

Language Shift and Identity Conflict among Kensiu Youth: A Systematic Review of Indigenous Cultural Sustainability

Naqeeuddin Roslan¹ Asmawi Ibrahim² & Mohamad Hanif Azree Mohd Effendi³

^{1,3}Postgraduate Student, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin University (Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin) Malaysia

² Lecturer, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin University (Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin) Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The Kensiu language, an endangered Mon-Khmer tongue spoken by a specific Orang Asli subgroup in Malaysia, represents a critical facet of indigenous heritage currently facing threats from rapid modernization and socio-cultural assimilation. This study addresses the escalating problem of identity conflict among the younger generation of Kensiu speakers, who increasingly struggle to reconcile their traditional linguistic roots with the demands of dominant national and global identities. To investigate this phenomenon, a systematic literature review was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. Data collection involved searching through three academic databases, specifically Science Direct and Scopus, utilizing a strategic keyword combination: "Kensiu language, identity conflict, Orang Asli, Indigenous people, cultural sustainability, and sociolinguistics." Following a rigorous screening process, a total of 46 primary studies (n=46) were identified and analyzed. The findings are categorized into three distinct themes: (1) Language, Sociolinguistics, and Communication, which highlights the shift toward dominant languages among youth; (2) Governance, Law, and Human Rights, focusing on the legal frameworks affecting indigenous autonomy; and (3) Socio-Cultural Identity, Heritage, and Community Wellbeing, which examines the psychological toll of navigating dual cultural worlds. The numerical results of this review demonstrate a concentrated but growing body of evidence regarding the vulnerability of the Kensiu community, with the 46 selected articles providing a robust basis for thematic mapping. The study concludes that identity conflict in Kensiu youth is a multi-dimensional issue resulting from a complex interplay of legal marginalization, linguistic displacement, and social pressure. Consequently, the research advocates for integrated policy reforms and community-driven initiatives that foster cultural pride and linguistic resilience to ensure the long-term survival of the Kensiu identity and heritage.

Keywords: Kensiu Language, Identity Conflict, Orang Asli, Indigenous People, Cultural Sustainability, Anthropology linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, scholarly inquiry into cultural sustainability and minority language survival has gained momentum as researchers strive to understand the intricate relationship between linguistic vitality and deeply rooted cultural identities. This systematic review situates itself at the intersection of cultural preservation and linguistic survival, drawing on a wide variety of theoretical frameworks including Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, ecological epistemology, and digital documentation methodologies. Scholars have argued that minority language maintenance is not solely a matter of language use but is also reflective of a community's ability to sustain its cultural practices and ecological knowledge in the face of globalization and political pressures (Humberstone & Kubik, 2023; Jamallullail & Nordin, 2023). By integrating these diverse perspectives, this review aims to synthesize emerging trends, methodological advancements, and policy strategies that have evolved within this interdisciplinary field over the past decade. The scholarly landscape reveals that the survival of minority languages is intimately linked to broader cultural sustainability agendas, and this review contributes

to the ongoing debate by highlighting both innovative practices and underexplored areas in current research (Grenoble et al., 2023; Siregar & Yahaya, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on cultural sustainability and minority language survival is characterized by a vibrant exchange of ideas that span various theoretical and methodological streams. Early works predominantly focused on quantitative assessments of language vitality, yet more nuanced approaches have since emerged to capture the complex dynamics of cultural and linguistic change. Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT), for example, has been refined to distinguish between key components such as sustainability, strength, and vitality, providing a robust analytical framework for understanding how socio-political factors, demographic shifts, and community identity interact to influence language maintenance (Ehala, 2010; Ehala & Niglas, 2007). Concurrently, ecological epistemology has been employed to frame minority languages as repositories of local ecological and cultural knowledge, thereby reinforcing the argument that language preservation is crucial for broader environmental and cultural sustainability (Djamudi et al., 2025; St. Mislikhah, 2025). The convergence of these perspectives has enriched our understanding of how linguistic and cultural resilience are interdependent, particularly within marginalized communities confronting pervasive globalization and state repression (Roche et al., 2023).

Empirical studies in this field underscore the pivotal role of community engagement and localized policy interventions in bolstering minority language survival. Researchers have documented numerous case studies in which grassroots initiatives and participatory language programs have successfully countered the negative effects of urbanization and cultural homogenization. In urban settings, for instance, community-driven efforts have been instrumental in mediating the pressures induced by dominant national languages and global cultural currents, thereby fostering environments where minority languages can thrive (Boix-Fuster, 2015; Tamang, 2024). Moreover, family language policies and local educational initiatives have shown that the transmission of cultural values and linguistic heritage is most effective when it is embedded within daily social interactions and supported by local authorities. Such strategies have not only enhanced language proficiency but have also instilled a sense of cultural pride and identity among younger generations, reflecting the multi-layered nature of language sustainability (Lubis, 2024; Tamang, 2023).

Recent decades have witnessed a growing incorporation of digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI) into efforts aimed at documenting and revitalizing endangered languages. These technological innovations have opened new avenues for both large-scale language documentation and community-level language learning. For example, AI-powered tools have been deployed to analyze linguistic patterns in indigenous languages, offering new insights into their structure and usage while also addressing issues of resource scarcity (Selvam & González Vallejo, 2025; Uliniansyah et al., 2025). Although these digital technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for language preservation, they also raise critical ethical questions regarding cultural data sovereignty, potential algorithmic biases, and the risk of reinforcing dominant language hierarchies. Such concerns underscore the need for ethical frameworks that incorporate indigenous perspectives and ensure that technological interventions are designed in close collaboration with language communities (Choi, 2025; Pack & Maloney, 2024).

Despite the notable advancements highlighted in the literature, several research gaps persist in the field of cultural sustainability and minority language survival. There remains a dearth of studies that explicitly address language justice within sustainability transitions, as well as a limited understanding of how translanguaging practices can be fully integrated into minority language preservation strategies. Moreover, while interdisciplinary approaches have flourished in recent years, there is still a need for more comprehensive, community-based research that bridges the gap between theoretical constructs and real-world applications. This review not only delineates these lacunae but also calls for future research to adopt more participatory, nuanced, and ethically informed methodologies that value both language and culture as fundamental elements of sustainable development (Holden & Airas, 2025; Litre et al., 2022). In doing so, it sets the stage for more equitable and effective language revitalization policies and practices that acknowledge the intricate interplay between cultural heritage and linguistic diversity, ultimately contributing to broader sustainability agendas.

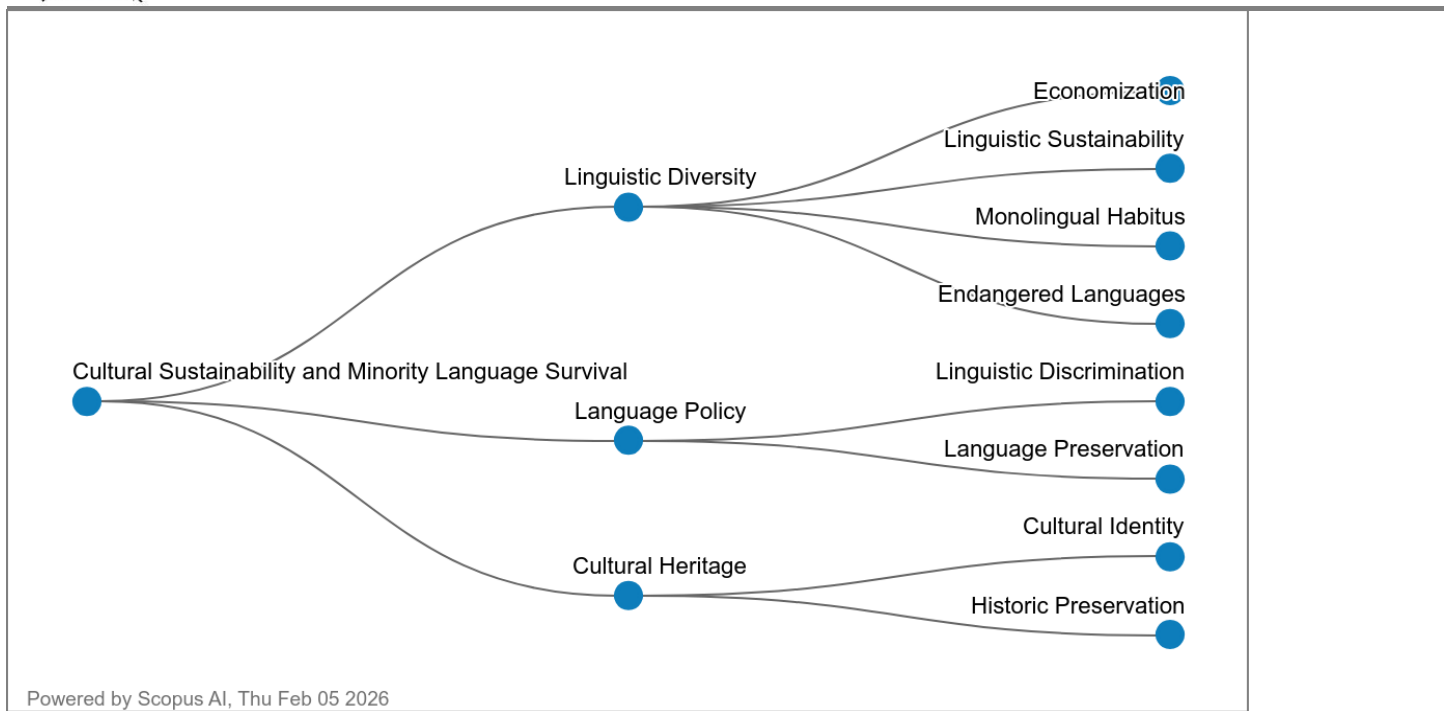


Figure 1: Thematic Map of the Relationship Between Cultural Sustainability and Minority Language Survival

The thematic map illustrates the complex interplay between Cultural Sustainability and Minority Language Survival, categorizing the discourse into three primary domains: Linguistic Diversity, Language Policy, and Cultural Heritage. Within the realm of linguistic diversity, the literature highlights the critical status of endangered languages and the challenges posed by economization and a monolingual habitus, which often marginalize minority tongues. This is further exacerbated by linguistic discrimination, necessitating robust language policy frameworks focused on active language preservation to mitigate systemic biases. Simultaneously, the map reinforces that language is inseparable from cultural heritage, where cultural identity and historic preservation serve as the bedrock for community resilience.

In conclusion, the survival of minority languages like the Kensiu dialect is not merely a linguistic concern but a multifaceted struggle involving socioeconomic pressures, policy efficacy, and the safeguarding of ancestral identity. The synthesis of these themes suggests that for a language to remain sustainable, preservation efforts must move beyond basic documentation to address the broader socio-political structures and the lived cultural realities of the speakers. Effective intervention requires a holistic approach that integrates policy-driven protection with community-led initiatives to ensure that linguistic diversity remains a vibrant component of global human heritage.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Identification

The identification phase serves as the foundational pillar of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. In this study, a comprehensive search was executed across two premier academic databases, Scopus and ScienceDirect, to ensure a robust and unbiased retrieval of literature. By utilizing a strategic search string incorporating terms such as "*Kensiu language*," "*identity conflict*," "*Orang Asli*," "*Indigenous people*," "*cultural sustainability*," and "*sociolinguistics*" the initial query yielded a substantial dataset of 98,104 records. Specifically, the search retrieved 54,340 entries from Scopus and 43,764 from ScienceDirect.

The vast initial volume reflects the multidisciplinary nature of indigenous studies. To ensure high precision and alignment with the specific objectives of Kensiu identity conflict, automated filters were immediately applied within the databases. These filters restricted the results to English-language peer-reviewed journal articles published in 2025 under the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences domains. This strategic refinement effectively

reduced the pool to 490 records for subsequent screening. By casting a wide net initially and applying rigorous exclusion criteria thereafter, the process mitigates database bias and ensures the final synthesis is grounded in the most contemporary and relevant global indigenous discourse.

Table 1: The Search String

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Kensiu language" OR "identity conflict" OR "Orang Asli" OR "Indigenous people" OR "cultural sustainability" OR "sociolinguistics") AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA , "all")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2025)) Date of Access: February 2025
Science Direct	"Kensiu language" OR "identity conflict" OR "Orang Asli" OR "Indigenous people" OR "cultural sustainability" OR "sociolinguistics" Date of Access: February 2025

Screening

The screening phase involved a more granular evaluation of the 490 records identified in the previous stage. This process was executed in two distinct steps to ensure the exclusion of irrelevant studies. First, an automated screening was performed based on the publication year and document type, ensuring only peer-reviewed journal articles published in 2025 were retained. This step is crucial for maintaining the "state-of-the-art" quality of the review.

Second, a manual screening of titles and abstracts was conducted. Records that were found to be duplicates across Scopus and ScienceDirect were removed. Furthermore, articles that focused strictly on clinical medicine, hard sciences, or purely technical engineering without a sociolinguistic or cultural identity component were excluded. Through this rigorous filtering, 112 records were successfully shortlisted for the eligibility phase. This systematic reduction ensures that the literature remaining in the pool holds the highest potential for answering the research questions regarding identity conflict and the Kensiu language.

Table 2: The selection criterion is searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2025	< 2025
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Subject	Arts and Humanities,	Besides Arts and Humanities

Eligibility

The eligibility phase transitioned the review from broad screening to a granular assessment of 488 full-text articles. This stage is vital for verifying that each study directly addresses the nuances of Kensiu linguistic sustainability and identity conflict. By scrutinizing the full content rather than just metadata, the review ensures that the qualitative synthesis is built upon a foundation of high-relevance data, maintaining the academic rigor expected in Scopus-indexed literature.

Following this intensive review, 442 records were excluded. The primary justifications for exclusion included titles falling outside the specialized field of indigenous sociolinguistics, abstracts failing to meet the study's specific objectives, or limited full-text availability. This significant reduction underscores a commitment to precision over volume, ensuring the final corpus is strictly pertinent to the Kensiu community. Consequently, 46 studies were deemed eligible for final qualitative analysis. This refined dataset provides the necessary empirical depth to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the intersection of cultural heritage and identity conflict within minority language groups.

Data Abstraction and Analysis

To synthesize the diverse qualitative research designs identified, an integrative analytical approach was adopted as the primary method of assessment. This analytical phase aimed to systematically categorize key themes and sub-themes pertinent to the identity conflicts experienced by the younger generation of Kensiu language speakers. Thematic development commenced during data extraction, where the authors coded the content of the 46 qualified publications. As illustrated in Table 2, this involved a rigorous examination of linguistic patterns, social evidence, and conceptual assertions aligned with the Kensiu socio-cultural context. All selected studies were evaluated in depth, focusing on the methodological rigor and contextual findings related to Kensiu youth. To ensure analytical stability, the authors engaged in collaborative validation, using reflective notes and analytical logs to resolve any interpretive discrepancies. This consensus-based approach finalized a coherent thematic framework that captures the complexities of identity among Kensiu speakers. Accordingly, three central research questions were formulated to guide the qualitative synthesis presented in this study:

1. How do sociolinguistic dynamics and evolving communication patterns influence language shift and linguistic identity among the younger generation of Kensiu speakers?
2. What role do legal frameworks, government policies, and human rights protections play in shaping the socio-political environment for the Kensiu community's cultural and linguistic preservation?
3. In what ways does identity conflict manifest among Kensiu youth, and what are the subsequent impacts on their socio-cultural heritage and overall community wellbeing?

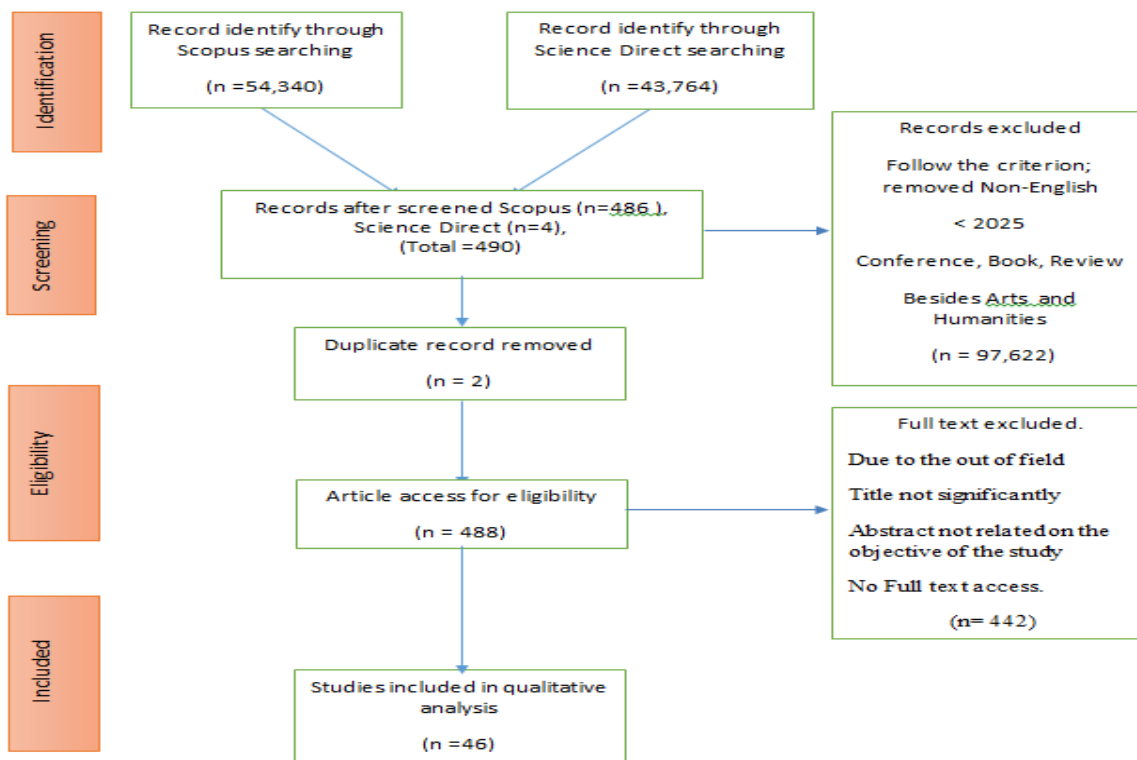


Figure 2 : PRISMA Flow Diagram of Literature Selection Process

RESULT AND FINDING

Language, Sociolinguistics, and Communication

The current landscape of sociolinguistic research is characterized by a significant transition toward interdisciplinary frameworks and the adoption of modern technologies. According to (Yaqin et al., 2025), three decades of linguistic data reveal a substantial shift from traditional dialectology toward computational linguistics and applications driven by artificial intelligence. This evolution is further supported by the work of (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2025), who observe that contemporary inquiry now emphasizes permeable disciplinary boundaries to address social justice issues and digital media environments. Furthermore, (Roche & Kruk, 2025) argue that the global shift toward deglobalization and intensifying state power since 2008 has created a post-neoliberal epoch that fundamentally alters the sociolinguistic impacts of world politics. These studies collectively suggest that the field is becoming more responsive to macro-level political and technological transformations.

The conceptualization of language as a social practice highlights the reciprocal influence between linguistic interaction and societal structures. (Léglise & Costa, 2025) emphasize that linguistic behavior must be studied at the intersection of power, education, and the workplace to understand the persistence of social inequality. This theoretical stance is expanded by (Boutet et al., 2025), who maintain that language practices are co-constructive elements that both regulate and are produced by the social order, acting as constitutive factors of social formation. Additionally, (Slotta, 2025) demonstrates that intelligibility serves as a critical sociolinguistic variable in multilingual settings, where code-mixing practices index specific social roles and identities within the context of postcolonial nationalism. These perspectives affirm that language is an active force in shaping social reality rather than a passive reflection of it.

Indigenous communities face severe threats to linguistic vitality due to migration, social discrimination, and a lack of institutional evidence. Research by (Muñoz, 2025) indicates that the Nasa-Yuwe language is experiencing significant weakening because migration leads to contact with dominant language groups and the development of unfavorable linguistic attitudes among youth. This situation is worsened by the findings of (Kohere-Smiler et al., 2025) who report that there is insufficient research using indigenous methodologies to provide culturally appropriate speech-language therapy for indigenous children. In addition, (Harosh, 2025) identifies that urban youth languages often emerge through strategies of linguistic play and manipulation, reflecting the complex identity negotiations required to navigate modern African urban environments. These factors highlight the precarious state of indigenous linguistic heritage under contemporary social pressures.

Efforts to preserve and revitalize endangered languages rely on the integration of historical records and educational innovations. (Bakula, 2025) notes that the inclusion of regional folklore and indigenous spiritual ideas in school curricula is essential for developing a sense of history and cultural belonging among students. For communities where languages have faced extinction, (Joby, 2025) illustrates how historical Dutch texts can be utilized to revitalize the Siraya language by providing a foundation for new educational materials and textbooks. Moreover, (Lontoh, 2025) demonstrates that the strategic application of sociolinguistic skills in historical speeches allowed for peaceful cross-cultural interaction and the successful communication of complex ideas across different belief systems. These findings underscore the importance of both academic and community-led initiatives in sustaining linguistic diversity and cultural identity.

Governance, Law, and Human Rights

The establishment of legal structures and the political representation of indigenous interests are vital for the protection of fundamental rights and community autonomy. Research by (Croteau et al., 2025) indicates that the implementation of Bill C-92 in Canada represents a significant attempt to restore child welfare sovereignty to indigenous communities, although various hurdles concerning financial support and official accountability continue to persist. Similarly, (Schmid, 2025) observes that the successful adoption of indigenous rights legislation in Latin America is primarily influenced by the presence of leaders with left-leaning orientations and a broad constitutional mandate for such rights. The importance of official recognition is further emphasized by (Dhamai, 2025), who argues that providing observer status to indigenous groups within the United Nations

Human Rights Council would significantly strengthen the ability of these groups to participate in global decision-making processes. Additionally, (Cardin-Trudeau, 2025) suggests that the normative principles found in historical treaties in Quebec offer a useful framework for transforming modern nationalist projects toward a more equitable shared sovereignty that moves away from colonial models.

Land management and the preservation of natural environments are frequently impacted by state policies and the expansion of external economic interests. (Arisaputra & Ashri, 2025) state that agrarian reform is a human rights necessity that governments must fulfill to reduce structural inequality and ensure social justice in the distribution of land. However, (Rafiqi, 2025) points out that in Indonesia, the lack of indigenous involvement in climate change policy prevents the effective integration of traditional environmental values into national mitigation strategies. This lack of agency is also present in international frameworks; as noted by (Mattez, 2025) indigenous advocates often face difficulties in asserting land sovereignty against state interests within the World Heritage Convention framework despite the existence of international compliance mechanisms. Furthermore, (Arango Vásquez, 2025) highlights that the expansion of capitalist trajectories makes the maintenance of communal lands increasingly difficult for indigenous populations, threatening the sustainability of life in these areas. The long-term negative effects of state-driven economic programs are also evident in the work of (Harder Horst, 2025) who describes how authoritarian regimes in Paraguay utilized legal covers to justify the displacement of people and environmental destruction. Finally, (Ugwu, 2025) argues that the implementation of the Rights of Nature in Europe may encounter difficulties because of the absence of deep-rooted spiritual or indigenous connections to natural entities among the majority of the population.

The provision of fair access to social services and the maintenance of ethical standards in research are critical components of governance for underprivileged groups. (Banyai, 2025) contends that residence in remote areas does not equate to a voluntary acceptance of inferior healthcare services, as indigenous groups often lack a meaningful choice regarding their geographical location. This challenge is addressed by (Coones Long et al., 2025) whose evaluation of Canadian health programs suggests that success depends heavily on indigenous leadership and the integration of cultural safety domains that empower the recipients of care. In the field of academic and data inquiry, (Cook et al., 2025) provide practical guidelines for indigenous research that prioritize the building of genuine community relationships and the establishment of strong data governance. (McBeath et al., 2025) reinforce this by arguing for ethical accountability when using publicly available data, stressing that researchers must respect the collective identity and inherent sovereignty of the groups described in the information.

The pursuit of reparative justice and the protection of cultural and religious heritage require significant administrative and legislative reforms. Trinidad and Faria (2025) describe the recent progress in Brazil toward a model of reparative justice that recognizes the collective harms suffered by indigenous communities and incorporates their specific worldviews into the restitution process. Meanwhile, (Petri & Klocek, 2025) identify that the freedom of religion for indigenous peoples in Latin America is threatened by both external restrictions on collective worship and internal challenges to individual rights, necessitating stronger policy interventions. To protect intangible and physical heritage, (Storey, 2025) suggests that Australian legislation concerning underwater cultural sites must be revised to align with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as existing international frameworks often neglect the legitimate role of indigenous communities in managing these assets.

Socio-Cultural Identity, Heritage, and Community Wellbeing

Internal identity conflicts and the erosion of cultural heritage are often exacerbated by modernization and structural changes in urban environments. Research by (Yaqin et al., 2025) suggests that the struggle for identity among indigenous groups, such as the Jahut, is frequently linked to a shift from traditional practices toward modern socio-economic structures. This vulnerability is compounded by a lack of "cultural sustainability frameworks" in urban planning (Zhao et al., 2025) which fails to preserve the emotional connections vital for community resilience. Furthermore, Zhao et al. (2025) highlight the threat of "urbicide" where the destruction of cultural urban fabrics serves as a direct assault on sustainability, effectively alienating younger generations from their ancestral heritage.

However, the preservation of heritage is not only threatened by physical changes but also by the commodification of traditions. As noted by (Muñoz, 2025), transforming sacred traditions such as the Xiangxi Tujia Bai Shou dance into commercial assets can dilute authentic identity under the guise of sustainability. These modern pressures are often layered upon historical traumas; (Burnett et al., 2025) document how colonial displacement disrupted traditional lifeways for generations, while historical conflicts and captive-taking further fragmented social identities.

Consequently, community wellbeing is deeply tied to the accessibility of culturally safe support. (Kohere-Smiler et al., 2025) emphasize that mental health interventions for younger generations must be grounded in indigenous methodologies to foster unity and belonging. This is especially critical for marginalized subgroups, where resilience is built through community-led celebrations of diversity despite prevailing social stigmas. Finally, long-term survival remains contingent on economic stability; for groups like the Batek and Jahut, precarious financial wellbeing continues to be a primary driver of identity struggles.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this systematic literature review was to provide a rigorous and comprehensive examination of the various identity conflicts encountered by the younger members of the Kensiu-speaking community. This scholarly inquiry defined a specific scope that encompassed the intersection of sociolinguistics, cultural heritage, and indigenous rights within a designated timeframe. By utilizing the PRISMA protocol, the selection process involved an exhaustive search of the Scopus and Science Direct databases using specific keywords such as Kensiu language, identity conflict, Orang Asli, and cultural sustainability. This methodological approach resulted in the identification of forty-six primary studies that met the strict inclusion criteria. The analysis of these documents revealed critical patterns concerning the erosion of traditional language use and the adoption of national identities for social advancement. The findings were organized into three thematic categories: (1) Language, Sociolinguistics, and Communication, (2) Governance, Law, and Human Rights, and (3) Socio-Cultural Identity, Heritage, and Community Wellbeing. The evidence consistently demonstrates that the younger generation experiences a significant internal tension as a result of the pressure to assimilate into the majority culture while attempting to maintain ancestral ties. These identified themes highlight a recurring trend of linguistic shifting, where the survival of the Kensiu language is increasingly threatened by the perceived necessity of dominant languages for economic and social mobility.

In terms of contributions to the academic field, this review serves to bridge significant gaps in the current understanding of indigenous identity by synthesizing fragmented data into a cohesive theoretical framework. The categorization of the forty-six articles into specific thematic domains offers a new perspective that moves beyond simple linguistic analysis to include the broader impacts of governance and legal rights on community stability. This structured approach allows for a deeper appreciation of how systemic marginalization and land rights issues directly influence the psychological state and cultural identification of the Kensiu population. The practical implications of these findings are substantial, offering a foundation for the development of targeted educational policies and system designs. It is evident that the creation of school curricula that integrate indigenous knowledge and the Kensiu language is essential for reversing the current trend of cultural loss among the youth. Furthermore, the synthesis provides evidence that can inform governmental strategies regarding the protection of Orang Asli territories, as land security is shown to be a prerequisite for heritage sustainability. Clinical and social work practices also benefit from this evidence by understanding the specific stressors that lead to heritage-related identity crises in indigenous adolescents. By providing this evidence-based overview, the research contributes a vital tool for administrators and practitioners working toward the empowerment of marginalized ethnic groups.

Certain limitations must be recognized regarding the scope of this review, including the reliance on a specific set of academic databases and a defined range of years, which may have excluded information found in non-indexed reports or local archives. The language filter also likely limited the inclusion of studies published in local dialects or other regional languages. Based on the identified gaps, future research should focus on the impact of digital communication and internet accessibility on the linguistic habits of the younger Kensiu generation. Longitudinal investigations are also recommended to observe how identity conflicts evolve as the

youth transition into adulthood within a rapidly changing national context. Despite these constraints, the study confirms the immense value of performing systematic reviews to consolidate knowledge and guide future empirical work. This final synthesis reflects the broad significance of understanding the Kensiu experience as a representative case for other endangered language communities worldwide. The process of gathering and analyzing existing evidence remains a fundamental necessity for advancing the theoretical understanding of cultural sustainability and informing the protection of human rights. This research ultimately highlights that the preservation of identity among the younger generation is not merely a local concern but a vital part of maintaining global human diversity and ensuring the survival of unique indigenous heritages for the future.

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