

THE NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING PEKALONGAN LOCAL CULTURE FOR BIPA LEARNERS AS A MEDIUM FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION

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Abstract

BIPA learning provided to foreign students is carried out to provide knowledge and language proficiency. Not only language proficiency but also fulfilling cultural understanding as a means of survival. This study aims to explain the needs of foreign students to understand the local culture of Pekalongan as a region with rich local cultural wisdom. This descriptive qualitative research method analyzes based on questionnaire and interview data collection techniques with data sources of seven foreign students from Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The questionnaire is elaborated with questions about the experience of learning Indonesian and opinions on local Pekalongan culture. BIPA students who have no previous experience learning Indonesian (85%) need an understanding of Pekalongan culture integrated into learning through teaching materials and learning media. Problems that arise as obstacles in carrying out academic activities show a figure of 71.4%. One of the difficulties in adapting to local culture is food and traditions that are not familiar and the meaning of each tradition is not understood. This proves the importance of BIPA learning by incorporating local Pekalongan cultural content to provide insight as an effort to adapt to the environment.

Keywords: BIPA learners, BIPA learning, local culture of Pekalongan

INTRODUCTION

Learning Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) is part of efforts to strengthen Indonesia's language and cultural diplomacy internationally. Indonesian speakers internationally have reached a widespread level, as evidenced by the designation of Indonesian as an official language by UNESCO on November 23, 2023. This designation paves the way for the global development of Indonesian to be further strengthened. Through BIPA learning, foreign learners are equipped not only with spoken and written language skills but also with an understanding of Indonesia's cultural diversity. Language and culture are inseparable, as language serves as a means of cultural communication, and culture is a reflection of language use. Therefore, measuring BIPA learning

achievement is not only based on language mastery, but also on integrating understanding into the language process, which is a crucial aspect of BIPA learning.

Indonesia is a country rich in cultural diversity, which presents unique challenges in learning BIPA. Foreign students must be able to adapt to the multicultural environment of the country, each with its own culture and unique characteristics. Cultural differences in each region can be utilized as an authentic learning resource in language learning. Foreign students learn the language through cultural exchange, and vice versa. One example is Pekalongan, nicknamed the City of Batik, whose social environment is religious and prioritizes the tradition of mutual cooperation (gotong royong, guyup, and harmony). This presents potential for developing various components in BIPA learning that uphold local cultural wisdom.

The importance of cultural understanding for BIPA learners, especially BIPA learners who are pursuing academic activities, is used as a means of survival for the smooth running of their studies. This is proven by research conducted by Kusmiatun (2019) that 90% of foreign students feel the need for academic culture classes that provide cultural understanding at their place of study. BIPA learners are required to be able to adapt to the norms and customs of the local community to avoid things that hinder academic implementation. Therefore, the introduction of Pekalongan local culture to BIPA learners at the K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid State Islamic University of Pekalongan is something important and not as a complement in social interactions. The introduction of Pekalongan local culture is aimed at strengthening intercultural abilities and as a process of social integration. In addition, research conducted by Arwansyah et al., (2017) revealed that the availability of culturally charged teaching materials as material for understanding local culture is not widely available, so BIPA teachers must be able to innovate in providing culturally charged content.

The reality in the field is that cultural aspects, especially local culture, have not been a key point integrated into BIPA learning. Cultural understanding is only included as a separate material and has not been integrated into every learning material. This means that understanding local culture is only an introduction for BIPA learners and has not been implemented functionally and actively in carrying out social life in society.

Based on this, a study is important to analyze the needs for understanding Pekalongan's local culture for BIPA learners. The need for cultural understanding must be packaged with adequate teaching materials that meet the requirements of teaching materials in the form of self-instructional, self-contained, stand-alone, adaptive, and user-friendly (Magdalena et al., 2020). This study will identify the needs for understanding Pekalongan's local culture that are integrated into learning in the form of teaching materials. The results of this study are expected to provide benefits for considering the integration of local cultural content in each material provided, not only as introductory material taught in several meetings.

LITERARY REVIEWS

Research on the need for understanding local Pekalongan culture for BIPA I learners as an effort to adapt to the environment is guided by relevant research, namely as follows: research conducted by Murtianis in 2019 "Obstacles to Cultural Transfer in Learning Indonesian for Foreign BIPA Speakers at Sebelas Maret University". Based on this research, the results obtained that obstacles to cultural transfer are one of the obstacles faced in BIPA learning including 1) limited Indonesian language skills of foreign students, 2) the use of bilingualism by teachers, 3) cross-cultural, 4) tempo of speech, 5) lack of motivation by BIPA learners, 6) limited knowledge about cultural understanding, 7) limited cultural integration in learning, and 8) there is no demand for evaluation of cultural understanding. Based on this, it can be concluded that cultural integration in learning is important to facilitate cultural transfer (Murtianis, Andayani, et al., 2019).

Another relevant study was conducted by Fida Pangesti and Arif Budi Wuriyanto in 2018 on "Development of Cross-Cultural BIPA Teaching Materials through a Contextual-Communicative Approach." The study resulted in the development of a product in the form of teaching materials with local Malang content that achieved a trial score of 84.2%. The problem underlying this research was the limited teaching materials specifically studying Malang culture. Existing teaching materials primarily focus on Sundanese culture. Therefore, it is important to provide and integrate an understanding of local culture for foreign students, especially the

culture of the place where they live (Pangesti & Wuriyanto, 2018).

The research conducted by Ilawati and Laily Nurlina in 2025 on "Utilization of Cultural Value Integration: Analysis of Open BIPA Teaching Materials" is in line with this research. This is shown by the results of the research obtained, namely research that explored various articles. Of the ten articles analyzed, it shows that the use of cultural elements such as folklore, traditions, and social practices not only enriches the content but also helps learners understand the social and cultural context in which they live. Based on these results, the need to understand Pekalongan's local culture can be met through integration through various types of media or teaching material content to improve the cultural understanding of BIPA learners (Ilawati & Laily Nurlina, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study, examining the need for understanding local Pekalongan culture for international students as an adaptation effort, used a qualitative descriptive research method to describe the extent of the need and the types of cultural integration desired for inclusion in BIPA learning. Data collection techniques used questionnaires and interviews to gather measurable and clear data based on the experiences of international students. The data sources were seven international students at UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan from Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Source triangulation was used to analyze the data to obtain diverse and valid data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data obtained from foreign students as BIPA learners who come from countries with the same language as Malay as their primary language shows that understanding of Indonesian is still not mastered even though it is almost the same as their primary language. The level of understanding of Indonesian shows that 57.1% of BIPA learners still lack understanding of both grammatical structure and meaning. Based on this lack of understanding, foreign students consider the need to learn Indonesian as an effort to adapt to the environment for ease of academic study to be very important, as shown by the results of 85.7%. The need for intensive BIPA learning at UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan not only language skills but

also understanding of local culture shows the results of 85.7%. Based on this, intensive BIPA learning to support the improvement of Indonesian language skills of foreign students is carried out as a solution to the lack of language understanding by foreign students.

The following are the results of the questionnaire on the need to understand local Pekalongan culture for BIPA level 1 students as an effort to adapt to the environment:

Table 1. Results of Analysis of BIPA Learners' Cultural Understanding Needs

No	Pertanyaan	Hasil
1	Difficulty attending lectures due to language barriers	71,4% difficulty
2	The feeling of living in Pekalongan with local cultural adaptation	71,4% quite easy
3	Types of adaptation constraints in Pekalongan	71,4% local traditions/culture
4	Experience of visiting Pekalongan tourist attractions	71,4% 1-2 tours
5	The importance of providing local cultural understanding classes	85,7% important
6	The need for BIPA teaching materials containing local culture	85,7% need
7	Local cultural content included in BIPA teaching materials	71,4% tourist attraction 14,3% typical food 14,3% typical souvenirs 14,3% cultural traditions

Based on the table above, it shows the results of the need to understand Pekalongan's local culture as an environmental adaptation in the form of difficulties attending lectures, feelings of living in Pekalongan, types of adaptation obstacles, travel experiences, the importance of cultural classes, the need for culture-based teaching materials, and cultural content in BIPA teaching materials.

Language Barriers in Lectures

The difficulty of attending lectures due to language barriers resulted in 71.4% experiencing difficulties adjusting to the language. This was due to the diverse backgrounds of the BIPA students' countries of origin, who had not yet received intensive BIPA instruction. Three foreign students from Thailand, whose primary language is Malay and who were studying in the English Language Education Study Program, experienced language barriers. The demands of communicating in Indonesian, which is not yet fluent, were coupled with the need to master English. Increasing the use of Indonesian more broadly will have an impact on Indonesia's position on the international stage as a reinforcement of national identity and competitiveness (Muzaki, 2021). BIPA students cited these difficulties as the reason cultural adjustment takes a long time due to differences in language use in their environment and in lectures. Other language difficulties that arise are caused by the community conditions surrounding BIPA students at UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, who do not master foreign languages. This situation makes it difficult for foreign students to learn Indonesian and its culture naturally through interaction with their environment.

Feelings of Living in Pekalongan in Adapting to Local Culture

The perception of living in Pekalongan regarding adapting to local culture showed that 71.4% reported it was quite easy. This ease of adaptation to local culture stems from the similarities between the foreign students' home countries and Indonesia, which are within the Malay group. These cultural similarities facilitate the foreign students' understanding of culture and the acquisition of secondary vocabulary. Acquiring secondary vocabulary naturally through direct observation and experience can provide a clear understanding of the relationship between words and meanings. For example, the culture of seeking takjil (food for breaking the fast) is a common occurrence. BIPA learners acquire this vocabulary directly through their own experiences seeking takjil, allowing them to grasp and interpret the vocabulary of takjil as an appetizer to break the fast. Learners can benefit from learning linguistic aspects in real-world contexts when gaining cultural understanding through BIPA learning (Sari & Ansari, 2021).

Types of Adaptation Constraints

The type of adaptation barriers in Pekalongan resulted in 71.4% responding to difficulties adapting to local cultural constraints. The Pekalongan community, whose regional potential includes batik and garment businesses, and whose location in a coastal area, has a distinct cultural diversity compared to Indonesian Language and Literature (BIPA) learners in Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Local Pekalongan traditions and cultures, such as Nyadran and Kliwonan, which are routinely performed by the Pekalongan community, pose a challenge for international students. Foreign students reported observing many people selling jasmine flowers on the roadside every Thursday afternoon to offer condolences. Furthermore, the monthly Kliwonan event has a significant impact on foreign students unfamiliar with the tradition. Foreign students shared their experiences attending Kliwonan religious study groups and feeling confused about the events. The sheer number of culturally-based events forces international students to adapt to and understand the language, creating a unique adaptation challenge. BIPA learning must be able to motivate learners to be active and committed to learning Indonesian (Violensia et al., 2021).

Travel Experience

Cultural understanding is of course related to the experiences of BIPA students in traveling. One effort to understand culture is by visiting places that have unique characteristics and cultural-based activities. In terms of travel experiences, when asked about BIPA students, 71.4% found that they had only visited one to two tourist attractions during their two years of education in Indonesia. These visits were also experienced when foreign students received orientation from the university, not of their own volition to visit and learn about the local culture of Pekalongan. Based on the experiences shared by BIPA students, it shows that student activities visiting tourist attractions or local cultural sites must be done through intermediaries. Intermediaries in BIPA learning activities can be a vehicle for cultural understanding. Therefore, BIPA learning packaged with cultural-based activities is carried out by introducing or visiting directly or using authentic teaching sources.

The Importance of Cultural Understanding Classes

Cultural understanding classes are special classes or special times given to BIPA learners to learn more deeply and deeply about Pekalongan's local culture. The importance of cultural understanding classes shows that 85.7% consider it very important to have special classes that discuss cultural understanding for international students. International students stated that cultural understanding classes are provided on a schedule like language classes. Based on this, BIPA learning based on local cultural integration is indeed important. Relevant to the results of research conducted by Khoirunnisa and Sunarya, n.d. (2023), cultural diversity presents its own challenges as well as opportunities that can emerge in BIPA learning in a positive way. BIPA learning can be accompanied by cultural classes or BIPA teaching materials specifically integrating local culture in each of its contents. BIPA learning that is accompanied by cultural understanding will make it easier for tutors and BIPA learners to understand at the same time.

The Need for BIPA Teaching Materials Containing Local Culture

Teaching materials are a crucial component of learning to support the achievement of learning objectives. BIPA teaching materials are officially available from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, both for students and for tourism. Sahabat Indonesia teaching materials are presented in ebook format, freely accessible online. Regarding the need for BIPA teaching materials containing local culture, 85.7% of respondents stated the importance or need for teaching materials specifically integrating local culture. This is because the teaching materials used by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, although already integrating culture, still encompass culture in Indonesia. BIPA learners feel the importance of teaching materials specifically integrating local Pekalongan culture with its unique characteristics in various content. Teaching materials are one of the factors influencing BIPA learning because they are used by teachers in delivering material, adapting the needs of BIPA learners according to their level and environmental conditions (Gavrila Bela Puspita et al., 2021).

Local Cultural Content in Teaching Materials

The aspect of local cultural content in teaching materials shows that 71.4% want content about tourist attractions included in the teaching materials. The content of tourist attractions as an introduction to the area has a special attraction for BIPA learners to provide real cultural insights and be in the surrounding environment. In addition, the content of tourist attractions integrated into teaching materials is also integrated into learning methods in the form of field studies to obtain direct language acquisition with native speaker interactions. Relevant to research conducted by Bahri (2020) which shows that direct learning activities in the field are proven to be effective in improving spatial thinking in critical thinking that field studies have a significant and positive effect on spatial thinking by 0.82. The preparation of materials based on language skills is intended so that the teaching materials have a communicative aspect. The communicative aspect is reflected in the form of material presentation that is in line with the communicative approach, namely pre-communication and communication (Pangesti and Arif, 2018). Based on this, BIPA learning packaged with cultural integration and presented using the field study method can make it easier for BIPA learners to understand culture.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on the need for BIPA learners to understand Pekalongan's local culture for environmental adaptation indicates that cultural aspects are crucial for survival. This is supported by questionnaire results, which demonstrated the importance of cultural classes and culturally-based teaching materials, achieving the highest score of 85.7% across all aspects. Language proficiency extends beyond simply being able to use Indonesian, but also encompasses mastering language skills for application in everyday life and social interactions. Mastery of language skills must be balanced with an adequate understanding of the cultural context based on where BIPA learners live.

This urgency has driven innovations in BIPA learning, including teaching materials, media, learning strategies, and evaluation, all based on and integrating local cultural content. Understanding Pekalongan's local culture is a key element in supporting the achievement of BIPA learning objectives in facing academic life in the region. Cultural integration not only strengthens the function of BIPA learning but also serves as a diplomatic bridge of culture for mutual respect.

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