

## **Dayak Students' Attitude toward Bilingualism in West Kalimantan, Indonesia**

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### **Abstract:**

*Amid many studies investigating language attitudes, very few studies placing their emphasis on attitudes toward bilingualism. This study sets out to examine how Dayak students react toward two languages (i.e. Indonesian and Dayak Language) that have existed in their surrounding for quite a long time. This study was quantitative in nature, despite containing some elements of qualitative data. The study employed questionnaires that consisted of 20 main questions and 1 open-ended question. The questionnaires then were distributed online to 32 Dayak students studying in university with various discipline backgrounds. The results indicate that Dayak students in this study share a positive attitude toward bilingualism, although the rate varies if we investigate the smaller components of the attitudes. It is reported that the students are very positive in a surficial level of attitudes (i.e. cognitive components), yet slightly low in emotional dimensions (i.e. affective components). Further, the students also seem doubtful to implement their belief and feeling into real action, for example in education (i.e. readiness for action). This paper concludes by summarising key findings and acknowledging research limitations, especially concerning with generalisability and participant's sociolinguistic aspects.*

**Keywords:** *language attitude, bilingualism, Dayak language*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Over the decades, research on language attitudes continues to show a fascinating movement (e.g. Karahan 2007; Ng and Zhao 2015; Siregar 2011; Young and Yee 2006). However, it seems bizarre that only few researchers have placed bilingualism at the heart of their research (Baker 1992, Myers-Scotton 2006). Up to the present, what the researchers mainly have done is somewhat comparing two languages, reflected by the inventory scales employed by previous studies which imply a nuance of competition between both languages (see Baker 1992, p.77). Consequently, results which emerge from such surveys somehow indicate that the rise of one language means the decline to the other.

To fill the gap, this paper offers the concept of attitude toward bilingualism as its main focus. Baker (1992, p.79) describes that “[a]ttitude to bilingualism concerns the viewpoint that languages can be fused or can exist in tandem”. In other words, unlike in the previous studies, this paper tries to find out how people react toward the possibility of two languages living hand in hand in one community, for example between Indonesian and Dayak language in bilingual Dayak People.

I shall begin this paper by framing the contextual setting of West Kalimantan as well as Dayak people that is the focus of this study. After that, a review of previous research is presented to give an adequate discussion about bilingualism and language attitudes. At this point, it seems necessary to include the concept of language maintenance and shift as they constitute key aspects of bilingualism. Having presented the theoretical literatures, I shall outline the research question that this study tries to address. The following section, then, will describe how this study is conducted, including the research methods, the participant selection, and the research instrument. After presenting and discussing the data, finally, the author will acknowledge research limitations and make suggestions for further research under the heading of conclusion.

### **1.2 Context**

West Kalimantan (also called West Borneo) is one of the five Indonesian provinces in Kalimantan territory. Based on the national census in 2010, Dayak is the most populous ethnic group in West Kalimantan by 2.194.009 (Badan Pusat Statistik 2011). Beside ethnicity difference, occasionally they are also characterised by different religion. Whilst other ethnic groups (e.g. Malay and Javanese) are Islam followers, Dayak is recognized as the representative of Catholic followers. In term of the language, the anecdotal assumption perceives that Indonesian People, including Dayak, are bilingual. Like other ethnic groups in Indonesia, Dayak people receive the impact of a “national” language policy applied since New Order regime in which leads them to speak in Indonesian and Dayak language.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Definition of Bilingualism**

Before going further, it is necessary to clarify the term bilingualism in this paper. Scholars (Apple and Muysken 2005, Myers-Scotton 2006) have agreed that the definition of being bilingual is rather complex. The boundary between a person who is monolingual and bilingual remains a blurred line.

Probably, a definition from Myers-Scotton (2006, p.44) will provide a useful insight. She defined that "bilingualism is the ability to use two or more languages sufficiently to carry on a limited casual conversation ...". In other words, it is not about how much time that someone has spent to learn the L2 or how many foreign words he/she has mastered that make them eligible to be called bilingual speakers. But rather, it is about if he/she can use the L2 for a communicative purpose or sustaining a simple conversation using appropriate functions, for instance to read the food list and make an order appropriately when eating in a restaurant.

### **2.2 Language Maintenance and Shift in Bilingual Speakers**

Essentially, being bilingual means to *learn* a second language and *use* it alternately with the speaker's first language. According to Myers-Scotton (2006, p.68), when individuals or groups are in touch with a second language (bilingual), three consequences might appear, they are: 1) simply rejecting the L2, 2) speaking L1 with L2 as an additional language, or 3) replacing L1 with L2 related to the status of their main language. Through the process, the speakers experience an internal conflict to decide which language that he/she should prioritise as the main language: L1 or L2? If the influence and status of the L2 is quite strong, such as in Indonesian Language, the role of the L1 might be left behind and shifted to the L2. In the worst scenario, Apple and Muysken (2005) assert that, language shift along with language loss will lead eventually to a language death for weak languages.

Nevertheless, avoiding bilingualism is not a judicious option. Unless people live in a homogenous community, they may have little chance to speak only in one language. More frequently, people learn the new language voluntarily as the language has a higher status which might be beneficial if the groups learn it. Another scenario, they do not learn it voluntarily, but rather through obligation, for instance refugees in order to be accepted in their new countries (Myers-Scotton 2006). Given this reality, what we can do now is to keep the L1 alive while at the same time to allow people to speak in L2 alternately. As far as the groups have a commitment to allocate occasion to speak in his/her L1, being bilingual might not be a problem, at least at the mean time.

### **2.3 Research Gaps on Language Attitudes**

Researchers (Apple and Musyken 2005; Myers-Scotton 2006; Garret 2010) believe that conducting a study into language attitudes is considerably important. Particularly for minority groups, research on people's attitude helps us diagnose the vigour of their language, e.g. whether it is healthy or in a danger. In addition, it can be also used as an indicator if a language policy applied has a chance to work well in

a society (Baker 1992). What Ting (2003) has done in Sarawak, the Eastern state of Malaysia, probably demonstrates a good example of the latter benefit. In her study, she examines the impact of language planning to use the Malaysian language, instead of English, as the only official language. Although the result indicates a promising attitude toward both English and Malaysian languages, the majority participants' attitude is still negative if it is associated with Malaysian's issue to take over English fully. Hence, the research suggests delaying to use Malaysian language for official purposes. Positively, such a research helps the Malaysian government provide a strong empirical basis before they make an important decision about certain language policies. In Indonesia, some researchers have also shown their interest in language attitude. A study in Jambi Province (Anderbeck 2010), for instance, reveals that people have higher attitudes toward Jambi Malay than Indonesian language. In addition, other local-scale publications have been regularly released, for example Rahmawati (2013) who examines attitude to Sundanese Language or Wulandari (2013) whose attention is directed to attitudes toward Javanese language.

Especially in Indonesia, however, research which focuses on attitudes toward bilingualism is scarce. Likewise, although an anecdotal assumption says that Dayak people are bilingual, there is little empirical information that describes how they feel about the bilingualism in their surroundings. In fact, the attitude that people hold might be diverse and changeable. For this reason, the present research is designed to address this gap. It aims to answer the following research questions:

*“What are Dayak students' attitudes toward bilingualism in West Kalimantan?”*

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This research was quantitative in nature. Since this study is limited by time availability, the selection of questionnaires as the research instruments seems plausible. The advantage of questionnaires, according to Dornyei (2007, p. 101), is “... they are relatively easy to construct, extremely versatile and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly ...”. Moreover, the tool has been used widely by researchers (e.g. Baker 1992; Ting 2003; Young and Yee 2006) to prove its suitability on attitude investigation.

Using a 5 point Likert Scale, questionnaires in this study were adapted from a similar study by Baker (1992). The researcher grouped participants' favour/disfavour toward bilingualism into three components of attitude suggested by Baker (1992) : cognitive, affective, and readiness for action. Explanation of these three components is provided separately in the finding section. The questionnaires comprised 4 personal-background questions and 20 main questions. Additionally, 1 open-ended question was offered at the end to allow the participants expressed their personal views which might not be covered in the questionnaire items. Also, this type of question enabled us to infer a deeper interpretation especially for number-

related data. This qualitative-type data is presented in discussion section, in the form of participant's excerpts. To help the readers classify the attitude components (cognitive, affective, and readiness for actions), the following table illustrates how all the questionnaire items were distributed.

**Table 1. Table of Specifications**

<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Attitude Component</i>
1	It is important to be able to speak Indonesian and Dayak.	<b>Cognitive</b>
2	To speak one language in West Kalimantan is all that I need.	
5	Being able to write in Indonesian and Dayak is important.	
7	Speaking two languages is not difficult.	
13	Speaking both Indonesian and Dayak is more for older than younger people.	
15	Both Dayak and Indonesian should be important in West Kalimantan.	
19	Both Indonesian and Dayak languages can live together in West Kalimantan.	
20	People only need to know one language	
3	Knowing Dayak and Indonesian makes people clever.	<b>Affective</b>
4	Speaking both Dayak and Indonesian helps to get a job.	
8	Knowing both Dayak and Indonesian gives people problem.	
9	I feel sorry for people who cannot speak both Indonesian and Dayak.	
11	People know more if they speak Indonesian and Dayak.	
12	People who speak Dayak and Indonesian can have more friends than those who speak one language.	
14	Speaking both Dayak and Indonesian helps people get promotion in their job.	
16	People can earn more money if they speak both Dayak and Indonesian	<b>Readiness for Action</b>
6	All schools in West Kalimantan should teach pupils to speak in Dayak and Indonesian.	
10	Students in West Kalimantan should learn to read in both Indonesian and Dayak.	
17	When I graduate, I would like to be considered as a speaker of Indonesian and Dayak	
18	All Dayak people in West Kalimantan should speak Dayak and Indonesian.	

### **3.2 Participants**

Through a purposive sampling process, 40 participants were recruited voluntarily. All participants were ethnically Dayak and used Dayak language as their mother tongue. As it was difficult to access all Dayak people in West Kalimantan, this research limited its scope by only investigating the attitude of Dayak students in Tanjungsari University (Pseudonym). Despite encountering sample limitation, the student's course profile may still provide useful insights since the participants were taken from multiple disciplines, e.g. Department of Education, Social, and Engineering. Of 40 participants, however, only 36 returned the questionnaire and 4 of them were invalid. Thus, only 32 participants who were eligible to advance to data analysis.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

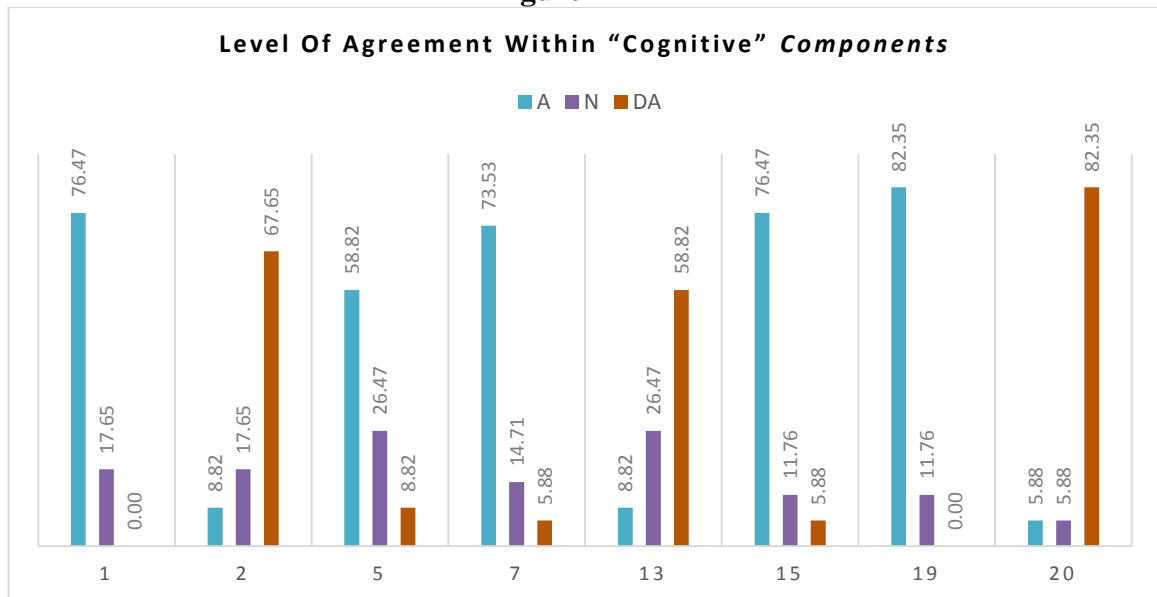
This study was conducted in 2016. While doing this study, the researcher was studying in a university in the UK. Hence, it was difficult for the researcher to contact the participants and distribute the questionnaires personally since they were in Indonesia. The questionnaires then were shared online using a simple survey application, called Google Forms. The participants took about 10 minutes to complete the survey. They were requested to choose in what extent they agree or disagree to the statements given. These five-level options ranged from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). Having collected sufficient data, a careful calculation was undertaken to identify the percentage distribution of participants' answers. It was begun by giving codes to every option in the questionnaires, for instance 5 for Strongly Agree, 4 for Agree, 3 for Neutral, and so forth. In interpreting the data, it should be borne in mind that SA did not always mean positive attitude. In item no. 20 "*People only need to know one language*", for example, if the participants rated his/her answer SA, it meant that the participant was not happy with the notion of bilingualism in their community. Therefore, it could be inferred that such a participant had a negative feeling toward bilingualism.

## **4. FINDINGS**

This section attempts to provide important information resulted from the data collection. To simplify the data presentation and analysis, the researcher re-categorises the scale by placing the two end options into the same group. Hence, the options become just Agree (A), Neutral (N), and Disagree (DA). It should be noted again that the higher rank of "Agree" does not necessarily mean positive attitude to bilingualism and vice versa. Further, the data is visualised in chart form and the detail statement for each item can be found in Appendix 1.

#### 4.1 Cognitive Components

Figure 1

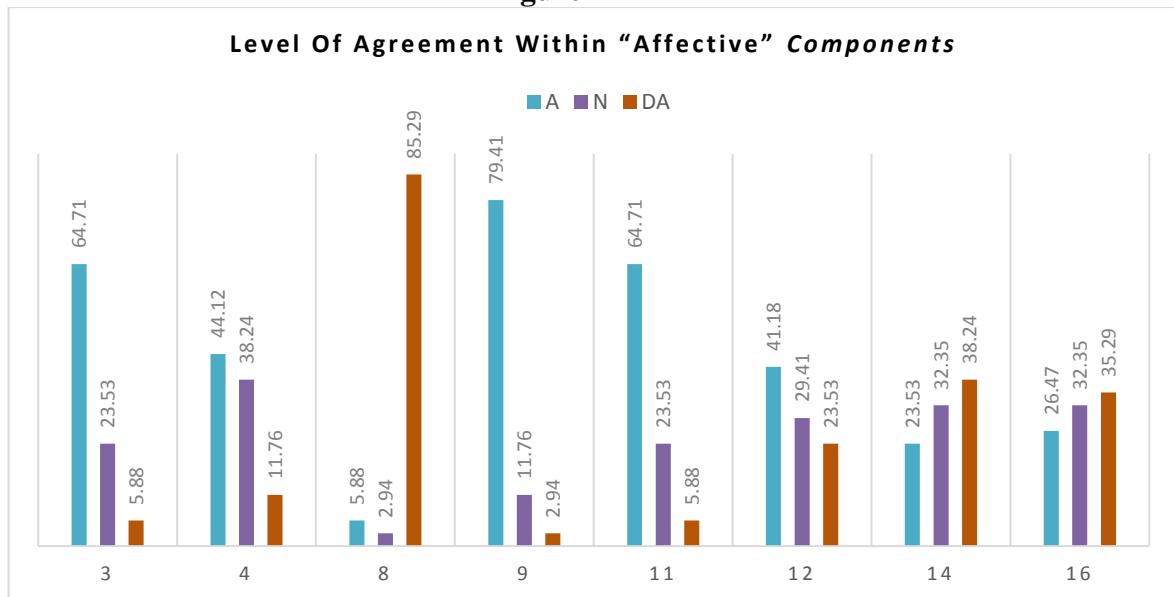


Cognitive component refers to participant's thought and belief about bilingualism; manifested by whether speaking in two languages is important or not for them. Generally, the finding revealed that the statements which supported bilingualism were rated highly. In question 1, for example, 76.47% participants believed that owning an ability to speaking in two languages was important. This statement was reinforced by an agreement that speaking bilingual was not difficult (73.53% respondents), although it was not that high when associated to literacy ability. It was reported that only 58% respondents agreed that bilingualism was important in writing and a small number of participants disagreed (8.82%) to this statement. Similarly, when asked about the possibility of Indonesian and Dayak languages co-existed in West Kalimantan, most participants agreed with a strikingly high percentage mark; i.e. 82.35%. Similarly, more than two thirds of participants (76.47%) agreed to the statement saying bilingualism should be important in West Kalimantan.

On the other hand, the participants demonstrated a negative sense if the statements were linked to monolingualism. As an example, the idea that people should only know one language was disagreed with by more than 80% respondents. Additionally, almost two third participants were in a negative position toward the idea of possessing only one language in their community. Another statement which attracted participant's disfavour was regarding the age issue. Despite slightly decreasing, they generally disagree that only older people who should be bilingual with the percentage of 58.82% respondents.

## 4.2 Affective Components

Figure 2



These components concern with participant's feeling or emotional aspect, for example love, being passionate, or anxious. For statement 9, for example, it shows that almost 80% of participants felt sad when finding Dayak people around them could not speak in two languages. On the other hand, a non-anxious attitude was demonstrated after only about 5 percent participants that considered bilingualism as a threat. The rest, at least 85.29%, stated that bilingualism would not bring them any problem.

In addition to emotional state, this aspect also underlies the hidden belief which participants might not consciously notice, for instance, someone's motivation for choosing one language rather than the other. As illustrated in Table 2, the participants believed that knowing two languages would expand their knowledge which eventually make them cleverer. These claims were verified by questions 11 and 3 by 64.71% for both questions. Nevertheless, this number was still smaller if we compared them with the cognitive components. Even so, several items tended to fall to quite a significant extent. The clear example was item 12 where they (23.53%) did not perceive that being bilingual played a significant role in making new friends. Meanwhile, it was not half of the participants who were in line with such a statement.

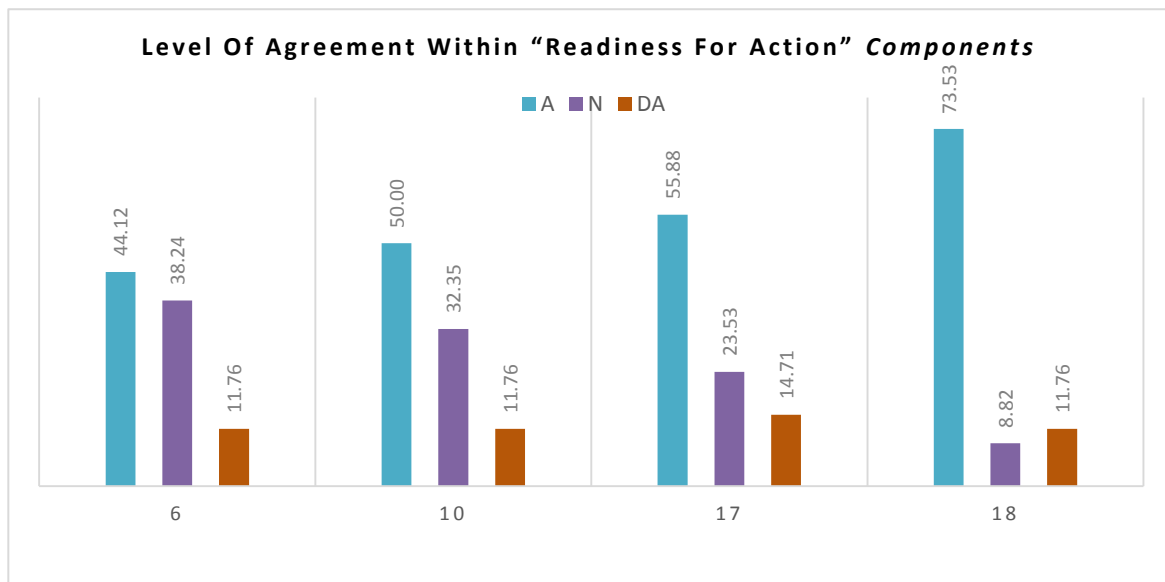
Whilst moving to occupational and economic motivation, the results indicated relatively lower rates. Less than a half of participants believed that being bilingual might help them get a job. Similarly, in item 14, 38.24% participants disagreed that bilingualism could make them to be promoted to a better position and 32.35% stood in a grey area. In other words, only 23.53% respondents echoed their favour toward this statement. In question 16, the participants also showed a negative reaction after 35.29% students indicated their disfavour toward the idea of earning more money

because of speaking in two languages. It exceeded those who agreed which was only 26.47%.

### 4.3 Readiness for Action Components

Having seen the participants' beliefs and feelings, it is imperative now to see how far their desire or readiness to convert their thought into an actual plan or action. The higher blue block in figure 3 would indicate the higher level of willingness to apply their belief into a real action. Of the four statements that appear in this dimension, item 18 established the strongest support by 73.53%. Nevertheless, the other three items i.e. 6, 10, and 17 did not receive tremendous support as item 18. They shared the agreement rates around 44.12%, 50%, and 55.88% respectively. Meanwhile, around one third respondents for each item neither decide agree nor disagree by 11.76% (6 and 10). Finally, 14.71% (17) participants chose disagree. Surprisingly, these three statements are below the idea of bringing bilingualism into the classroom where it is a vital place to maintain the continuity of one language.

Figure 3



## 5. DISCUSSION

The data above seems to indicate a pleasing sense for bilingualism. When we refer to cognitive components, many participants show a strong belief upon speaking in two languages while at the same time rejecting the notion to speak only in one language. In the earlier work, Gao (2009) also presents a similar finding with this study i.e. a positive belief toward Korean-Chinese bilingualism. Only, the extent his participants distinguish the bilingual usage is slightly different. From his participant's perspective, speaking both Korean and Chinese language provides them an advantage economically and politically. Whilst South Korea and China recently are the face of Asian countries advancement, they envision that the bilingualism may deliver them to have a smooth connection to develop their

business in both countries in the future. Therefore, Gao (2009, p.529) mentions that being able to speak Korean and Chinese is associated with “power and prestige” for the participants.

On the other hand, for participants in this study, bilingualism is not necessarily about economic advantages. The participants do not show a strong agreement that becoming a bilingual speaker will give them a chance to be accepted or promoted in their profession. In my participants' beliefs, speaking in Indonesian and Dayak language is a manifestation of nationalisation which offers a bridge with those of other ethnic groups that were linguistically different. By speaking in two languages, it may widen their coverage of interaction with other ethnic groups in Indonesia. Moreover, Indonesia has hundreds of different ethnicities so that it is difficult to move to the other regions or communities if they persist to speak in one language only. The following excerpt perhaps visualises how my participants distinguish the use of Indonesian and Dayak language.

“Local language (Dayak) constitutes as a Dayak identity, and Indonesian language is a unifier of the diverse languages (in Indonesia – author words). Hence, Indonesian is very important to communicate especially with non-Dayak community, acting as a medium of education, and Dayak language is (used – author word) just to interact with Dayak speakers either at home or certain even or cultural ceremony related to Dayak ethnics” (Participants 19, author translation).

It is obvious that this participant understands where and when she must use Indonesian and Dayak language. Besides bridging the linguistic gap, it can be noticed that both languages are also different in terms of formality where the local language tend to be used in a less formal domain. Nevertheless, at least, the participants have recognised that both languages are beneficial for life in different ways. There is no superior language since one language plays a complementary role for the other.

Interestingly, although the cognitive components show a robust support, participants' attitudes regarding the affective component appear to slightly fluctuate. Indeed, most participants do not worry that bilingualism will threaten their well-being. Similarly, participants are quite certain that bilingualism entails a benefit to broaden their insight. However, at the same time, they are pessimistic as to whether speaking in two languages is advantageous for their professional career and income. To this extent, Baker (1992) reminds us that cognitive and affective indeed do not always have a positive correlation. In other words, someone may have positive belief in cognitive component but vice versa in the affective domain. He argues that the cognitive component is just a superficial assessment whereas a more in-depth evaluation is reflected in the affective domain. Baker (1992, p.13) explicates that “[d]efence mechanism and social desirability response sets tend to come inbetween stated and more secret attitude”. In other words, the contextual conventions which surround the participants potentially influence their stated attitude (i.e. cognitive

components), although it is rather difficult to affect their subconscious belief (i.e. affective components).

Furthermore, more concerns should be given to participant's readiness for action. Although, they are keen to be bilingual, they seem hesitate to integrate bilingualism into education. At least, they do not see an immediate necessity to include their local language in the curriculum. It is also confirmed from their cognitive belief that only a half of participants that perceive writing ability in two languages is important. In fact, Gao (2009) has alerted us that literacy skill plays a pivotal role to protect first languages from the massive attack of the second language. Indeed, in his study, their students act as a minority Korean ethnic group among the domination of Chinese ethnics; which is the opposite from the participants in this study. Thus, educational institution is used to introduce the minority speakers and their descendants to their mother tongue as well as to maintain the L1 existence. However, giving local language a space in the curriculum remains important for Dayak people because the current report indicates a decreasing number of local language speakers in Indonesia. For instance, Indonesian language has led Sundanese whose speakers are the second most populous in Indonesia (Sidik 2013).

One of the students who supports the integration of Dayak language in education shares her view by suggesting:

“but it'd be better if Dayak language is used as a core module for all West Kalimantan people, so that all educated people may recognise its cultural richness as well as to preserve its existence which is under a threat of extinction” (participant 6, author translation).

It means that to leave Indonesian as the only language subject with English language, is no longer advisable. In the notion of bilingualism, the university should introduce local languages as, at least, an option module. Perhaps, the university could provide the local languages as choices and then the student could select based on their L1 background.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In general, the participants demonstrated a positive attitude toward bilingualism. Nevertheless, if we look closer, this strong support was derived from the cognitive domain. The participants' certainty was a bit lower in the affective components and their readiness for actions. In short, the participants are quite confident to admit the importance of bilingualism in the surroundings, but have a subtle doubt in the mental domain about integrating this bilingualism into real action especially in education.

Regarding the generalisability, however, it should be noted that this research is not addressed to make a generalisation to all Dayak people, instead only Dayak students at university level. Also, this study does not examine the relationship between bilingualism attitude and participant's sociolinguistics aspects such as individual difference (e.g. gender & age) and contextual difference (e.g. course difference). Hence, it would be interesting to perceive this study's result as a starting point

before doing further research with a wider population and deeper analysis in the future.

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