

EXPLORING THE THAILAND STUDENTS IN LEARNING BIPA: PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This research analyses Thai students' perceptions and challenges in learning BIPA. Research respondents for this study were 14 international students from Thailand who enrolled in Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) at Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar. Observations, open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and classroom recordings were used to obtain data and analyzed using the descriptive qualitative method. The findings indicated that BIPA students encountered several challenges in language skills, language components and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, simple instructions and examples are needed to help them learn the Indonesian language. Moreover, having more practice with Indonesian students also helps them understand the Indonesian language.

Keywords: Learning BIPA; Perceptions; Challenges

INTRODUCTION

Training foreigners in Bahasa as a means of communicating Indonesian culture is the aim of Bahasa Indonesia Bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) for those who aspire to live in Indonesia (Retma Sari, 2020; Saddhono et al., 2023; Yusuf & Budiawan, 2020). With daily activities and the classroom, the BIPA curriculum helps potential international students prepare to converse and interact in Indonesian. Teaching BIPA is not the same as teaching mainstream Indonesian to native speakers. A wide range of ethnic backgrounds and mother tongues are spoken by the students in BIPA (Pratama et al., 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2023). BIPA students hold similar concerns regarding the age disparity. Without a doubt, learners who are teenagers view education differently from those who are younger or middle-aged.

Teachers must carefully consider the planning, procedures, assessment phases, instructional materials, media, and strategies to enhance the learning process. So that someone can easily absorb or process learning and make learning and communicating a new language easy and fun. It is also necessary to consider cultural similarities and differences without looking at the positive and negative aspects of humans. Introducing the Indonesian language and culture to the global community is the primary goal of the BIPA initiative (Fitriyah, 2021; Leksono & Tiawati, 2020). BIPA is a language learning program that is used to introduce the community and Indonesian culture to international students as well as give instruction in Indonesian to those students who choose to study the language.

BIPA itself has a teaching method different from the teaching techniques used by teachers for native speakers, where BIPA continues to explore how students perceive the learning process and the difficulties they experience. Most BIPA students need help with pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary (Aguskin & Maryani, 2018; Pratama et al., 2021; Yusuf & Budiawan, 2020). Gaining mastery of a large vocabulary is necessary to improve language competency since it makes it possible to communicate ideas clearly and concisely (Saddhono et al., 2023). A person's ability to use vocabulary effectively determines the quality of their language. With

a sufficient vocabulary, learning a language will be more accessible, and the learner can successfully apply the structures and features they have acquired.

BIPA students have difficulties such as a lack of enthusiasm, drive, time, comprehension of the course materials, cultural disparities, and insecurity when speaking Indonesian. Psychological obstacles, such as anxiety related to language, may also impede their capacity to acquire Indonesian (Fitriyah, 2021; Junpaitoon, 2017; Saddhono et al., 2023). Some of them frequently have low self-confidence in their abilities to communicate in the Indonesian language due to feeling insecure about it. They need help distinguishing between pronunciation variations since they speak the language infrequently. Notwithstanding these difficulties, BIPA is still a valuable resource for teaching Indonesian.

International students have more and more chances to study abroad in Indonesia. They can now participate in programs offered by numerous Indonesian higher education institutions to continue their studies at public or private colleges. Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar is one of the leading private universities in Bali, constantly striving to achieve its stated vision, namely "To become a quality and cultured university". One strategy to realize this vision is to collaborate not only with domestic universities but also with foreign universities. One of these universities is BanSomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University (BSRU) in Bangkok – Thailand. Through this collaboration, the two universities hope to improve each other's academic and non-academic quality and contribute to the world of education in Indonesia and Thailand.

The Indonesian language learning is basic, such as greetings in Indonesian, introductions and expressions often used in daily conversations. Learning is carried out in the classroom with material designed to be as simple as possible, engaging, and interactive so that the class, which is held in approximately five meetings, is not boring. Lecturers also asked students to interact directly with Indonesian people by conducting interviews around campus.

The previous studies above encouraged the researchers to discover Thai students' perceptions and difficulties in learning BIPA. Finding out the difficulties can provide information about developing BIPA material and serve as a reflection for the BIPA teacher to handle the problems encountered during the teaching-learning process. Hence, this research analyses the perception and challenges of learning BIPA.

METHOD

To address the research problems, a qualitative approach with a case study method is employed (Creswell, 1991). A case study is used to investigate Thai students' perceptions and difficulties regarding BIPA learning. By using a questionnaire to get the perceptions and problems of the Thai students, the researchers expected to learn more about the perceptions and difficulties of the students when they enrolled in the BIPA learning. The participants of this research were 14 university students from Thailand. The researchers conducted this study to learn about the students' perceptions and difficulties related to BIPA Learning. The respondents have gathered the information needed for this study.

The researchers employed open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as part of their instruments for this study. The researchers used a 1-5 Likert scale, namely 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The researchers instructed the participants to complete the open-ended questionnaire to obtain comprehensive data about the difficulties encountered in learning BIPA. Then, the researchers conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 14 Thai university students. To produce valid and trustworthy research conclusions, the researcher does triangulation.

The primary data in this study were referred to as respondents. There were 14 Thai students. Some procedural teaching and observation were conducted: Observing the students during the teaching-learning process for two weeks and distributing the open-ended questionnaires. The

questionnaire comprised 20 questions about perceptions and challenges of participating in BIPA learning at Unmas. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to find out the difficulties faced by Thai students. Teachers’ and students’ interviews were also conducted to determine the students’ perspectives on the teachers’ teaching strategies. The data collection carried out by the researchers for this research was the observation method with the distribution of questionnaires containing several questions about the difficulties faced by students in learning the Indonesian Language and also the experiences of students in the learning process, as well as the motivation of international students towards language learning, and interviews. Therefore, the distribution of questionnaires in this study aimed to obtain feedback on research questions and information needed from respondents. The data was then collected and analyzed. The researchers employed a qualitative data analysis flow model comprising data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion/verification. To identify and categorize the data required by the study objectives, raw data were sorted during the reduction phase using data-gathering methods such as questionnaires and interviews. The second step presents the data as field notes and interview extracts narrated into data transcriptions. The last is verification by doing triangulation with the lecturer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This international research analyzed the perceptions and challenges of BIPA students in Learning the Indonesian language. The following discussed the students' perceptions and challenges of BIPA Students in Learning the Indonesian language.

Table 1. Students’ perception and challenges

Perceptions	Challenges
Learning Bahasa Indonesia is fun	I need help understanding Indonesian.
Simple Instructions enable me to learn Indonesian faster	I have problems pronouncing words in Indonesian
Providing examples makes it easier to understand Indonesian.	I need help with reading in Indonesian.
Having practised with Indonesian students makes me enjoy learning Indonesia.	I need help with writing in Indonesian.
	I need help with speaking in Indonesian.
	My cultural and linguistic background makes learning Indonesian challenging.

Discussion

Perceptions in learning BIPA

Some Thai students consider learning the Indonesian Language fun. A very high percentage of the respondents considered learning the Indonesian language fun, with 64.3%. 28.6% of respondents agreed that understanding the Indonesian language is fun. At the same time, only 7.1 % disagreed that learning the Indonesian language is fun. It is also supported by the result of the interview as stated in the following excerpt of the interview:

“I think Bahasa Indonesia is a fun language. It is a language that is quite difficult to pronounce. But when I learned it, I realized that there are some pronunciations similar to the Thai language, such as the tongue wagging, but the Indonesian language emphasizes the tongue wagging more clearly than the Thai language. For me, learning Bahasa is an interesting language. Even though it's difficult

to pronounce *But it was a fun pronunciation. It was a memorable language learning experience (TC).*”

Other respondents also stated that learning the Indonesian language is fun as follows:

“I like learning foreign languages. Learning Bahasa Indonesia is fun (CC).”

“Have fun using the Indonesian language. But mostly they use body language (PK).”

Another perception about learning BIPA is that they could understand the Indonesian language faster if they understood the instructions. It could be done by showing gestures or explaining the word by drawing. Based on the interview, 14.3 % of respondents felt they needed clarification about how simple instruction could help them learn the Indonesian language. However, the same percentage, 42.9% of respondents, preferred to agree and strongly agree about the instructions given in learning BIPA.

Providing examples also makes them understand Indonesian. Providing examples can help BIPA's students understand the material. There were 21.4 % of respondents agreed, and 78.6 % of respondents strongly agreed about giving an example of BIPA's learning as shown in the following excerpt interview:

“It was a great experience for me. Even though it was hard, I still enjoyed it because the teacher always explained by giving examples, and sometimes she used body language or drawing. So fun (SS).”

“Have fun using the Indonesian language. But mostly they use body language (TB).”

The interview excerpt above shows that examples can help them understand the material.

The more Thai students practice their Indonesian language, the more they can enjoy learning it. In BIPA class, the lecturer asked them to practice their English in the real situation. For example, when the teaching material is about shopping activities, they should do real shopping activities. Moreover, they had to interview the seller around the canteen. This shopping activity was recorded on the recorder and then replayed and discussed in the class. Based on the interview session, 78.6 % of respondents strongly agree, and 21.4% agree that if they need more practice with Indonesian students, they will help them learn the Indonesian language. It is shown in the following excerpt.

“Studying in class, while going out to buy things, then going out, practising speaking the Indonesian Language with my Indonesian friend is the best idea (NC).”

“ Having game activities and interviewing Indonesian people on campus is a good way to help Thai students learn the Indonesian language (MI).”

Challenges in Learning BIPA

Thai students encountered some difficulties; there needed to be more problems in mastering language components (pronunciation and vocabulary) and language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Thai students felt learning BIPA was fun; however, they still needed the lecturer's help understanding Indonesian words. As the facilitator, the teacher should be able to help the students learn BIPA. 57.17 % of respondents felt they needed clarification about the problem they encountered when studying the Indonesian language. The same percentage, 14.3 %, of respondents who chose the items strongly agree, agree, and disagree about difficulties in understanding the Indonesian language.

The second is the problem in pronouncing words in Indonesia. Some 50% of respondents felt they needed clarification about the problem of pronouncing words in the Indonesian language. At the same time, 28.6 % of the respondents agreed that their problem was pronunciation. 14.3 % of respondents strongly disagreed, and 7.1 % disagreed that pronunciation is problematic in learning Indonesian. It can be shown in the following interview excerpt:

“I like it and sometimes find it funny when the Indonesian language is similar to the Thai language and translated to another meaning, which makes you remember the word faster and trains our mouths to be able to pronounce sounds other than our language (BE).”

The excerpt from the interview indicates that learning pronunciation is fun, and some sounds in the Indonesian language have similar meanings in the Thai language that can help them understand the definition in the Thai language.

Moreover, they also needed help with reading activities. 35.7 % of respondents disagreed that they had issues with reading. Meanwhile, 21.4 % of respondent show uncertainty in their ability to learn to read. However, 28.6 % of respondents preferred to agree, and 14.3 % strongly agreed that they had a problem with reading, as shown in the following interview.

“ I love reading if the text is short and there is a picture in it (NU). ”

“ It is difficult to understand the vocabulary, but it does not matter; I used Google Lens to comprehend the reading (WA). ”

Not only did the Thai students have problems reading, but they also needed help writing. There, 28.6% of respondents preferred to disagree that they had a problem with writing. However, 7.1% of respondents agreed, and 21.4 % strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 42.9 % of respondents felt doubt about the situation in writing. The following excerpt also supports it:

“When I had the opportunity to study in Bali, I learned about new cultures, which was amazing. And learned the Bahasa Indonesian language, which is difficult to pronounce and write (SS).”

“ Sometimes, writing one sentence is quite challenging for me. I don't know if we are asked to write about ourselves in a paragraph (BI). ”

Thai students also need help in speaking activities. 28.6 % of respondents disagreed that speaking activity is the problem in learning Bahasa Indonesia. The excerpt from the following interview supports it:

“I found learning speaking fun and challenging to learn a new language that I had never learned before (SS).”

“ I love speaking in the Indonesian language. It is easy to learn for me. Terima kasih (NW). ”

Meanwhile, 7.1 % of respondents agreed, and 14.3 % strongly agreed about their speaking activity problem. However, 50 % felt uncertain about the situation in learning to speak.

For Thai students, their cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence the way they learn a language. It is challenging for them. 50 % of respondents strongly agree, and 28.6 % agree that the difficulty in understanding Indonesian is due to their cultural and linguistic background. 7.1 % of the respondents also disagreed about their cultural and linguistic background. However, 14.3 % felt uncertainty about their cultural and linguistic background.

In conclusion, Thai students felt that learning Bahasa Indonesia was fun. BIPA students must be able to apply what they have learned to real-world situations. However, there are several barriers to learning. For example, one BIPA student finds it difficult to pronounce words in Indonesian due to his small vocabulary. Therefore, they frequently speak to each other in their tongue. A lack of confidence is one of the biggest challenges students face while interacting with others in the real world. However, they encountered a problem in terms of cultural and linguistic background. Simple instructions and examples are needed to help them understand the Indonesian language. Moreover, having more practice with Indonesian students also helps them learn the Indonesian language. Most respondents still felt their problems needed help mastering pronunciation, reading, speaking, and writing.

To overcome those challenges, educators must use their creativity when implementing learning strategies and doing needs analyses. To help students adjust to real-life circumstances, teachers should go into detail about Indonesian culture from an early age. Due to their cultural origins and issues comprehending educational materials, vocabulary, and grammar, BIPA students who use English as their first language find it challenging to learn the Indonesian language.

CONCLUSION

The study results show that the respondents were highly motivated and had a positive attitude when studying Indonesian Language. They get encouragement and guidance from the teacher and the surrounding environment. Using simple instruction, giving examples and having more practice with Indonesian students helps the students learn the Indonesian language. The problems they encountered during the learning were cultural and linguistic background. The researchers suggested that the involvement of BIPA teachers encourages them to acquire the Indonesian language. BIPA students generally exhibit a positive outlook and a strong drive to achieve the Indonesian language.

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