

# The role of educational institutions in preserving the Malay language: Insights from the Patani ethnic community in southern Thailand

Bastian Yunariono\*

*<sup>a</sup>Department of International Relations, UPN "Veteran" Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta 55283, Indonesia*

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## Abstract

For over a century, the Thai government's assimilationist policies have hindered the development of the Patani people's cultural identity, which blends Malay and Islamic cultures. This cultural impediment is reflected in the language as the Patani have experienced a decline in their ability to use the Malay language as a marker of their identity. This study aims to explain the role of educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), private Islamic schools (madrasah), and kindergartens (tadika) in preserving the Malay language. This study employed a qualitative research method, utilizing library resources such as journals, books, reports, and websites. The results indicated that these educational institutions play a significant role in preserving the Malay language among the Patani. By using Malay as a means of communication and as a subject of study in these educational institutions, the Patani ethnic identity can be preserved.

**Keywords:** Patani; Malay muslim; Islamic boarding school; private Islamic school; tadika

## 1. Introduction

Ethnic identity is a characteristic inherent to an ethnic group that allows it to distinguish itself from other groups. It is symbolized by cultural attributes such as language and belief systems.

The Patani ethnic group in southern Thailand is one of the ethnic groups that faces challenges in preserving its cultural identity. As a community blending of Malay and Islamic cultures, the Patani are often referred to as Malay Muslims. They use Malay cultural symbols such as language, the baju kurung, and the songkok and they behave based on Islamic principles. Malay and Islamic culture have been the foundations of individual and community life for generations.

In 2021, the Patani ethnic groups was estimated to account for about 5.4% of the population, while the Thai Buddhist population reached 92.5% of the total population of 69.9 million. The Patani ethnic group also known as Muslim Malays live in four provinces of southern Thailand bordering Malaysia: Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun (US Department of State, 2022).

The Patani ethnic identity was challenged when the southern Thailand region, formerly known as Patani Darussalam became an integral part of the Kingdom of Thailand. In 1902, the Kingdom of Thailand, whose population was predominantly ethnic Thai (Siamese) and Buddhist annexed Patani Darussalam.

To increase loyalty to the Thai kingdom, the Patani ethnic group was required to assimilate into the Thai culture. The Thaification policy required the Patani ethnic group to follow the Thai traditions and customs. They had to abandon their Malay names and adopt Thai-sounding names and they also had to use the Thai language and legal system. This policy aimed to promote Thai nationalism while simultaneously eroding the Malay Muslim culture (Shobron et al., 2020).

In its development, the assimilation policy implemented by the Thai government could not eliminate the cultural identity of the Patani Muslim ethnic group. Until recently, they still maintain ancestral cultural traditions such as the Malay language and Islamic traditions. The combination of Malay and Islamic cultural values has become a symbol of their culture and way of life. Thaification does not eliminate the traditions deeply rooted in the lives of the Patani ethnic group from generation to generation.

One of the pillars in preserving the cultural identity of the Malay Muslims is the education system which includes Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), private Islamic schools (also known as madrasahs) and kindergartens (tadika). These educational institutions use the Malay language to instill Islamic values. Islamic boarding schools, for instance, are the traditional educational institutions using the Malay language to teach classical Islamic books to strengthen their religiosity.

These institutions play an important role in conveying cultural values for future generations. They teach the younger generation about the Malay Muslim outlook on life, and their norms and customs. Their unique teaching approach in these educational institutions contributes greatly to preserving Malay

\* Corresponding author.

Email: [bastian.yunariono@upnyk.ac.id](mailto:bastian.yunariono@upnyk.ac.id)

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Muslim culture. The use of Malay language to teach Islamic lessons allows the younger generation to emotionally connect with their ancestors, strengthening their cultural heritage and fostering pride in their unique ethnic identity as Malay Muslims amidst the predominantly Thai Buddhist nation (Salaeh, 2023).

Several studies have examined the Malay Muslim ethnic group in southern Thailand. Arismunandar et al. (2019), for instance, examined the socio-political life of this ethnic group in southern Thailand, which is a minority within a Buddhist majority. Assimilation policies forced them to merge their Malay Muslim cultural identity with Thai culture. The policy sparked resistance from the Patani ethnic group, led by religious figures and intellectuals. These leaders demanded recognition of the sociocultural rights, including of the Malay Muslim ethnic, including the right to use of the Malay language in the southern Thai education system.

Meanwhile, Ismail Suardi Wekke et al. (2019) reviewed the development of Islamic education in Patani, which has metamorphosed from mosques and traditional or modern Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), madrasahs, and or private Islamic schools. The Thai government influenced these changes in an effort to integrate the Patani Muslim ethnic group into the Thai nation through education. Education is a process through which cultural assimilation and national integration occurs. Muhammad afeefee Assalihee and Abdulai M. Kaba (2023) discussed the systems and challenges of Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren. The Thai government has supported the development of Islamic education in southern Thailand by allocating budgets, improving infrastructure, and enhancing the quality of teachers and students. However, Islamic educational institutions are considered inadequate for facing the challenges of the 21st century, which require mastery of modern technology, foreign languages, and entrepreneurship. This is due to some Islamic educational institutions' continued use of traditional learning systems, low teacher welfare, and a lack of parental and community support.

Furthermore, Sudarno Shobron et al. (2020) discussed solutions for resolving conflict in southern Thailand. They argued that granting special autonomy to Malay Muslims is one alternative solution to this conflict. This would give them the authority to manage local natural resources, develop cultural identity, and establish educational institutions. Furthermore, ethnic Malay Muslims must improve their human resources by reconceptualizing Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as modern institutions that focus not only on classical Islamic knowledge but also on other subjects.

Unlike previous articles, this article examines the role of educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), private Islamic schools (madrasah), and tadika (Islamic boarding schools) in preserving the Patani ethnic culture, particularly the Malay language. These institutions transmit the Malay language, the ancestral heritage and identity of the Patani ethnic group in southern Thailand.

## 2. Methodology

This research study examined the role of educational institutions in preserving the Malay language as the identity of

the Patani ethnic group in southern Thailand. The study used a qualitative research method. This approach was chosen in view of its ability to produce in-depth research. For this study, the primary data were secondary data obtained from credible journals, books, and internet sources on Malay identity and language as cultural symbols of the Patani ethnic group in southern Thailand. To support our data, we interviewed the former chairman of the Yogyakarta branch of the Association of Islamic Students Association from Patani (South Thailand) in Indonesia (PMIPTI). Data collection took place from February to May of 2025.

We analyzed the data in three stages: data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusion (Sugiyono, 2018) using the steps proposed by M.B Miles and A.M Huberman was carried out in three stages, namely . Data reduction involved sorting data related to the Patani ethnic identity and completing what is needed. Data presentation is carried out by categorizing the Patani ethnic identity, Thaification policies, and educational institutions as well as their influence on the Malay language. The next stage involved mapping the role of educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, private Islamic schools and tadika in preserving the Malay language.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Development of Patani ethnic identity in southern Thailand

The Patani are an ethnic group living in southern Thailand. The term “ethnicity” is often associated with a tribe which is a social unit that is distinguished from different units based on culture such as language. R. Narrol stated that an ethnic group is a population that is biologically capable of reproducing; shares the similar cultural values and has a sense of togetherness. This group forms its own communication and interaction network; determines its own group characteristics that are accepted by other groups and can be distinguished from other populations (Barth, 1996).

While, according to Anthony Smith ethnicity refers to a human population shares myths, common ancestors, past historical experiences, a culture (such as religion and language), a homeland and a sense of solidarity (Smith, 1991). Based on the primordialist perspective, ethnic identity is characterized by images of territory, religion, culture, language and social organization and refers to the characteristics inherent to a particular ethnic group that differentiate one ethnic group from others.

The Patani ethnic group is referred to as Malay Muslims because they are a community group that shares Malay cultural characteristics. The word "Muslim" emphasizes their religion and is inseparable from their ethnic identity. Consequently, the phrase “Buddhist Malay” or “Christian Malay” are never used because they contradict each other, while the terms Malay and Muslim complement each other (Dorloh & Hashim, 2019). The term Muslim Malay began to develop alongside with the spread of Islam in Patani and became an ethnic identity.

Islam has been spreading in Patani since the 10th century AD. There are two opinions explaining how Islam entered the region. The first explains that Arab brought Islam into Patani when they traded to Southeast Asia. This opinion is proven by

ancient paintings depicting Arab traders in Ayuthaya, an area in Thailand. These historical traces illustrate the process by which Islam spread throughout Southeast Asia, including to Patani.

The second opinion states that Islam developed in the Patani region due to the influence of the Samudra Pasai kingdom. This opinion is proven by the similarity of the ornaments on the tombstones of the Patani's Muslim kings with those in the Samudra Pasai Kingdom in Aceh. These ornaments indicate that the king originated from Aceh during the transition from Hindu-Buddhist to Islam. Other evidence showing the Aceh's influence in the Islamization of Patani can be seen from the Patani scholars who came from Samudra Pasai, including Sheikh Said and Sheikh Daud (Manan et al., 2022). Sheikh Said is credited with converting the ruler of Patani, Paya Tu Nakpa, to Islam, who later changed his name to Ismail. The conversion of the Patani King to be a Muslim was considered as a "turning point" in religious life in Patani. The Patani people who were previously Hindu and Buddhist then converted to Islam, as their king did.

In the 1600s, Patani developed rapidly into a center of trade and the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. The fall of Malacca to the Portuguese and the subsequent decline of its port made Patani a major trading hub where ships from the Western and Eastern hemispheres docked here. In addition to trade, Patani grew into a center of Islamic knowledge attracting many students from the archipelago. The development of Islam in Patani was inextricably linked to the role of Islamic boarding schools (ashrams). These institution became the most important in spreading Islam to remote areas. Activities at these schools combined Islamic teachings and Malay culture. The students wore sarongs, Malay clothing, as well as white caps and used Jawi script. These schools were very influential in the formation of Malay Muslim culture (Salaeh, 2023).

The Islamic boarding schools that developed in Patani are believed to have originated from Java. The first person to establish one was Wan Husein, a student of Sunan Ampel in Java. He was an influential cleric who played a key role in the Islam development in Patani. With the introduction of the pesantren system, Islamic education became accessible to both common people and the royal elite.

Educational institutions became increasingly prominent in spreading Islam. Rulers in Patani used mosques not only as places of worship, but also as centers of Islamic education. This helped Islam to spread to various areas. Many Islamic boarding schools emerged in Patani attracting students from Thailand and other countries. They speak Malay in their daily lives. These schools equipped a students with the skills needed to communicate Islam to the people of Patani.

Nevertheless, the freedom of the Patani ethnic group to develop Malay culture and Islam was hindered when the Kingdom of Siam, now known as Thailand, conquered Patani in 1785. Patani then became an integral part of the Kingdom of Siam, whose population was predominantly Buddhist.

To increase loyalty to the Thai kingdom, an assimilation policy was continuously implemented. Robert E Park and Ernest W Burges explained that assimilation refers to a process by which an individual or a community is penetrated and unified with a different individual or community. This process includes the concept of thinking, feelings, attitudes, culture and

sharing past experiences and history (Hirsch, 2020).

King Rama V (1853-1910 AD) implemented an assimilation policy under the pretext of modernizing Patani society, obliging the Malay Muslims to merge the cultural identity with that of Thai Buddhists. The Patani people were forced to abandon the Malay language and adopt Thai, the national language of Thailand for use in administration and daily life. Likewise, Islamic law has been replaced with Thai law in Patani. Civil Law and Criminal Law in force in Patani must use Thai law which aims to standardize the legal system throughout the territory of the Thai kingdom. Although legal issues, especially family law, are sensitive, assimilation policies require the equalization of the legal system in accordance with the interests of the Kingdom of Thailand.

The Kingdom of Thailand has implemented another assimilation policy in education. In an effort to promote Thai culture, the traditional education system of the Patani ethnic group such as Islamic boarding schools is required to adapt to this policy. Islamic boarding schools are required to teach secular curriculum in addition to a religious one and use Thai as the language of instruction.

This cultural policy is an effort to 'Thaiify' the Patani ethnic group. The policy threatens the cultural identity of the Patani community including its laws, language and customs. The Malay language used for everyday communication has been replaced with the national language of Thailand and other cultures that are full of Malay culture must also be replaced to follow Thai culture. This has then caused the Patani ethnic group to feel threatened, and led to various rebellions demanding freedom to develop Muslim Malay culture. This is because identity is related to the human need to feel safe and comfortable.

However, after more than a century of the implementation, the assimilation policy has not been completely successful. From generation to generation, the Muslim Patani ethnic group has engaged in cultural resistance. They still maintain their Muslim Malay cultural identity. One educational institution considered a guardian of Muslim Malay culture is the Islamic boarding schools that are very influential and serve as community development centers and strongholds for preserving local culture. The students wear sarongs, Malay clothing, white caps and Jawi books as was common in the early development of Islamic boarding school education.

The discussion explains the important role Islamic boarding schools, private Islamic schools (madrasahs) and Tadika play as the guardians of the cultural identity of Muslim Malays such as the Malay language. The assimilation policy cannot erase their language identity as a minority group with its own characteristics.

### 3.2. Malay language in education

The Patani ethnic group uses Malay in everyday life and it is a marker of their ethnic identity. The use of Malay shows the Patani ethnic group identity which differs from that of other ethnic groups using Thai to communicate (Phaosan Jehwae, 2019). Setiarini explained that the Patani ethnic group has a distinctive variety of Malay, including the so-called kecek nayu, a dialect of the Kelantan Malay language in Malaysia which is geographically close to Patani (Setiarini, 2021).

As previously explained, the use of Malay in Patani has declined since the Kingdom of Thailand implemented the Thaifika program throughout the region. The policy requires all Thai people to use Thai, such as in elementary schools in the Patani region. The Thai government is concerned that the continued use of Malay in Patani will undermine the position and influence of Thai (Jehwae et al., 2014).

Using Thai instead of Malay has led to a decline in Malay language proficiencies in Patani society. Malay's position has also declined among the younger generation. It is now only used for daily communication, religious ceremonies and Islamic religious instruction in Islamic boarding schools. Malay is prohibited from administrative matters of the kingdom, mass media and bulletin boards or billboards. Malay is only used verbally among Patani ethnic groups (Jehwae et al., 2014).

The decline of Malay has an impact on the identity of the Patani ethnic group in view of its strategic significance. For the Patani ethnic group, Malay is the mother tongue, the language of education and the language of peace (Phaosan Jehwae, 2019). As a mother tongue, Malay is the main means of communication and a legacy of ancestors passed down from generations to generations. People use Malay to express thoughts, feelings, and other expressions. The position of Malay as a mother tongue plays a critical role in forming Patani identity.

Malay is also important in the field of education used as a medium of instruction in Islamic boarding schools and private Islamic schools. Masters and teachers use Malay language books to teach religious knowledge. Western missionaries even used Malay language to spread Christianity in Patani.

The Malay language has elevated Patani's position as a cultural center, like Malay Islamic literature in the global realm. In the 18th century, Patani scholars such as Syeh Daud Al Fatani wrote 58 religious books in Arabic and Malay. These religious books have become references for Muslims in various countries such as the Middle East and Africa. Also, students from Cambodia, Burma, Vietnam and the Indonesian archipelago must learn Malay because it is the language of instruction in the Islamic boarding schools where they study. Thus, Malay has become an important language in Islamic education in Patani (Jehwae, 2019).

Malay also serves as a political language. Since the political crisis in Thailand, the Thai kingdom has seen the importance of Malay's position and role in Patani. Malay promotes peace in Patani, so Thai Kingdom employees working in Pattani or southern Thailand must master Malay. It is hoped the ability to speak Malay will eliminate misunderstandings between royal employees and the community in Pattani, preventing prolonged conflict. However, the cultural significance of Malay as a symbol of pride for the Patani ethnic group is fading. The younger generation of Patani is increasingly unable to use Malay due to the assimilation policy that has been in place for decades.

To maintain the position of Malay, the Patani ethnic group is trying to preserve their Malay language through education and other means. Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), private Islamic schools and Children's Education institutions (Tadika) play a role in maintaining Malay amidst the massive teaching

of Thai. Pesantren is an important traditional educational institution for preserving the Malay language.

Historically, the pesantren grew and developed as Patani became the center of Islamic preaching and activities in Southeast Asia from the 17th century to the early 20th century. Students from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and countries in the archipelago come to Patani to study religion. At the boarding schools, Malay is used as the language of instruction and the books used are in Arabic and Malay. This makes the Malay language an important medium in the learning process at the boarding school (Jehwae, 2019).

After Patani became part of the Thai Kingdom, however, Islamic boarding schools decline as centers for Malay cultural education. The Thai government viewed Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions that taught Islamic values that were considered incompatible with Taification. From 1930 to 1949, the Phibun Songkram government assimilated the Patani ethnic group into Thai culture, including language. Furthermore, in the 1960s, the Sarit Thanarat government of the Thai Kingdom implemented a policy requiring Islamic boarding schools to teach secular subjects and use Thai as the language of instruction.

Following the intervention of the Thai Kingdom, Islamic boarding schools were divided into two categories : those receiving assistance from the Thai Kingdom and those that did not (Jehwae, 2019). Those that received assistance were also known as private Islamic schools (madrasahs) and had to reduce the use of Malay in lessons replacing it with Thai. Malay was only used for religious lessons. These private Islamic schools offered academic and religious lessons and had good facilities and management. These schools were considered modernist and were in demand by the younger generation (Dorloh & Hashim, 2019).

Meanwhile, Islamic boarding schools that did not receive assistance from the Thai Kingdom maintained the old system, teaching yellow books and using Arabic and Malay as the languages of instruction. Students at these traditional boarding schools lived in small huts close to the surau or mosque. This traditional pondok education represents the older generation (Jehwae, 2019).

Islamic boarding schools are educational institutions that maintain the use of Malay as the language of instruction. Husasan, a Patani youth who is currently studying for a postgraduate degree in Yogyakarta, stated the following:

"Islamic boarding schools, it seems that almost 100 percent of the learning uses Malay. Because the books are written in Malay and Arabic (Husasan, interviewed, 8 February 2025)."

Based on the explanation of the resource person, Islamic boarding schools are educational institutions that play a role in preserving the Malay language. They fulfil this role by using Malay as the language of instruction to communicate in the Islamic boarding school environment. Also, learning materials use Arabic and Malay texts. Thus Islamic boarding schools consistently maintain the Patani ethnic identity, Malay language and Islamic values from generation to generation.

Another educational institution that plays a role in preserving the Malay language is madrasah. It grew and developed in Patani due to the Thai government's policy of

nationalizing the education system throughout Thailand, including traditional education in Islamic boarding schools. But, the education system in Islamic boarding schools does not align with the Thaification policy and developments of the times.

Facing the Thaification policy in the field of education, the Muslim elite of Patani opposed the government's efforts to implement a modern education system in their region. They considered the policy as an attempt to exert hegemony and replace their Malay Muslims culture with Buddhist Thai culture.

However, the Patani ethnic group realized that they could not be a priori, rejecting the nationalization policy in the field of education. They sought a solution that could maintain Malay culture and Islamic values while fulfilling the government's hopes of modernizing Islamic boarding schools from a traditional education system to a more modern one and accommodating Thai culture. Patani ethnic figures such as Haji Sulong sought a middle ground that would be mutually beneficial for both parties. One rational choice was to transform traditional Islamic boarding school institutions into "Madrasah" institutions that were considered capable of "bridging" the Thai government's desire to implement a modern education system. This change is considered the best alternative. On the one hand, the Patani ethnic group can maintain their Malay Muslim cultural identity and on the other hand, they can implement a modern education system. They are modelled after the madrasah system in several modern Islamic countries in the Middle East.

Madrasah institutions, also known as private Islamic schools during their development, have three levels of education: elementary level or *Ibtidaiyah* with a 4-year study period; middle level or *Mutawasitah* with a 3-year study period; and high school level or *Tsananiyah* with a 3-year study period. The madrasahs curriculum is divided into two fields of knowledge: secular subject such as science, mathematics, social sciences, and Thai language. While religious subjects include subjects of *Ahklak*, *Tauhid*, *Tafsir*, *Fiqh*, Arabic and Malay in which Malay is used as the language of instruction (Madmarn, 1999).

Observing the curriculum above, it is evident that the reformation and transformation of the Islamic boarding school education system to madrasah did not result in the extinction of traditional Islamic education and Malay culture. The Similarly, the introduction of Thai culture did not completely disrupt the efforts of the Patani ethnic group to maintain their identity. This can be seen, among other things, from the continued use of classical Islamic books and Malay culture in madrasahs. Even the Muslim Patani ethnic group benefits doubly as they are able to adopt a modern education system while maintaining their Malay cultural identity (Madmarn, 1999).

Furthermore, madrasahs are private Islamic schools that contribute significantly to the preserving the Malay language in Patani. Many madrasah graduates continue their education to university. Four universities in Patani offering Malay language programs include Songkhla Nakharin University; Tkasin University; Fatoni University and Rajabhat Yala University. These universities produce graduates in the field of Malay Cultural Studies such as the Malay language which is their identity.

After completing their studies at these universities, graduates work as Malay language teachers. Graduates of these then work in schools owned by the Kingdom, madrasahs programs and Tadika. They are identified as part of the fighters and developers of the Malay language in Thailand (Jehwae et al., 2014).

Another educational institution that plays a role in maintaining the Malay language is Tadika. It was created as a reaction in response to the Thaification of the education sector. In the 1950s, the Thai kingdom required that Malay children throughout Thailand attend school using the Thai Royal School model (Thai National Primary School). This model was considered more modern and aligned with the Thaification policy. This policy required Patani children to use Thai as the official language in school.

Further implications of Thaification in the field of education resulted in children in Patani having limited opportunities to learn religion and Malay, which was their ancestral and former official language. They potentially lost their cultural identity as their identity.

The Thaification policy prompted the Patani ethnic group to preserve their religion, language and culture. They then formed a Malay school system using Tok Guru's house or Surau as a place of study. In the early stages of establishing this educational institution, management and curriculum were not emphasized. The education system still used classical patterns such as the traditional Islamic boarding school system.

Husasan conveyed the importance of Tadika as a means of preserving the Malay language and culture as follows:

"Tadika is the foundation, a cultural fortress that maintains the identity of the Malay language and cultural identity. From elementary school, our school is Monday to Friday, it is a public elementary school, then Saturday to Sunday we go to Tadika...

... if in a public elementary school (Monday to Friday), .... if we mention studying academic knowledge such as science, mathematics, social, Thai language. What is meant there is no teaching about our identity, meaning religious knowledge. The language used is Thai, Malay language is not taught. In Tadika, we learn morals, monotheism, and there is Malay language, stories from Malay written in Jawi (Husasan, interviewed, 8 February 2025) .".

The informant explained that Tadika is the foundation or fortress of the Patani ethnic culture in preserving their cultural identity. This is because in Tadika, Patani children learn the cultural identity of Muslim Malay. The Malay language is used to teach Islamic values. The children do not learn about Malay Muslim cultural identity in government elementary schools, which focus on secular education and the introduction to Thai culture.

The importance of Tadika as a stronghold of Patani ethnic culture is evident in the age of its students. Tadika is attended by Patani children aged 6-12 years. There, they learn to read the Koran, and study Fiqh sciences in Malay. The age of children is important because they need attention. Children are important because they are often called "the hope of nation's youth", they are the ones who will carry on the identity or

legacy of their ancestors. Indeed, children are taught to love Malay culture and language (Interview with Husasan, 8 February 2025).

Apart from that, Malay language issues are currently always hot topic in Thailand. In the view of the Patani people, if Malay language is not preserved, then there is no guarantee that the Malay culture will exist in Thailand in the future. Moreover, in this current era, sociolinguistically, the Malay community has experienced many grammatical changes such as the adoption of Thai and Malay/Jawi, which has led to a mixture of languages. The purity of the Malay language, a characteristic of the Patani ethnic group for generations will gradually become difficult to find. Thus, the massive development of Tadika in Patani is associated with instilling a love of Malay culture from an early age.

Islamic schools such as Islamic boarding schools, private Islamic schools (madrasahs) and Tadika play an important role in preserving and transmitting Islamic values and teachings for generations. These play a vital role in maintaining the cultural identity of the Patani ethnic group reflecting Islamic beliefs, traditions, language and way of life. Islamic schools in Patani have also contributed to the intellectual and cultural development.

Based on the description, the primordialist approach is relevant for analyzing an ethnic group. It encompasses regional features, religion, culture, language, and social organization. Furthermore, shared ancestry and cultural attributes are inherent and distinguishing characteristics from other ethnic groups. From a primordialist perspective, modern life has not changed the relevance of ethnic identity.

Meanwhile, in practice, primary and secondary educational institutions play a strategic role in maintaining cultural identity. This study showed that educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), private Islamic schools (madrasahs), and Tadika (Islamic boarding schools) act as guardians of an ethnic group's culture. Also, early childhood education plays a central role in preserving ethnic group culture.

Through these educational institutions, the Patani ethnic group has the assets and resources to maintain its cultural identity. Furthermore, cultural identity has the potential to foster social cohesion solidarity among its members.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Patani ethnic group is a minority among the predominantly Buddhist Thai ethnic group. For decades, the Patani have consistently maintained their unique identity, blending Malay culture and Islamic values. The Thai government's assimilation policy aimed to change the Patani's culture to Thai culture has not been successful. Cultural identities such as the Malay language as a cultural symbol and a means of communication have survived from generation to generation.

The Patani use educational institutions as an effective instrument to maintain the Malay language. Through educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools,

private Islamic schools (madrasahs) and Tadika, the Malay language is passed down from generation to generation to teach Islamic values. These institutions are pillars in preserving the Malay language as the ancestral heritage.

However, these institutions must adapt to current developments. These educational institutions must adapt to the domestic politics dynamics and massive globalization. At the same time, they must also maintain their cultural identity as an ethnic group with distinctive customs such as language. Losing these values would result in the loss of their identity.

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