

The Role of Community-Based Nonformal Education in Maintaining the Sawai Language in Central Halmahera: An Ecological Perspective

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Abstract

Background – The maintenance of local languages depends on meaningful domains of use, intergenerational transmission, and community ownership. In Central Halmahera, Sawai remains an identity marker, but its regular use among younger speakers is narrowing as Indonesian becomes more dominant in schooling, digital media, and everyday interaction.

Research Urgency – Indonesian language-maintenance initiatives have largely emphasized school-based local-content curricula and government revitalization. Less attention has been given to community-based nonformal education as a flexible learning ecology connecting elders, families, facilitators, cultural leaders, and young people.

Research Objectives – This study examines the social and educational conditions shaping Sawai maintenance in Kobe Village, identifies how existing community practices can support intergenerational nonformal learning, and formulates the components of a community-based ecological learning framework.

Research Method – A qualitative single-case study purposively recruited participants representing community-learning organizers, facilitators, customary and community leaders, and learners. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Thematic analysis, source triangulation, and method triangulation supported credibility.

Research Findings – Sawai continues to function in customary events, family communication, oral traditions, and some intergenerational interaction, but its use among children and adolescents is less regular. Transmission remains dependent on families and cultural figures rather than a sustained learning program. Participants emphasized oral competence, everyday communication, customary expressions, folklore, and local environmental knowledge. The analysis generated a seven-component framework comprising needs and vitality mapping, learning outcomes, place-based content, participatory strategies, learning media, authentic assessment, and community partnership.

Research Conclusion – Community-based nonformal education can strengthen Sawai maintenance when learning is regular, community-owned, intergenerational, and connected with cultural and environmental practices. The proposed framework remains an analytical proposition that requires piloting and evaluation.

Research Novelty/Contribution – The study reframes Sawai maintenance as the organization of a community learning ecology and proposes a seven-component community-based ecological learning framework linking language-vitality mapping, place-based content, participatory strategies, authentic assessment, and community partnership.

Keywords: community-based nonformal education; Sawai language; language maintenance; ecocultural; intergenerational learning

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INTRODUCTION

Local languages carry more than vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. They encode relationships, histories, customary values, place names, ecological knowledge, and ways of interpreting the world. Consequently, language contraction affects not only communication but also collective memory, identity, wellbeing, and cultural participation. Recent studies show that Indigenous language practices are inseparable from totemic identity, intergenerational affect, and experiences of historical trauma and healing (Hamley, 2025; McKenzie, 2022; Mills et al., 2025). UNESCO's language-vitality framework similarly identifies intergenerational transmission, the proportion of speakers, shifts in domains of use, responses to new media, and the availability of educational materials as central dimensions of language sustainability (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2003). Language maintenance must therefore be understood as an educational, social, cultural, and ecological concern.

Language maintenance refers to the continued use of a language across generations and social domains, whereas revitalization generally involves deliberate efforts to reverse an established decline (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). The distinction is relevant to Sawai because the language is still spoken, while the source study indicates a narrowing of its everyday use among younger community members. Recent research confirms that speaker attitudes, family aspirations, emotional investment, and parental involvement influence whether a minoritized language is actively transmitted or reduced to a symbolic marker of identity (Gomashie, 2025; Noar, 2026; Prilyasinta & Purnawan, 2025; Rosado Valencia et al., 2025). Maintenance in this context requires more than documenting vocabulary. It requires recurring opportunities to hear, speak, interpret, and use Sawai for meaningful purposes.

Indonesia's legal and educational frameworks provide space for such efforts. Law No. 20 of 2003 recognizes formal, nonformal, and informal education as complementary pathways within the national education system, while Law No. 24 of 2009 places responsibility for the development, guidance, and protection of regional languages within the broader national language policy. Nonformal education is especially relevant because programs can be organized flexibly around community needs, local schedules, available facilitators, and culturally specific resources. Community language schools and related complementary institutions demonstrate that organized learning beyond compulsory schooling can support language, identity, and cultural continuity, although their sustainability depends on recognition, resources, governance, and connections with families and formal institutions (Nordstrom et al., 2024; Song, 2024).

Formal schooling remains an important partner because it can provide status, literacy materials, trained educators, and curricular continuity. However, a school subject alone does not necessarily create the dense interaction needed for intergenerational transmission. Indigenous-language programs may be constrained by limited instructional time, dominant-language policies, inadequate materials, or insufficient community authority (Ahmed, 2025; Chew & Tennell, 2023; Sultana, 2026). Indonesian studies likewise show that local-content curricula require careful management, suitable resources, and coherent implementation (Cantika et al., 2025; Faturrohman et al., 2022; Widiyanto, 2018). The implication is not to separate school and community, but to distribute language learning across complementary domains.

Community-based nonformal education can create such domains by placing fluent elders, customary leaders, parents, tutors, and youth within the same learning ecology. Community learning centers can build collective capacity when participation extends beyond administrative involvement and when governance distributes responsibility among institutions and community actors (Dadang et al., 2026; Hayat et al., 2024; Lukman, 2021). Complementary schools can become "breathing spaces" for identity and critical multilingual practice, while youth work and participatory workshops can support language reclamation through community-defined activities (Kwon et al., 2026; Nic Roibeaird, 2026; Silvestri, 2025). Grassroots activism also shows that revitalization gains strength when speakers organize social networks, shared resources, and collective agency rather than functioning only as recipients of top-down policy (O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024).

An ecolinguistic perspective strengthens this position. [Haugen \(1972\)](#) conceptualized the ecology of language through the relationship between a language and its social environment. Later ecolinguistic work broadened attention to the interdependence of language, culture, human communities, other living beings, and the physical environment ([Penz & Fill, 2022](#); [Stibbe, 2021](#)). Indonesian ecolinguistic scholarship has expanded rapidly but still requires stronger educational and methodological application ([Isti'anah & Suhandano, 2023](#)). Contemporary studies demonstrate that land-based pedagogy and traditional ecological knowledge can connect language learning with place, community relationships, and culturally accountable technology ([Iversen, 2025](#); [Meighan, 2024](#)). Ecolinguistic analysis also shows that maintenance depends on interacting family, institutional, historical, and transnational conditions rather than on a single intervention ([Wąsikiewicz-Firlej et al., 2025](#)).

This ecological view directs attention to domains of use. Family language policy research indicates that parental beliefs, language input patterns, available media, and children's agency interact with wider community support ([Dağdeviren-Kırmızı, 2025](#); [Ding, 2023](#); [Hollebeke et al., 2023](#); [Vaskinn et al., 2026](#); [Wang & Hamid, 2024](#)). Community institutions can extend the home domain: churches and other religious organizations, for example, may create recurring spaces for heritage-language interaction, identity work, and intergenerational participation ([Her, 2025](#); [Joo et al., 2024](#); [Muscat, 2024](#)). Digital practices can also expand access, although they are most productive when they reinforce interaction and community agency rather than substitute for relationships among speakers ([Nordstrom & Zhang, 2024](#); [Torsh, 2026](#)).

The Sawai language, also associated with Weda and including a Kobe variety, is a South Halmahera language spoken in North Maluku ([Hammarström et al., 2026](#); [Whistler, 1992](#)). Glottolog records it as threatened, reinforcing the need to examine the continuity of its domains and transmission ([Hammarström et al., 2026](#)). This study was conducted in Kobe Village, Weda Tengah District, Central Halmahera Regency. Indonesian supports communication across groups and dominates many institutional domains, while Sawai retains significance in family relations, customary activities, oral traditions, and local identity. The challenge is not to oppose Indonesian and Sawai, but to prevent the functional space of Sawai from becoming too restricted to sustain intergenerational use.

Recent language policy scholarship increasingly emphasizes the agency of language users and communities. Humanizing approaches require policy and research to be answerable to the people whose language practices are being planned ([Kaveh, 2023](#)). Studies of community-based planning, heritage-language schools, and micro-level policy show that local actors interpret, negotiate, and create language policy through everyday educational decisions ([Chen & Wang, 2024](#); [Li & Shen, 2024](#); [Meighan, 2023](#); [Wang & Hatoss, 2024](#)). These insights are highly relevant to nonformal education because flexible programs can respond to local repertoires, participation patterns, and culturally legitimate forms of knowledge.

Creative and multimodal activities can further broaden participation. Community-based media can connect local knowledge, collaborative innovation, and learner participation when communities help produce and evaluate the resources ([Darmawan et al., 2025](#); [Nugroho et al., 2024](#)). Indigenous hip hop, popular music, traditional music, multimodal storytelling, and community-based arts have been used to connect minoritized languages with youth identity and contemporary cultural practice ([de la Piedra & Johnson, 2025](#); [Francese, 2024](#); [Huang, 2023](#); [Sparling & MacIntyre, 2024](#)). Online and face-to-face heritage-language classrooms likewise show that multimodal literacy and democratic "third spaces" can increase opportunities for learners to position themselves as legitimate language users ([Cun, 2025](#); [Lee, 2025](#)). Such work cautions against equating authenticity with reproducing the past unchanged; maintenance also requires safe opportunities for young people to adapt a language to present and future purposes.

Despite this growing literature, three gaps remain. First, comparatively fewer studies examine Indonesian local-language maintenance through explicitly nonformal and community-owned learning arrangements. Second, language is often treated as curriculum content without sufficient attention to the social ecology that enables regular use across home, community, cultural, digital, and educational domains. Third, empirical evidence from eastern Indonesian communities, including Sawai-speaking communities in Central

Halmahera, remains limited. The present research addresses these gaps by centering community education while using ecolinguistics to connect language, intergenerational relationships, cultural practice, and place.

This study therefore examines the role of community-based nonformal education in maintaining Sawai from an ecolinguistic perspective. It addresses three questions: (1) What social and educational conditions shape the maintenance of Sawai in Kobe Village? (2) How can existing community practices be organized as nonformal learning that supports intergenerational transmission? and (3) What components are required in a community-based ecolinguistic learning framework? The study contributes a context-sensitive framework for PKBM, village learning houses, cultural studios, and customary communities while extending nonformal-education scholarship on community learning, lifelong learning, and culturally grounded life skills.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative single-case-study design. A case study was selected because language maintenance is embedded in everyday relationships, institutions, cultural practices, and place-specific conditions that cannot be separated from their context (Yin, 2018). The case was community-based nonformal learning related to Sawai in Kobe Village, Weda Tengah District, Central Halmahera Regency, North Maluku. The design enabled the researchers to examine current language-use domains, existing learning practices, participant roles, and the educational implications of the community's linguistic and cultural needs. The study was interpretive rather than evaluative. It did not test the effectiveness of a completed curriculum or compare pre- and post-program language proficiency. Instead, it analyzed existing conditions and practices and then used the themes to formulate a proposed community-based framework. This distinction prevents the conceptual framework from being treated as an empirically validated intervention.

Participants and Research Context

Participants were selected purposively because they had direct knowledge of Sawai use, community learning, or cultural transmission. They represented four stakeholder groups: organizers or managers, tutors or facilitators, customary or community leaders, and learners. Selection considered participants' direct involvement in Sawai use, community learning, cultural practice, or intergenerational transmission.

Participant reporting is limited to information preserved in the study manuscript. The available record verifies four stakeholder groups and their relevance to Sawai use, community learning, and cultural transmission, but it does not preserve participant-level counts, demographic profiles, proficiency levels, or recruitment codes. Table 1 therefore reports only the verified stakeholder categories and analytical roles rather than reconstructing missing participant data.

Table 1. Participant profile

Participant group	Analytical role	Participant-level metadata	Empirical contribution	Selection basis
Organizer/manager	Program organization and continuity	Not preserved in the available manuscript record	Knowledge of community-learning organization, schedules, institutional support, and continuity	Purposively represented because of direct knowledge of community learning and Sawai-related activities
Tutor/facilitator	Learning facilitation	Not preserved in the available manuscript record	Knowledge of facilitation, learning activities, language practice, and resource use	Purposively represented because of direct involvement in facilitation or Sawai learning
Customary/community leader	Cultural and linguistic authority	Not preserved in the available manuscript record	Knowledge of customary practice, local language use, oral tradition, and intergenerational transmission	Purposively represented because of cultural and community knowledge relevant to Sawai maintenance
Learner	Learner and youth perspective	Not preserved in the available manuscript record	Experience of Sawai use, learning opportunities, language choice, and participation in community activities	Purposively represented because of direct experience of Sawai use or community learning

Kobe Village was selected because Sawai remains part of local social and cultural life while facing pressure from increased mobility, institutional use of Indonesian, and changes in younger people's communication practices. The study treated the village not merely as a physical site but as a learning ecology consisting of families, customary institutions, community organizations, potential nonformal education providers, and everyday places where language is used.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews examined domains of Sawai use, intergenerational transmission, desired competencies, culturally important content, stakeholder roles, and barriers to regular learning. Observation focused on language choice, interaction, and participation in community activities. Documents were selected when they recorded Sawai learning, language use, or cultural transmission.

The three techniques produced complementary forms of evidence. Interviews provided participants' interpretations; observation showed how language and participation appeared in practice; and documents indicated the degree to which activities had been planned, recorded, or supported institutionally. Data collection focused on patterns that were repeatedly observable across these sources rather than on isolated statements.

The study record available for this revision confirms the use of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, but it does not preserve the exact fieldwork dates, interview count and duration, interview language, recording procedure, observation hours, or a complete document inventory. These operational details are therefore not reconstructed, and the analysis is reported only at the level directly supported by the available study record.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The analysis followed an iterative thematic process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Interview, observation, and documentary data were read repeatedly and segmented into meaningful units. Initial codes were compared and grouped into categories, which were refined into themes concerning language-use domains, intergenerational transmission, learning content, program organization, and community partnership. The analysis distinguished empirical themes from literature-informed design propositions.

The available study record supports an iterative thematic process but does not identify whether coding was manual or software-assisted, the number of coders, or a formal inter-coder agreement procedure. Accordingly, no software-specific coding, independent double-coding, or inter-coder reliability statistic is claimed. Analytical dependability rests on repeated reading, comparison across data sources and stakeholder roles, retention of divergent evidence, and a transparent distinction between empirical themes and literature-informed framework propositions.

Credibility was strengthened through source and method triangulation. The researchers compared perspectives across stakeholder roles and checked interview accounts against observed practices and available documents. Divergent evidence was retained when it qualified the dominant pattern. The analysis also distinguished present field conditions from framework components proposed for future implementation.

Member checking is not reported because it is not documented in the available study record. Trustworthiness is therefore supported by source triangulation, method triangulation, comparison across stakeholder perspectives, and the retention of evidence that qualified the dominant pattern.

Ethical considerations

Ethical reporting is limited to information that can be verified from the available study record. The manuscript supplied for revision does not contain a verifiable ethics approval identifier or a complete description of consent, confidentiality, data-security, and community-permission procedures. Accordingly, no approval number or undocumented procedure is reconstructed in this article; only ethics and consent information supported by the original field and institutional records should be added to the final submission.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sawai as Cultural Identity within Narrowing Domains of Use

The first theme concerned the coexistence of strong symbolic value and declining regular use. Participants continued to view Sawai as a marker of local identity and a medium for customary knowledge. Interviews and observation indicated that the language remained visible in customary events, family communication, oral traditions, and interactions involving older community members. This pattern is consistent with research showing that minoritized languages may retain strong affective, cultural, and identity value even when their everyday communicative use is less secure (Hamley, 2025; Mills et al., 2025; Noar, 2026). These domains provide a social base for maintenance because Sawai is still associated with relationships and activities that community members value.

Field evidence summary

Across interviews and observations, Sawai was repeatedly associated with family belonging, customary occasions, oral traditions, and communication with older speakers. The same evidence indicated that children and adolescents used Sawai less consistently, particularly in school-related, digital, and peer interaction where Indonesian was more dominant. Because verbatim transcripts were not included in the manuscript record available for revision, these findings are presented as analytic paraphrases rather than reconstructed quotations. At the same time, participants described a less stable pattern among children and adolescents. Indonesian was more dominant in school-related interaction, digital media, and many everyday exchanges. Younger people could encounter Sawai in the family or at cultural events without necessarily using it consistently with peers.

Similar studies show that family commitment does not automatically produce active youth use when exposure, input patterns, peer networks, and institutional support are uneven (Dağdeviren-Kırmızı, 2025; Ding, 2023; Gomashie, 2023; Hollebeke et al., 2023; Hu & Yagmur, 2026; Vaskinn et al., 2026). The issue was therefore not a complete absence of speakers, but a reduction in frequency, interlocutors, and domains.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, this pattern shows that language vitality is relational. Sawai remains meaningful when speakers, places, activities, and cultural purposes reinforce one another. Research on family polymedia and ecological heritage-language maintenance confirms that digital, domestic, institutional, and transnational domains can either reinforce or fragment one another (Torsh, 2026; Wang & Hamid, 2024; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej et al., 2025). When language is restricted to ceremonial moments, its symbolic importance can remain high while everyday competence weakens. Maintenance consequently requires recurring, low-risk settings in which younger speakers can use Sawai for real interaction. This finding also clarifies the educational problem. A language-maintenance program should not be designed only around a list of linguistic items. It must expand the ecology of use by connecting learners with fluent speakers, creating regular time for interaction, and linking language to activities that already carry community meaning. In this sense, nonformal education contributes by organizing social participation, not simply by delivering content.

Tabel 2. Empirical themes and implications for community-based nonformal education

Theme	Empirical indication	Implication for nonformal education
Identity and current domains	Sawai remains meaningful in customary events, families, oral traditions, and interaction with older speakers.	Use culturally important activities as recurring learning domains rather than treating language as isolated vocabulary.
Narrowing youth use	Indonesian is more dominant in school-related interaction, digital media, and many daily exchanges among younger people.	Provide regular youth-oriented conversation, cultural projects, and supported digital production in Sawai.
Incidental transmission	Learning depends on families, elders, or occasional cultural activities; a consistently implemented program is not yet available.	Organize flexible schedules, agreed outcomes, facilitation roles, and modular resources without school-like rigidity.
Oral competence priority	Listening, speaking, everyday conversation, stories, and customary expressions are prioritized; literacy supports documentation.	Begin with communicative and intergenerational practice, then add reading and writing for continuity and resource creation.
Place-based knowledge	Participants connect Sawai with flora, fauna, livelihoods, place, customary practices, and collective memory.	Use naming walks, story circles, demonstrations, interviews, and cultural-environmental projects as learning activities.

Existing Transmission: Valuable but Incidental

The second theme concerned the form of existing language transmission. Field evidence showed that young people learned Sawai mainly through family communication, stories, customary events, and the personal initiatives of cultural figures. These practices are valuable because they retain authentic language, community authority, and local meaning. Studies of community language schools likewise show that cultural connection and committed facilitators are important assets, but they require organizational continuity and locally legitimate pedagogy (Li & Shen, 2024; Nordstrom et al., 2024; Reath Warren & Ahlgren, 2025). In Kobe, transmission remained largely incidental rather than organized as a sustained learning sequence.

Field evidence summary

Interview, observation, and documentary evidence converged on a pattern in which Sawai was learned primarily through family communication, elders, stories, customary events, and the initiatives of cultural figures. These opportunities were meaningful but irregular, and the available records did not indicate a consistently scheduled learning sequence with agreed outcomes, facilitation roles, and recurring assessment.

The absence of a structured program creates continuity problems. Participation depends on the availability of particular elders or leaders; learning opportunities may cluster around cultural events; and learners with limited family exposure receive fewer opportunities to practice. Valuable knowledge can therefore remain concentrated among individuals without becoming a shared educational resource. Scoping reviews of heritage-language planning and community schools identify the same vulnerability: local commitment is essential but insufficient without sustainable organization, resources, coordination, and recognition (Nordstrom et al., 2024; Wang & Hatoss, 2024).

Community-based nonformal education can convert these scattered practices into a recurring learning ecology without turning them into rigid school lessons. A flexible program may use short weekly sessions, seasonal cultural projects, intergenerational conversation circles, story documentation, or youth media production. Studies of community language schools show that micro-level planning, multimodal literacy, and hybrid learning spaces can expand participation when communities retain agency over goals and practice (Cun, 2025; Lee, 2025; Nordstrom & Zhang, 2024). The important feature is regularity combined with community ownership.

This role aligns with the broader lifelong-learning principle that meaningful learning occurs across ages, settings, and institutions (Prasetyo & Kusumawardani, 2025; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022). Elders can act as language mentors and sources of cultural knowledge; tutors can facilitate activities and prepare accessible materials; parents can reinforce home use; and youth can co-design workshops or reinterpret stories through appropriate media (Kwon et al., 2026). Community organizations can provide schedules, spaces, and continuity. The resulting arrangement distributes responsibility across the language ecology.

Competencies and Place-Based Learning Content

The third theme involved what community members considered important to learn. Participants identified listening and speaking as immediate priorities because Sawai has primarily been transmitted orally. Reading and writing were also considered useful for documentation and learning resources, but they should support rather than displace communicative use. This order reflects a practical concern: a language cannot be maintained through written materials alone if learners do not use it in interaction.

Field evidence summary — Participants prioritized listening and speaking for everyday communication and identified stories, customary expressions, and oral traditions as important learning content. They also connected Sawai with locally grounded knowledge of flora, fauna, livelihoods, places, and customary practices, indicating that communicative competence and place-based cultural knowledge should be developed together.

The desired competencies extended beyond structural language knowledge. Participants linked proficiency with the ability to understand stories, customary expressions, cultural values, and the appropriate use of language in social situations. They also identified vocabulary related to local flora, fauna, livelihoods, places, and everyday practices. Land-based and community-led studies demonstrate that such content can strengthen relationships among language, place, cultural authority, and learner identity when it is developed with community knowledge holders (Iversen, 2025; Meighan, 2023, 2024; Sultana, 2026).

The findings support a place-based sequence of learning content: everyday greetings and conversation; kinship and social relations; local flora and fauna; livelihood practices; songs and oral narratives; customary expressions; and community environmental knowledge. Activities can involve guided conversation, story circles, naming walks, interviews with elders, cultural demonstrations, and the creation of bilingual or multimodal records. Multimodal and arts-based research indicates that storytelling, music, images, movement,

and digital production can connect language rights with Indigenous knowledge and contemporary youth participation (de la Piedra & Johnson, 2025; Mills et al., 2025).

Language-learning research in complementary and community settings shows that multilingual practices can be treated as resources rather than failures to keep languages separate (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Learner-centered micro-planning is especially important where a standardized variety dominates other community repertoires (Chen & Wang, 2024). In Kobe, Indonesian may be used strategically to explain tasks or compare meanings while Sawai remains the principal language of practice and cultural engagement. The aim is not artificial monolingualism but an increase in meaningful Sawai use.

This orientation differs from a decontextualized local-content subject. School-based curriculum management research rightly emphasizes planning, resources, instructional implementation, and assessment (Faturohman et al., 2022). The community framework adds another requirement: content should originate in locally recognized practices and be taught with the people who hold that knowledge. This protects the program from reducing Sawai to standardized vocabulary detached from social life.

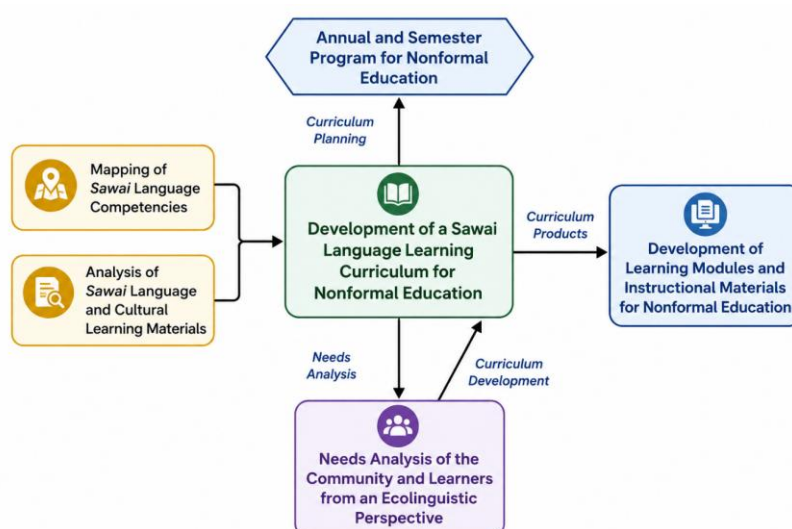
From Needs Mapping to a Flexible Community Curriculum

The fourth theme concerned the need to move from broad commitment to an operational yet flexible curriculum. Interviews and community discussions indicated support for mapping competencies, selecting culturally relevant materials, organizing activities, and preparing learning resources. Current research suggests that community planning is most sustainable when it combines grassroots agency, locally defined purposes, and institutional coordination rather than relying on a predetermined textbook or a single policy actor (O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024; Song, 2024; Wang & Hatoss, 2024). The analysis therefore produced a pathway that begins with community and learner needs.

Field evidence summary

Interview and community-discussion patterns supported beginning with community and learner needs, mapping practical Sawai competencies, selecting culturally relevant materials, and organizing recurring learning activities. Participants also favored arrangements that could follow community schedules and allow learners of different ages and proficiency levels to enter through flexible, modular activities rather than a rigid school-like sequence.

Figure 1. Proposed curriculum-development pathway for community-based Sawai learning



Source: Author-developed analytical proposition based on the study themes and reviewed literature (2026); not yet pilot-tested or validated by participants unless otherwise documented.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed pathway. Needs analysis informs two closely related processes: mapping Sawai competencies and analyzing linguistic and cultural materials. These inputs support curriculum design, annual or semester programming where appropriate, and the development of modular learning resources. The pathway is iterative because materials and activities should be revised after use and community reflection. The central implication is that curriculum is not merely an administrative document. It is a community agreement about which language practices should be sustained, who will facilitate them, where they will occur, and how participation will continue. This interpretation aligns with humanizing language planning, which treats users as policy actors and makes research answerable to community priorities (Kaveh, 2023). It also responds to evidence that Indigenous languages are weakened when education policy marginalizes community repertoires or separates implementation from local agency (Ahmed, 2025; Li & Shen, 2024).

The curriculum should remain modular. Participants of different ages and proficiency levels may enter at different points, and activities may need to follow community schedules. A module on local plants, for example, can combine a naming walk, oral description, an elder's explanation of use, learner-produced photographs, and a short bilingual glossary. A module on oral history can combine listening, retelling, role play, recording, and reflection on cultural meaning. This modular structure preserves flexibility while ensuring that activities are more than occasional events.

Participatory Facilitation, Media, and Authentic Assessment

The fifth theme addressed how learning should occur. Participants favored active and communicative learning rather than lecture-dominated instruction. Appropriate strategies include small-group conversation, demonstration, storytelling, cultural practice, peer learning, and intergenerational mentoring. These strategies extend established revitalization pedagogy focused on meaningful use and new interactional domains (Hinton, 2011; Hinton et al., 2018). Recent studies of complementary and land-based education likewise support participatory, critical, and multimodal approaches that position learners as legitimate language users (Cun, 2025; Iversen, 2025; Lee, 2025; Silvestri, 2025).

Field evidence summary

Participants favored active and communicative learning through small-group conversation, storytelling, demonstration, cultural practice, peer learning, and intergenerational mentoring. They identified locally usable media such as vocabulary cards, story collections, recordings, cultural videos, portfolios, and simple digital archives. Their preferences support assessment through actual language use, while specific formats such as structured portfolios, performance rubrics, and documented cultural projects are retained as literature-informed design recommendations for future piloting.

Media should be locally producible and usable with varying levels of infrastructure. Suggested resources include picture and vocabulary cards, short modules, story collections, recordings of fluent speakers, cultural videos, learner portfolios, and simple digital archives. Technology can widen access and enable multimodal production, but community-led studies caution that it should remain relational, culturally accountable, and connected to interaction among speakers (Meighan, 2024; Nordstrom & Zhang, 2024; Torsh, 2026). A recording becomes educationally valuable when learners listen, discuss, imitate, retell, and use the language with others.

Assessment should likewise reflect actual language use. Authentic assessment may include observed conversation, story retelling, performance tasks, learner portfolios, cultural projects, or documented participation in a community activity. Participatory workshop and teacher-trajectory research suggests that process indicators—voice, confidence, connection, collaboration, and sustained participation—are important alongside linguistic performance (Kwon et al., 2026; Reath Warren & Ahlgren, 2025). Community mentors can contribute criteria concerning cultural accuracy and appropriate expression, while tutors document learner progress. Because the source study did not conduct a longitudinal proficiency test, the framework does not

claim that these strategies have already increased language competence. It identifies forms of learning and assessment that follow logically from the empirical themes and established revitalization principles. Pilot implementation should examine participation, frequency of Sawai use, communicative performance, and changes in the range of social domains.

Community Partnership as the Infrastructure of Maintenance

The sixth theme was partnership. Participants consistently located responsibility across tutors, community organizers, customary leaders, village government, families, and cultural groups. No single actor can maintain a language alone. Studies of educational sovereignty, community-based provision, grassroots activism, and activist-linguist collaboration similarly show that revitalization requires distributed but coordinated roles among speakers, educators, organizations, researchers, and public institutions (Chew & Tennell, 2023; O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024; Shah et al., 2022; Song, 2024).

Field evidence summary

Participants distributed responsibility for Sawai maintenance across tutors, community organizers, customary leaders, families, village government, and cultural groups. Customary figures and fluent elders were positioned as sources of linguistic and cultural authority; tutors as facilitators of learning; families as the main domain for routine use; community organizations as coordinators of space and continuity; and village institutions as potential supporters of recognition and resources. The analysis therefore treats governance as shared rather than assigning responsibility to a single institution.

Government support remains important, especially for funding, recognition, facilitator development, documentation, and connections with broader regional-language programs (Sitompul et al., 2024). However, residents should not be treated as recipients of an external program. Music, hip hop, and youth-work initiatives demonstrate that culturally meaningful participation can mobilize learners and public recognition when communities retain control of representation and purpose (Francese, 2024; Huang, 2023; Nic Roibeaird, 2026; Sparling & MacIntyre, 2024). Decisions about content, appropriate language forms, cultural access, and recordings likewise require community consent and leadership.

Sustainability also requires attention to facilitator and organizational capacity, including the competence of community-learning managers (Ambarini et al., 2025). Fluent speakers are not automatically prepared tutors, while trained educators may not possess sufficient Sawai competence or cultural authority. A co-facilitation model can address this tension: an elder provides language and cultural expertise, while a tutor organizes scaffolding, inclusive participation, documentation, and reflection. Studies of churches and community schools show how durable organizations can supply mentors, recurring contact, and leadership pathways, although educational quality still depends on facilitator preparation (Her, 2025; Joo et al., 2024; Muscat, 2024; Reath Warren & Ahlgren, 2025).

Table 3. Analytical trail from field evidence to framework components (verified excerpts required)

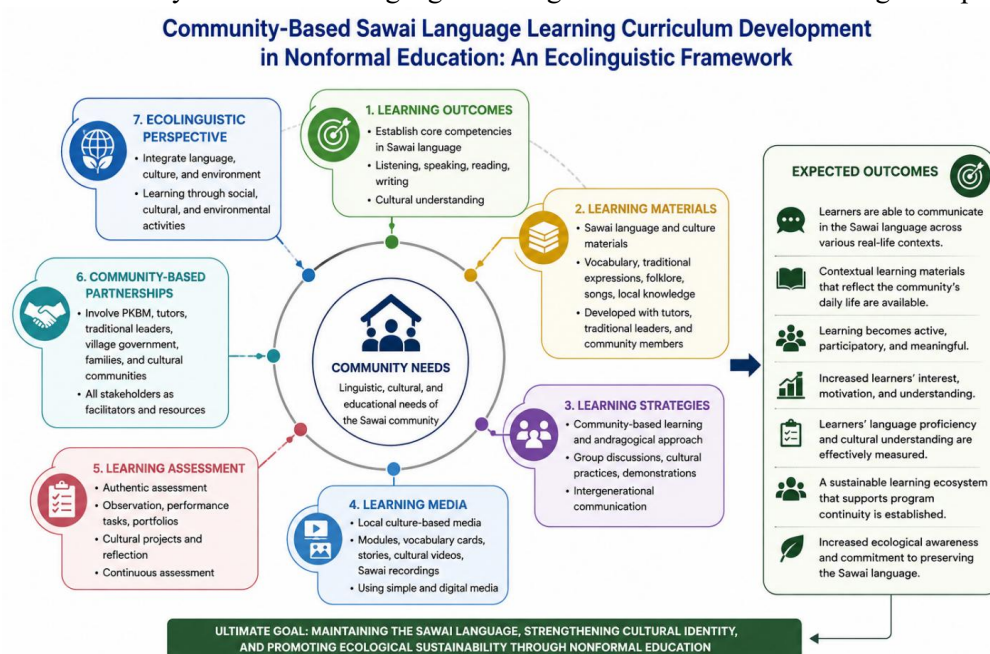
Paraphrased field evidence	Initial code	Category	Empirical theme	Framework component
Interviews and observations linked Sawai with local identity, customary and family interaction, while also indicating less regular use among younger speakers in school-related, digital, and peer domains.	Youth use narrowing	Reduced frequency and domains	Identity within narrowing domains	Needs and vitality mapping

Paraphrased field evidence	Initial code	Category	Empirical theme	Framework component
Field evidence indicated that transmission occurred mainly through families, elders, stories, customary events, and individual cultural figures rather than through a sustained learning sequence.	Transmission depends on individuals	Incidental learning	Valuable but incidental transmission	Community partnership and governance
Participants prioritized listening and speaking, everyday conversation, customary expressions, oral traditions, and language connected with local flora, fauna, livelihoods, places, and cultural practices.	Oral competence prioritized	Communicative learning needs	Competencies and place-based content	Learning outcomes and place-based content
Interviews and community discussion supported recurring organization, needs and competency mapping, culturally relevant materials, and flexible modular activities that can follow community schedules.	Need for recurring organization	Program continuity	Flexible community curriculum	Participatory strategies and learning media

An Ecolinguistic Framework for Community-Based Sawai Learning

The themes were synthesized into a seven-component framework for community-based Sawai learning: (1) community needs and language-vitality mapping; (2) learning outcomes; (3) language, cultural, and environmental content; (4) participatory and intergenerational strategies; (5) locally grounded learning media; (6) authentic assessment; and (7) community-based partnership and governance.

Figure 2. Community-based Sawai language-learning framework from an ecolinguistic perspective



Source: Developed by the researcher (2026).

Source: Author-developed analytical proposition based on the study themes and reviewed literature (2026); not yet pilot-tested or validated by participants unless otherwise documented.

The framework positions community needs at the center. Learning outcomes include functional listening and speaking, supported literacy, cultural understanding, and the ability to use Sawai across relevant real-life contexts. Content is derived from everyday communication, oral traditions, local knowledge, and relationships with the environment. This combination reflects evidence that language vitality emerges from interaction among family input, community institutions, learner attitudes, place, and opportunities for meaningful participation (Gomashie, 2025; Prilyasinta & Purnawan, 2025; Vaskinn et al., 2026; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej et al., 2025).

The framework makes three theoretical contributions. First, it defines the role of nonformal education as domain creation. The program is valuable not simply because it sits outside school, but because it can create recurring social spaces where Sawai is used for meaningful purposes. Second, it defines maintenance as intergenerational participation in which elders, tutors, families, and youth negotiate contemporary relevance. Third, it applies ecolinguistics to curriculum organization by connecting language learning with cultural practices, local environments, and conditions of use. Together, these contributions extend community-based planning beyond material production toward the organization of relationships, agency, and domains (Kaveh, 2023; Meighan, 2023; Wang & Hatoss, 2024).

These contributions also reveal the limits of a purely school-centered strategy. Schools remain important partners, but community language vitality cannot be sustained during limited instructional hours alone. The ecology must include homes, cultural spaces, community organizations, digital practices, and public recognition. Hornberger (2002) describes ecological approaches as opening ideological and implementational space for multiple languages. Community-based nonformal education provides one practical means of opening that space for Sawai.

Practical Implications and Limitations

Reporting boundary — The conceptual interpretation and seven-component framework are grounded in the thematic patterns documented in the manuscript. Participant-level counts, verbatim quotations, complete fieldwork metadata, and ethics identifiers are not reconstructed because they are absent from the available study record. The article therefore distinguishes clearly between verified thematic evidence and design propositions for future piloting and evaluation.

For practice, PKBM, village learning houses, cultural studios, and customary communities can begin with a small pilot rather than a comprehensive curriculum. A feasible sequence is to map speakers and use domains, select one culturally important theme, form an elder-tutor facilitation pair, co-design a short learning cycle with youth and families, document participation, and revise the module through community reflection. Participatory design and community-school research support this iterative approach because it aligns materials with learner interests, facilitator capacities, and locally meaningful outcomes (Kwon et al., 2026; Nordstrom et al., 2024; Reath Warren & Ahlgren, 2025).

For policy, support should prioritize facilitator development, community documentation protocols, modest operational funding, and coordination between village institutions, nonformal education providers, language agencies, and schools. Policy should enable rather than absorb community agency, consistent with evidence from humanizing, grassroots, and micro-level language planning (Kaveh, 2023; O'Rourke & Dayán-Fernández, 2024; Wang & Hatoss, 2024). Evaluation should include educational indicators and language-ecology indicators, such as intergenerational interaction, diversity of use settings, learner willingness to speak, and locally controlled resources.

The study has several limitations. It focuses on one village and uses qualitative evidence, so its themes should not be generalized to all Sawai-speaking communities without comparative study. It did not measure language vitality longitudinally, test learner proficiency, or evaluate the proposed curriculum through an intervention. The figures therefore represent an analytically grounded design proposal rather than a validated model. Future research should pilot the framework, report participant and implementation data in detail, examine changes in actual language use over time, and compare different Sawai-speaking communities and age groups. A further reporting limitation is that the manuscript archive available for this revision does not

preserve participant-level recruitment metadata, verbatim transcript excerpts, or complete fieldwork and ethics logs; consequently, the results are presented as convergent thematic paraphrases rather than reconstructed participant quotations.

CONCLUSION

Community-based nonformal education can support Sawai maintenance by expanding meaningful domains of use, organizing intergenerational participation, and connecting language learning with cultural and environmental knowledge. In Kobe Village, Sawai remains important in family communication, customary activity, and oral tradition, but younger speakers use it less consistently and transmission remains largely incidental. The study's contribution lies in explaining language maintenance as the organization of a community learning ecology rather than as the delivery of an isolated local-language subject. The seven-component framework translates this explanation into needs and vitality mapping, learning outcomes, place-based content, participatory strategies, learning media, authentic assessment, and community partnership. The framework remains an analytical proposition, not a validated intervention. The single-village design, qualitative evidence, and absence of longitudinal proficiency measures limit transferability. Future research should pilot the framework, document implementation fidelity and participant experience, and measure changes in Sawai use across age groups and social domains.

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