

Beyond Language: BIPA Teachers' Perception of the Role of The Cultural Content in Teaching Bahasa Indonesia to Foreign Learners in West Kalimantan

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ABSTRACT

Culture has become an essential component in the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia for Foreign Speakers (BIPA), as language learning involves not only linguistic competence but also cultural understanding. This study explores the perception of BIPA teachers in West Kalimantan regarding the role of cultural content in teaching Indonesian to foreign learners. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to BIPA teachers in West Kalimantan. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions, perception-based items, and open-ended survey questions. Three BIPA teachers participated in the study. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to perceptions, classroom practices, challenges, and recommendations. The findings reveal that teachers perceive cultural content as an inseparable aspect of language learning because it provides context for communication and helps learners understand Indonesian social values. Teachers have integrated various forms of local culture, including traditional songs, culinary traditions, local customs, and intercultural discussions. Authentic cultural materials were found to increase learner engagement and facilitate meaningful learning experiences. However, participants also identified challenges, including limited culturally responsive teaching resources, difficulties in explaining culturally specific concepts, and financial constraints that hinder experiential learning activities. The participants recommended developing more culturally diverse BIPA materials and increasing the representation of regional cultures beyond Java. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on culturally responsive BIPA instruction and highlights the importance of integrating local cultural perspectives into language education.

Keywords: BIPA; cultural content; intercultural competence; Kalimantan culture; teachers' perception.v

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing international interest in learning Bahasa Indonesia has encouraged the development of Bahasa Indonesia bagi *Penutur Asing* (BIPA) programs in various countries. Indonesian is taught not only as a language of communication but also as a gateway to understanding Indonesian society, culture, and identity (Widodo, 2019). As the number of foreign learners continues to grow, BIPA teachers face the challenge of providing learning experiences that support both linguistic competence and intercultural understanding.

Language and culture are closely interconnected. Language functions as a medium through which cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and social norms are expressed (Kramsch, 2013). Therefore, language learning cannot be separated from cultural learning. Learners who understand the cultural context of a language are more likely to communicate effectively and appropriately in real-life situations. Conversely, limited cultural knowledge may result in misunderstandings despite adequate linguistic proficiency (Byram, 2021).

The importance of integrating culture into language teaching has been highlighted in various studies on intercultural communication and foreign language education. Cultural learning enables learners to interpret meanings, understand social expectations, and interact appropriately with members of different communities (Giles, 2016). In BIPA contexts, cultural content helps foreign learners understand Indonesian ways of life while developing practical communication skills (Suyitno, 2017).

Indonesia's cultural diversity provides rich opportunities for integrating local culture into language instruction. However, cultural representation in BIPA teaching materials often remains concentrated on major cultural centers such as Java and Bali (Aini, et.al, 2025). As a result, learners may receive a limited understanding of Indonesia's multicultural reality. Integrating cultural content from regions such as Kalimantan can broaden learners' perspectives and provide a more comprehensive picture of Indonesian society.

Kalimantan possesses unique cultural traditions, local wisdom, indigenous practices, and artistic expressions that can enrich BIPA learning. Traditional ceremonies, folklore, culinary traditions, music, and community practices offer authentic resources for language instruction (Richards, 2022). Through these cultural elements, learners can engage with Indonesian culture in meaningful and contextualized ways.

Teachers play a crucial role in selecting and implementing cultural content (Hadisaputra et al., 2024). Their perceptions provide valuable insights into classroom practices, learner responses, and challenges associated with cultural integration (Anyichie et al., 2023). Despite growing attention to cultural learning in BIPA, limited studies have explored teachers' experiences with local cultural content from Kalimantan.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of BIPA teachers regarding the integration of cultural content in teaching Indonesian to foreign learners.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do BIPA teachers perceive the role of cultural content in teaching Indonesian to foreign learners?
2. How do BIPA teachers integrate local cultural content into their classroom practices?
3. What challenges and recommendations do BIPA teachers identify regarding the integration of cultural content in BIPA instruction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and Culture in Foreign Language Education

The relationship between language and culture has long been recognized in language education. Kramsch (2013) argues that language is not merely a system of communication but also a carrier of cultural meanings. Learning a language involves understanding how people think, behave, and interact within particular social contexts (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022).

Byram (2021) introduced the concept of intercultural communicative competence, emphasizing that effective communication requires cultural awareness in addition to linguistic skills. Learners need to understand cultural perspectives, values, and practices in order to engage successfully with members of other cultures.

Cultural Content in BIPA Learning

Cultural content serves an important role in BIPA instruction. It provides learners with contextual knowledge that supports meaningful language use. Cultural materials may include folklore, customs, traditions, local wisdom, food, music, arts, and social practices (Hoaihongthong & Tuamsuk, 2024).

Studies have shown that authentic cultural materials increase learner engagement and motivation. Exposure to cultural content also encourages intercultural awareness and helps learners connect language learning with real-world experiences (Jain, 2024).

Teacher Perception and Cultural Integration

Teachers' viewpoints play a significant role in understanding educational practices and classroom realities. Investigating teachers' perspectives provides valuable information about how they interpret, value, and implement particular instructional elements in their teaching (Ravi et al., 2023). Such studies offer insights into educators' experiences, expectations, and concerns, helping researchers identify both the benefits and challenges associated with specific pedagogical

approaches (Alwaqdani, 2024). By examining these perspectives, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of factors that shape teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes.

Teachers' perceptions are particularly valuable for understanding how cultural content is selected and adapted in BIPA classrooms. Such perceptions can inform curriculum development and material design for future BIPA programs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The research aimed to explore teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of cultural content into BIPA instruction.

Participants

The study involved three BIPA teachers from West Kalimantan who voluntarily completed an online questionnaire. Participants represented different educational settings and teaching experiences.

To recruit participants, the questionnaire was distributed through a WhatsApp group of the BIPA Teachers Association in West Kalimantan. The invitation was open to all members of the group who were actively involved in teaching Indonesian to foreign learners. Participation was voluntary, and no specific sampling criteria beyond BIPA teaching experience were applied. Although the survey was made available to all eligible members, only three teachers were available during the data collection period and subsequently returned completed questionnaires. Consequently, the study analyzed responses from these three participants.

TABLE 1. *Participant Profile*

Participant	Gender	Teaching Experience
P1	Female	1–3 years
P2	Male	More than 6 years
P3	Female	1–3 years

Data Collection

Data were collected through an online questionnaire consisting of demographic questions and open-ended survey questions. Participants were invited to describe their experiences integrating local cultural content into BIPA instruction.

Data Analysis

The responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved familiarization with the data, coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation based on Braun and Clarke (2006).

The researcher first read the responses several times to become familiar with the data. Initial codes were then generated manually from relevant segments of text. These codes were grouped into categories and then refined into themes that addressed the research questions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, the coding process and emerging themes were reviewed with a colleague experienced in qualitative research through peer debriefing. The researcher also repeatedly checked the original responses to confirm that the themes accurately represented the participants' views. An audit trail was maintained throughout the analysis process. Three major themes emerged from the analysis, and these themes are presented in the Findings and Discussion section.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Theme 1: Cultural Content as an Essential Component of Language Learning

All participants emphasized the importance of cultural content in BIPA learning. They viewed culture as an inseparable aspect of language instruction because language reflects social values and cultural practices.

Participant 2 stated:

Indonesian: "Konten budaya penting dalam pembelajaran BIPA karena membantu pembelajar memahami konteks penggunaan bahasa dalam kehidupan nyata. Dengan memahami konten budaya, penutur asing dapat berkomunikasi lebih tepat, kontekstual, dan memahami nilai sosial masyarakat Indonesia."

Translated: "Cultural content is important in BIPA (Indonesian for Foreign Speakers) learning because it helps learners understand the context in which the language is used in real-life situations. By understanding cultural content, foreign learners can communicate more appropriately and contextually, while also gaining a better understanding of the social values of Indonesian society."

Similarly, Participant 3 highlighted the practical significance of cultural knowledge:

Indonesian: "Karena mereka butuh untuk aplikasikan bahasa dan hidup tengah masyarakat Indonesia."

English: "Because they need to apply the language and live among Indonesian society."

Participant 1 emphasized the importance of understanding Indonesian perspectives:

Indonesian: “Supaya peserta didik bisa melihat sebuah budaya lokal Indonesia dari sudut pandang orang Indonesia (konstruksi mindset).”

English: “So that learners can understand and view an Indonesian local culture from the perspective of Indonesians, thereby helping to shape their mindset.”

These perceptions demonstrate that teachers perceive cultural learning as a means of supporting meaningful communication. These reflections show that language cannot be separated from culture. The teachers' focus on shaping a "mindset" and understanding "social values" directly supports Kramsch's (2013) view of language as a carrier of culture. Furthermore, the need for learners to "live among Indonesian society" highlights the practical importance of Byram's (2021) intercultural communicative competence for real-world interaction.

Theme 2: Integrating Local Culture Through Authentic Learning Experiences

Participants reported incorporating various cultural elements into classroom activities. The cultural topics included traditional songs, food traditions, local customs, and intercultural discussions.

Participant 1 described a successful learning activity involving Dayak songs:

Indonesian: “Menyanyikan lagu khas Dayak. Sesi tersebut sangat sukses karena background mahasiswa asing yang saya ajar adalah seni musik.”

English: “The students sang a traditional Dayak song. The session was highly successful because the foreign learners I taught had a background in music and the performing arts.”

The experience suggests that cultural content becomes particularly effective when it aligns with learners' interests. Participant 1 further reflected:

Indonesian: “Masalah utama bukanlah terletak pada budaya lokal apa yang kita ajarkan, namun apakah bidang budaya tersebut relevan dengan minat peserta didik kita.”

English: “The primary concern is not the specific local culture being taught, but rather whether the cultural content is relevant to the interests and needs of the learners.”

Participant 2 shared an example involving local cuisine:

Indonesian: “Salah satu pengalaman yang berhasil menarik minat peserta didik asing adalah ketika kami membahas makanan khas Kalimantan, seperti tempoyak dan pekasam.”

English: “One experience that successfully engaged foreign learners was a lesson on traditional Kalimantan cuisine, particularly dishes such as tempoyak and pekasam.”

Students compared Indonesian food traditions with those of their home countries, creating opportunities for intercultural dialogue and vocabulary development.

Participant 3 highlighted learner curiosity regarding marriage traditions in eastern Indonesia:
Indonesian: "Seorang pria di Sumba harus memberikan 100 sapi untuk mahar wanita dalam menikah."

English: "A man in Sumba must provide 100 cattle as a bride price to marry a woman."

The discussion generated active participation because students found the cultural practice unique and different from their own experiences.

These findings indicate that authentic cultural materials facilitate engagement, discussion, and intercultural comparison. These activities do more than just engage students; they bridge cultural gaps. Using the Dayak song illustrates Kramsch's (2013) idea of language carrying cultural art. Additionally, when students compared Kalimantan's food or Sumba's customs to their own, they were actively practicing the comparative skills central to Byram's (2021) intercultural competence framework.

Theme 3: Challenges and Recommendations for Cultural Integration

Despite recognizing its importance, participants reported several challenges.

The first challenge involved limited opportunities for experiential learning. Participant 1 explained:

Indonesian: "Mahasiswa asing lebih paham dengan budaya jika mereka bisa melihat langsung, namun kendala budget membatasi pembelajar tersebut mengalami kegiatan-kegiatan bertemakan budaya lokal."

English: Foreign learners develop a deeper understanding of culture when they can experience it firsthand. However, budget limitations often restrict their participation in activities centered on local cultural practices and traditions.

This finding suggests that direct cultural exposure may be constrained by financial limitations.

The second challenge concerned teaching resources. Participant 2 stated:

Indonesian: "Kurangnya referensi dan materi pembelajaran yang mengintegrasikan budaya lokal secara relevan dengan konteks BIPA."

English: "A lack of references and learning materials that integrate local culture in a way that is relevant to the BIPA context."

The participant further explained that cultural materials need to be adapted to learners' language proficiency levels.

Participant 3 identified conceptual challenges:

Indonesian: “Menjelaskan secara saintifik mengenai konsep lokal, mitos, kepercayaan.”

English: “Explaining local concepts, myths, and beliefs from a scientific perspective.”

Certain cultural concepts may require additional explanation because they are deeply rooted in local worldviews and traditions.

Regarding recommendations, participants emphasized the importance of increasing cultural diversity in BIPA materials.

Participant 2 suggested:

Indonesian: “Perlu lebih banyak pengembangan bahan ajar BIPA yang mengintegrasikan budaya lokal secara kontekstual, sederhana, dan sesuai dengan tingkat kemampuan pemelajar.”

English: “There is a need for further development of BIPA instructional materials that integrate local culture in a contextualized, accessible, and proficiency-appropriate manner.”

The participant also encouraged collaboration with local communities to provide authentic cultural resources.

Participant 3 expressed concern regarding the dominance of Javanese culture in existing materials:

Indonesian: “Jangan hanya fokus di budaya Jawa seperti yang banyak di buku BIPA.”

English: “BIPA materials should not focus exclusively on Javanese culture, as is the case in many existing BIPA textbooks.”

The findings suggest that future BIPA materials should represent Indonesia’s regional diversity more comprehensively. These challenges highlight critical gaps in current BIPA education. The difficulty in explaining local myths shows how deeply language is tied to specific worldviews, as argued by Kramsch (2013). Ultimately, the overrepresentation of Javanese culture limits learners from developing a complete intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2021) regarding Indonesia's true regional diversity.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceptions of BIPA teachers in West Kalimantan regarding the role of cultural content in teaching Indonesian to foreign learners. The findings indicate that teachers perceive culture as an essential component of language learning because it provides context, facilitates communication, and supports intercultural understanding.

Participants integrated various cultural elements into classroom activities, including traditional songs, local food, customs, and intercultural discussions. Authentic cultural materials increased learner engagement and encouraged meaningful learning experiences.

However, challenges remain, including limited resources, difficulties explaining cultural concepts, and financial constraints that restrict experiential learning opportunities. Participants recommended developing more culturally diverse BIPA materials and increasing representation of regional cultures beyond Java.

The study contributes to the development of culturally responsive BIPA instruction and highlights the importance of integrating local cultural perspectives into language education. Future research involving larger samples and multiple regions is recommended to obtain broader insights into the role of local culture in BIPA learning.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, and the intended use of the collected data. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no personal identifiers or institutional affiliations were reported in the study. Participants were assigned pseudonymous codes (P1, P2, and P3) for reporting purposes. Participants were also informed that anonymized excerpts from their responses might be included in research publications and presentations, and they consented to such use. Given the small number of participants, additional care was taken to remove any information that could potentially reveal individual identities or specific workplaces.

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