Journal of Language and Literature
Vol. 25 No. 1, April 2025, pp. 263 – 273
DOI: 10.24071/joll.v25i1.10539
Available at https://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/JOLL/index
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Exploring Teenager's Language Attitudes towards Javanese Language

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Abstract

Language attitudes significantly influence language vitality and revitalization, shaping users' language choices. In Indonesia, indigenous languages, including Javanese, are declining in use, particularly among younger generations who prefer Indonesian for daily communication. Family language policies, where parents prioritize Indonesian over indigenous languages, contribute to this trend. This study investigates teenagers' language attitudes towards Javanese, aiming to inform strategies for preserving the language. Using a mixed-method sociolinguistic approach, the researchers collected data through surveys and interviews, examining factors like cultural identity, social dynamics, educational experiences, and media exposure. The study involves Junior High School students, with 127 survey responses and 42 respondents joining the interviews. The findings reveal that 44.1% of respondents learned Javanese as their mother tongue, while 55.1% acquired Indonesian. Proficiency in Javanese varies: 41.7% can fluently use Javanese Ngoko, *but only 4.7% are fluent in* Krama. *Javanese* Ngoko *is mainly used within families and local communities, whereas Indonesian dominates in schools and public spaces, influenced by its perceived utility and globalization. Despite challenges, including limited learning resources and fear of misuse, respondents view Javanese positively, driven by cultural pride and ethnic identity. These findings highlight the need for targeted strategies to empower teenagers to preserve and revitalize Javanese. Addressing language attitudes and increasing exposure to Javanese could help reverse its decline.*

Article information

Received: 29 November 2024

Revised: 17 February 2025

Accepted: 6 March 2025

***Keywords**: Javanese; language attitude; language policy; perceptions; teenagers*

Introduction

A language will be in danger when its speakers stop using it, use the language in a severely limited number of communicative domains, and hesitantly pass it on from one generation to the next (Languages, 2003). The statistical data published in Ethnologue shows that Javanese is spoken by more or less 1M to 1B speakers (Ethnologue, 2024). But there is a tendency for the number of speakers to get less and less. The use of Javanese is also decreasing

(Udasmoro, et al., 2023). This situation might put the Javanese language in danger.

There are some factors influencing this situation. Indonesia is considered an endoglossic nation that implements one language as its national and official language in any affairs (Ulfa, 2019). The government language policy that places Indonesian as the official language and main language of communication has put Indonesian as the most dominant language spoken by Indonesian society. The increased use of Indonesian influences the current trends and shifts in the use of Javanese by younger speakers because Indonesian takes over more domains of communication (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014).

Globalization also popularizes the use of more foreign languages, especially among young generations. Globalization impacts local languages becoming threatened and affects youths' perception of local languages because of the significant use of international or national language (Ramli, Setyawan, & Rampeng, 2019). Furthermore, Shakiyya and Martin-Anatias (2023) stated that multilingualism in Indonesia is at risk due to the dominance of English as an international language.

Furthermore, the family language policy also contributes to the decline of Javanese language usage. Family language policy is a crucial factor that leads to child language outcomes. In multilingual families, the decisions about the linguistic upbringings of their children potentially influence the children and the family (Hollebeke, Struys, & Agirdag, 2020; King & Fogle, 2013). The parental language use and ideologies may influence the decision-making and strategies related the language choice. It can be observed that nowadays Javanese multilingual parents tend not to introduce Javanese as the main language in their family (Fitriati, 2023). They tend to choose Indonesian as the main language to facilitate communication among family members.

The decrease of the Javanese language use is even worsened by the limited access to resources in Javanese. Nowadays, more digital resources in Javanese are available online. Unfortunately, the availability of Javanese learning materials is not as many as the one in Indonesian.

The above condition stimulates the researcher to investigate the language attitudes of teenagers towards the Javanese language and to identify the factors that influence their attitudes. This study also aims to identify whether or not there is a correlation between teenagers' language proficiency and their language attitudes towards Javanese. Analyzing language attitude is significant considering its important role in language learning, maintenance, planning, and policy. (Li & Wei, 2022).

Why teenagers? The teenage years are a period of growth and development. Teenage development might be influenced by parental and cultural influences. Teenagers also go through hormonal and physical changes. These changes might also contribute to forming their personality and identity. The development of identity is a result of cultural, educational, and technological influences. It can be said that teenagers are in a critical period that shapes their personality and identity. In terms of language transfer, teenagers play a crucial role in the intergenerational transfer of language. Therefore, it is important to apprehend how teenagers view, value, and use their indigenous language to develop effective strategies that support linguistic continuity and cultural resilience.

Many studies have focused on language attitudes. Nur studied the language attitudes of Betawi adolescents towards their mother tongue (Nur, 2021). He employed a descriptive quantitative design with a sociolinguistic approach. He found that Betawi adolescents showed a negative language attitude towards their mother tongue, which was mainly influenced by the existence of the Indonesian language.

Nur et.al investigated the language attitude of Betawi teenagers toward their mother tongue (Nur, Lukman, Kaharuddin, & Dafirah, 2021). The teenagers also showed a negative language attitude. This attitude is shaped by the language habits of the respondents outside the home environment.

Indonesian and English are dominant and both of them gained more positive language attitudes. The positive language attitude towards the Indonesian language was also influenced by the language policy implemented by the parents who gave freedom to the language choices of their children. Meanwhile, the respondents' perception of English as the language of modern development made it gain more positive value.

Other researchers, Li and Wei, analyzed language attitudes and their associations with language achievements. The findings of their research show that language attitudes affect self-perceived language proficiency and real language achievements. They highlight the importance of language attitudes for language learning (2022).

Another research was conducted by Udasmoro et.al. who analyzed the active and passive usage of the Javanese language by youth in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Udasmoro, Sulistyowati, Firmonasari, & Astuti, 2023). They analyzed the use of Javanese *Ngoko* and *Krama* in the domestic sphere and public sphere. Furthermore, they also addressed the use of Javanese in the media.

This research is similar to Nur's studies in terms of the focus of the study and the age of the respondents since this study is also concerned with the language attitudes of teenagers. This study shares similarities with the study conducted by Udasmoro et.al. since the researcher will also analyze the Javanese language and youth. However, this study concentrates on the language attitudes of Javanese teenagers towards the indigenous language spoken in their environment. Furthermore, the data of this research will be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Methodology

A sociolinguistic approach focusing on social psychology was implemented to identify the language attitudes of teenagers and the factors influencing their language attitudes. This study employed a mixed method combining the quantitative and qualitative approaches. As explained by Hernandez-Campoy (Hernández-Campoy, 2015), the study of language attitudes should be analyzed based on quantitative and qualitative methodology. The quantitative approach contributed more to generalizing the research results, while the qualitative approach provided in-depth data. This combination helped the researcher explore the language attitude adequately.

The respondents of this research were Junior High School students of three schools in Klaten: Maria Assumpta Junior High School, Pangudi Luhur Wedi Junior High School, and Pangudi Luhur Gantiwarno Junior High School. Those schools were selected to represent different areas of living. Maria Assumpta Junior High School is located in the center of the town, Pangudi Luhur Junior High School is located in the suburb of Klaten, while Pangudi Luhur Gantiwarno Junior High School is in the rural area.

The research data were collected via the distribution of a questionnaire to the students of class 8 with an expectation that the students have already passed the transition period from being elementary school students to junior high school students and have the ability to independently answer the distributed questions. 127 students consisting of 76 female students and 51 male students gave responses to the questionnaire.

Questions on language attitudes were formulated as closed-ended questions so that it would be easier for the respondents to give responses. Kesbi (Kesbi, 2018) states that close-ended questions require little effort from the respondents and the analysis is straightforward. Each answer was scored from one (totally disagree) to five (totally agree) and analyzed based on the Likert scale. The questionnaire was made using Google form and distributed through the WhatsApp platform to the respondents.

The data were also collected through structured interviews and focus group discussions. Eight students were interviewed individually and thirty-three students joined the focus group discussion. The interviews and the focus group discussion were conducted after the students finished their classes so that

the data-gathering process would not disturb their study.

Results and Discussion

This subchapter presents the findings and analysis of the research on teenagers' language attitudes toward the Javanese language. It examines three key aspects: the teenagers' attitudes towards Javanese, the factors influencing these attitudes, and the correlation between their mastery of Javanese and their attitudes. The analysis integrates qualitative and quantitative data to comprehensively understand the teenagers' perspectives and their connection to Javanese language use. By exploring these dimensions, the discussion sheds light on the interplay between language attitudes, sociocultural influences, and linguistic proficiency, offering insights into the status and vitality of the Javanese language in the younger generation.

An analysis of the respondents' family backgrounds was conducted to identify the respondents' family situation. Based on the analysis, as described in Table 1, it is identified that most respondents come from bilingual families in which the parents are in middle age and have mastered both Indonesian and Javanese. Most parents acquire a middle level of education.

Table 1. Respondent demographic distribution

		Mother	Father
Age of the parents	25 yo – 35 yo	12	4
	36 yo – 45 yo	62	55
	46 yo – 55 yo	46	55
	56 yo - .... yo	7	13
Education	Senior High School	95	98
	S1	13	22
	S2	3	3
	S3	6	4
Language mastery of the parents (M)	Indonesian	9	6
	Javanese	22	26
	Foreign language	0	2
	Indonesian and Javanese	94	89
	Indonesian and foreign language	2	4

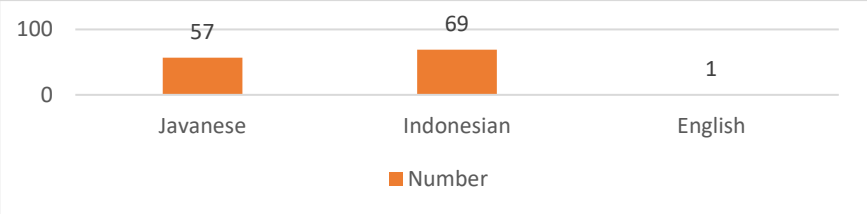


Figure 1. Respondents' Mother Tongue

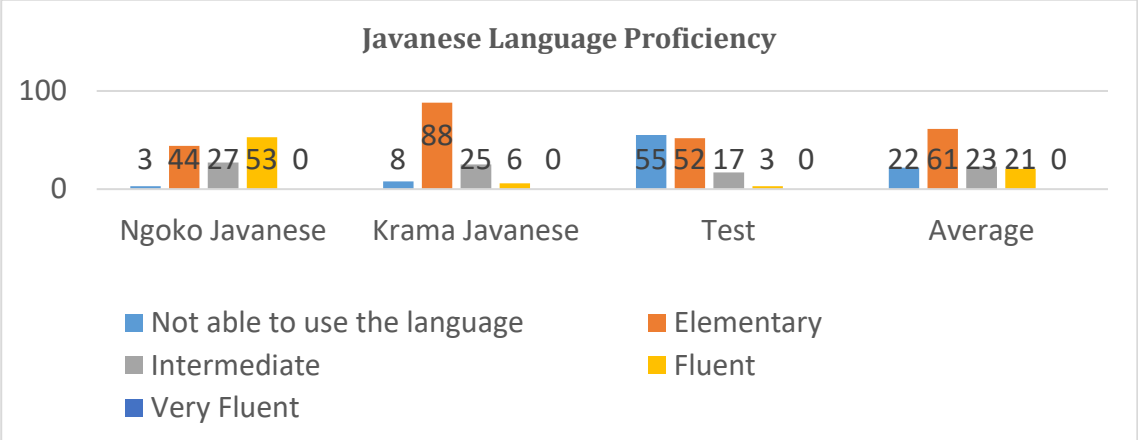


Figure 2. The language use distribution

In terms of language mastery, 85% of the respondents acquire Indonesian and Javanese. Meanwhile, as shown in Figure 1, only 45% of them acquire Javanese as their mother tongue. It shows that Javanese is not the first language introduced by the parents. Though the parents are bilingual, they choose Indonesian as the main language used in the family.

Figure 2 shows that the respondents' Javanese language mastery is still weak since 65% of the respondents are still in the elementary and below elementary level/not able to use the language. Most of them can communicate in Javanese *Ngoko* better than in Javanese *Krama*. This situation is influenced by the fact that most of the respondents communicate with their peers more than with older people. They feel more intimate when they communicate in Javanese *Ngoko.* The wider exposure to Javanese Ngoko gives more opportunity for the respondents to develop their Javanese *Ngoko* language mastery.

The respondents use Javanese mostly when they communicate with family members at home, neighbors, and friends at school and in their neighborhood. They choose to use Javanese *Ngoko* because it shows intimacy and their parents also use Javanese *Ngoko* for daily communication. On the other hand, when the respondents communicate with their teachers, they prefer to use Indonesian. This finding is in line with the previous study conducted by Udasmoro et.al. who also identified that Javanese *Ngoko* is used in casual exchanges, while Javanese Krama which carries a level of formality and politeness is used when speaking to a respected figure (2023).

Another reason for the respondents to use Javanese *Ngoko* more often compared to the *Krama* is that the respondents are afraid of making mistakes when they communicate in Javanese *Krama* since they are not fluent enough in using Javanese *Krama* and if they use Javanese *Ngoko*, it will be considered impolite. The respondents rarely use the Javanese *Krama* because they are not confident in using it.

In terms of the language attitudes towards Javanese, even though the respondents' Javanese language proficiency is not good enough and their intensity of Javanese language use is not as intensive as Indonesian, the respondents show positive language attitudes to Javanese language. The Likert scale calculation results that the average score of the language attitude is 77.39. The percentage score is categorized into five levels: very low agreement (0-20%), low agreement (21-40%), moderate agreement (41-60%), high agreement (61-80%), and very high agreement (81-100%). Based on this categorization, the average score of the language attitudes falls in the high agreement range and indicates that the respondents generally agree with the statements, though it is not at the highest possible level. They hold a favorable opinion and thus it suggests a positive perception of the language.

Some variations exist among responses because some respondents chose 'Neutral' or 'Disagree' for certain items. The highest

frequency of 'Neutral' answers occurs for the question about which one is more important, mastering Javanese or English. The respondents do not consider mastering Javanese is more important than mastering English. For them, both languages are important. Mastering Javanese is important it can show their identity as Javanese, while mastering English plays a significant role in global communication, education, and also future lives. The respondents also show moderate agreement with the statement "Good Javanese language skills increase my prestige." In other words, mastering Javanese may not be prestigious. In society, it can be observed that the prestige of mastering English or other foreign languages is higher than mastering local languages. Moderate agreement is also given to the statement related to the role of the Javanese language in improving the quality of the respondents' lives. The respondents consider that the use and mastery of the language will not significantly influence the quality of their lives.

The 'Disagree' is highest when the statement is related to the existence of Javanese culture. The respondents show strong disagreement with the statement that "Javanese culture can survive without the Javanese language." The respondents believe that the loss of the Javanese language will lead to the extinction of Javanese culture. This awareness is a good point for society to keep preserving the Javanese language.

The following table shows the details of the data distribution.

Table 2. Language Attitude

Statements	TD	D	N	A	TA
Javanese culture can survive without the Javanese language	40	40	34	10	3
Maintaining the preservation of the Javanese language is important to me	1	0	3	45	78
The people around me have made good efforts to preserve the Javanese language	0	6	15	61	45
Javanese people need to master Javanese	2	0	5	54	66
I need to master and be able to use Javanese well to communicate in everyday life.	1	2	15	60	49
Using Javanese is important in my identity as a Javanese person.	2	2	12	58	53
A good command of Javanese will help me to succeed in my school	3	7	28	67	22
Good mastery of Javanese will support my future.	3	5	34	63	22
Good Javanese language skills increase my prestige.	15	23	42	30	17
Javanese must be taught intensively in schools.	3	3	20	64	37
Parents need to teach Javanese to their children and the younger generation.	1	1	6	51	68
Mastering Javanese is more important than mastering English or other foreign languages.	7	15	59	27	19
The use and mastery of the Javanese language improves the quality of my life.	2	8	44	55	18
It is important for teenagers and the younger generation to master Javanese.	3	0	12	74	38

I feel satisfied with my current Javanese language skills.	4	12	28	56	27
I want to learn Javanese.	0	1	15	55	56

A pattern of correlation between the positive attitude toward ethnic identity and Javanese language preservation can be seen from the data showing that 97% of the respondents consider that the preservation of the Javanese language is important. The loss of the language will influence the continuation of Javanese culture. The respondents are aware of the efforts that have been made to preserve the language. They also think that, as parts of Javanese society, they have to actively participate in preserving the language. The following response is in line with the respondents' opinion on the relationship between the loss of language and the loss of culture.

While the respondents do not show high agreement on the role of the Javanese language in improving the quality of their lives and their future, the respondents give a different response to the role of the language in their daily lives and identity. Mastering the Javanese language is considered significant in supporting the respondents' daily communication and maintaining their identity as Javanese. Although some respondents consider that mastering the Javanese language will not improve their prestige, it is identified that for some others, being able to communicate in Javanese is considered excellent since nowadays not many teenagers can speak in Javanese, especially the krama, fluently. One of the respondents said, "It's cool if I can speak in Javanese fluently." As stated by Kasstan, Auer, and Salmon, language attitude and prestige are regularly and strongly implicated in language maintenance (2018; Extra & Yagmur, 2010).

The respondents also highlight the role of parents in helping them acquire the language. Parents should teach them how to use Javanese. The role of parents in minority language maintenance is crucial because the parents will determine the family language policy that will be used in the family's daily communication (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007; Spolsky, 2012). Previously, as described in Figure 2, it was identified that parents tend not to prioritize the use of Javanese as the first language of their children. Societal pressure to adopt Indonesian, the socio-cultural background, and also the context where the family lives affect the family language policy. Some respondents who live in a more rural area stated that they use Javanese more often because, in their surroundings, some elderly cannot speak Indonesian. This condition requires the respondents to speak in Javanese. Meanwhile, those who live in the centre of the town, speak Indonesian more often because most people in their surroundings speak Indonesian.

Considering the Javanese language learning process, 64% of the respondents suggest that the Javanese language must be taught intensively in schools. So far, the time allotment for the Javanese language class is two hours per week, which is very limited. Moreover, the content of the subject does not focus on how to train students to communicate. They propose some strategies to help them learn the Javanese language better. Optimizing digital media to provide more content related to Javanese language learning is one of the strategies that they highlight because right now it is difficult to find Javanese language content. The respondents also suggested opening some free courses for them to join. There are many English courses available, but Javanese courses are very rare. Conducting interesting and interactive events related to Javanese language usage is also proposed.

The respondents suggested those strategies because they thought that there should be some interesting ways to attract youths to learn Javanese. 55% of the respondents stated that they want to learn Javanese. It can be seen as an opportunity for the Javanese language maintenance because if young generations are willing to learn the language, it can be a capital for preservation.

Meanwhile, some respondents feel

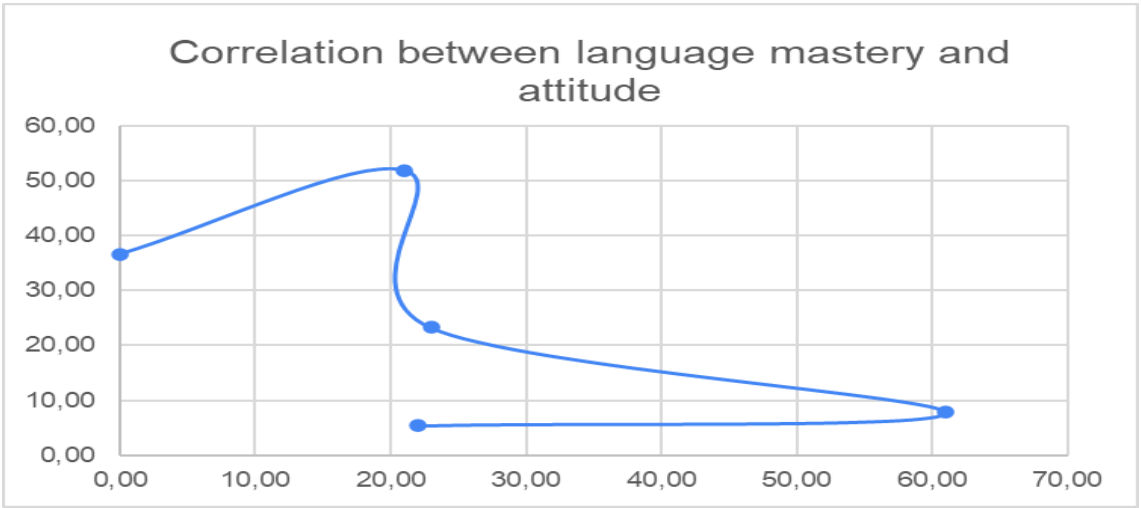
hesitant to communicate in Javanese. They are afraid of making mistakes and being ridiculed when they use inappropriate terms, especially in using Javanese *Krama*. The experience of being ridiculed is the factor that makes the respondents feel reluctant to learn Javanese. Some respondents experienced some bad experiences when they inappropriately used Javanese. They were laughed at and scolded. This discouragement might hinder the Javanese maintenance.

Another factor is the complexity of the language. The respondents stated that learning Javanese is challenging because it is very complex. Javanese has three different levels of speech: *Ngoko, Madya*, and *Krama*. These different levels require the respondents not only to learn the language but also to be able to determine the situation to whom they communicate so that they can decide which level they should use. The result shows that the respondents are reluctant to use the *Madya* and *Krama* because they are less able to select the appropriate vocabulary related to the level of speech. As an example, the verbs *mangan, maem*, and *dahar* have the same meaning which is to eat, but they are used differently. To say " Father, I want to eat." to our father, in appropriate Javanese, we are supposed to say "Pak, kula badhe maem." not "Pak, kula badhe dahar." The father is more respected so we need to communicate in *Madya* or *Krama.* Dahar is used for someone who is respected. This finding is in line with what Atmawati found in her research. She identified that young generations are less able to choose the correct form of verbs related to the level of speech (2021).

On the other side, 56% of the respondents have been satisfied with their Javanese language proficiency although the data related to the language proficiency shows that the respondents' language mastery is not good yet. They feel that although they cannot communicate in Javanese *Krama* as well as in the *Ngoko*, it is still better than when they cannot use the language at all. They are willing to learn Javanese so that they can improve their Javanese language proficiency.

To identify the correlation between language mastery and attitudes, the calculation based on the Pearson formula is applied. As a result, the calculation shows that the correlation coefficient is -55. The following scatter chart shows the relation between the two values.

Figure 3. Correlation between language mastery and attitude



Based on this calculation, the respondents' language mastery and language attitudes tend to move in the opposite direction. The *r* value indicates a moderate negative correlation between the language mastery and language attitudes of the respondents. It means that while the attitudes are positive, this does not translate to better proficiency. The data show that although the Javanese language proficiency is weak, the

respondents value the language positively because they consider Javanese important for cultural identity.

The weak proficiency in the Javanese language can be the result of limited exposure to the language. In Klaten, Javanese is mostly spoken in informal settings which makes structured learning difficult. Furthermore, the education system also does not support Javanese language learning because of its insufficient time allotment for Javanese lessons. Another cause is related to the psychological factor. Some of the respondents avoid using Javanese, especially the Krama one due to fear of ridicule.

This finding is different from the findings of Nur (2021) and also Nur et.al (2021) who identified respondents' negative language attitudes towards their mother tongue. The factor that may lead to this difference is the linguistic situation faced by the respondents. The respondents of the two previous studies were those who live in DKI Jakarta where Indonesian language use is significantly dominant, while the respondents of the current study live in a small city where Javanese is still used by most people.

In terms of the relationship between language attitudes and proficiency, the result of this study is slightly different from what is found by Li and We since it does not significantly show that positive language attitudes will correspond to good language proficiency. As mentioned before, Li and Wei stated that positive language attitudes play a significant role in predicting language achievement (2022). Of course, there might be some factors influencing this result. Some are the complexity of the Javanese language, the learning system, and also the support of the family.

Considering the results of the analysis, a paradox is highlighted: while teenagers value Javanese, their proficiency remains weak. This paradox accentuates the need for identifying appropriate strategies related to Javanese language maintenance. Some strategies that can be inferred from the analysis deal with family language policy, learning strategies, and integration of Javanese in digital and social media.

The first strategy aims at improving parental involvement in maintaining the Javanese language. Parents and family play a significant role in language preservation. In this case, parents should pay considerable attention to the family language policy. They should be more concerned about what language should be used and what language(s) should be maintained (Curdt-Christiansen & Lanza, 2018). In terms of the Javanese language maintenance, parents must implement a family language policy that encourages Javanese active use at home. It is needed to maintain the transgenerational transmission of the language and to give more exposure to the children.

The second strategy is to reform the Javanese educational system. Javanese language lessons should be given more time and expanded beyond learning formal grammar to developing practical communication skills. Teachers and curriculum policymakers should evaluate the teaching and learning techniques. Based on the result of the interview, some respondents are not interested in learning Javanese because they think that the materials are difficult and not practical. Finding the most appropriate learning method and materials is necessary so that teachers can make the lessons more compelling, attractive, and student-centred. Schools and the community may also host interactive cultural events promoting Javanese usage to teenagers.

The third strategy is related to digital media engagement. Rianto and Juliarta (2024) found that digital media have been an integral part of teenagers' lives and exposure to various texts and language styles on social media will enrich teenagers' vocabulary and improve language style. Therefore, developing and increasing Javanese social media content, interactive games, and also online courses might be useful to promote the use of the Javanese language among teenagers. Designing a mobile app to aid in the learning of Javanese is another way to enhance the teaching and learning of Javanese.

Conclusion

The objective of this research is to identify the language attitude of teenagers towards Javanese, analyze the factors influencing the attitudes, and diagnose whether there is a correlation between language proficiency and attitudes or not. The study reveals that while teenagers' proficiency in the Javanese language, particularly in *Krama*, is weak, their attitudes toward the language remain positive. Most respondents view Javanese as essential for cultural preservation and identity, despite prioritizing Indonesian as their mother tongue. They predominantly use *Ngoko* in informal settings, with limited use of *Krama* due to a lack of fluency and fear of mistakes. Although they express satisfaction with their proficiency, they advocate for better learning strategies, including increased school hours, digital resources, and interactive language programs. A moderate negative correlation (-0.55) between language mastery and attitudes suggests that appreciation for the language's cultural significance does not translate into practical use. These findings highlight the need for family involvement, improved education, and supportive learning environments to bridge the gap between positive attitudes and low proficiency, ensuring the language's sustainability.

Acknowledgments

The writers would like to express their deepest gratitude to:

1. Sr. Herlina Nogo M., OSU, S.Pd., as the headmaster of SMP Maria Assumpta, the teachers, and all respondents from SMP Maria Assumpta, Klaten, Jawa Tengah
2. Br. Adrianus Sulistya Kristy P., FIC as the headmaster of SMP Pangudi Luhur Wedi, the teachers, and all respondents from SMP Pangudi Luhur Wedi, Klaten, Jawa Tengah
3. Ibu An. Dyah Swari Pramastuti, S.Pd., as the headmaster of SMP Pangudi Luhur Gantiwarno, the teachers, and all respondents from SMP Pangudi Luhur Gantiwarno, Klaten, Jawa Tengah
4. The Research and Service Centre of Universitas Sanata Dharma for funding this research.

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