

# Challenges and Existence of the Mekongga Local Language as a Media for Preserving Local Wisdom

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**Abstracts:** The Mekongga local language of Indonesia is an essential part of this country's cultural variety. Unfortunately, the number of speakers of the local Mekongga languages is decreasing. The Mekongga local language, like other local languages in Indonesia, is on the verge of extinction due to a declining number of speakers. Therefore, preserving the Mekongga local language is critical in order to preserve local wisdom and the local community's cultural identity. This research aims to describe the maintenance function of the Mekongga local language in the Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. The quantitative descriptive approach was used in this research, with research subjects consisting of adolescents and adults who were native speakers of the Mekongga language. The data was collected using a closed questionnaire and analyzed using a percentage descriptive technique. The research's findings show that the speaking community's attitude toward maintaining the Mekongga local language is positive, with an average of 76.23. However, there are still concerns about the potential extinction of the Mekongga local languages, especially amid the increasing challenges of globalization and modernization. Therefore, more optimal and concrete efforts are needed to preserve the local Mekongga language. These findings provide important implications for development policies directed at maintaining the Mekongga local language and local wisdom inherited from the past. This implication can positively contribute to the development of culture in Indonesia as a whole. This research can also significantly contribute to further research related to maintaining local languages and local wisdom in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Mekongga Local Language, Language Maintenance, Local Wisdom, Native Mekongga Language Speakers, Quantitative Descriptive.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Wundulako Sub-district is one of the sub-districts in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province. Wundulako Sub-district covers an area of 158.57 km<sup>2</sup> and is bounded to the north by Kolaka Sub-district, to the south by Baula Sub-district, to the east by East Kolaka Regency, and to the west by Bone Bay. Wundulako Sub-district has a population of 21,874 people, consisting of 11,174 men and 10,700 women (BPS Kolaka 2022). The original inhabitants of the Wundulako sub-district are the Mekongga tribe.

In principle, the Mekongga tribe is a sub-tribe originating from the Tolaki tribe. The Tolaki people are divided into the Tolaki-Konawe people and the Tolaki-Mekongga people. The Tolaki-Konawe people are located on the mainland or in coastal areas of the Konawe River with the Konawe dialect, inhabiting Konawe Regency, South Konawe Regency, North Konawe Regency, and Kendari City. The Tolaki Mekongga tribe occupies the Kolaka Regency, East Kolaka Regency, and North Kolaka Regency, which have the characteristics of the Mekongga dialect ([https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suku\\_Mekongga](https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suku_Mekongga)).

Based on data acquired from various sources, such as the internet, books, and interviews with Mekongga Tribe people, it was discovered that the names of the languages used by the Mekongga Tribe differ. Some refer to it as the Tolaki-Mekongga language, some as the Mekongga dialect, and yet others as the Mekongga language. To accommodate these naming discrepancies, the researcher refers to it as the Mekongga local language, implying that it is the language spoken by the tribes who inhabit the Mekongga kingdom's realm, including Wundulako Sub-district.

As a result, the speaking community in Kolaka Regency and its surrounding areas, which once belonged to the Mekongga kingdom, speaks the local language of that region. Previously, the Mekongga Kingdom's area was known as Wonua Sorume (Orchid Country) because it was noted for growing numerous varieties of orchids. The name Mekongga is derived from the name of a large bird known locally as the Kongga bird (Kadaruddin et al.,

2022). The term Mekongga was only adopted after the kingdom was created to commemorate the slaying of Kongga Owose (the Giant Eagle) by Sangia Larumbalangi, the Mekongga Kingdom's First King (Kolaka, 2021).

Unfortunately, the local language of Mekongga has steadily been abandoned as an asset to the Indonesian nation, particularly among the younger generation. The transmission and learning of the Mekongga local language by children have received little attention. Children are typically taught Indonesian because it is the language used in the school's teaching and learning process. It is similar to learning the Mekongga language in the home or social environment; most people do not teach it to their children anymore. In fact, learning the Mekongga local language in schools is also no longer carried out by some schools, even though the demands of the community, especially from the Mekongga speech community, that the Mekongga local language be taught in schools are very large (Firman, 2022), including language politeness. With an increasingly globalized society, the use of politeness, especially among young people, is increasingly threatened (Gusnawaty et al., 2022).

The number of local languages owned by Indonesia has decreased significantly because the number of speakers has decreased. In fact, local languages have long been considered one of the identities of those who live in remote parts of the archipelago (Alamsyah, 2018). Local languages are an essential asset of a country, according to Widiyanto in 2018. The paradigm of 21st-century society, however, places a higher value on foreign languages than national and local languages. The diversity of languages is one of Indonesia's cultural treasures that few other countries possess. The Indonesian people's diversity of languages is a unique and rare legacy from their ancestors that needs to be protected and preserved.

Language and culture are inextricably linked because language represents the nation and is intimately associated with the attitudes and behaviors of groups of speakers of that language (Rabiah, 2018). The obligation to protect and preserve language rests not only on speakers or researchers but on all components of the nation that must contribute to protecting and preserving it. Through language, local wisdom can be explored and known. Hence, it is hoped that the nation's indigenous knowledge will not only endure as a memory but also be able to make life better for the nation (Komalasasi & Rusdiana, 2017).

Language, including the local language, is an essential factor in the teaching and learning process. The local community or its speakers use local languages (Akello & Timmerman, 2018). According to Mahboob & Lin (2018), local languages can be used as a source in education. The importance of using the local language is not only in teaching other languages but also in teaching other subjects (particularly in cases where a language other than the student's local language is used as the medium of instruction).

In Indonesia's multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural languages, with high intensity of contact between one ethnic group and another, linguistic competition cannot be avoided. Moreover, suppose that competition is associated with the rapid development of the Indonesian language. In that case, the phenomenon of shifting local languages is caused not only by the decline in young people learning local languages as their local identity but also by the increasing tendency of parents who come from the same family to choose to use Indonesian as their primary means of communication rather than foreign languages. their area (Farisiyah & Zamzani, 2018). Language shifts occur gradually as speakers have less and less opportunity and motivation to speak their local language (Farisiyah & Zamzani, 2018). Language shifts occur gradually because speakers have fewer opportunities and motivation to speak their local language (Mufwene, 2020). Additionally, according to Baso (2018), the transition in language use from local languages to Indonesian was induced by various factors, including economic factors, migration, and marriage. Local languages are only spoken and are rarely utilized in written form.

As part of the local culture, language faces challenges in maintaining its continuity. The government must design and integrate culture to fulfill its commitment to advancing and respecting national culture as state recognition of cultural diversity (Lawelai et al., 2021). Cultural heritage drives and enables sustainable development (Pintossi et al., 2021).

The usage of local languages as a media of communication has shifted to the national language and English. Local language is a rare thing. It is uncommon to encounter parents teaching their children local languages (Susanti 1780

et al., 2018). Attempts to preserve local languages should never cease. Efforts to maintain the Mekongga local language are required. Language maintenance depends on language transmission between generations (Yeşim Sevinç, 2017). Language maintenance refers to the willingness of speakers of a language to use that language in the presence of other languages in society (Saputra, 2018). Language maintenance is a way to maintain a language so that it does not shift and lead to its extinction (Nisah et al., 2020). Language change, shift, and death are examples of language maintenance (Muslihah et al., 2018). Large-scale survey data and research show that demographic factors influence people's likelihood of preserving their local language (Benjamins, 2018). With efforts to maintain the language, it is hoped that the Mekongga local language will remain sustainable.

Local cultural wisdom is expressed in real life in society through patterns or habits practiced by the community that is part of the cultural heritage (Logayah & Ruhimat, 2021). For this reason, attempts to preserve local languages must be maintained as a medium for preserving local wisdom, where local wisdom is defined as a set of knowledge and practices to solve problems or difficulties encountered in a good and right way (Luriawati Naryatmojo, 2019). Meanwhile, according to Ali & Ruslan (2018), Local wisdom culture is a means of forming national character.

The Mekongga local language is still sporadically spoken in the Wundulako Sub-district area, including schools, markets, hospitals, mosques, and village or Sub-district offices. The elderly are the only ones who typically speak this language; most people only do so when they meet other tribespeople. If they meet other tribes, such as Bugis, they switch to using Bugis or Indonesian. Various factors, including economic factors, migration, and marriage, caused the shift in the use of the local language to Indonesian language (Baso & Agussalim, 2021).

According to the description above, this research aims to describe the situation of maintaining the Mekongga local language in the Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency. This research focuses on maintaining the Mekongga local language in everyday life as an effort to preserve local wisdom, especially in social interactions like greeting neighbors when you meet them, when someone asks you something, or when an older sibling is playing with a younger sibling.

## 2. METHOD

This research form is quantitative descriptive research (Teng et al., 2021; Julfiah et., 2023). According to Nassaji (2015), Quantitative descriptive research intends to investigate phenomena and their characteristics and then be analyzed quantitatively. In descriptive research, phenomena are activities, characteristics, changes, relationships, similarities, and differences between one phenomenon and another. It is in accordance with the purpose of this study, which is to describe the attitude of maintaining the Mekongga local language in the speaking community in the Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency.

The subjects in this research were Mekongga local language speakers in Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency, with a population of 21,874 people, 11,174 men, and 10,700 women. However, neither the regency's Central Bureau of Statistics nor the Wundulako Sub-district office has precise data on the number of native speakers of the Mekongga local language in the Sub-district. So the Purpose Sampling technique is used to determine the research subject (Rai & Thapa, 2023). Through this purposive sampling technique, 50 research subjects were determined by considering homogeneity; the age group deriving from native speakers of the Mekongga local language consists of 25 people from the youth group, aged 12-25 years, and 25 people from the adult group, aged 26-45 years.

A questionnaire was used to collect data. Questionnaires are a set of questions that people ask in order to acquire statistically useful information on a particular topic (Roopa & Rani, 2012). The questionnaire employed in this research was a closed questionnaire with 20 question items and alternative replies (options) from which the respondents could only choose in tabular form. Respondents must only put a tick (√) in the column or place according to their characteristics. This questionnaire employs a Likert scale (Joshi et al., 2015) with five alternative answers, namely strongly agree (SS), agree (S), neutral (N), disagree (TS), and strongly disagree (STS), which are distributed to respondents in the form of a list of written statements addressed to the speaking community. The

validity test of the questionnaire was carried out through a transferability test. In this transferability test, the researcher gave a question sheet that the respondent filled out.

The preparation of a questionnaire instrument in the form of positive and negative statements based on the attitude indicators of maintaining the Mekongga local language includes aspects of cognition, affection, and conation (will). Aspects of cognition include indicators of acquisition of the Mekongga local language that is not natural; the Mekogga local language is easy, and the Mekongga local language is not inferior. The aspect of affection includes pride in using the Mekongga local language, loyalty to using the Mekongga local language, and responsibility in using the Mekongga local language. Meanwhile, the conation aspect includes responsiveness. The data analysis technique utilized in this research was a scoring technique that involved calculating the total score of the questionnaire responses given by the respondents and then describing them using a Likert scale in the form of a checklist, with a different score assigned to each answer. The following formula is used to calculate the number of responses from respondents using percentages:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Description:

F= The frequency that is being searched for is the percentage

N= Number of Case (The number of frequencies / the number of individuals)

P= Percentage number (Sudijono, 2018)

To determine the attitude of the inhabitants of Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency, toward the preservation of the Mekongga local language, the data collected was divided into four categories: very good, good, good enough, and not good.

The score obtained in % with a descriptive analysis of the percentage consulted with the following criteria table:

**Table 1. Criteria for Percent Descriptive Analysis**

No.	Percentage	Criteria
1	81,25% – 100%	Very good
2	62,50% – 81,24%	Good
3	43,75 – 62,40%	Good Enough
4	25% – 43,74%	Not good

Furthermore, the existing data is converted into an average value, where the average is the ratio of the total number of observations to the number of all observations given. So, the average formula is: **Average = Amount of All Data/Amount of Data**

### 3. FINDINGS

There are disparities in attitudes toward maintaining the Mekongga local language among the people of Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency, according to research conducted with 50 respondents from the adolescent and adult domains. Based on the findings of a data analysis of the people of Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency's attitude toward maintaining the Mekongga local language. The youth group in the Wundulako Sub-district community, Kolaka Regency, in the aspect of cognition with an average (71.01), aspects of affection with an average (71.03), and aspects of conation with an average (73.02), from all aspects for the youth group, obtained an average (71.68). Furthermore, from the adult group, the cognition aspect averaged (80.26), the affective aspect averaged (82.20), and the conational aspect averaged (80.20). It attained an average for the total number of features of cognition, affection, and conation for the adult group (80.87). Based on the results of the questionnaire calculation, it is possible to conclude that the attitude toward maintaining the Mekongga Region's

language in the Wundulako Sub-district community, Kolaka Regency for adolescents and adults in terms of cognition, affection, and conation is in a good category, with an average (76.23).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The people of Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency, are a heterogeneous society. The inhabitants are indigenous and immigrants from South Sulawesi, Java, and other islands, representing various tribes and languages. Although there is no data on the number of residents by ethnicity in the Wundulako Sub-district, the language situation and local language contact used in the Wundulako Sub-district show heterogeneity.

In addition, Wundulako Sub-district is also said to be a transit area because Wundulako Sub-district is a central crossing area where many people go to other areas. This situation makes the people of Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency, a multilingual society. Communities like this tend to use their local language as the first language in communicating. The community's attitude in an effort to use their local language is called language maintenance. It causes language shifts to occur due to population, economics, school, and other movements.

According to the findings of research on language maintenance in the Mekongga Region, the maintenance of the Mekongga Local language happens in the inhabitants of Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency, from the adolescent group with an average cognition (71,01). The conation aspect comprises evidence that the Mekongga Region's language is not natural, that the Mekongga Region's language is easy, and that the Mekongga Region's language is not inferior. Aspects of affection with an average (71.03). The aspect of affection includes being proud to use the Mekongga Local language, being loyal to using the Mekongga Local Language, and being responsible for using the Mekongga Local language. The conation aspect with an average (73.02) includes being responsive; from all aspects for the youth group, the average is average (71.68). Furthermore, from the adult group regarding cognition aspect with an average (80.26), Conation aspects include unnatural Mekongga Local language indicators, Mekongga Local language is easy, Mekongga Local language is not lower, aspects of affection with an average (82.20). The affection aspect comprises being proud to use the Mekongga Local language, being loyal to using the Mekongga Local language, and being responsible for using the Mekongga Local language, and the conation aspect includes responsiveness (80.20) for the entire number of adult cognition, affection, and conation aspects that reached an average (80.87). Based on the results of the questionnaire calculation, it is possible to conclude that the attitude toward maintaining the Mekongga Region's language in the Wundulako District community, Kolaka Regency for adolescents and adults in terms of cognition, affection, and conation is in a good category, with an average (76.23).

If it is related to the theory put forward by Ibrahim et al. (2019) that language shift generally refers to the process of replacing the use of a language with another language in a speaker or a speech community, so this is relevant to the opinion of Nugroho (2017) that if a language community is unable to maintain its language, it gradually picking up another language vocabulary, it will lead to a language shift and if a situation is in which a language community tries to use its language to maintain its language, either the local language or its mother tongue, the attitude of the people of Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency leads to language preservation because still reached 76.23 (in good category). The community can still be said to maintain the Mekongga Local language based on the acquisition of the attitude category for maintaining the Mekongga Local language in the Wundulako Sub-district community, Kolaka Regency, even though some have experienced language transitions and language shifts because the Mekongga Local language coexists with other local languages.

Bilingualism is the factor that contributes to the maintenance of the Mekongga Local language among adolescents and adults. The youth group is weaker than the older group. The youth group is significantly influenced by language loyalty, the impact of mixed marriages, educational background, social mobility, and other factors; thus, it is only logical that the adult group has a stronger attitude toward maintaining the Mekongga Local language than the younger group.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion findings, it is feasible to conclude that the attitude of maintaining the language of the Mekongga Region in the Wundulako Sub-district community, Kolaka Regency, is in the good category among adolescents and adults with an average attitude of 76.23. The attitude toward maintaining the Mekongga Local language in the adult group is stronger than in the youth group. It demonstrates that the adult group is stronger in maintaining the Mekongga Region's language as the native language of the inhabitants of the Wundulako Sub-district, Kolaka Regency.

However, the speaker's attitude toward preserving the Mekongga local language differs from the utmost efforts to maintain the language. For this reason, an approach is required to ensure the language's preservation, such as providing curriculum and media for learning the Mekongga local language, which is used as a model for learning the Mekongga local language in schools.

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