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Language Vitality of Gorontalo: A Rescue from Regional Language Extinction

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ABSTRACT

Language vitality reflects the sustainability of a language's use in broader society, influenced by dimensions such as status, demographics, and institutional support. This study evaluates the vitality of the Gorontalo language in the coastal area of Teluk Tomini, which is at risk of extinction due to socio-cultural shifts and linguistic dominance. A survey method was employed based on UNESCO's nine vitality indicators, which include intergenerational language transmission, the absolute number of speakers, the proportion of speakers in the total population, trends in existing language domains, responsiveness to new domains and media, materials for language and literacy education, governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies including official status and use, community members' attitudes toward their language, and the amount and quality of documentation. Data were gathered from 155 respondents in Gorontalo and Bone Bolango regencies through questionnaires, observations, and interviews. Quantitative analysis was used to interpret the survey results, while qualitative analysis of interview data was conducted to enrich the understanding of sociolinguistic dynamics. Results indicate that the Gorontalo language is classified as "Vulnerable," with an average vitality score of 3.44. While still used in some areas, transmission to younger generations is declining, exacerbated by Indonesian's dominance in education and social domains. This study underscores the urgency of fostering collaboration among governments, educational institutions, and local communities to enhance awareness and preservation strategies. The development of digital learning materials is proposed as a novel approach to revitalizing the Gorontalo language and ensuring its sustainability for future generations.

Keywords: vitality; language; language extinction; language rescue; Tomini Bay

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INTRODUCTION

4

The Gorontalo language is a regional language spoken by the Gorontalo ethnic community residing in Gorontalo City and several surrounding regencies, including Gorontalo, Bone Bolango, Pohuwato, Boalemo, and North Gorontalo. As part of the Austronesian language family, it plays a vital role as a marker of cultural identity, a means of communication, and a medium for preserving local traditions. Gorontalo Province, a relatively new administrative region in Eastern Indonesia, is home to over one million residents, most of whom also speak Indonesian as the national language and English as a foreign language. Strategically located between the Sulawesi Sea and Tomini Bay, the province is characterized by its multilingual and multicultural environment. Consequently, the use of the Gorontalo language is increasingly shaped by interactions with migrants and the growing influence of the tourism sector (Djou et al., 2021, 2023; Firdaus, 2018; Napu, 2024; Zakaria et al., 2021). Gorontalo language is a means of communication, a buffer and developer of local culture, and an identity for the people of Gorontalo (Baruadi, 2013). The function of local languages is to support the development of the Indonesian language and national culture (Olii, 2021). However, its use has been in steady decline, particularly among younger generations. The Gorontalo language experienced a decline in use due to the arrival of immigrants who brought their language and culture, transforming Gorontalo into a multi-ethnic society. This encouraged the adaptation of immigrant languages by local communities, triggering the Language Development Agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture to classify Gorontalo as an endangered regional language (Usman, 2008; Zakaria et al., 2021). Language vitality validation data up to 2019 shows that Gorontalo is only spoken by a few speakers aged 20 years and above, causing this language to be endangered, similar to 24 other regional languages in 10 provinces in Indonesia (Purwaka et al., 2020). According to the 2020 Linguistic Statistics, the Gorontalo language is included in the 56 regional languages in Indonesia that are classified as vulnerable to critical (Rahardini & Niswah, 2022).

The vitality of the Gorontalo language in the Tomini Bay Coastal Area is threatened by the dominance of Indonesian and other ethnic languages, such as Bajo, Javanese, and Bugis-Makassar, as well as foreign languages, especially English, due to globalization and interaction with immigrants. The people of Gorontalo have a tradition of using the Gorontalo language, which is influenced by Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch, and Malay (Djou et al., 2023). The dominant language influence in global communication and trade now threatens the Gorontalo language in remote areas. Hence, Tomini Bay Coastal Region parents often encourage their children to leave the local language to achieve higher education and success (Firdaus, 2018). The decline in the use of the Gorontalo language can threaten cultural identity and traditional knowledge. Therefore, the importance of this research is to understand the vitality of the Gorontalo language as an effort to save the extinction of regional languages.

The importance of local language as an essential asset plays a vital role in developing Indonesian vocabulary. Therefore, it is crucial to take strategic steps in maintaining, preserving, and promoting local languages (Nteli et al., 2022; Nteli & Djou, 2017). The study of language vitality is an essential basis for language conservation activities, which support efforts to protect local languages in Indonesia. Therefore, research on the vitality of the Gorontalo language it can be the right step to save the extinction of the Gorontalo language.

Fishman (1972) emphasises the importance of measuring language vitality based on several categories that include aspects such as the number of speakers, diversity of use, adaptability, and relevance in social and cultural contexts (Medeiros, 2017). Applying language vitality in research

can help develop effective and sustainable plans to save endangered languages, including ongoing revitalization and preservation efforts (Gobbo, 2021). In the study of language vitality, researchers used a unique measuring tool to assess the condition of the language among its speakers, which later determined the status of the language in several categories (Zhou & Ang, 2024).

Benu (2023), through the results of his research, shows that local languages in Kupang City still have significant vitality with efforts to preserve local languages through the use of language in public signs and essential institutions. Firdaus (2018) shows that the Suwawa-Gorontalo language is considered stable and steady but threatens extinction. Ibrahim (2011) shows that mapping language vitality is the primary key to understanding the linguistic status of tribes in Indonesia. With this vitality mapping, it can be a solution for designing a program to save regional languages from the risk of extinction. Marica dan Duwila ((2017) show that the vitality status of the Ternate Language is in the worrying category. Aritonang (2016) also examined the vitality of the Talondo language by reporting the results of the evaluation of group sub-indices based on respondent characteristics such as gender, age, education, and occupation, which showed that the sustainability of the Talondo language had decreased.

This research differs from some of these studies, especially on the object of the Gorontalo language and locations in the Tomini Bay Area, namely Gorontalo Regency and Bone Bolango Regency. The novelty of this research lies in a specific location, highlighting the unique sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic dynamics in the Tomini Bay area that affect the vitality of the Gorontalo language, targeting the regional language rescue strategy in the Tomini Bay Area, Gorontalo Province. This study aims to assess the vitality of the Gorontalo language by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches within the framework of UNESCO's nine language vitality indicators. Through a comprehensive analysis of these indicators, the research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the language's sustainability. By building on the findings of prior studies, this study is expected to contribute significantly to the preservation of minority languages in the context of globalization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

¹¹ Language vitality refers to the sustainability of a language within a community, shaped by factors such as status, demographics, and institutional support (Dattamajumdar, 2020; Wickström, 2023). It plays a crucial role in designing effective preservation strategies, strengthening group identity, and formulating intervention policies for minority or endangered languages (Clément & Norton, 2021; Coluzzi et al., 2013). Vitality is reflected in the ability of a speech community to maintain language use, supported by the number of speakers, social recognition, and institutional backing (Ding, 2023; Landry et al., 2022). It is commonly measured through variables such as language use, dominance, preference, attitude, motivation, and proficiency—factors that are especially critical in multilingual societies where interlingual interactions significantly influence social and cultural dynamics (Rohmah & Wijyanti, 2023; Stern, 2017; Ying et al., 2015). In the context of globalization, minority languages are increasingly threatened by the widespread use of dominant languages, making efforts to understand and enhance language vitality ever more urgent (Moring et al., 2011; Zabadi et al., 2023). Grenoble and Whaley (2006) emphasize that languages used in daily communication across domains such as family, education, work, and social interactions exhibit high vitality. Holmes (2001) argues that language sustainability is reinforced when ethnic communities live in close proximity and continue to use their language in key domains. Pateda

(1987) further explains that within social interactions, more actively used languages tend to dominate, while those used less frequently are likely to be displaced by dominant languages—potentially leading to extinction if not preserved (Malabar, 2015).

UNESCO has established a comprehensive framework for evaluating language vitality, particularly for endangered languages. Developed by UNESCO's Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages in 2003, this framework encompasses nine key factors: intergenerational transmission, the absolute number of speakers, the proportion of speakers within the total population, shifts in domains of language use, adaptability to new media, the availability of educational and literacy materials, governmental attitudes and policies, community perceptions of their language, and the quantity and quality of language documentation. This framework provides a systematic approach to assessing the status of languages and identifying targeted interventions for their preservation (UNESCO, 2011). The framework is widely acknowledged as an effective tool for assessing a language's vitality and determining the necessary interventions for its preservation (Chen, 2023; Moseley, 2010).

Previous studies have demonstrated that the application of UNESCO's framework provides valuable insights into the factors influencing language vitality across diverse sociocultural contexts. The Temiar language in Malaysia, for example, exhibits relatively high vitality due to its large speaker population and its role as a lingua franca (Hassan et al., 2015), while the Sihan language in Sarawak faces a high risk of extinction, having failed to meet most UNESCO vitality criteria (Mohamed & Hashim, 2012). Research on the Kensiu language highlights the critical role of intergenerational transmission, despite challenges arising from younger generations' preferences for the dominant language (Hamzah et al., 2024). Similarly, the So language community in Thailand shows varying degrees of vitality, influenced by local village dynamics and external policy support (Tehan & Markowski, 2017). In Europe, the Friuli language in Italy continues to decline in terms of young speakers and usage domains, despite its official recognition (De Cia, 2021).

Several regional languages in Indonesia are currently facing a significant decline in vitality due to the combined effects of dominant language pressure, limited transmission, and inadequate educational resources. In Indonesia, the Leukon language confronts comparable challenges. According to the Expanded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), the language is classified at level 6b, signifying a high risk of language loss driven by the social and cultural influence of the dominant language (Candrasari et al., 2018). In the context of the Malay language in North Sumatra, the study reveals a decline in vitality, with transmission classified as level 3 (endangered), a decreasing number of native speakers, and a narrowing scope of usage, underscoring the language's critical condition. The availability of educational materials and adequate documentation plays a crucial role in sustaining language vitality. However, the Malay language in North Sumatra is significantly undervalued in these areas, further jeopardizing its survival (Pramuniati et al., 2024). The vitality of the Sundanese language in Cianjur City is declining, particularly in terms of intergenerational transmission. However, it retains potential in areas such as new media, literacy, and documentation. Enhancing the vitality of the Sundanese language necessitates strengthening intergenerational transmission through increased usage within families, the promotion of language learning in schools and communities, and the development of teaching materials and broader literacy initiatives (Kurniawati et al., 2021).

These studies underscore the necessity of an integrated approach to assessing and preserving minority languages. The UNESCO framework offers systematic guidance for evaluating language status, while quantitative and qualitative methods can be employed to explore

critical aspects of language vitality, including community attitudes, shifts in language usage domains, and the availability of educational resources. For instance, research by Rohmah dan Wijayanti (2023) by combining demographic surveys with in-depth interviews, this approach evaluates community attitudes toward linguistic minorities in Indonesia. It not only offers a comprehensive understanding of a language's actual conditions but also informs the development of more effective intervention strategies.

Research on the Gorontalo language has been conducted from various perspectives, including its function as a marker of cultural identity and a means of communication within the local community (Baruadi, 2013; Olii, 2021), as well as the threat of language endangerment due to the dominance of Indonesian and migrant languages (Usman, 2008; Zakaria et al., 2021). Statistical data indicate that Gorontalo is now spoken by only a small portion of the population over the age of 20, classifying it as a vulnerable language (Purwaka et al., 2020; Rahardini & Niswah, 2022). Studies by Firdaus (2018) dan Ibrahim (2011) emphasize the importance of intergenerational transmission and vitality mapping as the foundation for preservation policies. In addition, Djou et al. (2023) and Lihawa et al. (2016) highlight the historical aspects and documentation of traditional vocabulary. Napu (2024) examines the linguistic landscape of Gorontalo City, revealing a trend toward bilingualism through the use of Indonesian, English, and Arabic in public signage. However, these studies have not specifically assessed the vitality of the Gorontalo language in the coastal region of Teluk Tomini using measurable indicators. This study fills that gap by evaluating language use, transmission, and community attitudes toward Gorontalo based on UNESCO's nine vitality indicators, while proposing contextual preservation strategies grounded in the sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic dynamics of the region.

METHOD

This study was conducted in the coastal region of Tomini Bay, specifically in Gorontalo Regency and Bone Bolango Regency, selected due to their vulnerability to the potential extinction of the Gorontalo language. This vulnerability is largely attributed to intensive language contact with speakers of other languages, particularly in tourist areas. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative strategies to assess language status through measurable indicators and qualitative approaches to explore the sociocultural factors influencing language use (Bordonaba-Plou, 2022). By combining these methods, the study offers a more nuanced and contextual analysis, supporting the development of more targeted and effective language preservation strategies in the coastal region.

This study employs a purposive sampling technique to select respondents deemed relevant to the research objectives. Respondents were chosen based on specific criteria, including residence in the coastal area of Tomini Bay, a minimum age of 15 years, and proficiency in the Gorontalo language, both active and passive. Additionally, demographic diversity—such as variations in age, gender, and education level—was considered to ensure the data accurately reflect the characteristics of coastal communities. A total of 155 respondents were selected, representing a sufficient sample size to provide a comprehensive understanding of the vitality of the Gorontalo language in the region. To complement the data collected from the community, interviews were conducted with indigenous leaders, government officials, and language practitioners, offering institutional and cultural perspectives to enrich the study's findings. Data collection in this study was carried out using a survey method. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) surveys are

designed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data from individuals using instruments such as questionnaires and interviews, with the aim of identifying trends, attitudes, or characteristics within a population. In the context of this study, the survey method was applied to explore the vitality of the Gorontalo language in the coastal area of Teluk Tomini.

In this study, the survey method was employed to investigate the vitality of the Gorontalo language in the coastal area of Tomini Bay. Data were collected through a combination of questionnaires, observations, and interviews, providing a comprehensive understanding of the language's current status and usage dynamics. The survey in this study is based on nine factors formulated by UNESCO's Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages to assess language vitality. These factors include intergenerational language transmission, which measures the extent to which a language is passed from one generation to the next; the absolute number of speakers, indicating the total number of users; the proportion of speakers within the population, reflecting the percentage of users in the community; shifting domains of language use, which evaluates the variety of social contexts in which the language is utilized; response to new domains and media, assessing the language's adaptability to technology and digital platforms; availability of educational and literacy materials, such as textbooks and dictionaries; government and institutional attitudes and policies, including the language's official status; community attitudes toward the language, reflecting the level of appreciation and value assigned by the community; and the amount and quality of language documentation, which examines the extent to which the language has been recorded in written, audio, or video formats. These nine factors were incorporated into a questionnaire using a rating scale from 0 to 5, providing a quantifiable assessment of the vitality of the Gorontalo language in the coastal area of Tomini Bay. This framework also serves as a foundation for strategic analyses aimed at language preservation.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the research approach, this study employed a combination of survey, observation, and interview methods. Data from observations and interviews complement the data obtained from the survey. Contributing to a more robust and nuanced analysis. A series of formal and informal interviews were conducted with participants to gather detailed information about their biographical and linguistic backgrounds, language use in various social contexts, and attitudes toward the Gorontalo language. These interviews were specifically designed to capture dimensions not fully addressed through surveys, such as individual perceptions and patterns of language use in specific contexts. Observations further enriched the dataset by allowing researchers to directly observe language use in natural settings, offering critical context to validate and enhance the survey findings. All collected data were analyzed using UNESCO's nine language vitality criteria, as outlined during the UNESCO Expert Meeting in March 2003. By integrating these methodologies, the study provided a comprehensive assessment of the vitality of the Gorontalo language and ensured the reliability and depth of its findings (Brenzinger et al., 2003; Lewis, 2009).

Data analysis in this study employed a quantitative approach complemented by qualitative analysis to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the research findings. According to Mahsun (2011), Data analysis is the process of classifying, grouping, and equalizing similar data, as well as separating and grouping different data. Data analysis was carried out quantitatively. Technically, quantitative data analysis includes (1) describing the analysis techniques used, including descriptive statistics in the form of averages and percentages, (2) presenting the results of the analysis in the form of tables, histograms, bar charts, line charts, or other relevant diagrams, (3) analyzing percentages based on statements obtained from research instruments, (4) providing interpretations of descriptive statistical data, which are generally in the form of averages and

percentages, and (5) supplementing data analysis with interviews to understand the problems revealed in the research (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2022). This approach aligns with Creswell's (2014) perspective, which emphasizes that quantitative data analysis involves organizing data, conducting statistical analyses, and interpreting results to address research questions and test hypotheses. Creswell also underscores the importance of presenting data in various visual formats, such as tables and diagrams, to enhance reader comprehension. Furthermore, Creswell advocates supplementing statistical data with qualitative methods, such as interviews, to provide deeper contextual insights into the study's findings. This study adopts this principle, integrating Mahsun's (2011) and Creswell's (2014) steps for data analysis. By combining these quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the analysis not only yields measurable data but also offers a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

RESULT

KEY FACTORS IN LANGUAGE USE

INTERGENERATIONAL LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION

Intergenerational language transmission is an essential factor in the sustainability of a language because it involves the inheritance of language from the older generation to the younger generation through daily interactions and educational institutions. If the regional language is not used between parents and children, language skills will decrease, threatening the continuity of the language. Therefore, intergenerational transmission is a significant benchmark of language vitality, where well-passed languages are more resistant to the threat of extinction than those that fail to be transmitted.

TABEL 1. Factor I: Intergenerational Language Transmission

Grade	Degree of Endangerment	Speaker Population	Percentage of Respondents
0	Extinct	There exists no speaker	0.65%
1	Critically endangered	The language is used mainly by very few speakers of the great-grandparental generation.	3.87%
2	Severely endangered	The language is used mainly by the grandparental generation and up	9.03%
3	Definitively endangered	The language is used mainly by the parental generation and up	51.61%
4	Unsafe	The language is used by some children in all domains; all children in limited domains use it.	8.39%
5	Safe	The language is used by all ages, from children up.	26.45%

The survey results showed that the transmission of the Gorontalo language between generations was at level 3, indicating a decline, with the majority of respondents (51.61%) reporting that the elderly and elderly generations mostly used this language. The gap in transmission, especially among the younger generation, risks accelerating the extinction of these languages if there are no intensive revitalization efforts. Therefore, conservation strategies that target children and vulnerable areas are urgently needed, such as integrating the Gorontalo language into formal education and increasing access to learning materials.

THE ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF SPEAKERS

The absolute number of speakers is an essential indicator in assessing the vitality of a language because the more native speakers there are, the greater the chances of the language surviving. This indicator covers all age groups and language use in various social, cultural, and economic contexts. The decline in speakers, especially among the younger generation, increases the risk of language extinction. This factor is not assessed by scale but rather by the actual number of speakers in the community, with small populations more vulnerable to threats. While the number of speakers is essential, other factors must also be considered to ensure the preservation of the language.

POPULATION SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION

Tabel 3.2 Jumlah Penduduk menurut Kabupaten/Kota, Daerah Perkotaan/Pedesaan, dan Jenis Kelamin
Population by Regency/Municipality, Urban/Rural Area and Sex

Kabupaten/Kota Regency/Municipality	Daerah Perkotaan (City)			Daerah Perdesaan (Rural)			Daerah Perkotaan-Pedesaan (Urban-Rural)		
	Laki-laki Male	Perempuan Female	Jumlah Total	Laki-laki Male	Perempuan Female	Jumlah Total	Laki-laki Male	Perempuan Female	Jumlah Total
Kabupaten/Regency	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Buana	15.454	16.110	31.572	60.301	56.653	116.954	75.755	72.771	148.526
Coronata	70.333	83.605	153.938	120.760	114.513	235.273	200.681	198.116	398.797
Pulawati	19.305	20.696	40.001	16.034	12.862	28.896	75.939	73.388	149.327
Bone Bolango	32.310	34.076	66.386	9.140	49.514	58.654	83.640	82.650	166.290
Coronata Utara	10.304	11.140	21.444	53.131	51.808	104.939	93.615	82.658	176.273
Koror	87.018	88.335	175.353	3.035	3.913	6.948	100.843	101.303	202.146
GORONTALO	255.124	263.926	519.050	316.461	327.762	644.223	501.565	501.762	1.003.327

FIGURE 1. Number of Population as a result of the 2020 population census long form

PENDIDIKAN

Tabel 3.4 Jumlah Penduduk Berumur 5 Tahun ke Atas Menurut Kabupaten/Kota, Bahasa Pertama Kali Dikuasai, dan Jenis Kelamin
Population 5 Years of Age and Over by Regency/Municipality, First Language Spoken, and Sex

Kabupaten/Kota Regency/Municipality	Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian)			Bahasa Daerah (Local Language)			Bahasa Asing (Foreign Language)		
	Laki-laki Male	Perempuan Female	Jumlah Total	Laki-laki Male	Perempuan Female	Jumlah Total	Laki-laki Male	Perempuan Female	Jumlah Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Kabupaten/Regency									
Buana	51.736	50.882	102.618	17.521	15.782	33.303	-	-	-
Coronata	133.015	133.052	266.067	51.258	46.302	97.560	5	-	5
Pulawati	55.055	53.525	108.580	14.476	12.843	27.319	-	-	-
Bone Bolango	66.241	66.208	132.449	9.848	9.400	19.248	-	-	-
Coronata Utara	50.791	48.882	99.673	9.551	9.230	18.781	-	-	-
Koror	87.008	88.225	175.233	4.437	4.405	8.842	13	-	13
GORONTALO	444.662	440.808	885.470	161.081	151.887	312.968	18	-	18

FIGURE 2. Data on the Number of Speakers from the 2020 Population Census Long Form

According to the UNESCO LVE framework, the data shows that the number of regional language speakers in Gorontalo and Bone Bolango Regencies reflects the "Vulnerable" condition. Gorontalo Regency has 100,560 regional language speakers (30.51% of the total Population), while Bone Bolango Regency only has 19,040 speakers (11.45%). With a total of 119,600 speakers from a combined Population of 495,776 people, the use of regional languages is still significant but vulnerable to extinction, especially in Bone Bolango. Urban areas face a faster decline in language use due to the dominance of national and foreign languages. To maintain the vitality of the language, a continuous revitalization program is needed, primarily through bilingual education and local Government policy support.

THE PROPORTION OF SPEAKERS IN THE TOTAL POPULATION

The proportion of speakers in the total population is a critical indicator in assessing the vitality of a language because the more significant the proportion of speakers, the higher the vitality of the language. If only a tiny portion of the population speaks the language, this indicates a decline in use and the threat of extinction, especially if the dominant language replaces the role of the local language. Understanding this proportion is essential for determining the urgency of language preservation and revitalization, as this factor reflects the percentage of target language users in the context of the overall population.

TABLE 2. Factor 3: The Proportion of Speakers in the Total Population

Grade	Degree of Endangerment	Proportion of Speakers	Percentage of Respondents
0	Extinct	None speak the language	1.29%
1	Critically endangered	Very few speak the language.	21.29%
2	Severely endangered	The majority speak the language.	20.00%
3	Definitively endangered	A majority speak the language	25.16%
4	Unsafe	Nearly all speak the language.	21.29%
5	Unsafe	All speak the language.	10.97%

The results of the Gorontalo language vitality survey in Tomini Bay show that the highest level of the use of the Gorontalo language is in the category of "Experiencing Decline," with 25.16% of respondents reporting that most of the population still uses this language. Although the use of the Gorontalo language is still relatively common in most regions, the decline is noticeable, especially in formal use and among the younger generation. This shows that although the Gorontalo language has not yet reached a critical condition, signs of deterioration have begun to be seen, so more intensive preservation measures are needed.

TRENDS IN EXISTING LANGUAGE DOMAINS

Trends in language use in various domains of life, such as home, school, workplace, and media, are essential indicators of language vitality. If the language is only used at home or among the elderly, while other languages dominate in the formal realm, such as schools and the media, this indicates a decline in use. In contrast, the widespread use of language across various domains shows good vitality.

TABLE 3. Factor 4: Trends in Existing Language Domains

Grade	Degree of Endangerment	Domains and Functions	Percentage of Respondents
0	Extinct	The language is not used in any domain and for any function.	0.00%
1	Minimal domains	The language is used only in a restricted domain and for a few functions.	18.71%
2	Limited or formal domains	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions	10.97%
3	Dwindling domains	The language is used in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.	23.23%
4	Multilingual parity	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.	22.58%
5	Universal use	The language is used in all domains and for all functions	24.52%

The results of the survey on the vitality of the Gorontalo language in Tomini Bay based on Factor 4: Trends in Language Domain showed that the highest respondents were at level 5 as 24.52% of respondents reported the use of Gorontalo language in all regions and social functions, which reflects the community that is still strong in maintaining this language in the formal and informal realms. However, a downward trend was seen, with 23.23% of respondents reporting that this language was limited to home, and 22.58% of respondents reported the joint use of Gorontalo and other languages, reflecting the situation of diglossia. A further downward trend was reported by 18.71% of respondents who only used this language in limited situations, indicating that the Gorontalo language faces significant challenges under the dominance of Indonesian.

RESPONDING TO NEW DOMAINS AND MEDIA

In the digital era, new media such as the internet, social media, and digital applications provide opportunities and challenges for the Gorontalo language in the Tomini Bay area. While this media can be used to preserve language through digital content, the dominance of national and foreign languages threatens the use of the Gorontalo language, especially among the younger generation.

TABLE 4. Factor 5 : Responding to New Domains and Media

Grade	Degree of Endangerment	New Domains and Media Accepted by the Endangered Language	Percentage of Respondents
0	Inactive	The language is not used in any new domains.	1.94%
1	Minimal	The language is used in only a few new domains.	31.61%
2	Coping	The language is used in some new domains.	21.29%
3	Receptive	The language is used in many domains.	14.19%
4	Robust/active	The language is used in most new domains.	18.71%
5	Dynamic	The language is used in all new domains.	12.26%

The Gorontalo language vitality survey results showed that the highest response was at level 1, with 31.61% of respondents reporting that adapting the Gorontalo language in the region and new media was very limited. This language is only used in a few new contexts, such as digital media or work environments, but it is not yet widespread. This level 1 indicates that the use of the Gorontalo language in dealing with technological developments is still minimal, so there is a risk that this language will not be able to compete in the digital space.

MATERIALS FOR LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EDUCATION

Language education and literacy are essential in preserving the Gorontalo language in the coastal area of Tomini Bay. The development of exciting and curriculum-appropriate learning materials, both formal and informal, is urgently needed so that the younger generation can still learn this language. The material must cover various levels, from basic to advanced, and use print, digital, and audiovisual media. Interactive textbooks, dictionaries, folklore, and online platforms will help expand the range of learning.

TABEL 5. Faktor 6: Materials for Language and Literacy Education

Grade	Accessibility of Written Materials	Percentage of Respondents
0	No orthography is available to the community.	9.03%
1	A practical orthography is known to the community, and some material is being written.	12.26%
2	Written materials exist, but they may only be helpful for some community members; for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.	18.71%
3	Written materials exist, and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.	27.74%
4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language.	14.84%
5	Writing in the language is not used in administration. There is an established orthography literacy tradition with grammar, dictionaries, texts, literature, and everyday media. Writing in the language is used in administration and education.	17.42%

The results of the Gorontalo language vitality survey in Tomini Bay showed that in Factor 6: Materials for Language and Literacy Education, the highest response was at level 3, with 27.74% of respondents reporting that written materials were available and children were exposed to the Gorontalo language in schools, but literacy in this language has not been widely promoted. This indicates that despite efforts to introduce the Gorontalo language in written form, its spread in the educational environment is still limited. Therefore, more significant efforts are needed to integrate the Gorontalo language into the curriculum and expand the availability of literacy materials.

LANGUAGE POLICY, ATTITUDES, AND URGENCY OF DOCUMENTATION

ATTITUDES AND POLICIES OF GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE, INCLUDING OFFICIAL STATUS AND USE

The government's language policy greatly influenced the use of the Gorontalo language, especially in Tomini Bay. Despite recognising the importance of regional languages, their implementation at the local level is often limited, with official use of the Gorontalo language generally only in cultural events and informal communication. More substantial support is needed in education and documentation, such as dictionary development and research projects, to keep the language alive amid the dominance of national and foreign languages.

TABLE 6. Factor 7: Attitudes and Policies of Governments and Language Institutions, Including Official Status and Use

Grade	Degree of Support	Deskripsi	Percentage of Respondents
0	Prohibition	Minority languages are prohibited.	1.29%
1	Forced assimilation	The dominant language is the sole official language, while nondominant languages are neither recognized nor protected.	5.81%
2	Active assimilation	Government encourages assimilation to the dominant language. There is no protection for minority languages.	3.87%
3	Passive assimilation	No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.	9.68%
4	Differentiated support	Minority languages are protected primarily as the language of the private domains. The use of the language is prestigious.	28.39%
5	Equal support	All languages are protected.	50.97%

The results of the Gorontalo language vitality survey in Tomini Bay showed that the government's support for the Gorontalo language was at level 5, with 50.97% of respondents reporting that the language was protected on an equal footing with other languages. Despite the inclusive policy, the use of the Gorontalo language is still more robust in the private sphere than in the public. As many as 28.39% of respondents noted support for the Gorontalo language in the local community, but this language has not been fully recognized as an official language in the formal realm. Challenges remain in strengthening policies that support the use of the Gorontalo language in the public and institutional spheres to ensure its preservation.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR OWN LANGUAGE

The community's attitude towards the Gorontalo language in Tomini Bay significantly affects the continuity and vitality of the language. The community is divided into two groups: those firmly committed to preserving and using the Gorontalo language in their daily lives and cultural events and those more likely to use national or foreign languages, especially in education and employment. The first group sees the Gorontalo language as an essential ethnic identity, while the second group, especially the younger generation, prefers Indonesian or English, which is considered more relevant in the modern context.

TABLE 7. Faktor 8: Community Members' Attitudes Toward Their Own Language

Grade	Deskripsi	Percentage of Respondents
0	No one cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language	2.58%
1	Only a few members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.	9.03%
2	Some members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.	10.32%
3	Many members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.	19.35%
4	Most members support language maintenance.	31.61%
5	All members value their language and wish to see it promoted	27.10%

The results of the Gorontalo language vitality survey in Tomini Bay showed that in Factor 8: Community Members' Attitudes towards Their Language, the highest response was at level 4, with 31.61% of respondents reporting strong support from most of the community for the maintenance of the Gorontalo language. This shows a positive awareness of the importance of language as a cultural identity.

AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF DOCUMENTATION

The quantity and quality of Gorontalo language documentation are significant in efforts to preserve and revitalize the Tomini Bay area, but they are still limited. Existing documentation, such as primary dictionaries and traditional texts, does not cover all aspects of language, including vocabulary and the use of language in cultural contexts. The quality of documentation is also not optimal, with many sources that are difficult to access, and most are still in print format. The improvement of digital-based documentation is very urgent, and linguists and local communities should be involved in collecting, compiling, and disseminating Gorontalo language materials to remain relevant in the era of globalization.

TABLE 8. Factor 9: Amount and Quality of Documentation

Tingkat	Label	Deskripsi	Persentase
0	Undocumented	Nonmaterial exists.	5.16%
1	Inadequate	Only a few grammatical sketches, short word lists, and fragmentary texts. Audio and video recordings do not exist, are unusable, or are 10 ely unannotated.	18.71%
2	Fragmentary	Some grammatical sketches, word lists, and texts are helpful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video 9 ordings may be of varying quality, with or without annotation.	18.06%
3	Fair	There may be adequate or sufficient grammar, dictionaries, and texts, but no everyday media; audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality or degree of annotation.	25.81%
4	Good	There is one good grammar and several adequate grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and occasionally updated everyday media; adequate annotated high-quality audio and video recordings.	14.84%
5	Superlative	There are comprehensive grammar and dictionaries, extensive texts; and a constant flow of language materials. Abundant annotated high-quality audio and video recordings exist.	17.42%

The results of the Gorontalo language vitality survey in Tomini Bay showed that the documentation of this language was at level 3, with 25.81% of respondents reporting that the existing documentation was sufficient to support the research. However, the quality of multimedia and annotation was still limited. Although there are grammar, dictionaries, and some texts, the coverage and quality of audio-visual recordings are still minimal.

DISCUSSION

Based on the UNESCO-LVE framework, a thorough evaluation of the vitality status of a language must consider nine factors in an integrated manner. Table 9 presents a combined scale for all factors, which describes the overall vitality level of the Gorontalo language used in the Tomini Bay Area, Gorontalo Province. (1) intergenerational language transmission, (2) the absolute number of speakers, (3) the proportion of speakers in the total population, (4) trends in existing language domains, (5) Responding to New Domains and Media, (6) Materials for Language and Literacy Education, (7) Attitudes and Policies of Governments and Institutional Language, Including Official Status and Use, (8) Community Members' Attitudes Toward Their Own Language, (9) Amount and Quality of Documentation

TABLE 9. Gorontalo Language Vitality Assessment Status

Factor	The Vitality of the Gorontalo Language
3 1. intergenerational language transmission	3
2. the absolute number of speakers	4
3. the proportion of speakers in the total population	3
4. trends in existing language domains	5
5. Responding to New Domains and Media	1
6. Materials for Language and Literacy Education	3
7. Attitudes and Policies of Governments and Language Institutions, Including Official Status and Use	5
8. Community Members' Attitudes Toward Their Own Language	4
9. Amount and Quality of Documentation	3
Rata-Rata Vitalitas Bahasa Gorontalo	3.44

According to Dwyer's formulation of language vitality, the following are the categories that are usually used to determine language status based on vitality scores:

1. 0 - 1.4 : Critically endangered
2. 1.5 - 2.9 : Endangered
3. 3.0 - 3.9 : Vulnerable
4. 4.0 - 5.0 : Stable or safe

With an average score of 3.44, the vitality of the Gorontalo language is included in the vulnerable category. This suggests that although the language is still in use, certain factors could threaten its future viability.

The results of the survey on the vitality of the Gorontalo language in the Tomini Bay area based on the UNESCO-LVE framework show several essential factors that affect the sustainability of this language. First, the transmission of language between generations is at level 3, indicating a decrease in the use of language among the younger generation, while the dominance of Indonesian and foreign languages in education and daily life is increasing. The older generation tends to speak the Gorontalo language to children no longer, instead encouraging their children to abandon the tribal language in order to achieve higher education and success, resulting in the Gorontalo language being endangered (Firdaus, 2018; Purwaka et al., 2020). The viability of a language is greatly influenced by the social stability of its speaking community and whether the language is still passed on to the younger generation (Pakendorf, 2024). The transmission of language between generations helps in describing the vitality status of a language (Hamzah et al., 2024).

The absolute number of speakers reaching 119,600 indicates a considerable number, but the proportion of speakers in the total population is starting to decline. Language extinctions are often associated with languages that have few speakers. As Grauss states (1992), languages with fewer than 100,000 speakers can potentially become extinct. The use of the Gorontalo language in the social domain is at level 5, which indicates that this language is still maintained in local traditions and culture, although its use in the formal realm, such as government and education is limited. This is as well as research Fitriyani & Subiyanto (2021), which shows that the Gorontalo language is often used in religious and cultural activities, such as in ritual communication in the Dikili tradition. However, the response to the new media is at level 1, which shows the low adaptation of the Gorontalo language on digital platforms and modern technology, weakening its position among the younger generation.

In the field of education and literacy, level 3 shows that efforts to include the Gorontalo language in the education system are still limited, with a lack of comprehensive teaching materials. The development of exciting and relevant local teaching materials in the Gorontalo language is critical to increasing the use of the Gorontalo language in formal education and strengthening its vitality (Bay et al., 2018). The government's attitude is at level 5, indicating local government support for language preservation, although policy implementation still needs improvement. The community's attitude is at level 4, with pride in the language, especially among the older generation, although the younger generation is starting to be less interested.

Gorontalo language documentation is at level 3, with existing documentation efforts that are still limited in terms of quality and accessibility. The development of two-way translator applications and dictionaries of traditional terms based on computational linguistics shows that technology can increase the quantity and quality of Gorontalo language documentation, facilitate access to learning, and support language preservation in the digital era. This innovation strengthens

the vitality of the language by providing relevant documentation accessible to the broader community, including the younger generation (Dako et al., 2015, 2017; Lihawa et al., 2016). The presence of language in the realm of technology can show vitality and protect and promote the language for young speakers (Cunliffe, 2024; Wood, 2024).

The study also shows that the UNESCO-LVE framework provides a comprehensive evaluation of the vitality of the Gorontalo language. However, further studies are needed, especially in multiethnic and urban areas, to understand the dynamics of the Gorontalo language in different socioeconomic contexts. Language vitality indicators must clearly explain how changes in people's attitudes towards a language occur. Suppose this indicator is not able to provide a strong explanation for the change in language attitudes in society. In that case, the measurement or analysis of language vitality will only be an academic activity that does not have a natural or practical impact on language preservation efforts (Gobbo, 2021). The assessment of the vitality of languages has been of particular concern for the past 20 years, spearheaded by UNESCO, which affirms that linguistic diversity is a valuable part of human heritage and that the loss of languages is a loss to all of humanity (Webster, 2022). Therefore, this research is part of an effort to preserve the endangered Gorontalo language, especially in the coastal area of the Tomini Bay Area, Gorontalo Province.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Gorontalo language in the coastal area of Tomini Bay, particularly in Gorontalo and Bone Bolango Regencies, is in a vulnerable condition, with an average vitality score of 3.44. While the language remains in use, its intergenerational transmission is weakening, particularly among younger speakers. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the dominance of Indonesian in educational and social settings, limited learning resources, and low youth engagement. These findings underscore the urgency of revitalization efforts that prioritize strengthening language transmission within families, integrating Gorontalo language into formal education, and expanding its presence in digital platforms. Collaboration among local communities, governments, and educational institutions is vital to sustaining the language. Beyond the local context, this research highlights broader implications for linguistic diversity and language preservation in multilingual societies. It calls on stakeholders to invest in digital language documentation, culturally responsive curricula, and community-driven programs. Future research should explore longitudinal changes in language use, especially in urban-migrant contexts, and evaluate the effectiveness of revitalization strategies. Emphasizing the cultural and identity value of the Gorontalo language is essential—not only for its survival but also for maintaining the region's rich intangible heritage. A collective, heartfelt commitment is needed to ensure that the Gorontalo language continues to live and thrive across generations.

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