

# Constraints of Cultural Transfer in Teaching Indonesian Language as a Foreign Language (BIPA)

Lina Herlina

Nusa Putra University, Sukabumi, Indonesia

---

## Article Info

### Article history:

Received March 9, 2023

Revised March 20, 2023

Accepted March 30, 2023

---

### Keywords:

BIPA

Culture

Indonesian Language

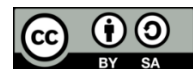
Language Teaching.

---

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe and explain what obstacles are encountered in cultural transfer in teaching Indonesian Language as a Foreign Language (BIPA). This study uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The results show that the barriers to cultural transfer in teaching BIPA include a) cross-culture, b) the use of bilingualism by Indonesians, c) the limited ability of foreign students to speak Indonesian at the elementary level, d) the tempo of Indonesian people's speech, e) limited knowledge of the teachers about culture, f) the limitations of cultural integration in learning, g) there is no demand for a special evaluation of cultural understanding, and h) the lack of foreign students' motivation.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



---

## Corresponding Author:

Name: Lina Herlina, S.Pd., M.Pd.

Institution: Nusa Putra University, Jl. Cibolang Kaler No. 21 Cisaat Sukabumi 43152

Email: [lina.herlina@nusaputra.ac.id](mailto:lina.herlina@nusaputra.ac.id)

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian language is one of the assets of the Indonesian nation whose existence is always maintained both in the educational and non-educational environments. Several efforts to advance the existence of the Indonesian language are increasingly getting attention from the Indonesian government.

The Indonesian government has been aggressively promoting the Indonesian language to the world by providing scholarships for foreign students so that they can learn about the Indonesian language and culture. It is proven that at least 219

institutions in 74 countries, both domestically and abroad, have organized BIPA [1].

This study aims to describe what obstacles are encountered in the cultural transfer of culture in BIPA learning. These constraints can be seen from two factors, namely the factor of the teacher and the factor of the student as the subject of learning to what extent foreign students study Indonesian culture in BIPA learning.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

BIPA is Indonesian language learning for non- Indonesian speakers. For foreign students, the Indonesian language can be their second language, third language, and so on.

The implementation of the BIPA program is basically always related to two goals, namely introducing the Indonesian language and introducing Indonesian culture to foreign students. This is in line with the opinion of [2] which states that in addition to having a vision of introducing Indonesian language as a national identity, BIPA learning is also a support for teaching Indonesian culture globally. In the teaching of BIPA, culture cannot be separated because language and culture are both closely related and mutually supportive in a teaching program.

Several universities in Indonesia hold BIPA for their foreign students. One of the universities is Nusa Putra University. This university provides scholarships for foreign students. Those students must learn BIPA during their studies so that they can understand the subjects taught by the lecturers. In addition, by learning BIPA, the students will be able to communicate well with the local students and understand their cultures. Through this program, the Indonesian language and culture are increasingly becoming global. However, in BIPA learning, the understanding of the Indonesian language and culture cannot run in balance. Aspects of language recognition dominate learning activities compared to aspects of cultural recognition.

In practice, the cultural aspect of learning activities seems to be only a complement to BIPA learning. The teachers focus more on the linguistic aspect than the cultural aspect. In addition, cultural aspects are not always taught in every meeting or face-to-face in class. As a result, foreign students' understanding of Indonesian culture is still lacking. In fact, the cultural aspect is an important element in language teaching. This statement is in line with the opinion of [3] which emphasizes that culture can improve the quality of language learning and teaching. In addition, [4] also explains that cultural understanding is the most important component in language teaching.

Based on the above statements, it can be seen that cultural understanding is an important component in BIPA learning. However, obstacles are often encountered in

terms of cultural transfer in BIPA learning from both teachers and foreign students. The conditions are certainly based on several factors.

This article is the result of research on culture in language learning. A similar study was conducted by [5]. This research is one of the efforts to develop teaching materials in BIPA learning based on Indonesian culture. Furthermore, [6] also conducted research on culture in BIPA learning. The research focused on the problem of a parallel study of native culture and target language culture in foreign language teaching. The results show that parallel study of the native culture and the target language culture is the most efficient way to encourage students' personal development in the language teaching process.

### 3. METHODS

This research is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words about the language of the person being observed. The descriptive method is defined as a way of solving research problems by describing the state of the object being investigated [7]. With this method, the researcher reveals and describes the object under study from various sources.

In qualitative research, appropriate data collection techniques are needed and in accordance with the problem so that the objectives of the research can be achieved. This is in line with the opinion of [8] which states that the main purpose of research is to obtain data. Data collection techniques used in this study are observation and interview techniques. The observation was made during BIPA learning which aimed to determine the process of cultural transfer.

The interview technique was carried out using in-depth interviews. The interviews were used to investigate BIPA teachers and foreign students as subjects in BIPA learning at Nusa Putra University. The in-depth interview aims to find out what obstacles are

encountered by both teachers and students in cultural transfer in BIPA learning.

The data validity test in this study uses data triangulation (source), which collects similar data from several different data sources. The data analysis technique uses interactive analysis techniques as presented by Miles and Huberman in [9]. In this analysis technique, research data that is quite a lot must be reduced first according to needs and then presented. After that, conclusions are drawn from the data that has been presented.

Based on the explanations above, this study describes and explains what obstacles were found in cultural transfer in teaching the Indonesian Language as Foreign Language (BIPA) at Nusa Putra University.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constraints in understanding Indonesian culture in BIPA learning are not only experienced by teachers but also by foreign students. Based on the results of interviews with teachers and students, the constraints in cultural understanding in BIPA learning can be described as follows:

##### *a. Cross-culture*

BIPA class is an interesting class because it includes students from various countries with different cultural backgrounds. The learning styles of BIPA students are also different from each other according to the culture of their country of origin. The learning styles of BIPA learners are very diverse because they come from different backgrounds [10].

This situation also affects the learning climate in the classroom. Based on the results of observations in class, it can be seen that some students do not like the culture that the teacher tried to introduce in the class. For example, when the teacher tried to introduce jamu as one of the traditional Indonesian beverages. The introduction was carried out by the teacher by demonstrating jamu in front of the class. After that, the students were asked to try drinking it. As a result, almost all students thought that the drink was not good. The students said that if they have never tried that kind of drink before.

The same thing happened when they were offered spicy seblak, an Indonesian traditional dish. Most of them did not like the taste, because they thought it was too spicy. However, Indonesian people are mostly into spicy food. This refusal occurs because there are indeed cultural differences between Indonesia and their country.

##### *b. The use of bilingualism by Indonesians*

Indonesia is a diverse country with various ethnic groups. Each region also has a language with its unique characteristics. Students of Nusa Putra University also come from various regions with various languages and cultures. The use of bilingualism both by the community and students in Sukabumi, where the university is located, includes Indonesian and Sundanese. This is what BIPA students often encounter. They also face the fact that in the process of understanding Indonesian culture, especially Sundanese culture, foreign students must understand the language before they learn the culture.

[11] explain that bilingualism is related to the use of two languages or two language codes. The general concept of bilingualism is the exchange of two languages by a student in his interactions with other people. It is also felt by foreign students while studying Indonesian.

Based on the results of interviews with foreign students, they often observe students chatter on campus, at the canteen, or in boarding houses. However, they said that there were plenty of words that they did not understand from what they heard in the conversation, and when foreign students tried to search the words in the Indonesian dictionary, they could not find the meaning. This happened because most Nusa Putra University students still used Sundanese when interacting in non-formal situations.

BIPA students cannot quickly understand this bilingualism. Such conditions force the students to participate in learning Sundanese in addition to Indonesian. This is certainly not easy for them because the Sundanese language is even more complex than the Indonesian language.

**c. *The limited ability of foreign students to speak Indonesian at the elementary level***

At the elementary level or early semester, the ability of foreign students to communicate using the Indonesian language is still very difficult. The initial ability of the Indonesian language also differs from one student to another. Some of them have little understanding of Indonesian because they have studied it, on the other hand, most of them have never studied it.

This condition causes the process of cultural transfer to be hampered. This is reinforced by the opinion of [12] who explain that difficulties in understanding culture can be caused by language differences.

Furthermore, [10] revealed that every BIPA student has a mother tongue or first language that they master. The structure of the first language will certainly affect the process of learning the Indonesian language. In this case, the Indonesian language is positioned as a foreign language for them. Therefore, it is not surprising that foreign students will interfere a lot when learning the Indonesian language. From these opinions, it can be seen that mastery of the target language vocabulary, in this case, the Indonesian language, is really needed so that foreign students can understand Indonesian culture.

**d. *The tempo of Indonesian people's speech***

One way for students to understand Indonesian culture is to understand the Indonesian language both orally and in writing. They often listen to explanations or conversations about Indonesian culture by both teachers and Indonesian students. However, foreign students are not easy to comprehend. This is in accordance with the opinion of [13] which explains that second language speakers may take longer to find the words they want to communicate and may be limited to the words available to them.

Based on the results of the interview, the foreign students feel that the tempo of Indonesian people's speech is too fast so they cannot immediately catch the message

conveyed by the interlocutor. It takes some time to be able to translate the meaning of the interlocutor. This condition also affects foreign students' understanding of Indonesian culture. It takes time to understand Indonesian culture.

**e. *Limited knowledge of the teachers about culture***

BIPA teachers should not only be qualified in terms of language, but they should also be able to understand Indonesian culture. However, this is a scourge in BIPA learning. The shallow knowledge of BIPA teachers regarding cultural aspects is a challenge for BIPA teachers.

BIPA teachers are generally Indonesian lecturers as well as English lecturers so their knowledge of culture is still general. This causes limited cultural aspects that they could teach to foreign students. From the interview results, we can see that the cultural aspects taught by the teacher adjust to the teaching material and also the teacher's knowledge of culture. As a consequence, when the teachers must explain culture in detail, they have not been able to convey the cultural aspects in general.

**f. *The limitations of cultural integration in learning***

Basically, the purpose of the BIPA program is to teach the Indonesian language and culture. However, language teaching often dominates. In the BIPA class textbooks, cultural elements have been included, but only a few cultures are included in them. Based on the results of interviews, BIPA teachers will include cultural elements in learning materials if the material allows cultural elements to be included. This is what causes the absence of cultural elements in the class in every meeting.

The above fact is reinforced by Mustakim's opinion in [2] which groups BIPA teaching materials that need to be presented in relation to cultural aspects are 1) cultural objects, 2) body parts, 3) physical distance when communicating, 4) eye contact in communicating, 5) touching, 6) customs that apply in society, 7) the value system that applies in society, 8) the religious system

adopted by the community, 9) livelihood, 10) art, 11) use of time, 12) how to stand, sit, and respect others, 13) hospitality, reprimand, greeting, and pleasantries, 14) praise, 15) mutual cooperation, 16) manners including euphemisms. However, not all these elements have been presented and there are elements that have not received attention in the various existing BIPA textbooks.

***g. There is no demand for a special evaluation of cultural understanding***

In BIPA learning, there is an evaluation in the form of a mid-semester test and a final test at the end of the course. In addition, the demands of the daily tasks of foreign students are also mostly on the linguistic aspect which includes four skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it was found that there is no special evaluation to measure foreign students' understanding of Indonesian culture. This causes foreign students to be less serious about studying Indonesian culture. However, BIPA lecturers at Nusa Putra University still try to evaluate the level of cultural understanding of foreign students by frequently asking questions orally about Indonesian culture in every lesson in class.

***h. The lack of foreign students' motivation.***

Motivation is a factor that plays an important role in a person's life. From that motivation, arises an impulse that comes from both the individual himself and from others. [14] reveals that motivation is an internal state that activates and gives direction to our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Motivation is an internal state that activates and gives direction to thoughts, feelings, and actions. This implies that drive is something inherent in motivation.

Another definition of motivation is also conveyed by [14] who reveals that motivation is a force, both from inside and outside that encourages a person to achieve certain predetermined goals. These forces are basically stimulated by the existence of various kinds of needs such as 1) desires to be

fulfilled, 2) behavior, 3) goals, and 4) feedback. Based on the opinions above, we can say that motivation is an encouragement both from inside and outside of the individual. This drive stimulates a person to achieve goals in accordance with what is expected by the individual.

Motivation is also one of the most influential factors in understanding Indonesian culture in BIPA learning. The purpose of foreign students entering the BIPA program also varies from one student to another according to their class in the Nusa Putra University BIPA program. Based on the results of interviews, it can be concluded that the students generally come to Indonesia to just get their degree and learn the Indonesian language as an additional subject. They are less motivated to know and understand Indonesian culture.

The results of the study describe the main findings of the study. The presentations in the results and discussions are written in a systematic manner, only the results of data/information related to the research objectives.

## 5. CONCLUSION

BIPA learning is one way to advance the Indonesian language as a national identity. In the implementation of BIPA learning, the cultural aspect cannot be separated because it is an important component and is interconnected with the language aspect. However, the process of cultural transfer in BIPA learning encounters obstacles so that foreign students' understanding of Indonesian culture has not been maximized. These obstacles include: a) cross-culture, b) the use of bilingualism by Indonesians, c) the limited ability of foreign students to speak Indonesian at the elementary level, d) the tempo of Indonesian people's speech, e) limited knowledge of the teachers about culture, f) the limitations of cultural integration in learning, g) there is no demand for a special evaluation of cultural understanding, and h) the lack of foreign students' motivation.

However, the constraints are not a scourge that makes teachers transfer Indonesian culture to foreign students. BIPA teachers are expected not only to focus on the linguistic aspect of teaching BIPA but also to prioritize the cultural aspect as an important component in BIPA learning. In addition, BIPA teachers are expected to continue to open their horizons about Indonesian culture so that the process of cultural transfer in BIPA learning can run optimally.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to address my greatest gratitude to Allah SWT, the God Almighty who has been giving me the strength and good health to carry out this study.

Secondly, I sincerely express my great gratitude to the BIPA lecturers and students of Nusa Putra University who participated in this study.




Last but not least, I would like to express my family for their love, support, and encouragement throughout this research.

## REFERENCES

- [1] S. Widodo, *Bahasa Indonesia Menuju Bahasa Internasional*. 2010.
- [2] K. Saddhono, "Integrating culture in Indonesian language learning for foreign speakers at Indonesian universities," vol. 6, pp. 273–276, May 2015, doi: 10.7813/jll.2015/6-2/58.
- [3] A. Kusmiatun, *Mengenal BIPA (Bahasa Indonesia bagi penutur Asing) dan Pembelajarannya*. Yogyakarta: K-Media. J.P, 2016.
- [4] A. Alalou, "Reevaluating curricular objectives using students' perceived needs: The case of three language programmes," *Foreign Lang. Ann.*, vol. 5, no. 34, pp. 453–69, 2001.
- [5] H. . Stern, *Fundamental Concept of Language Teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- [6] L. . Mikhaleva and J. C.R, "Parallel Study of Native and Target-Language Culture in Foreign Language Teaching," in *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2014, pp. 154:118–12.
- [7] H. Nawawi and H. Martini, *Instrumen Penelitian Bidang Sosial*. Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University Press, 1992.
- [8] Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta, 2013.
- [9] H. . Sutopo, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Surakarta: UNS Press, 2002.
- [10] L. Muliastuti, *Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing: Acuan Teori dan Pendekatan Pengajaran*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor, 2017.
- [11] A. Chaer and L. Agustina, *Sosiolinguistik Perkenalan Awal*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2004.
- [12] S. M. . Alves and F. M. . Oliveira, "Vocabulary Acquisition in Second Language," *Int. J. Humanit. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 4, no. 13, pp. 51–56, 2014.
- [13] D. Mp. A. C. Stringer, *Activities for improving Cross-Cultural Communication*, Intercultu. USA, 2009.
- [14] T. K. Crowl, *Educational Psychology*. London: Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1997.

## BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHORS



**Lina Herlina**    born in 1977, is an Indonesian and English Teaching Specialist who has been involved in some research in English Language Education. She has been teaching English since 2003 with specialization in General English, English for Business, and English for Specific Purposes. She also teaches Indonesian Language for Foreigners. She took her bachelor's degree of English Education in STKIP Pasundan Cimahi and continued her study in Universitas Indraprasta Jakarta for her Master of English Education. She currently works in Nusa Putra University, located in Sukabumi West Java, as an English instructor and the head of Nusa Putra language center. Her first book, *English for Business*, was published in 2021.

[lina.herlina@nusaputra.ac.id](mailto:lina.herlina@nusaputra.ac.id)