



Indonesian as a Regional Lingua Franca in the Asean Economic Community

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Abstract

Despite sustained policy initiatives to promote Bahasa Indonesia internationally, its strategic development as a regional lingua franca within the ASEAN Economic Community has received limited scholarly attention, particularly in relation to economic integration and multilingual governance. This study examines whether Indonesian can function as a regional lingua franca in ASEAN and analyses how its internal linguistic conditions (strengths and weaknesses) and external environment (opportunities and threats) shape its internationalization prospects. Employing a qualitative research design, the study applies a structured SWOT analysis to official policy documents, institutional strategies, and regional cooperation frameworks relevant to ASEAN. The findings reveal that, despite strong demographic presence, legal recognition, and geopolitical significance, the internationalization of Indonesian is constrained by fragmented governance, limited cross-sectoral coordination, and the absence of a coherent long-term strategic roadmap. The study argues that advancing Indonesian as a regional lingua franca requires a paradigmatic shift in language policy, reconceptualizing it as a multi-sectoral process integrated with diplomacy, economic cooperation, education, and cultural governance. Rather than serving solely as a communicative medium, Indonesian must be positioned as a strategic policy asset embedded within ASEAN's political-economic structures. By situating Indonesian within a Global South perspective, this study contributes to broader debates on regional lingua franca formation beyond English-centred models.

Keywords: Indonesian Language; Regional Lingua Franca; Language Planning; ASEAN Economic Community.

A. Introduction

For more than a decade, Indonesia has articulated an explicit policy ambition to extend the functions of the Indonesian language beyond its national borders (Abduh et al., 2021, 2022; Fahmi et al., 2023; Umayya, 2020). This ambition is codified in a wide range of language-planning instruments, cultural regulations, and diplomatic initiatives that frame Indonesian not merely as a marker of national identity, but as a language envisioned to play a broader regional and international role. Within official discourse, Indonesian is increasingly positioned as a potential medium for cross-border communication, regional cooperation, and cultural diplomacy. Nevertheless, despite the growing intensity of policy rhetoric, the conceptual and strategic foundations of Indonesian as an “international language” remain insufficiently articulated. Much of the discussion has taken place at a procedural or programmatic level, without being grounded in a coherent theoretical framework that clarifies what internationalization entails, how it operates, and under what structural conditions it may succeed. This conceptual vagueness has generated persistent policy ambiguity, particularly with regard to how these international language aspirations should be operationalized at the regional level.

In the wider scholarly literature, the notion of an “international language” itself is far from settled. It has been variously associated with professional mobility and cross-border communication in international institutions, with the global dominance of English, and constructed languages explicitly designed for international use (Laitin & Ramachandran, 2022). While these perspectives offer useful classificatory insights, they provide limited analytical leverage for understanding how national languages from Global South contexts might expand beyond national boundaries through historically contingent processes shaped by political economy, governance arrangements, and institutional power (Gobbo, 2021; Jenks, 2018; Lo Bianco, 2017; McKay, 2018; O’Keeffe, 2019; Panero, 2018; Pereltsvaig, 2017). Most notably, much of the existing literature remains conceptually detached from regional integration dynamics, where language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a strategic resource embedded in power relations, policy coordination, and economic structures.

These conceptual limitations become particularly salient in the context of Southeast Asia. The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has significantly intensified regional economic interdependence, cross-border mobility,

and institutional coordination (Chan, 2021; Muslihah, 2016). Yet, language has received remarkably limited analytical attention in the construction of ASEAN as an integrated regional space. Efforts to internationalize Indonesian have so far been predominantly channeled through education, especially through the expansion of BIPA (Indonesian for Foreign Speakers) programs. Although BIPA has grown quantitatively, its qualitative impact remains constrained, largely because language internationalization has been approached primarily as a pedagogical endeavor rather than as a multidimensional policy process (Permadi et al., 2022). In reality, language internationalization is deeply intertwined with economic interaction, diplomatic negotiation, cultural exchange, and regional administration. The limited exposure of Indonesian language policy to these broader dimensions has restricted scholarly understanding of how Indonesian might function beyond education as a regional communicative resource within ASEAN.

Existing research on language internationalization reflects a degree of analytical fragmentation. Studies on English as a lingua franca have demonstrated how policy alignment, prestige, and economic incentives interact to sustain linguistic dominance in academic, professional, and institutional domains (Mariani et al., 2023; Pishghadam et al., 2023). Conversely, research on Indonesian language policy has highlighted the importance of internal linguistic resources and institutional capacity in supporting wider dissemination, while other strands of work have examined how economic forces influence language policy trajectories within multilingual spaces (Alfathimy et al., 2021; Firman et al., 2023; Surpi et al., 2020; Wicaksono, 2020). Collectively, these studies illuminate important dimensions of language internationalization, yet they remain insufficiently connected to language planning theory and to the political economy of regional integration – particularly in relation to ASEAN as an evolving macro-regional entity.

As a result, the status of national languages as potential regional *linguae francae* within economically integrated macro-regions such as the ASEAN Economic Community remains conceptually under-theorized. Previous studies on the internationalization of Indonesian have largely focused on institutional readiness, educational diffusion, or linguistic potential, while paying limited attention to structural constraints, policy coherence, and regional power relations. This analytical gap obscures how language planning operates at the intersection of regional economics, governance mechanisms, and cultural diplomacy. Consequently, we still



lack a comprehensive understanding of how a national language from the Global South may be positioned, negotiated, enabled, or constrained as a regional communicative resource outside purely pedagogical contexts.

This article seeks to address this gap by examining Indonesian as a prospective regional lingua franca from a language planning perspective that explicitly incorporates policy coherence, governance capacity, and ASEAN's political-economic construction as central units of analysis. Rather than treating language internationalization as a symbolic aspiration or an educational project alone, the study conceptualizes it as a multi-sectoral policy process embedded within regional economic integration. To this end, the article employs a SWOT-derived policy analysis framework to systematically investigate Indonesia's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and constraints, in relation to ASEAN dynamics. By doing so, the analysis moves beyond education-centered or institution-specific narratives and interrogates the structural conditions under which Indonesian may – or may not – function as a regional lingua franca.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to reframe Indonesian language internationalization as a strategic policy process situated within the political economy of regional integration, rather than as a culturally driven or pedagogically bounded ambition. In offering this reframing, the article contributes an alternative Global South perspective to debates on regional lingua franca formation, an area that remains dominated by analyses centered on English and on Global North experiences. Through this lens, the article aims to advance theoretical discussions on language planning and regional integration, while also providing policy-relevant insights for ASEAN and other economically integrated regions grappling with questions of linguistic diversity, power, and communication.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative policy document analysis using a structured SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) framework to examine language planning and policy orientations related to the prospective internationalization of Indonesian within the ASEAN Economic Community. The methodological approach conceptualizes language planning as a policy-driven process shaped by institutional coordination, economic convergence, and regional governance, rather than as a purely linguistic or pedagogical endeavor.

The dataset consists exclusively of legally enacted and officially published policy and strategic documents issued by relevant Indonesian governmental and non-governmental institutions. These include the National Medium-Term Development Plans (RPJMN) for 2015–2019 and 2020–2024; strategic plans and annual performance reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; policy documents and strategic programs of the Language Development and Cultivation Agency under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology; policy documents issued by the Ministry of Trade; and strategic publications produced by the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KADIN). No interviews, surveys, or focus group discussions were conducted, as the study was intentionally designed as a fully document-based policy analysis.

The analytical procedure followed a systematic multi-step SWOT process to ensure transparency and replicability. First, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring policy themes across the documents, focusing on language capacity, institutional coordination, geopolitical positioning, economic integration, and regional communication needs. Second, based on these themes, twenty-two strategic dimensions were derived and categorized into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. For example, the dimension “legal and regulatory framework” was classified as a strength due to repeated statutory mandates on language internationalization found in Law No. 24/2009, Presidential Regulation No. 63/2019, and the RPJMN 2020–2024. In contrast, the dimension “lack of an aligned roadmap” was categorized as a weakness, as cross-document analysis revealed limited coordination between higher education strategies and foreign affairs policies.

Third, weights were assigned to each strategic dimension based on their relative policy salience, derived from comparative assessments of emphasis and prioritization across documents. The total weight of all factors was standardized to 1.00. Fourth, each dimension was rated in the context of the ASEAN Economic Community using a four-point scale (1 = weak or poorly developed; 4 = strong or well established). Weighted scores were calculated by multiplying each factor’s weight by its rating, and composite scores were obtained by aggregating values within each SWOT category.

The institutions analyzed were treated as policy analysis units rather than research subjects, with the focus placed on identifying strategic assumptions and policy orientations embedded in official texts. Regarding research ethics, all data were drawn from publicly accessible and formally published documents, and no human participants

were involved. Accordingly, ethical approval for human-subject research was not required. The analysis was conducted with a commitment to transparency, accountability, and responsible interpretation of policy content.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study derived from the qualitative policy document analysis and the structured SWOT framework. The results are first presented to demonstrate the structural patterns, strategic positions, and policy conditions surrounding the potential role of Indonesian as a regional lingua franca within the ASEAN Economic Community. These findings are then interpreted and critically examined through the lens of language planning theory—particularly status, prestige, acquisition, and language management—by situating them within broader governance dynamics, political-economic structures, and regional integration processes. This integrated presentation is intended to maintain a clear distinction between empirical evidence and analytical interpretation, while ensuring coherence between data, theory, and the study's overarching research objectives.

1. Results

a. Internal factors: Strengths and weaknesses

The research revealed several internal factors that influence the internationalization of Indonesian. These factors were drawn from official policy and strategic documents and were categorized as Strengths and Weaknesses.

1) Strengths

There are plans to codify the Indonesian language internationalization into a formal legal and regulatory framework, as reflected in policy documents. The text also mentions specialized linguistic institutions responsible for language ad hoc, popularization, and international cooperation. Policy documents report that Indonesia maintains diplomatic representations in more than 125 countries, providing institutional channels for language dissemination. Policy documents also name available human resources language teachers, practitioners and learners nationally and internationally. Official figures also say how many speak Indonesian and list Indonesian as one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. As other

references indicate, increased access to linguistic infrastructure – standardization tools, digital resources, and documentation systems (Table 1) and to lexical resources from the locally spoken languages in language development efforts has also been emphasized.

2) *Weaknesses*

The reviewed documents also mention various internal limitations. These include haphazard implementation of existing language regulations, an inadequate allocation of financial and organizational resources, and uneven public support for language internationalization. Policy papers also note that the profile of Indonesian international engagement is low in some fields; formally at least, there are no ratified Roadmaps or strategic plans for coordinating activities between institutions. Other documentation also highlights a deficit in public awareness of the purposes of language globalization and of domestic resistance to the internationalization discourse (see Table 1).

Table 1. Internal factors affecting the internationalization of the Indonesian Language

Category	Key Factors	Description
Strengths	Legal and regulatory framework	The Indonesian language is supported by a comprehensive legal umbrella, including constitutional provisions and national regulations that formally mandate its internationalization.
	Dedicated linguistic institutions	The existence of institutions responsible for language development and diplomacy provides organizational capacity for planning and coordination.
	Global diplomatic presence	Indonesian representatives in more than 125 countries offer institutional channels for language dissemination and cultural engagement.
	Human resource capacity	Indonesia possesses a substantial pool of language professionals and educators, both domestically and internationally.
	BIPA facilitation programs	The Language Development and Fostering Agency supports and coaches the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers program organizers.
	Large speaker population	Indonesian ranks among the world’s top ten most widely spoken languages, strengthening its demographic viability.
	Linguistic infrastructure	The availability of modern linguistic tools supports standardization, documentation, and dissemination.
Weaknesses	Lexical resources	The richness of local languages provides a reservoir for expanding vocabulary and adapting to linguistic contexts.
	Policy enforcement gaps	Existing linguistic regulations are not consistently enforced, reducing policy effectiveness.
	Limited resource	Financial and organizational resources remain insufficient



Category	Key Factors	Description
	mobilization	to support large-scale internationalization efforts.
	Public attitudinal constraints	Positive attitudes toward the internationalization of Indonesian are uneven and remain low.
	Limited international visibility	Indonesian is still relatively unknown or under-recognized in specific international contexts.
	Absence of a unified roadmap	No formally ratified, integrated roadmap aligns initiatives across institutions.
	Low public awareness	Public understanding of the objectives and mandate of language globalization remains incomplete.
	Domestic resistance	Resistance to internationalization discourse persists among certain segments of society.

b. External factors: Opportunities and challenges

The research also identified external factors that encourage or hinder the internationalization of the Indonesian language, which were categorized into opportunities and challenges.

1) Opportunities

Official policy documents refer to Indonesia’s demographic size and regional geopolitical position as significant external factors. There is also evidence in records of international linguistic assistance from universities, cultural organizations, and overseas partners. Recent reports by education and foreign affairs agencies indicate the growth of BIPA programs in various countries. Other sources highlight the persistent demand from overseas learners, the appeal of Indonesia’s culture and economy, and the role of digital and information technology in distance learning and online dissemination. Policy documents also refer to Indonesians, diaspora, and international students as transnational agents of linguistic activity (see Table 2).

2) Challenges

External impediments identified in the corpus include political and economic instability within the region, competition with globally hegemonic and locally well-established languages, and insufficient public knowledge of language internationalization policies. Policy sources also cite opposition from other states, as well as institutional blockages in international organizations. Weak coordination between external stakeholders and the ongoing competition between Indonesian and other foreign languages within Indonesia are also noted in reports (see Table 2).

Table 2. External factors affecting the internationalization of the Indonesian Language

Category	Key Factors	Description
Opportunities	Demographic and geopolitical relevance	Indonesia's growing population enhances its strategic importance in regional prestige planning.
	Stakeholder support	The internationalization agenda has received support from diverse domestic and international actors.
	Expansion of BIPA countries	Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers programs have been implemented in up to fifty countries.
	Foreign learner interest	There is a strong, sustained interest among foreigners in learning Indonesian.
	Cultural and economic appeal	Indonesia's natural, cultural, and economic assets increase incentives for language engagement.
	Digital and ICT development	Advances in information and communication technology enable broader digital dissemination.
Challenges	Transnational partners	Indonesianists, diaspora communities, and international students function as informal language ambassadors.
	Global linguistic representation	Aspirations to increase representation of Austronesian languages offer symbolic leverage.
	Political and economic instability	Instability and security concerns may disrupt long-term policy implementation.
Challenges	Competition with dominant languages	Indonesian competes with globally entrenched languages with established functional domains.
	Limited public comprehension	Public understanding of compulsory language globalization remains incomplete.
	International political resistance	Resistance from other countries and veto power in global institutions pose structural barriers.
	Weak stakeholder constructive collaboration	Limited coordination among stakeholders hampers coherent implementation.
	Domestic language competition	Competition with foreign languages within Indonesia reflects ongoing prestige asymmetries.

c. Aggregated SWOT Scores

The weight and score method generated total scores for each of the SWOT dimensions. Based on the calculated weighted scores, the strength dimension received a total score of 8.99, weaknesses 7.77, opportunities 8.66 and threats 6.88. By calculating the average weight assigned to each SWOT category, an overall composite weighted score of 2.75 was obtained. The weighted score for each SWOT category are illustrated in Figure 1.

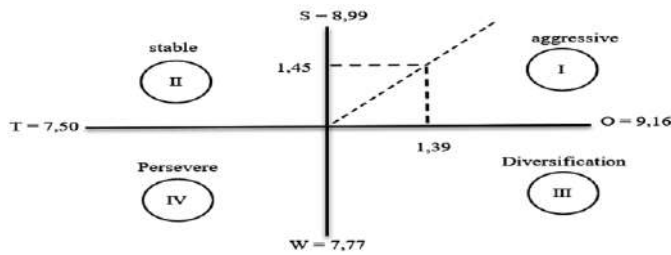


Figure 1. Strategic positioning of Indonesian Language Internationalization based on aggregated SWOT scores

Figure 1 presents the aggregated SWOT scores positioning Indonesian language internationalization across the four SWOT dimensions.

d. Empirical Data on Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA)

Empirical data from official sources indicate the scale and distribution of Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) programs. According to the most recent records, 142,484 learners are participating in BIPA programs across 49 countries (see Table 3 and Figure 2). These efforts are supported by approximately 428 coordinating institutions and 1,270 teaching assignments abroad.

The data were compiled from multiple institutional sources, including records of BIPA facilitation by the Language Development and Fostering Agency (2015–2021); participant data from Darmasiswa, KNB, and BSBI scholarship programs (until 2019); and reports from the Directorate General of Information and Public Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (through 2021) (see Figure 3).



Figure 2. Distribution of Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) Learners by World Region

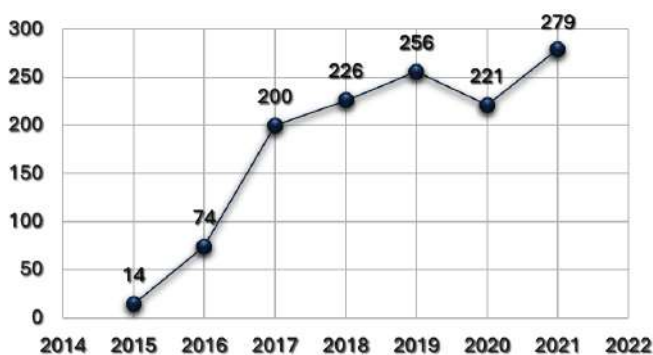


Figure 3. Growth trend of Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) programs (2015–2021)

Table 3 presents a regional classification of countries that offer Indonesian language programs, organized according to their geographical location and based on official records from the Ministry of Education and Culture. This table not only illustrates the global distribution of Indonesian language instruction but also highlights the expanding international interest in Indonesian as a subject of academic and cultural engagement across different parts of the world.

Table 3. Countries offering Indonesian Language programs

	America and Europe	Asia Pacific and Africa	Southeast Asia
Country Name	The United States	Australia	The Philippines
	Austria	Bahrain	Cambodia
	Bulgaria	Bangladesh	Laos
	Denmark	Fiji	Malaysia
	Finland	India	Myanmar
	Hungary	Japan	Singapore
	England	Kazakhstan	Thailand
	Iceland	South Korea	Timor Leste
	Italy	Egypt	Vietnam
	Germany	Pakistan	
	Lithuania	Papua New Guinea	
	Norway	Qatar	
	France	Senegal	
	Russia	Sri Lanka	
	Suriname	China	
	Türkiye	Tunisia	
	Poland	United Arab Emirates	
	Portugal	Uzbekistan	
	Switzerland		
	Greece		
	The Netherlands		
	Spain		

2. Discussion

The empirical findings presented in the previous section can be interpreted more meaningfully when situated within established theories of language planning, prestige planning, and language policy. Rather than treating the SWOT outcomes as a purely technical mapping exercise, this discussion locates the identified patterns within broader structural conditions, governance dynamics, and political-economic constraints that shape the potential of Indonesian to function as a regional lingua franca in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). In doing so, the analysis advances the argument that language internationalization is neither a linear nor a sector-specific process, but a complex policy configuration that emerges from the interaction of legal authority, institutional coordination, sociopolitical legitimacy, and regional economic integration.

The SWOT-derived framework reveals four interdependent strategic realms – political-diplomatic commitment, economic-business integration, educational-cultural dissemination, and institutional coordination and governance – that jointly condition the prospects of Indonesian as a regional lingua franca. A key implication of this finding is that language internationalization cannot be sustained through isolated interventions in a single domain. Instead, the results demonstrate that progress in one sphere without corresponding alignment in others produces symbolic recognition without functional consolidation. This insight resonates strongly with language planning theory, particularly with the distinction between declarative status planning and effective language management (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Baldauf, 2005; Spolsky, 2019a). While Indonesian benefits from a strong legal-institutional foundation and explicit *de jure* recognition of its expanded role, governance decentralization, fragmented authority, and uneven implementation undermine the translation of this status into practical regional use.

The findings point to a clear disjuncture between formal policy articulation and operational coherence. Although statutory instruments such as Law No. 24/2009, Presidential Regulation No. 63/2019, and the RPJMN 2020–2024 articulate ambitious language internationalization goals, the absence of a shared, inter-ministerially endorsed roadmap reveals a persistent management gap. From the perspective of language management theory, this gap exemplifies what Nekvapil and Sherman (2015) describe as the failure of coordination mechanisms to connect planning intentions with sustained implementation. In this respect, Indonesian language policy reflects a broader pattern identified in the language policy literature, where centralized declarations coexist with weak enforcement, optional compliance, and fragmented institutional responsibility

(Spolsky, 2019a, 2019b; Tollefson, 2015; Tuz, 2019; Rahmatullah et al., 2025). The Indonesian case thus reinforces the argument that legal instruments alone are insufficient to secure language internationalization in the absence of governance structures capable of synchronizing policy execution across sectors.

Beyond institutional design, the SWOT analysis underscores the importance of sociopolitical legitimacy in shaping language policy outcomes. The findings indicate asymmetries in public awareness and ambivalence toward the internationalization of Indonesian, suggesting a gap between elite-level policy aspirations and broader social processes. Language planning theory has long emphasized that policy effectiveness depends not only on formal authority but also on the extent to which policy goals resonate with social actors and are perceived as meaningful and legitimate (Spolsky, 2019a, 2019b; Wright, 2020; Muniain et al., 2019). In this regard, the Indonesian case provides a compelling illustration of how ambitious regional language aspirations may falter when administrative intent is not supported by shared societal expectations and incentives. The results thus contribute empirical depth to critiques of top-down language policy models, particularly in plural institutional contexts where authority is distributed and contested.

Taken together, these findings complicate conventional interpretations of language internationalization as a primarily legal or symbolic process. The evidence suggests that internationalization is better understood as a multidimensional policy outcome shaped by managerial competence, political commitment, and political-economic alignment. Unlike earlier studies that focused primarily on institutional readiness or linguistic potential, this study demonstrates that policy coherence and governance capacity constitute critical bottlenecks in the formation of a regional lingua franca. In doing so, the analysis moves beyond traditional status-oriented accounts and redirects attention toward language management and structural alignment as central explanatory variables.

The transition from status planning to prestige planning emerges as a particularly salient theme in the interpretation of the findings. The SWOT results demonstrate that while Indonesian has achieved considerable progress in formal status planning, this achievement has not been matched by corresponding gains in symbolic and functional prestige at the regional level. This pattern aligns with previous research showing that legal recognition and bureaucratic authority do not automatically generate linguistic prestige or international uptake (Aravossitas, 2020; Ndebele, 2018; Nikitha et al., 2020; Utri, 2024; Ulum et al., 2025). In the ASEAN



context, where multilingualism and political sensitivity shape regional interaction, prestige is negotiated through practice rather than proclaimed through policy. The findings suggest that Indonesian faces competitive pressures from established global and regional languages, particularly English, whose prestige is embedded in economic, professional, and institutional domains.

Prestige planning in this context cannot be detached from regional political economy. The analysis indicates that linguistic prestige accrues through sustained engagement in value-added sectors such as diplomacy, trade, professional mobility, and regional governance, rather than through symbolic policy declarations alone. This observation reinforces the argument advanced by Williams-Van Klinken and Hajek (2018) that prestige planning in multilingual settings is inseparable from questions of legitimacy, power, and perceived utility. The Indonesian case thus extends existing language planning theory by illustrating that the shift from status planning to prestige planning is neither linear nor automatic. Instead, it constitutes a negotiated and context-specific process shaped by regional power relations, economic incentives, and institutional credibility.

The findings related to acquisition planning further refine this interpretation. The expansion of BIPA programs and other educational initiatives reflects growing global interest in learning Indonesian and demonstrates the importance of education as an entry point for language dissemination (Chen & Wang, 2023; Hewson, 2018; Kumari et al., 2025; Spolsky, 2019a). However, the SWOT analysis reveals that these initiatives function primarily as foundational mechanisms rather than as drivers of sustained regional language use. Without parallel development in economic integration, diplomatic practice, and institutional coordination, acquisition planning remains confined to educational settings and fails to translate into broader communicative adoption. This finding supports Cooper's (1982) argument that language spread requires equitable diffusion across social and economic domains beyond schooling.

The analysis also highlights the role of transnational actors – such as Indonesianists, diasporic communities, and international students – in facilitating informal diffusion beyond state-led interventions. These bottom-up dynamics represent an important but underutilized dimension of acquisition planning. However, the lack of institutional mechanisms to integrate informal diffusion with formal policy frameworks constitutes a structural weakness. This disconnect underscores the need for governance arrangements that link learning, use, and symbolic value across regional contexts. In Global South

settings, where state capacity and institutional coordination may be uneven, successful acquisition planning depends as much on governance integration as on educational provision.

One of the central contributions of this study lies in its explicit positioning of Indonesian as a regional lingua franca from the Global South. Much of the existing literature on lingua franca formation remains dominated by English-centric perspectives that emphasize colonial legacy, global market forces, and institutional dominance (Kecskes, 2021; Lohstroh et al., 2021). By contrast, this study foregrounds a national language that lacks global hegemony yet seeks regional relevance through policy-induced and institutionally mediated strategies. The Indonesian case thus offers a counter-analytic perspective that broadens theoretical understandings of lingua franca emergence beyond Anglophone models.

The findings suggest that regional lingua franca formation in the Global South does not follow a linear trajectory from national consolidation to international dominance. Instead, it emerges as a contingent outcome shaped by governance capacity, prestige contestation, and political-economic alignment at the meso-regional level. Although Indonesian enjoys a strong legal basis and widespread national use, it remains constrained by weak policy synchronization and limited prestige transfer within ASEAN. These dynamics indicate that linguistic scope alone does not determine regional success; rather, it is the degree to which a language aligns with perceived standards of policy coherence, symbolic value, and functional relevance within regional institutions that proves decisive.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to language planning scholarship in several important ways. First, it demonstrates the analytical value of integrating SWOT-based policy analysis with established domains of language planning, including status, prestige, and acquisition. By linking empirical policy conditions to theoretical constructs, the study provides a systematic framework for analyzing regional lingua franca formation that bridges macro-level policy analysis and language planning theory. Second, the findings refine existing models of prestige planning by showing that prestige is produced through political-economic calculation and institutional credibility rather than through formal recognition alone. Third, by situating Indonesian within a Global South framework, the study expands the geographical and conceptual scope of lingua franca research, challenging English-centered assumptions and highlighting alternative pathways of regional language development.



The practical implications of these findings are equally significant. For policymakers, the results underscore the need to move beyond sectoral and education-centric approaches to language internationalization. Effective language planning requires cross-sectoral coordination that aligns diplomacy, trade, education, and cultural governance within a coherent strategic framework. The absence of a unified national roadmap for language internationalization reflects not only planning deficits but also governance and resource allocation challenges. Addressing these challenges necessitates institutional reform and sustained political commitment rather than symbolic policy proliferation.

The findings also suggest that acquisition planning initiatives such as BIPA are most effective when embedded within broader regional engagement strategies that connect language learning with economic incentives, professional mobility, and migration patterns. Education can serve as a gateway to language spread, but its long-term impact depends on integration with functional domains of use. Finally, beyond the Indonesian context, the analytical framework developed in this study offers transferable insights for other Global South regions seeking to assess the feasibility of non-Anglophone regional lingua francas. By highlighting the interdependence of language policy, political economy, and regional integration, the study provides a diagnostic tool for understanding how linguistic futures are shaped in multilingual macro-regions.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on document-based analysis constrains insight into policy implementation and stakeholder perceptions, while the focus on ASEAN limits generalizability to other regions. Additionally, although the SWOT methodology was applied systematically, the weighting and rating of strategic dimensions inevitably involve interpretive judgement. These limitations suggest avenues for future research, including fieldwork with policy actors, comparative regional studies, and longitudinal analyses of language policy and economic integration. Nonetheless, rather than undermining the findings, these limitations reinforce the value of the present study as a structured diagnostic contribution that advances theoretical and empirical understanding of regional lingua franca formation.

D. Conclusion

This study set out to analyze the position of the Indonesian language as a prospective regional lingua franca within the ASEAN Economic Community by employing

qualitative policy analysis and a structured SWOT framework grounded in language planning theory. The findings demonstrate that the regional viability of Indonesian is shaped less by linguistic capacity or speaker numbers alone than by the interaction between institutional capacity, policy coherence, and the broader political-economic architecture of ASEAN. Despite a strong legal-institutional foundation and explicit policy recognition, the internationalization of Indonesian remains constrained by fragmented governance, weak inter-ministerial coordination, inconsistent policy implementation, and the absence of a formally endorsed, integrated national roadmap. These conditions collectively limit the translation of legal status into functional regional use.

This study contributes to language planning and lingua franca scholarship by demonstrating that regional lingua franca formation depends less on legal status or educational provision than on governance coherence and prestige-building within regional political-economic structures. By situating Indonesian within a Global South context, it extends lingua franca debates beyond English-centered models and highlights regional integration as a key pathway for language internationalization. At the policy level, the study offers a concise diagnostic framework for ASEAN, underscoring that sustained regional use requires multi-sectoral coordination rather than symbolic or sector-bound interventions.

Future research should build on the limitations identified in this study. Given the reliance on document-based analysis, subsequent research could incorporate empirical fieldwork with policy actors and regional stakeholders to examine how language policies are enacted in practice. Comparative studies across other regional blocs and longitudinal analyses of language use in professional and institutional domains would also provide valuable insights into the dynamics of regional lingua franca formation over time.

Taken together, this study reinforces the argument that the emergence of a regional lingua franca is not an evolutionary linguistic process but a negotiated sociopolitical outcome. The Indonesian experience illustrates that non-English regional lingua francas in the Global South can only gain functional regional traction through a convergence of legal mandate, governance capacity, and political-economic alignment—beyond mere linguistic viability.



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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, without any financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could be perceived as influencing the results or interpretations presented in this study.

Declaration of Generative AI

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in a limited and responsible manner to assist with language refinement and stylistic clarity during the revision process. All substantive content, analytical interpretations, theoretical arguments, and conclusions are entirely the responsibility of the authors. The use of AI did not influence the research design, data analysis, or interpretation of findings, and complies with the ethical standards of academic publishing.

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