

INDONESIAN FOREIGN LANGUAGE (IFL) LEARNERS' DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING BIPA

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ABSTRACT

The Subject of this study is the difficulties confronted by the Indonesian foreign language learners (BIPA) that taught by postgraduate English Education students at University of Bengkulu. Data collection involves a total of 20 participants aged from 19 to 63 years who attended six to seven online sessions conducted by postgraduate students in their third semester, with a quantitative research method. Participants were assessed for their experience and hardships via a questionnaire regarding how they were challenged by the learning setting out alongside pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, cultural barriers, and lack of time practicing. It came out that out of the challenges the students encountered vocabulary and averages were the most fundamental problems together with pronunciation, grammar, cultural differences, and insufficient time to practice speaking. This is consistent with the literature on the subject of cultural and psychological variables working in combination with linguistic factors learning in a virtual environment. The conclusion reached in the study is that to deal with the above problems better teaching strategies such as the use of technology, culture, and practice are needed.

Key Words: *BIPA; Indonesian as a foreign language; pronunciation challenges; online learning; cultural barriers; language acquisition.*

ABSTRAK

Subjek penelitian ini adalah kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh pembelajar bahasa Indonesia bagi penutur asing (BIPA) yang diajarkan oleh mahasiswa pascasarjana Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Bengkulu. Pengumpulan data melibatkan total 20 peserta berusia antara 19 hingga 63 tahun yang mengikuti enam hingga tujuh sesi daring yang diselenggarakan oleh mahasiswa pascasarjana semester tiga, dengan metode penelitian kuantitatif. Peserta dinilai berdasarkan pengalaman dan kesulitan mereka melalui kuesioner mengenai tantangan yang mereka hadapi dalam pembelajaran, termasuk pelafalan, kosa kata, tata bahasa, hambatan budaya, dan keterbatasan waktu untuk berlatih. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dari berbagai tantangan yang dihadapi, kosa kata dan pelafalan merupakan masalah yang paling mendasar, disertai dengan tata bahasa, perbedaan budaya, serta keterbatasan waktu untuk berlatih berbicara. Temuan ini sejalan dengan literatur yang membahas variabel budaya dan psikologis yang berinteraksi dengan faktor linguistik dalam pembelajaran di lingkungan virtual. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa untuk mengatasi masalah-masalah tersebut, diperlukan strategi pengajaran yang lebih baik, seperti pemanfaatan teknologi, integrasi budaya, dan peningkatan latihan praktik.

Kata Kunci: BIPA; bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa asing; tantangan pelafalan; pembelajaran daring; hambatan budaya; akuisisi bahasa.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian language (*Bahasa Indonesia*) is taught to both foreigners and native speakers through the BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*, or Indonesian language for foreign speakers). These programs seek to educate Indonesians to foreigners with different languages and cultures which presents its own set of interesting opportunities for both learners and teachers. Tiawati (2019) observes that the teaching of BIPA is very distinct from the way Indonesians are taught since it involves functional, social, and cognitive aspects of learners which affect the level of the learners' performance after the instruction.

A study by Shofia and Suyitno (2020) explains that BIPA students tend to have problems with vocabulary and grammar and utilize instructional materials. They also find it difficult to adapt to different cultural contexts. According to the research by Lasa et al. (2019) and Widiyanto (2021), the acquisition of phonology, syntactic, and morphemic aspects was reported to be difficult among students in Thailand and Vietnam. As Karina et al (2020) states, speaking and listening are the most difficult skills to acquire for students while the acquisition of writing and reading comes second and third respectively.

Syafryadin et al (2022) argue in their study on teaching the Indonesian language remotely to foreigners that cultural content plays a crucial role in BIPA learning. They found out that cultural and literary aspects embedded in the TISOL textbook "Sahabatku Indonesia" for instance, can be a benefit or pain for learners, depending on how well those aspects are integrated into the teaching process. Permatasari and Syafryadin (2021) highlighted the significance of integration between language skills and cultural competence for more complete learning.

Complex and complicated conditions such as language anxiety could aggravate the learning process. As quoted by Sampelolo et al. (2021), Gürsoy considered language anxiety as one of the important affective factors in the process of learning a second language. This fear, of being misunderstood or making a mistake, is

frequently experienced by BIPA's students. According to Pratama and others (2022), this set of psychological problems leads BIPA students to low confidence and speaking difficulty.

In this context, Marsevani et al. (2023) studied the impediments faced by foreign students while taking Indonesian language courses at Batam. Their research was interdisciplinary or mixed method; they administered a questionnaire to 25 international students aged between 8 and 12 and interviewed BIPA teachers. The restrictions pointed out in this research are categorized as such: Poor pronunciation of some learners, limited vocabulary resources, grammar difficulties, cultural barriers, and practice time not enough. The results of the research emphasize difficulties faced in learning BIPA and present a comprehensive paradigm for addressing comparable issues in other contexts. The present research, drawing on a questionnaire constructed by Marsevani et al., (2023), explores the general problems that BIPA learners encounter while doing Indonesian language learning.

METHOD

Research design

For this study the students are BIPA and their difficulties in learning Indonesian were taken up the quantitative measure approach as a basis for the study. Data was collected through a questionnaire which made it possible to measure the difficulties that were experienced by learners and also the trends in their responses.

Participants

The subjects of the study were 20 respondents who were of different countries and sex, ages ranging between 19 and 63. The respondents participated in BIPA teaching sessions within the scope of their assignment as BIPA practicum students supervised by University of Bengkulu English Education Department third-year postgraduate students. These teaching practices formed part of the requirements that students needed to do for the completion of the TISOL/BIPA course. The difficulties were experienced by most of the respondents who had about 6-7 online sessions on both language and culture.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the survey that was slightly modified from Marsevani et al. (2023). Aiming at solving the challenges targeted in the research, the questionnaire contained five sets namely grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, cultural limitations, and lack of practice time. This questionnaire was also self-contained so there were 1-5 scale items for statements.

Data analysis

For each of the challenges reported by the participants, descriptive statistics were employed to provide an overview regarding the number of mentions as well as the intensity of the challenge. The percentage and frequency methods were employed in the computation of the response distribution in each of the regions of difficulty. The mean scores and standard deviations were utilized to gauge the central tendency and the variability of the learners' experiences, respectively. Such pieces of information were then used to establish the greatest sources of problems that BIPA learners faced and look into the implications it had on both teaching and learning practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings show the responses of BIPA students to a questionnaire designed to assess their perceived difficulties in learning Indonesian.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Reported Difficulties

Difficulty	Percentage	
	Score	frequency
Pronoun	1	0
	2	2
	3	2
	4	4
	5	12
Vocabulary	1	1
	2	4
	3	2
	4	4
	5	9
Grammar	1	1
	2	4

	3	7	35.00
	4	5	25.00
	5	3	15.00
Cultural Barriers	1	1	5.00
	2	3	15.00
	3	3	15.00
	4	9	45.00
	5	4	20.00
Insufficient Practice Time	1	2	10.00
	2	8	40.00
	3	3	15.00
	4	2	10.00
	5	5	25.00

Table 1 demonstrates the frequency and percentage of issues identified by BIPA learners across five categories: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, cultural barriers, and insufficient practice time. Pronunciation is the most serious problem, with 60% of pupils judging it "very difficult" (scoring 5). Vocabulary follows, with 45% of students evaluating it as "very difficult," while grammar has a more fair distribution, with 35% ranking it as moderate (scoring 3). Cultural barriers and insufficient practice time show a variety of responses indicating moderate to slight difficulty for most students.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of difficulty scores

Difficulty	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pronoun	4.35	0.88
Vocabulary	3.70	1.17
Grammar	3.10	1.02
Cultural Barriers	3.35	1.04
Insufficient Practice Time	2.70	1.08

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation for each difficulty category, giving a clearer picture of the central tendency and variability of responses. Pronunciation has the highest mean score (4.35), reflecting its consistency as the most significant challenge, with low variability (SD = 0.88). Vocabulary and grammar had lower mean scores (3.70 and 3.10, respectively) but higher standard deviations, indicating greater variability in students' experiences. Insufficient practice

time had the lowest mean (2.70), indicating that it is less of a critical issue overall, though with notable variability ($SD = 1.08$).

The results indicate that the BIPA learners experience multiple challenges of which their most grim is pronunciation. This conclusion resonates with Widiyanto's (2021) observation that a number of foreign learners experience phonological challenges when learning Indonesian specifics of the phoneme such as *ng* and *ny* sounds and the distinction between long and short vowel sounds. According to Syafryadin et al. (2022), the drawbacks of virtual classrooms, such as the absence of real-time feedback and less contact with natural speech, worsen the problems of pronunciation. These difficulties underscore the need for modern teaching devices to supplement the traditional ones that could include, for instance, pronouncing apps or language speech recognition software.

Another fundamental problem was vocabulary which has been well supported by the works of Shofia and Suyitno (2020) and Nasution (2020) who also emphasized on the vastness and context-dependence of Indonesian languages. Learners do not easily fight their way around homonyms, affixes and words that have been borrowed and thereby complicated usage. Syafryadin et al. (2022) are of the opinion that perhaps online training has limited the amount of context exposure which is necessary for vocabulary retrieval. The inclusion of real life texts, videos and context of vocabulary games or activities may improve interest and memory retention.

Grammatical issues, on the other hand, represent structural disparities between Indonesian and the pupils' native languages. According to Lasa et al. (2019), Indonesian's agglutinative structure and flexible word order can be perplexing for learners who are accustomed to rigid syntactical constraints. The online structure utilized in this study's BIPA sessions may hinder collaborative grammar exercises, which are critical for mastering complicated linguistic patterns. Asynchronous activities, such as grammar-focused quizzes or interactive video courses, could help students learn more effectively.

Cultural barriers are not the primary challenge, but a crucial part of BIPA learning. It has been suggested (Permatasari & Syafryadin, 2021) that cultural and

literary content contained in BIPA programs will be a value-added in the learning process, but can also pose problems because learners are indeed initially 'not familiar' with the norms of Indonesian. For instance, the textbook *Sahabatku Indonesia* includes materials that need cultural understanding, for example, family ties and social norms, which might be alien to learners of differing social and cultural dimensions. Online format role-plays, virtual cultural tours, or working with native speakers may be employed to overcome some of these barriers.

Most challenging yet least rated by several BIPA teachers was the lack of adequate time for practice, which still serves as a limitation of the BIPA program. Pratama et al. (2022) assert that mastery of a foreign language takes practice and practice builds fluency as well as confidence. Unlike novel interventions, the restricted number of sessions (6–7) and largely online format in this study might have restricted their practical application [25]. Adding informal conversation groups, peer practice sessions, and partnerships with native speakers to the program could provide students with additional language exposure and improve their fluency.

Psychological factors, such as anxiety and low self-confidence also contribute to the aggravation of these difficulties. As Sampelolo et al. (2021) mentioned, students who are afraid of making mistakes, are less willing to engage in class, especially if the learning environment is online, where the interaction itself is limited. Implementing anxiety-reducing strategies like positive reinforcement, peer modeling, and anonymous practice tools could create a more supportive learning climate.

The findings illuminate several aspects of the BIPA learning experience, which are particularly unique to the online form of delivery. Though in keeping with the findings of previous studies, the results highlight limitations of remote teaching and limited opportunities for practice unique to this moment. Tackling these challenges will require a holistic lens that integrates linguistic, cultural, and psychological strategies all underpinned by innovative learning tools and enriched learning opportunities. Then students could learn language skills alongside cultural awareness as well as confidence in themselves and their learning.

CONCLUSION

This study shows how pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar are crucial problems experienced by the best BIPA learners at Bengkulu University. Cultural obstacles and a lack of practice time, while not as prominent, inhibit the students' progress. The study's results align with prior studies drawing attention to linguistic intricacy, cultural context, and psychological components that can manipulate the learning process and resulting outcomes, particularly in online environments. Study limitations include its small sample size, one setting, and reliance on self-reported data which may carry biases. Further research should involve larger and more heterogeneous groups of subjects and mixed methods, as well as investigate how delivery methods (mostly hybrid or fully offline) relate to results. Future research should include larger and more diverse groups of participants, use mixed methods and examine the impact of different teaching methods, especially hybrid or completely offline formats. Teachers are advised to incorporate technology, expand cultural immersion activities and provide more opportunities for practice to increase students' language acquisition and confidence.

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