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The Influence of Slang on the Indonesian Language Ability of Elementary School Students

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of the use of slang on the Indonesian language ability of elementary school students. Informal slang that deviates from the rules of standard language is now widely used by students in their daily lives, both in direct communication and through social media. The method used is a literature study with a qualitative descriptive approach that refers to various relevant literature. The results showed that the intensive use of slang can lead to a decrease in mastery of standard vocabulary, difficulty in structuring sentences according to the correct structure, and confusion in distinguishing between formal and informal language contexts. Nevertheless, students still recognize the importance of Indonesian in the context of education and official communication. To overcome this negative impact, cooperation between teachers, parents, and the environment is needed in fostering good language habits, as well as the implementation of learning strategies that emphasize the importance of correct Indonesian as a means of communication and national identity.

Keywords: *Slang Language, Indonesian Language Ability, Elementary School Students, Language Acquisition*

1. Introduction

Language is the main foundation in building civilization, uniting society, and shaping the identity of a nation (Abatbaevna, 2025). In the Indonesian context, Aydingün & Aydingün (2004), language not only functions as a tool of daily communication, but also as a symbol of unity, a tool of national integration, as well as the main instrument in the process of education and the formation of the nation's character. As a country consisting of various ethnicities, ethnicities, and cultures, the existence of Indonesian as a national language has a central role in maintaining social cohesion and avoiding identity fragmentation (Sidi, 2020). Therefore, the

mastery and correct use of the Indonesian language cannot be seen as an option, but as an obligation that must be instilled from an early age to all levels of society, especially the younger generation.

For elementary school students, Savescu & Sandra (2021), the 6–12-year-old phase is a crucial period in the development of language skills. (Hayat et al., 2024) emphasized that children come to the concrete operational stage, where they begin to be able to understand rules and structures more systematically. In this context, language learning is an important part of forming ways of thinking, arranging logic, and conveying ideas in a structured manner (Hayitovna, 2025). Therefore Jones et al. (2020), building a strong formal language foundation is essential for students to be able to thrive academically and socially. Indonesian as the main language of instruction in national education has a strategic position to support the success of the teaching and learning process.

However, in recent decades Kohler (2019), the challenge to the existence of the standard Indonesian language has intensified. Migdadi et al. (2020), one of the most prominent linguistic phenomena is the rampant use of non-standard or casual language, which in modern development is referred to as slang. Situmorang et al., 2024 revealed that slang is a manifestation of social dynamics and linguistic creativity of society, which is often influenced by popular culture, digital media, and everyday life. It is developing rapidly, flexibly, and innovatively, but at the same time it also deviates from formal and systematic linguistic norms.

Pulcini (2024), the phenomenon of slang is not new in the study of linguistics, but its spread among elementary school-age children shows a significant change in social patterns. Maulidiya et al. (2021), previous generations may have only learned slang in adolescence or adulthood, but today with extensive access to gadgets, social media, and the internet have been exposed to informal language from an early age. They absorb language from YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and even from online games and virtual conversations. As stated Situmorang et al. (2024), social media has a great influence in spreading and instilling slang styles into children's communication practices. The language they hear and see every day gradually becomes part of their language habits.

This condition raises concerns because elementary school-age children should be in the intensive stage of forming formal language skills. The uncontrolled habit of casual language blurs the boundaries between formal and informal language. As reported by Sitanggang et al., this phenomenon results in many students' experiencing confusion in distinguishing the use of language in different situations (Toan, 2022). Students are unable to determine when they

should use standard language (e.g. in writing reports or answering exam questions), and when they should use informal language in a casual context (Flores, 2020). This signifies a low register switching ability, an important ability in effective communication skills.

More than that, Abatbaevna (2025) investigated that the impact of excessive use of slang can also be seen in the deeper linguistic aspect. While Ardiani (2022), the use of inappropriate sentence structure, the loss of subjects or predicates, the decapitation of words, and the use of foreign vocabulary that are not absorbed correctly are indicators of a decline in the quality of formal language mastery. Graham et al. (2018), this decline will have a direct impact on students' literacy skills, including reading academic texts, writing systematic essays, and delivering arguments in a concise and logical manner. Finally, this has the potential to affect students' academic performance in various subject areas, not just Indonesian.

Another impact that is no less important is the erosion of a sense of pride in the Indonesian language as a national identity (Arief et al., 2021). As stated by Saputra et al. (2023), many students consider slang to be a representation of modern culture that is more attractive and flexible, while standard Indonesian is perceived as a rigid, archaic language, and irrelevant to everyday life. These findings are in line with the study of Djafri & Wimbari (2018) which stated that negative perceptions of standard languages are an obstacle to language learning in schools. When the younger generation no longer sees Indonesian as something valuable, the national linguistic identity becomes fragile.

This situation requires serious attention and intervention from various parties, especially from educators and policymakers. In this case Allen et al. (2018), Indonesian teachers have a strategic position as agents of change. Komara & Tiarsiwi (2021), teachers are not only tasked with teaching grammar and vocabulary but must also be able to form students' positive attitudes towards Indonesian. Huber et al. (2018), strengthening this attitude can be done through contextual learning approaches, the use of interesting media, and the integration of technology that is relevant to the child's world. For example, teachers can use social media or educational applications to introduce standard vocabulary in the form of creative content that is close to students' daily lives.

Furthermore Huber et al. (2018), there needs to be synergy between schools, families, and the community. Farida et al. (2024), parents have a big role in fostering good language habits at home. Marwan et al. (2024), the community can also contribute through literacy programs that foster love for the Indonesian language. Chik & Benson (2020), the government also needs to involve mass media and digital platforms to spread language campaigns that are educational,

inspiring, and easy to reach children. In addition Abdollahi et al. (2024), the formulation of a language-based curriculum policy that is adaptive to the times but still upholds formal language standards is an important step.

Thus, this article will comprehensively explore how the phenomenon of casual language use impacts the formal language skills of elementary school students. In addition, this article will also review various strategic approaches to balance the demands of modernity with the preservation of the national language. It is hoped that through in-depth analysis and constructive recommendations, this article can be a real contribution in efforts to maintain the quality and identity of the Indonesian language during changing times.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

This study did not involve direct participants such as students or respondents, because it used a literature study method. In this case, the term "participant" refers to various reading sources such as journals, articles, books, and previous research reports that discuss the use of casual language and its impact on the Indonesian language skills of elementary school students. These sources are the main source of data in this study.

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Instrument of Collecting Data

The main tool in collecting data is a literature selection guide that consists of several criteria, including the relevance of the content to the research topic, the credibility of sources such as articles from trusted journals or works by experts in the field, and the suitability of information to ensure that the data obtained reflects the latest conditions.

In addition, a framework was also used to extract data, which helped researchers identify key themes, key findings, and previous researchers' opinions on the influence of slang on students' language skills. The sources used come from various types of publications, such as scientific journals, textbooks, research reports, conference articles, as well as relevant official documents.

2.2.2 Techniques for Collecting Data

The data collection technique uses the purposive sampling method, which is to choose the source of the reference book deliberately because it is in accordance with the research objectives. Each selected document is analyzed in detail, and relevant information is recorded, grouped, and

categorized by topic. Researchers collected data by focusing on several aspects, namely the pattern of casual language use (slang) among elementary school students, the impact of such language use on Indonesian language skills both positively and negatively, as well as the strategies or solutions that have been proposed by previous researchers to address this phenomenon.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data that has been collected is analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method. The purpose of this analysis is to describe and interpret phenomena in an in-depth way, not based on numbers or statistical data. The analysis steps include theme coding to identify key patterns in everyday language use and their impact on students' language structures, interpretive analysis to understand the relationship between the use of everyday language and changes in students' Indonesian language skills, and data aggregation to summarize results from various sources in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between everyday language and Indonesian language skills at the elementary level. With this approach, the research is expected to provide a complete and in-depth picture of the complexity of the phenomenon being studied.

3. Results

Based on observations and interviews with children at elementary school as the Sample, they used casual language or slang in daily communication. They often combine correct Indonesian with casual language in conversation, which indicates the presence of language interference. This causes mastery of vocabulary in standard Indonesian to be lacking, as terms from casual languages are more frequently used and more popular in their environment. As a result, many children are more familiar and used to using casual language compared to language that follows the rules.

However, children have their own views on the use of casual language. For them, the use of mixed language is considered a form of communication that is creative, modern, and in accordance with the times. This shows that casual language is not only considered a means of communication, but also part of the social identity and self-expression of the younger generation. Interestingly, some children also realize that excessive use of casual language can have negative impacts, but they tend to accept it as part of language development.

An interesting finding is that children are still aware of the importance of using standard Indonesian in an official context. They understand that the correct and correct Indonesian language is very useful in communicating across cultures, in the teaching and learning process, as well as in interacting on social media or playing online games. In addition, they also realize that conveying information in the right language is very important in official activities at school. This shows that

even though they are familiar with casual language, their understanding of the function and importance of Indonesian is maintained.

Examples of interference of standard vocabulary into slang that are often used by children include the word "*terciduk*" which is changed to "*tercyduk*", "relaxed" to "*santuy*", "*bisa*" to "*sabi*", "sleep" to "*туру*", and "*gemas*" to "*gemoy*". In addition, they also use terms such as "*kuy*" (from *yuk*), "*gaje*" (unclear), "*kezel*" (upset), "*mantul*" (steady), "*sotoy*" (pretentious), and "*mager*" (lazy to move). These words show how slang vocabulary has entered and shaped students' language habits in daily life.

The examples of vocabulary transformation such as "*terciduk*" → "*tercyduk*," "relaxed" → "*santuy*," "able" → "*sabi*," "sleep" → "*туру*," and "*gemas*" → "*gemoy*" illustrate the linguistic phenomenon where standard vocabulary undergoes modification to form slang. This process often involves phonetic alteration, abbreviation, playful spelling, or creative borrowing. Children and adolescents tend to reshape formal words to sound more casual, humorous, or to express group identity.

Similarly, the emergence of slang terms like "*kuy*" (from "*yuk*"), "*gaje*" (from "*nggak jelas*"), "*kezel*" (from "*kesal*"), "*mantul*" (from "*mantap betul*"), "*sotoy*" (from "*sok tahu*"), and "*mager*" (from "*malas gerak*") demonstrates the flexibility of language in informal contexts. These expressions are not random but serve social and cultural functions. They provide young speakers with a sense of belonging to peer groups, distinguish informal settings from formal ones, and allow them to express emotions or attitudes more vividly.

Linguistically, this can be categorized as interference of standard vocabulary into slang, where standard forms are "distorted" or creatively reshaped to produce new meanings or stylistic nuances. From a sociolinguistic perspective, such interference reflects language dynamics influenced by digital culture, social media, and peer interaction. These slang forms circulate rapidly through online platforms (TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.), making them widely adopted and normalized among students.

The examples provided show that children and adolescents actively transform standard vocabulary into slang as part of their linguistic creativity and social identity construction. This phenomenon highlights how language evolves in response to cultural shifts, digital communication, and group belonging. While slang enriches everyday interaction and fosters solidarity among peers, it also gradually shapes students' language habits, sometimes at the expense of formal language proficiency. Therefore, understanding this process is essential for educators and parents to balance the preservation of standard language with the recognition of slang as a natural part of youth linguistic expression.

4. Discussion

The phenomenon of casual language use found in this study indicates a transformation in the language practice of elementary school students that reflects the evolving social and cultural dynamics. Children as part of the digital generation experience very high exposure to various forms of informal communication, both through interaction between friends, online watching, digital games, and social media. This change in context has also shifted the pattern of language use, from the previous tendency to be formal and structured towards a more flexible and expressive direction. This shift can be seen in the tendency of students to mix standard Indonesian with casual or slang in their daily conversations. The phenomenon of casual language use among elementary school students is closely supported by existing research. Schutte (2009) revealed that slang functions as a marker of youth identity and solidarity, particularly through social media, which reflects how children adopt informal language to build closeness and community.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of casual language by elementary school students can be understood as a form of adaptation to the social environment and as an effort to build group solidarity. Casual language is a symbol of the identity of the younger generation that reflects closeness, equality, and a sense of belonging. Children use this language not only because it follows trends, but also because it is considered more efficient, flexible, and in accordance with their lifestyle. This shows that language functions not only as a means of communication, but also as a reflection of culture and a means of self-expression. However, its dominance can negatively affect formal language mastery. Gates & Ilbury (2019) noted that frequent use of non-standard language leads to weak sentence structure and vocabulary, while Gebhard & Graham (2018) linked limited formal language ability to a decline in literacy skills, such as essay writing and logical argumentation.

From a pedagogical and cognitive development perspective, the dominance of casual language use can also have a negative impact on good and correct Indonesian language mastery. Children who are too accustomed to use casual language tend to have difficulty communicating in formal contexts, such as when writing essays, drafting reports, speaking in public, or understanding reading texts that use standard vocabulary and sentence structure. In addition, interference between slang and formal Indonesian can cause simplification of sentence structures and blurring of word meanings, which ultimately reduces the quality of students' literacy skills. This is particularly concerning because, as emphasized by Hayat et al. (2024), children in the concrete operational stage (ages 6–12) require structured language exposure to develop logical and systematic thinking, and excessive use of slang can disrupt this process and hinder learning in other subjects.

Linguistically, limitations in mastering standard vocabulary and proper syntactic structure can hinder the development of logical and systematic thinking in children. Since language is the main

tool in thinking and understanding abstract concepts, insufficient formal language skills can reduce children's ability to grasp other subjects such as science, mathematics, or social sciences. In other words, weak mastery of correct Indonesian can have wider implications for students' academic performance.

However, research also highlights the positive aspects of slang. Rianto & Juliarta (2024) found that informal language fosters creativity, self-expression, and digital literacy, encouraging children to participate actively in online platforms. In the context of two-way communication-based learning, relaxed language can create a wider space for participation as students feel more comfortable and less stressed. Casual language also allows for the exploration of creativity in language, such as creating new terms, using metaphors, or incorporating elements of popular culture into conversation. In fact, some forms of slang can be a bridge to build digital literacy and spark interest in reading and writing in children through platforms such as blogs, educational social media, or online forums.

Nonetheless, the main risk lies in the imbalance between informal and formal language skills. When casual language dominates, students may struggle to adapt their language use to different social contexts. For example, they might use profanity or overly casual expressions in formal situations such as flag ceremonies, interviews, or speech competitions. Inaccuracies in register choice can negatively affect their social and professional evaluations in the future. Shelton (2019) also warned that overexposure to slang can weaken register-switching skills, making it harder for students to distinguish between formal and informal contexts.

To overcome these challenges, a holistic and adaptive language education strategy is needed. Schools must play an active role in fostering students' language skills through a curriculum that is contextual, relevant, and practice-based. For example, Indonesian lessons can include contrasting sessions between formal and informal language, critical discussions on slang trends, and writing projects that integrate creativity with proper linguistic structures. Teachers must also serve as role models in using good and correct language, while encouraging students to reflect on their own language practices.

Furthermore, collaboration between schools, families, and the community also plays an important role. Parents need to be involved in shaping children's language habits, especially in encouraging the use of good language at home. Communities can hold cultural and literacy activities that foster pride in Indonesian, such as poetry competitions, language festivals, or "Love Indonesian" campaigns. Social media can also be optimized to promote standard Indonesian through engaging educational content tailored to the younger generation. Liu (2021) emphasized the important role of parents in language habit formation, while Novrita et al. (2025) showed that community literacy initiatives can strengthen pride in Indonesian. These findings underline the

importance of cross-sector collaboration in maintaining a balance between informal and formal language.

Thus, the preservation of the standard Indonesian language does not mean rejecting casual language, but rather guiding students to use it appropriately in different communication contexts. This balance will create a generation that is not only linguistically competent, but also culturally intelligent and socially adaptive. As a symbol of national identity, the Indonesian language must be preserved amidst rapid globalization and cultural change. Its preservation is the shared responsibility of schools, families, communities, and all components of the nation who care about the future of Indonesian language and culture.

5. Conclusion

The use of casual language among elementary school students reflects the social and cultural changes that are occurring dynamically in the digital age, where access to information and communication is increasingly open through various platforms such as social media, online games, and instant messaging applications. Casual or slang, which originally flourished in the youth and young adult community, has now permeated primary school-age children as part of their daily interactions. This language is not only used as a means of communication, but also to build social identity, strengthen friendships, and adapt to modern trends and lifestyles. In this context, casual language serves as a flexible, adaptive, and often more engaging medium of self-expression than standard language.

However, excessive and uncontrolled use of casual language can negatively impact the development of students' formal language skills. The habit of mixing a variety of standard and non-standard languages can lead to the degradation of sentence structure, the reduction of standard vocabulary, and the weakening of students' syntactic skills. The inability to distinguish between formal and informal communication situations, known as low register switching skills, is one of the main indicators of disrupted linguistic development. This condition has a direct effect on the academic quality of students, especially in writing skills, reading comprehension, and the ability to convey arguments logically and systematically. Furthermore, the negative perception of standard Indonesian as a rigid and boring language has the potential to reduce students' sense of pride in the national language, thereby threatening the position of Indonesian as an identity and symbol of national unity.

To overcome this problem, a contextual, creative, and strategic approach to language education is needed. Education not only aims to teach grammar and language rules but also must instill a positive attitude towards the good and correct use of Indonesian. Language teaching needs to be designed to be relevant to students' daily lives, for example through the integration of digital

content, educational social media, and technology-based literacy projects that bring standard vocabulary closer to children's worlds. In addition, the role of teachers as facilitators and role models is very important in guiding students to be able to use language according to their situation and context.

More than that, the involvement of parents in the household environment, as well as the active role of the community and digital media in spreading the Indonesian love campaign, are important elements in creating a healthy language ecosystem. This cross-sectoral collaboration allows for the formation of linguistic awareness from an early age, so that students can appreciate the richness of national languages without having to reject the existence of slang as part of cultural development. With the right balance, the young generation can grow up to be linguistically intelligent speakers, responsive to social changes, and still uphold linguistic and national values during an increasingly strong globalization trend.

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