

Bicultural, personality, and pedagogical competences in the perspective of BIPA language assistants

Kompetensi bikultural, kepribadian, dan pedagogik dalam perspektif guru bantu BIPA

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KEYWORDS

BIPA teachers, bicultural competences, personality competences, pedagogical competences

ABSTRACT

In 2019, there were 63.022 learners of Indonesian as a foreign language in Victorian schools, Australia. They were facilitated by 263 Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) local teachers. Due to a shortage of BIPA local teachers, the Department of Education and Training Victoria had recruited language assistants from Indonesia. This study is aimed to describe the required skillsets of BIPA language assistants to support their duties. The data were collected through interviews, an inventory, observations, and stories of eight Indonesian language assistants with one year of experience. The findings reveal that the language assistants need to develop bicultural, personality and pedagogical competences. These competences should become the reference for developing workshop materials for future BIPA language assistants.

KATA KUNCI

guru BIPA, kompetensi bikultural, kompetensi kepribadian, kompetensi pedagogik

ABSTRAK

Pada tahun 2019 terdapat 63.022 siswa Victoria, Australia, yang mempelajari bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa asing. Mereka dibimbing oleh 263 guru BIPA. Karena jumlah guru tidak memadai, maka *Department of Education and Training Victoria* merekrut guru bantu (language assistant) dari Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan berbagai kompetensi yang perlu dimiliki guru bantu untuk menunjang pelaksanaan tugasnya. Data dikumpulkan dari wawancara, inventori, observasi, dan deskripsi pengalaman dari delapan guru bantu selama satu tahun mengajar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru bantu perlu mengembangkan kompetensi bikultural, kompetensi kepribadian, dan kompetensi pedagogik. Ketiga kompetensi ini sebaiknya dijadikan bahan workshop pada pembekalan guru bantu di lembaga pengirim.

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Introduction

The ability to communicate is one of the skills required in the global era. The most important tool in communication is language. English, French, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Arabic are among the most commonly used languages in international affairs. Although Indonesian has not yet become the language of international relations, many countries make it a lot easier for their citizens to learn the language.

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Australia is one of these countries. Indonesian is taught as a foreign language, not as a second language, in a state of Australia, Victoria. According to Littlewood (1984), the terms foreign language and second language are different. Littlewood asserted, “a ‘second’ language has social functions within the community where it is learned (eg, as a lingua franca or as the language of another social group), whereas a ‘foreign’ language is learned primarily for contact outside one’s own community” (1984, p. 3).

In addition to Indonesian language, students learn about 72 other foreign languages spread across state schools, Victorian Language Schools and community-funded language schools accredited by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). Of the 72 languages, 53 foreign languages are studied by 19,267 students and facilitated by the Victorian Language School. However, of the 53 foreign languages, only 20 languages are taught formally in selected public schools. Of the 20 languages, there are 7 languages that are studied the most by students, namely Chinese (Mandarin), Italian, Japanese, Indonesian, French, and Auslan. The foreign language is taught in 4 teaching programs: foreign language as a separate subject, foreign language learning integrated with certain content, foreign language taught in bilingual classes, and foreign language taught in vocational schools (Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2020).

The report also provides details of learners in seven foreign languages: 85,885 students are interested in Chinese (Mandarin); 83,971 students are interested in Italian; 79,435 students are interested in Japanese; 63,022 students are interested in Indonesia; 51,421 students are interested in French, and 26,715 students are interested in Auslan. The number of learners and its fluctuation the since 2013 can be seen in Figure 1.

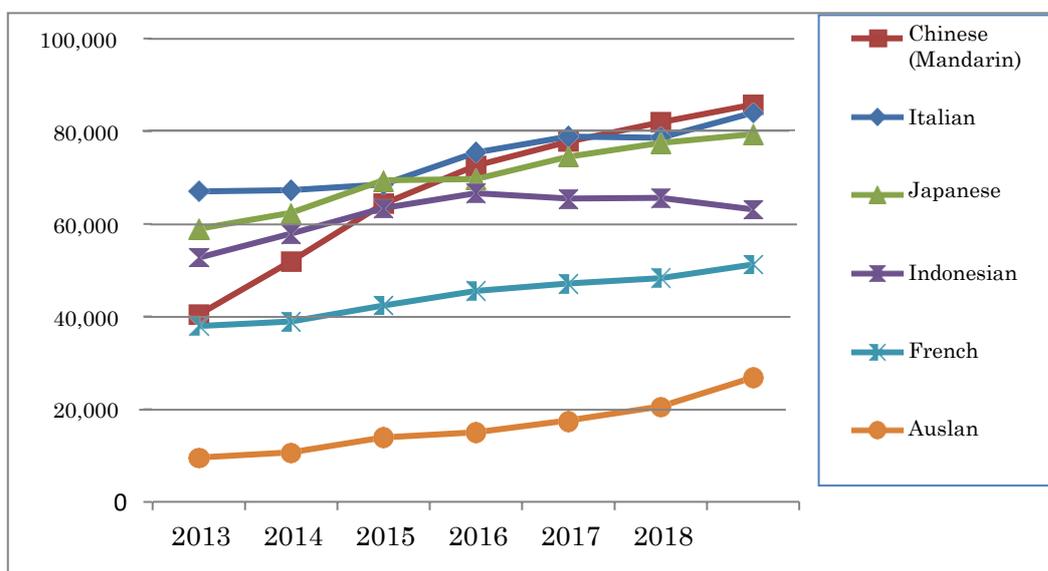


Figure 1. Number of Learners of 7 Languages in 2013-2019

Note: Taken from Victoria Department of Education and Training (2020, pp. 11–13).

The data in Figure 1 shows that Indonesian is ranked fourth of the seven foreign languages most studied by primary and secondary school students in Victoria. The report explains that in 2019 there were 63,022 students studying Indonesian at various schools in Victoria. To serve the number of students, 263 teachers were assigned to 180

elementary schools, 36 elementary/junior high schools, and 58 junior high schools. In detail, the changes of the number of Indonesian language learners in Victoria can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. Changes in the Number of Indonesian Language Learners in Victoria in 2013-2019

School Type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Primary school	35,772	40,688	47,018	51,657	51,059	51,456	47,390
Secondary school	16,592	16,845	16,073	15,088	14,112	14,323	15,347
Victoria Language School	361	353	347	334	289	292	285
Total	52,725	57,886	63,438	67,079	65,460	66,071	63,022

Note: Taken from Languages Provision in Victoria Department of Education and Training (2020, p. 11)

The data presented in Table 1 shows the high interest of children in Victoria to learn Indonesian. As a consequence, the Victorian government responded to this interest, through the Department of Education and Training (DET), by appointing a number of Indonesian language teachers as language assistants in collaboration with the Faculty of Language Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) since seven years ago. The language assistants are fresh graduates from various study programs. The selection of the language assistants is based on a number of criteria set out in the memorandum of understanding between UPI and DET, both administrative and academic criteria.

The language assistants are placed in a number of primary or secondary schools, both located in Melbourne and outside the city. Their main task is to assist Australian teachers of Indonesian for Non-native Speakers (BIPA) in managing classes, explaining the meaning of words or concepts, giving examples of pronunciation of a word, explaining a concept or term through actions, and other tasks agreed upon by the BIPA teacher and the language assistants.

The high interest of students in Victoria who learn Indonesian, the presence of a number of BIPA language assistants from Indonesia, and the Indonesian language internationalization policy prompted me to research the competence of BIPA language assistants. In fact, the problems that the language assistant may encounter have been studied by Hardini et al. (2019). However, Hardini et al. (2019) focused on the recruitment and selection of language assistants. Their research revealed that the selection of language assistant was based on the ability to speak Indonesian, English, the culture of the two nations, and the ability to control oneself. The research has not yet addressed the questions such as whether the selection results are representative of the language assistants who are in accordance with user expectations, what obstacles that the language assistants will face, and what competences that the language assistants really need in order to be successful in carrying out the tasks of language assistant.

The questions above are important to answer because the result of the evaluation presented by DET at the end of 2018 concluded that there were not many language assistants from Indonesia who can demonstrate specific skills related to Indonesian culture, in addition to teaching Indonesian. Thus, to get an in-depth picture, this study attempted to answer the last question. This study aimed to reveal what competences that are needed by BIPA language assistants in Victoria to be successful in carrying

out their duties. The theoretical explanation about the role or task of the language assistants is discussed in the following.

The Tasks of Language Assistant

In this study, the term used is language assistant, which is defined as teachers who have just graduated and obtained bachelor's degree in Indonesia, who are assigned the task of assisting BIPA teachers for one year in primary and/or secondary schools in Victoria, Australia.

The term language assistant seems to be equivalent to the term teaching assistant. The difference is that the first term refers to the work of helping BIPA teachers in primary or secondary schools, while the second term refers to the work of helping teachers of any subject or course at the basic, secondary, and higher education levels (Lehman, 2020).

In general, institutions that recruit language assistant have their own policies regarding the type of assistance requested, duration of assistance, amount of salary, career path, sanctions, and various other provisions. The task of the language assistant is helping students who have learning difficulties, assisting teachers in managing classes, and assisting various academic activities at school (Tarry, 2011). Therefore, they need to understand children's needs, build good relationships among school members, and cultivate students' self-confidence to continue learning. In addition to these tasks, according to Luo et al. (2000), another task of the language assistant is to plan learning activities, organize learning activities in the classroom, motivate students, and manage the classroom atmosphere.

The success of helping the teacher in carrying out these various tasks is determined by the types of language assistant, teaching experience, and academic discipline (Luo et al., 2000). Language assistants who do not have teaching experience are expected to experience difficulties in managing classes, motivating students, and establishing relationships with various members in the school, mainly because of cultural differences. This is in line with the views of Erumit et al. (2021) who conclude that language assistants have difficulty with regard to cultural aspects, such as in understanding various customs in school, understanding the humor, values, and beliefs held by students. Moreover, Adebayo and Allen (2020) specifically mention that language assistants have difficulty understanding the student culture that is applied in the classroom. Further, Erumit et al. (2021) confirm that there are many universities that empower international students as language assistant. Their presence provides many benefits, especially in terms of cultural exchange and preparation for entering the world of work in the international world.

Difficulties in cultural aspects are understandable, especially because of the characteristics of culture itself as a complex whole. British scientist E.B. Tylor defines culture as "the complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and the various capabilities and habits required of a person as a member of a society" (Tylor, 1871, p. 1). The culture becomes "something that already exists and is available in society, but greatly influences understanding and behavior so that it is learned and applied by members of community groups" (Peacock, 1988, p. 33). Culture affects communication activities at various levels (Liddicoat, 2009, p. 14). This culture affects all activities in the school.

In addition to difficulties in the cultural aspect, the language assistants also experience difficulties in the linguistic aspect. Erumit et al. (2021) and Norris (1991) summarize that language assistants have difficulty understanding student's learning habits, accent, fluency in communication, pronunciation of a word or term, and difficulty in using a term in the right context. This weakness sometimes causes ridicule among students. In fact, the difficulty of this linguistic aspect also stems from the difficulty of the cultural aspect. These linguistic difficulties need to be corrected immediately as the linguistic competence is closely related to the abilities required by certain tasks, so that the owner can do the job ideally. This ability is formulated in the form of goals that describe the desired behavior. This goal demands a performance that should be carried out by an individual (An-Naqah, 1997).

Some of the results of the research above show some difficulties experienced by language assistant, including cultural difficulties, linguistic difficulties, difficulties in interacting with school members, difficulties in managing classes, and difficulties in motivating students. From there the question arises, are the BIPA language assistant in Victoria also experiencing relatively the same difficulties? The answers to these questions are presented in the results and discussion section.

Method

This research was conducted in Bandung and in Victoria, Australia. The research aims to explore the types of competencies that are of necessity for BIPA language assistants in Australia. To achieve this goal, an interpretative qualitative methodology was used. Data were collected from eight language assistants: two males and six females. The BIPA language assistants have various educational backgrounds, ages, and life experiences. They were asked to narrate the experience of being a BIPA language assistant in detail, the difficulties they faced, the competencies that should be prepared, the artistic skills that are needed, and various other important notes while they were on duty. The researcher compiled an inventory and then asked the level of importance of each statement. In addition, researcher interviewed the eight language assistant participants, the employee who managed the language assistant program, and BIPA teachers. The researcher also observed two teaching and learning activities. Interviews and observations were conducted in Victoria.

Furthermore, the collected data were then sorted with the study's focus in mind, analyzed based on its relationship, and comprehensively interpreted under the study's focus, so that the three data reinforced and strengthened each other. The data were then processed in order to identify potential outcomes that could lead to research findings. The findings were then interpreted and analyzed in terms of the relationship with the focus of the study as a form of discussion, allowing conclusions to be drawn.

Results and Discussion

Some of the findings obtained from the encoding and analysis of data collected through experience narratives, inventories, interviews, and observations are presented in the following sections. At the conclusion of the discussion, recommendations on how

to improve or strengthen the BIPA language assistant program in Australia is discussed.

Pedagogical Competence

Table 2. Importance Level of Teaching Activities

No.	Activity	Answer (Percentage)		
		Very important	Important	Not important
1.	Assisting teachers in compiling creative, authentic, and enlightening teaching materials	44	28	28
2.	Assisting teachers compile teaching materials	44	28	28
3.	Assisting students who are having difficulty	100	-	-
4.	Making corrections to student assignments and test results	28	58	14
5.	Correcting, demonstrating, and reinforcing the use of good and correct Indonesian language when learning in class	72	28	-

The main task of language assistants, according to all respondents (100%) in Table 2, is to assist students who are having difficulty learning Indonesian. This viewpoint is consistent with the employment agreement letter between the Victoria Department of Education and Training and the language assistant, which emphasizes that the primary responsibility of the language assistants is to assist students who are struggling to learn Indonesian language.

The results of the interviews reveal that the assistance provided to students varied, including assisting students in pronouncing unfamiliar vocabulary in their language, such as pronouncing a nasal sound (*ng*), and pronouncing words that are graphically written but not pronounced clearly and unambiguously. Language assistants are also tasked with explaining lexical, contextual, and cultural meanings. Under certain conditions, Indonesian language classes frequently encounter difficulties with word meaning. If the meaning of the word is related to the lexical definition, the teacher or student consults a dictionary. Teachers, on the other hand, frequently face contextual and cultural issues. Contextual meaning refers to the setting in which a word is used, whereas cultural meaning refers to the culture in which the word is used.

Language assistants are frequently called upon to demonstrate the meaning of verbs. Students of Indonesian language course are frequently invited to demonstrate verbs in the classroom in order to understand them. Jump, run, step, turn, face, and back are all words. This is the demonstration to which Adebayo and Allen (2020) refer as the ability to demonstrate a concept. Another task is to strengthen and correct. Language assistants are frequently asked to clarify a word's pronunciation or writing. In this context, the language assistant plays a critical role in ensuring the success of the learning process.

In terms of correcting student assignments and test results, the main task of classroom teachers is to create creative and authentic teaching materials. Nonetheless, the language assistant is occasionally asked to prepare teaching materials. Compiling teaching materials and assisting the teachers in the preparation of teaching materials are regarded as important activities by as many as 44% of respondents. Compiling teaching materials, in other words, is not an authentic activity for language assistants.

Another responsibility of the language assistant is to act as a model native speaker in the classroom. This assignment has been approved by all respondents (100%). The concept of the actual model is very important in the educational process to support and strengthen the student learning experience. It is possible that the concepts they learn from books, teachers, or other sources have not been internalized as solid experiences. As a result, the reinforcement provided by this actual model serves to validate the learning experiences of students, as well as classroom teachers. This finding is consistent with the findings of Luo et al.'s (2000) research, which asserts that the language assistant's role is to plan, organize, motivate, and control the classroom environment.

Formally, according to the agreement, the language assistant's job is to follow, observe, and participate in the BIPA teacher's learning activities. This task was justified by all of the respondents. The language assistant facilitates by sitting behind or on the edge of the class and observing the ongoing learning activities. If the main teacher requires assistance in explaining a concept, saying a difficult word, or providing an example, the language assistant should appear in accordance with the main teacher's directions and requests. It is also possible for the language assistant to assist students who are experiencing difficulties. The task of assisting students who are having difficulty has been approved by 10% of those polled.

Furthermore, the observation results show that the language assistant takes the initiative to help the teacher or students without being asked, participates in motivating students to answer questions asked by the teacher, helps tidy up teaching aids, assists students in preparing answer sheets, monitors students in completing assignments and a variety of other tasks. According to data analysis from interviews and narrations, BIPA language assistant need to have pedagogical abilities.

Teacher's Personality

Table 3. Activities Related to Teacher's Personality

No.	Activity	Answer (Percentage)		
		Very important	Important	Not important
1.	Present yourself as a teacher who directs behavior, develops potential, and inspires students to learn more.	72	14	14
2.	Have strong mental fortitude, the ability to control emotions, and the personality of a professional teacher	100	-	-
3.	Be a native speaker role model in the classroom to help students and teachers improve their speaking and listening skills.	100	-	-
4.	Understand the tasks that must be completed in class.	57	43	-
5.	Observing the teacher's instructional activities in the classroom	100		

The cultures of Indonesian and Australian societies are vastly different, including the culture of the school environment. In general, Australian children are critical, ask probing questions, speak openly, and some students even greet the teacher as they would their own friends. This situation differs from the student culture in Indonesia, where students are less critical, greet teachers politely, and only inquire about matters deemed important. Because of these cultural differences, 100% of respondents believe that language assistants should have good mental strength, be able to control emotions,

and have the personality of a professional teacher when they are subjected to questions and even treatment that is considered inappropriate in Indonesian culture. This interest is amplified when the teacher is assigned to a junior or senior high school where the students are adults and the language assistants have a body posture that is comparable to them. Thus, the teacher should have resilience, strength, ability, and patience in dealing with very critical questions from students; questions that may be demeaning, possibly with harassing comments, very annoying student behavior, and other unknown student behaviors in Indonesian culture.

Another finding indicates that 72% of respondents believe that language assistants should be portrayed as teachers who direct students' behavior, develop their potential, and motivate students to continue learning. Although this task is rarely performed specifically in the classroom, teachers should have it on a regular basis. This means that, even if the assignment is not stated in the employment contract, he/she should motivate his/her students to continue learning and improve their quality as a teacher.

The preceding explanation demonstrates that the language assistant requires personality competence in order to manage himself, understand the student's personality, direct students, and establish communication with other parties. This finding is consistent with Adebayo and Allen's (2020) and Liddicoat's (2009) research findings, which emphasize the importance of the teacher's understanding of the destination country's educational system, classroom cultural expectations, and assumptions about student-teacher relationships.

Activities of Cultural and Social Aspects

Table 4. Activities Related to Cultural and Social Aspects

No.	Activity	Answer (Percentage)		
		Very important	Important	Not important
1.	Have a good understanding of the cultural differences between Australia and Indonesia.	43	57	-
2.	Playing a musical instrument or teaching an art form	43	57	-
3.	Describe the Indonesian people's customs or practices.	86	14	-
4.	Understanding the differences between the school environments in Australia and Indonesia	72	28	-
5.	Interact effectively with teachers, school leaders, students, and parents.	57	43	-

One of the cultural and social competence duties of a language assistant is to be able to explain Indonesian customs or habits to Australian teachers and students. As many as 86% of respondents believe that this skill is essential for language assistants. As a result, language assistants should be well-versed in various aspects of culture that become student subject matter. Language assistants should be able to explain various arts, customs, clothing, food, and other cultural artifacts.

Another distinction that language assistants need to grasp is the distinction between the school environments in Australia and Indonesia. As many as 72% of language assistants believe that understanding is critical for language assistants. This comprehension will greatly aid in the task of assisting teachers at work. What he does should be appropriate in the context of an Australian school.

Language assistants should also be able to communicate effectively with teachers, school leaders, students, and parents in order to complete their tasks on time. This interaction and communication is intended to aid comprehension of the language assistant's task. As a result, it is not surprising that 57% of respondents believe that an assistant teacher would interact with students within reasonable limits.

The main content of language is culture. In other words, language reflects the culture of its speakers. For this reason, language assistants need to have sufficient knowledge of the cultural differences between Australia and Indonesia. It is even better if the teacher helps master certain musical instruments and demonstrates them in front of students. However, only 43% of respondents think that this is important.

All respondents agreed that language assistants need to have knowledge of Indonesia in order to anticipate students' unpredictable questions. In addition to broad knowledge of Indonesia, 86% respondents agreed that language assistants should be able to explain the customs or habits of the Indonesian people. Understanding the culture can be done either actively or passively. Culture can also be studied both in the classroom and in the community. In this context a language assistant needs to study the behavior, lifestyle, beliefs and social skills of Australian society. This is in line with the views of Rinehart (2002) and Yang et al. (2011). The teacher's understanding of culture will foster multicultural awareness that leads a person to a form of relationship that is acceptable to both parties and mutually satisfying through negotiation efforts between the two cultures of the parties involved (Guilherme, 2000). This multicultural awareness is termed by Paulston with 'biculturalism' (2005, p. 280). Thus, it can be concluded that language assistants need to have bicultural competence, namely the ability to understand Indonesian culture and Australian culture.

Language Competence

Table 5. Activities Related to Language

No.	Activity	Answer (Percentage)		
		Very important	Important	Not important
1.	Have the ability to speak English	58	28	14
2.	Have knowledge of Indonesia to anticipate unexpected student questions	100	-	-
3.	Studying Indonesian literary works such as short stories, novels, poetry, and dramas by famous writers	-	72	28
4.	Understanding linguistic aspects, such as why affixes in Indonesian can be different	57	43	-
5.	Understand Indonesian linguistic books that are used as references by Indonesian language teachers in Australia.	57	43	-

As stated above, language reflects the culture and thoughts of its speakers. As a BIPA language assistant, he/she should understand various things related to Indonesia. All respondents stated that language assistant need to have knowledge of Indonesia in order to anticipate students' unpredictable questions. The urgency of this understanding is based on the characteristics of children in Australia who are critical, like to ask questions, and want to know things in deeper and in detail. This needs to be anticipated by preparing adequate knowledge about Indonesia in all its dimensions.

Another thing that is important and needs to be mastered by the language assistant is studying Indonesian literary works such as short stories, novels, poetry, and dramas by famous writers. As many as 72% view that the understanding of the teacher about this literary work is very important. Literature is a documentation of the civilization of a nation.

Other competencies that need to be mastered by language assistant are the ability to speak English, understanding theoretical linguistics, and an understanding of Indonesian linguistic books that are used as references by Australian BIPA teachers. As many as 57% of respondents think that these three things need to be owned by a language assistant. However, linguistic understanding cannot be separated from the culture of the speakers. Studying a foreign language well is not only mastering pronunciation problems, mastering grammar, understanding the meaning of words, mastering the use of idioms, but also learning the language as a medium to reflect the ideas, habits, and behavior of the speaking community. Learning a language means understanding the thoughts contained in their language (Huang, 2014). Therefore, such abilities are included in the bicultural competence, namely an understanding of the language and culture of Indonesia and Australia.

Based on the views expressed by the BIPA language assistants, it appears that the ability is narrowed in three aspects, namely pedagogical competence, personality competence, and bicultural competence. Therefore, before leaving, students and sending institutions need to prepare debriefing activities regarding these three essential abilities.

Conclusions

The results and discussion show that the duties of BIPA language assistants in Australia are helping students who have learning difficulties, being a model in pronouncing words or terms, explaining a term through actions, and observing learning activities to provide assistance or spontaneous responses when needed. In order for a language assistant to carry out this task, he/she needs to understand Indonesian culture and Australian culture, master Indonesian and English, understand the education systems of the two countries, master pedagogical competence, and have psychological competence. In short, a language assistant needs to have bicultural competence, personality competence, and pedagogical competence. Therefore, language assistants and sending institutions need to organize debriefing activities about Indonesia-Australia biculture in the form of workshops, training in certain cultural arts, and the use of musical instruments.

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