Preliminary Studies of Indigenous Languages Teaching in Taiwan

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Introduction

Language is the distinctive property of human. It carries speaker’s memory, culture, and the knowing of the world. Crystal (2000) points out that language is an expression of their whole society and history. Language speakers see language as the means of transmitting the story of the great journeys, wars, alliances, and apocalyptic events of their past; it is the chief mechanism of their rituals; it is the means of conveying ancient myths and legends, and their beliefs about the spirit world, to new generations.

Taiwan – which is called as “Formosa” by Portuguese, consists of 36,000 square kilometers, but high diversities of people, biology, and languages. Chao (2005) points out that there are four primary groups of language speakers in Taiwan, which are Chinese language, indigenous languages, Haka, and Southern Min speakers. According to its population ratio, Chinese language speakers occupy 13%, indigenous languages speakers occupy 2%, Haka speakers occupy 12 %, and Southern Min speakers occupy 73%. According to the democratic principle, all of them should be regarded as the national language and treated equally. However, with certainly long period of oppression of inappropriate language policies, and solitary advocacy of Chinese language, languages other than Chinese language are almost on the verge of death. It is indigenous language that is especially significant.

Fishman (1991) suggests Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) to indicate the seriousness of language death. The higher the GIDS rating, the lower the intergenerational continuity and maintenance of a language network and community. Combining the extinction of indigenous language in Taiwan with the GIDS, indigenous languages in Taiwan cover three different stages, which are stage 6, 5 and 4. The ideas of these 3 stages might be different from the Fishman’s definition, by it sharply reflects the situation of indigenous language teaching and revitalization in

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Taiwan (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Concepts of Fishman’s GIDS and indigenous language teaching and revitalization in Taiwan](image)

Until 1993, Ministry of Education proclaimed General Guidelines of Curriculum for Elementary School Education. It was, beyond doubt, the turning point that not only replies to the decline in indigenous languages, but also the very beginning of indigenous languages teaching.

General Guidelines of Curriculum for Elementary School Education regulated that the ‘Place-based Curriculum’ ought to be implemented from 3rd grade in elementary school. There is only one session, which takes 40 minutes, for each week. At that period, Place-based Curriculum was designed to compose of local language, history, geography, nature, and art (Ministry of Education, 1993). It seemed a copious course. However, compared to other subjects, it is only a drop in the bucket.

Up to now, indigenous languages teaching has been implemented for 16 years. Nevertheless, there are varieties of comments as well as conceivable difficulties. Therefore, through the discussion of relevant issues and collaboration from people of all walks of life, we look forward to the greater effect of indigenous languages teaching in Taiwan.

Apart from the introduction, the remainder of the paper includes the discussion about language policy and indigenous language teaching in Taiwan, indigenous languages teacher education in Taiwan which is compared with Chinese language teacher education, possible suggestions and conclusion.

**Language Policy and Indigenous Languages Teaching in Taiwan**

**Review of language policy in Taiwan**

Language policies would inevitably arise many language issues in the following days. The most arbitrary Language policies were executed by Kuo Min Tang (KMT) when it held the reins of government. Huang (1994) scrutinizes the improper language
policies and illustrates the development restriction of other languages rather than
Chinese language. From 1946 to 1985, the government regulated many laws and bills
to solitarily advocate the status of Chinese language. In 1987, a language clash took
place in provincial council and made those improper language policies become
suspicious and challengeable. In the following year, the demand of protection of
multiple languages and cultures rose gradually, and appealed to government for
popularize Southern Min and Hakka. It was the point to pay much attention on the
diversity of language and culture in Taiwan.

In 1990, the mother tongue education, which was named Place-based curriculum
at that time, was organized into formal curriculum guidelines. This act not only
admitted the multiple races in Taiwan, but also began the first step of protection of
inheritance of languages and cultures in Taiwan. Then, the reins of government
shifted in 2000 from Kuo Min Tang to Democratic Progressive Party. It was the
moment that Southern Min, Hakka and indigenous languages, and local culture
became the new trend of study.

It is natural to have diverse races and languages in a country. It is also
undeniable that improper language policies could seriously stop the development of
languages. Before the reciprocally respect, many languages suffered from the
suppression of improper language policies.

**Indigenous Language Teaching in Taiwan**

The revision of language policy is, beyond doubt, a wonderful news for minority
languages. Following these frontiersmen, the Ministry of Education of Taiwan
organized “local language” as part of formal primary curriculum guideline in 1994.
Then, in 2003 the local language was termed as indigenous language and organized
into national language curriculum guideline of Grade 1-9 Curriculum.

Even these two acts made a great step for indigenous languages teaching in
Taiwan, they are still slow acts compared with the movements of other countries. For
examples, Basque, Breton, Vlaams, and Occitan were organized as selective courses
in schools in France in 1941 (Wu, 2002). The first language nest (Te Kohanga Reo)
was established in 1982 in New Zealand (Tiu⁸, 2002). Hawaiian Language Immersion
Program was exploited in teaching activities in schools in Hawaii in 1990
(Department of Education, State of Hawaii, n.d.).

**Discussion of Indigenous Language Teacher Education in Taiwan – Comparison
with Chinese Language Teachers**

Hong (2006), Hu (2006), and Chen (2008) suggest the problems and difficulties
in indigenous language teaching. They are teacher resources, teaching materials,
curriculum content, and cultural elements, which could not be fully integrated and
unsuitable for every indigenous race in Taiwan. In additions to that, the professional literacy indigenous languages teachers are closely linked to the quality of indigenous language teaching.

**Indigenous Languages Teacher Education and Chinese Language Teacher Education in Taiwan**

**Indigenous Languages Teacher**

There are two primary resources of indigenous languages teachers, who are in-service teachers and people who are interested in and capable of teaching. In order to be a qualified indigenous languages teacher, these people are required to pass the Indigenous Languages Proficiency Test and complete the curriculum of Workshop on Qualified Examinant, which is illustrated by figure 2.

1. in-service teachers
2. people who are interested in and capable of teaching

Indigenous Language Proficiency Test

Workshop on Qualified Examinants

Workshop on Language Revitalization Members (Advanced)

Qualified Indigenous Languages teachers

*Figure 2. Channel of Indigenous languages Teacher Education*

In addition to that, in order to promote the profession of indigenous languages teachers, the Ministry of Education suggests “Measures to promote professional literacy of indigenous languages teacher in primary and junior high schools” in 2009. It regulates that no qualified examinant is allowed to be an indigenous languages teacher without completion of the curriculum of Workshop on Teacher Education (Workshop on Qualified Examinants). Furthermore, those who don’t anticipate and complete the advanced curriculum of teacher education (Workshop on Language Revitalization Members) can never be hired from the year of 2009.

Regarding the indigenous languages teacher education, there two primary
different designs of curriculum. One is the “72-hour curriculum of indigenous languages seeded teacher education”, which is designed by the Ministry of Education. The other one is “36-hour curriculum of indigenous languages supportive faculty”, which is designed by the Council of Aboriginal Affairs, Executive Yuan (Huang, 2004). These two designs of curriculum are largely identical but with minor differences. Both of which contain indigenous languages and culture, indigenous langue structure, and indigenous language teaching (Table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Indigenous Languages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Introduction to Indigenous Languages</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Indigenous Culture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pronunciation and Writing System</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Indigenous Peoples</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lexicon and Grammar Structure</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Oral Literature</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teaching Materials and Methods of Indigenous Languages</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Expressive Art</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teaching Observation and Practice of Indigenous Languages</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pronunciation and Writing System</td>
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<td>Lexicon and Grammar Structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to Linguistic Field Method</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Materials and Methods of Indigenous Languages</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compilation of Indigenous Languages Teaching Materials</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity Planning of Indigenous Languages Teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Observation and Practice of Indigenous Languages</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Indigenous Languages Teaching Media</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous Languages Teaching Assessment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not provided.¹</td>
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</table>

Besides these two curriculums, the Council of Aboriginal Affairs designs another five different workshops in order to speed up the pace and effect of indigenous languages revitalization. These five workshops are “Workshop on Indigenous Languages Supportive Faculty”, “Workshop on Indigenous Languages Teaching Material”, “Workshop on Dictionary Compilation”, “Workshop on Indigenous Languages Teaching Assessment”.¹

¹ Advanced workshop on Supportive Faculty of Indigenous Language Teaching was organized by National Taiwan Normal University since 2008.
Languages and Culture”, and “Workshop on Indigenous Languages and Multimedia”.

Ministry of Education suggests that the advanced curriculum of teacher education will be the requirement for future indigenous languages teachers. Indigenous languages teacher education and certification is, however, not as systematic as Chinese language teachers in Taiwan.

**Chinese Language Teacher**

In Taiwan, Chinese language teachers mainly come from relevant departments or graduate institutes. These graduates with bachelor degree or above, who want to be a Chinese language teacher, must complete the Educational Program for Secondary School Teachers or for Elementary School Teachers, and a six-month practicum in school before the examination of certification (Figure 3).

![Diagram](Figure 3. Chinese language teacher education in Taiwan)
Table 2.

Comparison between Indigenous Languages Teacher Education, and Chinese language Teacher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indigenous Languages Teacher</th>
<th>Chinese Language Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department and Postgraduate in schools</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum of Teacher education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparison between curriculum of Indigenous Languages Teacher Education and Chinese Language Teacher Education in Taiwan

Language learning includes the life and culture of native speaker. Language teacher, therefore, not only to impart the accuracy of language and offer the context for practice, but also to understand and daily live and social culture of native speaker in order to provide learners with diverse phases of language learning.

Except Chinese language teacher, most of the curriculum of indigenous language teacher education primarily focuses on language teaching and language structure (Table 3), but overlooks other phases, e.g. life, and culture. Teacher, who ignores the cultural phase, become teaching oriented, and neglect the cultural sense, which is carried by the language. In addition to that, students would only care about the correctness and incorrectness of language, and lose cultural sensitivity by and by.

Table 3.

The comparison among the curriculum of language teacher education in Taiwan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Languages Teacher (Council of Aboriginal Affairs, Executive Yuan)</th>
<th>Chinese Language Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Introduction to languages in Taiwan.</td>
<td>• Compulsory and Selective Courses from Department or Graduate Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pronunciation and writing system.</td>
<td>• Chinese Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lexicon and grammar. Teaching materials and methods of Indigenous languages.</td>
<td>• Chinese Linguistic and Paleography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching observation and practice of Indigenous languages</td>
<td>• Classical Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chinese Thoughts and Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Educational Program for Secondary and Elementary School Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chinese Phonetics and Oral Expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Children’s Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chinese Calligraphy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vernacular Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subject Matter and Pedagogy of Elementary School Mandarin Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subject Matter and Pedagogy of Vernacular Language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glance at New Zealand, one of the most successful countries in language teaching and revitalization, regulates the necessary knowledge and competence of being a primary school teacher according to the norms of Graduating Teacher Standards2:

A. Professional Knowledge:
   A1. have content knowledge appropriate to the learners and learning areas of their programme.
   A2. know how to select curriculum content appropriate to the learners and the learning context.
   A3. have an understanding of education within the bicultural, multicultural, social, political, economic and historical contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand.

B. Professional Practice:
   B1. demonstrate proficiency in oral and written language (Māori and/or English), in numeracy and in ICT relevant to their professional role.
   B2. use te reo Māori me ngā tikanga-a-iwi appropriately in their practice.

C. Professional Values & Relationships:
   C1. have knowledge and understanding of the ethical, professional and legal responsibilities of teachers.
   C2. work co-operatively with those who share responsibility for the learning and wellbeing of learners.

There is no specific requirement or criteria for indigenous languages teacher in Taiwan. Anyone, who passes the indigenous languages Proficiency Test, and completes the curriculum of workshop on qualified examinant and advanced workshop on language revitalization members, can give himself to indigenous languages teaching. The shortage of careful consideration to professional literacy, and knowledge and skills in teaching consequently results in the suspicious of qualification of indigenous languages teachers.

**Suggestion**

Professor Lillian M. Huang (2007), who devotes her life all the year round, suggests that the success of indigenous languages teaching relies on the competent teachers, applicable language teaching materials, and administrative support. However, according to the present situation in Taiwan, incompetent teachers, inapplicable, scanty of teaching media and materials, insufficient administrative support,

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uncooperative parents, and deficient in teaching hours cause the ineffectiveness in indigenous languages. Even the indigenous languages teaching is not as smooth as we expect, it still need to be carried on, for it stands for the government’s respect for minority language after all.

**Education**

According to Article 5, Teacher Education Act, teacher education shall be done by teacher training colleges and normal universities, and universities with teacher education-related departments or teacher education centers. In addition to that, Article 7 points out that teacher education includes pre-service teacher education and teacher certification. Pre-service teacher education courses comprise an ordinary curriculum, specialized courses, education concentration courses, and an education practicum. Furthermore, in accordance with Teacher Education Act Enforcement Rules, ordinary curriculum: the common curriculum required of students. Specialized courses: courses in specialized competencies to prepare teachers to teach particular subjects, disciplines, or specialties. Education concentration courses: education credit courses to develop educational competencies required of teachers according to teaching subject areas. Education practicum: a half-year full-time education practicum for teacher development comprising a teaching internship, "homeroom" teaching (general class affairs) supervision, administrative work practice, and study and training activities. The education concentration courses and the education practicum are collectively termed the "education studies program." It is the formal teacher education in Taiwan to cultivate the qualified teachers from kindergarten to senior high school.

However, under the imperious demand of indigenous languages teaching and preservation, there is still no official organization, or department for cultivation of indigenous languages teacher. Indigenous Languages Proficiency Test and Workshop on Indigenous Languages Teachers are the only two criteria for hiring indigenous languages teacher. Compared to the teacher qualification from kindergarten to senior high school, it seems the indigenous languages teacher qualification is a bit of effortless to acquire. Moreover, due to the lack of formal and complete mechanism of indigenous languages teacher education, indigenous languages teachers always enter the field without objective assessment.

Ignace (1988) suggests that public schools and First Nations School alike express a critical shortage of suitably qualified Aboriginal language teachers, and urgently recommend Aboriginal language teacher training and education that comprises skills in classroom management, literacy, curriculum design and use, organization, communication, Aboriginal language linguistics and, especially teaching methods and strategies suitable for Aboriginal language.
Kahuawaiola indigenous Teacher Education Program by University of Hawaii at Hilo is to prepare “Mauli Ola Hawaii” teachers of the highest quality, who are grounded in Hawaiian language and culture, to serve in Hawaiian language medium schools, in Hawaiian language and culture programs in English medium schools, and in schools serving students with a strong Hawaiian cultural background. The establishment of the program does not focus on the cultivation of language teachers, but the applicants should have four-year study of Hawaiian language with a minimum GPA of 2.75 for the third and fourth years, or permission from the Hawaiian Studies Division based on an evaluation of fluency.

Therefore, to establish the organization of specific duty, and to organize the curriculum with systematic, practical content, are urgent matters to cultivate the competent indigenous languages teachers. Moreover, to promote and develop the professional literacy, well-organized courses and channels for indigenous languages teacher to pursue further education are also essential as well.

**Linguistics and Teaching Preparation**

Linguistics, which is viewed as language science, focuses on the investigation of speech sound, lexicon, structure, and meaning. In other words, linguistics is an empirical science, which studies language through scientific methods. Linguistics is further divided as general linguistics and descriptive linguistics.

Tai and Tai (2000) point out that general linguistics provides the principles and theory of speech sounds, grammar, and lexicon. Descriptive linguistics focuses on research and analysis of speech sounds, grammar, and lexicon in a certain period.

Although they study language from different angles, they both provide us with comprehensive and insightful studies of language. However, the knowledge of linguistics becomes another defect of indigenous languages teacher in Taiwan.

Glancing over the 9-Level Indigenous languages Teaching Materials, which are edited by Center for Aboriginal Studies, the content of the materials include not only basic conversation and vocabulary, but also the drills of reading and its translation in Chinese. Yet, no language structure and grammar are described. Besides that, most of the indigenous languages teachers, who are proficient in indigenous languages, are elders in the tribes or retired teachers from primary school. More than half of them have no ideas about linguistics, neither the participation of linguistics courses. It is, consequently, difficult for them to provide students with comprehensive and systematic explanation of language structures.

Language learning should be combined with daily life in order to communicate effectively and pass on the traditional culture and thought. The misunderstanding of language structure, however, might cause students to learn without comprehension, to
use without understanding. Therefore, the fundamental linguistics concept could provide these indigenous languages teachers with not only the understanding of language, but also the methodology to investigate and preserve the language data.

**Literacy of Language Teaching**

Language teaching integrates theory with application, and pays attention to teaching skills of teachers and learning achievement of students. In the past years, the trend of English learning brought the hot discussion of effective teaching methods and skills. Since that moment, techniques and principles in language teaching became essential for English language teachers, especially in Taiwan. Language teaching methodology consists of not only techniques and skills of teaching, but also teachers’ and students’ role, classroom management, language context, and curriculum planning as well.

Even most of the indigenous languages teachers in Taiwan are retired teachers, they know quite little about the theory and application of language teaching. Then, the inexperience and insufficiency of teaching skills are predictable. Moreover, unskillful course planning makes these teachers excessively dependent on 9-Level Indigenous languages Teaching Materials.

Therefore, fine and effective language teaching methodology should be included as part of language teacher education. Furthermore, in order to better the theory and application of teaching skills, workshop and teaching observation are as well as essential for these indigenous languages teachers.

**Mother Tongue and Culture Preservation**

We have no more elders living from the previous century. That means we no longer have that linguistic and spiritual link to the previous cultures (Littlebear, 1999:1). This significantly indicates the importance and effect of culture preservation on any race. Chuang (1999:46) also points out that the cultures are different from each other in that culture is a kind of life styles. So, to understand a culture of a language is necessary for language learning. Culture is like running water. It contains temporal, spatial, and human factors and changes, impacts, and communicates every now and then (Tai, 2002:23).

Therefore, it is not difficult to reveal that culture is the reflection of human’s life, and the resources of history. Language is the representation of human’s thought, and words are symbols of the thought. It also records every aspect of native speaker’s life. When culture and language join together, the relation among language, culture, and human are as close as lips to teeth (Figure 4).
According to item 6 of indigenous languages teaching in Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines, it aims to know foreign culture and diverse customs of different races, and develop extensive vision through the learning of indigenous languages. Thus, it can be seen that the learning and knowing the culture play important roles in language learning. Indigenous languages teachers, therefore, have responsibilities for providing students with the understanding of cultural essence, extending the vision in order to know the different cultural feature of other races. Basing on this notion, cultural literacy becomes another indispensible element of teacher education.

To sum up the elaboration above, a quality indigenous languages teacher should have not only fluent indigenous languages, but also the knowledge of four different phases. The competent indigenous languages teachers in Taiwan, however, are like a drop in the bucket. Besides that, the relevant issues of indigenous languages teaching should be further discussed and cooperated by people from all walks of life.

In addition to the discussion of teacher, Reyhner (1999: xvii) brings up a concept of 3 “M’s” – methods, materials and motivation. It is these 3 “M’s” that will either lead indigenous languages learners to communicative competence and more sophisticated language usage or to failure.

**Conclusion**

Taiwan is a country which is composed of many miscellaneous races and languages. Diversity is the most significant feature of Taiwan. Along with the worldwide trend, language policies in Taiwan were revised and stop advocating Chinese language only after the government ceased the curfew. It provided each race and culture with rights and space for development. Indigenous languages teaching was activated according to the successful experience from other countries with primary focus on curriculum design, teacher education, material development, teaching practice, and language context. Although the present achievement is
doubtless, there is still a blemish in an otherwise perfect thing after 15-year efforts from all walks of lives. It is the teacher that is the most important problem of the imperfection, which is also the main discussing issue in this paper.

The result shows that most of the indigenous language teachers in Taitung are supportive faculties rather than formal teachers in schools, even all of them passed the proficiency test and completed the curriculum of teacher education. Besides that, these indigenous languages teachers, also known as supportive faculties, are questionable about their ability of teaching, lesson planning, and evaluation because of the shortage of formal teacher education. In addition to that, indigenous languages and culture are organized into curriculum of teacher education in New Zealand and Australia. This is, beyond doubt, another weakness of indigenous languages teacher education. If the predicament of indigenous languages teaching in Taiwan is expected to be bettered, the revision of teacher education curriculum, and cultivation system would be the first step. It is to combine the theoretical frame with practice in order to execute indigenous languages teaching activities and promote the learning effect.

According to Fishman’s concept of GIDS (1991), school is one of channels to maintain the existence of language (stage 4), and it is closely linked to family and community. When students’ learning effect is raised, the frequency of indigenous languages use is promoted as well. Until these students, family and community members are used to speaking indigenous languages, indigenous languages somehow successfully revitalized and survived.

Multiple races and languages are the characteristics of Taiwan. It is also the essential element to show the diversity of Taiwan. Except for the revision of language policies, it is also pressing to cultivate more indigenous languages teachers who are capable of teaching and inheriting traditional culture.

School education in Taiwan plays an indispensible role. It used to be the place to forbid indigenous people to speak their own languages, and give up their traditional culture and belief. Now it is also the place to start the indigenous languages revitalization, and keep reminding people of inheritance of culture. If these schools can provide these students with fine language education, and help them speak their own languages with their family and community members, the success of language revitalization can be expected soon.

No one person, community, school, university, tribe, or government program has all the answers to keeping any indigenous languages alive. It is only through sharing successes and learning from failures that the extinction of indigenous languages can be prevented (Reyhner, 1999: xvii). A saying from the analects of Confucius - “a mill cannot grind with the water that is past.” There is a great deal of influence from inappropriate policies on language, but the criticisms could never compensate
language speakers for what had lost before.

From the local activity instruction in the past days to indigenous languages in the present days, it is doubtless that the racial identity and language authority are inspired. Looking back on the efforts in past years, there are still more needed to be done for indigenous languages teaching, and that calls for immediate and continuous support and efforts. What we have and will have done would make these minority languages carry on their lives, development and communication, especially in Taiwan – a country with multiple cultures and diverse races.
Reference


