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## Efforts and Concerns for Indigenous Language Education in Taiwan

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**Efforts and Concerns for Indigenous Language Education in Taiwan**  
**Chen-Feng Joy Lin, I-An Grace Gao, and Pi-I Debby Lin**

**Handbook of Indigenous Education, Springer 2019**  
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Taiwan has over 16 tribes of Indigenous peoples, consisting of 42 local dialects from 3 major Austronesia language systems. Indigenous peoples in Taiwan have for centuries been assimilated into the surrounding Chinese Han culture. Following the international Indigenous people's rights movements in the 1980s, Indigenous peoples in Taiwan started a cultural and social movement, which resulted in the legislation of the Indigenous Peoples' Basic Law. The Basic Law leveraged room for negotiations to enact concrete efforts for Indigenous cultural revitalization. Language education is one of the most urgent priorities of this revitalization. The central government initiated a nationwide effort to preserve Indigenous languages. Two terms of the Six-Year Indigenous Language Revitalization Project have already been implemented by the government, which has laid the foundation for expanding Indigenous language education, including training Indigenous language teachers and developing an Indigenous Language Proficiency Certification. Many local governments are also involved in providing language learning opportunities for Indigenous children and youth, such as establishing Indigenous immersion kindergartens and incorporating Indigenous language curricula in elementary schools. Resources for online learning have also been designed, providing opportunities for learning Indigenous languages using computer and

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mobile technology. These top-down projects give rise to an increase of grassroots actions and awareness to preserve Indigenous languages has been intensified. This chapter provides an overview on works relevant to Indigenous language education in Taiwan and the challenges this project faces. Recommendations are given at the end to provide direction for future efforts on Indigenous language revitalization in Taiwan.

Indigenous education • Indigenous language • Taiwan • Indigenous language revitalization plan • Austronesian languages

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## Introduction

Indigenous peoples make up about 2% of the total population of Taiwan, totaling 549,127 people as of May, 2016 (RIS 2016). The Council of Indigenous Peoples currently recognizes 16 Indigenous tribes. They are the Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Tsou, Rukai, Puyuma, Saisiyat, Yami, Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Sediq, Hla'alua, and Kanakanava (Fig. 1).

Indigenous peoples in Taiwan speak languages belonging to the Austronesian family that encompasses 386 million people spreading from Easter Island in the east to Madagascar in the west, and from New Zealand in the south to Taiwan in the north (Bellwood 1991). Taiwan is believed to be the Austronesian homeland from a linguistic perspective (Blust 1984). About 24 Indigenous languages were found to be spoken in Taiwan up to the twentieth century, including Ketagalan, Taokas, Papora, Babuza, Favorlang, Hoanya, Siraya, Makattao, Taivoan, Kavalan, Pazeh,



**Fig. 1** Distribution of Indigenous tribes in Taiwan (Figure adapted from Taiwan Indigenous People's Knowledge Economic Development Association (2016))

Thao, Atayal, Saisiyat, Bunun, Tsou, Saaroa, Kanakanavu, Rukai, Paiwan, Puyuma, Amis, Sediq, and Yami. However, nine of the 24 languages (Keta[n]galan, Taokas, Papora, Babuza, Favorlang, Hoanya, Siraya, Makatto, and Taivoan) are already extinct (Zeitoun et al. 2003). Among the 16 officially recognized tribes, 42 local dialects have been recorded. The linguistic history of Taiwan is complex, demonstrating the diversity of the region.

A language is not only a tool for cultural exchange and communication but is also an important medium for passing on history, wisdom and cultural practices. Language provides evidence of an established society. However, with societal change, migration, and lack of support in the everyday environment, some languages face threats of extinction. What often eventuates is the emergence of a numerical or

politically powerful majority that influences the minority by forcing them to learn the dominant culture and language. Indigenous peoples have encountered Dutch traders, Spanish naval invasions, colonization by the Qing dynasty, and the national language education policy to assimilate them into the dominant society imposed by the Japanese and Han Chinese (Nationalist Party). These outside influences negatively influenced Indigenous people's identities and their aspiration to self-govern. Additionally, Indigenous languages were expected to go extinct under the unified language education policy. As the world started to realize the importance of endangered languages, the Indigenous peoples in Taiwan also became aware of the risks of losing their identity to assimilation with a larger group of people. Fortunately, Indigenous people still have their languages precariously preserved, some being frequently spoken in everyday life and some in the observance of religious practices. The progressive efforts of communities and government working together in recent years have led to the implementation of policies to preserve Indigenous languages. This chapter provides an analysis of the different policies, approaches, and their outcomes. The analysis hopes to make better policy recommendations for the future.

## Historical Background

To understand fully the state of Indigenous languages in Taiwan, it is essential to first understand the history. Based on archaeological evidence, Indigenous peoples of Taiwan have inhabited the land for thousands of years. Puyuma heritage artifacts date Indigenous people's existence on the island back to at least 7000 years ago (Digital Museum of Taiwan Indigenous Peoples 2016).

Studies of Indigenous languages of Taiwan can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Lee 2004). Analysis and historic comparisons of Indigenous languages have been documented even before these linguistics studies. For example, in 1822 J. H. Klaproth published "Sur la langue des indigènes de l'île de Formose" (On the indigenous languages of the Island of Formosa) in the *Asia Polyglotta*, which first confirmed the native languages of Taiwan to belong to the Austronesian family. In 1859, H.C. von der Gabelentz's article, "Über die formosanische Sprache und ihre Stellung in demmalaiischen Sprachstamm" (About the Formosan language and its position in the Malaysian language family), discussed the relationship of Taiwanese Indigenous languages to various Austronesian languages.

Dutch colonizers in Taiwan learned Indigenous languages during occupation (Li 2007). They translated and taught the Bible to Indigenous Peoples in their own Indigenous languages. In contrast, the Qing dynasty completely ignored the existence of Indigenous languages and attempted to eliminate them. Because there were different dialects used by the Han Chinese immigrants on the island at that time, the government allowed the Han Chinese to speak in their mother tongues to study Confucian teachings; however, Indigenous peoples were restricted to use their own mother tongues. The Japanese colonial period initially respected the Indigenous languages, but slowly used this as a lure to manipulate a new educational policy that

assimilated Taiwanese culture into Japanese culture. By the end of the Japanese colonial period, there were strong restrictions on Indigenous language usage.

The Chinese Nationalist party, which reclaimed Taiwan in 1949, was the first colonial regime that brings Indigenous education into the modern education system. Since the retrocession of Taiwan by the Nationalist Party, five major language education policies have been proposed (Chao 2014). The first is the Retrocession of Taiwan in 1945–1949, during which Mandarin Chinese was recognized along with Indigenous languages. Starting in 1945, the Chinese Nationalist Party implemented an assimilation policy on Indigenous peoples and began the removal of Japanese influences. At this point, Mandarin Chinese was used in classroom to transition from Japanese, although Indigenous languages were still permitted in schools. The second era was the time from 1949 to 1987, when the government of the Republic of China relocated to Taiwan and enforced strict, Mandarin-only policies while prohibiting all other languages. This period is also marked by the most intense persecution of Indigenous people. In 1949, the government announced the “Mountain Education Policy” which promoted the speaking of Mandarin and prohibited any Indigenous people from speaking or teaching their Indigenous languages. The third policy was enacted after the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 and ran until 1998. This period saw the initiation of a revival of Indigenous languages and education. However, most of the focus were on other local dialects spoken in Taiwan and most teachers still delivered lesson content in Mandarin and no strong emphasis was placed on Indigenous language education. More challenges surfaced as many of the elders fluent in Indigenous languages passed away. The fourth period involves the implementation of the Education Act for Indigenous Peoples in 1998–2005. Policies and legal standards for Indigenous language education started when the Draft for the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law was announced in 1998. The Education Fundamental Act, which passed in 1999, gave provisions for special support for the Education Act for Indigenous Peoples (1998). The final stage began with the passage of the Indigenous People’s Basic Law in 2005. The Ministry of Education and the Council of Indigenous Peoples modified the Education Act for Indigenous Peoples after the Indigenous People’s Basic Law was enacted. This change included Indigenous languages under the purview of Indigenous education. A proficiency requirement for Indigenous languages was added to the Affirmative Action of Indigenous Education in 2007 to encourage students to learn their Indigenous language.

This historical overview shows that even though Taiwan is the home of many Indigenous peoples, much of Indigenous people’s cultural heritage was destroyed by political, social, cultural, and educational threats imposed over four centuries of colonization by the Dutch, Spanish, Qing, and Japanese (Chen 2004).

The destruction of language in the process of social change is an important catalyst to establish protective policies to revitalize Indigenous languages. Indigenous peoples of Taiwan have also come to a greater self-realization after years of unequal treatment that it is time to claim equal rights and to practice and maintain Indigenous culture and lifestyle, including their language. In the drafting of the Indigenous Language Development Act of 2015, it was noted that Indigenous peoples of Taiwan suffered great losses from the enforcement of the Mandarin

speaking policy, and the first step toward cultural revitalization was to preserve the language. From a political perspective, appropriate action and methods should be taken to communicate the importance of Indigenous languages not only in Indigenous communities but also in all communities in Taiwan.

## **Legislative and Policy Support for Indigenous Language education**

In this section we provide an in-depth review of the legislative and policy efforts in Indigenous language education at different stages that have supported the raising of Indigenous cultural awareness and cultural identity. Three interrelated parts are discussed in this section. First, we delineate the institutional basis of Indigenous language education in both the Constitution and the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law. Institutional underpinning is examined to show the environment of Indigenous language education on the legal level. Second, we discuss the critical roles of the Council of Indigenous Peoples and the Ministry of Education in upholding Indigenous language education. Finally, an up-to-date account of the development of the Indigenous Language Development Act is provided to demonstrate the historical contingency of Indigenous language education in Taiwan.

The rights for Indigenous language education first appeared in national law in 1997. The highest law in Taiwan, the Constitution of the Republic of China, included an additional article to embrace cultural pluralism. Paragraph 11 of the Additional Article 10 promulgated July 21, 1997, states, “the State affirms cultural pluralism and shall actively preserve and foster the development of Indigenous languages and cultures.” This provision initiated the legal foundation to establish more detailed laws to reform Indigenous language education. The Additional Article of the Constitution affirmed the importance of Indigenous languages.

The Council of Indigenous People (formally Council of Indigenous Peoples, Executive Yuan) is the central institution that governs Indigenous affairs in Taiwan. At its inception in 1996, the Department of Education and Culture ranked Indigenous language research, preservation, and heritage as the top priorities (Palemeq and Muzuer 2015). The Council of Indigenous People referenced various international legal instruments to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples to use, preserve, and develop Indigenous languages. The Indigenous Peoples Basic Law, promulgated in 2005, specifically states the rights for Indigenous languages in Articles 9, 12, and 30. The Basic Act states that development of Indigenous languages shall be stipulated by law. Article 9 lays out the plan for a research agency on Indigenous languages, a language proficiency evaluation system, and preferential measures for Indigenous peoples who have proficiency in Indigenous languages. Article 12 provides foundations for Indigenous language broadcast media and institutions, and Article 30 provides for Indigenous language interpretation. Beyond the general provisions stipulating that the government shall respect Indigenous languages (Article 30), the Basic Law did not explicitly discuss the right for Indigenous language education.

The Ministry of Education is another primary administrator of Indigenous education matters. The Ministry first compiled primary school curricula for Indigenous language education in 1995. The Education Act for Indigenous Peoples of 1998 incorporates Indigenous languages in sections on school education (Article 10), curricula (Article 21), qualified teachers (Article 24 and 26), and social education (Article 28 and 30). The Education Act for Indigenous Peoples specifically calls “to ensure young Indigenous children have the opportunities to learn their own Indigenous language, history and culture” (Article 10) within the public education system. With regards to curricula, Article 21 states “governments at all levels shall provide Indigenous students at preschool, elementary school and junior high school level with opportunities to learn their respective ethnic languages, histories and cultures.” The Education Act for Indigenous Peoples also adds the requirement of a language proficiency test for qualified teachers (Article 24). Articles in the Act clearly state the methods for Indigenous language preservation. Projects and additional actions have also been generated based on these articles and the Basic Law, reflecting the will of the government to preserve languages with tangible plans and programs.

The Taiwanese government worked on establishing the Indigenous Language Development Act to have a legal base for Indigenous language development after the promulgation of the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law in 2005. Support for Indigenous languages is most strongly evident in Article 9 of the Basic Law, which calls for the creation of a dedicated agency on Indigenous language. Article 9 states,

The government shall establish a special unit responsible for Indigenous language researches and for an Indigenous language proficiency evaluation system in order to actively engage in the promotion of Indigenous language development.

The government shall provide preferential measures for Indigenous peoples or hold special civil service examinations designed for Indigenous peoples where, under the relevant laws and regulations, it may require beneficiaries or candidates to pass the afore-mentioned evaluation or have proficiency in Indigenous language.

The development of Indigenous language shall be stipulated by law. (Indigenous Peoples Basic Law)

In May 2017, the Indigenous Language Development Act passed its third reading and took effect. Indigenous languages are symbols of identity, culture, and validity for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous language education has been implemented in Taiwan for more than a decade, and significant progress has been made in laying the legal foundation for Indigenous language education. Nevertheless, even with the Indigenous Language Development Act, the situation for the endangered languages remains dire and many scholars and educators have expressed concerns over the effectiveness of the current policies on revitalizing Indigenous languages (Chao 2014). The next section of the chapter will explore the current condition of Indigenous education and discuss the challenges encountered during the implementation of Indigenous language education and revitalization projects.

**Table 1** Indigenous language usage among participants of the first Indigenous language survey (Data adopted from the Council of Indigenous People's Indigenous Language Report (2016a))

Name of tribe	Number of participants	Percentage of Indigenous language speakers (%)	Percentage of participants >61 years old who can speak an Indigenous language (%)	Percentage of middle school students (grades 7–9) who can speak an Indigenous language (%)	Percentage of the speakers who feel their Indigenous language is fluent (%)
Kuvalan	384	47.0	85.5	17.8	2.0
Thao	239	26.2	43.5	11.0	3.0
Tsou	1028	61.4	86.0	34.3	25.7
Kanakanavu	207	32.0	75.0	19.5	5.0
Hla'alua	254	10.6	47.6	4.6	1.0

## Current Condition of Indigenous Languages in Taiwan

Indigenous language classes are available in formal and informal educational systems. In the formal education system, 20 Indigenous language immersion kindergartens are currently available; one 40-min Indigenous language class per week is required from first grade to sixth grade and is offered as an elective from seventh grade to ninth grade. College level courses are available in several universities, including National Chengchi University, National Donghua University, National Taiwan University, and National Hsinchu University of Education. In informal educational systems, there are language nest classes (available in the evenings and on the weekends), language classes in tribal and community colleges, and intensive summer Indigenous language classes (Huang 2015). Indigenous language classes are crucial in the process of revitalization. The language vitality surveys conducted by the Council of Indigenous Peoples provide additional information on how best to engage with Indigenous speakers.

These two national surveys aimed to understand the current situation of Indigenous language usage. The surveys included an Indigenous language situation questionnaire and an Indigenous language ability questionnaire. The first survey was conducted in 2012 targeting the Kuvalan, Thao, Tsou, Kanakanavu, and Hla'alua tribes in Taiwan. Out of 8,494 Indigenous persons from the five tribes, 2,112 participated in the study. The survey showed that among the five tribes, the percentage of participants who spoke their Indigenous language was the lowest among the Hla'alua tribe (Table 1). The majority of these speakers were over 61 years old. The Tsou tribe had the highest percentage of middle schoolers (seventh grade to ninth grade) who can speak their mother tongue and the highest percentage of speakers who feel their Indigenous language abilities are fluent. Among the other four tribes, only 1.0–5.0% of the participants reported fluency in their Indigenous language.

**Table 2** Indigenous language usages among participants of the second Indigenous language survey (Data adopted from the Council of Indigenous People’s Indigenous Language Report (2016a))

Name of tribe	Dialect	Number of participants	Percentage of Indigenous language speakers (%)	Percentage of participants >61 years old who can speak an Indigenous language (%)	Percentage of middle school students (grades 7–9) who can speak an Indigenous language (%)	Percentage of the speakers who feel their Indigenous language is fluent (percent varied across age group) (%)
Amis	Northern Amis	819	48.1	84.6	16.7	2–14
Amis	Central Amis	1353	53.0	86.0	22.0	2–14
Amis	Costal Amis	2455	55.8	86.9	33.3	2–17
Amis	Malan Amis	884	61.9	93.6	9.7	2–26
Amis	Hengchun Amis	341	49.6	87.5	19.6	1–18
Bunun	Takituduh	276	46.0	85.0	9.7	1–18
Bunun	Takibakha	364	68.7	100	50.0	0–11
Bunun	Takivatan	243	64.6	84.3	32.5	3–15
Bunun	Takbanuaz	573	58.8	90.5	32.4	1–15
Puyuma	Nanwang	284	35.6	84.8	3.2	1–15
Puyuma	Katratripul	227	21.1	54.2	5.4	0–6
Puyuma	Ulivivek	321	28.7	77.1	1.9	2–19
Puyuma	Kasavakan	179	33.0	81.3	5.9	2–19
Saisiyat		1143	31.9	81.8	13.9	2–19
Tao		1002	74.9	92.2	59.4	1–28
Sakizaya		295	69.8	95.5	46.2	2–4

In the second survey (Table 2) conducted in 2013 by the Council of Indigenous Peoples, the targeted groups included: Amis, Bunun, Puyuma, Saisiyat, Tao, and Sakizaya. Different dialects within each tribe were also surveyed, among which, the Amis and Bunun tribes had five different dialects each, and the Puyuma had four different dialects, while the remaining three languages have only a single dialect, for a total of 17 Indigenous dialects surveyed. The total population from these six tribes is 280,736 Indigenous persons, and 12,177 of them were randomly sampled to participate in the study. A high proportion of subjects surveyed from the Tao, Sakizaya, Bunun, and Amis tribes still speak their traditional dialect. However, most of the speakers were elders aged 61 years or older. The percentage of young

people who can speak their traditional dialects was relatively low and a smaller portion of people felt their Indigenous language was fluent.

These data suggested that Indigenous languages are losing their vitality. Differences were found across regions, dialects, and age groups in regards to the use of Indigenous languages. Overall, the loss of Indigenous languages was more severe in nontraditional territories compared to traditional territories. Most Indigenous language speakers were elders, and major loss of Indigenous language was observed among the group aged 30–40. Most of the participants reported speaking Indigenous languages with family, during traditional ceremonies, or in tribal gatherings. Although Indigenous languages are less used among Indigenous peoples, most participants did report positive attitudes toward the revitalization of Indigenous languages, suggesting that the effort to promote and revitalize Indigenous languages has some positive effects.

## **Students' Attitudes Toward Learning Indigenous Languages**

The Council of Indigenous Peoples has been publishing annual reports on Indigenous Education since 1998. In 2014, they assessed Indigenous students' attitudes toward learning Indigenous languages. The survey was conducted with seventh grade Indigenous students in both regular middle schools and Indigenous middle schools. According to Article 3 of the Education Act of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous middle schools are schools where the student population consists of more than one-third Indigenous students. The survey found the number of students who understand their mother tongue was low based on the students' self-reported listening ability. Only 4.24% reported to be at expert level, meaning they fully understand the spoken language (Table 3). In regards to speaking ability, the majority of the students reported having novice levels (Table 4). A higher percentage of Indigenous middle school students reported understanding the language compared to those students who study at regular middle schools. This suggests that environment is an important factor affecting students' ability to speak in their mother tongue and that the mainstream education curricula may have suppressed students' ability to learn Indigenous languages.

Singing is a type of verbal expression that can help students understand their mother tongues. Traditional songs can especially help with sentence retention, remembering traditional stories, and other historical content. Indigenous peoples in Taiwan historically used songs and rituals to communicate with nature and with each other. Sawtoy (2016) pointed out that songs and dances are central to the traditional Amis culture. During religious rituals, celebrations, work, and leisure time, Amis people sing and dance to express their feelings and emotions. Indigenous elders use chanting to pass down oral history from one generation to another. It has been said by Indigenous peoples that, "songs make up our being" (Sawtoy 2016). Students' Indigenous language ability has also been evaluated by their ability to sing traditional melodies and folk songs. The survey on students' ability to sing Indigenous songs shows that more than half of the students knew at least a few songs. Similar to

**Table 3** Self-reported Indigenous language listening ability among seventh grade Indigenous students (Data adopted from the Council of Indigenous Peoples (2014))

School	Total (N)	Expert (%)	Intermediate (%)	Novice-intermediate (%)	Novice-low (%)	Cannot understand (%)	Did not respond (%)
Indigenous middle schools	1748	6.12	31.92	17.62	37.53	5.78	1.03
Regular middle schools	3985	3.41	19.15	13.90	46.35	16.51	0.68
Total	5733	4.24	23.04	15.04	43.66	13.24	0.78

**Table 4** Self-reported Indigenous language speaking ability among seventh grade Indigenous students (Data adopted from the Council of Indigenous Peoples (2014))

School	Total (N)	Expert (%)	Intermediate (%)	Novice-intermediate (%)	Novice-low (%)	Do not speak (%)	No response (%)
Indigenous middle schools	1629	2.95	5.77	55.37	30.69	4.54	0.68
Regular middle schools	3300	1.64	4.03	43.79	42.73	7.15	0.67
Total	4929	2.07	4.61	47.62	38.75	6.29	0.67

their language ability, a higher percentage of students from Indigenous Middle Schools indicated familiarity with Indigenous songs (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2014a).

One of the biggest challenges for Indigenous language revitalization is that younger Indigenous people do not communicate daily in their mother tongues anymore. The 2014 survey showed that only 6.83% of students reported using their mother tongue every day. The low rate of Indigenous language communication among young Indigenous students makes revitalization work even more challenging. Student motivation and attitude are important concerns for promoting Indigenous language education. When asked about students' perception of Indigenous languages in society, more than half of the students reported few people speak their Indigenous language as the first language. When students hold this kind of perception, they may feel there are not enough people with whom they can communicate using their Indigenous language. This saps motivation for them to speak or to learn Indigenous languages. However, most students do hold a positive attitude about using Indigenous languages. The survey also indicated that the majority of the students agreed that speaking their Indigenous language is the responsibility of all Indigenous people, and that parents should teach their children Indigenous languages. Students agreed that speaking Indigenous languages is a means for cultural inheritance and were proud of their Indigenous culture and languages. When asking students the reason preventing them from speaking Indigenous languages, most students reported, "using Indigenous language is not very convenient to communicate with others" (38.64%). Other reasons reported included, "not being able to speak Indigenous languages even though my parents can speak the mother tongue" (26.13%), "people around me do not speak Indigenous language" (21.16%), "personal psychological factors" (15.09%), "Indigenous languages were not taught in school" (8.75%), and "parents do not speak Indigenous languages" (6.50%). The reasons reported by students enrolled in regular school and Indigenous middle schools were comparable.

Despite the fact that Indigenous languages are not widely used in daily conversation, most Indigenous students in seventh grade were willing to learn Indigenous languages. More than 50% of seventh grade Indigenous students in regular middle schools reported high interest in learning Indigenous languages and only 1.95% reported no interest at all.

As most Indigenous parents lose the ability to communicate with their children in Indigenous languages, the role of Indigenous language teachers becomes crucial. The responsibility to pass on Indigenous languages is being placed on schools and Indigenous teachers. Stakeholders often challenge this approach to language revitalization. 79.87% of the Indigenous middle schools and 80.01% of the Indigenous elementary schools reported difficulties in teaching Indigenous languages (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2014). Reasons for the hardship were threefold. First, the school reported that students did not express a high interest in learning Indigenous languages. Second, students came from different tribes, resulting in a small student body for each language, thus making it hard to allocate enough resources for each language. Third, schools reported difficulty in finding Indigenous language teachers.

In elementary schools, similar problems were noted. In addition, a lack of supportive environment to learn Indigenous languages at home and in local communities was reported. Funding and Indigenous language curricula, in contrast, were of less of concern.

The above revelations indicate that fewer and fewer Indigenous students are using Indigenous languages in daily life. The force of assimilation of the Han Chinese mainstream dialect is silent yet powerful. Indigenous languages in Taiwan now face endangerment. Fortunately, most Indigenous students showed positive cultural identity and high interest in learning Indigenous languages. Another major difficulty in current Indigenous language education is the small teaching force. More Indigenous language teachers are desperately needed in order to revitalize the language for the next generation (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2014). In the next section of the article, policy efforts on revitalizing Indigenous language will be presented.

## **Indigenous Language Education Policy and Projects in Taiwan**

The discussion on Indigenous language education policy and projects can be divided into national and local levels. Council of Indigenous Peoples and Ministry of Education are the two primary national level governmental agencies charged with administering Indigenous language education.

Major projects from the Council of Indigenous Peoples will be presented first, including the Six-Year Indigenous Cultural Revitalization and Development Project, Six-Year Indigenous Language Revitalization Project, Indigenous Language Proficiency Certification, and training of Indigenous language teachers, followed by discussions on the efforts made by the Ministry of Education. At the end of this section, example projects carried out by local governments will be presented.

### **Council of Indigenous Peoples**

#### **Six-Year Indigenous Cultural Revitalization and Development Project**

Indigenous language research, preservation, and heritage were one of the mandated areas for the Council of Indigenous Peoples at its establishment in 1996. Starting in 1999, the Six-Year Indigenous Cultural Revitalization and Development Project encompassed Indigenous language revitalizations (The first 6- Year Indigenous Language Revitalization Project 2008). The main goals of the first Six-Year Indigenous Cultural Revitalization and Development Project (1999–2004) included (1) reconstruction of tribal history, (2) establishment of Indigenous academy to promote cultural education, (3) construction of Indigenous museums, (4) promotion of cultural development among Indigenous teenagers, (5) training and empowerment of Indigenous persons and groups, and (6) Indigenous language revitalization.

After the completion of the first Six-Year project, a second Six-Year Indigenous Cultural Revitalization and Development Project (2008–2013) was proposed, with a total budget of approximately USD\$ 3.3 million (The second 6-Year Indigenous cultural revitalization and development project 2008; The Second 6-Year Indigenous Language Revitalization Project 2014). Its aims were (1) training of Indigenous professionals in history, culture, and art (including Indigenous Youth Cultural Enrichment Program); (2) research on Indigenous history, culture, and art; (3) enrichment of Indigenous museums; (4) creating environments to develop Indigenous music and dance; (5) subsidies for Indigenous communities to host traditional rituals and ceremonies; (6) promotion of all forms of artistic events; and (7) setting up offices for Indigenous cultural revitalization.

Compared to the first Six-Year project, the second placed more emphasis on art and culture. Due to the large scope of Indigenous language revitalization, a separate program was proposed that focused specifically on language revitalization efforts.

## **Six-Year Indigenous Language Revitalization Project**

Indigenous languages education was included in the first Cultural Revitalization and Development Project, but the results were inconclusive. Due to the large scope and efforts required for language revitalization, a new project specifically focused on Indigenous languages was initiated in 2008. The funding for this project came from the central government, with a total budget of approximately USD\$ 23.6 million. This is the most important project for Indigenous language education, as it is the biggest nationwide project to target Indigenous languages specifically. The project had ten primary goals: (1) strengthen Indigenous language legislation; (2) establish Indigenous language organizations; (3) develop dictionaries for Indigenous languages and Indigenous language curricula; (4) promote research on Indigenous languages and development; (5) cultivate Indigenous language revitalization staff; (6) promote family-, tribal-, and community-based learning of Indigenous languages; (7) utilize multimedia and digital technology for teaching Indigenous languages; (8) implement Indigenous Language Proficiency Certification; (9) collect traditional and modern Indigenous songs; and (10) train specialists to translate policy, law, and regulations into Indigenous languages. The ultimate goals of the project are to preserve Indigenous languages as living languages in hope that, 1 day, Indigenous languages can be incorporated as official languages of Taiwan.

After the implementation of the First Six-Year Indigenous Language Revitalization Project, several problems were identified, including the slow progress on language revitalization, the rise of diverse learning media, the hardship of promoting the Indigenous Writing System, the urgency of saving endangered languages, and the lack of Indigenous language specialists. In addition, the numerous dialects and their complexity made the language revitalization process even more challenging. In the Second Six-Year Indigenous Language Revitalization Project (2014–2019), six main goals were set out to address these challenges. The first goal is to strengthen the connection between Indigenous languages and families where languages are used.

There it is vital to create a family learning environment. It is evident that reviving the connection is essential to ensure successful languages revitalization. To build on the experience of the first 6-year program, the second 6-year program will continue to work on making “speaking and learning Indigenous languages” the trend in the Indigenous society.

The second goal is to build a comprehensive learning system from the cradle to the grave. The emphasis is placed in developing a systematic learning process, starting with Indigenous language immersion in preschool to adult education. In addition, digital technology is employed to make learning Indigenous languages more efficiently. Apart from the abovementioned enabling environmental factors to revitalize Indigenous languages, the role of specialists should not be overlooked. Therefore, the third goal of the project is to train Indigenous language revitalization specialist. To ensure specialists being sustainable, a comprehensive training system for Indigenous language revitalization specialists is warranted, including four levels of training (basic, beginner, advanced, and professional). Collaboration is urgently needed with higher education institutions that provide master and PhD programs in Indigenous language studies. Funding for short-term study abroad and for attending international conferences to facilitate experience sharing from other countries is also necessary. Of course, the presence of the specialists alone cannot guarantee the success of revitalization because what is being taught matters. This brings us to the fourth goal: the curricula. The Indigenous language learning curricula has to be diversified. Three sets of curricula had been developed in the first Six-Year Project (“Words,” “Daily Conversation,” and “Reading and Writing”). Advanced-level curricula (such as “Cultural and Creative Work”) and other diverse curricula will be developed, such as children’s books, translated books, Indigenous literature, and grammar books. An online database on Indigenous language resources and e-learning website will be established under this project. Diversifying the Indigenous language curricula is the first step to fully recognize the language rights of the Indigenous peoples, which brings us to the fifth goal: language rights.

The meaning of language rights may be context-dependent. Language is a right to freedom, which shall be freely used by the people without interference by the State. At the same time, it is a social right that a State shall be obligated to promote. For Indigenous peoples, it is also a form of collective right, linked with the sustainability of its nation. Therefore, the key factor of whether this project can be successful depends on whether the state is honoring its constitutional obligation.

Lastly, the project also takes note in eliminating discrimination based on sex and promotes gender equality. The concept of gender identity and gender sensitivity shall be incorporated when implementing the Indigenous language revitalization at all stages.

## **Indigenous Language Proficiency Certificate**

The Indigenous Language Proficiency Certificate was proposed in 2001. The Certificate provides four levels of proficiency ranking, including basic, intermediate,

advance, and professional. No restriction was set on applicants' nationality, age, ethnicity, or education level. In 2014, the Indigenous language proficiency test required for the Affirmative Action for Indigenous Students was incorporated into the Indigenous Language Proficiency Certificate program. Currently, certifications are available for 16 language groups and 42 dialects and are given in 16 test sites. According to a survey conducted by the Council of Indigenous Peoples (2014a), most of the Certificates were granted for Amis, Paiwan, and Bunun languages. Between 2001 and 2011, a total of 17,165 people had applied for the certificate and 8321 people passed the test. The development of a test bank and practices tests was initiated in 2008.

## **Training of Indigenous Language Teachers**

No formal educational training is required for Indigenous language teachers at this point. The Council of Indigenous Peoples hosted training workshops to prepare fluent speakers who had obtained the Indigenous Language Proficiency Certificate to become teachers. By 2011, more than 4000 people had attended the workshops (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2014). Opportunity for observational learning was provided based on different curricula. A database of qualified Indigenous language specialists was built in 2008. More than 5000 people who had obtained the Indigenous Language Proficiency Certificate or had attended the training workshop were registered in the database (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2014).

## **Online Learning Materials**

The Council of Indigenous Peoples developed online learning materials to meet the growing demand of online learning in the forms of online dictionaries, e-Books, and an e-learning platform.

Indigenous Language Online Dictionary (2016e) began its development in 2007. Sixteen online dictionaries are currently available, one for each of the 16 officially recognized tribes. The dictionary provides search functions from and to Mandarin Chinese. The dictionaries can be downloaded for offline use. Other learning materials on the website include downloadable vocabulary flashcards, vocabulary games and assessments. The website has on average 15,000 viewers per day, and a total of 9.8 million views up to June 2016 (Indigenous Language Online Dictionary 2016e).

Indigenous Language E-Park is the central platform for Indigenous languages learning, it provides downloadable textbooks, multimedia materials (videos and interactive children's books), online games, teaching materials and resources for teachers, and links relevant to Indigenous languages (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2016a). Another online e-learning platform is the Indigenous e-Learning website, which provides downloadable textbooks and teaching materials, video courses, and online courses (Indigenous e-Learning 2014b). Courses in vocabulary, songs, and stories are available for 14 Indigenous languages. There are currently a total of

42 courses available on the website now. An Android App “Indigenous Language Genius” is also available (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2016a). It provides the learning curricula for grade 9–12. However, no statistics are yet available on the utilization frequency of these e-learning materials.

Taiwan Indigenous eBooks, which is available in both website and mobile App format, provides 355 eBooks in 16 different Indigenous languages. More than 7,000 reads had been recorded at the end of June 2016 (Taiwan Indigenous eBooks 2016c).

## **Indigenous Language Research and Development Center**

Funded in 2013, the Indigenous Language Research and Development Center was established on the basis of Article 9 of the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law, which states “the government shall establish (a) special unit responsible for indigenous language researches and (an) indigenous language proficiency evaluation system in order to actively engage in the promotion of indigenous language development.” The five mandated goals for the center included: (1) research on loanwords and new words; (2) research on the Indigenous Language Proficiency Certification test and the construction of a test bank; (3) research on Indigenous language teaching methods, including curricula assessment and development; (4) research on grammar and word formulation; and (5) research on Indigenous language revitalization (Indigenous Language Research and Development Center 2016f).

Some examples of the work accomplished by the center include hosting international conferences on Indigenous languages, translation of western literature texts into 16 Indigenous languages (Palemeq 2016) and publishing research findings on loanwords, new words, and the language revitalization process (Indigenous Language Research and Development Center 2016f). The center is also very active in disseminating information on social media to engage with a broader audience.

## **Ministry of Education**

Prior to the establishment of the Council of Indigenous Peoples, the Ministry of Education had started to develop and compile Indigenous language curricula as part of its Indigenous Education Development and Improvement Projects. In 2006, the Ministry initiated the Indigenous Education Development Five-Year Midterm Case Project (2006–2010) to encompass Indigenous language teaching into the Local Dialect classes required for primary schools. The Ministry also developed learning assessment methods and a training system for Indigenous teachers. In higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education set up programs for Indigenous studies, task forces for Indigenous language teaching, and Indigenous Research and Development Centers.

To establish an Indigenous writing system, the Ministry first commissioned Professor Paul Jen-Kuei Li to develop the Austronesian Language Symbol System (1994). The system was later replaced by the Indigenous Language Writing

System to ensure consistency (Council of Indigenous Peoples and Ministry of Education 2005).

Progress concerning indigenous education can be observed from the White Paper for Indigenous Education Policy (2011) published by the Ministry of Education. In the white paper, Indigenous languages education was pointed out as one of the key issues in Indigenous education (Ministry of Education 2011). Instead of having a ministry-wide program, small projects were implemented to promote Indigenous language education across different sectors in the Ministry. The Ministry of Education's annual educational report provides detailed examples of the programs that had been implemented in promoting Indigenous languages. To sum up, two measures can be delineated when it comes to promote indigenous languages: institutional reform and the development of language tools.

First, institutional reform took place within the educational system at both elementary and tertiary level. Indigenous language teaching was implemented at kindergarten level during 2014–2015, and grants were provided for local government to institute educational programs for this type of mother tongue language education. On the other hand, nine universities formed associations to train elementary school teachers and set up local language educational centers in schools. These centers are responsible for the development and promotion of local language programs.

Second, language tools were developed to facilitate an indigenous language-friendly environment. The tools include “Taiwan Indigenous Language and History Encyclopedia,” “Indigenous Language Wikipedia,” Fifth Edition of the Basic Indigenous Language Teaching Materials, “Neologism for Indigenous Language,” and “Indigenous Language Writing System.” Awards and seminars were created to consolidate people's motivation to use these tools. These tools are further strengthened through programs and activities, including National Indigenous Reading and Speech Contest, Mother Tongue Language Contribution Award, and stipend provided to local organizations promoting Indigenous languages based on the Local Language Education Aid Policy.

## **Local Governments**

Local governments refer to the 13 county governments and 6 municipal city governments in Taiwan. Every year the Council of Indigenous Peoples allocated budgets to collaborate with local governments and civil society organizations to establish “language nests” or “tribal classrooms,” Indigenous language classes, and Indigenous cultural experience camps (Chao 2014). Successful implementation required strong will and collaboration effort from the local governments. Some local government also initiated efforts on Indigenous language educations in addition to the aids from the central governments. For example, Taipei City Government began the “Indigenous language nest” program in 2001, which provided 2 h of class each week for 11 Indigenous languages. In 2010, a total of 35 language nests teaching 10 languages had been established. On average, 378 people attended the

language nests each month, but only 10.64% of them were under 18 years of age (Hsieh 2010). Other programs initiated by the Taipei City Government included holding training camps for Indigenous language teachers, editing Indigenous language textbook, hosting Indigenous cultural events, and broadcasting Indigenous language and culture education on the radio (Indigenous Peoples Commission of Taipei City Government 2003). Similar language nest programs were implemented by New Taipei City, Taoyuan City, Kaohsiung City, Hsinchu City, Tainan City, Taidong, Pingtung, Hualien, and Yilan. Other examples for promoting Indigenous language included hosting drama contests, vocabulary contests, and speech contests in Indigenous languages to raise learning incentives.

In 2016, the Pingtung County Government held an International Austronesian Language Education Forum for the first time. More than 250 Indigenous language education practitioners participated in the Forum. The Forum invited three international experts in Maori (New Zealand), Ainu (Japan), and Sami (Norway) languages to share their experiences on the language revitalization. The Forum not only generated tangible recommendations but also prompted local people to action. The impact of this local event was nationwide. The Forum engaged local Indigenous elders with scholars. This type of bottom-up effort showed that the awareness for Indigenous language revitalization is growing in Taiwan.

## **Future Project**

In 2016, the Council of Indigenous People and the Ministry of Education joined efforts to develop an Indigenous Education Five-Year Midterm Development Project (2016–2020). The Project places an emphasis on “self-determination, equality, respect, diversity, and honor,” with a center focus on “cultivating the next Indigenous generation and equipping them with competitiveness, cultural awareness, and self-determination” and to “regain basic rights, affirm fundamental learning, initiate cultural education, and practice multicultural goals.” Language revitalization and promotion were not stated directly in the project (Council of Indigenous Peoples and Ministry of Education 2015). To achieve a true practice of cultural education, a solid plan of Indigenous language revitalization must be established. The Project, which laid out 12 strategies, 35 execution items, and 148 specific actions, lacked of tangible focus on Indigenous languages. A detailed plan for language reconstruction for Indigenous education is highly recommended by the authors of this chapter. Other observation based on the direction and actions of the 2016–2020 Five-Year Project included:

1. The trend to self-learning has begun even with limited policy endorsement and funding. With time and more policy endorsements, it will become a common norm.
2. Through years of discussion, concrete policies and legal bases have been established for Indigenous education. More funding is also available. Indigenous peoples’ opinions have been more accepted by mainstream society.

3. Though the overall condition of Indigenous peoples is improving, there are still traces of discrimination toward this minority population. It is a long road with many challenges waiting for Indigenous education toward sustainability and maturation.
4. Many of the languages for the smaller tribes are nearly impossible to revitalize. However, digital recording can help keep records of these languages, in hopes that these endangered languages could be preserved for future revitalization efforts.

## **Challenges on Indigenous Language Education**

Despite efforts, Indigenous language development in Taiwan continues to face challenges. In identifying these challenges, it enables us to see where we can further progress. First, one of the biggest challenges has been a lack of coherent policy direction taken by the Ministry of Education and the Council of Indigenous Peoples. These two government agencies have carried out parallel and duplicate efforts on Indigenous language education. The inadequate collaboration results in wasted resources and time. For instance, the Ministry of Education previously spent millions of Taiwanese dollars on developing local dialect curricula for 13 different Indigenous languages, but they were later shelved (Chao 2014). The lack of consensus on the Indigenous Writing Systems in the beginning also staggered the revitalization progress. Horizontal communications between central governmental agencies and vertical communications between central governmental agencies, schools, and local governments were laborious, and very little attention was paid to assessing project outcomes (Hung 2014). This problem has been noted and addressed in the most current Indigenous Education Five-Year Midterm Development Project, which is a joint project by the Ministry of Education and the Council of Indigenous Peoples. Effective communication between the Ministry of Education and the Council of Indigenous Peoples is central to creating sustainable collaboration.

Second, not having an independent system to train Indigenous language teachers is a severe challenge to sustain indigenous language education. The initial approach by the Ministry of Education was to train Indigenous schoolteachers who already held valid teaching licenses to become Indigenous language teachers. Short-term training workshops on Indigenous languages were available to the teachers. However, most of the Indigenous schoolteachers did not have the ability to speak Indigenous languages fluently; thus, most of the teaching was accomplished by Indigenous language specialists who did not have any formal education training (The Education and Culture Committee of the Control Yuan 2003). Indigenous schoolteachers were not required to attend the language workshops to teach Indigenous languages, and there exists no assessment of their language proficiency. For Indigenous language specialists who do not hold a teaching license, they must obtain Indigenous Language Proficiency Certification in order to teach in public schools. The Indigenous language specialists responsible for the actual teaching expressed that Indigenous language education does not have a clear place in the school system

and most schools lack Indigenous cultural sensitivity (Huang 2004). The Ministry of Education has made some progress to incorporate Indigenous language in higher education institutions, such as the institution of local language educational centers in universities (Ministry of Education 2015). A formal education program for Indigenous languages teachers can help them gain more respect in the schools and facilitate the promotion of Indigenous languages in the formal education system. Because there is no independent training system, Indigenous language teachers gain their qualifications by cobbling together fragmented policies. Consequently, teaching indigenous languages is still largely ignored by the formal education system. For this reason, it is necessary that Indigenous peoples need to have our own independent training system.

Third, Indigenous peoples' language revitalization cannot be realized without an increase in designated teaching hours coupled with additional resources. Currently, only one class (40 min) is allocated for Indigenous language per week in public schools (first grade to ninth grade). The effect of a single hour of language learning per week is minimal. Most schools schedule the class during nonofficial class hours (early mornings or weekends). Some schools mix students from different grades or different languages in the same class. The lack of classroom space forces some teachers to teach in the gym or in the hallway. Indigenous language specialists who assist in teaching primary schools usually did not have enough support or respect from school officials. Many of them need to travel from school to school in order to maintain full-time employment status (Hung 2014). These conditions discourage passionate teachers and create new obstacles to guaranteeing Indigenous peoples' rights to a sustainable language education.

Fourth, a proper legislative framework is urgently needed to promote indigenous languages at the preschool level. The critical window for learning language is between 5 and 7 years old. Indigenous language immersion preschool can lay the foundation for Indigenous language learning (Pawan 2006). There are currently 20 experimental Indigenous language-immersion kindergartens (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2016b). The lack of legislative framework leads to insufficient funds and resources for the preschool level.

Following are tentative recommendations to meet the challenges delineated above. The following aspects are important for the future work of promoting indigenous language education. Firstly, identify those who are still able to speak indigenous languages fluently. These people are key to revitalize indigenous languages and preserve indigenous language-friendly environments. More awareness for language rights in schools and other public sectors needs to be generated. In addition, the revitalization process will benefit from the self-initiating wills from each tribe. Each tribe should be given the resources and power to manage and revitalize its own language and create a safe and convenient environment to practice these languages. Furthermore, family is the foundation to establish good learning environment for Indigenous languages. Increasing the number of children who start learning Indigenous languages from an early age is the most sustainable way to save endangered languages. Secondly, an adequate allocation of resources from the central government to local governments and institutions is necessary. Empowering

those people who work closely with their own culture and language will help maximize the effects of revitalization. Retired Indigenous persons would prove an enormous asset to help educate the new generation to speak Indigenous languages. Third, creation of a platform for experience exchanges can allow experts and scholars to work collectively toward language preservation and revitalization that attracts new talent. For example, international conferences on Indigenous language education are an effective means to highlight the importance of practicing Indigenous languages in daily life. The platform can also document the efforts for long-term assessment and evaluation.

Finally but importantly, the journey of language revitalization should be conceptualized in a long-term scale where new ideas and innovations are constantly being incorporated. Many Indigenous languages are slowly being replaced by mainstream languages; new ideas are currently needed for language revitalization, especially for those languages that are on the brink of extinction. Revitalization is possible with the help of the government, academia, and NGOs. Endangered languages require more attention and specially dedicated research teams to persist long term in helping local tribes maintain their linguistic identities by creating a lively learning environment.

## Conclusion

Recent international trends and new policies brought new opportunities and acceptances for Indigenous languages in Taiwan. Indigenous languages are vital to Indigenous peoples' identities and community development, but the extent of achieving revitalization is linked to Indigenous peoples' social status. Many Indigenous peoples have not yet realized the importance of language revitalization because they are under great social and economic pressure. In addition, the lack of Indigenous language specialists is the biggest concern for Indigenous language development in Taiwan. Indigenous people need to utilize these given revitalization resources and work toward a common goal. This chapter aims to serve as a reference for the international Indigenous language education community and also act as a starting point for future language revitalization for Indigenous peoples in Taiwan.

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