

## The Maintenance of Kualuh Malay Language of Labuhanbatu Utara Students in Medan

Pemertahanan Bahasa Melayu Kualuh oleh Mahasiswa Labuhanbatu Utara di Kota Medan

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### Abstract

Language preservation is an important effort to maintain the continuity of language and culture. This study aims to: (1) identify the factors that influence the use of Kualuh Malay among students from Labuhanbatu Utara, (2) analyze the strategies used by students to maintain the language, and (3) evaluate the motivation behind the language maintenance. A descriptive-qualitative method was chosen to gain in-depth understanding through observation, interviews, and documentation. The participants of this study consisted of 18 students. The results show that there are seven factors that influence Kualuh Malay language, including visits to hometowns and usage in the family. Students apply strategies such as family language policy and use in cultural activities. The main reason Labura students maintain Kualuh Malay is their pride of identity. This research recommends that the people of Labuhanbatu Utara continue to integrate the use of Kualuh Malay in daily life and support its preservation in education.

**Key words:** *Language preservation, Kualuh Malay language, Labuhanbatu Utara, Language-use strategy*

### Abstrak

Pemertahanan bahasa merupakan upaya penting untuk menjaga keberlangsungan bahasa dan budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk: (1) mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi penggunaan bahasa Melayu Kualuh di kalangan pelajar asal Labuhanbatu Utara, (2) menganalisis strategi yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa untuk mempertahankan bahasa, dan (3) mengevaluasi motivasi di balik pemertahanan bahasa tersebut. Metode deskriptif-kualitatif dipilih untuk mendapatkan pemahaman mendalam melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Partisipan penelitian ini terdiri dari 18 mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat tujuh faktor yang mempengaruhi bahasa Melayu Kualuh, antara lain kunjungan ke kampung halaman dan penggunaan dalam keluarga. Mahasiswa menerapkan strategi seperti kebijakan bahasa keluarga dan penggunaan dalam kegiatan budaya. Alasan utama pelajar Labura mempertahankan bahasa Melayu Kualuh adalah kebanggaan identitas mereka. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar masyarakat Labuhanbatu Utara terus mengintegrasikan penggunaan bahasa Melayu Kualuh dalam kehidupan sehari-hari dan mendukung pelestariannya di dunia pendidikan.

**Kata kunci:** *Pemertahanan bahasa, Bahasa Melayu Kualuh, Labuhanbatu Utara, Strategi penggunaan bahasa.*

## INTRODUCTION

Linguistics plays a crucial role in society by conveying cultural values. As Fishman (1972) notes, every language used in society reflects the essential values that shape understanding. Indonesia is particularly rich in linguistic diversity, with 707 languages spoken by approximately 221 million people, making it home to around 10% of the world's languages. This linguistic variety is a source of pride, showcasing the vibrant cultures present in the country. However, maintaining these languages poses significant challenges. According to UNESCO (2018), there are 6,700 languages spoken globally, with 2,500 already extinct. Indonesia, recognized as a bilingual nation, experiences a high rate of language migration, leading to the extinction of approximately 200 languages after three generations due to a decline in speakers. Furthermore, UNESCO reports that Indonesia ranks third globally with 147 alternative languages, while 719 of its 41 ethnic languages are endangered, each having fewer than 500 speakers. Language and culture are intricately intertwined; language serves

as a vital tool for communication within social contexts and is deeply rooted in cultural identity. As Thomas et al. (1999) state, language is essential for establishing individual and social identities and can serve as a means of social control. Each linguistic community has its own conventions, which encompass not only the vocabulary used but also the manner of expression. This connection allows individuals to identify with their social groups and communities.

Language and culture are intricately connected; language is an integral part of culture. Language is used as a form of communication in social settings. When used in communication, it should be rooted in and connected to the cultural environment, which can take many varied and complex forms. Language and culture are viewed as intricately intertwined. They differ yet cannot be separated since linguistic roles communicate speakers' culture and self-identity. In the words of Thomas et al. (1999), language is one way in which we establish our identity and influence others' opinions of who we are. Language is important in shaping individual and societal identities, yet it can also be used to exert social control. Similarly, language has its own standards for certain groups that govern not only the words we use but also how we express them. Individuals can identify with their social groups or communities.

Language maintenance is an effort to keep a language alive by consistently using it in the face of competition from other languages in society (Fishman 1990). Language societies should keep the language alive in order to prevent it from becoming an endangered language. This is because the existence of a language is dependent on the effort of its users. Language maintenance is also a component of language planning, as Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) state that language maintenance is one of the aims of language planning. Furthermore, Musk (2006) claimed that in sociolinguistics, the term "maintenance" is commonly used to define a minority language in comparison to the dominant language. It shows that language maintenance is concerned with the interaction between minority and majority languages, as its goal is to balance the usage of minority and majority languages in communication. Language maintenance is described as a three-generation process. The first generation still uses vernacular language at home even though they know another language (Indonesian); the second generation uses vernacular language at home but shifts towards Indonesian at school and in the workplace; and in the third generation, the vernacular language disappears totally. In addition, Spolky (1998) says that the maintenance of a language begins with the use of a language at home by parents, then by neighbors, school, and the workplace. It means that a language can be maintained if we use it everywhere, because the surroundings can influence the speakers when using their language. The students of Malay Kuala Lumpur have done it; they keep the existence of their language by using their vernacular language at home because they believe that the language will be preserved if they always use that language at home.

The term language maintenance is used to describe a situation in which a speaker, a group of speakers, or a speech community continue to use their language in some or all spheres of life despite competition with the dominant or majority language to become the main or sole language in these spheres. Both phenomena emerge in the context of language contact. Although language contact does not always involve linguistic competition in which only one language survives, there are many situations of language contact in which one language gradually loses ground in the face of another language. This "losing ground" can have several consequences for the language and the speech community in question. The most drastic effect is, undoubtedly, language death. This occurs in situations where an entire speech community stops using the language for a variety of reasons. The language dies because it no longer has a community of users (including speakers), and all its functions or uses have been usurped by another language. From the definition above, it can be concluded that language maintenance is an effort that is conducted by minority groups to keep using the vernacular language or maintain their language in a multicultural society that has different cultural diversity and ethnic identity.

The phenomenon of language maintenance has been extensively discussed in the literature, highlighting its complexity and significance within the field of sociolinguistics. Language serves as a symbol of ethnic identity, and its preservation is crucial for maintaining the diverse ethnic identities in Indonesia. Without conservation efforts, Indonesia risks losing a vital aspect of its cultural heritage. Schiffman (1995) emphasizes that if a language is not preserved, several issues may arise, including language death. This occurs when speakers become bilingual, and subsequent generations prioritize another language, leading to the decline and eventual extinction of their native tongue.

In Labuhanbatu Utara, however, the Kuala Lumpur Malay language continues to thrive as speakers actively engage in its use. Evidence of this ongoing linguistic vitality was observed in conversations

among students from Labuhanbatu Utara in Medan city, demonstrating the resilience of the Kualuh Malay language.

KA : *Abah Ulong, ondak kamano abah?*

'Brother, where are you going?'

AS : *Nak ka kost adek Ongah ha, mangantakhkan gobakh nyo ni*

'To my young sister' hostel, I want to give this blanket.'

KA : *Oiyoiyo, sampekkkan la salam ku samo si onghah yo bah.*

'Alright, please convey my regards to her.'

AS : *Iyo, nanti kok udah jumbo kami abah sampekkkan.*

'Okay, I'll inform her when I see her.'

The conversation revealed that the students actively use the Kualuh Malay language when communicating with their friends. Despite encountering many people who predominantly speak Indonesian in their daily interactions, they continue to speak Kualuh Malay among themselves, especially when meeting other Kualuh Malay speakers. In interviews, the students expressed pride in their language, noting that using Kualuh Malay fosters a sense of closeness and community. By speaking Kualuh Malay, they affirm their identity as residents of Labuhanbatu Utara. Roesch (2012) emphasizes that maintaining a heritage language is vital for the self-identity and self-esteem of its speakers. Therefore, it is essential to protect, preserve, and promote such languages.

This phenomenon of language maintenance has prompted the researcher to explore the factors influencing the preservation of Kualuh Malay among Labuhanbatu Utara students in Medan City. The study aims to understand how these students maintain their language and their motivations for doing so. However, with the progression of modern society and the development of the younger generation, many are reluctant to preserve regional cultures, including regional languages. Consequently, it is observed that students who pursue education in urban areas often return home less inclined to use their regional language.

Research on language maintenance continues to evolve. Seli (2020) conducted a study on language choice and attitudes in Sumatran-Javanese intermarriage families in Lubuklinggau, revealing that Palembang-Malay is the most widely spoken language in family and friendship contexts. In contrast, Indonesian is predominantly used in non-casual domains such as religion, education, employment, and public life. In a different study, Lekatompessy (2021) examined parental perspectives and practices related to maintaining the heritage language, focusing on the preservation of Ambonese-Malay. The increasing use of national and foreign languages across various sectors has indirectly altered people's perceptions of the importance of learning and maintaining their heritage languages. Ines and Endang (2019) investigated the factors motivating the use of the Javanese language in Ahmad Tohari's *Bekisar Merah*, discussing strategies for language maintenance in literature. Nurul et al. (2020) addressed language maintenance issues within the context of EFL classrooms, specifically focusing on the factors affecting Balinese language maintenance in Labuhanbatu Utara. Additionally, Hariyanto et al. (2023) explored the factors contributing to shifts in usage, maintenance efforts, and strategies for the Bangka Malay language. From these relevant studies, it can be concluded that minority languages are at risk of shifting or even disappearing. Young speakers, particularly teenagers, are especially vulnerable when their environment does not provide adequate support for maintaining their mother tongue. The aforementioned studies are pertinent to this research, as their theories and findings offer valuable insights into language maintenance.

In summary, this study addresses the following research questions regarding the maintenance of the Kualuh Malay language: (1) What factors affect the maintenance of the Kualuh Malay language among students from Labuhanbatu Utara in Medan? (2) How is the Kualuh Malay language maintained by students from Labuhanbatu Utara? (3) Why do students from Labuhanbatu Utara maintain the Kualuh Malay language as they do? The objectives of this study are to answer these research questions. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) discover the factors influencing Kualuh Malay language maintenance among students from Labuhanbatu Utara in Medan; (2) analyze how these students maintain the Kualuh Malay language in Medan; and (3) evaluate the reasons behind their maintenance of the language. While there are many native languages in Labuhanbatu Utara, this study focuses exclusively on the Kualuh Malay language. The investigation into Kualuh Malay language maintenance will be conducted through an analysis of how students from Labuhanbatu Utara who reside in Medan City use their language.

## METHODS

This research employs a qualitative design to describe the maintenance of Kualuh Malay in Medan City. The data for this study consist of utterances of Kualuh Malay used in conversations among participants during observations. Additionally, interview results provided insights into the factors contributing to the maintenance of Kualuh Malay, the strategies employed for maintaining the language, and the reasons for its preservation in Medan City. Participants were purposefully selected to ensure they could provide rich, relevant, and necessary data for the research. The study involved 18 university students from Labuhanbatu Utara residing in Medan, all of whom are proficient in Kualuh Malay. The research was conducted in Medan City, chosen as the study site due to the significant number of students pursuing their education there.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to ensure that participants maintained the use of Kualuh Malay during conversations with their peers in Medan City. This approach also aimed to assess the vitality of the language, including fluency in its use. Participants completed a questionnaire, and in-depth interviews were conducted to gather more detailed insights and reasons behind language maintenance. The data comprised responses from the questionnaires, transcripts of the interviews, and field notes taken during the interviews. The interviews included key questions regarding why and how participants maintain the Kualuh Malay language. Additionally, documentation was gathered using a camera to provide a visual and comprehensive understanding of the study's site and environment.

In analyzing the data, the researcher employs the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and verification. The data reduction phase involves selecting pertinent data, summarizing it, and categorizing it into themes. This study focuses on student utterances related to Kualuh Malay maintenance, ensuring relevance to the investigation. Data were classified into three topics: factors, strategies, and reasons for preserving Kualuh Malay among students from Labuhanbatu Utara. During abstraction, the data were evaluated based on these categories. The organized data, presented in tables, graphs, and charts, facilitate drawing conclusions and informed action. Conclusion drawing involves interpreting the significance of the displayed data and identifying insights from the analysis.

## FINDING

The data analysis identifies seven factors influencing the maintenance of Kualuh Malay in Medan: family language use, visits to the homeland, language use in neighborhood interactions, ethno-linguistic vitality, cohabitation in a community, language use in religious contexts, and participation in traditional ceremonies. The most significant factors are cohabitation in the area and visits to the homeland. Students from Labuhanbatu Utara employ various strategies to maintain Kualuh Malay, including family language policies, frequent use of Kualuh Malay in daily life, participation in religious gatherings like Perwiritan, and engagement in cultural activities such as wedding ceremonies. Among these, the most prominent strategy is the frequent use of Kualuh Malay in daily interactions. Students maintain their language because they take pride in their identity as Labura people, and Kualuh Malay serves as a marker of this identity.

### 1. Factors Influencing the Preservation of Kualuh Malay language in Medan

According to language maintenance theory, many factors influence language maintenance, including family use, homeland visits, intermarriage, use of the language in the neighborhood, workplace, and educational domains, ethno-linguistic vitality, living in the same area, use of the language in religion, and the practice of traditional ceremonies. After gathering data, the writer discovered that seven factors affect the students from Labuhanbatu Utara in maintaining the Kualuh Malay language in Medan, as shown in Figure 1 below.

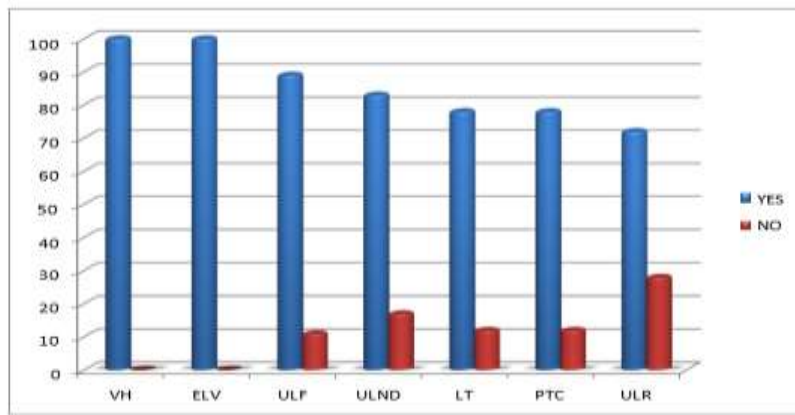


Figure 1. Factors Affecting Kualuh Malay Language Maintenance

Note:

VH: Visiting Homeland

ELV : Ethno Linguistic Vitality

ULF : Using Language in Family

ULND : Using Language in Neighborhood Domain

LT : Living Together

PTC : Practice of Traditional Ceremony

ULR : Using Language in Religion

### Homeland Visits

One crucial factor in maintaining a language is frequent travel to one's hometown. Regular visits to their place of origin allow individuals to interact linguistically with the locals. This interaction significantly influences the improvement of Kualuh Malay speakers' ability to speak the language, as shown by the data below.

WU : *Pabilo kau sampek dari Medan baya omak?*

'When did you arrive from Medan?'

SA : *Tadi pagi baru sampek nyo wak.*

'It just arrived this morning, ma'am.'

Wu : *Naek apo kau? Parah jalan tidak?*

'What vehicle are you taking?? Is the road damaged?'

SA : *Naek travel wak, jalan becek bagitu la wak tapi masih bisa la dilewati.*

'Take the travel bus, the road is so muddy, but it's still passable'

WU : *Pore kamu iyo?*

'Are you on holiday?'

SA : *Pore wak.*

'Yes, ma'am'

WU : *Lamo pore kamu tu?*

'How long have you been on holiday?'

SA : *Bulan sambilan baru masuk balek wak, puas la trep pore tahun ni karna panarimoan mahasiswa bar utu, mangkonyo lamo pore.*

'In September, I'm going back to college, I'm satisfied with having a holiday this time, because there are new student admissions, that's why we've been on holiday for a long time'

The data presented above can be classified as a factor in the use of language in the hometown. This conversation occurred when students, who were on holiday, visited their hometown and interacted with the Kualuh Malay people, continuing to communicate in their local language, Kualuh Malay. The data indicates that students from Labuhanbatu Utara still maintain their local language. They make a point to visit their hometowns to preserve their linguistic heritage, as expressed by the participants below.

*Di saat ada kesempatan pulang kampung saya akan pulang kampung. Selain untuk bertemu kedua orang tua, tentunya kenyamanan dengan suasana kampung, orang orang di kampung yang sering bertegur sapa dan lain halnya.*

'I will never hesitate to return to my homeland if given the chance. Apart from meeting both parents, of course, other considerations include feeling at ease in the village and getting to know the locals, who frequently greet one another.'

From the data collected in the interviews, all participants, representing a total percentage of 100%, stated that they always visit their hometown whenever there is a holiday or an opportunity. However, the interview results revealed that they visit their homeland only at certain times. Some participants return home during college holidays, while others go back to their village solely for religious celebrations. Even though they return home only twice a year, they can and always do use Kualuh Malay.

### **Ethno-Linguistic Vitality**

The vitality of ethnolinguistics is the second factor influencing language maintenance. Language is typically maintained longer when it is viewed as an important representation of ethnic identity, as show the data below.

- AS : *Tak taraso udah satahun awak tinggal di Medan ni baya Pak.*  
'I can't believe it, I've been living in this city of Medan for a year, Sir.'
- RA : *Camano nyo kau raso long?*  
'How do you feel?'
- AS : *Bagitu la Pak, elok-elok kawan awak baya. Kang kok bacakap awak pakek bahasa kampung awak golak orang tu, tapi mogah nyo aku biar tau orang tu bahasa kito.*  
'That's how it is, sir. My friends are good. If I speak with Kualuh Malay language, sometimes they laugh, but I'm still proud because they know our regional language.'
- RA : *Paten la long.*  
'That's good.'
- AS : *Iyo pak. Ku bilangkan aku orang Labura, dibilang orang tu pulak lebar sawit ayahku Pak.*  
'Yes sir. I said I was from Labura, they said that my father's oil palm plantation was wide, sir.'
- RA : *Angko bagitu hahaha.*  
'Why is it like that hahaha.'
- AS : *Tak tau awak jang Pak. Pikir orang tu kuraso kok orang sana awak lebar-lebar la kobun awak.*  
'I don't know, sir. I feel like they think that if you live in Labura you will definitely have a big garden.'

The most significant factor in the maintenance of a threatened language is the attitude of the speakers toward their own language and the importance they attach to it as a major symbol of their identity. This is illustrated by the data from a conversation between a student from Labura and his uncle. It is clear that the student takes pride in the Kualuh Malay language and uses it while in Medan. Although some of his friends occasionally laugh when they hear him speak the regional language, this reaction stems from the distinct characteristics of Kualuh Malay, such as the pronunciation of the letter 'R,' which is much more pronounced than the way Indonesian speakers typically pronounce it.

From the data analysis, it can be seen that ethnolinguistic vitality contributes to the maintenance of the Kualuh Malay language in Medan. Participants expressed pride in being Kualuh and in speaking the language. This is illustrated by the statements of other participants below.

*Sangat bangga. Walaupun kadang pada saat berbahasa Melayu Kualuh bersama teman yang asalnya dari kualuh juga ditempat umum, orang-orang yang tidak mengerti selalu melihat kami pada saat berbicara, lalu beberapa orang akan bertanya asal kami dari mana, dan kami menjawab dari Kualuh Hilir di Labura.*

'Very proud. Even though sometimes when we talk Malay Kualuh with friends who come from Kualuh in public places, people who don't understand always stare at us when we talk, then some people will ask where we are from, and we answer from Kualuh Hilir in Labura.'

### Language Use in the Family Environment

When it comes to teaching language to their children, parents play a crucial role. The language used by parents is the one that children can see, hear, and practice. Even when parents speak a local language from a different tribe, they still significantly contribute to their children's language acquisition by encouraging them to practice and speak it. In fact, language maintenance is influenced by the use of the local language in the family environment, as demonstrated by the following data.

- YA : *Ibuk apola enaknyo kito masak untku babuko puaso nanti yo*  
'Ma'am, what delicious food should we make for our iftar later'
- AT : *Kok salero kau apo enaknyo?*  
'What food do you want?'
- YA : *Anyang ayam samo bubur podas enak itu buk*  
'Anyang ayam and bubur podas is delicious, isn't it?'
- AT : *Haa iyo, itupun jadi kito masak. Kok bagitu nanti ajak si unde, biar banyak dimasak, diokan ligat itu mamasak.*  
'Oh yeah, we'll cook it, that's fine. If that's the case, you'll have to invite Unde to cook a lot, she's good at cooking.'
- YA : *Iyo buk, nanti la awak telfon unde, manyuruh dio datang.*  
'Yes ma'am, I'll call Unde later and tell her to come.'

Children's language acquisition is heavily influenced by their parents and family; in fact, it is said that the family environment is where language maintenance begins. A language is classified as dead once it is no longer used in the family context. From the data above, it is evident that the conversation took place within the family, specifically between YA and AT. They wanted to cook food to break the fast, preparing Ayang ayam and bubur podas, which are typical dishes from the Labuhanbatu Utara area. Additionally, they wanted to invite Unde to join them in cooking at their house. Unde is a nickname for our father's younger sister in Kualuh Malay, while Ibuk is a nickname for our mother's younger sister. Children's language acquisition is heavily influenced by their parents and family; in fact, it is said that the family world is where language maintenance begins. Language will be classified as dead once it is no longer used in the family context. From the data above, it can be seen that the conversation took place in the family realm, between YA and AT. They wanted to cook food to break the fast at that time, by cooking Ayang ayam and bubur podas, which are typical foods from the Labuhanbatu Utara area. And not to forget they also wanted to invite Unde to join in the cooking at their house. Unde is a nickname for our father's younger sister in Kualuh Malay, while Ibuk is a nickname for our mother's younger sister.

### Neighborhood Factors

The next factor associated with the maintenance of Kualuh Malay is the use of the language in local contexts. Consider the following data.

- MD : *Kak, kenapa menjomur akak mondung mondung begini?*  
'Sister, why are you drying your clothes when the weather is cloudy like this?'
- KA : *Kanapo ruponyo, ontah panas nyo karang, mangkonyo akak kirekan jugo*  
'Why does it look like it will be sunny again later, that's why I'm drying the clothes.'
- MD : *Kalo akak kirekan sekarang, tak ado nanti mengangkat pakean akak tu, kami serumahni ondak pogi kuliah*  
'If you dry it now, it suddenly rains, then no one will pick up your clothes, because we all want to go to college.'
- KA : *Aba nang bagitu nyo dek, akak jomur didalam sajola ini ekan*  
'Oh well, that's what it's like, sister, you're just drying in the sun, right?'
- MD : *iyo baya akak*  
Yes sister

The use of the local language in the neighborhood domain is one factor that contributes to the maintenance of the Kualuh Malay language. The environment always affects human life, including language. From the data above, it can be seen that this conversation occurred between students from Labuhanbatu Utara who live next door to each other (neighbors) in Medan. When communicating, they use Kualuh Malay. About 17% of those who can speak Indonesian do not use Kualuh Malay in their neighborhoods, but they can speak Kualuh Malay. They speak Kualuh Malay to their family and

friends, and switch to Indonesian when talking to others or friends from different ethnic backgrounds. Consider the following excerpt.

*Ya kalau jumpa sama tetangga sebelah kontrakan ini yang suku Melayu Kualuh ya jelas pakai bahasa Kualuh, tapi nggak jarang juga kalo bahasa nya campur dengan bahasa Indonesia.*

*'If I meet with tribe Kualuh Malay neighborhood so obviously I use Kualuh, but not in frequently also I mixed with Indonesian.'*

### Intimate Interaction

Another factor that helps students maintain their language proficiency is the intimate interaction between its users. North Labuhanbatu students maintain their language by using Kualuh Malay when interacting with each other, although they occasionally switch to Kualuh Malay or Indonesian. The researcher found the maintenance of Kualuh Malay in Medan in the following conversation of students from Labuhanbatu Utara, as shown by the data below:

IR : *Abat, moh la kito korjokan tugas ni samo-samo?*  
*'Sister, Let's do this task together.'*

SK : *Moh, tapi masih bingung awak ntah dari mana ongak dimuloi, poninglah kapalo kok udah bagini.*  
*'Come on, but I'm still confused about which one to start first, I'm getting a headache.'*

IR : *Aba, apo lagi nang dibingungkan, korjokan la nang ongak copat dikumpulkan.*  
*'Oh well, why should you be confused? Just do what you have to collect first.'*

SK : *Botul baya, nang payahanpun awak raso, punbagitu dikorjokan jugola.*  
*'That's right, even though I think it's difficult to do it, it has to be done.'*

Based on the conversation among students from Labuhanbatu Utara, it is evident that they use Kualuh Malay when communicating with their friends. The transmission of this language to the younger generation continues, even though they use Indonesian for daily conversations with people from different districts. However, when they are together with fellow students from Labuhanbatu Utara, they communicate in Kualuh Malay. They maintain their native language, even while mixing Kualuh Malay and Bahasa Indonesia in their daily interactions. Consider the following interview excerpt.

*Sejak lahir bahasa ibu saya adalah bahasa Melayu Kualuh, sehingga bahasa Melayu Kualuh sering saya gunakan dalam kegiatan apapun, termasuk pada saat tinggal bersama teman teman kontrakan saya yang asli dari Labura di Medan ini.*

*'Since birth, my mother tongue has been Kualuh Malay, so I often use Kualuh Malay in any activity, including when I live with my rented friends who are originally from Labura in Medan.'*

### Cultural Practice Factors

The ongoing maintenance of Kualuh Malay is also influenced by the practice of adat ceremonies. There are many types of traditional ceremonies that use Kualuh Malay, such as traditional wedding ceremonies and upah-upah ceremonies. See the following data.

MR : *Udah datang pabordah samo pangantin laki-lakinyo Bah?*  
*'Has the wedding music accompaniment team and groom come, brother?'*

AD : *Itu tongah dijalan ongak kasini la itu.*  
*'They were on their way here.'*

MR : *Siapa perwakilan mamuncak dari kito ni?*  
*'Who represents our martial arts attraction?'*

AD : *Udah ado wak Alang nanti yang mamuncak.*  
*'There will be Mr. Alang who will perform martial arts.'*

MR : *Oooiyoyo, nanti siap mamuncak baru la mangupah-upah kito samuo yo ka pangantin tu, udah abah bawak kaen upah-upah abahkan!*  
*'Oh Alright, later after doing the martial arts stunt, we will Continue to 'mangupah-upah' the bride and groom. Have you prepared your sarong for upah-upah, brother!'*

AD : *Udah aman kok itu.*  
*'It's done.'*



In traditional ceremonies, the Kualuh people use and speak the Kualuh Malay language because it is an integral element of their culture. From the conversation above, it can be seen that students from North Labuhanbatu use Kualuh Malay during traditional wedding events. The *pabordah* team is typically present at every traditional wedding. *Mamuncak* is a tradition to welcome the groom to the bride's house. Usually, there is a representative who performs martial arts acts as a cultural form of having to pass through guards to enter the bride's territory. *Mamuncak* is performed by male representatives from both the groom's and bride's parties and is accompanied by music from *Gendang*. It can be said that *mamuncak* performances have been conducted since ancient times and have been passed down from ancestors to subsequent generations. In the past, *mamuncak* served as a form of self-defense against enemies, but today it is performed at weddings as a custom in the Malay tribe. The tradition of *upah-upah* involves giving awards in the form of a ceremony to the bride and groom, aimed at encouraging their enthusiasm to face life together in the future. Participants in the traditional ceremony communicate with each other in the Kualuh Malay language. See the following statement.

*Kalau acara adat Kualuh seperti perkawinan lebih sering pakai bahasa Melayu Kualuh, misalnya ada acara upah-upah, nasi hadap-hadapan itu memang menggunakan bahasa Kualuh. Kami juga sering pakai Bahasa Kualuh disini.*  
'If Kualuh Malay custom events such as marriage more often use Kualuh, there are events upah-upah, nasi hadap-hadapan it does use Kualuh Malay language. We also often use Kualuh here.'

### Religious Ritual Factors

The maintenance of Kualuh Malay is also significantly influenced by the use of the language in religious contexts. The participants said that they always use Kualuh Malay when they hold religious gatherings such as *wirid* in Labuhanbatu Utara. See the following quote.

- SI : *Akak, geleren sapo kito wirid jumahat ni?*  
'Sister, whose turn wirid on Friday?'
- RS : *Di rumah si Fatimah baya, janlupo yo jam siap isya.*  
'In the Fatimah home, don't forget after isya'
- SI : *Ooo baya, iyo datang nyo aku.*  
'Yes, I will come'
- RS : *Iyola baya.*  
'Alright'

In traditional events and religious rituals, participants often use the Kualuh language. However, in some cases, they employ Indonesian as an intermediary language. Consider the following excerpt.

*Kalo lagi rapat di Kaum Ibu atau wirit kami pakek bahasa Kualuh dan Indonesia.*  
*Tapi yang paling sering pake bahasa Kualuh, karena kan memang orang Kualuh rata-rata paling ada yang ayah atau omak yang tidak satu suku atau gak pande bahasa Kualuh ya kita pake lah bahasa Indonesia.*  
'We speak Indonesian and Kualuh Malay in meetings held in Kaum Ibu or wirid. However, since Kualuh people are dominant, we speak Kualuh Malay most of the time. However, if there are some people who do not understand, then the wirid will be delivered in Indonesian.'

## 2. Strategies used in Kualuh-Malay language preservation in Medan

According to the theory, language maintenance strategies include: (1) family language policy; (2) watching vernacular satellite channels; (3) listening to vernacular mass media; (4) tuning into vernacular radio programs; (5) using the Kualuh Malay language in daily life; (6) using Kualuh Malay in religious gatherings such as *Perwiritan*; (7) employing Kualuh Malay in cultural events like wedding ceremonies; and (8) attending a national seminar on vernacular language presented by linguists. This study does not examine all of these strategies but focuses on the following: (1) family language policy; (2) frequent use of Kualuh Malay in daily life; (3) use of Kualuh Malay in religious gatherings such as *Perwiritan*; and (4) use of Kualuh Malay in cultural events such as wedding ceremonies. The results are presented in the table below:

**Tabel 1.** The Strategies of Maintaining Kualuh Malay Language

No.	Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1	Family Language Policy	16	89
2	Using Kualuh Malay in Daily Communication Frequently	18	100
3	Using Kualuh Malay Language in Traditional Organization	14	78
4	Using Kualuh Malay language in Religious Congregations	13	72
<b>Average</b>			<b>84,75</b>

### Family Language Policy

A family language policy is a strategy used to maintain the native language of the area. Family plays an important role in the natural spread of Kualuh Malay, helping to keep it functional. In Medan, several participants utilize this strategy. When interacting with their families at home, they make it a practice to speak Kualuh Malay, as the participants state below.

*Karna saya tinggal di Medan ini di rumah saudara (Bibi). Bibi juga asalnya dari Labura, bahkan anak-anaknya juga di ajari memakai bahasa Melayu Kualuh. Kalau di rumah yang di Labura, Ayah sama Ibu memang selalu menagajarkan kami bahasa Kualuh, misalnya dengan cara setiap Ayah bicara atau pun menyuruh kami, Ayah selalu memakai bahasa Kualuh. Kalau kami menjawab pake bahasa Indonesia pasti Ayah menyambungny dengan bahasa Kualuh sampai kamipun sadar harus menjawab beliau dengan bahasa Kualuh juga.*

'Because I reside in my aunt's home in Medan. My aunt is from Labura as well, and she taught Kualuh Malay to her kids as well. My mother and father always taught us the Kualuh language at home in Labura. For instance, my father would always use Kualuh when he spoke to us or gave us instructions. Dad would undoubtedly keep speaking Kualuh if we responded in Indonesian, until we learned we also needed to respond to him in Kualuh.'

Only 11% of the participants who could speak Kualuh Malay did not implement a family language policy at home. Their parents do not encourage communication in Kualuh Malay when interacting with family members. Consider the following interview excerpt.

*Kalok dirumah kami nggak ada aturan harus berbahasa Kualuh karena tanpa ada aturan pun kami pandai pake bahasa Kualuh kak.*

'At home we don't have a rule that we have to speak Kualuh, because without any rules we can speak in Kualuh language.'

### Daily Conversation Language

Following the family language policy, Kualuh Malay continues to be used in everyday conversations. Additionally, this strategy helped the Labuhanbatu Utara students maintain their language as the participants state below.

*Ya, sehari-hari saya menggunakan bahasa Melayu kualuh, karena saya asli masyarakat kualuh hilir, saya lahir dan dibesarkan di daerah kualuh itu.*

'Yes, every day I use Kualuh Malay Language, because I come from Kualuh Hilir, I was born and raised in the Kualuh area.'

However, some participants do not use Kualuh Malay in their everyday conversations. They adjust their communication style based on the person they are speaking to; therefore, they do not employ Kualuh Malay in daily interactions. Consider the following interview excerpt.

*Saya pande bahasa Kualuh. Tapi terkadang digunakan sedikit-sedikit sesuai dengan lawan bicara dan tempatnya.*

'I can speak Kualuh Malay language. However, it is occasionally utilized somewhat depending on the situation and the person I am speaking to.'

### Using in Religious Congregations

One strategy used to maintain the local language is its use in religious contexts. In religious gatherings, participants use Kualuh Malay when discussing occurrences or perwiritan. This method serves to help preserve the Kualuh Malay language, as stated below.

*Kalau disini memang ada khusus pengajian semacam organisasi perkumpulan pemuda dan mahasiswa yang berasal dari Labuhanbatu Utara. Kami selalu pakai bahasa Kualuh kalau sedang mengadakan pertemuan ataupun diskusi. kalau pakai bahasa Kualuh rasanya lebih nyambung dan akrab aja.*

'Special recitations are held here, including those Labuhanbatu Utara youth and student organizations. We always use Kualuh for meetings and discussions. Using Kualuh Malay language makes us feel more connected and familiar with each other.'

Additionally, students who do not speak Kualuh Malay in religious congregations are still able to communicate in the language. However, they converse with others in these settings using Indonesian.

### Using in in Traditional Organization

Promoting culture or ethnicity requires the support of traditional organizations. The establishment of these organizations helps the younger generation learn about their cultural heritage. By forming traditional organizations, they can promote Kualuh Malay culture and language to Kualuh Malay speakers, particularly the younger generation. Traditional groups, such as manyonggot or upah-upah, play a crucial role in this effort, as stated by participants below.

*Ya, saat jumpa kawan di acara adat Labura di Medan ini seperti PRSU kami pakai bahasa melayu Kualuh*

'Yes, when we met friends at Labura traditional events in Medan, such as PRSU, we used Kualuh Malay language.'

## 3. The Reasons of Maintaining Kualuh Malay Language

Three reasons behind the maintenance of Kualuh Malay language were identified, namely (1) as Kualuh Malay pride, (2) as the identity of Kualuh Malay people. Based on the participant interviews, the table below shows the reasons students from Labuhanbatu Utara maintain communication in Kualuh Malay.

**Tabel 2.** The Reasons of Maintaining Kualuh Malay Language

No	The Reason of Language Maintenance	Frequency	Percentage
1	Pride	18	100
2	Identity	18	100
<b>Average</b>			100

### Pride

After making observations, it can be seen that participants show pride when speaking Kualuh-Malay either to fellow speakers or other people. This is also illustrated in the following interview excerpt.

*Bangga, karena walaupun saya tinggal di Medan, bahasa melayu kualuh ini bisa menyatukan saya dengan teman-teman yang lain. Saya bangga karena saya memiliki kemampuan untuk berbahasa daerah.*

'I am Proud, because even though I live in Medan, this Kualuh Malay language can unite me with other friends. I am proud because I have the ability to speak regional languages.'

During the interviews, all participants felt happy and proud to be Kualuh Malay, although some of them did not speak the language in certain contexts. As the following participant stated.

*Sangat bangga, karena bahasa Melayu merupakan bahasa yang melambangkan keberagaman dan bahasa Melayu juga adalah bahasa yg sudah dikenal banyak orang.*

'I am truly proud because Kualuh Malay is a language that represents variety and is well-known among many people.'

## Identity

The use of Kualuh Malay is also linked to self-identity. To express their Kualuh tribal identity, students from Labuhanbatu Utara use Kualuh Malay in their daily communication. This practice reflects their identity as Kualuh people, with 100% of participants maintaining the language, as indicated by the data in the table. The following participant's statement illustrates this further.

*Masih dan harus wajib dipertahankan, kita sebagai putra/i kualuh yang lahir dan besar di tanah Kualuh tentu saja mempunyai kewajiban mempertahankan bahasa Melayu Kualuh yang kita punya, bahasa yang tidak mungkin dimiliki daerah lain, bahasa yang menjadi identitas kampung kita, bahasa yang mempersatukan kita di kota orang lain. Kalau tidak kita sebagai penerus bangsa yang mempertahankannya, siapa lagi. Kita mungkin tidak akan mengenal bahasa ibu, nenek, atau pun buyut kita kalau tidak kita gunakan ke depannya ke anak cucu kita nantinya.*

'It must be maintained. Kualuh's young generation has a responsibility to preserve the Kualuh Malay language, which is unique to our village and unifies us, even in other cities. If we, as the nation's successors, do not defend it, who will? We are unlikely to know our mother's, grandmother's, or great-grandmother's language unless we speak it with our children and grandchildren in the future.'

The interview excerpt above demonstrates that language is one of the primary markers of a culture and tribe. It serves as the most effective medium for passing on noble values and ancient wisdom to the next generation. This principle is also upheld by the Kualuh tribe for their descendants.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, most students from Labuhanbatu Utara can speak Kualuh Malay due to seven identified factors influencing their language maintenance. Previous research has explored language maintenance, but this study examines a different language, community, and context. These findings align with those of Hariyanto (2023) and Silka (2020), who also noted that educational and workplace domains do not significantly impact Malay language maintenance. Silka's research in Palembang identified the family domain as the dominant factor, attributed to the large number of Malay community members who can establish internal organizations. In contrast, this study found that the limited number of Kualuh Malay speakers makes it challenging to form such organizations. The phenomenon of visiting the homeland emerged as a dominant factor, as students frequently use Kualuh Malay to communicate during these visits. In conclusion, this research presents different findings compared to previous studies, while still supporting established theories.

The findings reveal seven factors that influence students from Labuhanbatu Utara in maintaining the Kualuh Malay language in Medan: living together in one area, ethno-linguistic vitality, language use in the family domain, language use in the neighborhood, language use in religious contexts, language use in the workplace, and the practice of traditional ceremonies. Additionally, a new insight from this research is the importance of visiting one's homeland. Some of these factors do not fully align with Holmes's theory. Notably, visiting the homeland regularly is a significant factor in language maintenance; it facilitates language contact with local speakers. This interaction enhances the ability of Kualuh Malay speakers to communicate effectively in their language.

The second factor is ethno-linguistic vitality, which significantly supports the maintenance of the Kualuh Malay language. Ethno-linguistic vitality relates to speakers' attitudes toward their language; the pride they feel in being Labura people and in using Kualuh Malay fosters their commitment to preserving it. As Holmes (2001) states, ethno-linguistic vitality is closely connected to how language users perceive their language. Students from Labuhanbatu Utara in Medan take pride in their Kualuh Malay identity, which encourages them to use the language in daily communication. They aspire to see their language develop further. However, when they leave their region, many prefer to use other languages, such as Javanese or Bahasa Indonesia, because speakers of other ethnicities may not understand Kualuh Malay. Additionally, some students feel a lack of confidence when using Kualuh Malay in front of speakers from other ethnic groups.

The third factor is the use of language in the family domain. Language use at home plays a crucial role in maintaining a language. As Holmes (2001) states, the use of vernacular at home

encourages both nuclear and extended families to continue using their native language, thereby aiding in its preservation. The use of Kualuh Malay in the home is closely related to the language practices of the respondents' families. This use can be categorized by the roles of speakers, such as parents (father and mother) and their children.

The fourth factor, the use of language in the neighborhood, is also important for maintaining the Kualuh Malay language. As Gomma (2011) notes, transmitting vernacular language occurs through interactions with friends from various ethnic backgrounds and participation in community activities. Students from Labuhanbatu Utara frequently use Kualuh Malay when communicating with one another in their environment, especially among fellow Kualuh Malay speakers. The fifth factor is living together in a communal area. Residing in close proximity supports students in maintaining their language. Students from Labuhanbatu Utara continue to use Kualuh Malay while communicating with each other, although they occasionally switch to Bahasa Indonesia.

The sixth factor is traditional ceremonies, which significantly influence the maintenance of the Kualuh Malay language in Medan. Various traditional ceremonies, such as the Manarikan Ine ceremony, Nasi Hadap-Hadapan, and Manyonggot, are still actively practiced by students from Labuhanbatu Utara. These cultural activities support the preservation of their language by ensuring its continued presence in community life. Participation in these ceremonies encourages students to study and practice Kualuh Malay, reinforcing their linguistic identity. The final factor is the use of language in the religious domain. Religious gatherings serve not only as places of prayer but also as venues for discussing religious matters. Most students use Kualuh Malay during Perwiritan, a communal religious practice. This finding suggests that maintaining the Kualuh Malay language can be supported through various strategies employed by students from Labuhanbatu Utara.

According to Fishman (1990), there are eight strategies that indigenous speakers can employ to maintain a language. These strategies include: family language policy, watching vernacular satellite channels, utilizing mass media in vernacular satellite programming, listening to the radio for vernacular content, frequently using Kualuh Malay in daily life, employing Kualuh Malay in religious gatherings such as Perwiritan, participating in cultural activities like wedding ceremonies, and attending national seminars on vernacular language with presentations by linguists.

However, the findings of this research do not fully align with Fishman's (1990) strategies. While he identifies eight strategies for maintaining local languages, this study found only four strategies employed by students from Labuhanbatu Utara in Medan to preserve Kualuh Malay. The strategies not identified in this research include watching vernacular satellite channels, accessing mass media in vernacular satellite programming, listening to the radio for vernacular content, and attending national seminars on vernacular language. This discrepancy arises from the lack of efforts by non-governmental organizations to provide satellite channels, mass media, radio programs, and seminars that utilize Kualuh Malay, particularly in Medan.

The maintenance of the Kualuh Malay language in Medan is driven by the pride that students from Labuhanbatu Utara feel in their identity, which serves as a symbol of the vitality of Kualuh Malay. According to experts such as Holmes, Thomas, Baker, and Fishman, key reasons for maintaining a language include expressing ethnic identity, achieving honor and self-esteem, aiding community development, and preserving linguistic diversity. From the findings of this study, it is evident that students from Labuhanbatu Utara maintain their language to express their identity as Kualuh Malay speakers, to foster self-pride and prestige as members of the Labura community, and to ensure their language remains vibrant. This aligns with Holmes (2001), who stated that when a language is viewed as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it tends to be maintained longer. The use of Kualuh Malay in daily communication reinforces their identity as Labura people. Consequently, the positive attitude of students from Labuhanbatu Utara toward their vernacular supports their efforts in language maintenance. Furthermore, maintaining the Kualuh Malay language also entails preserving cultural heritage, as every cultural activity relies on language. In this context, Kualuh Malay is an essential element of national culture in Indonesia and should be preserved.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, language maintenance is vital for enhancing the value and existence of Kualuh Malay within its community. Students from Labuhanbatu Utara in Medan have effectively engaged in preservation efforts, driven by factors such as visiting the homeland and ethno-linguistic vitality. Their strategies include family language policies and frequent use of Kualuh Malay in daily life and cultural practices, reflecting their pride in their identity as Labura people. However, these efforts must be

further developed, particularly in linguistic aspects like translation and correct spelling, to enhance awareness of proper language use. Future research in Labuhanbatu Utara should focus on collaborative approaches to strengthen these maintenance efforts and ensure the continued vitality of the Kualuh Malay language.

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