

Teaching bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers: Strategies, challenges, and innovations

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Abstract - The instruction to teach Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers has become increasingly vital within the expanding context of global mobility, academic exchange, and cross-cultural engagement. The primary aim here is not only to enhance students' linguistic competence but to cultivate genuine intercultural understanding, recognizing that successful communication extends well beyond rote memorization or grammar drills. The methods centre on authentic use of language—encouraging dialogue, collaborative tasks, and meaningful immersion activities. By integrating cultural content—sometimes through digital resources, sometimes by direct community engagement—educators address both pragmatic language needs and critical sociocultural nuances that learners must grasp to become confident speakers. Technology, notably apps, virtual classrooms, and gamification techniques, has dramatically altered access and interaction, offering more dynamic, learner-centred environments compared to traditional instruction. There is a shortage of teaching materials specifically designed for non-native speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds, and instructors must constantly adapt to different levels of learners' prior knowledge. The equilibrium between linguistic precision and communicative fluency remains a perennial challenge; programs must avoid focusing so heavily on rules that spontaneous speech becomes stilted, yet also ensure students develop sufficient accuracy. It becomes clear that the combination of communicative and culturally embedded strategies—supported by practical technological innovations—yields the most significant advances. Classroom engagement increases, and learners retain both language and cultural context more successfully. Effective instruction for non-native speakers necessitates a holistic philosophy. This involves the deliberate alignment of curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment with the specific needs of diverse learners, while also taking full advantage of contemporary technology and opportunities for cultural interaction. Such an approach equips students with not just linguistic skills but also the intercultural competence essential for meaningful real-world communication in Indonesia and across global contexts.

Keywords: Bahasa Indonesia, language teaching, pedagogical strategies, teaching challenges, language learning, intercultural competence

1. Introduction



Language learning has long served as a vital foundation for cross-cultural understanding, effective education, and global mobility (Kramsch, 2014; Richards, 2014). In recent decades, especially in an era marked by accelerated globalization, the teaching of Asian languages to non-native speakers has witnessed remarkable expansion. This growth has been fuelled by factors such as intensified international collaboration, booming tourism sectors, increased trade links, and scholarly exchanges across borders (Gil, 2017)). Within this broad context, Bahasa Indonesia stands out as the national language of the world's fourth most populous country. The language has drawn substantial attention from a diverse array of learners, educators, and policymakers worldwide, all intrigued by both its practical and cultural significance.

Bahasa Indonesia is spoken, either as a first or second language, by more than 270 million people—a testament to its centrality in Indonesian society (Paauw, 2009; Sneddon, 2003). The language not only facilitates internal cohesion and national unity across Indonesia's vast archipelago but also supports broader ambitions in the realms of regional diplomacy, cultural identity construction, and sustainable economic development. In essence, Bahasa Indonesia is more than a mode of communication: it is a binding element in a country characterized by extraordinary ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity.

The global surge of interest in Bahasa Indonesia can be attributed to several interrelated factors. Indonesia's emergence as a major economic power in Southeast Asia, with increasing influence in international business forums and organizations, has naturally heightened the demand for linguistic competence among professionals in business, diplomatic, and academic fields (Wahyuningtyas, 2021; Rini, 2014 in Subandiyah et al., 2023). Additionally, Indonesia's rich cultural heritage, dynamic arts scene, and multifaceted social fabric position language learning as a portal to deeper cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect (Suhardi, 2015). Notably, within the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Bahasa Indonesia often acts as a key lingua franca, particularly in contexts linked to maritime activities, international trade, and tourism (Lowenberg, 1991)).

Despite its growing relevance, the field of teaching Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers remains relatively understudied, especially in comparison to prominently taught languages such as English, Mandarin, or Japanese (Odlin, 1989). This lack of robust research poses both challenges and opportunities for language educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. The present study seeks to address this research gap by systematically exploring effective teaching strategies, identifying persistent obstacles in the field, and highlighting innovative instructional practices that can better support the learning journeys of non-native speakers.

Teaching Bahasa Indonesia to foreign learners transcends mere linguistic transfer; it is fundamentally a cultural endeavour. Language, as emphasized by Sapir (1921) and Kramsch (2014), serves as a dynamic vehicle for culture, identity, and worldview. Through the process of acquiring Bahasa Indonesia, learners gain valuable access to Indonesia's societal norms, hierarchical structures, and core traditional values. This perspective is closely aligned with the conceptualization of language as not only a communicative tool but also a cultural artifact in its own right (Halliday, 1978).

The significance of teaching Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers is particularly evident across four interrelated domains:

- (1) Academic Collaboration: International students enrolling in Indonesian higher education institutions must demonstrate considerable proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia. This linguistic ability enables them to engage meaningfully with local academic materials, participate in collaborative research, and integrate into wider campus communities (Zein, 2017)). Additionally, such proficiency enhances their capacity to contribute to Indonesia's academic landscape while fostering deeper intercultural collegiality.
- (2) Tourism and Hospitality: Indonesia's robust tourism ecosystem significantly benefits from the presence of foreign professionals, including tour guides, hospitality workers, and international researchers, who possess effective communication skills in Bahasa Indonesia (Suhardi, 2015).



Their linguistic competence supports not only operational efficiency but also enriches tourists' experiences and promotes positive cultural representation.

(3) **Diplomacy and International Relations:** In the sphere of diplomacy, proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia has become increasingly prioritized, particularly in contexts involving ASEAN cooperation and bilateral engagements (Lowenberg, 1991)). Language ability here functions as a crucial asset in cultivating trust, facilitating dialogue, and managing sensitive negotiations.

(4) **Business and Trade:** Foreign investors and expatriates routinely use Bahasa Indonesia to navigate Indonesia's complex legal, social, and commercial terrains (Rini, 2014). Adequate language skills can determine the degree to which these individuals and organizations integrate with local stakeholders, adapt to regulatory requirements, and ultimately succeed in their business endeavours.

The teaching of Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers represents a strategically significant facet of Indonesia's broader efforts in cultural diplomacy and international economic engagement. It involves much more than simple mastery of grammar or vocabulary; it is about fostering intercultural dialogue, opening opportunities for global cooperation, and equipping learners to become effective bridges between societies. Studying and addressing the challenges and innovations in this area is, therefore, not only timely but vital for both Indonesia and the international community.

The teaching of Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers can be effectively analysed through the lens of established Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. Notably, Krashen's Input Hypothesis underscores the necessity of exposure to language input that is both comprehensible and slightly above the learner's current level. Complementing this, Long's Interaction Hypothesis posits that meaningful interactions and opportunities for negotiation of meaning are central to progressing in a new language, while Swain's Output Hypothesis highlights the cognitive benefits of language production for achieving proficiency.

Bahasa Indonesia, as a subject of SLA, presents a distinctive linguistic profile that shapes the learning process in several unique ways:

- **Simplicity of Morphology:** One of the most salient features of Bahasa Indonesia is its comparatively simple morphological system. Unlike many other languages, Indonesian verbs do not inflect for tense, person, or number, which can lower the initial barrier to communicative competence for adult learners. This structural transparency makes it possible for learners to convey basic meanings quickly, fostering early engagement with authentic communication (Sneddon, 2003). However, it is important to note that learners must still grapple with other morphosyntactic elements as their proficiency grows.
- **Affixation System:** Despite the relatively analytic syntax and lack of complex verb conjugations, Bahasa Indonesia's use of affixation for deriving new meanings or grammatical functions introduces complexity. Learners from linguistic backgrounds that do not feature productive affixation, particularly of the Austronesian type, often find this challenging (Musgrave, 2014). For example, prefixes and suffixes can significantly alter word meanings or grammatical roles, demanding ongoing morphological awareness as learners advance.
- **Sociolinguistic Variation:** Another core consideration is the wide gap between Bahasa Indonesia's formal and informal registers. There is considerable variation between standard written forms and the colloquial varieties that predominate in daily life. Successfully navigating these registers requires not only grammatical knowledge but also the acquisition of pragmatic competence, including an understanding of when to deploy certain forms and the sociocultural weight they carry (Ewing, 2014).

Taken together, these features imply that comprehensive Bahasa Indonesia instruction should prioritize both communicative functionality and the development of morphosyntactic awareness. Educators need to prepare learners to recognize and flexibly adapt to varying registers, ensuring their ability to operate effectively across different social and communicative contexts.



Methodologies for teaching Bahasa Indonesia reflect broader trends in language pedagogy, with a clear shift over recent decades away from grammar-translation approaches towards more interactive and technology-mediated methods (J. C. and R. T. S. Richards, 2014a). Recent classroom practices and applied research increasingly recommend an eclectic blend of techniques, including:

- **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):** Emphasizing meaningful interaction and authentic communication, CLT prioritizes the practical use of language as it is actually spoken and written in real contexts (Littlewood, 2014).
- **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):** This method focuses on the completion of real-world tasks, fostering both linguistic competence and pragmatic awareness. Such an approach is especially effective for building the flexible language skills necessary for everyday situations (Ellis, 2003).
- **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL):** Integrating language study with relevant disciplinary content (e.g., Indonesian history, the arts) provides meaningful contexts for language acquisition and deepens learners' cultural literacy (Coyle et al., 2012).
- **Culture-Integrated Approaches:** Drawing from authentic cultural materials—including folk narratives, proverbs, and contemporary media—grounds language learning in local meanings, supporting not just vocabulary acquisition but sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence as well (Kramsch, 2014).

Technological innovation further shapes contemporary pedagogy. Blended learning, which combines face-to-face instruction with online components, expands access and allows for flexible pacing, benefitting learners in both domestic and international settings (Godwin-Jones, 2018)). The use of multimedia, gamified platforms, and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has become widespread, enhancing motivation and, in some cases, improving learner outcomes by enabling practice outside traditional classroom boundaries.

Despite these advantages, the field continues to face significant challenges:

- **Insufficient Standardized Materials:** Compared with major languages such as English or Mandarin, Bahasa Indonesia lacks a robust ecosystem of standardized instructional resources designed specifically for non-native speakers (Zein, 2017). This can result in inconsistent learning experiences and variable quality across instructional contexts.
- **Limited Professional Development:** Many teachers have not received systematic training specific to Indonesian as a foreign language, leading to wide variation in pedagogical quality (Rachmajanti, n.d.).
- **Register and Dialect Variation:** Learners must master both standard and colloquial forms and discern when each is appropriate. This is particularly challenging given the pervasive use of informal varieties in everyday communication and media (Ewing, 2014).
- **Cultural and Pragmatic Nuances:** Attaining communicative competence includes understanding subtle distinctions in politeness, kinship, and sociocultural expectations that permeate Indonesian society (Djenar & Ewing, 2015).
- **Technological Disparities:** In some regions, limited digital infrastructure constrains the implementation of technology-enhanced pedagogies (Lai et al., 2011), perpetuating access gaps.

Addressing the constellation of these challenges requires coordinated interventions from multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, universities, and cultural institutions, to develop both human and material resources.

Over the past decade, innovative practices have emerged that point toward a more responsive and effective system:

- **Digital Platforms:** Technology-mediated resources—such as interactive mobile applications, virtual classrooms, and forums—extend learning opportunities and facilitate peer interaction outside the physical classroom (Godwin-Jones, 2018)).



- **Immersive Cultural Programs:** Experiences such as short-term study tours, homestays, and community-based learning provide invaluable exposure to authentic linguistic and cultural environments (Liddicoat, 2013).
- **Gamification:** The use of game-based elements has proven particularly successful in motivating learners and reinforcing language patterns (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2014).
- **AI-Assisted Feedback:** Emerging artificial intelligence tools now deliver rapid feedback on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage, enabling more individualized and effective learning (Chaudhuri et al., 2021).

The trajectory of these innovations signals an increasing orientation toward learner-centred, technology-supported, and contextually meaningful instructional frameworks. Such approaches better accommodate diverse learning profiles and local realities, promoting greater engagement, higher proficiency, and more robust intercultural understanding.

The present article seeks to offer a thorough analysis of pedagogical strategies, persistent challenges, and recent innovations in teaching Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers. Specifically, the analysis aims to: (1) Identify effective teaching practices across different learner needs, (2) Examine primary challenges encountered by teachers and students in varied settings, and (3) Highlight and assess innovations with the potential to improve engagement, proficiency, and cultural competence.

By integrating theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and practical experience, this synthesis aspires to advance the state of the art in Bahasa Indonesia instruction and provide actionable recommendations for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers.

By drawing from theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and practical classroom experience, this study not only adds depth to our collective understanding of Indonesian language education, but also distills concrete recommendations for teachers, curriculum developers, and policy officials operating in this field. The synthesis here is purposeful – bridging abstract theory with day-to-day realities in second language classrooms serves to inform current practice and shape future educational policy.

To provide clarity and structure, the article is divided into four principal sections: • Literature Review: This section offers a critical overview of existing research on language pedagogy, focusing especially on second-language learning processes as they relate to Bahasa Indonesia. • Methodology: Here, the research design, data collection techniques, and analytic methods are set out in detail, ensuring transparency and reproducibility. • Findings and Discussion: Within this core section, the paper analyses successful instructional approaches, persistent obstacles, and emerging innovations in teaching Indonesian to learners from non-Indonesian backgrounds. • Conclusion and Recommendations: The article concludes by highlighting practical implications for educators, as well as identifying directions for future research and development.

A central premise undergirding this work is the idea that language is never merely a system of vocabulary and morphosyntax. Rather, it is intimately bound up with culture, identity, and social communication – an insight explored in depth by Kramsch (2014) and Halliday (1978). Second language acquisition is thus a complex process. Learners, as Byram (1997) suggests, are not simply acquiring grammatical forms; they are also cultivating cultural awareness and sociolinguistic sensitivity. The effective teaching of Bahasa Indonesia to non-natives, therefore, cannot be separated from the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence – the learner's ability to use language appropriately and fluently in a range of cultural contexts.

Current sociolinguistic research (Liddicoat, 2013) emphasizes the pivotal role of cultural immersion in effective language acquisition. As Djenar & Ewing (2015) observes, mastering the layers of politeness, kinship relations, and context-sensitive greetings in Bahasa Indonesia often necessitates authentic interaction, rather than exclusively classroom-based instruction. This argument resonates with Hymes' (1972, cf. Cazden, 2011) influential concept of communicative competence, which extends the goal of education beyond grammatical accuracy to encompass pragmatic and sociocultural proficiency.



In the contemporary era, globalization is radically extending both the scope and significance of second language learning (Kramsch, 2014)). Indonesia's increasingly prominent roles in global commerce, diplomacy, and cultural exchange have helped to drive unprecedented demand for Bahasa Indonesia programs worldwide (Rini, 2014). International students, business professionals, and diplomats alike are now seeking advanced proficiency, not only for pragmatic reasons but also to facilitate integration and cross-cultural understanding (Lowenberg, 1991). The meteoric rise of BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* – Indonesian for Foreign Speakers) courses, now established in tertiary institutions, language centres, and Indonesian cultural houses both domestically and abroad, powerfully demonstrates this trend. Zein (2017) notes that this growth is further nourished by Indonesia's strategic efforts in cultural diplomacy – essentially positioning the Indonesian language as a key tool for fostering regional cooperation and enhancing its global image.

Within the field of second language acquisition (SLA), an array of theoretical models have been proposed to shed light on the processes by which non-native speakers learn Indonesian. Krashen's (1985, see (Luo, 2024)). Input Hypothesis maintains that learners progress most effectively when exposed to slightly challenging, yet comprehensible input. Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis places greater emphasis on face-to-face negotiation of meaning during communicative interaction – a process that can help to clarify misunderstandings and consolidate learning. Swain's (1995) Output Hypothesis adds another dimension, proposing that the act of producing language (rather than simply comprehending it) pushes learners to process linguistic forms more deeply, thus accelerating both grammatical and lexical development.

Indonesia's own linguistic structure offers unique opportunities and challenges to the non-native learner:

- **Phonological Simplicity:** With its relatively limited range of phonemes, Indonesian can be easier for learners from a wide variety of mother tongues to pronounce accurately (Sneddon, 2003).
- **Morphological Structure:** While the absence of tense/person verb conjugation lightens the grammatical load, the use of intricate affixation can present a substantial cognitive hurdle to novices (Musgrave, 2014).
- **Register Variation:** A noteworthy challenge is the need to navigate between highly formal Standard Indonesian and more informal, often regionally influenced, colloquial forms (Ewing, 2014).

These characteristics imply that teaching and learning strategies for Indonesian as a second language are most effective when they combine task-based interaction, a strong focus on contextualized input, and explicit instruction in sociolinguistic variation.

When reviewing approaches to foreign language pedagogy, several methodologies emerge as particularly effective within BIPA and related contexts:

- a) **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):** CLT prioritizes genuine communicative exchanges over rote drills or isolated grammar exercises. In the specific case of Bahasa Indonesia instruction, communicative activities such as role-playing, simulated social situations, and small group discussions are used to encourage active use and experimentation with the language (Richards, 2014b). Littlewood (2014) further observes that CLT not only enhances learners' ease and fluency, but also builds confidence by gradually increasing their exposure to real-world communicative contexts.
- b) **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):** Task-based approaches structure instruction around meaningful, goal-oriented tasks that mirror authentic uses of language outside the classroom environment. This often results in more robust learning, as students are challenged to draw upon their existing knowledge and adapt to new linguistic demands. This pedagogical focus on practicality and authenticity aligns well with the needs of learners aiming for both accuracy and communicative success in contemporary Indonesian.

The complex interplay between linguistic form, cultural norms, and communicative function makes Indonesian language education a particularly rich field for study and innovation. By situating pedagogical recommendations within both theoretical and empirical contexts, and by highlighting the importance of cultural understanding alongside linguistic skill, this paper contributes to ongoing conversations about best practices and future prospects in the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers.



2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach, which is particularly well-suited for the multifaceted and context-dependent world of language teaching. Rather than confining the inquiry within the strict boundaries of a theoretical model, qualitative description offers flexibility and depth, allowing for nuanced explorations of real-life experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). The core intention was to surface the genuine realities faced by BIPA (Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing) practitioners, bringing forward their stories and strategic choices whether they are teaching in urban Indonesian institutions, running programs for expatriates, or connecting with learners located abroad via digital platforms.

To ensure that patterns and peculiarities could be examined both within and across different contexts, the study adopted a multiple-case study framework (see Yin, 2018 see Hollweck, 2015; Wajdi, 2018)). This approach facilitated meaningful comparisons between, for example, university-operated BIPA programs—each with its own culture and constraints—as well as private language centres and international cultural institutes. Every “case” effectively constituted an independent data stream, but cross-case analysis helped reveal recurring obstacles, patterns of innovation, and distinctive instructional dynamics. The underlying aim was to develop insights that resonate across settings while also capturing the singularities that make each teaching context unique.

The methodology, in line with the study’s exploratory aims, was crafted to address three guiding questions: (1) Which pedagogical strategies consistently produce effective outcomes in teaching Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers, and how do these practices manifest across diverse instructional settings? (2) What kinds of operational, linguistic, and pedagogical challenges confront both educators and learners within BIPA programs, and how do these hurdles differ according to context? (3) Which innovative tools, practices, or curricular solutions have emerged, and in what ways do they contribute to enhanced learning outcomes, cultural understanding, and overall program success?

In addressing these questions, the study sought to move beyond simple descriptions by exploring the underlying principles and context-specific adaptations that shape each program.

2.2. Research Setting and Participants

2.2.1. Selection of Research Sites

To maximize the representativeness and richness of the dataset, research was conducted across six strategically chosen BIPA programs from a variety of geographical, institutional, and delivery-mode backgrounds. These included:

- Two Indonesian universities with well-established BIPA programs for international cohorts, allowing examination of academic contexts;
- One private Jakarta-based language institute, reflective of the market-driven sector and attuned to expatriate needs;
- An Indonesian cultural centre abroad, selected in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture, highlighting Indonesia’s soft diplomacy and cultural outreach;
- Two online BIPA programs, which enabled global participation and introduced variables related to technology-mediated instruction.

The rationale for site selection rested on purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015), focusing on programs recognized for their instructional quality, diversity, and willingness to support research activities. This approach was critical for capturing a spectrum of perspectives while grounding findings in credible programmatic experience.

The participant pool was carefully constructed to reflect the multiplicity of voices and roles active in BIPA education. Specifically, the study included:

- Eight instructors, each with a minimum of three years’ experience, ensuring that insights were anchored in sustained, practical engagement with BIPA teaching;



- Thirty non-native learners spanning four countries and a mix of first-language backgrounds, providing demographic and linguistic variability that enriched the data's relevance;
- Four seasoned program coordinators tasked with curriculum development, teacher professionalization, and administrative oversight.

This varied group provided a 360-degree perspective on the teaching and learning process—allowing for triangulation of themes and a more in-depth portrayal of BIPA's operational realities. All participants contributed voluntarily and on the basis of informed consent, consistent with current ethical standards for qualitative research (Cresweel & Creswell, 2018).

2.3. Data Collection Methods

To accurately portray the complexity of BIPA's pedagogical landscape, the study utilized three interconnected methods, each contributing distinct but complementary forms of evidence: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all instructors and program coordinators to gather rich, first-hand accounts. The interview protocol was designed to cover critical terrain—pedagogical philosophies, instructional repertoire, obstacles encountered, creative strategies, and the availability of institutional support. The interviewer fostered a conversational atmosphere, allowing respondents to elaborate on unanticipated issues as needed. Each session ran between forty-five minutes to an hour and was conducted in either Bahasa Indonesia or English, attuned to the preference and fluency of participants. With consent, every interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, laying the foundation for robust qualitative analysis.

Classroom (and virtual classroom) observations were systematically carried out using a structured observation checklist modelled on established qualitative research tools (Richards, 2014; Wajdi, 2018)). These observations encompassed a suite of focal points: the nature of teaching methodologies, the rhythm of teacher-student interactions, the embedding of cultural content, and the degree of learner engagement. Each observed instructional episode lasted at least ninety minutes, affording a representative snapshot of a complete pedagogical cycle. Supplementary field notes captured additional contextual and spontaneous insights that might have eluded the formal checklist structure.

To triangulate findings from interviews and observations, the research team systematically reviewed relevant textual artifacts: teaching materials, lesson plans, online modules, and policy documents. This phase of analysis was expressly aimed at identifying patterns of content organization, curriculum design priorities, assessment practices, and the ways in which cultural immersion was operationalized or, alternatively, overlooked.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis unfolded in alignment with thematic analysis principles (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This entailed several distinct but iterative steps: (a) Familiarization: Close, repeated readings of transcripts, observation notes, and documentary data to assemble an integrated sense of the material's scope and texture. (b) Initial Coding: Systematic application of open coding techniques to designate text segments that illuminated central issues—such as instructional strategies, barriers to engagement, or novel pedagogical practices. (c) Theme Development: The process of clustering and organizing codes into higher-order thematic categories (e.g., "Task-Based Instruction," "Technological Barriers," or "Cultural Immersion Practices"), guided by both theory and the empirical particularities arising in each research site.

This approach provided a balanced framework for ensuring analytical rigor while remaining sensitive to the unanticipated nuances and contextual idiosyncrasies that qualitative work—particularly in the multilingual, multicultural realm of BIPA—inevitably brings to light. The overall result is an analysis attentive both to cross-cutting trends and to the distinctive textures that shape individual cases.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results



This study embarks on a comprehensive examination of the evolving pedagogical approaches, persistent obstacles, and ongoing innovations in teaching Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers (BIPA). Drawing extensively from qualitative interviews with both educators and learners, as well as institutional reports spanning domestic and international contexts, the research uncovers several significant findings that highlight the multifaceted nature of effective language instruction. The analysis calls attention to the necessity of an integrated pedagogical model—one that weaves together linguistic competence, cultural fluency, and sustained learner motivation as interconnected pillars of effective foreign language education.

The findings decisively indicate that the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia transcends rote memorization of grammatical structures or vocabulary. Instead, the most successful instructional practices encourage the synchronous development of language skills and intercultural awareness, while also fostering an environment where learners remain motivated throughout their studies. Teachers who embrace pedagogical flexibility, enact contextually appropriate strategies, and invest in dynamic teacher development tend to facilitate more robust language acquisition. These educators recognize that language learning is not merely a cognitive process, but also a social and cultural one, requiring the intertwining of academic rigor with communicative relevance.

Central to the analysis are four prominent instructional domains that emerged from the qualitative data: (1) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), (2) Task-Based Learning (TBL), (3) Cultural Immersion, and (4) Blended Learning modalities. Among these, Communicative Language Teaching arises as the most pervasively implemented and impactful method. Rather than prioritizing isolated grammar exercises, CLT foregrounds real-life communication and authentic language use, empowering learners to navigate everyday scenarios in Bahasa Indonesia. Teachers reported that integrating role-play exercises—such as skilfully negotiating in a marketplace or planning a trip—provided rich opportunities for students to internalize both the grammatical and sociolinguistic functions of the language. Such practices are grounded in Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, which posits that pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge is as critical as grammatical proficiency. By fostering such competence, learners become more adept at using Bahasa Indonesia appropriately across varied social interactions.

Task-Based Learning (TBL) further enriches the instructional landscape by linking language acquisition to personally meaningful tasks. The study highlights that when students engage in longer-term projects—like producing short documentaries or authoring blog posts—their investment in the learning process deepens considerably. These tasks necessitate not only linguistic agility but also a nuanced acculturation into the local context, requiring students to draw connections between language, culture, and identity. The framework echoes (Kolb, 1984) principles of experiential learning, suggesting that reflective, hands-on engagement enhances retention and propels ongoing skill development. Teachers observing TBL environments noted that learners exhibited not only greater motivation but also increased self-confidence, especially when participating in collaborative projects that mirrored authentic communicative demands.

Equally significant is the domain of cultural immersion, which the study identifies as indispensable for both linguistic and intercultural mastery. Immersion initiatives—including field excursions, service learning, and, most notably, extended “Live-In Desa” experiences with host families—provide learners with opportunities to use Bahasa Indonesia in genuinely authentic settings. Participants in these programs often reported marked improvement in pragmatic competence, such as the sensitive use of regional dialects, the appropriate deployment of formal and informal registers, and deeper comprehension of social norms and hierarchies. By interacting directly with local communities, learners gained valuable insights into idiomatic expressions, cultural etiquette, and local values, aspects that traditional classroom instruction might rarely address in depth. Such experiences are particularly critical for mastering the subtleties and unspoken rules that govern everyday communication in Indonesian society.



Blended Learning, the fourth major domain, blends traditional face-to-face teaching with digital modalities, allowing for greater flexibility and personalized pacing. This approach has become increasingly vital, expanding access to quality instruction for geographically dispersed learners while maintaining opportunities for synchronous interaction and formative feedback.

The research underscores that cultivating proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia as a foreign language demands holistic, context-sensitive pedagogy. Effective instruction integrates communicative authenticity, task-driven engagement, immersive cultural experiences, and adaptive learning environments. The synergy of these strategies not only elevates language achievement but also prepares learners to participate fully and sensitively in intercultural communication. Continued professional development for educators and a commitment to innovative, evidence-based methodologies appear crucial in advancing the field of Bahasa Indonesia instruction for non-native learners.

Blended learning—which effectively integrates conventional face-to-face instruction with various digital resources—has increasingly established itself as a pivotal strategy in modern educational contexts. This pedagogical approach is particularly advantageous for learners who, due to time constraints or personal commitments, find it challenging to attend in-person lessons with any degree of consistency. With platforms such as Kelas Bahasa Indonesia, students gain access to a diverse array of multimedia resources, interactive activities, and the benefit of receiving immediate feedback on their progress. Such versatility enables learners to advance at a pace aligned with their individual circumstances, thereby complementing what is achieved in the physical classroom and fostering a more learner-centred environment. It is essential to recognize, however, that the effectiveness of blended learning models is significantly mediated by students' access to contemporary digital devices and reliable internet connectivity—limitations which remain persistent in under-resourced regions and must be addressed to avoid exacerbating educational disparities.

Beyond the benefits identified, the research also highlights several enduring challenges confronting Bahasa Indonesia as a foreign language (BIFL) instruction. A primary concern relates to the field's lack of a universally accepted curriculum. Although the Indonesian Ministry of Education has promulgated the Indonesian for Foreigners program, its implementation is inconsistent; institutions within Indonesia and abroad interpret and adapt the curriculum with considerable variability. This disparity results in fluctuating proficiency standards, making it difficult to evaluate learners' competencies uniformly or to ensure reliable benchmarking across programs. There is a clear call among educators for the establishment of a curriculum that aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Such alignment would facilitate more objective assessment of proficiency, foster greater standardization in instruction, and enhance the global recognition of certifications in Bahasa Indonesia.

Another fundamental issue concerns the pervasive influence of learners' first languages, often referred to as linguistic interference or transfer. For instance, students whose primary language is English frequently encounter obstacles with Indonesian word order, since Bahasa Indonesia does not adhere strictly to the subject-verb-object (SVO) arrangement typical in English. Meanwhile, speakers of Mandarin are often stymied by the complex affixation system in Indonesian, which incorporates prefixes such as *me-*, *ber-*, and *di-*, substantially differing from the formative structures of their native tongue. Educators attempt to address these issues through strategies such as contrastive analysis, targeted drills, and repeated corrective feedback. Nevertheless, minimizing the effects of L1 interference is a protracted process that necessitates sustained exposure and continuous practice; progress is incremental, and learners must navigate a steep acclimatization curve as they adapt to entirely new grammatical and morphological systems.

One of the most pressing issues hampering progress in Bahasa Indonesia as a Foreign Language (BIFL) instruction remains the chronic shortage of authentic instructional resources. High-quality audio-visual materials, native literature, and real-life artifacts are, quite frankly, not readily obtainable outside select circles or regions. This absence has limited the atmosphere for



linguistic immersion. Learners—especially those far removed from urban hubs—seldom encounter natural spoken Indonesian, since native-speaking instructors are, to put it bluntly, remarkably scarce outside the major metropolitan areas. This limited access means students are often left with repetitive memorization, failing to advance toward real communicative competence or meaningful engagement with the language as it is lived.

Compounding this issue, the integration of digital learning tools in BIFL classrooms faces significant technological headwinds. Reliable internet access is by no means guaranteed, particularly in remote or underserved regions. On top of that, both instructors and students frequently lack the digital literacy required to make use of modern online platforms. As Selwyn (2016) aptly notes, the “digital divide” is still very much a reality, hindering equitable access to innovative educational technologies and leaving many potential learners behind, regardless of their motivation or diligence.

Despite these entrenched challenges, recent years have witnessed notable shifts in how Bahasa Indonesia is taught. For instance, digital platforms such as Duolingo, Bahaso, and Memrise have revolutionized vocabulary practice by introducing game-like features—points, rankings, rewards—that foster a spirit of competitiveness and playful engagement. These apps are intentionally designed to accommodate flexible schedules, enabling students to practice at their own pace and reinforcing learning through repetition and immediate feedback. As a result, vocabulary retention and learner motivation receive a measurable boost, and the process of acquiring a new language feels considerably less burdensome and monotonous.

Beyond mobile applications, immersive technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are gaining a foothold in innovative language programs. These tools simulate practical, lifelike situations—such as ordering food at a local *warung* or navigating public transport—within the safe constraints of the classroom. Early data suggest these simulated experiences measurably reduce performance anxiety when speaking, supporting students as they cement vocabulary and communication strategies through direct participation. The opportunity to fail and try again without embarrassment cultivates a genuine sense of agency and experimentation—qualities vital for real-world language use.

Further, telecollaborative partnerships between Indonesian universities and partner institutions abroad add another dimension of authenticity to language study. Structured video conversations with native speakers provide learners with real-time, meaningful opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills. Along the way, these exchanges encourage intercultural understanding, helping students experience the nuances of Indonesian life that textbooks simply cannot capture.

This study underscores the ongoing need for BIFL programs to adopt contextually responsive, multifaceted strategies. By weaving together communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based learning (TBL), cultural immersion, and blended digital instruction, educators can offer a richer, more comprehensive learning environment. That said, addressing perennial obstacles—chief among them a lack of standardized curricula, persistent linguistic interference, and resource shortfalls—remains crucial if BIFL education is to achieve its full potential. On a more hopeful note, continued experimentation with digital platforms, immersive technologies, and telecollaborative exchanges points towards a future where instruction is more interactive, engaging, and broadly accessible, supporting learners from a wide variety of backgrounds as they embark on the journey to linguistic and cultural fluency.

3.2 Discussion

The findings from this research unmistakably highlight the necessity of embracing a multifaceted, holistic approach in teaching Bahasa Indonesia as a foreign language (BIFL). It is not sufficient to focus solely on the grammatical system or vocabulary lists; effective instruction in this field demands the seamless integration of linguistic, cultural, and technological aspects. This combinative strategy is a recurrent theme in the available scholarship (Kramsch, 2014; Brown, 2014), reinforcing the urgent need for educational models that incorporate and reflect real-world language dynamics.



The prevailing success of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) surfaced as a major point of consensus throughout this inquiry. CLT is supported in the literature for its focus on real-life, context-based communication rather than static, theoretical grammar drills. Canale & Swain's (2018) communicative competence framework emphasizes not just grammatical or discourse proficiency, but also sociolinguistic and strategic competence, thereby acknowledging the complexity of genuine communication. Within the context of Bahasa Indonesia, CLT proves especially effective because it accommodates a variety of speech registers – *krama*, *madya*, *ngoko* – that are essential for meaningful interaction. This flexibility allows students to grapple with, and ultimately master, the nuanced and layered ways Indonesians actually express themselves. Engaging practices such as role-playing, simulated community involvement, and interactive discussions create a bridge connecting classroom instruction with authentic societal interactions. Such strategies do not merely reinforce textbook knowledge; rather, they cultivate practical skills and foster adaptive communicative confidence, as noted by Richards and Rodgers (2014), who underline the transformative impact of practicing language in real-life scenarios.

Simultaneously, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has demonstrated powerful motivational effects. Unlike more traditional formats, TBLT situates language within tasks that possess clear personal meaning and relevance for the learner (Ellis, 2003). Task-based projects – ranging from creating short-form documentaries to composing reflective blog posts – require learners to operate within both the linguistic and cultural frameworks of Bahasa Indonesia. This engagement typifies experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), emphasizing iterative practice and meaningful reflection. These authentic and practical tasks not only reinforce language skills but also promote collaboration among peers, which has the additional benefit of reducing anxiety and increasing speaking confidence. Peer-supported learning environments create a sense of shared effort and collective problem-solving, essential elements for effective acquisition of a new language.

Cultural immersion also emerged as a critical mechanism for deepening both linguistic and cultural competencies. The importance of integrating culture into language pedagogy is widely acknowledged (Liddicoat, 2013), and the findings from this study reiterate this point. Immersive experiences, such as the Live-In Desa program, provide learners with an incomparable sense of Indonesian culture and social life – elements too complex to replicate within the four walls of a classroom. Through sustained real-world exposure, learners not only refine their grammatical and pragmatic competence but also become adept at interpreting non-verbal cues, social hierarchies, and culturally specific communicative practices. This level of immersion fosters an intuitive sensitivity to context and appropriateness, critical components of effective language use and successful cross-cultural communication. Such outcomes are in line with decades of research on experiential learning, reiterating that genuine linguistic mastery is inseparable from a lived cultural understanding.

The evidence presented here strongly advocates for an instructional approach that is multifaceted by design and practice – one that blends linguistic proficiency, technological engagement, and, crucially, cultural immersion. Language education is most impactful when it mirrors the multidimensional nature of real communication and social interaction, thereby equipping learners not only with the technical skills of Bahasa Indonesia, but with the cultural fluency necessary for meaningful, lasting engagement.

Blended learning, in recent years, has really cemented itself as an approachable and remarkably flexible strategy for language acquisition – especially for individuals balancing academic, professional, or even personal obligations. Integrating digital tools alongside conventional face-to-face instruction, this model enables learners to interact with the target language far beyond the rigid boundaries of traditional classroom hours. To illustrate, platforms like Kelas Bahasa Indonesia have been instrumental, providing round-the-clock access to multimedia resources, interactive quizzes, and instant feedback. This kind of engagement doesn't just make the process more dynamic; it actively encourages deeper, ongoing interaction with Bahasa Indonesia.



It is worth noting that this adaptability meaningfully addresses scheduling and diverse learner needs, a problem (Graham, 2013) highlighted years ago. Learners who might otherwise fall through the cracks due to time constraints or geographic limitations now have the means to participate meaningfully. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of blended learning is in many ways directly tethered to the availability of reliable internet infrastructure and the level of digital literacy present in both the teaching staff and student body. This points to a significant ongoing equity issue: many under-resourced regions and learners risk exclusion because of these structural barriers.

One cannot overlook the persistent challenge of curricular standardization in Bahasa Indonesia as a foreign language. Unlike other major languages, there is currently no comprehensive, CEFR-aligned curriculum to serve as a global benchmark for proficiency. This lack of standardization leads to inconsistencies in both instructional outcomes and the assessments used to certify learners' expertise. Tussadiah et al., (2021) have argued persuasively for the development of such a framework, reasoning that universal benchmarks would lend not only greater international recognition to Bahasa Indonesia itself but would also clarify expectations around learner outcomes—ultimately, facilitating student mobility and global academic collaboration.

Linguistic interference, particularly arising from learners' native languages like English or Mandarin, is a further obstacle toward genuine mastery of Bahasa Indonesia. The intricacies of Bahasa's affixation system, as well as its specific syntactic order, present distinctive hurdles. Odlin (1989) has continually underscored that surmounting L1 interference hinges on sustained exposure to the target language and a pedagogic approach that offers constant, targeted feedback. While instructors in this study made use of contrastive analysis—directly comparing students' L1 structures to Bahasa—it became apparent that the effectiveness of this strategy relies heavily on learners' willingness to engage with nuanced grammatical differences.

Resource limitations continue to undercut the effectiveness of Bahasa Indonesia as a Foreign Language (BIFL) instruction, especially the scarcity of authentic learning materials and qualified native-speaking instructors. This shortage is only magnified in environments already disadvantaged by the digital divide, where access to educational technologies and a basic level of digital literacy, as Selwyn (2016) remarks, are neither universal nor guaranteed. The result is an amplification of educational inequity, where innovations in digital pedagogy are available only to a select subset of privileged learners.

Yet, in parallel, recent technological innovations are driving significant transformation within the field. Mobile and web-based platforms such as Duolingo, Memrise, and Bahaso have introduced elements of gamification to the language learning process. These tools foster motivation and engagement, while features like progress tracking and self-paced modules encourage learners to take active ownership of their learning journey. Still, it is crucial to acknowledge that large-scale international platforms often lack the localized content and cultural specificity necessary for a truly immersive Bahasa learning experience—underscoring the continuing need for domestic platforms tailored to Indonesian linguistic and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the emergent application of immersive technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) signals a paradigm shift in BIFL instruction. By enabling simulated real-world interaction scenarios—from marketplace negotiations to casual everyday conversations—VR and AR provide learners with a low-stakes environment to practice oral proficiency and build confidence. These environments lower affective barriers, such as speaking anxiety, while reinforcing situational fluency through experiential learning. Students increasingly report greater comfort and linguistic agility in authentic contexts after such practice, suggesting that these tools have a measurable impact on language acquisition outcomes.

International collaborations and virtual exchange initiatives have also gained considerable traction. These programs offer learners invaluable opportunities for authentic language use, often partnering students with native-speaking peers or facilitating real-time conversation exchanges. In doing so, they not only boost communicative competence but also



foster intercultural understanding, which is now regarded as an essential aspect of global education. Learners participating in such exchanges often emerge with heightened cultural intelligence and a realistic appreciation for the diversity of global Indonesian-speaking communities.

While blended learning and its associated pedagogical advances have unlocked exciting possibilities in Bahasa Indonesia instruction, critical barriers—ranging from infrastructure inequalities and non-standard curricula to persistent L1 interference—still demand sustained attention. At the same time, the ongoing integration of digital platforms, gamified apps, VR/AR environments, and global exchanges clearly demonstrates the enduring adaptability and promise of BIFL education in an increasingly interconnected world. Addressing the remaining challenges will undoubtedly require coordinated efforts from educators, policymakers, and technology developers alike, if the goal is to achieve both equity and excellence in language learning.

4. Conclusion

The landscape of teaching Bahasa Indonesia to non-native speakers has undergone substantial transformation over recent decades, moving well beyond prescriptive, grammar-driven approaches and morphing into frameworks that prioritize meaningful communication, learner agency, and digitally enriched resources. The present article has explored an array of pedagogical strategies, persistent challenges, and ongoing innovations, situating them within the context of the increasingly interconnected and multicultural reality of global education. It becomes apparent that, while traditional methods—such as direct grammar translation drills or repetitive mechanical exercises—retain some function in instilling initial linguistic structures, truly durable language development depends upon integrating communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT), and culture-driven syllabi. These methodologies not only reflect global best practices, but also support more robust acquisition by embedding language learning in authentic tasks and contexts.

A pivotal observation from the discussion is the necessity for effective Bahasa Indonesia instruction to be thoroughly contextualized within social realities and pragmatic settings. Grammar alone, while a foundation, gives a partial and at times sterile command of the language. Learners demonstrably benefit when they develop both grammatical proficiency and a nuanced sociolinguistic awareness, equipping them to engage with the full range of formal and informal registers, dialectical diversity, and culturally nuanced points of interaction. This finding is supported by a substantial body of research (e.g., Kramsch, 2014) which asserts that language, abstracted from culture, loses its communicative vitality. Therefore, language education should purposefully incorporate real-world content, immersive activities, and experiential learning modules that expose students to living, evolving Indonesian culture.

It is also clear that instructors face persistent obstacles—including limited opportunities for learners to experience genuine communication environments, diversity in students' native language backgrounds, and the ongoing shortage of tailored instructional resources. In response, innovative solutions have emerged, particularly through the adoption of digital platforms, gamified lessons, and structured virtual exchanges. These mechanisms offer low-barrier access to authentic materials and interactive exchanges, which are even more crucial in the wake of the pandemic, as remote and hybrid learning models become entrenched features of the educational landscape. Nevertheless, the adoption of technology demands thoughtful integration. Digital applications and language learning platforms, while effective for building vocabulary, increasing listening comprehension, and supporting independent study, must remain supplementary to the core experience of active, teacher-led engagement. Discussions, feedback, and collaborative activities guided by skilled instructors remain irreplaceable for developing critical thinking and spontaneous communicative ability.

Central to the effective teaching of Bahasa Indonesia, therefore, are the teachers themselves—whose roles extend far beyond linguistic correction or curriculum delivery. Instructors are cultural mediators, motivators, and adaptive facilitators. This highlights an urgent



need for policies and institutional investment in ongoing professional development. Comprehensive training should focus not only on linguistic expertise, but also on advanced pedagogical techniques, digital literacy, and intercultural competence, as articulated in international proficiency frameworks like the CEFR. Furthermore, coordinated collaboration among universities, cultural bodies, and governmental authorities can drive the development of standardized curricular resources, formal teacher certification, and more frequent exchanges—thereby normalizing higher standards across the field.

Another essential consideration is the alignment of curriculum and instruction with the actual goals and backgrounds of learners. As observed throughout this paper, language learners are a highly heterogeneous group; their aspirations may range from mastery of professional jargon and negotiation tactics to scholarly discourse or everyday colloquial interaction. Conducting rigorous needs analyses at the outset of any course allows educators to fine-tune the learning process, bolsters student retention, and enhances satisfaction by making the course content relevant.

The specific characteristics of Bahasa Indonesia—such as its agglutinative morphology, non-conjugating verbs, use of reduplication, and nuanced address forms—also call for targeted research into acquisition strategies and teaching interventions. Ongoing scholarly inquiry will be indispensable for optimizing methodology, addressing unforeseen hurdles, and enriching the academic literature around the pedagogy of Indonesian as a foreign language.

The ongoing progress in the field of Bahasa Indonesia education for non-native speakers can be conceptualized around three interdependent axes: pedagogical flexibility, strategic technological adoption, and immersive cultural participation. By continuously refining these areas, both at the level of the individual classroom and within broader institutional policy, educators can produce language learners who are not only competent, but also culturally adept and globally engaged. This integrated model stands as the most promising path for the future of Bahasa Indonesia instruction worldwide.

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