphasis of this language revitalization program is to find out how songs in Retta language can persuade youngsters to speak the language and the impact to the local government.

Therefore, this study seeks to discover the process of revitalizing the Retta language in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. In addition, this study also reviews the effectiveness of revitalizing the Retta language by using songs written in the local language and signing a “memorandum of understanding” of language revitalization program with the local government. Not only that, this research also seeks to explore the local content of Retta language songs which are used as learning material in the language revitalization framework. What is meant by local content in Retta language songs is local knowledge in Retta culture which is transmitted into the local songs. For example, point of views on life, natural characteristics, and so on.

This is important to be able to preserve the Retta language and culture to the youngsters. This is because songs written in local language can be used as a material of language and culture learning. The young Retta speakers use the language as a group identity of the Retta community, which is different from other communities in Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province.

This is supported by the fact that local languages contain three important inherent elements, which are traditions, norms, and local identity (Olko & Sallabank, 2021). In this way, language learning can also be interpreted as cultural learning. These two

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elements can be implemented in songs in local languages that contain group identity. Making songs in the Retta language in this language revitalization program is newly-discovered and different from other revitalization efforts in other languages. This is due to the Retta language revitalization focusing on making local language songs to be able to attract interest in learning from young speakers. This is because Retta language revitalization program is aimed to attract potential young speakers and grows their interest in speaking and preserving the language.

Several language revitalization programs in Indonesia are rarely associated with songs. This can be seen from various researches from Wahyuni (2017), Harto (2016), Nasution (2021), Sugita and Pastika (2022). Wahyuni (2017) in her research were focusing on the Menongkah Festival as a Duanu’s language and culture revitalization effort in Indragiri Hilir Regency, Riau Province. Harto (2016) discusses about dissemination of language revitalization through an animation video inspired by the Relief of Lalita Vistara Borobudur. Nasution’s (2021) study is to revitalize the Angkola—Mandailing language through translating elementary school books in Indonesian into Angkola—Mandailing by incorporating its cultural elements. Lastly, the research of Sugita and Pastika (2022) is to revitalize the Balinese language through “Drama Gong” performing arts. The research shows that Drama Gong is a medium that is quite effective in maintaining and spreading the Balinese language to the public. The focus of language revitalization was the drama gong performance.

The effort to revitalize the language through songs have already been implemented in different ways in Guatemala. According to Barrett (2016), Mayan language is introduced to children through music and combines lessons in hip hop such as rapping, break-dancing, etc. This has had a major impact on the understanding of local identity as well as providing a new movement in acculturating traditional and contemporary culture.

In addition, the language revitalization program using songs can be seen from the research by Budiono (2023). The goal of the research is the revitalization of Konjonese Language of Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi using songs written in the language. Some of these Konjonese songs becomes a media for expression by the youngsters learning the local language. Thus, a cultural identity of Konjo starts to nurture.

Furthermore, another study that resembles this study through signing a written agreement with the local government is the research by Budiono dan Harimansyah (2023) in revitalizing the Tobati language in Jayapura City, Papua Province. The research shows that the local government felt involved and encouraged to preserve the Tobati language by signing a written agreement with them. Until this day, the efforts to preserve the Tobati language still continue.

These similarities do not render the study obsolete due to the fact that it has a different language as the research object. Apart from that, the novelty is also evident from the combination of two aspects, namely the creation of local language songs and the signing of a memorandum of understanding with local government. This is important because local government have responsibility to preserve local languages in their areas in accordance with Regulation of the Ministry of Home Affairs Number 40 of 2007 concerning Guidelines for Regional Heads in the Preservation and Development of State and Local Languages.
Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative research method. This is due to the fact that the research is about explaining a social phenomenon rather than providing statistical calculations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The method mainly used is observation so that the context of songs written in local languages can be easily recognized. This is in line with the analysis of this study data which is divided into three types, namely (1) examining the effectiveness of language revitalization through songs, (2) key performance indicator of Retta language revitalization, and (3) exploring cultural elements from songs written in local language. In terms of the language revitalization process, the Retta language revitalization model uses a community—based approach. This is consistent with Retta’s language revitalization model which emphasizes mastery of local language through communities, such as local art community, traditional arts community, or the community of local language activists (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). Community-based language revitalization model for Retta language is more suitable than school-based and family-based language revitalization model cannot be applied with this language.

The participants for this study were 60 young speakers of the Retta language with 10-15 years of age. The implementation of the program can be divided into three stages, which are as follows: (1) preliminary survey and team coordination, (2) learning stage, (3) performance stage. In addition, Retta language revitalization program in South Ternate Village has produced multiple songs in the local language and a signed written agreement with the local government as a research instrument. The program is based on Hinton and Hale (2001). The results will then be analyzed for its cultural identity in order to be nurtured and further recognized.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the discussion starts with explaining the stage of the Retta language revitalization program in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Then, we shall review the effectiveness of the program by using songs as a learning material. Next, we shall extract the cultural elements inside the songs to identify any cultural identity. This is related to the program because a language contains certain cultural elements that formed a cultural identity; elements that make the language different from others. This is in line with Hinton et al. (2018) who believes that language loss is a part of cultural loss. In this case, Retta language revitalization program focuses on the contribution of the speakers that aimed to preserve their own indigenous language. The researchers act only as facilitators that contribute and develop ideas regarding the efforts towards language preservation. Whether or not a language become endangered or stable is solely depends on the efforts by the speakers. The speakers contribution in language revitalization here is inseparable from the context or concept of the speech about the fears of language change, language shift, and language extinction (Arka, 2011). This makes it necessary to have language revitalization efforts that focuses on strengthening community and promoting willful commitment. This is based on the key performance indicators in strong and committed community (Wiltshire et al., 2022). All of these discussions provide a complete description
of the Retta language revitalization implementation through local language songs as learning material.

**Retta language revitalization**

Ministry of Education and Culture (2018) divided language revitalization model into three types, namely family, school, and community—based language revitalization models (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). This is different from Hinton (2001) which divided language revitalization model into five types, namely (1) school—based programs, (2) children’s activity outside school (e.g., extracurricular programs), (3) adult language programs, (4) documentation and materials development, and (5) home—based programs. Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) updated the local language revitalization policy by dividing it into three types, namely type A, B, and C. Each type has its own criteria and shown as follows.

Type A has to fulfill the following criteria: (1) the language has to be in a safe-level category, (2) the language must have a good number of active speakers, and (3) the language must be used as major or dominant languages for communication in the communities. Languages that fall into these characteristics include Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, so on. For Type A, approaches for revitalization are divided into two ways: (1) transmission of languages through formal learning at schools and (2) adoption of integrated, contextual, and creative learning, focusing on learners’ interest (learner-centered learning system).

Type B has to fulfill the following criteria, such as (1) the language has to be in a vulnerable-level category, (2) the language have a fairly good number of speakers, and (3) the language co-exist and compete with other local languages. Languages that fall into these characteristics include languages in North Sumatra, South Sulawesi, West Nusa Tenggara Province, and so on. For Type B, approaches for revitalization are divided into two ways: (1) in addition of formal learning, transmission of languages will be emphasized through communities and (2) strong involvement of local language activists.

Type C has to fulfill the following criteria, such as (1)) the language has to be in a vulnerable, endangered, and critical-level category (2) have small number of native speakers with limited domain of usage. Languages that fall into these characteristics include languages in Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, and Papua Province. For Type C, approaches for revitalization are divided into two ways: (1) transmission of languages by community-based learning and (2) learning can take place at community activity centers such as places of religious places, village offices, or other possible places.

Based on these policies, Retta language revitalization is included in Model C because it uses community—based model. This is different from Model A and B which can be use school—based model. School—based model is not suitable because the number of speakers is not suitable and the distribution of language areas is limited. If referring to the language revitalization model from Hinton (2001), Retta language revitalization is the same with after—school programs. Moreover, the stages of Retta language revitalization in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province consist of (1) a preliminary survey and coordination, (2) learning stage, and (3) performance
stage. The preliminary survey and coordination focused on the initial assessment to determine the language revitalization model and form that are appropriate to the local situation and conditions. The learning stage is focused on the process of transmitting the local language to young speakers in a way that increases young speaker interest so that local language learning takes place in a fun way. The performance stage is focused on displaying the results of the local language learning stage to the local language community and the local government. Some of these stages are based on O’Grady (2018) and have also been implemented in Papua by Mu’jizah (2018) and Sunendar et al. (2019).

In the first stage, the activity begins with conducting a survey and coordination in the South Ternate Village. This is intended to directly identify the right model for Retta language revitalization. In this survey, coordination was carried out with the Head of South Ternate Village, Yefta Haydjadi. Additionally, representatives from Retta language speakers were also present in this coordination. Then, the survey was carried out at the Inpres 2 Ternate Elementary School, which is located in the South Ternate Village. On this occasion, coordination was carried out with the Principal of Inpres 2 Ternate Elementary School and several classroom teachers. Together, a brainstorming session was organized about the Retta language revitalization plan and to see the situation and condition of the learning process at school firsthand. Furthermore, coordination was also carried out for Retta language young speakers. This is important to accumulate various opinions from different speakers and agree on a single decision. The coordination was also carried out with traditional leaders in South Ternate Village.

Furthermore, coordination is carried out with the Alor Regency Government Office as local government. In this coordination, Alberth N. Ouwpoly as the Head of Education Office and Mesak Tapua Blegur as the Head of the Culture Office welcomed the efforts to revitalize the Retta language in South Ternate Village. Both of them provided full support for this Retta language revitalization activity. Interestingly, the South Ternate Village is known for its traditional festivals. Therefore, cultural elements can be embedded in Retta language revitalization efforts that can be displayed in traditional festivals in the future. This coordination also provides the Retta community awareness of the importance of using the Retta language in daily communication as one of unique characteristics that other places do not have. After the preliminary survey and coordination have been completed, the next step is to determine the instructor, participants, and techniques that shall be utilized at the learning stage and the performance stage. This was made in accordance with the results of joint agreement and aim towards sustainability so that the Retta language revitalization efforts can run for the next three months. The coordination atmosphere in the South Ternate Village can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Coordination with Head of South Ternate Village and Retta language speakers
On learning stage, the participants of the program consist of about 60 young speakers. Most of the young speakers who participated in the Retta language revitalization were elementary school students. Nevertheless, the Retta language revitalization model that is agreed with the speakers is community—based language revitalization. This is because other models are less acceptable and their sustainability aspects are also not as strong as community—based language revitalization model. There are six Retta language revitalization teachers. Retta language teachers were (1) Aknes Singabola, (2) Maria M. Tonunglalang, (3) Salom Besy, (4) Triposa Korang, (5) Henderina Donuhulu, and (6) Helena Puling Dopung. Teaching takes place after church service or after the children’s church meeting on Wednesdays or other agreed days. From the results of the agreement, Retta language learning uses songs written in Retta as the learning material. This is based on the young speakers’ hobby in singing spiritual songs. Retta language learning is carried out for three months from the preliminary survey and coordination stage. The results of learning the Retta language will be showed in the performance stage. The Retta language learning atmosphere can be seen in Figure 3.

On the performance stage, language revitalization participants showed the results of learning from the previous stage. Interestingly, during the performance stage, the participants who rarely use Retta language in daily communication are getting used to speaking Retta language in their daily lives. This condition makes other Retta speakers proud and touched, especially the older generation. The performance stage took place in the open fields of Inpres 2 Ternate Elementary School in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The performances of young speakers as Retta language revitalization participant in singing Retta language song also vary. Starting from someone who sings together, there are a group of boys who sings together, followed by a group of girls. This performance was also attended by local traditional leaders, local government, and Retta speakers’ communities. The demonstration of the learning outcomes also has an impact on young speakers as participants in language revitalization and has an impact on Retta speakers in general. The impact of the performance from results of Retta language learning on Retta young speakers that Retta young speakers felt proud with the language and more confident using Retta language daily. Besides that, the performance impact from Retta language learning results on Retta speakers in general are increasing the speakers’ awareness to use Retta language as the local language and teach the Retta language to the younger generation. The speaker mindset towards the Retta language has also changed so that the Retta language existence is no longer neglected. The atmosphere of the Retta language revitalization performance can be seen in Figure 3.
Key performance indicator of language revitalization

In language revitalization, the key performance indicators are based on several elements (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). First, a good perception from the community and local government, which was marked by the presence of the community and local leaders during the performance of the language revitalization program. Second, support from local government and stakeholders. Starting from the sub-district level, regency/city level, until the provincial level, a memorandum of understanding was made regarding the language preservation in the area. Third, the results of language revitalization are actualized in society, schools, or communities. Based on these key performance indicators, the Retta language revitalization in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province can be classified as fulfilling all of the key performance indicators. This is because the Retta language revitalization has received a good reception from the Retta language speakers’ community and the local government. The positive attitude of Retta language speakers can be proven by the involvement of many Retta speakers, both as participants and teachers of Retta language revitalization so that learning and performing Retta language revitalization runs smoothly. Then, the affirmation from the local government can be proven by the presence of the Alor Regency Government. Starting from the Head of the Education Office, Head of the Culture Office, until the Head of the South Ternate Village.

In addition, key performance indicators can also be seen from the support from the Alor Regency Government. This support was realized by making a written agreement in the form of memorandum of understanding regarding the Retta language preservation in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The memorandum of understanding was made by Albert N. Ouwpoly as the Head of the Education Office, Mesak Tapua Blegur as the Head of the Culture Office, and Yefta Hoydjadi
as the Head of South Ternate Village. Several things are contained in the memorandum of understanding from the Head of the Education Office, including (1) supporting all Retta language learning activities or research in Alor Regency at the education unit level, (2) carrying out declarations or publication of Retta language learning, both in extracurricular activities as well as local content lessons in schools, and (3) accept and implement all language preservation policies in Alor Regency. This is not much different from the memorandum of understanding made by Head of the Culture Office which contains (1) supporting all Retta language activities or research in the context of language preservation in Alor Regency, especially in South Ternate Village, (2) conducting socialization of the Retta language through publications from the Cultural Office, and (3) facilitating activities or research on the Retta language in the context of language preservation effort in Alor Regency. The difference between the two memorandum of understanding lies in their duties and functions so that the memorandum of understanding content based on the authority of each office.

Figure 5. Signing of a memorandum of understanding by the Head of the Education Office

Local content of Retta language songs

As explained in the previous section, the Retta language revitalization in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province uses language learning media through local language songs. This Retta language songs was created by Retta speakers as participants in the Retta language revitalization. Not only as material for learning the Retta language, the songs also have cultural elements that is unique to the Retta people themselves. In this section, the cultural elements of the Retta language songs which are used a learning material in revitalizing this language is discussed in more depth. There are only three Retta songs discussed in this section. This is because the three Retta songs represents the Retta community. The following below is a Retta language song that is used in the learning stage and is displayed in the performance stage.

Vid Kalila

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vid kalila huling melak</th>
<th>Sun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aduang olang orang duna</td>
<td>The sun is shining bright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunga manyjama moe babula palmi</td>
<td>Birds are chirping happily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajimi pijata pio boga ma</td>
<td>Fragrant as fragrant as the flowers in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahata angba geng tajaning</td>
<td>Everyone who invites us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who praises the name of the One God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the lyrics of the song above, it can be seen that the lyrics of the song reflect the closeness of Retta community to God. This is because the lyrics of the song contain an
encouragement to praise God. The encouragement is based on God’s grace that has been given to the Retta community. This excitement can be seen from the lyrics of (1) the sun shining brightly, (2) the birds chirping happily, and (3) the fragrance as fragrant as the flowers. All of these are signs of God’s favor because they have positive adjectives, such as bright, happy, and fragrant. From the lyrics of the song, it can be seen that the Retta community are very concerned about natural environment. On the other hand, there are also song lyrics that show the important role of a mother for the Retta community. Although the song lyrics below express the sadness of losing a mother, but this song also gives an idea on the struggle that every mother needs to pull through.

The song below shows the struggle of the Retta community as fishermen that risk their lives just to get some food on the table:

The role of a mother who is very meaningful for the Retta community cannot be separated from the Retta community condition who work as fisherman outside the
island. This condition can be seen from the song lyrics above. The lyrics show that most of Retta community are fishermen. This is indicated by the lyrics (1) going far away, (2) lethargic sailing, (3) going to a faraway place, until (4) making a living. The situation in the South Ternate Village, which is on a separate island, makes the people’s livelihoods dependent on fishermen. This is due to the abundant wealth from the seas. Even so, the Retta community have to fish in remote and risky areas. The uncertainty and dangerous seas make fishing in the sea challenging and often cost lives. The risk of becoming a fisherman makes the Retta community submit to God. In this case, the Retta community can be said to be close to God so that all their efforts and lives are under God’s protection. This indicated by the lyrics (1) You take care of us and (2) it is true that You take care of us. The word You here are interpreted as God. All kinds of dangers at sea can be avoided because of the power of God and how the Retta community believes in God.

Conclusions

Based in the results and discussion in the previous section, it can be concluded that local language songs are effective materials for learning Retta language in South Ternate Village, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. This is based on the impact felt by the participants and the Retta speakers in general. The results of this research is reflected by the participatory observation result by asking directly about the local language songs impact to revitalization participants and Retta language speakers themselves. The impact of the language revitalization learning material in the form of songs in local languages has made young speakers accustomed to speaking Retta and starting to use Retta language in their daily lives. Meanwhile, the Retta speakers have raised their awareness regarding the importance of preserving Retta as an indigenous language. On the other hand, this Retta language revitalization effort is classified to have a high performance based on the key performance indicator. This is because the language revitalization show received support and good reception from the Retta community and local government which was marked by the participation of the community and local leaders in accordance with the applicable language revitalization guidelines. Apart from that, key performance indicators of the Retta language revitalization efforts are also proven from the local government support. This is proven by the signing of memorandum of understanding regarding the Retta language preservation in the South Ternate Village. In addition, the Retta language songs used in Retta language learning also have local content which is a marker of the Retta community identity. Thus, Retta language songs can not only be material for learning the Retta language, but can also used as material for learning Retta culture. This Retta language revitalization effort can then be continued by the local government or the Retta community itself so that the Retta language use will be even more widespread in the future. Not only that, this discussion surely can be a reference for other language revitalization effort in Indonesia.

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