



Perception of Communication Science Students from Belu on the Policy of Using Tetun Language in Cultural Diplomacy of the Indonesian - Timor Leste Community in the Border Region

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the perception of Communication Science students of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Widya Mandira Catholic University (UNWIRA) who come from Belu Regency towards the use of the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and Timor Leste in the border area. The Tetun language has an important role in the social life of border communities because it reflects the closeness of history, culture, and linguistics, and functions as a communication tool as well as a medium of non-formal cultural diplomacy. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. The research informants are students of Communication Sciences FISIP UNWIRA from Belu Regency. Data analysis was carried out with an interactive model that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that most students have a positive perception of the use of the Tetun language because it is considered effective in strengthening social relations, facilitating cross-cultural communication, and maintaining the cultural values of border communities. However, there is also a critical view that emphasizes the importance of balance with the use of Indonesian language to maintain national identity

INTRODUCTION

In a sovereign country, language has a strategic role in building social, cultural, and political relations between peoples, including in the context of cultural diplomacy between countries. Cultural diplomacy is the process of strengthening relations between nations through the exchange of values, traditions, languages, and cultural practices that allow for the creation of more harmonious mutual understanding and cooperation (Fishman, J. A., 1999). In the context of contemporary international relations, diplomacy is no longer only carried out by state actors, but also involves local communities as non-state actors through daily social interactions. This process is known as people-to-people diplomacy, where relations between peoples are an important foundation in building trust and stability in relations between countries through a grassroots approach.

The border area of Indonesia - Timor Leste is a unique social space because the people come from one ancestor and have a close history, ethnicity, culture, and language in common, Tetun. In East Nusa Tenggara Province, especially in Belu and Malacca Regencies which are directly adjacent to Bobonaro District in Timor Leste, social, economic, and cultural interactions between communities take place intensely in daily life. One of the factors that strengthens community interaction is Tetun as a language of communication understood by people in border areas.

The Tetun language has an important position in the lives of border communities. In Timor Leste, Tetun is recognized as one of the official languages of the country along with Portuguese as stated in (Timor Leste Constitution, 2002). Meanwhile, in Indonesia, Tetun is categorized as a regional language used by some people in the East Nusa Tenggara region, especially in the border area. The difference in language status does not reduce the role of Tetun which is perceived as an effective social communication medium in cross-border interaction between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste.

According to the Theory of Perception from Jerome S. Bruner (1957), perception is an individual process in receiving, organizing, and interpreting information or stimuli from the environment so that it gives a certain meaning. The essence of perception theory states that perception is a mental process in understanding information received through the five senses. Everyone's perception can be different, because it is influenced by experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and cultural backgrounds. Perception determines the way a person assesses or views a social object, language, or phenomenon. Perception theory explains that the way a person views and evaluates something is influenced by his cognitive processes, experiences, and social environment. In research on the Tetun language, this theory is used to analyze how people view and assess the use of the Tetun language in social life and informal cultural diplomacy activities.

In daily life, the Tetun language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of cultural identity and social solidarity of border communities. The use of the Tetun language in various social activities such as cross-border trade, customary activities, cross-border family interactions, and other informal communication shows that this language plays a role as a

medium that strengthens social relations between communities. According to Cull, N. J. (2008), from the perspective of cultural diplomacy, the use of local languages such as Tetun can be understood as a form of grassroots diplomacy that indirectly strengthens bilateral relations between the two countries.

According to Milton Cummings (2003), cultural diplomacy is the process of exchanging ideas, information, art, and other cultural elements among nations to foster mutual understanding. Meanwhile, the concept of soft power introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2004) emphasizes that the power of a country's culture, values, and policies can influence other parties without coercion. In this context, language as part of culture can be an important instrument in building a positive image, increasing trust, and strengthening social relations between cross-border communities.

Sociolinguistic studies show that language has an important function in shaping social identity and group solidarity. According to Joshua A. Fishman (1972), language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of cultural identity that reflects the historical and social relations of a community. Thus, the use of the Tetun language in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area can be understood as a form of expression of cultural identity as well as a means of cross-border social interaction.

In the perspective of language policy, the regulation of language use in a society is influenced by political, social, educational, and cultural factors (Fishman, J. A., 1999). According to Bernard Spolsky (2004), language policy includes language ideology, language use practices in society, and language management efforts by formal and informal institutions. In the context of border areas, language policy is an important issue because it is related to national identity, cross-cultural communication, and social relations between communities with different political systems (Ricento, T., & Hornberger, N. H., 1996).

Several previous studies have shown that local languages have an important role in building social and cultural relationships in border areas. Research conducted by Suryawan (2017) shows that local languages in Indonesia's border areas can function as a medium of cross-cultural communication that strengthens social interactions between communities. Another study by Lopes (2020) on the border communities of Timor Leste also shows that the use of the Tetun language in daily social interactions plays an important role in maintaining kinship and cultural solidarity between communities separated by national borders.

However, most previous studies have focused more on sociolinguistic aspects and social interactions of border communities, while studies that specifically highlight the relationship between Tetun language policy and cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and East Timor are still relatively limited. In addition, the perspectives of the younger generation, especially students as intellectual groups with educational experience and cross-cultural interactions, have also not been extensively researched in this context.

Based on these conditions, this study seeks to examine the perception of Communication Science students of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,

Widya Mandira Catholic University (UNWIRA, 2022) who come from Belu Regency regarding the policy of using the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste in the border area. Students were chosen as research informants because they are a group of young generations who have an academic understanding of communication and have social experiences related to the practice of language use in the community.

This study asks several research questions, namely (1) What are the policies of the governments of Indonesia and Timor Leste regarding the use of the Tetun language in the border area?; (2) What is the role of the Tetun language in building cultural diplomacy between the peoples of the two countries?; (3) What are the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the Tetun language policy in the border area?

The purpose of this study is to describe policies related to the use of the Tetun language in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area, analyze the role of the Tetun language in the social interaction and cultural diplomacy of border communities, and identify various challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the language policy.

The benefits of this research, theoretically, are expected to contribute to the development of the study of international relations, cross-cultural communication, and sociolinguistics (Wardhaugh, R., 2006), especially related to cultural diplomacy based on local languages in border areas. Practically, the results of this research are expected to provide input for local governments, educational institutions, and cultural institutions in formulating policies that support the preservation and use of the Tetun language as an instrument of cultural diplomacy between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste.

The scope of this research is focused on the border area of Belu Regency in East Nusa Tenggara Province which is directly adjacent to Bobonaro District in Timor Leste. This research highlights aspects of perception, language policy, cultural diplomasi in the social practices of border communities, as well as the dynamics of cultural relations related to the use of the Tetun language in cross-border interactions.

Based on the framework of this research, the Tetun language is seen as an important medium in building cultural diplomacy in border areas. The role of the language is influenced by the language policies that apply in each country, the social practices of the community in using the language, and the dynamics of social and cultural relations between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste. This research seeks to understand how the Tetun language functions not only as a means of communication, but also as an instrument of cultural diplomacy that strengthens social relations between the peoples of the two countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tetun Language as Cultural Identity and Cross-Border Communication

Tetun is an Austronesian language that is widely spoken in Timor-Leste and the border regions of Indonesia, especially Belu and Malacca Regencies. This language not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of cultural identity and a representation of the historical relationships of people who have common kinship roots (Wikipedia contributors, 2024). In the context

of border communities, Tetun plays a role as a lingua franca that facilitates cross-border social interaction, both in economic, social, and cultural activities (Seran et al., 2024). Other research shows that cultural similarities and kinship relationships reinforce the use of local languages in the daily communication of border communities (IPDN, 2023). In addition, cross-border communication studies confirm that communities tend to maintain their mother tongue as an identity as well as the main means of social interaction (Handayani & Inayatushalihah, 2020).

Language Perception and the Role of the Young Generation

The perception of language influences attitudes and behaviors of its use in society. The younger generation, especially students, have an important role in preserving local languages as part of cultural identity. Research shows that students in border areas have a tendency to maintain local languages despite the influence of globalization and the dominance of national languages (Silva, 2021). However, Indonesian is still more dominant in the formal realm, while Tetun is stronger in social and cultural contexts (Budi, 2025). This condition shows the dualism of language use that affects the perception and communication practices of border communities.

Language Policy and Implementation Challenges

Language policy functions to regulate the status, function, and use of language in society. In the Indonesian context, regional languages such as Tetun have not been fully accommodated in formal policies, so their use is more dominant in the informal realm and based on social practices (Budi, 2025). Studies on border areas show that formal policies are often unable to respond to the needs of multilingual and cross-cultural societies (IPDN, 2023). Therefore, more contextual and adaptive policies are needed to support the preservation of local languages and increase the effectiveness of cross-border communication.

Cultural Diplomacy and Cross-Cultural Communication

Cultural diplomacy is a non-formal approach in international relations that emphasizes the exchange of cultures, languages, and social values to build mutual understanding. In the Indonesia-Timor Leste context, cultural diplomacy takes place through direct people-to-people diplomacy. Research shows that cultural elements such as language and tradition have an important role in strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries (Amikom, 2024). In addition, Indonesian public diplomacy also emphasizes the importance of a cultural approach in building harmonious international relations (Heriamsal & Jekaisa, 2024). In this case, the Tetun language plays a role as a cross-cultural communication instrument that strengthens social solidarity and reduces potential conflicts in border areas.

Challenges and Opportunities for Tetun Language Development

The Tetun language faces various challenges, such as the limitations of formal policies, the lack of educational support, and the influence of globalization on the use of the language among the younger generation. However, there are great opportunities in its development as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. The geographical proximity and social relations between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste are important capital in strengthening the role of the Tetun

language as a means of communication across countries (Seran et al., 2024). In addition, technological developments show that the Tetun language is beginning to be developed in the digital system even though it is still classified as a language with limited resources (de Jesus, 2024). This opens up opportunities for the strengthening of the Tetun language in the fields of education, technology, and cultural diplomacy in the future.

METHODOLOGY

In principle, the research method is a scientific way to obtain data for specific benefits and purposes (Ramdhan, 2021:1). This study uses the focus group discussion method and a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and deeply understand the perceptions of Communication Science students of FISIP Widya Mandira Kupang Catholic University from Belu towards the policy of using the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste in the border area. The qualitative approach was chosen because it emphasizes the exploration of meaning, subjective experiences of respondents, and complex socio-cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was carried out on the campus of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Widya Mandira Kupang Catholic University, especially the Communication Studies Study Program. The research time was carried out from January-April 2026, with details: January 2026 filling out questionnaires and administering informant approval. February 2026 conducting in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and focus group discussions (FGD) at the FISIP UNWIRA Hall; March-April 2026: Data processing of research results and publications

The sources and types of data used are divided into: a) Primary Data, in the form of student responses obtained through in-depth interviews, filling out open questionnaires, focus group discussions; b) Secondary Data, in the form of relevant documentary materials, namely official government policies related to cultural and language diplomacy, academic literature and previous research publications, reports of cultural, educational, and border facilities.

The data collection technique is designed to obtain a rich, authentic, and contextual picture, namely: a) Filling out a questionnaire by informants of communication students from Belu district for one week according to their experience in the border area. b) In-Depth Interview, conducted with students who were selected purposively to explore their perceptions, experiences, and values regarding the policy of using the Tetun language in social interaction and cultural diplomacy. This technique is in accordance with a phenomenological approach that emphasizes the subjective experience of the respondents (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015); c) Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which is carried out to identify patterns of shared views or differences in perspectives among students regarding the dynamics of language in cultural diplomacy (Wardhaugh, R., 2006); d) Documentation Study, which is the analysis of relevant official documents, regulations, and scientific articles to develop theoretical foundations and policies for the use of language in cultural diplomacy (Bowen, 2009). In addition, most of them are enriched with personal opinions and experiences

(Fauzi, 2019:45) from Communication Science study program students from Belu district who live in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area.

Data is analyzed thematically using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994) including: a) Data reduction, which is selecting, summarizing, and focusing data based on relevance to the research objective; b) Data display is compiling data in the form of narratives, tables, and/or visuals to facilitate understanding of patterns and main themes; c) Conclusion drawing & verification, which is attracting interpretation of the findings that have been presented and verifying through triangulation. This model was chosen because it is able to integrate the data processing process systematically, flexibly, and contextually (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2019).

Triangulation and Data Validity: The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking: a) Source Triangulation: comparing data from interviews, FGDs, and observations.; b) Method Triangulation: combining different qualitative techniques to complement each other; c) Member Checking: the results of the initial interview and interpretation are reviewed by the respondents to ensure the correctness of the representations. This procedure is performed to minimize bias and increase the credibility and reliability of research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 1. Theory, indicators, operations, and research questions on the perception of the Tetun language and its use in cultural diplomacy

Theory	Indicator	Operational	Research Questions
Theory Persepsis - Jerome S. Bruner	Knowledge of Tetun language	Measure how Belu students understand, assess, and give meaning to the use of the Tetun language in social and cultural life across the borders of Indonesia-Timor Leste	How do Belu students know about the Tetun language?
	Perception of the Tetun language		What is the perception of Belu students about the Tetun language?
	Policy on the use of Tetun language in cultural diplomacy		What is the attitude of Belu students towards the policy of using Tetun language in Indonesia-Timor Leste cultural diplomacy?
Language Policy Theory - Joshua A. Fishman	Language <i>practices</i>	The practice of using the Tetun language in daily life in formal and informal social interactions in border areas.	What are the practices of using the Tetun language in daily life in formal and non-formal social interactions in border areas?

	<p>Ideology and perception (<i>language beliefs/ideologies</i>).</p>	<p>Students' perception of the Tetun language as a symbol of identity, brotherhood, and a means of cross-border communication in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area.</p>	<p>What are the ideologies and perceptions (language beliefs/ideologies) of students towards the Tetun language as a symbol of identity, brotherhood, and a means of cross-border communication in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area?</p>
	<p>Policy management and implementation (<i>language management</i>)</p>	<p>The policy of using the Tetun language by the government or related institutions in the border area, as well as how students view the policy</p>	<p>Is there already a policy rule from PEMBDA BELU regarding the use of Tetun language at the border? How is the management and implementation of policies (language management) related to the use of the Tetun language by the government or related institutions in border areas, and how do students view the policy?</p>
<p>The Theory of Cultural Diplomacy - Milton C. Cummings</p>	<p>PRACTICE of the Tetun language in formal and non-formal social environments in border areas.</p>	<p>Formal: school, government, administration. Nonfprmal: house, market, customary affairs</p>	<p>How is the Tetun language practiced in the formal and non-formal social environment in the border area?</p>
	<p>THE role of the Tetun language in building cultural diplomacy between the</p>	<p>The Tetun language is used in building cultural diplomacy between the</p>	<p>What is the ROLE of the Tetun language in building cultural diplomacy between</p>

	peoples of the two countries	peoples of the two countries	the peoples of the two countries?
	CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES in the implementation of the Tetun language policy in the border areas	There are CHALLENGES and OPPORTUNITIES in the implementation of language policies	What are the CHALLENGES in implementing Tetun language policies in the border areas? What are the OPPORTUNITIES in the implementation of the Tetun language policy in the border area?

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study is entitled "Perception of Communication Science Students of FISIP UNWIRA from Belu Regarding the Policy of Using the Tetun Language in Cultural Diplomacy between the People of Indonesia and Timor Leste in the Border Area". This study discusses public perception of the Tetun language and its policy of use as a tool of cultural diplomacy. The research informants were Communication Science students of FISIP UNWIRA Kupang from Belu Regency from semester 2 of the class of 2025 and semester 8 of the class of 2022 who were randomly selected and able to speak Tetun. Student perceptions show that the Tetun language is seen as a symbol of cultural identity and a means of communication across communities with a high level of pride, acceptance, and understanding.

Policy on the Use of Tetun Language in Cultural Diplomacy

The policy of using the Tetun language is understood as an effort to encourage its formal and informal use in education, media, and cultural activities with the support of the government and the community. Meanwhile, cultural diplomacy is interpreted as an effort to strengthen the cultural relations of the Indonesia-Timor Leste people through cultural exchanges, art activities, and cross-border interactions without official channels. This study uses perception theory, language policy theory, and cultural diplomacy theory as the basis for analysis.

This study shows that students from Belu master Tetun as their mother tongue and view it as the main communication tool, symbol of cultural identity, and a connecting language in cross-border interactions between Indonesia and Timor Leste. The Tetun language plays an important role in the social life of border communities because it is used in various activities such as kinship relations, trade, and cultural activities. In addition, the Tetun language also

functions as a means of preserving cultural values, local knowledge, and traditions that are inherited from generation to generation. In the context of education, the Tetun language is used as a companion language that helps students understand learning materials more effectively because it is close to daily life.

On the other hand, this study found that there is no official policy from the government regarding the use of the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy in border areas. Nevertheless, the Tetun language is still widely used in people's lives and creates a bilingual or multilingual situation with Indonesian and other regional languages. The use of Tetun does not replace Indonesian as the official language, but functions as a communication tool that strengthens social interaction and education. The Tetun language also serves as a means of social integration that goes beyond the administrative boundaries of the country, as it is supported by historical, cultural, and social relations between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste. However, its use still faces challenges such as the limitations of formal policies, the need for the development of teaching materials, the training of educators, and further research to enhance its role in education and cross-cultural communication.

Perception

Perception Theory according to Jerome S. Bruner (1957) explains that perception is an individual process in receiving, organizing, and interpreting information that is influenced by experience, knowledge, and the social environment. In this study, the theory was used to analyze the way students from Belu view the Tetun language in social life and cultural diplomacy in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area. The results of the study show that all students master the Tetun language as a mother tongue that is actively used in daily life, both in the family environment, education, and social interactions such as in markets, public service places, and traditional activities. The Tetun language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of cultural identity, historical closeness, and kinship relations of border communities, thus acting as a lingua franca that facilitates cross-border interaction.

Belu students have a very positive perception of the Tetun language. This language is seen as a "language of life" because it is used in various aspects of daily life, as well as as the main means of communication that facilitates cross-cultural interaction. In addition, the Tetun language is also perceived as a symbol of culture and brotherhood that reflects the emotional closeness between the people in the two countries. The use of the Tetun language is considered to be able to create more close, harmonious social relationships, and facilitate the exchange of information in various social, economic, and cultural activities, as

well as playing a role in maintaining and preserving the local cultural values of border communities.

However, this study found that until now there has been no official policy from the central and regional governments regarding the use of the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy, as the proposal to include the Tetun language in the local content curriculum has not been realized (Aloysius Lewokeda-Pewarta, Laurensius Molan-Editor, 2026). Nevertheless, the use of the Tetun language remains widespread informally in the lives of border communities and functions as an instrument of non-formal diplomacy (people-to-people diplomacy) that strengthens social and cultural relations between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste. This language is a bridge of communication that helps build mutual understanding, solidarity, and harmonious relations in border areas.

In addition, the use of the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy is still spontaneous and not formally structured, thus showing the need for clearer and more targeted policy support. With supportive policies, the Tetun language has great potential to be developed as an instrument of cultural communication that strengthens social relations, cooperation, and cultural diplomacy between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste. Therefore, students' positive perception of the Tetun language is an important capital in encouraging the preservation and development of this language as part of cultural identity and a means of cultural diplomacy in border areas.

Language Policy

Language Policy Theory according to Joshua A. Fishman (1968; 1970s) explains that language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a political, identity, and cultural instrument that can be regulated through policies in various fields of life. In Indonesia, language policy is regulated in Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 24 of 2009 which stipulates Indonesian as the official language of the state, the language of instruction for education, and the language of communication for the government and media (Government of the Republic of Indonesia, 2009). Meanwhile, regional languages such as Tetun do not have an official policy and their use is still limited to the informal realm and local culture.

The results of the study show that the practice of using Tetun language in border areas is widespread in formal and non-formal contexts. In the formal realm, Tetun is used as a companion language to help communication in education, administration, and public services, although Indonesian remains the main language. Meanwhile, in the nonformal realm, Tetun is more predominantly used in daily life such as in markets, family environments, customary activities, and cross-border social interactions, thus functioning as an effective means of communication in strengthening social and cultural relations of border communities.

In addition, the ideology and perception of students from Belu towards the Tetun language shows a very positive view. The Tetun language is seen as a symbol of cultural identity, a symbol of brotherhood, and a means of

communication across countries that facilitates interaction and strengthens social relations between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste. This language not only has pragmatic value as a means of communication, but also symbolic value that reflects the togetherness, solidarity, and historical closeness of border communities.

However, the management and implementation of Tetun language policies are still not formally regulated by the government, as quoted by ANTARANews.ComNTT (2019). Nevertheless, Tetun language is still widely used in community social practices and is an important alternative in cross-border communication. Therefore, a more contextual and responsive policy is needed so that the Tetun language can be optimally utilized in strengthening the social, cultural, and economic relations of the Indonesian-Timor-Leste community in the border area.

Cultural Diplomacy

The theory of cultural diplomacy according to Milton C. Cummings (2003) explains that cultural diplomacy is the exchange of ideas, information, art, language, and other cultural aspects between communities to increase mutual understanding, and can be carried out not only through official channels but also through cultural activities such as education, art, and social interaction. This is also in line with the view of Mark (2009) who emphasized that cultural diplomacy is a form of international relations between communities that prioritizes the exchange of cultures, languages, and values to create harmonious cooperation. In the context of this research, the practice of using Tetun language in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area takes place in formal and informal environments. In the formal realm, the Tetun language does not yet have official rules in government administration and education, but is still used as an additional language of instruction to help public understanding, especially in public service communication and interaction with the people of Timor Leste. Meanwhile, in the informal realm, the Tetun language is widely used in daily life such as in traditional markets, family environments, traditional activities, and cross-border cultural festivals, thus serving as an effective lingua franca in strengthening the social and cultural relations of border communities.

Furthermore, the role of the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy is seen to be very significant in building social and cultural relations between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste. The Tetun language facilitates cross-border communication, strengthens fraternal relations, and supports interaction in various social, cultural, and economic activities, including trade activities in traditional border markets developed by the government (ANTARA, 2017). This language is a bridge of communication that allows people to understand each other's values, traditions, and cultures, so as to create harmonious, cooperative, and mutually respectful relationships. In practice, cultural diplomacy through the Tetun language takes place in a non-formal manner (people-to-people diplomacy), where direct interaction between communities is the main factor in strengthening cross-border relations. The Tetun language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of cultural identity and social

solidarity that can reduce the potential for conflict and increase cooperation between communities in border areas.

However, the implementation of the Tetun language policy still faces various challenges. These challenges include the absence of official regulations governing the formal use of the Tetun language, the dominance of the Indonesian language in the education and government administration system, the limitation of educational resources such as teaching staff and teaching materials, and the lack of policy socialization to the community. In addition, the influence of globalization and the development of communication technology causes the younger generation to tend to use Indonesian or foreign languages, thus potentially reducing the use of the Tetun language. Differences in dialects and language skills among communities are also obstacles in the implementation of the Tetun language evenly in border areas. This condition shows that the use of the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy is still situational and has not been systematically integrated in national and regional language policies.

On the other hand, this study also shows that there is a great opportunity in the development of the Tetun language as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. The Tetun language has the power as a cultural identity that is still strongly embedded in border communities, and is supported by the geographical proximity and intense social relations between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste. The development of the Tetun language can be carried out through integration in local content education, strengthening cultural activities, and utilization in the cross-border economic and tourism sectors. In addition, the use of the Tetun language also opens up opportunities to strengthen social and economic cooperation, as well as improve the quality of cross-border interactions. With clearer policy support and active community participation, the Tetun language has the potential to become a strategic instrument in strengthening cultural diplomacy, maintaining harmonious relations, and building sustainable cooperation between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste in the border area.

Systematic Research Findings

Based on the theoretical study, it can be synthesized that the perception of students from Belu towards the Tetun language greatly influences the success of the policy of using the language in cultural diplomacy in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area. Perception theory (Jerome S. Bruner) emphasizes that the way students view the Tetun language determines the level of acceptance and use in social life. Language policy theory (Joshua A. Fishman) shows that language functions as a means of communication, cultural identity, and social instrument that needs to be regulated to support its preservation and development. Meanwhile, the theory of cultural diplomacy (Milton C. Cummings) emphasizes that language can be a means of building relationships and mutual understanding between communities.

The synthesis of these three theories shows that students' positive perceptions of the Tetun language strengthen the implementation of language policies and support its use as a means of cultural diplomacy, both formal and informal. Thus, student perceptions, language policies, and cultural diplomacy

are interrelated elements in maintaining and promoting the Tetun language as the cultural identity of border communities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of questionnaire data analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, it was found that Communication Studies FISIP UNWIRA students from Belu have a high awareness and understanding of the importance of the Tetun language as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. The Tetun language is seen not only as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of identity and an intercultural bridge between the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste. Most students support the policy of using the Tetun language, although its implementation is considered to be limited and not well coordinated, so more intensive training and socialization are needed. In practice, the Tetun language is used situationally in daily interactions such as in markets, traditional activities, and cultural festivals, but its effectiveness is influenced by differences in language skills and the level of student participation.

In addition, the use of Tetun has been proven to strengthen cultural identity, build trust, and strengthen solidarity among cross-border communities. However, there are obstacles such as limited literature and teaching materials, lack of institutional support, and differences in dialect and cultural understanding. Overall, the use of Tetun language in cultural diplomacy has received positive perceptions from students, but it still faces practical challenges that require policy support, training, and cross-institutional collaboration to increase its effectiveness.

FURTHER STUDY

Based on the findings of this research, there are several opportunities for further research development that can be carried out to deepen the study of the use of the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border area. First, further research can expand the research subject not only to students, but also to involve the general public, government officials, cultural actors, and cross-border economic actors to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the practice and policy of using the Tetun language. This is important because this research is still limited to the perspective of students as an educated young generation group.

Second, follow-up research can use more diverse methodological approaches, such as quantitative methods or mixed methods, to more objectively measure the level of effectiveness of the use of the Tetun language in cultural diplomacy, as well as the relationship between perceptions, language policies, and cross-cultural communication practices. In addition, longitudinal studies are also needed to look at changes in the perception and use of the Tetun language over time, especially in the midst of the influence of globalization and the development of communication technologies.

Third, future studies can focus more on the comparative aspects of language policy between Indonesia and Timor Leste, including the analysis of policy implementation, the role of educational institutions, and the integration of the Tetun language in the local content curriculum. This research can also

examine how language policies can be designed in a more contextual and responsive manner to the needs of border communities that are multilingual and multicultural.

Fourth, further research can explore the use of digital technology in the preservation and development of the Tetun language, such as the use of social media, language learning applications, and digitization of cultural content. This is important considering that the younger generation tends to be more active in the digital space, so technology can be a strategic means in strengthening the use of the Tetun language as part of modern cultural diplomacy.

Fifth, future research can also examine more deeply the role of the Tetun language in the context of formal cultural diplomacy, including the involvement of governments, educational institutions, and international organizations in promoting the language as an instrument of soft power and bilateral relations. Thus, further research is expected to make a broader contribution to the development of cross-cultural communication studies, sociolinguistics, and cultural diplomacy based on local languages in border areas.

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