

THE VITALITY OF THE NIAS LANGUAGE IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

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Abstract

This study examines the vitality of the Nias language (Li Niha) among young speakers in the era of globalization using UNESCO's (2003) Language Vitality and Endangerment framework. A convergent mixed methods design was employed involving 150 participants aged 15–30 years from Gunungsitoli, Telukdalam, and Mandrehe. Data were collected through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and non-participant observations and analyzed using descriptive statistics, binary logistic regression, and reflexive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Li Niha has a composite vitality score of 2.71 out of 5, placing it in the vulnerable category. Language use remains high in traditional ceremonies (90.7%) and communication with elderly family members (83.3%), but declines substantially in formal education (9.0%) and digital communication (9.0%). Intergenerational transmission shows a sharp decrease from 76.0% among grandparents and parents to 21.3% among youth and younger siblings. Logistic regression identified urban residence (OR = 3.20), social media use (OR = 2.33), and higher education (OR = 2.06) as significant predictors of language shift, while parental use of Li Niha at home (OR = 0.26) emerged as the strongest protective factor. The study highlights the urgency of family-based and digitally integrated language revitalization strategies to ensure the future sustainability of Li Niha.

Keywords: *Li Niha; Language Vitality; Language Shift; Youth; Globalization; Sociolinguistics.*

A. Introduction

Indonesia stands as one of the most linguistically diverse nations on earth. Home to more than 700 living regional languages spread across its vast archipelago, the country represents an extraordinary repository of human communication systems, oral traditions, and cultural knowledge encoded in its linguistic heritage. Yet this richness is under unprecedented threat. According to UNESCO (2021), nearly 40% of the world's

approximately 7,000 languages are currently endangered, with one language disappearing every two weeks a rate of loss that reflects not a natural linguistic evolution but rather the outcome of complex historical, social, political, and economic forces. Each language that vanishes takes with it a unique worldview, an irreplaceable system of knowledge, and the collective memory of a people.

Among Indonesia's regional languages facing this existential pressure,



the Nias language known by its speakers as *Li Niha* occupies a position of particular urgency. Spoken predominantly across the Nias Island chain, encompassing Nias Regency, South Nias, West Nias, North Nias, and Gunungsitoli City in North Sumatra Province. As a language spoken mainly by those living on the Nias Islands, *Li Niha* is facing a mounting challenge as its native speakers increasingly shift to Indonesian and English, while the language itself loses its distinctive characteristics through contact with dominant languages in urban settings a process researchers have described as endangering the very existence of *Li Niha*.

The era of globalization has fundamentally reconfigured the sociolinguistic landscape in which minority languages like *Li Niha* must survive. The intensification of economic integration, the expansion of formal education in national languages, accelerated rural-to-urban migration, and above all the explosive growth of digital communication platforms have collectively produced conditions that are deeply hostile to language maintenance among younger generations. Research on urbanization and language shift in Indonesia demonstrates that, cross-nationally, urbanization is consistently associated with the decline of minority languages and a shift toward national and official languages, with ethnic diversity in urban areas being a primary driver of this transition rather than the process of urbanization itself.

The digital dimension of this challenge is equally formidable. A landmark global analysis of 6,511 spoken

languages by Bromham et al. (2022) found that without targeted intervention, language loss could triple within forty years, with higher average years of formal schooling paradoxically associated with greater endangerment evidence that education systems designed around dominant languages can actively erode minority language vitality. This finding carries direct resonance for the Nias context, where formal education in Indonesian has expanded dramatically while *Li Niha* remains absent from most school curricula.

This study is grounded in three interconnected theoretical frameworks drawn from sociolinguistics, language ecology, and digital language studies. The foundational theoretical lens is the Language Vitality and Endangerment framework established by UNESCO (2003). The UNESCO framework identifies nine evaluative factors for assessing a language's vitality and endangerment status, including intergenerational transmission, absolute number of speakers, proportion of speakers within the total population, trends in existing language domains, response to new domains and media, availability of educational materials and literacy, government language policies, community attitudes toward the language, and the quantity and quality of documentation. These nine factors provide the analytical architecture of the present study, enabling a systematic and comparative assessment of *Li Niha*'s current sociolinguistic health across multiple dimensions of community life.



The second theoretical pillar is Reversing Language Shift (RLS) theory, articulated by Fishman (1991) in his seminal work. Fishman's RLS framework develops a closely argued theory of worldwide efforts to reverse language shift, systematically examining ten threatened language constellations and establishing that the most critical site of intervention is the intergenerational transmission of language within the home and informal community domains arguing that no school or institutional program can substitute for the organic transmission of language from parents to children in everyday family interaction. This principle is especially pertinent to Li Niha, as the family domain represents the last functional stronghold of the language in the face of institutional pressure from Indonesian.

The third theoretical strand concerns ethnolinguistic vitality (EV) theory, which provides a framework for understanding the socio-structural conditions that enable or inhibit a minority language community's capacity for collective action. A recent application of ethnolinguistic vitality theory to the endangered Miao language in China identified a cluster of mutually reinforcing threats including low vitality, dominant language pressure, declining proficiency, economic-cultural shifts, and media influence finding that negative perceptions of a minority language's linguistic capital and inadequate educational resources together create a self-reinforcing cycle of endangerment. The structural parallels with Li Niha's situation are unmistakable.

Beyond these core frameworks, the study draws on a growing body of recent sociolinguistic literature to contextualize its findings. Research on intergenerational multilingual dynamics in Chinese minority families by Chen et al. (2024) found that amid rapid industrialization and globalization, the interplay between minority and majority languages within the familial domain is critical to the enduring vitality of heritage languages, with family language policies and individual perceptions of linguistic identity being decisive factors. This insight suggests that the Nias family domain warrants particular analytical attention.

The role of digital technology in language shift deserves sustained theoretical examination. Lee, Siew, and Ng (2022) demonstrated through network analysis of 3,423 languages that language endangerment hotspots display strong positive assortative mixing critically endangered languages tend to be surrounded by similarly endangered ones and that more geographically isolated languages face greater endangerment risk, a structural feature with clear relevance to the insular geography of the Nias archipelago.

The digital communication environment has emerged as a decisive new arena in which minority language survival is contested. Hakim, Hidayat, and Jusrianto (2025), in an ethnographic study of the endangered Limola language in South Sulawesi, found that the younger generation increasingly prefers Indonesian, regional lingua francas, or colloquial language heavily influenced by



social media, reflecting a rapid and significant language shift while simultaneously demonstrating that youth-driven digital content creation can serve as a revitalization resource when intentionally mobilized. This dual nature of digital platforms both threatening and potentially enabling for minority languages is a central tension this study addresses.

The question of community identity and language attitude among young speakers is equally theoretically significant. Research on heritage language transmission in multilingual contexts has shown that globalization, while fostering social interconnectedness, often imposes a linguistic homogenization that threatens the survival of minor and heritage languages, and that family language practices and policies become the core mechanism for ensuring language survival when formal institutional support is absent. For the Nias context, where government support for Li Niha has been limited and inconsistent, the family domain's role as the primary transmission site assumes critical importance.

The preservation potential of digital technologies offers a measure of hope. Zamasi and Setiawan (2025), in developing a relational database model for a digital Li Niha dictionary, argued that concrete technology-based preservation efforts are urgently required for the Nias language to remain accessible to younger generations proposing that digital tools integrating artificial intelligence and natural language processing could serve

as educational media for youth in learning and preserving Li Niha.

Language attitudes, furthermore, function as a powerful predictor of intergenerational transmission outcomes. Recent sociolinguistic research has confirmed that language attitude comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral components plays a critical role in identity construction, language maintenance, bilingualism, and language planning, with positive attitudes toward a minority language being strongly predictive of its continued use across generations.

The intergenerational disruption of language transmission in Indonesian regional languages is not unique to Nias. As intergenerational transmission the primary mechanism of linguistic survival has been disrupted across many Indonesian communities, children are growing up with little or no exposure to their ancestral languages at home or in school, leading to weakened cultural continuity and accelerating cycles of language shift that may be irreversible within a generation if unaddressed.

The structural drivers of this endangerment extend to education policy. Bromham et al. further found that higher average years of formal schooling is associated with greater language endangerment globally providing evidence that formal education systems, which typically operate in dominant national or international languages, can function as vectors of language loss even as they advance human capital development. Indonesia's education policy, which places Bahasa Indonesia as



the sole medium of instruction from early primary school onward, exemplifies this dynamic precisely.

The question of social media's role in minority language endangerment has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Studies on the use of social media for indigenous language preservation focusing on Setswana and Punjabi have demonstrated that while dominant languages like English threaten smaller languages through increased digital connectivity, social media platforms simultaneously provide new spaces where linguistic communities can promote and normalize their heritage languages in ways previously impossible.

Finally, the revitalization of indigenous languages through digital means has been theorized as a form of decolonization. Meighan (2021) synthesized three decades of evidence on the role of digital and online technologies in Indigenous language revitalization, finding that digital tools can promote intergenerational language transmission and expand language use across multiple social domains arguing that technology's role in language revitalization is transformative when it empowers communities to decolonize their digital communicative spaces.

Anchored in the problems, theoretical frameworks, and contextual realities described above, this study pursues four principal objectives. First, to assess the current vitality of the Li Niha language among young speakers aged 15–30 using the nine-factor UNESCO (2003) framework as the primary analytical instrument. Second, to identify the

dominant sociolinguistic factors including formal education, social media use, and geographic mobility that drive language shift in the Li Niha speech community. Third, to describe the linguistic attitudes and cultural identity perceptions of Nias youth toward Li Niha in the context of accelerating globalization. Fourth, to formulate evidence-based policy recommendations and community-centered revitalization strategies that are adaptive to the digital age and responsive to the specific sociolinguistic ecology of the Nias archipelago.

This research contributes theoretically to the field of language ecology and sociolinguistics by expanding empirical knowledge of Austronesian minority language vitality dynamics in archipelagic Indonesia. Practically, it is intended to serve as an empirical foundation for decision-makers at the Nias regency level, within the national Ministry of Education, and within Nias customary (*adat*) institutions in designing revitalization programs that are not merely reactive to decline, but proactively structured to ensure the sustainable transmission of Li Niha to the generations who will determine its future.

B. Research Methodology

This study employs a convergent mixed methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, analyzed independently, and subsequently integrated during the interpretation stage to provide a comprehensive understanding of Li Niha vitality among young speakers. Creswell (2023) defines



mixed methods research as an approach that combines qualitative and quantitative inquiry to achieve greater breadth and depth of understanding, as well as to corroborate findings through multiple forms of evidence. This design is particularly suitable for the present study because assessing language vitality requires both measurable indicators, such as language use frequency and domain distribution, and rich contextual insights into linguistic attitudes, identity, and social experiences that cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone.

The study was conducted across three administratively and geographically distinct locations in Nias Island: Gunungsitoli (urban), Telukdalam in South Nias (semi-urban), and Mandrehe in West Nias (rural). This tri-site design enables a systematic comparison of how different levels of urbanization influence language maintenance and shift. Pepinsky, Abtahian, and Cohn (2022) identify urban sociolinguistic environments as a key factor shaping minority language dynamics in Indonesia, noting that increased ethnic diversity and linguistic contact often encourage greater use of Indonesian in daily communication.

A total of 150 participants were recruited, comprising 50 participants from each research location. The sample size was considered sufficient to capture variation across the three sociolinguistic settings while allowing meaningful statistical analysis of language use patterns. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) being a native speaker of Li Niha, (2) having resided continuously

in the research area for at least three years, and (3) providing informed consent to participate in the study. Ahmad and Wilkins (2025) emphasize that the quality of purposive sampling depends on the alignment between participant characteristics and the objectives of the research rather than on sample size alone. From the survey participants, 25 key informants were selected for in-depth interviews to represent diverse social backgrounds, including secondary school students, university students, young professionals, and active social media users.

Three data collection instruments were employed. First, a structured questionnaire consisting of 25 items measured language use frequency across seven domains: household communication, educational settings, peer interaction, social media, religious activities, customary ceremonies, and marketplace transactions. The questionnaire also assessed language attitudes and self-reported proficiency. All indicators were operationalized based on the nine factors of language vitality proposed by UNESCO (2003). Prior to data collection, the questionnaire underwent expert validation by two sociolinguistics scholars and was pilot-tested with 20 respondents outside the study sample. The instrument demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating good reliability.

Second, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 15–30 minutes were conducted with the 25 key informants. The



interviews explored participants' perceptions of language shift, emotional attachment to Li Niha, experiences with digital communication, and patterns of intergenerational language transmission. Third, non-participant observation was carried out across six community settings over a four-week period. Observation focused on naturally occurring language practices in public and private interactions and served to triangulate self-reported language behavior with observable linguistic practices.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 22. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize language use frequencies, language attitudes, and proficiency levels. In addition, binary logistic regression was used to identify factors associated with language shift. The dependent variable was language maintenance versus language shift, while independent variables included place of residence, educational attainment, frequency of social media use, and parental use of Li Niha in the home environment. Odds ratios (ORs) and significance values were calculated to determine the relative influence of each predictor.

Qualitative data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis, following the six-phase procedure outlined by Byrne (2022): familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. This iterative and recursive approach enabled progressively deeper interpretation of participants' experiences and perspectives. All qualitative data were

managed and coded using NVivo 14. To enhance trustworthiness, member-checking was conducted on approximately 20% of interview transcripts, allowing participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during the interpretation phase through a joint comparison approach, whereby statistical results were examined alongside qualitative themes to identify convergence, complementarity, or divergence. This process enabled a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing Li Niha vitality among younger speakers. Research validity was further strengthened through methodological triangulation, cross-instrument data comparison, and peer debriefing among the research team. These procedures are consistent with the multi-source triangulation strategies commonly employed in contemporary language revitalization research.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. All participants provided informed consent, and strict measures were implemented to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and the secure storage of research data throughout the study.

C. Results And Discussion

1. Respondent Profile

A total of 150 participants completed the structured questionnaire across three research sites. The demographic distribution was balanced across gender (53.3% female; 46.7% male)



and age cohorts: 15–19 years (36.0%), 20–24 years (35.3%), and 25–30 years (28.7%). Educational backgrounds ranged from junior high school (14.0%) and senior high school (52.7%) to university level (33.3%). The majority of respondents (66.0%) identified their primary occupation as

students, with the remaining 34.0% engaged in employment or informal work. All 150 participants self-identified as ethnic Ono Niha and reported Li Niha as their mother tongue, providing a homogeneous base for comparative analysis across the three sites.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Gunungsitoli (n=50)	Telukdalam (n=50)	Mandrehe (n=50)	Total (%)
Gender	Female	28	26	26	53.3%
	Male	22	24	24	46.7%
Age	15–19	19	18	17	36.0%
	20–24	18	17	18	35.3%
	25–30	13	15	15	28.7%
Education	Junior High	5	9	7	14.0%
	Senior High	27	27	25	52.7%
	University	18	14	18	33.3%

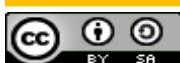
2. Li Niha Vitality Assessment Based on UNESCO (2003) Nine Factors

The central finding of this study is that Li Niha among the youth population occupies a vulnerable (threatened) position on the UNESCO Language Vitality Scale, with a composite mean score of 2.71 out of 5.00 across all nine factors. The UNESCO (2003) framework categorizes languages on a five-level scale from safe to extinct, with the classification determined by nine factors reflecting

language usage and transmission within its community intergenerational transmission, absolute number of speakers, proportion of speakers, domain trends, response to new domains and media, educational materials, governmental policies, community attitudes, and documentation quality. Table 2 presents the factor-by-factor scoring derived from the present study's survey and observational data.

Table 2. UNESCO Language Vitality Assessment of Li Niha Among Youth (N = 150)

UNESCO Factor	Gunungsitoli Score	Telukdalam Score	Mandrehe Score	Overall Mean	Category
F1: Intergenerational Transmission	2.1	3.2	3.6	2.97	Unsafe
F2: Absolute Number of Speakers	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.00	Unsafe
F3: Proportion of Speakers	2.8	3.4	3.7	3.30	Unsafe
F4: Domain Usage Trends	1.9	2.8	3.3	2.67	Definitely Endangered



F5: Response to New Domains/Media	1.4	2.1	2.6	2.03	Definitely Endangered
F6: Educational Materials	1.2	1.5	1.8	1.50	Severely Endangered
F7: Government & Institutional Policy	1.8	2.0	2.0	1.93	Severely Endangered
F8: Community Attitudes	3.2	3.8	4.1	3.70	Unsafe
F9: Documentation Quality	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.27	Definitely Endangered
Composite Mean	2.17	2.68	3.06	2.71	Vulnerable

Scale: 5 = Safe; 4 = Stable but threatened; 3 = Unsafe; 2 = Definitely endangered; 1 = Severely endangered; 0 = Extinct

The most critical discrepancy exists between urban Gunungsitoli (composite score 2.17) and rural Mandrehe (3.06), confirming that urbanization significantly accelerates vitality decline. This finding aligns with Pepinsky, Abtahian, and Cohn's (2022) demonstration that ethnic diversity in urban Indonesian contexts functions as the primary structural driver of shift toward Indonesian, with urban residents considerably more exposed to inter-ethnic communication requiring a lingua franca. The two most alarming factors are F6 (Educational Materials, mean 1.50) and F7 (Government &

Institutional Policy, mean 1.93), both falling in the severely endangered range. The near-absence of Li Niha in formal schooling constitutes a structural gap that no community-level effort alone can fully compensate.

3. Language Use Across Seven Communication Domains

Table 3 presents the percentage of respondents who reported using Li Niha as their primary language across the seven surveyed domains, disaggregated by research site.

Table 3. Percentage of Respondents Using Li Niha as Primary Language by Domain and Site

Communication Domain	Gunungsitoli (%)	Telukdalam (%)	Mandrehe (%)	Overall (%)
Traditional/Customary Ceremonies	84.0	92.0	96.0	90.7
Communication with Elderly Family	72.0	87.0	91.0	83.3
Religious Activities	58.0	74.0	79.0	70.3
Household/Home Domain	41.0	63.0	72.0	58.7
Peer Interaction (same ethnicity)	34.0	55.0	68.0	52.3
Marketplace/Commerce	28.0	46.0	59.0	44.3
Formal Education	6.0	9.0	12.0	9.0
Social Media / Digital Platforms	5.0	9.0	13.0	9.0

These data reveal a clear pattern of domain narrowing (Fishman, 1991): Li Niha retains high usage in culturally sacred domains customary ceremonies

(90.7%) and communication with elders (83.3%) but collapses dramatically in formal education (9.0%) and digital communication (9.0%). The household



domain, typically regarded as the last bastion of minority language survival, shows a troubling rate of only 58.7% overall, dropping to 41.0% in Gunungsitoli. This pattern of low vitality, declining proficiency, and Mandarin or in this case, Indonesian dominance parallels findings from Xu and Chen's (2024) study of the Miao language in China, where media influence exacerbated threats while negative perceptions of a minority language's linguistic capital and

inadequate educational resources created a self-reinforcing cycle of endangerment.

4. Intergenerational Language Transmission

Intergenerational transmission (Factor 1) is widely considered the most decisive indicator of long-term language survival. Table 4 presents the reported patterns of language use within family generational structures.

Table 4. Language Use Patterns Across Family Generations (N = 150, in %)

Family Communication Pattern	Li Niha Only (%)	Li Niha + Indonesian (%)	Indonesian Only (%)
Grandparents → Parents	76.0	19.3	4.7
Parents → Respondent (youth)	38.7	41.3	20.0
Respondent (youth) → Younger Siblings	21.3	39.3	39.3
Respondent to Peers (same ethnicity)	18.0	42.0	40.0

The data in Table 4 illustrate a severe generational rupture in transmission. While 76.0% of grandparent-to-parent communication occurred in Li Niha only, this figure collapses to 38.7% between parents and the current youth generation, and further to just 21.3% when youth communicate with their younger siblings. This progressive decline across three consecutive generational links constitutes a near-textbook case of what Fishman (1991) identified as the critical disruption point in language survival the breakdown of home-domain transmission. As research on heritage language transmission confirms, globalization imposes a linguistic homogenization that

threatens heritage languages, and family language practices become the core survival mechanism when formal institutional support is absent.

5. Social Media Language Behavior and Digital Dimension

The digital communication environment emerged as one of the most powerful drivers of language shift in this study. Of the 150 participants, 94.7% reported daily use of digital platforms, with TikTok (78.7%), WhatsApp (76.0%), and Instagram (71.3%) being the most frequently used. Table 5 presents the language distribution used across these platforms.



Table 5. Language Used by Respondents on Digital Platforms (N = 150)

Platform	Li Niha (%)	Indonesian (%)	English (%)	Mixed (%)
TikTok	4.3	67.8	15.2	12.7
Instagram	3.8	64.9	18.7	12.6
WhatsApp (general chat)	8.7	72.4	4.3	14.6
WhatsApp (family group)	22.4	54.3	1.2	22.1
YouTube (content created)	2.1	71.6	19.4	6.9
Overall Digital Average	8.3	66.2	11.8	13.7

Li Niha's near-total absence from digital spaces (8.3% overall) is particularly alarming because digital platforms now function as the primary socialization arena for youth aged 15–30. Indonesian dominates across all platforms at 66.2%. This finding resonates with Kornai's (2013) argument that less than 5% of all languages can ascend to the digital realm, with the resulting digital language death constituting a form of endangerment that vastly exceeds the consensus figure for traditionally documented endangered languages. The partial exception is

WhatsApp family group chats (22.4% Li Niha), suggesting that family-mediated digital communication retains some heritage language function even among youth, though it remains a minority practice.

6. Language Attitudes Among Youth

Despite the behavioral evidence of language shift, attitudinal data revealed a more nuanced picture. Table 6 presents the distribution of responses to key attitude statements measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Table 6. Language Attitude Scores Among Youth Respondents (N = 150)

Attitude Statement	Strongly Agree/Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean (1–5)
Li Niha is an important part of my identity	84.7	9.3	6.0	4.31
I feel proud when speaking Li Niha	79.3	12.7	8.0	4.12
Li Niha should be preserved for future generations	88.0	7.3	4.7	4.44
I feel obligated to use Li Niha daily	46.7	23.3	30.0	3.21
Indonesian is more useful for my future career	77.3	14.7	8.0	4.09
English is more important than Li Niha	61.3	20.0	18.7	3.67
I would teach Li Niha to my children	63.3	22.7	14.0	3.74
I use Li Niha regularly on social media	12.7	18.0	69.3	2.08



The attitudinal data reveal a structural paradox central to the language endangerment dynamics of Li Niha: youth exhibit high symbolic attachment to the language 84.7% regard it as important to their identity and 88.0% believe it should be preserved yet this positive orientation does not translate into active daily use or digital behavior. Only 12.7% reported regular Li Niha use on social media, and just 46.7% felt personally obligated to use it daily. Wan and Leung (2022) confirm that language attitude, comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, plays a critical role in language maintenance, with positive attitudes being necessary but insufficient predictors of actual language use indicating that structural and institutional

factors must complement attitudinal predisposition to sustain minority languages. The disconnect found here between high symbolic loyalty and low behavioral adherence is consistent with what researchers describe as emblematic vitality a condition in which a language is valued as a cultural symbol but progressively abandoned as a living communicative tool.

7. Predictors of Language Shift: Binary Logistic Regression Results

Binary logistic regression was conducted with language shift (operationalized as predominant use of Indonesian over Li Niha in home and peer domains) as the dependent variable. Table 7 presents the significant predictors.

Table 7. Binary Logistic Regression: Predictors of Language Shift Among Li Niha Youth (N = 150)

Predictor Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B) / OR	95% CI
Urban location (Gunungsitoli)	1.164	0.312	13.92	1	.000	3.20	[1.73–5.91]
Daily social media use (hrs/day)	0.847	0.231	13.44	1	.000	2.33	[1.48–3.67]
Education level (university)	0.721	0.274	6.91	1	.009	2.06	[1.20–3.52]
Frequency of inter-ethnic interaction	0.634	0.249	6.49	1	.011	1.89	[1.16–3.07]
Parental use of Li Niha at home	-1.342	0.318	17.82	1	.000	0.26	[0.14–0.49]
Positive attitude toward Li Niha	-0.589	0.212	7.72	1	.005	0.56	[0.37–0.85]

The regression model accounted for 48.7% of the variance in language shift (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .487$), indicating strong explanatory power. The strongest positive predictor of language shift was urban location (OR = 3.20), meaning youth in Gunungsitoli were 3.2 times more likely to shift toward Indonesian than their Mandrehe counterparts, after controlling for other variables. Daily social media use (OR = 2.33) and university-level education (OR = 2.06) also significantly increased

shift probability. Conversely, parental use of Li Niha at home was the strongest protective factor (OR = 0.26) parents who consistently used Li Niha reduced their child's shift probability by 74%. A positive attitude toward Li Niha also significantly reduced shift likelihood (OR = 0.56). These findings echo Bromham et al.'s (2022) global analysis demonstrating that higher average years of formal schooling is associated with greater language endangerment, as education systems



structured around dominant national languages can accelerate minority language displacement even while advancing human capital.

8. Qualitative Findings: Thematic Analysis of In-Depth Interviews

Reflexive thematic analysis of the 25 key informant interviews produced four overarching themes that converge with and enrich the quantitative findings.

Theme 1 Identity-Practice Gap: All 25 informants expressed genuine emotional attachment to Li Niha, yet acknowledged its declining presence in their daily communication. One 22-year-old university student from Gunungsitoli stated: *"I love Li Niha. It is who I am. But when I am at university or on Instagram, it feels strange to use it nobody there does."* This verbalization captures the emblematic vitality paradox identified quantitatively in Table 6.

Theme 2 Institutional Exclusion: Nineteen of 25 informants (76%) reported that Li Niha had never been taught in any formal schooling they attended. This mirrors findings from Hakim, Hidayat, and Jusrianto (2025) in their Limola language study, where the younger generation's preference for dominant languages was strongly conditioned by the absence of heritage language instruction in formal educational settings, indicating that institutional exclusion functions as a powerful accelerator of intergenerational transmission breakdown.

Theme 3 Digital Displacement: Twenty-two informants (88%) described switching to Indonesian automatically

upon opening any social media application, reporting that available content, interface language, and peer norms on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube created an environment perceived as inhospitable to Li Niha use. One 19-year-old informant from Telukdalam noted: *"When I make a video in Li Niha, almost no one watches or comments. But when I use Indonesian, people engage. So I just use Indonesian."*

Theme 4 Community Revitalization Aspiration: Despite the documented decline, 21 of 25 informants (84%) expressed willingness to participate in community-based revitalization efforts if they were digitally integrated and youth-led. Informants from Mandrehe specifically cited local adat ceremonies and church activities as existing domains where Li Niha remains strong, suggesting a cultural infrastructure that revitalization programs could strategically leverage.

Discussion

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study construct a coherent and multi-layered picture of Li Niha's sociolinguistic condition. The language occupies a vulnerable but not yet critically endangered positionits overall composite UNESCO vitality score of 2.71 and its strong retention in ceremonial and elder-communication domains indicate that the intergenerational transmission chain has not yet been irreparably severed. However, the convergence of structural pressures urban migration, institutional exclusion from education, social media displacement, and the economic prestige



of Indonesian creates a trajectory that, without deliberate intervention, points toward accelerating endangerment within the next generation.

The urban-rural differential documented throughout this study (Gunungsitoli composite score 2.17 vs. Mandrehe 3.06) confirms that urbanization operates as a major vulnerability multiplier, consistent with broader patterns documented for Indonesian regional languages. The near-absence of Li Niha from digital domains (8.3% overall platform use) represents what may be the most structurally novel threat to the language's long-term viability one that did not exist two decades ago and for which traditional revitalization models are poorly equipped. As Hakim et al. (2025) demonstrate in the Limola case, multi-domain revitalization integrating cultural traditions with modern technological adaptation can simultaneously contribute to language vitality and community identity suggesting that youth-led digital content creation in Li Niha represents both an urgent priority and a strategic opportunity.

The regression findings place parental home language behavior (OR = 0.26) as the single most powerful protective factor against language shift a finding in full alignment with Fishman's (1991) foundational RLS principle that home-domain transmission is irreplaceable. This suggests that revitalization policies should prioritize family-based language programs over institutional interventions as their first line of response. Chen et al.'s (2024) research

on multilingual family dynamics similarly confirmed that family language policies and individual perceptions of linguistic identity are decisive factors in the enduring vitality of heritage languages amidst rapid industrialization and globalization. Finally, the strong aspirational attitudes documented in Table 6 and Theme 4 of the qualitative data particularly the 88.0% who believe Li Niha should be preserved constitute a critical social resource. The challenge is not to manufacture motivation but to translate existing symbolic loyalty into behavioral commitment through accessible, culturally resonant, and digitally integrated revitalization pathways.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Nias language (Li Niha) continues to retain a measurable degree of vitality among younger speakers; however, it is increasingly vulnerable to language shift in the context of globalization and rapid digital transformation. Based on UNESCO's nine language vitality factors, Li Niha achieved a composite score of 2.71, placing it within the vulnerable category. Although the language remains actively used in traditional ceremonies, certain religious activities, and communication with older generations, its use has declined considerably in formal education, peer interaction, and digital communication environments, which have become central domains of social engagement for contemporary youth.

The findings reveal a notable discrepancy between language attitudes and actual language practices. Most



participants expressed pride in Li Niha and regarded it as an important symbol of cultural identity and ethnic heritage. Nevertheless, these positive attitudes do not consistently translate into regular language use. Indonesian, and to a lesser extent English, is increasingly perceived as more advantageous for educational attainment, employment opportunities, social mobility, and participation in digital networks. As a result, many young people prioritize these languages over Li Niha in their daily interactions.

The regression analysis identified urban residence, intensive social media use, higher educational attainment, and frequent interethnic interaction as significant predictors of language shift. In contrast, the consistent use of Li Niha by parents within the home emerged as the strongest protective factor against language loss. This finding reinforces a central principle of sociolinguistic theory: intergenerational transmission remains the most critical mechanism for sustaining minority languages and ensuring their long-term survival.

Beyond documenting the current condition of Li Niha, this study contributes to the broader literature on language vitality and language maintenance in multilingual societies. It highlights how globalization and digital communication simultaneously create challenges and opportunities for minority language preservation. The study also provides empirical evidence from an underrepresented linguistic community in Indonesia, thereby enriching scholarly understanding of language shift processes

in regional and indigenous language contexts.

The findings carry important implications for language policy and revitalization initiatives. Efforts to strengthen Li Niha should prioritize family-based language transmission, integrate the language into educational and cultural programs, and expand its presence in digital spaces through youth-oriented content, social media campaigns, and community-based digital platforms. These initiatives require collaboration among local governments, educational institutions, customary organizations, cultural communities, and young language users themselves.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused on three locations within Nias and examined only participants aged 15–30 years; therefore, the findings may not fully represent language practices across all age groups or regions where Li Niha is spoken. Future research may benefit from longitudinal designs that track language use over time, comparative studies involving other indigenous languages in Indonesia, and investigations into the effectiveness of specific revitalization programs and digital language initiatives.

In conclusion, Li Niha remains an important marker of cultural identity among the younger generation, but its future vitality depends on transforming symbolic attachment into active and sustained language use. Strengthening intergenerational transmission, expanding opportunities for language use in education and digital communication, and fostering collaborative revitalization



efforts across families, communities, and institutions are essential for ensuring that Li Niha continues to thrive as a living language for future generations.

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