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PAMONA LANGUAGE VITALITY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY BASED ON UNESCO INDICATORS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

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Abstract: The threat to regional languages is an urgent global issue that warrants study. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is reflected in the Pamona language, which shows signs of declining intensity of use among the younger generation. Previous studies have not assessed the vitality of the Pamona language using the nine UNESCO indicators in its core-speaking area, namely Pamona Puselemba District. This study aims to describe the vitality status of the Pamona language, identify the dominant factors associated with it, and formulate its implications for language revitalization. The study employed a *mixed-methods* design involving 30 respondents selected through *purposive sampling* and grouped into three generations. Data were collected through a 34-item questionnaire, interviews, observation, and document review based on the nine UNESCO language vitality indicators. The results show that the Pamona language falls in the Vulnerable category, with a Total Vitality Index of 3.24. The new domains and digital media indicator obtained the lowest index (2.54), followed by domains of language use (2.81), whereas language attitudes and loyalty were relatively high (3.62). Descriptively, the vitality index of the younger generation (3.02) was lower than that of the middle generation (3.26) and the older generation (3.45), and all three fall in the Vulnerable category. The factor identified as dominant in the data was the dominance of Indonesian in everyday settings of use, particularly in education, peer interaction, and digital spaces, which appears to be associated with the increasingly limited space for the Pamona language. These descriptive findings indicate the need to strengthen intergenerational language transmission in the family, expand the use of Pamona in schools and the community, and develop Pamona-language digital content as part of a revitalization strategy whose effectiveness requires further testing.
Keywords: *language vitality; Pamona language; UNESCO indicators; language shift; language revitalization*

INTRODUCTION

The endangerment of regional languages now occupies a central position in contemporary sociolinguistic discourse. UNESCO (2003, as cited in Rhamadona & Zahara, 2025) estimates that the majority of the roughly 7,000 languages in the world face a risk of extinction in this century. The loss of a language is not merely the disappearance of a means of communication but the erosion of a worldview, collective memory, and the cultural identity of its speech community (Fishman, 1991). Social change and the increasingly widespread use of the national language in community life also pose challenges to the sustainability of regional languages, especially when intergenerational shift in language use occurs (Mukhamdanah et al., 2025; Yannuar et al., 2025). This condition is highly relevant to Indonesia, a country of high linguistic diversity, where regional languages face pressure from the dominance of Indonesian, both as the language of national unity and as the language of instruction in formal education. Recent studies show that the vitality of regional languages in Indonesia is related to intergenerational transmission, the breadth of domains of use, speakers' attitudes, and social and institutional support for regional languages (Budiono et al., 2023; Pramuniati et al., 2024).

One regional language showing signs of intergenerational shift is Pamona, which is spoken

by communities in Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi. Studies of regional languages in Sulawesi show that language sustainability relates not only to the number of speakers but also to a language's ability to retain its functions across various domains of life. A study of Moronene language vitality shows the importance of examining a language's condition through multiple dimensions of vitality, while research on the Bare'e language among the Pamona community shows that language maintenance is likewise an important issue for speech communities in the Poso region (Firman et al., 2023; Fatmawati et al., 2026). In the broader context of Central Sulawesi, the sustainability of regional languages is also related to education policy and support for language use as part of cultural sustainability (Marhum et al., 2023). Meanwhile, research on the revitalization of the Kaili language in Palu City shows the importance of the younger generation and the educational environment in maintaining and developing the use of regional languages (Syamsuddin & Budiman, 2024). Collectively, these studies show that language vitality in Central Sulawesi is related to intergenerational transmission, domains of use, education, and social and institutional support. However, these studies have not provided a comprehensive picture of the vitality status of the Pamona language based on all of the UNESCO indicators in its core-speaking area.

Nevertheless, Pamona Puselemba District, which is historically and demographically the core-speaking area of the Pamona speech community, has not, based on the studies that could be traced, been the object of research using a comprehensive vitality measurement framework. Research on language vitality in various regions of Indonesia shows that a comprehensive assessment needs to consider intergenerational transmission, the number and proportion of speakers, domains of use, education, attitudes, policy, and language documentation (Budiono, 2025; Tamrin et al., 2024; Setiawati et al., 2026). Thus, the limited data on the core-speaking area of the Pamona language mean that the vitality condition of the language cannot yet be mapped in full. This gap is important because core-speaking areas occupy a strategic position for understanding the sustainability of a language in communities that have historically been the center of its use.

The urgency of this study is further strengthened by preliminary field findings indicating a tendency among the younger generation to use Indonesian more dominantly across various domains of interaction, from the family to educational institutions and public spaces, compared with previous generations. A similar tendency of intergenerational shift has also been found in various regional language communities, where younger generations increasingly use Indonesian in daily life (Pramuniati et al., 2025). On the other hand, positive attitudes toward a regional language are not always proportional to the intensity of its use, as shown in a study of the dynamics of attitudes and language shift in Tae' (Rusdiansyah et al., 2024). This condition shows that mapping vitality is not sufficient if it only looks at the existence of speakers or attitudes toward the language; it is also necessary to identify the interrelations among the various dimensions that determine language sustainability.

This study is important because it provides empirical evidence on the vitality status of the Pamona language in its core-speaking area, identifies factors related to its sustainability, and broadens the study of language vitality in Central Sulawesi. Practically, the results can serve as an empirical basis for designing Pamona language revitalization strategies that better fit the conditions of speakers and the language-use environment.

To address these problems, this study is grounded in three complementary theoretical frameworks that function at different stages of analysis. First, the ethnolinguistic vitality theory formulated by Giles et al. (1977) is positioned as the initial conceptual framework for understanding that the vitality of a language is determined not only by the number of its speakers but is also influenced by social status, demographic composition, and institutional support. This framework is enriched through the critical review by Smith et al. (2017), which asserts that language vitality needs to be understood as a dynamic construct shaped by the community's subjective perception of the position of its language, rather than merely by static objective conditions. Understanding vitality as a multidimensional phenomenon is also reflected in recent studies that develop vitality measurement by considering various linguistic and social aspects (Budiono, 2025; Yannuar et al., 2025).

Second, the nine language vitality indicators developed by UNESCO in the document *Language Vitality and Endangerment* (Brenzinger et al., 2003) are positioned as the main measurement instrument in this study. The nine indicators cover intergenerational language transmission, the absolute number of speakers, the proportion of

speakers within the total population, trends in language use in existing domains, responses to new domains and media, the availability of materials for education and literacy, governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, community members' attitudes toward their own language, and the quality of language documentation. This framework was chosen because of its multidimensional character, which enables a more comprehensive measurement of language vitality than approaches that rely on only one or two aspects. This approach is also in line with language vitality research in Indonesia that treats various aspects of language use and sustainability as interrelated in determining the vitality status of a language (Budiono et al., 2023; Tamrin et al., 2024).

Third, the Reversing Language Shift (RLS) theory and its Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) by Fishman (1991), later developed into the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) by Lewis and Simons (2010), serve as an interpretive framework for interpreting the results of the UNESCO indicator measurements in terms of more detailed stages of language shift. This framework also provides the basis for understanding the mechanisms by which intergenerational transmission is disrupted and for formulating recovery strategies in stages. This perspective is enriched by Mufwene's (2017) view of the ecological and social factors that drive language shift, including the dominance of languages with greater economic and political power, as well as Comajoan-Colomé and Coronel-Molina's (2021) view of the contemporary paradigm of language revitalization that integrates top-down and bottom-up approaches. The development of the revitalization paradigm in Indonesia has also increasingly positioned the strengthening of learning, transmission, documentation, and the expansion of language functions as important parts of sustaining regional languages (Budiono & Jaya, 2024; Budiono & Yanita, 2024; Budiono et al., 2024; Hakim et al., 2025).

These three theoretical frameworks are arranged complementarily: the theories of Giles et al. and Smith et al. provides a conceptual lens for understanding the multidimensional character of language vitality, the UNESCO indicators serve as an operational instrument for its measurement, while the theories of Fishman, EGIDS, Mufwene, and Comajoan-Colomé and Coronel-Molina serve as explanatory and interpretive frameworks for the measurement results and their implications for revitalization. Using these mutually complementary frameworks enables the study not only to map the vitality status of the Pamona language but also to connect the measurement results with factors of transmission, domains of use, institutional support, and the need for language revitalization. Departing from this gap, the study is formulated to answer three research questions, each of which responds to one gap. The first question is what the vitality status of the Pamona language in Pamona Puselemba District is in terms of the nine UNESCO indicators, which responds to the absence of a comprehensive mapping in the core-speaking area. The second question is which factor is identified as most dominant in relation to the vitality of the language amid the dominance of Indonesian, which explains the patterns that appear in the indicators. The third question is what the implications of these findings are for designing language revitalization programs. The contribution of this study is descriptive-empirical and contextual, namely providing Pamona language vitality data for one district that can be compared with vitality studies in other regions of Central Sulawesi. This study is not intended to generalize the findings to all speakers of the Pamona language and does not test the effectiveness of revitalization interventions.

METHOD

This study used a mixed-methods design with predominantly descriptive quantitative data supported by qualitative data. The quantitative approach was used to measure the vitality status of the Pamona language in a structured manner based on the nine UNESCO indicators, while the qualitative approach served to deepen and explain the meaning behind the quantitative findings. The two types of data were then triangulated to produce mutually reinforcing interpretations. The study was conducted in Pamona Puselemba District, Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, on the grounds that the area is the core-speaking area of the Pamona-speaking community which, in the studies that could be traced, has not been comprehensively assessed from the perspective of language vitality based on UNESCO indicators, and it took place over three months.

The research subjects consisted of 30 questionnaire respondents selected through purposive sampling and grouped by age into three generational groups: the older generation (aged 50 and above), the middle generation (aged 30–49), and the younger generation (aged 15–29). The respondents comprised 10 people from the older

generation, 10 from the middle generation, and 10 from the younger generation. This grouping was used as a descriptive comparison across generations, not as a basis for population-level generalization, because the number of respondents in each group was small and the sample was selected purposively. In addition, the study involved 3 to 5 key informants selected through snowball sampling, consisting of a customary leader, an official of the Education Office, and a local content teacher, who were considered to have an in-depth understanding of the social conditions, policies, and language practices of the Pamona language in the study area.

Data were collected through four complementary techniques: a structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews, field observation, and document review. The questionnaire was the main instrument for quantitative data collection and consisted of 34 items derived from the nine UNESCO language vitality indicators. Response formats were adapted to the characteristics of each item, including choices of attitude, frequency of language use, perceptions of the number and proportion of speakers, conditions of language use, knowledge of language resources, and support for language maintenance. All responses were then converted into standardized 0–5 scores according to the category and direction of response on each item. The questionnaire was administered to the 30 respondents through guided interviews, in which the researcher read out the items and guided the completion to avoid misunderstanding of the questions and answer choices. The distribution of the 34 questionnaire items across the nine UNESCO indicators is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Distribution of questionnaire items by UNESCO language vitality indicator*

Code	Language vitality indicator	Item code	Number of items
I-1	Intergenerational transmission	A1–A5	5
I-2	Absolute number of speakers	B1–B2	2
I-3	Proportion of speakers	B3	1
I-4	Domains of language use	C1–C8	8
I-5	New and digital domains	D1–D4	4
I-6	Educational materials	E1–E3	3
I-7	Government policy	F1–F3	3
I-8	Language attitudes and loyalty	G1–G6	6
I-9	Language documentation	H1–H2	2
Total		A1–H2	34

The interviews used a semi-structured guide with 10 key questions. Interviews were conducted with selected informants consisting of a customary leader, an official of the Education Office, and a local content teacher. This technique was used to explore perceptions, experiences, and information regarding the condition of Pamona language use, policy, and the social and cultural factors related to language use. Observation was conducted non-participantly using a structured observation sheet to observe the practice of Pamona language use in five speech domains, namely the family, the traditional market, customary ceremonies, the school environment, and public spaces. The document review covered documents relevant to the condition and maintenance of the Pamona language, including language policies, local content curricula or materials for the regional language, Pamona language documentation, and demographic data on speakers.

The content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert judgment by two sociolinguistics experts, while its internal consistency reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha on the 34-item data from the 30 study respondents, with a minimum threshold of 0.70. The coefficient obtained was $\alpha = 0.827$ for all items. At the indicator level, α values ranged from 0.411 to 0.801. Only the Domains of Language Use indicator (I-4) exceeded the 0.70 threshold ($\alpha = 0.801$), whereas the other indicators ranged from 0.411 to 0.673, which is understandable given the small number of items per indicator (the Proportion of Speakers indicator has only one item, so α cannot be computed). Because it was calculated on the same sample as the main analysis and the number of respondents was small, this value is interpreted as an indication of the instrument's internal consistency, not as the result of a separate pilot test. The credibility of the qualitative data was established through member checking, that is, reconfirming the researcher's interpretations with the key informants to ensure their consistency with the information they provided.

Quantitative data analysis was carried out in several stages. First, respondents' answers were tabulated and converted into standardized 0–5 scores based on the response categories of each item. Items indicating conditions that support the

vitality of the Pamona language were scored in the same direction, whereas items with the opposite direction were reverse-scored. In this way, different response forms, such as attitudes, frequency of use, perceptions, knowledge, and the availability of language resources, could be processed on the same score range. Second, item scores were grouped by the nine UNESCO indicators as shown in Table 1. The index of each indicator was calculated as the mean score of all items belonging to that indicator, using the formula:

$I_n = \Sigma X / k$

where I_n = the index of the nth indicator; ΣX = the sum of the scores of all items in the nth indicator; and k = the number of items in the nth indicator. Next, the Total Vitality Index was calculated by averaging the nine indicator indices, using the formula: Total Vitality Index = $(I_1 + I_2 + I_3 + I_4 + I_5 + I_6 + I_7 + I_8 + I_9) / 9$. This index value was then converted into six categories of language vitality status based on the UNESCO classification, ranging from extinct to safe. Thus, the UNESCO indicators were used as the substantive framework for identifying the dimensions of language vitality, while the 0–5 scores were used to standardize responses so that data from various question forms could be calculated and compared descriptively.

The 0–5 scale was chosen for three reasons. First, UNESCO uses a graded 0–5 assessment for most of its factors (Brenzinger et al., 2003), so this score is aligned with the framework being adapted. Second, the questionnaire items have different response formats (attitude, frequency, perception, knowledge, and availability of resources), so a common unit was needed so that they could be averaged per indicator. Third, the 0–5 score allows the index to be converted directly into six status categories. The conversion was done by dividing the score range into six classes, namely Safe (4.01–5.00; *safe*), Vulnerable (3.01–4.00; *vulnerable*), Definitely Endangered (2.01–3.00; *definitely endangered*), Severely Endangered (1.01–2.00; *severely endangered*), Critically Endangered (0.01–1.00; *critically endangered*), and Extinct (0.00; *extinct*). The category names follow UNESCO's levels of endangerment, while the score class boundaries are the author's adaptation and not a standard UNESCO threshold, so the categories are interpreted as a descriptive classification. This score is also not a psychometric measure: indicators with few items, for example Proportion of Speakers, which consists of only one item, need to be interpreted more cautiously than indicators with more items.

Qualitative data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The results of the qualitative analysis were then triangulated with the results of the quantitative analysis to obtain a complete picture of the vitality status of the Pamona language and, at the same time, to explain the factors underlying that condition as a basis for formulating implications for language revitalization programs. Triangulation was also used to anticipate the limitations of the questionnaire data, which are self-reported, because respondents' answers may be influenced by subjective perceptions or by a tendency to give answers considered socially appropriate.

This study has several limitations. The limited number of respondents and the purposive sampling technique mean that the findings need to be understood within the context of Pamona Puselemba District and are not intended to be statistically generalized to all speakers of the Pamona language. In addition, some of the data on language use and attitudes were obtained through self-report, although they were reinforced through interviews, observation, and document review. The study also describes the vitality condition at the time the research was conducted, so it cannot yet show changes in language vitality longitudinally. The intergenerational comparison is only descriptive because the number of respondents in each group is small. Explanations of the factors related to vitality derive from informants' perceptions and limited observation, so they are not intended as evidence of causal relationships. The study also assesses vitality status, not the effectiveness of revitalization interventions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Vitality status of the Pamona language based on the nine UNESCO indicators

The vitality status of the Pamona language was determined based on the nine UNESCO indicators (Brenzinger et al., 2003). The mean score of each indicator on the 0–5 scale was interpreted into six categories of vitality status, namely Safe (4.01–5.00), Vulnerable (3.01–4.00), Definitely Endangered (2.01–3.00), Severely Endangered (1.01–2.00), Critically Endangered (0.01–1.00), and Extinct (0.00). The calculation results for each indicator are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Vitality index of the Pamona language by UNESCO Indicator (n=30)*

Code	Indicator	Index	Status
I-1	Intergenerational Transmission	3.56	Vulnerable
I-2	Absolute Number of Speakers	3.07	Vulnerable
I-3	Proportion of Speakers	3.90	Vulnerable
I-4	Domains of Language Use	2.81	Definitely Endangered
I-5	New & Digital Domains	2.54	Definitely Endangered
I-6	Educational Materials	3.19	Vulnerable
I-7	Government Policy	3.23	Vulnerable
I-8	Language Attitudes & Loyalty	3.62	Vulnerable
I-9	Language Documentation	3.27	Vulnerable

The Total Vitality Index of the Pamona language is 3.24, so it falls in the Vulnerable category. This value lies within the 3.01–4.00 range and is the mean of nine indicators whose attainments vary. Proportion of Speakers (I-3 = 3.90), Language Attitudes and Loyalty (I-8 = 3.62), and Intergenerational Transmission (I-1 = 3.56) are relatively high, whereas New and Digital Domains (I-5 = 2.54) and Domains of Language Use (I-4 = 2.81) fall in the Definitely Endangered category. Substantively, this condition accords with the characteristics of the Vulnerable category, namely a language that is still spoken by most children and young people but whose use is beginning to be limited to certain domains such as the home and interaction among fellow speakers. The Pamona language still has a relatively broad speaker base and ongoing intergenerational transmission (I-1 and I-3), but its use is narrowing in public domains such as formal education, government, and the digital sphere (I-4 and I-5). Thus, the Pamona language is not yet in a condition of serious endangerment, but neither is it any longer in a Safe condition. This transitional position indicates a window of opportunity for revitalization efforts before language shift progresses further. The index of 3.24 is only 0.23 points above the lower limit of the Vulnerable category (3.01), so this position is better read as Vulnerable approaching Definitely Endangered than as a safe condition. The class boundaries used are the author's adaptation (see Method), not a standard UNESCO threshold.

Intergenerational transmission

The Intergenerational Transmission indicator obtained an index of 3.56 (Vulnerable). A total of 23 respondents (76.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that their parents had taught them the Pamona language from childhood, and 28 respondents (93.3%) intended to teach it, or had already taught it, to the next generation. However, daily communication practice was lower: only 9 respondents (30%) always used Pamona when speaking with their parents, while 7 respondents (23.3%) often did, 9 respondents (30%) sometimes, 3 respondents (10%) rarely, and 2 respondents (6.7%) never. This gap between intention and practice shows that language transmission at present takes place more passively, through exposure and listening, than through active communicative habituation.

Interview data reinforce this finding. Most informants acquired Pamona from the family environment without deliberate instruction, and almost all planned to teach it to their children or grandchildren. The obstacles mentioned were the limits of their own fluency as passive speakers and strong exposure to Indonesian through school and social media. A middle-generation informant stated, "Yes, I plan to teach my child, it's just that I am a passive speaker." A similar observation was made by a religious leader who had led the GKST Moria congregation for 32 years, that "many young people only know how to listen," so that in time they will become unfamiliar with their own language. Thus, the obstacle to transmission lies not in a lack of parental motivation but in the weak fluency of the inheriting generation and the dominance of Indonesian in children's social environment.

Absolute number of speakers

The Absolute Number of Speakers indicator obtained an index of 3.07 (Vulnerable). A total of 24 respondents (80%) judged the speakers of Pamona in their environment to be many (17 respondents; 56.7%) or very many (7 respondents; 23.3%), 5 respondents (16.7%) judged them to be moderate, and 1 respondent (3.3%) judged them to be few. However, 25 respondents (83.3%) felt that the number of speakers has declined from year to year (24 respondents stated that it had decreased slightly and 1 respondent stated that it had decreased greatly). A total of 5 respondents (16.7%) judged the number of speakers to be unchanged, and none judged it to have increased. The combination of a speaker base that is still

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judged to be large and a widespread awareness of a downward trend produced the score of 3.07.

Interviews confirmed this tendency. A younger-generation informant stated, "I believe the Pamona language will still be used, but the number of speakers could decrease if there are no preservation efforts." The speaker base of the Pamona language is thus still relatively strong, but public awareness of the downward trend has become widespread enough to serve as an early signal that needs to be responded to before the decline becomes more significant.

Proportion of speakers

In contrast to the Absolute Number of Speakers indicator, which measures perceptions of the speaker population in general, the Proportion of Speakers indicator measures the proportion of active speakers on a more concrete scale, namely the immediate neighborhood. This indicator obtained an index of 3.90, the highest of the nine indicators (Vulnerable). A total of 11 respondents (36.7%) stated that all 10 of their neighbors still actively speak Pamona, 9 respondents (30%) stated 7–9 people, and 7 respondents (23.3%) stated 4–6 people, so that 27 of the 30 respondents (90%) stated that at least 4 of their 10 neighbors still actively speak Pamona. Only 2 respondents (6.7%) stated 1–3 people and 1 respondent (3.3%) stated none. This score, which exceeds that of I-2, shows that in close and personal interaction the presence of active speakers is still felt to be real, even though respondents are aware of a downward trend at the broader level.

Interviews showed that the use of Pamona in neighborhood interaction depends on the interlocutor. An older-generation informant said that he used it "when meeting neighbors of Pamona ethnicity and at home when talking with parents." Observation in the market and other public places showed a similar pattern: transactions take place in Pamona when the seller and buyer are both speakers, and switch to Indonesian when one of the parties is not a speaker. Language choice in Pamona Puselemba District is thus determined situationally by the linguistic identity of the interlocutor (interlocutor-based code-switching), not by the domain of the interaction. The implication is that the continued use of Pamona in the public domain depends on how many active speakers remain available and can be recognized in that domain.

Domains of language use

The Domains of Language Use indicator obtained an index of 2.81 and falls in the Definitely Endangered category. This indicator measures the scope of the social functions of the Pamona language, from private to public domains. The frequency of use in informal and customary domains is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Frequency of Pamona language use in informal and customary domains (number of respondents, n=30)*

Domain	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Family	4	6	13	7	0
Market or small shop (warung)	0	3	15	5	7
Peer friendships	0	5	13	10	2
Public places (with fellow Pamona residents)	2	10	8	10	0
Customary ceremonies	7	11	11	1	0

In informal domains, use tends to be limited. In the family, only 4 respondents (13.3%) always and 6 respondents (20%) often used Pamona, while 13 respondents (43.3%) used it sometimes. In the market or small shop (warung) domain, 7 respondents (23.3%) never used it and only 3 respondents (10%) often did. Among peers, 13 respondents (43.3%) used it sometimes and 10 respondents (33.3%) rarely. Interaction with fellow Pamona residents in public places showed a slightly better pattern, with 12 respondents (40%) always or often using it.

The customary and religious domains showed greater resilience. In customary ceremonies, 18 respondents (60%) used Pamona at the often-to-always level. In the religious domain, 24 respondents (80%) stated that Pamona is used sometimes in services or worship, 5 respondents (16.7%) stated that it is used, and 1 respondent (3.3%) stated that it is not used. The religious leader who leads the GKST Moria congregation explained that Pamona is used fully in the worship liturgy "every month, in the first week, at six in the morning, it is full in the liturgy, from the greeting to the amen all in the Pamona language," whereas in other services the elders who are able to speak Pamona mix it into the sermon and prayer according to the composition of the congregation.

The official worship materials in Pamona, namely *Sura Magali* (the Bible) and *Sura Mpongayu* (a collection of spiritual songs), are still actively used because no digital versions are yet available. According to this informant, the Pamona language cannot be separated from the religious and customary values of the Pamona people, as reflected since the evangelization by A.C. Kruyt, which united custom and religion, including in customary wedding ceremonies, which still involve a pastor.

Use declines sharply in formal domains. At school or campus, 15 respondents (50%) used only Indonesian, 13 respondents (43.3%) used a mixture of the two languages, and only 1 respondent (3.3%) used purely Pamona. In interaction with government or village (kelurahan) officials, 19 respondents (63.3%) used only Indonesian, 10 respondents (33.3%) used a mixture, and none used purely Pamona.

Interviews showed that younger-generation informants still use Pamona mainly in certain situations, for example "when speaking with people who are already old or elderly," or in mixed form, namely "only one or two words, or what you might call mixing languages." For the younger generation, Pamona thus tends to function as a marker of emotional closeness and of respect toward older interlocutors or fellow speakers, no longer as the main language of social interaction. The narrowing of domains of use proceeds gradually, starting from the public and formal domains, while the private, customary, and religious domains become the last bastions of defense.

New and digital domains

The New and Digital Domains indicator obtained an index of 2.54, the lowest of the nine indicators (Definitely Endangered). On WhatsApp or text messages, 14 respondents (46.7%) sometimes used Pamona, 8 respondents (26.7%) never did, 6 respondents (20%) rarely did, and only 2 respondents (6.7%) often did; none always did. On social media such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok, 15 respondents (50%) never used it, 10 respondents (33.3%) rarely did, and 5 respondents (16.7%) sometimes did, with no one using it often or always.

Respondents' attitudes run counter to this practice: 25 respondents (83.3%) agreed or strongly agreed (21 agreed and 4 strongly agreed) that Pamona can and should be used on social media. The gap between attitude and behavior in the digital domain is quite wide. In terms of resources, 15 respondents (50%) did not know of any digital dictionaries, applications, or Pamona-language YouTube content, 8 respondents (26.7%) stated that such resources do not exist, and only 7 respondents (23.3%) could name them, mainly *Pamona Powuti* and *karambangan* songs on YouTube.

A younger-generation informant stated that Pamona is rarely used on social media because "social media is universal." Another younger-generation informant observed that "older people more often use the regional language on social media as well as in person." This perception runs counter to the general pattern that the younger generation is the most active on digital platforms, and it confirms that the digital domain is an unexploited revitalization opportunity, because younger people's supportive attitudes have not been accompanied by adequate content and habituation.

Educational materials

The Educational Materials indicator obtained an index of 3.19 (Vulnerable). A total of 11 respondents (36.7%) stated that their school teaches Pamona routinely as a local content subject, 8 respondents (26.7%) stated that it does so sometimes, and 11 respondents (36.7%) stated that it does not teach it at all, which shows unevenness in the implementation of local content across areas and schools in Pamona Puselemba District. A total of 22 respondents (73.3%) stated that Pamona-language books or reading materials are available in schools or village libraries, but 17 respondents (56.7%) judged the quantity to be small and only 5 respondents (16.7%) judged it to be large; 8 respondents (26.7%) stated that reading materials are not available.

A Pamona local content teacher who has taught for two years explained that this subject is taught consistently two hours per week in every class, without ever being replaced by another subject. The learning modules were compiled independently by the teacher team: "I and several other local content teachers have a module that our team compiled ourselves." The teacher also faces the obstacle of having to "adapt the regional language local content subject for students from other ethnic groups, such as Balinese, Toraja, and other groups," because the subject is compulsory for all students. Nevertheless, the teacher is optimistic and describes Pamona as a "symbol of our identity as the Pamona people that will not disappear no matter how long." These findings show that classroom teaching is running fairly well

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and is supported by the school, but that the availability of teaching materials is more the result of teachers' initiative than of official provision by the relevant agency, as discussed under the next indicator.

Government policy

The Government Policy indicator obtained an index of 3.23 (Vulnerable). Respondents' perception of language preservation programs by the regional government tends to be low: 12 respondents (40%) did not know of any such programs, 8 respondents (26.7%) stated that a program had been held once, 5 respondents (16.7%) stated that there had never been one, and only 4 respondents (13.3%) stated that programs are held routinely. Support at the school level was judged more positively, with 12 respondents (40%) stating that the school supports and 6 respondents (20%) that it strongly supports, while 10 respondents (33.3%) were neutral and 2 respondents (6.7%) stated that the school does not support. Regarding the attention of the regional government, 21 respondents (70%) judged it to be sufficient (14 respondents; 46.7%) to very great (7 respondents; 23.3%), whereas 8 respondents (26.7%) judged it to be lacking and 1 respondent (3.3%) judged it to be nonexistent.

The interviews revealed a gap between support at the school level and at the policy level. Some informants did not know with certainty whether there were preservation programs from the regional government or the school, while the programs observed were mostly school or religious community activities, for example Pamona-language reading competitions at schools or churches. The local content teacher stated, "There is no official curriculum from the Education Office yet," and that during the time of teaching there had been no special training from the government. Preservation efforts that are under way thus rely largely on the initiative of schools, teachers, and communities, while systematic support from the regional government and the education office is felt to be limited.

Language attitudes and loyalty

The Language Attitudes and Loyalty indicator obtained an index of 3.62 (Vulnerable). A total of 29 respondents (96.7%) were proud to be able to speak Pamona, and all respondents (100%) regarded it as an important part of their identity as Pamona people. A total of 21 respondents (70%) were worried that the language would die out within the next few generations. On the reverse-worded item, 16 respondents (53.3%) agreed or strongly agreed (15 agreed and 1 strongly agreed) that Indonesian is more useful than Pamona in modern life, which shows that pride in one's identity does not automatically eliminate a pragmatic perception of the functional benefits of Indonesian. In addition, 20 respondents (66.7%) actively encouraged family members to use Pamona at home, and 28 respondents (93.3%) supported revitalization programs in schools and the community.

In the interviews, informants expressed concern about the declining ability of the younger generation. A younger-generation informant stated, "I feel concerned because the Pamona language is part of the cultural identity of Poso Regency, specifically the Pamona ethnic group." In contrast, some middle- and older-generation informants tended to be accepting, for example, "I can only accept it, because parents cannot force their children to speak the regional language." This variation shows that positive attitudes are still strong, but a tendency is beginning to emerge to view the inability to speak the regional language as a natural consequence of environmental change. If it spreads, this tendency has the potential to weaken the informal social pressure that has helped to maintain the use of the regional language in the community.

Language documentation

The Language Documentation indicator obtained an index of 3.27 (Vulnerable). A total of 12 respondents (40%) did not know of any recordings, dictionaries, or research results on the Pamona language and 4 respondents (13.3%) stated that such documentation does not exist, whereas 14 respondents (46.7%) knew of them, mentioning the Pamona dictionary, notes by Dutch missionaries, video recordings and songs on YouTube, and *Sura Magali* and *karambangan*. In terms of use, 16 respondents (53.3%) had used such documentation and 1 respondent (3.3%) used it routinely, while 13 respondents (43.3%) had never used it.

Younger-generation informants generally knew only informal forms of documentation such as regional songs: "I know that there are songs in Pamona that can serve as a form of recording of the Pamona language and can be accessed on YouTube. However, I am less aware of the existence of dictionaries or Pamona language books." The religious leader stressed that *Sura Magali* and *Sura Mpongayu* already exist but do not yet have digital versions, so congregations continue to use the printed texts in worship. The

problem of documentation thus lies not only in the absence of materials but also in the limited format and accessibility of those materials in the digital era. The dissemination and digitization of existing documentation are as important as the production of new documentation in supporting the preservation of the Pamona language.

Descriptive intergenerational comparison

The vitality index was also calculated for each generational group as a descriptive comparison. The index of the younger generation is 3.02, of the middle generation 3.26, and of the older generation 3.45. All three fall in the Vulnerable category, but the index of the younger generation is only 0.01 points above the lower limit of that category (3.01). Each generational group consisted of 10 respondents. The pattern of increasing index from the younger to the older generation is consistent with indications of intergenerational shift. However, because each group is small and the sample was selected purposively, the differences are read as a descriptive picture, not as differences that have been statistically tested or that apply to all speakers.

Factors identified as most dominant in relation to the vitality of the Pamona language amid the dominance of Indonesian

The following factors were identified through triangulation of the questionnaire, interview, and observation data. The study has a descriptive design, so the relationship between the factors and vitality is read as an association supported by field evidence, not as a causal relationship that has been tested. Subsections 2.1–2.6 present direct evidence from the data, while the theoretical interpretation and the limits of the evidence are discussed separately in subsections 2.7 and 2.8.

Dominance of the Indonesian-language formal education system

A total of 15 respondents (50%) used only Indonesian in the school environment and 11 respondents (36.7%) stated that their school does not teach Pamona as a local content subject. The national education system, which positions Indonesian as the main language of instruction, makes school the domain in which children spend most of their productive time exposed to Indonesian, while Pamona receives only a limited share. The local content teacher stated, “Local content is taught in every class two hours per week.” Teaching continues even though there is no official curriculum from the Education Office, so the teaching of Pamona depends heavily on the individual initiative of teachers and schools, not on systemic policy whose continuity is assured.

Expansion of the digital domain not yet filled by the Pamona language

The new and digital domains obtained the lowest score among all indicators. Social media and instant messaging are the interaction spaces most frequently used by the younger generation, but these spaces are dominated by Indonesian. The scarcity of Pamona-language digital content, such as applications and digital dictionaries, leaves the younger generation without the means to use Pamona in daily life even though the majority support its use on social media. A younger-generation informant stated, “In my environment it’s rare, only a few, when they WhatsApp with people who usually use that language as their everyday language.” The use of Pamona on WhatsApp is thus limited to people who are already accustomed to speaking Pamona and has not become a general habit in the digital domain. A middle-generation informant added that social media “takes up more study time, so the younger generation is more exposed to the influence of social media.” Social media therefore has a double impact: it has not yet been filled with Pamona and, at the same time, it reduces the opportunity for the younger generation to be exposed to their regional language naturally.

Social mobility and interaction with outside speakers

The status of Pamona Puselemba District as a tourist area encourages interaction with newcomers who do not understand Pamona, so Indonesian is chosen because it is more practical and understood by all parties. As a result, the space for using Pamona in markets, public places, and government services is increasingly limited, as was also observed directly in the market environment. A younger-generation informant stated, “Because interaction now is not only internal but external. Outsiders will certainly come because our region is a tourist area.” This influence also extends to the household domain. Another informant explained that the use of Indonesian at home occurs because they are already “used to speaking with people from outside, usually coworkers,” so that habits at the workplace are carried over into the family.

Disruption of active transmission patterns in the family

Only 30% of respondents consistently used Pamona when speaking with their parents, even

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though the majority intended to teach it to the next generation. Many informants admitted to being passive speakers, that is, they understand but are not fluent in Pamona, so it is difficult for them to pass it on actively to their children. Besides exposure to Indonesian from school and social media, obstacles also come from parents' own habits. A middle-generation informant stated, "Because at home parents also more often use Indonesian when talking to their children," and another middle-generation informant added, "Because the Pamona language is only used among fellow parents and is not used to talk to children." The Pamona language thus tends to be positioned as a language among adults, not as a language of child-rearing. The disruption of active transmission in the family becomes a critical point of language shift, considering the role of the family, which is difficult for other social institutions to replace.

Lack of systematic government policy support

The public's perception of the regional government's seriousness in preserving the Pamona language remains low; 40% of respondents did not know of any preservation programs. Because there is no official curriculum, teacher training, or regional regulation, preservation efforts depend on individual initiative without structural support that guarantees their continuity. A local content teacher stated that during the time of teaching "there has been no workshop or training held by the government." The ignorance of the general public is consistent with the admission of those who should be the primary targets of support, namely the teachers themselves. A younger-generation informant who works as a teacher at another school stated, "At the school where I teach, there has never been a Pamona language preservation program," which shows that whether a program exists depends on the policy of each school, not on uniform direction from the education office. A middle-generation informant also hoped that "the government will pay more attention to the preservation of the Pamona language" so that the benefits of programs do not stop at a single activity.

Linguistic complexity in formal and ceremonial domains

Language shift is caused not only by attitudinal or policy factors but also by technical linguistic constraints. The religious leader who was interviewed described the difficulty of translating formal registers, such as the language of sermons, into Pamona: "There is a shift, especially when we interpret the contents of the Bible in the Pamona language, it takes quite a lot of energy to think, because the language of sermons is not the same as the language of the home. Everyday language is a bit rough, whereas in sermons it must be refined language, so it demands seriousness when translating." This difficulty causes some speakers, including highly motivated ones, to switch to Indonesian for the sake of communicative efficiency. This constraint is not captured in the questionnaire data but was confirmed in practice: an older-generation respondent stated that he uses Pamona "sometimes in sermons during worship if the congregation present consists of many older people." The use of Pamona in sermons thus depends on the age of the congregation, in line with the religious leader's account.

These six factors show that the dominance of Indonesian over Pamona does not occur through a single mechanism but through the accumulation of structural pressures in various domains of life at once. Revitalization of the Pamona language therefore requires a multidimensional approach, as discussed in the following sections.

The gap between language attitudes and language practice

The data show three distinct layers between attitude and practice. First, pride and identity: 29 respondents (96.7%) were proud to speak Pamona and all respondents (100%) viewed it as an important part of their identity. Second, willingness to pass on and support: 28 respondents (93.3%) intended to teach, or had already taught, Pamona to the next generation, and 28 respondents (93.3%) supported revitalization programs. Third, actual practice: only 9 respondents (30%) always used it when speaking with their parents, 2 respondents (6.7%) often used it on WhatsApp, and no respondent often or always used it on social media. Pride and willingness are thus expressed almost unanimously, whereas actual use is concentrated in interaction with fellow speakers.

All three layers were measured through respondents' own reports (self-report), so this gap needs to be read cautiously. Pride and intention may be influenced by a tendency to give answers considered appropriate, whereas the frequency of use is influenced by the interlocutor and the domain. Interviews and observation provide more independent supporting evidence, namely informants' mention of limited fluency as passive speakers, some parents' habit of using Indonesian

with their children, and the switch to Indonesian when the interlocutor is not a Pamona speaker.

Positive attitudes that do not automatically translate into use have also been reported in studies of the Tae' language (Rusdiansyah et al., 2024) and are a concern in studies of language attitudes among young speakers, for example of Javanese (Fitriati et al., 2025) and of the Chinese community in Jakarta (Yuliana & Yanti, 2023). The findings in Pamona Puselemba accord with the view of Smith et al. (2017) that positive attitudes and linguistic identity do not always result in active language use when the social functions and spaces of use become increasingly limited. Nevertheless, this study did not test the statistical relationship between attitude and practice; the conclusions that can be drawn are limited to the descriptive patterns that appear in the data.

Theoretical interpretation and the limits of the evidence

The nine UNESCO indicators in this study function as an assessment framework, that is, they determine what is measured and how status is established, whereas ethnolinguistic vitality theory, Reversing Language Shift, and the ecological view function as interpretive lenses for the patterns found. The indices and status categories are derived from the indicators, whereas the theoretical interpretation that follows is interpretive.

Giles et al. (1977) grouped the structural factors of vitality into demography, status, and institutional support. The findings can be loosely mapped onto these three groups: the demographic aspects (I-2 and I-3) are relatively strong, the aspects of status and function (I-4 and I-5) are weak in the public and digital domains, while the aspects of institutional support (I-6, I-7, and I-9) depend more on the initiative of schools, teachers, and communities. This mapping is interpretive because the UNESCO indicators were not designed to measure the variables of Giles et al. directly.

Within the Reversing Language Shift framework, intergenerational transmission in the family is the foundation of language sustainability (Fishman, 1991). The direct evidence from the data is the gap between the intention to pass on the language (93.3%) and consistent use with parents (30%), the large number of passive speakers, and some parents' choice to use Indonesian with their children. The distinction between the ability to understand and to speak has also been a concern in studies of language shift in other communities (Renddan et al., 2023). This study does not assign a GIDS or EGIDS stage (Lewis & Simons, 2010) to the Pamona language because its design was not intended for that, so the framework is used to interpret patterns, not to classify. Further research could combine the UNESCO indicators and the EGIDS scale, as was done for the Dayak Bentian language (Yulianti et al., 2025).

The ecological view emphasizes the ecological and social factors that drive language shift, including the dominance of languages with greater economic and political power (Mufwene, 2017). Informants linked the use of Indonesian to tourism and the work environment, which is in line with studies on tourism and language shift (Muin et al., 2026) and on ecological change and language shift (Yusriadi et al., 2024). However, the data of this study are limited to informants' perceptions and observation in the market. The study did not measure economic conditions, tourist flows, or migration, so the role of economic and mobility factors as causes is an interpretation, not a tested finding. The same applies to the influence of formal education: the data show the dominance of Indonesian in schools and the limits of local content, but its influence on vitality was not tested statistically. The role of education and public space in language vitality has also been discussed in other studies (Samuel, 2025; Benu et al., 2023; Rohmah & Wijayanti, 2023).

The relative resilience of the religious and customary domains in the Pamona language has also been a concern in studies of other communities, such as the use of Javanese in the Catholic Church (Ekarina & Apriyani, 2026), Betawi customary ceremonies (Reza et al., 2024), the Tatambaken oral tradition in Minahasa (Rattu et al., 2025), and language maintenance as identity formation in the Jalawastu customary community (Koeshandoyo et al., 2024). The interlocutor-based language switching observed in the market is relevant to studies of language accommodation (Resticka et al., 2023). In the digital domain, studies of the threat of regional language extinction in the digital era (Rhamadona & Zahara, 2025) and of the development of a glossary website as a form of language maintenance (Muljono et al., 2024) serve as comparisons for the findings of low use and scarce digital resources in Pamona.

Studies of language maintenance and resilience in other communities, such as Makassar (Abdullah et al., 2025), Lauje (Dita et al., 2026), Bajo in Morowali (Purwati et al., 2026), Sumbawa (Effendi & Sukri, 2024), Balinese in West Lombok (Yoniartini et al., 2023), Bidayuh (Gusmao & Nggarang, 2024), Lamaholot (Nugroho & Silaen,

2024), Mandobo (Tricahyadi, 2024), and Ngoko Javanese (Udasmoro et al., 2023), show that the factors at play vary according to context. These differences in context mean that comparison with the findings in Pamona Puselemba is indicative and is not intended as a generalization.

Implications of the Pamona language vitality study for designing language revitalization programs

The implications below are drawn from the descriptive findings on vitality status. The proposed strategies have not been tested for effectiveness in this study and need to be read as recommendations requiring evaluation, not as proven results.

The results of the study show that the internal and domestic indicators (intergenerational transmission, proportion of speakers, and language attitudes and loyalty) are relatively good, whereas the external and public indicators (domains of language use and new and digital domains) are in a worrying condition. The main problem of the Pamona language is thus not the loss of the community's willingness to maintain it but the narrowing of the institutional domains in which that willingness can be realized in everyday practice. Two programs that are still running, namely the Pamona-language worship order at the beginning of each month and the Pamona local content subject, are the most realistic starting points for revitalization compared with building new programs.

The Pamona-language worship order makes the religious domain one of the bastions of use of this language, but it has two vulnerabilities. First, it is held only once a month, so full exposure to Pamona is periodic and symbolic, whereas weekly services tend to use a mixed language that, according to the religious leader, is related to the difficulty of translating the refined register of sermons. Second, the Pamona-language Bible and spiritual songs are not yet available digitally, so they are less accessible to young congregants. Strengthening can be done by increasing the frequency of Pamona-language liturgy, for example in youth services, and by digitizing worship materials to bridge the gap between attitude and practice in the digital domain. This proposal is theoretically in line with the view that the function of a language in the domains that still hold can become the basis for expansion into other domains (Fishman, 1991), but its effectiveness has not been tested in this study.

Local content shows a similar picture. Learning runs consistently with modules compiled independently by teachers, but it depends entirely on the initiative of schools, without an official curriculum or training from the education office, and many respondents did not know of any preservation programs from the regional government. The short allocation of time also limits its impact on language practice outside the classroom. This program needs to be formalized through an official curriculum and teacher training so that it does not stop when the teacher in charge changes, and expanded through assignments that encourage the use of Pamona at home and on social media. This strengthening relates to the dimension of institutional support (Giles et al., 1977) and the role of the educational environment in the revitalization of regional languages (Syamsuddin & Budiman, 2024).

The two programs show the same pattern: micro-level initiatives run well, but structural strengthening from the policy level is minimal. This pattern is in line with the multi-domain revitalization model of Hakim et al. (2025) for the Limola language, which stresses the importance of synergy among the ritual-religious, family, and digital domains. For the Pamona language, the ritual-religious and educational domains have been maintained by the two programs, but the digital domain, as the main space of the younger generation, has not yet been much filled. Therefore, the strategy that appears most consistent with the findings is to strengthen and synergize the two existing programs while targeting the digital domain as the largest gap between attitude and practice, so that the three domains support one another. Available references, for example the development of a Javanese glossary website as a form of language maintenance and revitalization (Muljono et al., 2024), need to be adapted to the Pamona context and evaluated before being applied.

CONCLUSION

The Pamona language in Pamona Puselemba District has a Vulnerable status, with a Total Vitality Index of 3.24, which lies in the lower part of the range of that category. The indicators Proportion of Speakers (3.90), Language Attitudes and Loyalty (3.62), and Intergenerational Transmission (3.56) are relatively high, whereas New and Digital Domains (2.54) and Domains of Language Use (2.81) fall in the Definitely Endangered category. Descriptively, the index of the younger generation (3.02) is lower than that of the middle generation (3.26) and the older generation (3.45), although all three fall in the

Vulnerable category and the difference was not tested statistically. The data indicate that the dominance of Indonesian, especially in education, the digital domain, and interaction with outside speakers, is associated with the narrowing of the domains of use of Pamona, together with the weakening of active transmission in the family and institutional support that is not yet systematic. The strong pride and linguistic identity that remain constitute social capital that can be utilized, but the gap between attitude and practice shows that positive attitudes alone are not enough to sustain vitality. The proposed implications, namely strengthening transmission in the family, expanding the space of use in schools and the digital domain, and strengthening institutional support, are recommendations based on descriptive findings whose effectiveness has not been tested. The findings need to be read within the limits of a small sample selected purposively in one district, usage data that are mostly self-reported, and a cross-sectional design that does not show trends of shift over time. Further research with a larger and representative sample, direct measurement of language behavior, and a longitudinal design or evaluation of interventions is needed to test these implications.

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