

The Schoolscape of SMAN 1 Semarang: Patterns of Language Use and Global Identity

Afan Makhrus Al Basit¹, Arif Suryo Priyatmojo²

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

¹ Affanmakhrus132@students.unnes.ac.id, ² arifsuryo@mail.unnes.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates the schoolscape of SMAN 1 Semarang to understand its language patterns and underlying representations. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through 151 photographic records of linguistic signs and an interview with the school's quality assurance officer. The findings reveal a predominantly bilingual environment, dominated by Indonesian-English signs (72 signs), followed by monolingual Indonesian (67 signs), while standalone English signs are extremely rare. The analysis indicates this landscape is primarily driven by top-down institutional policies (122 signs) rather than bottom-up initiatives from students and school organizations. Triangulated with the interview, the study concludes that English serves a symbolic, rather than purely pedagogical, function. It visually manifests the school's global orientation, aligning with its international exchange program. Ultimately, the consistent pairing of English with Indonesian demonstrates a strategic institutional negotiation to project global prestige while complying with national language regulations and preserving local identity.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscape; Schoolscape; Bilingualism; Global Identity; Language Policy

INTRODUCTION

The role of English in the Indonesian educational context has shifted from merely an academic subject to a powerful symbol of global competitiveness (Lauder, 2008; Zein, 2020). As a result of this shift, educational institutions increasingly utilize English not only within classroom instructions but also throughout their physical environments to project modernization and international prestige (Pennycook, 2017; Pratama, 2023). This visual and spatial representation of language in public spaces is conceptualized as the Linguistic Landscape (LL), initially defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and further expanded as a critical framework to understand language ideologies (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

When applied specifically to educational settings, this phenomenon is termed the 'schoolscape'. The schoolscape serves as a crucial domain that reveals the hidden curriculum, language policies, and institutional identities constructed within the school premises (Gorter, 2013). The scope of a schoolscape goes beyond mere aesthetic decoration. It encompasses all visible texts that shape the educational environment, ranging from official institutional top-down signs, such as regulatory notices and school mottos, to bottom-up initiatives created by students and various school organizations (Barni & Bagna, 2015; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). In the context of this study, the schoolscape provides a highly relevant analytical lens to decode how a school intentionally designs its physical space to communicate its values, enforce language policies, and project a specific global image to the public.

While previous studies have extensively mapped language distribution in educational spaces, they have predominantly focused on specific aspects such as pedagogical awareness (Dagenais et al., 2009; Rowland, 2013) or the broad mapping of multilingualism. For instance, within the Indonesian context, Andriyanti (2019) comprehensively investigated the linguistic landscapes of five senior high schools in Yogyakarta. The study identified diverse lingual patterns, including monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs, and highlighted how language choices reflect local relevance, cultural preservation, and institutional identities. Other international studies have similarly investigated general bilingual education environments, exploring how signage reflects varying degrees of institutional support for minority or foreign languages (Brown, 2012; Dressler, 2015; Lai, 2013; Szabó, 2015).

Despite these valuable contributions, a close review of the literature reveals underexplored areas that require further investigation. Foundational studies like Andriyanti (2019) provide an excellent macro-level understanding of language vitality across various school types. However, such broad overviews often overlook the micro-level ideological frictions occurring within specific high-achieving public schools. There is a noticeable gap regarding how elite public institutions in superdiverse contexts like Indonesia (Zein, 2020) strategically deploy top-down bilingual signage not just for basic communication, but to intentionally construct and project a global identity. Furthermore, previous research has rarely addressed the tension between an institution's desire to showcase international competitiveness and its obligation to comply with strict national language policies that prioritize the state language. This specific intersection of policy compliance, global prestige projection, and sign production remains a significant limitation in current schoolscape literature.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the schoolscape of SMAN 1 Semarang. By analyzing the interplay between top-down policies and bottom-up textual productions, including those initiated by student organizations (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), this research aims to uncover the specific patterns of language use and the underlying representations of global identity within this uniquely positioned school environment.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach (John W. Creswell, 2014) to investigate the linguistic landscape of SMAN 1 Semarang. The primary data consisted of 151 photographic records of linguistic signs captured within the public areas of the school, intentionally excluding inside-classroom displays to focus on the broader institutional landscape as a complex sociolinguistic space (Blommaert, 2013). Furthermore, to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying language policies and institutional ideologies, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a key stakeholder: a quality assurance officer (*penjamin mutu*) of the school. This specific participant was purposively selected because their role involves direct oversight of the school's program planning, international partnerships, and facility management, making them highly knowledgeable about the institutional motivations behind the school's language policy. The interview was conducted face-to-face in Indonesian to ensure a natural flow of conversation and lasted for approximately 10 minutes. The session was audio-recorded with the participant's prior consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The inclusion of interview data alongside visual surveys is a crucial methodological step in LL research to uncover the hidden motives and language management strategies behind the signage (Garvin, 2010; Spolsky, 2009).

The data analysis was conducted in two main stages. First, to answer the first research question regarding language patterns, the 151 signs were coded and categorized quantitatively based on their language distribution (monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual) and their authorship. Following the foundational framework of LL (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006), the authorship was distinguished between top-down (official institutional signs) and bottom-up indicators. It is important to note that bottom-up signs in this educational context are not limited to informal student chats, but prominently include signs and posters produced by school organizations (Barni & Bagna, 2015; Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

Second, to address the representation of these signs, a thematic qualitative analysis was applied to the visual and textual data. For the interview component, the transcribed data was also analyzed thematically to identify recurring statements related to institutional identity, globalization, and language regulations. The findings from the visual analysis were then triangulated with the interview transcript to interpret whether the prominent use of English serves a pedagogical function or merely acts as a symbolic function.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the linguistic landscape at SMAN 1 Semarang reveals a distinct pattern of language use within the school's public spaces. Based on the data collected from 151 linguistic signs, the distribution is categorized into three main patterns: monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual. As illustrated in Figure 1, bilingual signs dominate the schoolscape with a total of 78 signs. This is closely followed by monolingual signs, which account for 70 signs, while multilingual signs are the least prominent with only 3 instances.

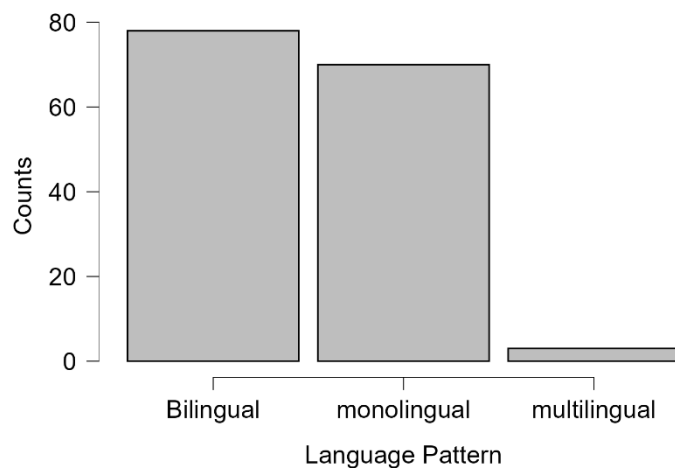


Figure 1. Distribution of Language Patterns at SMAN 1 Semarang

To further examine these patterns, a detailed breakdown of the specific languages displayed on the signs was conducted. As presented in Table 1, the bilingual landscape is overwhelmingly dominated by the combination of Indonesian and English (72 signs). This pattern is highly visible in official institutional signs, such as room labels and directional boards. A prominent example of this top-down bilingual pattern is the room identification sign which displays the Indonesian text as the primary language, immediately followed by its English translation beneath it (see Figure 2). This consistent pairing indicates a systematic effort to provide bilingual information.



Figure 2. A top-down bilingual sign displaying Indonesian as the primary language and English as the translation

Interestingly, within the monolingual category, Indonesian is the most prevalent language (67 signs). These signs are mostly found in the form of official regulatory notices or public service announcements (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. A top-down monolingual Indonesian sign in the form of a regulatory notice

In contrast, standalone monolingual English signs are extremely rare (only 2 signs) and are typically restricted to specific bottom-up contexts or designated zones (see Figure 4). Local languages (such as Javanese) and Arabic are present but significantly marginalized within the visual space.



Figure 4. A monolingual English sign within a specific designated area.

Table 1. Specific Languages Used Across Language Patterns

Specific Language	Bilingual	Monolingual	Multilingual
Arabic + Indonesian	1	0	0
English	0	2	0
Indonesian	0	67	0
Indonesian + English	72	0	0
Javanese	0	1	0
Javanese + Indonesian	5	0	0
Javanese + Indonesian + Arabic	0	0	1
Javanese + Indonesian + English	0	0	2
Total	78	70	3

Furthermore, to understand the authorship of these linguistic signs, a cross tabulation analysis was conducted between the language patterns and their creators. As presented in Table 2, the vast majority of the signs are generated by the school administration, accounting for 122 out of the 151 total signs. Notably, these official top down signs are predominantly bilingual (69 signs). In contrast, bottom up signs account for 29 signs, and they are mostly monolingual (19 signs). These non official signs encompass not only informal student texts but also prominently include posters, notices, and signs created by various school organizations (Barni & Bagna, 2015; Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

Table 2. Distribution of Language Patterns Based on Creators

Creator	Bilingual	Monolingual	Multilingual
Bottom-up	9	19	1
Top-down	69	51	2
Total	78	70	3

In addition to the visual data, an interview with the school quality assurance officer provided crucial insights into the institutional motivations, serving as a vital triangulation method (Garvin, 2010). When asked about the prominent use of English across the schoolscape, particularly in official bilingual signs, the officer emphasized the necessity for the institution to adapt to globalization and maintain its prestige. During the interview, the officer explicitly stated:

"Because our school is one of the most advanced in Semarang, and even the largest in Indonesia, we must use English to demonstrate that we are keeping up with globalization and modernization. Furthermore, our international student exchange program requires us to use English as an international language."

This direct statement provides strong supporting evidence that the English representation in the schoolscape serves a symbolic and strategic function rather than a purely pedagogical one. It confirms that the physical environment is intentionally designed to project a global identity to accommodate international partnerships, while the dominant presence of Indonesian ensures compliance with national language regulations.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a clear illustration of how language is negotiated within an elite educational setting. The quantitative data reveals that the bilingual environment is heavily dictated by top-down institutional policies rather than bottom-up student and organizational initiatives (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Spolsky, 2009). This aligns seamlessly with the interview data, which strongly suggests that the linguistic landscape at SMAN 1 Semarang functions predominantly as a symbolic representation rather than a purely pedagogical tool (Rowland, 2013), a phenomenon frequently observed in modern bilingual schoolscapes (Brown, 2012; Dressler, 2015). According to Shohamy (2005), top-down linguistic signs in public spaces often serve as mechanisms to enforce language policies and project institutional ideologies. Interestingly, the detailed language distribution in Table 1 shows that English is rarely used as a standalone language. Instead, it is almost exclusively paired with Indonesian. This specific pairing indicates that while the school strategically deploys English to project a modern, globalized identity and accommodate international prestige (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Pennycook, 2017; PILLER, 2001), it simultaneously preserves the national language regulations and local ethnolinguistic vitality (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Zein, 2020).

Instead of serving primarily as direct linguistic input for daily language acquisition, the Indonesian-English bilingual signs function as an ideological marker. They reinforce the school's status as a leading educational institution that actively participates in global initiatives, such as the student exchange program, without losing its national identity. Consequently, the linguistic landscape acts as a visual manifestation of the school's global orientation, where the physical space is utilized to navigate the complex interplay between local heritage and global aspirations (Gorter & Cenoz, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the linguistic landscape at SMAN 1 Semarang, this study concludes that the school's public visual space is predominantly characterized by a bilingual pattern, specifically integrating Indonesian and English. This bilingual environment is not a natural product of student interactions but is heavily driven by top-down institutional policies. Furthermore, the findings reveal that the prominent display of English serves a symbolic function rather than a purely pedagogical one. Driven by the demands of globalization and the school's active participation in international initiatives, such as the student exchange program, the schoolscape acts as a visual manifestation of the institution's prestige and global orientation. However, the consistent pairing of English with Indonesian and the rarity of standalone English signs indicates a strategic negotiation by the school. SMAN 1 Semarang successfully utilizes its physical space to project a modern, international identity while simultaneously complying with national language regulations and preserving its local identity. Ultimately, this study highlights how elite public schools deploy language in their physical environment not merely for communication or language acquisition, but as a powerful ideological tool to construct and represent their institutional status.

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