TURUN YLIOPISTO

Taiwanese Language Education

An Analysis of the Linguistic Human Rights of Indigenous Minority Communities

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This thesis examines the Taiwanese education system in relation to Indigenous minority students and their endangered heritage languages. The aim of the thesis is to analyze how the linguistic human rights of Indigenous minorities are realized in the national education system, and how that affects Indigenous language revitalization and student learning outcomes.

This was accomplished through a comparative literature review of 8 publications that cover Taiwan's Indigenous education from different angles. Issues in education are thematically grouped and analysed together and in relation to linguistic human rights. Through this analysis, the thesis finds that the Taiwanese education system does not properly support the linguistic human rights of Indigenous minority communities, and language revitalization efforts have largely been ineffective.

As such, I argue that aligning education to respect the linguistic human rights of Indigenous students would also lead to practical improvements in education and language revitalization. Most importantly, mother tongue medium education ought to be implemented for minority groups to respect their rights as well as improve language learning outcomes.

Key words: Taiwanese education, Indigenous languages, linguistic human rights, minority language education, language revitalization

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1 Introduction

Modern Taiwan is primarily comprised of four linguistic groups. The vast majority of the population is ethnically Han Chinese, and form the first three linguistic groups: The native speakers of Sinitic languages Mandarin, Min-nan and Hakka. Along with the three Sinitic groups, the fourth major group is made up of Indigenous, Austronesian languages speaking peoples (Liu, 2012). 16 Indigenous tribes are officially recognized, and they make up 2,5% of the population, thus being a minority group in a Han Chinese majority society (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 2024, pp. 15-16).

Currently, while linguistic and cultural diversity is acknowledged, in practice Mandarin Chinese is the primary language of Taiwan and is widely used in daily communication between all four linguistic groups (Liu, 2012, p. 109). This follows from historical language policy which aimed at creating a unified society through the promotion of a single standardized language, and discouraged or altogether banned the use of other native languages (Ho, 2022). The social minority position of Indigenous Peoples along with this legacy of colonial practices and discriminatory language policy has been highly damaging to the survival of Indigenous culture and their native languages, which UNESCO has pronounced nearly extinct or critically endangered (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 2017, as cited in Ho, 2022, p. 502). Since Taiwan's democratization, beginning from the late 1980's, language policy has over time shifted to attempting to rectify past damage and encourage the teaching of minority languages (Kasai, 2024, pp. 179-180).

Acquiring one's native language is a basic human right. It is one of multiple linguistic human rights (LHRs), that relate to how individuals and larger linguistic groups should be able to "enjoy a secure linguistic environment", identify with their mother tongue, and ensure their "linguistic group's fair chance of cultural self-reproduction" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012, p. 94). In addition to a right to language as an expressive marker of identity, LHRs also relate to "instrumental interest in language as a means of communication", and how language ought not to be "an obstacle to the effective enjoyment of rights", to "meaningful participation in public institutions", nor to "the enjoyment of social and economic opportunities" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012, p. 94). Historical language policy that promoted one standard language has breached these rights for Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples. Language shift has led to Taiwanese Indigenous languages being primarily learned as a second language, in a "language revitalization context", which is why Indigenous languages are often categorized as heritage languages (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 128). A group's heritage language carries a sense of identity and cultural belonging, even if it is not the primary language used in communication.

Considering the relatively recent attempts to revitalize Indigenous heritage languages and cultures through updating the education system, in this literature review I examine how current education

either supports or hinders the linguistic human rights of Indigenous Taiwanese communities. LHRs in education are examined through a comparative literature review done on literature that covers how Indigenous students are taught in Taiwan's education system, and how education is designed. Through compiling and analysing various issues within education, the paper finds areas where further development is needed to support Indigenous communities. As such, this paper contributes to understanding how practical improvements for education can be derived from a human rights based analysis of the current issues within education. I argue that aligning the education system with international legislation so that the LHRs of linguistic minorities are respected would have practical benefits for language revitalization, in addition to the primary goal of ensuring human rights for Indigenous communities.

After the introduction, chapter 2 provides a more detailed overview of prior language policy, to give context for how minority languages were marginalized, and covers policies that have been enacted since democratization to attempt to revitalize languages through education. The linguistic human rights angle that is used in the analysis section is also explained through relevant literature. Finally, the chapter also details the methodology of the paper, concerning how literature was collected and included in the literature review. Chapter 3 reviews existing literature that explores issues related to Indigenous education in the current Taiwanese education system, and organizes the literature by themes. Chapter 4 discusses the literature presented in chapter 3 across theme borders, building a comprehensive image of issues in Indigenous education. Additionally, the chapter also analyses these issues in how they relate to the LHRs of Indigenous minorities in Taiwan, and what changes would align Taiwanese education policy with respecting LHRs according to international law. Finally chapter 5 summarizes an answer to the research question, and suggests directions for future research.

2 Background

Chapter 2 has three main focuses: First, the background of language policies in Taiwan and relevant policy changes are covered in more detail. This sets current educational policies into their historical context which is then built upon in chapters 3 and 4 to cover the current state of language education in relation to Indigenous minority communities' linguistic human rights. Second, the concept of LHR is explained through relevant literature to give a theoretical basis for the following comparative analysis of literature, which is done through this lens. Lastly, the criteria and procedure for choosing the articles included in the analysis is explained.

2.1 Overview of historical language policies

To understand the current state of Taiwanese language education, it is important to understand the early developments influencing the vitality of Indigenous languages. As detailed by McNaught (2021), the earliest outside influences on Indigenous languages came from four different colonial powers throughout the past four centuries, carrying varying effects: First, during Dutch rule of the area in the 17th century, Indigenous languages were not actively suppressed through policymaking. However, during this time a push towards Christianity was damaging to Indigenous cultures and traditional social structures, although this was not as damaging for Indigenous languages. Bible translations by Dutch missionaries helped preserve linguistic data and to some degree the role of Indigenous languages in religious communities for the future.

After the Dutch, the Qing-dynasty held power until the late 19th century, and their policies caused more active harm to the Indigenous languages. The Qing "viewed the Indigenous peoples as barbaric and uncivilised" leading to a sinicisation process where the Indigenous Taiwanese were pressured to adopt Sinitic languages and Han Chinese social and cultural practices (McNaught, 2021, p. 128). Those who assimilated were afforded legal protection and access to education, while those who resisted were ostracised from Han Chinese society. Notably, the effects of Qing-era colonisation were particularly harmful for Indigenous tribes on the Western plains of the island, whose sinicisation was much more rapid compared to those residing on the mountainous Eastern regions. This divide is still reflected today as Plains Indigenous tribes have struggled to gain formal recognition and equal legal protections. These groups achieved official legal status only in 2025, which considerably set back the development of their rights, linguistic and otherwise, compared to those groups who had been legally recognized decades earlier (Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2026; McNaught, 2021; Hsieh, 2021).

The Japanese Empire controlled Taiwan from 1895 until 1945, during which systemic linguistic discrimination continued (McNaught, 2021). The Japanese education system, while initially relatively

tolerant of local languages, turned into a tool for the Empire's assimilationist goals, restricting both local Sinitic and Indigenous languages and instead promoting a new Japanese identity through policing the use of language. In addition to explicitly restrictive language policy, the Japanese expanded further into Indigenous territories in the mountainous regions where prior Qing-era institutions had lesser effects. Industrial efforts which forced the relocation of Indigenous Peoples from their homelands further disrupted Indigenous lifestyles and the passing on of cultural traditions (Lin et al., 2019; McNaught, 2021). While these three periods greatly influenced the loss of vitality for Indigenous languages, for this paper's focus the most important developments to be considered are those after the shift to the fourth colonial ruler from 1945 onwards, when control of the area was ceded from Japan to the Chinese.

The current Taiwanese government has its roots in this post-Japanese era, as the Kuomintang (KMT) relocated from China to Taiwan following the Chinese Civil War in 1949. Lin et al. (2019) describe language policy following the KMT's takeover happening in five separate phases. Between 1945–1949 Mandarin Chinese co-existed with local languages as policies mainly focused on removing the influence left over by the prior Japanese rule. Mandarin was the dominant language of education, although Indigenous languages were still accepted in schools and the broader public sphere. The KMT's relocation from China to Taiwan in 1949 started the period that is described as having "the most aggressive anti-local language policies" (McNaught, 2021, p. 129). The period is defined by martial law, as well as oppressive Mandarin-only policies that prohibited the use of other languages, including all Indigenous languages, local Sinitic languages, as well as Japanese. Education reforms supported linguistic assimilation through programs that forced Mandarin education particularly in Indigenous areas, banning the teaching of their native tongues (Lin et al., 2019). The effects of these policies cannot be understated, as the use of the already marginalized Indigenous languages "collapse[d] within two generations" (McNaught, 2021, p. 129). The effects were not limited to the loss of native language, as discriminatory policies towards Indigenous Peoples had negative consequences in all spheres of life, ranging from socio-economic to cultural.

Along with the KMT government ending martial law in 1987, the democratization process led to the lifting of the most discriminatory policies. Education policy shifted accordingly, with local languages now being taught in schools, although initially the main focus was on teaching local Sinitic languages alongside Mandarin (Lin et al., 2019). While these languages had undoubtedly also suffered under the Mandarin-only policies of the martial law era, improving their situation while deemphasizing Indigenous language education further disadvantaged Indigenous groups. As Pawan (2009) details, the earliest Indigenous language education programs were taking place in a small numbers of schools in Taipei County by 1990. Indigenous language education was gradually included in some schools in broader areas, but the real watershed moment in policy came when the Education Act for Indigenous

Peoples was adopted in 1998, which was the first national level development to improve education in practice, as Indigenous language and culture teaching was now available at all levels of education (Lin et al., 2019; McNaught, 2021). This followed from the establishing of the Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1996, and the Additional Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of China in 1997, which finally enshrined the right to Indigenous language in law.

The Council of Indigenous Peoples together with the Ministry of Education were the two main governmental bodies that were set to administer Indigenous education issues. The Education Act was supplemented with the Indigenous People's Basic Law in 2005, which further standardized Indigenous language education nationwide. The policies that have the most practical effects on current language education build on these two acts: Articles require the government to set up a specialized research agency on Indigenous languages, develop a standard system for language proficiency evaluation, and reward proficiency with preferential measures (Lin et al., 2019, p. 448) An example of such measures is giving extra credit to university entrance exam scores if a student has passed the Indigenous Language Proficiency Test (McNaught, 2021, p. 131). The 1998 Education Act also stipulates that teachers ought to be formally qualified to teach Indigenous languages, which is to be ensured through a language proficiency test.

After Taiwan's democratization, two major political parties have been in power. The KMT, which has retained popularity after the lifting of martial law, has been challenged by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which grew out of early democratic movements. The two parties have traded places leading the government, with the DPP gaining its first presidency between 2000–2008 and again since 2016. Dupré (2019) links national party politics with language policy, as the parties have differed in their handling of the legislation related to Indigenous Peoples. The 2005 Indigenous People's Basic Law was passed by a DPP-led government, and certain Articles of the bill imply additional future legislation on Indigenous self-governance and language matters. The KMT government, which retook power from 2008 to 2016, did draft such policies, although they would ultimately not be passed during this time (Dupré, 2019, p. 658). In 2017, the new DPP government passed the Indigenous Languages Development Act, whose Articles both designate Indigenous languages as national languages and include "practical elements of language revitalisation", fulfilling the promise of additional language legislation made by the IPBL and reaching a "fair balance between symbolic and substantive provisions" (Dupré, 2019, p. 661–662).

Even with the most recent positive developments, it is important to acknowledge that the cumulative effects of this historical background has been disastrous for the vitality of the Indigenous languages: During the latest period major improvements have been made on the legislative level, but in practice there have been multiple issues and the results of these policies have in large part been unsatisfactory.

Despite the revitalization efforts that have been taking place since the 1990s, a 2014 survey showed that only 6.83% of Indigenous students used their native language in daily life, a notable decrease from 1995's statistics, which indicated 37% using the language (McNaught, 2021, p. 130). Additionally, McNaught's (2021, pp. 130–131) analysis of the 2018 Indigenous Language Proficiency Test scores suggests that only 0.22% of students, those who passed the advanced or upper-advanced level test, could be considered fluent speakers.

While student test scores are not necessarily indicative of the whole situation, and the extent of language loss can vary widely between different Indigenous groups, these numbers are concerning. With this in mind, the next section focuses on linguistic human rights (LHRs), a concept through which current policy and its implementation will be analysed after the literature review section.

2.2 Linguistic human rights

The right to develop one's native language is a fundamental human right. The rights of Indigenous minority communities are mentioned specifically in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007. The Declaration states that Indigenous Peoples have the right to "revitalize, use, develop and transmit" native languages, that states ought to take "effective measures to ensure that this right is protected", including supporting the establishment of education systems that allow for Indigenous individuals to have access to education provided in their native language (United Nations, 2007, pp. 5–6). Article 14 highlights the importance of children in particular learning their languages, as passing on a language to newer generations is the only way to ensure its survival. Taiwan is not formally a member of the United Nations due to its contested status with the People's Republic of China, but the Taiwanese government has consistently implemented UN declarations, and as such has also set to follow the UNDRIP. The Indigenous Languages Development Act further aligned Taiwanese policy with UN regulations (Dupré, 2019).

Given the historical developments of Taiwanese language policies, it is clear that the right to language for the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan has not been properly supported, even with the latest corrective measures. The unsatisfactory outcomes of education policy reforms suggest room for improvement. For this reason, Taiwanese education policy and its application will be analysed in relation to linguistic human rights, particularly focusing on what could be improved to further align educational outcomes with the rights detailed in the UNDRIP. The LHR framework is informed by literature which helps us understand LHRs as not only theoretical regulations, but how these concepts can directly influence the practical side of language preservation and education in the Indigenous context.

Szoszkiewicz (2017) details three key linguistic human rights in education: The right to receive education in the mother tongue, the right to learn the dominant language, and the freedom from involuntary language shift. LHRs in education remain an underrepresented aspect of human rights, as most human rights law covers "other important human attributes, such as race, gender or nationality" (Szoszkiewicz, 2017, p. 105). Still, existing legislation and treaties implicitly protect LHRs within education, and the responsibility of ensuring these rights are achieved in practice falls on the state within which the minorities reside.

Skutnabb-Kangas (1994; 2001) covers linguistic human rights in practice. LHRs of course apply to all levels of society, but their application in education is especially important, as a proper language education system supports minority groups "to achieve high levels of bi- or multilingualism" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994, p. 625). LHRs are only properly secured when multilingualism is possible for linguistic minorities; a high level of competence in the language of the majority is a requirement for participating in society and ensuring that the minority's other rights are respected, while learning the minority group's native language is necessary for their collective existence as well as personal and group identity formation. Involuntary language shift is prevented by systems which encourage the minority language to be fully used in both public and private spheres.

Skutnabb-Kangas (1994) further highlights the importance for students to have the right to receive education in their native languages. An education system that only offers instruction through the majority language, even if separate language classes for minorities exist, does not fully support the minority's LHRs. Mother tongue medium (MTM) education provided by teachers competent in the minority language is "one of the most important elements in the right not only to exist with a separate identity but, most importantly, to reproduce this identity" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001, p. 204).

The linguistic human rights of Indigenous Peoples in particular are explored by Skutnabb-Kangas (2012) and Galla and Holmes (2024). Indigenous Peoples are a specific type of minority, broadly defined by their continuous inhabitation of territories prior to colonisation and the formation of said territories' current, dominant social structures (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012, p. 88). The subversion of traditional Indigenous social structures by default leaves their cultures and languages in a marginalized position, particularly due to culturally assimilationist policies, supremacist ideologies and structural discrimination (Galla & Hallas, 2024). This marginalization means that language shift within Indigenous communities should not be seen as a voluntary process, as assimilation by minority cultures into the dominant majority can stem from a choice between preserving traditional culture or being incorporated into the economic and social structures of dominant society. Skutnabb-Kangas (2012) presents this as a false dichotomy: Equal incorporation is possible while also preserving

Indigenous heritage, given that the dominant group agrees with the minority's view on how this ought to happen.

Thus, linguistic human rights are not purely words and abstractions in high-level legal documents. Instead, striving to ensure the rights of linguistic minority groups is a path to designing practical language education with real world results. The following methodology section describes how literature on Taiwanese Indigenous language education, presented in chapter 3, is collected and later analysed through the LHR lens in chapter 4.

2.3 Methodology

This paper is a comparative literature review, with analysis informed by linguistic human rights. The publications included in the literature review are peer reviewed articles and book chapters on the topic of Indigenous education in Taiwan. While the paper's focus is on heritage language education, studies on Indigenous education issues more broadly are included, as the inclusion of minority students in the general education system influences views on Indigenous heritage and language revitalization.

The articles included in the analysis were collected through the Volter-database of the University of Turku library. The timeframe for publications was limited from 2016 to 2026, for two primary reasons: First, as can be seen from the section covering historical developments in Indigenous language education policy, policymaking and application has been inconsistent between different eras, with changes made since 2016 being the most substantial. Second, limiting the study to the most recent developments allows for a deeper analysis of the current state of Indigenous language education, examining the effects of current policies instead of further discussing their history. The language of publication was limited to English to streamline analysis and to avoid the need to rely on translation tools.

Search terms included:
Taiwan AND "indigenous education" – giving 23 results.
Taiwan AND "indigenous language" AND (education OR policy) – giving 24 results.

The results were manually screened and studies outside the scope of this paper were excluded. Criteria for exclusion were the publication's main focus falling outside of the sphere of the public education system (e.g. publications focused on language nests used for language revitalization), the publication's main focus not being on Indigenous education itself (e.g. publications focused on linking ecological sustainability and Indigenous education), or the publication covering historical developments in

education rather than focusing on its current state. The final analysis includes 8 individual publications that all cover current aspects of education.

Similarly, articles covering LHRs in Indigenous minority communicates and the education system were found from the Volter-database with search terms:
“linguistic human rights” AND “minority education”
“linguistic human rights” AND “indigenous language”

In the analysis section of chapter 4, the literature presented in chapter 3 is first comparatively analysed to connect different articles into a comprehensive whole, noting overlaps in different areas of education. Afterwards they’re analysed through the LHR angle, to see how policy and educational practices either support or limit the rights of Indigenous minorities in Taiwan.

This paper is especially limited by the inclusion of only English-language literature. While this eases analysis, it possibly misses domestic Taiwanese perspectives on language education issues. Most crucially, this means that no Taiwanese education policy texts themselves are analysed in this paper: The focus is fully on covering education through secondary sources written on the topic. However, English-language papers by Taiwanese authors are included, and other literature covered also references Taiwanese materials. As a result, while the literature review is not optimal nor entirely comprehensive, it still allows for the analysis of broad themes in Taiwan’s Indigenous language education.

3 Literature Review

This chapter presents the literature review on Taiwanese Indigenous language education policy and application. The literature is categorised into four themes, each covering relevant literature on the topic. The themes are as follows: 1) education curriculum design, 2) the role of teachers in Indigenous education, 3) teaching materials, and 4) language attitudes. As much of the pre-existing literature on Indigenous language education touches on multiple topics, any study may appear under multiple themes. While presented separately, these themes are naturally interconnected, and developments in one area cannot be properly analysed without considering the state of education as a whole.

3.1 Curriculum

Curriculum design creates the basis for language education in practice. National curriculum guidelines dictate how many teaching hours each subject is afforded, how teaching ought to be conducted and what should be prioritised. As such, examining curriculum is a natural place to start investigating the state of Indigenous language education in Taiwan.

Lin et al. (2019, p. 462) points out that in the standard public education curriculum, only one 40-minute class per week is allocated to Indigenous language teaching. Additionally, these classes are often held outside usual school hours, in the early mornings or weekends, and student groups may be mixed, with students from different grade levels and even different tribes, with different heritage languages. The lack of resources, such as adequate classroom space, afforded to language education is lacking. McNaught (2021) points out that most Indigenous language classes are elective courses, and as such “no national standards need to be met by the school”, nor are schools accountable for learning outcomes as in other subjects (McNaught, 2021, p. 134). Outside of the general education system, more focus to Indigenous language is given in experimental schools which aim to incorporate “Indigenous viewpoints and ideas into school curriculums” (McNaught, 2021, p. 137). Experimental schools follow the national curriculum, but give Indigenous experiences more focus outside the heritage language classroom, integrating the local tribe’s cultural elements in other school subjects. Immersive education goes a step further, in providing education primarily through Indigenous languages. However, while some immersion kindergartens do exist, adopting similar programs for higher grade levels has been very limited, including a handful of Amis schools in Hualien (McNaught, 2021).

While curriculum design influences the practical aspects of education, legislation and curriculum guidelines reflect the government’s attitudes towards Indigenous cultures and languages. Kasai (2024) analyses curriculum guidelines in the current Taiwanese education system, examining how the concept

of multiculturalism has influenced the teaching of Taiwanese languages. As different groups have conceived of multicultural education policy differently, the study takes a Critical Discourse Analysis approach to examining views related to multiculturalism within legal documents on national language education curricula; each major language has its own education curriculum guidelines, which present a differing views on the Taiwanese language environment. This links language education policy into a broader discussion on the dynamics between different ethnic groups in Taiwan, hinting at the social and political status of each linguistic group.

The study finds that the different approaches to multiculturalism in the curriculum guidelines implicitly show a power hierarchy between the Taiwanese language groups: Mandarin education focuses on students becoming familiar with the different ethnic groups in Taiwan, in order to ensure students "understand and respect diverse cultures, and enhance ethnic interaction" (Kasai, 2024, p, 184). The status of Mandarin as the de-facto dominant language in Taiwan is reinforced through detaching Mandarin curriculum guidelines from the political debates regarding minority language education, presenting multiculturalism as a "self-evident characteristic of Taiwanese society" (Kasai, 2024, p. 185). Min-nan guidelines present a similar view, while also highlighting Min-nan as the largest heritage language for the Taiwanese population, leading to its unique "status as the embodiment of a distinctively Taiwanese culture" (Kasai, 2024, p. 186). In contrast, Hakka and Indigenous language curriculum guidelines, both being considerably smaller linguistic groups, present multiculturalism as justification for the need to revitalise these languages. Indigenous language guidelines in particular link the success of Indigenous language education to the success of Taiwan's multicultural identity and social progress (Kasai, 2024, p. 187). Indigenous language education aims to teach students who can both preserve traditional culture and knowledge, and also share them with wider society.

Ho (2022) further discusses the contradictions in policy documents and in curriculum guidelines. While the revised 2018 curriculum guidelines encourage to critically evaluate the Indigenous Peoples' social standing and to advocate to "overturn oppression of Indigenous peoples", they also present mainstream rhetoric which "may hinder Indigenous agency for emancipation" (Ho, 2022, pp. 509–510). Similar to Kasai's (2024) analysis, the focus on multicultural understanding between groups is seen as a way to maintain the status quo, with increased focus on the decolonization of Indigenous communities potentially disrespecting mainstream culture. Policy notes that Indigenous Peoples' linguistic and cultural heritage is to be preserved through the fostering of students' heritage language proficiency, while at the same time requiring Indigenous students to adjust to mainstream society and the education system through the dominant language (Ho, 2022, p. 510). Still, Indigenous students are encouraged to participate in Indigenous public affairs. Tribes and Indigenous organizations are called to organize Indigenous education and "take action to help establish Indigenous autonomous schools",

although the documents also mandate that “education shall be organized by the government” (Ho, 2022, p. 510). In essence Indigenous autonomy and self-governance over education is promoted in the text, but simultaneously denied.

In total, it seems clear that present curriculum guidelines and practices do not properly support the revitalization of Indigenous languages. Curriculum guidelines acknowledge the importance of preserving Indigenous language, but in practice the Indigenous language education is hardly prioritized in the mainstream education system. One weekly class is not enough classroom time to properly teach a language, resources are lacking and the fact that Indigenous language classes are often held outside usual class hours suggests that they are not viewed as equal in importance to other subjects (Lin et al., 2019). Experimental and immersion schools focusing specifically on local Indigenous cultures provide a better alternative, but adoption of them has been limited (McNaught, 2021). Government-designed curriculum guidelines present contradicting views on the importance of Indigenous language and the autonomy of Indigenous groups; in Taiwan’s multicultural landscape, language education curricula emphasise cultural understanding between groups, but this inadvertently reinforces the dominant social status of larger languages, especially Mandarin and Min-nan (Kasai, 2024; Ho, 2022). As Indigenous languages have suffered throughout Taiwan’s history of colonization and oppressive policies by the majority groups, the revitalization of Indigenous languages requires the addressing of broader social inequality, which current curriculum guidelines fail to do.

3.2 Teachers

In education, the role of teachers is crucial. Teachers are the ones responsible for conducting national education policies in practice in classrooms, and as such their influence on language revitalization efforts cannot be understated.

Lin et al. (2019) notes that no formal education is required for Indigenous language teachers. This lack of a dedicated language teacher training program is seen as a “severe challenge to sustain indigenous language education” (Lin et al., 2019, p. 462). The Ministry of Education planned to train Indigenous people who had already acquired teaching licenses to also act as language teachers, although due to the long history of language loss, most teachers were not fluent speakers. Instead, proficient speakers who don’t hold prior teacher training are trained in short-term workshops organized by the Council of Indigenous Peoples to act as specialized instructors for language classes. The CoIP holds a database of qualified specialists, by 2014 reaching 5000 registered people who had attended a workshop and gained the Language Proficiency Certificate, allowing them to teach in public schools. These language specialists are in charge of most of the language teaching in practice. The need for a formal education

program is stressed, to standardize how qualifications are gained and to improve the status of Indigenous language teaching within the education system.

Nesterova (2019) discusses the role of non-native speaking teachers in broader Indigenous education. An ethnographic study is conducted through "23 in-depth interviews with Indigenous leaders in various subfields of education and development", and the data from these interviews is analysed through a social justice lens (Nesterova, 2019, p. 157). The Indigenous people's dissatisfaction with their communities' inclusion in the current Taiwanese schooling system is explored, stemming particularly from "pedagogy and teachers' attitudes […] modelled after Chinese values" (Nesterova, 2019, p 157). The majority of teachers in Taiwan are of a Han Chinese background. This effects Indigenous students through the non-Indigenous teachers' shortage of skills in working with culturally diverse students. The comparatively few Indigenous teachers also face negative effects working in Han majority workplaces, which are often seen as culturally insensitive environments.

Through these interviews, the study finds that all of the Indigenous representatives find education policies inadequate to support the education of Indigenous students (Nesterova, 2019, p. 160). Indigenous students are taught in an education system that lacks cultural sensitivity, implicitly promoting assimilation into the majority population while de-emphasising the importance of Indigenous culture, identity and language. The interviewees acknowledge that non-Indigenous teachers are well qualified to work with the majority population, but teaching Indigenous students requires an additional set of skills and knowledge of the Indigenous experience. To improve education, the interviewees see that teachers who teach Indigenous students ought to have these additional skills, either through being Indigenous themselves, or in the case of otherwise qualified non-Indigenous teachers, by "having lived with Indigenous people, learnt the Indigenous ways and established a rapport and ethical relationship" with Indigenous communities (Nesterova, 2019, p. 161). Prioritizing the training of Indigenous teachers would alleviate the situation, although changes in broader teacher training would also be required to help non-Indigenous teachers work with Indigenous communities respectfully and effectively.

Teachers in the preschool environment are covered by Chen (2023), adding to the discussion of non-Indigenous teachers teaching Indigenous students. Analysing the culturally sensitive pedagogical skills of teachers gives insight into the practical ways education can be tailored to fit both the majority and Indigenous minority students. The study focuses on preschool teachers in primarily Indigenous areas, and how they integrate Indigenous experiences in education methods and materials to better align with the local cultural community, "improve indigenous students' academic achievements" and maintain their cultural competence (Chen, 2023, p. 3). The teachers were interviewed regarding choices made during curriculum design, their choices of teaching materials, as well as their motivation for beginning

to teach in an Indigenous area and how this has influenced their view of education. In addition to interviews, notes on students' assignments were collected.

The interviews along with researchers' observations found that to improve the academic achievement of Indigenous students, improving the teachers' multicultural literacy and understanding of culture helped them design effective activities for Indigenous students (Chen, 2023). The role of language was particularly notable, as students showed more trust towards those who could speak their native languages. The integration of families and the broader Indigenous community helped the maintaining of these students' cultural competence, including exposure to language.

Overall, the shortage of teachers who are both formally qualified and also native speakers in Indigenous languages is a major issue for language revitalization efforts. Shortages are being corrected with short-term workshops to train native speakers into language specialists, who conduct most teaching (Lin et al., 2019). While better than nothing, a short workshop does not give these language specialists the same pedagogical skills that a full teacher training program would, affecting the quality of education. Considering the lack of native speakers who are teachers, most teachers in the education system are from the Han majority. This influences learning for Indigenous students on a broader scale than just in language classes, as culturally insensitive education promotes assimilation and reduces the importance of Indigenous heritage and, as an extension, language (Nesterova, 2019). Indigenous communities are not satisfied with the current state of education, and ask that pedagogical practices should be aligned with Indigenous ways of life. They view non-Indigenous teachers as qualified to teach Indigenous students, with the caveat that teachers must be trained to be familiar with Indigenous cultures. Following from this, Chen (2023) shows that non-Indigenous teachers who do collaborate with Indigenous communities for their classroom activities and adopt culturally sensitive pedagogy can improve learning outcomes for Indigenous students, while also showing respect for their culture and language. Thus, in order to improve Indigenous language education, it seems clear that both new training programs for Indigenous teachers are needed, but that culturally sensitive pedagogy and ways of collaborating with Indigenous communities in practice should be taught in teacher training programs for non-Indigenous teachers. The current system employs teachers who too heavily rely on Han Chinese pedagogy without considering the different learning processes of Indigenous cultures.

3.3 Teaching Materials

Teaching materials constitute a large part of teaching in practice, guiding teachers and students. McNaught (2021) states that historically speaking, the materials used in Indigenous language education have been lacking in quality, mostly focusing on simple introductions "of phonetic symbols, vocabulary items and pronunciation drills", often with typos or errors (McNaught, 2021, p. 135).

Especially grammatical detail is lacking, resulting in difficulties for teachers to teach it beyond simple patterns. Apart from materials used specifically for language teaching, other education materials can also reflect general Indigenous experiences and issues. The Indigenous experimental schools have tailored materials for different subjects to include content that reflects their tribe's culture, which supports the learning of Indigenous students as well as reinforces positive views of their traditions (McNaught, 2021, pp. 137–138).

Education materials present Indigenousness from different points of view, in parts reinforcing the majority's dominant position in society. Ho (2022) studies the textbooks used in Indigenous language teaching, particularly those designed from 2009 onwards, as they are the most recent and commonly used ones. The set of textbooks being analysed were developed by The Council of Indigenous Peoples and the National Chengchi University, in collaboration with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. Emancipatory education theory informs data analysis, as through analysing government sanctioned textbooks, the study explores how Indigenous cultures are portrayed, and how this reflects broader questions about language revitalization, as well as how the education system could alleviate systemic oppression when implemented with care. Attention is especially paid to how textbooks cover Indigenous experiences through their own voices and perspectives, and "whether textbook activities invite students to take actions for social change" (Ho, 2022, p. 508). Additionally, the alignment between textbook themes and education policy documents is examined.

Overall, the study considers the contents of textbooks to be competing between Indigenous and mainstream perspectives when it comes to portraying emancipatory themes. The study finds that out of the 480 textbooks chapters covered, 409 or 85% depict Indigenous experiences, while 71 or 15% cover non-Indigenous topics, such as Bible quotations (42 chapters), world literature (20 chapters) and Chinese literature (9 chapters) (Ho, 2022, p. 508). 36 chapters actively advocate emancipatory themes for Indigenous peoples, such as "decolonization (experiences), restoration of Indigenous languages (voices), and name reclaiming for self-determination (actions)", while the rest of the chapters that cover Indigenous topics are descriptive in nature, introducing cultural elements (Ho, 2022, p. 510). Simultaneously, the 71 chapters covering non-Indigenous topics partially include "mainstream stereotypes about Indigenous peoples or experiences of colonizers" uncritically reproducing the views of the dominant social group (Ho, 2022, p. 510). Mainstream views of Indigenous Peoples are reinforced especially by the prevalence of stereotypes, such as the focus placed on Christianity over traditional Indigenous beliefs, presenting Indigenous ways of life as primitive when contrasted with mainstream culture, and relating Indigenous celebration and social gatherings to alcoholism. A large number of chapters are narrated from non-Indigenous viewpoints, and as such do not reflect Indigenous voices.

In contrast to government developed textbooks, McNaught (2019) examines digital materials produced by Indigenous communities themselves. Grassroots level projects by Indigenous groups have used technological developments to "circumvent bureaucratic barriers" and engage with issues that the government is not actively supporting (McNaught, 2019, p. 71). This self-organization allows for the production and distribution of language materials that conform with Indigenous identities and values, as well as ensuring that even smaller language communities, which may be overlooked in government-led planning, can have access to materials that support the preservation of their language and culture. Online platforms are particularly useful for those Indigenous peoples who have emigrated to larger cities, and thus are "separated from their cultural roots", lacking "immediate access to native speakers and language teachers" (McNaught, 2019, p. 75). Through digital developments, language communities can connect without the need to be physically present in one place, and public access to language teaching materials encourages individual learning. The Council of Indigenous Peoples has led the development of digital media for Indigenous languages, including the Indigenous Peoples' Dictionary which covers all 16 recognized languages, a series of language e-books, and a website to practice for the Indigenous Language Proficiency Test (McNaught, 2019, p. 76). While this development of independent online materials for language learning is helpful, it can still be improved upon. For example, audio-visual media is needed for spoken language to be taught properly, while currently most materials have focused on written forms.

The materials for language learning assist teachers in conducting class activities, but the quality of Indigenous language materials developed by the government has not been optimal. For example, detailed grammar teaching is not found in books, creating barriers for deeper language learning (McNaught, 2021). In addition to being unsatisfactory teaching-wise, the government-developed textbooks have presented mixed views towards Indigenous Peoples, with stereotypes and narratives that downplay decolonization efforts and Indigenous self-determination (Ho, 2022). Contrasted with official textbooks used in schools, digital materials developed by Indigenous organizations can present both more detailed language resources and act as a platform for the voices of the Indigenous communities to speak on their experiences, rather than reproducing Han Chinese narratives (McNaught, 2019). As such, materials developed by Indigenous communities ought to be included further in Indigenous education, and other materials should be evaluated and discriminatory attitudes removed, or at least presented more critically if their inclusion is important. Materials that reproduce dominant mainstream narratives make addressing social inequality between ethnic groups more difficult.

3.4 Language attitudes

Language attitudes are a less concrete, although still crucial factor in ensuring successful language education. Lin et al. (2019) covers student attitudes towards language learning, based on a 2014 survey by the Council of Indigenous Peoples. While only a small portion of students communicate with their heritage language in daily life, they still report positive attitudes towards language learning; the majority of students "agreed that speaking their Indigenous language is the responsibility of all Indigenous people, and that parents should teach their children Indigenous languages" (Lin et al., 2019, p. 453). Most students report high interest in learning their heritage language, and agree on the importance of language learning for the preservation of Indigenous cultures. Most of the reasons preventing heritage language usage were reported to be due to the languages' inconvenience in daily communication, insufficient language ability, and environmental factors such as the lack of other speakers in the students' social circles (Lin et al, 2019, p. 454). Contradicting the survey done on students, schools reported student motivation to be low.

McNaught (2021) adds that due to the history of discriminatory language policy, Indigenous communities themselves have had conflicting views on language acquisition. Older generations especially feel ashamed of speaking their heritage languages and "lack an appreciation for their intrinsic value" as a result of traumatic experiences (McNaught, 2021, p. 132). Negative experiences and discriminatory treatment have compounded to younger generations, who are faced with socio-economic inequality. 70% of the working-age Indigenous population now lives in urban areas, which both influences their views on the instrumental value of heritage languages, and leaves primarily Indigenous rural areas to struggle economically as workers leave (McNaught, 2021, p. 132). The negative views on heritage language often held by older generations along with the belief that these languages lack economic utility has led to some families, especially those from "lower socio-economic backgrounds", to de-emphasise heritage language learning (McNaught, 2021, pp. 133–134).

Huang and Chan's (2024) study examines language learning motivation for Indigenous students. Due to the historical development of language shift, the heritage languages of Indigenous Peoples globally are now often learned as L2s rather than as L1s, which is the case in Taiwan as well. The study examines student motivation through the concept of the L2 motivational self, or the comparison of "one's imagined future self with one's actual self", and how steps are taken to align these two self-images (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 128). The "ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self" represent two images of what kind of L2 user the student imagines they would be; personal "language-related hopes, desires, and aspirations", as well as "the attributes that language learners believe they should possess to meet the expectations of others", respectively (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 128). Additionally, the "Indigenous heritage self" is conceptualised to measure "the extent to which learners are connected to their heritage

language and culture", identification with Indigenous "worldviews, beliefs, and knowledge systems" as well as care for "the future of their heritage language and culture" (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 134). For Indigenous Peoples, language learning motivation is "characterized by a strong sense of responsibility in securing the survival of language and culture" (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 131). Heritage language learning motivation in Taiwan's language revitalization context is understudied, which the study aims to address. 293 Indigenous students from a total of 11 separate ethnic groups are included in the study, which was conducted through a questionnaire (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 133). All students were attending weekly heritage language classes at grades between 10 to 12. The questionnaire focused on the students' backgrounds and language learning experiences, as well as motivational variables.

The study found that the ideal L2 self-image motivates language learning more than the ought-to self-image, in other words, intrinsic motivation matters more than outside expectations. The concept of the Indigenous heritage self "significantly predict[s] motivational intensity and classroom engagement", and acts as a separate, additional factor together with the ideal L2 self (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 139). For Indigenous learners, the emotional contact between their identity and their cultural legacy act as motivators for language learning in a way that is unique from most other L2 learner groups. The "responsibility for the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural maintenance" is a motivator that, while partly influenced by outside expectations, differs from the L2 learners' ought-to self-image in that the responsibility is seen as both personal and communal (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 139). A stronger connection to heritage language and culture correlates with motivation, while on the other hand the instrumental value of heritage language learning is seen as low, lacking economic and broader social benefits. As such, the authors suggest that including "motivational strategy instruction aimed at developing an ideal HL-speaking self" in Indigenous language education could connect the school environment with the cultural experiences Indigenous students have outside of the education system (Huang & Chan, 2024, p. 142).

Overall, the literature shows that while students report high interest in heritage language learning, broader social attitudes towards Indigenous language are mixed (Lin et al., 2019). Particularly the instrumental value of Indigenous languages is seen as low, which discourages language learning and use. The legacy of discriminatory treatment towards Indigenous minorities has led to some older generations to believe that assimilation would lead to improved quality of life, with less focus given on preserving traditional culture and language (McNaught, 2021). Still, the connection between culture, heritage, and language is seen as a significant motivator in heritage language learning, and as such increased focus on promoting Indigenous cultures in education could lead to increased language learning outcomes (Huang & Chan, 2024). While students report high language learning motivation, schools report motivation to be low (Huang & Chan, 2024; Lin et al., 2019). This contradiction

suggests that the way language education is conducted does not encourage students to prioritize heritage language classes. When society devalues Indigenous heritage, for example in curriculum designs and pedagogical practices, students may be discouraged to study as heritage language classes feel superficial. A broader attitude shift in education design to genuinely respect Indigenous cultures, along with the necessary material support, could tap into high student motivation and increase classroom engagement. As it currently is, the negative attitudes of the majority population towards the importance of Indigenous language harm Indigenous self-images and negatively affect language acquisition.

4 Discussion

Chapter 4 focuses on the analysis and discussion of the literature as covered in chapter 3. The chapter is organized in two parts: First, the literature presented in chapter 3 is compared across theme borders and synthesized to give a fuller image of Indigenous language education issues. Second, the issues brought up through comparative analysis are viewed from the linguistic human rights angle, answering the research question of the paper: How does Indigenous language education in Taiwan either support or hinder the linguistic human rights of Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples?

4.1 Comparative analysis

There is consensus in literature that covers curriculum issues in education, which is that the amount of classroom time afforded to Indigenous language education is not enough to substantially influence language learning. Only one class per week is spent on heritage language education, and while that is guaranteed for all minority students, the lack of resources, classroom spaces and qualified teachers shows that Indigenous language education is not prioritized in the mainstream schooling system (Lin et al., 2019; McNaught, 2021). This is both impractical for language revitalization, as language learning requires time and effort, but also reflects majority attitudes towards Indigenous languages and cultures, and the social standing of minority groups. While progress has been made, Indigenous minorities are still largely speaking in a marginalized position in a Han Chinese dominant society, which results in an education system that does not properly support them.

The literature on curriculum guidelines for Indigenous language also support the view that minority groups are not viewed equally in education. With the government's move towards supporting all of the various ethnic groups of Taiwan and promoting a multicultural society, a hierarchical relationship between groups is still implicitly shown in policies (Kasai 2024; Ho, 2022). Mandarin is still seen as the default language of broader society, and linguistic minorities are expected to respect this fact. Policies that underline the importance of Indigenous languages in words only, without actually promising the required resources and classroom time for teaching students their heritage language, reinforce this marginalized position.

The language loss in Indigenous communities has led to a shortage of fluent speakers, and as a cascading effect especially the shortage of native-speaking teachers. The lack of qualified, native teachers directly relates to issues with the language teaching curriculum, as there are not enough qualified teachers to hold classes for each of the 16 Indigenous language groups. This is the case even with only one weekly language class as the curriculum dictates, and were the curriculum to be updated to include more teaching hours, more teachers would be required. As Lin et al. (2019, p. 462) points

out, many language teachers travel and teach between multiple schools, and increased classroom hours would inevitably lead to increases in overlapping schedules and as such, the need for more teachers. To meet demand for teachers, The Council of Indigenous Peoples trains native speakers into language specialists, but these short workshops do not give the same skills as a full teacher training program would. This lack of teachers combined with the short workshop model for training language specialists also means that the quality of teaching may vary widely between areas and schools, setting students in unequal positions. The standardization of a proper teacher training program, particularly one that would encourage native speakers to enrol, would considerably improve language education across the board.

The influence of culturally Han Chinese views on Indigenous education can be seen both in studies related to teachers, as well as studies covering the teaching materials used. As there are comparably few Indigenous teachers, most teaching of Indigenous students is by non-Indigenous teachers, and pedagogical practices are modelled from Chinese cultural values (Nesterova, 2019). Education designed after Han Chinese customs leads to schooling encouraging assimilation and the loss of Indigenous culture and ways of life. While the lack of Indigenous teachers is brought up as a real problem (Nesterova, 2019), it is also shown that non-Indigenous teachers can work with Indigenous students in a constructive manner, although this requires additional training for cultural sensitivity and understanding Indigenous Peoples' values (Chen, 2023). This is most efficiently achieved through the collaboration between schools and their surrounding Indigenous communities. Non-Indigenous teachers in primarily Indigenous areas should include the local communities in education, and design classroom activities to be in alignment in local cultural practices. This is also shown to improve Indigenous students' learning outcomes (Chen, 2023). Indigenous language should be included in general education in addition to explicit language classes, to uphold both language skills and understanding of Indigenous culture. Experimental schools focused on teaching Indigenous cultures holistically throughout the whole curriculum, and especially immersion schools where the heritage language is the main language of instruction, would be ways to address these problems in Indigenous education (McNaught, 2021). However, resource problems and the lack of governmental support has led to only a small number of such schools being established.

When the majority of Indigenous language instructors lack formal pedagogical training, teaching materials designed by the Ministry of Education play a larger role in guiding education. However, these materials have been problematic in two major ways: First, their quality has been lacking. Instruction given by textbooks is generally limited to vocabulary, phonetic writing systems and pronunciation drills (McNaught, 2021). Especially detailed grammatical information is often left out, which together with language instructors who have not received full teacher training, makes the teaching of deeper concepts difficult.

Second, similarly to the cultural insensitivity issues present in the education system designed and implemented largely by non-Indigenous teachers, problems related to cultural representation are also present in teaching materials, as they often show majority group biases towards Indigenous Peoples. Textbooks designed by the government are conflicting in their depiction of Indigenous issues, mostly including texts focused on covering experiences from Indigenous points of view, and emphasizing decolonization, the restoration of Indigenous languages and cultures, and calling for increased autonomy and self-determination (Ho, 2022). However, a part of chapters uncritically reproduce mainstream views of Indigenousness along with stereotypes, which again implicitly places the majority group in a dominant position in society. Their views lead discourse on Indigenous problems and as a result the agency of Indigenous communities for making social change. As can be seen, this issue of majority group dominated discourse is prevalent in all levels of education, from policymaking and curricula, through teachers and their pedagogical practices into teaching materials. In contrast, the grassroots level digital materials developed independently or by organizations in collaboration with the CoIP more prominently advocate for Indigenous voices and experiences, along with distributing language learning materials. These are especially useful for the smaller linguistic communities as well as those not living in Indigenous areas, as their opportunities to engage with other Indigenous people may be limited (McNaught, 2019). Establishing more experimental schools which cater their materials specifically for the prevalent tribe of the area where they operate, adopting more independently developed materials, as well as supporting their creators, would be practical ways to both increase the amount of high-quality language learning materials as well as ensuring they reflect Indigenous cultures and worldviews.

As seen above, mainstream society's attitudes toward Indigenous language learning do not support Indigenous students. While students report high interest in learning their heritage language, at the same time schools report interest in language classes to be low (Lin et al., 2019). Assumedly the students' self-reported high interest in learning is genuine, supported by Huang and Chan's (2024) study, bringing to question why schools view motivation differently. The state of language education, considering its resource problems and dismissive attitudes from majority society, could be a factor in influencing student engagement even if language learning motivation is high. Since students do report high motivation to learn, increasing the resources afforded to education, as well as encouraging a cultural shift to genuinely respecting Indigenous heritages beyond the superficial attitude currently seen in mainstream society, could improve language learning outcomes and encourage the use of Indigenous languages along with promoting Indigenous culture. A stronger emphasis on the preservation of Indigenous culture, identity and heritage as a broader concept would motivate language revitalization efforts more (Huang & Chan, 2024). Again, immersion schools should be explored to a greater degree, especially in high-density Indigenous areas, and how they influence

language acquisition and attitudes towards cultural and linguistic preservation should be studied further.

Still, it needs to be recognized that issues in language education are not purely the fault of government management and planning. Especially the diversity of Indigenous languages in Taiwan creates practical difficulties, with 16 Indigenous languages officially recognized. Each linguistic group deserves proper education in their heritage language, and while this right is given to them in policy, in practice affording it to everyone is difficult, particularly in the case of smaller minority groups with few speakers left. Schools do not have infinite resources, and while more could be given out, they still must make decisions on what can be promoted and to what degree. This leads to cost saving measures such as holding heritage language classes together for members of different tribes, which naturally impacts the quality of teaching, but without such practices it is likely that no dedicated language classes could be offered to all students. Encouraging local Indigenous communities to set up language learning programs in their native areas could alleviate this and therefore also support indigenous autonomy, but the current legislation requires official education to be government organized (Ho, 2022). Looser regulation on education paired with oversight and support from governmental entities could encourage Indigenous communities to invest in their own education systems.

4.2 Linguistic human rights in Taiwanese Indigenous education

Considering the totality of what is discussed in the earlier section, it can be argued that the linguistic human rights of Indigenous Peoples are not properly respected, let alone actively supported, in the Taiwanese education system. The responsibility of ensuring LHRs for linguistic minorities falls on the government, based on international law and in the case of Indigenous communities, particularly the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Even while Taiwan is not formally a member of the UN, the government has set to follow the regulations of UNDRIP and as such is responsible for ensuring LHRs for Taiwan's Indigenous population (Dupré, 2019).

The three key linguistic human rights that relate to education are the right to education in the mother tongue, the right to acquiring the dominant language, and freedom from involuntary language shift (Szoszkiewicz, 2017). In the case of Taiwanese Indigenous minorities, only one of these rights is fulfilled, at the detriment to the other two: Indigenous Taiwanese do overall acquire the dominant language, Mandarin Chinese. Of course, this right is as important as the other two. Without acquisition of the dominant language, Indigenous minority communities cannot fully engage with dominant society, marginalizing them further from "political life, […] access to justice or access to various education institutions" (Szoszkiewicz, 2017, p. 111). However, acquiring only the dominant language without also being able to acquire one's heritage language inevitably leads to language loss. The

history of discriminatory language policies have in large part already led to involuntary, community-wide language shifts, violating the LHRs of Indigenous Peoples. The number of fluent speakers of the various Indigenous languages is very low in school-age demographics, as seen from McNaught's (2021, pp. 130–131) analysis of the ILPT scores. Indigenous heritage languages are by and large not used in daily life, in education or workplaces, and as younger generations struggle to gain fluent language ability, the vitality of these languages will continue to decline if no changes are made.

The history of assimilationist schooling policy can be seen as one of the leading causes of language shift. The current Taiwanese government traces its roots to the one party rule of KMT, who are described as enacting "the most aggressive anti-local language policies" in the latter half of the 20th century (McNaught, 2021, p. 129), and therefore both the legal and moral responsibility for change falls on them. Unfortunately past events cannot be undone. As a result, to respect the LHRs of Indigenous communities today means that revitalization efforts must be seriously implemented. Modern language policy and education ought to strive for enabling Indigenous youth to acquire their heritage language to a high degree, since as Skutnabb-Kangas (1994, p. 625) points out, "high levels of bi- or multilingualism" is the basic practical necessity for the LHRs of linguistic minorities. This ensures both their rights to equal engagement in society as well as the development of their heritage language and culture. Since Taiwan's democratization, changes have been made with the aim to rectify the damage caused by earlier assimilationist policy, but these changes made to heritage language education have been unsuccessful in enabling a high degree of bilingualism for Indigenous students. As such, more practical effort and the rethinking of policy is required to respect the LHRs of Indigenous communities. Indigenous students overall report high interest in the preservation of their unique culture and language learning (Lin et al., 2019; Huang & Chan, 2024), so it follows that if given the chance to learn in the proper environment and with enough support, larger scale language revitalization should be possible in Indigenous communities.

The most blatant breach of Indigenous LHRs in Taiwan's education system is the lack of mother tongue medium education, as education is primarily done through Mandarin Chinese. MTM education is emphasized as an integral part of ensuring LHRs for minority students (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001; 2012), and it is one of the fundamental rights afforded in Article 14 of UNDRIP. Education should be completely done through the student's heritage language, especially in early childhood education, as it ensures the right not to assimilate, to exist with a separate Indigenous identity and to reproduce this for future generations (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001, p. 204). Education in the mother tongue both respects the Indigenous identities and ensures their collective right to exist, but also practically would increase language learning outcomes compared to the current curriculum with only one weekly class of heritage language education. Indigenous students going through education in a Mandarin environment reinforces language shift, as the spheres where Indigenous language is used become limited. This in

turn works against other language revitalization programs: For language revitalization, the heritage language needs to be usable as widely as possible in different spheres of life. Limiting Indigenous languages outside the sphere of education conversely discourages their use more broadly, as the language's status in society diminishes and views on its usefulness become more negative.

Of course, considering the shortage of teachers who are native level speakers of Indigenous languages, as well as the diversity of Indigenous languages in Taiwan, the move to MTM education would have to be gradual. Still, efforts such as Hualien's immersive Amis schools (McNaught, 2021) have been undertaken to address this issue. Conducting a portion of classes fully in heritage languages already from early childhood education should be further explored, especially in areas with a high density of Indigenous students who share a heritage language. If found successful in promoting heritage language learning without negatively effecting other learning outcomes, such school programs could be expanded to include more areas and Indigenous groups. This would align Taiwanese education closer to the demands UNDRIP makes, respecting the right to MTM education and hopefully slowing down involuntary language shift.

Linguistic rights cannot be separated from other human rights, as they are reliant on each other. The equal right of Indigenous students to participate in society and to receive education is foundational to allowing Indigenous people to thrive, and their cultures and languages can only be truly preserved when the people do not face other forms of discrimination. Still, as can be seen from the literature covered, education designed for the majority causes more harm than purely language loss for Indigenous communities: Curriculum guidelines, national education policy, teaching materials and pedagogical practices in part reinforce the dominance of the majority (Kasai, 2024; Ho, 2022; Nesterova, 2019). Along with the loss of cultural tradition and identity, education that neglects the unique needs of Indigenous minority students disadvantages them, leading them to overall achieve lower educational outcomes and as a result lower wage employment (McNaught, 2021). The gap in educational outcomes can be seen especially in higher education, where the university dropout rate for Indigenous students is "twice the national average" (McNaught, 2021, p. 133).

Skutnabb-Kangas (1994, p. 626) notes that "a fair chance of success in relation to school achievement" is one of the practical requirements for LHRs. Higher school achievement allows the gap in the socio-economic status between the majority and the minority populations to narrow, which would strengthen the stance of Indigenous Peoples in general, and as a result also their heritage languages. Nesterova (2019) and Chen (2023) show that while most teachers in the education system are non-Indigenous, collaboration with Indigenous communities and adopting culturally sensitive pedagogical practices can lessen the negative impact of the Han Chinese derived education curriculum and improve Indigenous learning outcomes. This also fits into Skutnabb-Kangas' (1994, p. 626)

suggestions for the practical requirements for LHRs, which in addition to school success also highlight "positive intercultural attitudes". Naturally, factors outside of the education system such as the lingering effects of past discrimination also influence the lower socio-economic status of Indigenous Peoples, but a successful education system could be used to alleviate these problems, rather than adding to them as is the case now. Training teachers in culturally sensitive pedagogical practices and including Indigenous communities in curriculum planning would be a path to supporting the rights and social status of Indigenous Peoples, and further improving the promotion and revitalization of their cultures and languages.

As mentioned in the literature, the instrumental value of Indigenous languages is seen to be low by society, including Indigenous communities themselves (McNaught, 2021; Huang & Chan 2024). This has led to negative views towards the importance of language revitalization, especially in older generations who experienced the harshest linguistic discrimination first-hand. The assumption that assimilating into the majority community and their economic structures would ensure a materially better life has discouraged heritage language teaching in some Indigenous communities (McNaught, 2021). If the heritage language is given up voluntarily in this manner, it could be seen that language shift does not violate the LHRs of Indigenous Peoples. Skutnabb-Kangas (2012) presents a counterargument to this line of thinking, by examining LHRs in relation to power structures within a society. If the dominant majority group forces the choice between incorporation or cultural preservation, either directly or indirectly through discriminatory practices, the choice cannot be seen to be made freely. The colonisation of Indigenous lands leaves Indigenous communities in a marginalized position in relation to their colonizers (Galla & Holmes, 2024), and in such a situation language shift with the goal of gaining better access to economic social structures violates the LHRs of the members from the Indigenous minority. High levels of fluency in the majority language, which is the single LHR that Taiwanese Indigenous students consistently observe, allows for this structural integration. Considering that students view the importance of preserving their heritage identity and language to be high (Huang & Chan, 2024), there should be no reason to discourage the acquisition of heritage languages. Furthermore, as any person is a member of their broader social and cultural group from birth, the right of a child to learn their heritage language should not be hindered by negative attitudes towards language revitalization from older generations, even if these ideas may be well-intentioned.

Finally, Articles 3–5 of UNDRIP mandate that Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination, which includes rights to autonomy and the upholding of "their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions", while also having access to the institutions of the majority society (United Nations, 2007, p. 4). Article 14 adds the right "to establish and control [Indigenous] educational systems and institutions", providing MTM education in "a manner appropriate to their

cultural methods of teaching and learning" (United Nations, 2007, p. 5). Currently in Taiwan, Indigenous education is solely organized by the government, and while the establishing of autonomous Indigenous schools has been advocated for, this has not been possible in practice (Ho, 2022). Taiwanese legislation states that "Indigenous education shall be organized by the government" (Ho, 2022, p. 510), which downplays the autonomy of Indigenous communities to establish their own education systems, a right required by UNDRIP. States ought to respect this right to autonomous institutions and MTM education, both in legislation and in practice, which in Taiwan could be done, for example, through supporting Indigenous communities in establishing their own immersion schools.

Overall, two out of three of the basic LHRs of Taiwanese Indigenous students are not respected by the current state of education. In order for the Taiwanese government to do its duty and support the Indigenous minority communities that have suffered under prior discriminatory policies, changes in education ought to be made to respect the two rights that are currently unmet, being mother tongue medium education and slowing down of involuntary language shift, through language revitalization efforts with real world results. This chapter offers some practical ways of achieving this, but more research on specific points in needed, for example in how autonomous immersion schools could be established or how teacher training programs and pedagogical practices should be updated to support Indigenous students within the majority education system.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper examines the Taiwanese education system, particularly how the linguistic human rights of Indigenous communities are supported or hindered through policies and educational practices. The findings are that while progress has been made on the legislative level, education does not fully support the LHRs of Indigenous students. Striving to align the education system to respect the linguistic human rights of Indigenous communities, derived from international law and especially the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, would lead to changes that also have practical benefit for language revitalization and the improvement of Indigenous students' learning outcomes and socio-economic status.

The most pressing problem for Taiwan's Indigenous students is the lack of mother tongue medium instruction, one of the most important educational LHRs. In Taiwanese education, MTM education is limited to heritage language classrooms, which only take place for one class per week in the standard education curriculum. Furthermore, even in heritage language classes full MTM education for all tribes of Indigenous Peoples does not take place, as due to teacher and material shortages students from multiple tribes may attend class together. More MTM education is needed both to respect LHRs and to improve the practical learning outcomes for language revitalization purposes. This could be achieved by broadening the scope of full immersion schools, that have recently been established in some parts of Taiwan.

Additionally, Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples have already suffered a great deal of involuntary language shift, and to address the long legacy of discrimination, heritage language and culture revitalization efforts ought to be seriously implemented to avoid further loss. To revitalize languages through education, more resources are to be given for improving the quality of teaching, including a teacher training program that incentivizes native speakers to gain qualifications to act as teachers. Taiwanese Indigenous students have the equal right to attend national education, and are able to do this as overall are fluent in Mandarin Chinese. Still, other aspects of the education system disadvantage them. Curriculum and pedagogical practices are derived from Han Chinese values and ways of acting, and Indigenous voices are not valued enough in the decision making processes. Including Indigenous communities in curriculum design and its application in schools, along with culturally sensitive education by the majority teachers, would improve the learning outcomes of Indigenous students as well as show Indigenous cultures the equal respect they deserve.

Linguistic human rights in education is a field that ought to be studied more. This paper demonstrates that analysing issues of education through the LHR lens can have practical applications in suggesting changes to education systems, and as such shows that ensuring the rights for linguistic minorities is

not needed purely for moral reasons, but how this can be combined with materially and practically improving the standing of Indigenous Peoples in societies where they have suffered under discrimination. Also, how these changes are implemented and how they impact learning outcomes is still understudied. The effects of the most recent policies and education reforms in Taiwan when it comes to Indigenous language revitalization need to be studied further, to find out which methods support Indigenous students in acquiring heritage languages the most. Further studies that clarify these practical questions will be useful when refining education policy further, as it is a gradual process.

While this paper suggests a dire situation for Taiwan's Indigenous languages and cultures when it comes to the effects of the education system, hope is not lost. Taiwanese Indigenous cultures have survived through the worst era of discriminatory policy, and recent attitudes have shifted towards promoting their revitalization. Indigenous cultures have proven to be resilient, and Indigenous youth still overall highly value their heritage cultures and show high motivation for preservation and language learning. Through proper support from governmental channels, these Indigenous populations can reclaim their cultures and ways of life, keeping alive language and histories passed down for thousands of years.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Mandatory AI Use Declaration

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Mandatory AI Use Declaration

BA Dissertation Proseminar (CHIN0012) — Department of Chinese, University of Turku

Name: Riku Salmijärvi Student ID:

Dissertation title: Taiwanese Language Education: An Analysis of the Linguistic Human Rights of Indigenous Minority Communities Date: 18.5.2026

1. Which of the following did you use AI for? (Tick all that apply.)

☐ Brainstorming or narrowing my topic / research question
☐ Finding or summarising sources, or replacing reading I did not do
☐ Drafting paragraphs, sentences, or transitions that appear in the final text
☐ Translating my own writing between languages (Chinese / English / Finnish)
☐ Paraphrasing or rewriting passages from sources
☐ Generating or coding data, examples, tables, or quotations
☐ Proofreading grammar, spelling, and punctuation only
☐ Structuring or restructuring chapters / the argument
☐ Other (specify below)

2. List every AI tool you used (ChatGPT, Claude, DeepSeek, Gemini, Grammarly, Quillbot, DeepL Write, humanisers, etc.):

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3. Approximately what percentage of the final text was produced with AI assistance in any form (drafted, rewritten, translated, or substantially edited)?

☒ 0% ☐ 1–10% ☐ 11–25% ☐ 26–50% ☐ 51–75% ☐ more than 75%

4. Did you use an AI humaniser, paraphraser, or any tool designed to make AI text sound human or evade detection (e.g. Undetectable AI, StealthGPT, Quillbot humanise, manually inserting errors)?

☐ Yes ☒ No If yes, which tool and for which sections: _____

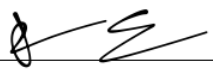
5. Can you, without AI, explain every argument, source, and analytical decision in your dissertation if I ask you in the viva?

☒ Yes, all of it ☐ Most of it ☐ Some parts I would need to revisit

6. Open response. Describe honestly how AI shaped your dissertation — what it helped you understand, where you relied on it more than you should have, and what in the final text is most clearly your own thinking. Vague answers ("only grammar") tell me nothing; specific answers build trust.

AI was not used for this dissertation.

Declaration. I confirm that the above is a complete and honest account of my AI use, and that the arguments, analysis, and critical engagement in my dissertation are my own work.

Signature:  Date: 18.5.2026