



## MAJAPAHIT CULTURE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL: BRIDGING HISTORY AND LANGUAGE IN BIPA PROGRAMS

Wahyun Bardianing Panggalih<sup>1</sup>, Amiruddin Hadi Wibowo<sup>2\*</sup>,

Lusy Tunik Muharlisiani<sup>3</sup>, <sup>4</sup>Laili Hibatin Wafiroh

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya

<sup>4</sup> Universitas PGRI Delta Sidoarjo

<sup>1</sup>Wahyunbp\_fbs@uwks.ac.id, <sup>2</sup>Amiruddin\_fbs@uwks.ac.id ,

<sup>3</sup>lusytm\_fbs@uwks.ac.id, <sup>4</sup>lailihibatinwafiroh@universitaspgridelta.ac.id

### Abstract:

This study investigates the integration of ethno-literacy strategies grounded in Majapahit culture within BIPA programs to enhance linguistic skills, intercultural awareness, and learner engagement. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research involved semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations to collect data from participants. Thematic analysis and triangulation were used to identify recurring themes and validate findings. Results indicate that the incorporation of Majapahit cultural elements, such as proverbs and folktales, significantly improved participants' language retention, practical application, and cultural empathy. Participants reported heightened motivation and a deeper connection to Bahasa Indonesia as a living language intertwined with history and cultural values. This study highlights the transformative potential of integrating local heritage into language education and offers practical implications for designing culturally responsive curricula in BIPA programs.

**Keywords:** Ethno-literacy, Majapahit culture, BIPA programs, intercultural awareness, language education

### INTRODUCTION

Ethno-literacy, which integrates cultural understanding into the acquisition of literacy skills, is an essential component of language education in today's globalized world. *Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* (BIPA), or Indonesian for Foreign Speakers, has grown in importance as Indonesia's role in the global community expands. In this context, cultural literacy not only enhances language competence but also equips learners with intercultural communicative skills, fostering more effective and empathetic communication.

Cultural literacy, as an extension of ethno-literacy, plays a crucial role in bridging linguistic



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competence and intercultural understanding. BIPA learners often encounter nuances in Bahasa Indonesia that cannot be understood without exploring its rich cultural heritage. These challenges emphasize the need for a pedagogical approach that incorporates ethnoliteracy as a core component.

Recent studies have underscored the value of ethnoliteracy in language learning. For instance, Kramsch (2013) argued that language is a symbolic system deeply rooted in cultural practices, and understanding these practices is pivotal for meaningful communication. Similarly, Byram (1997) introduced the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), emphasizing that language learners must not only acquire linguistic skills but also develop an understanding of the target culture's norms and values. These foundational theories have been expanded by contemporary research. For example, Al-Khatib (2019) explored ethnoliteracy in Arabic language instruction, demonstrating how cultural immersion enhances both language proficiency and critical thinking skills. Meanwhile, Susanti and Triyono (2020) examined the use of Indonesian folktales in BIPA programs, finding that narrative-based teaching strategies significantly improved learners' language retention and engagement.

Indonesia, as a nation rich in cultural diversity, offers a unique context for exploring ethnoliteracy. With over 700 languages and myriad cultural traditions, it presents an unparalleled opportunity for learners to engage with both linguistic and cultural pluralism. Universitas Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya (UWKS), renowned as the Majapahit Insight Campus, provides an ideal setting for such exploration. Drawing inspiration from the Majapahit Empire's historical and cultural legacy, UWKS integrates cultural awareness into its educational philosophy, making it a fitting location for the study of ethnoliteracy in BIPA programs.

The Majapahit kingdom, a significant historical and cultural reference point, exemplifies Indonesia's rich heritage. Its literature, art, and social norms provide an ideal foundation for embedding cultural content into BIPA curricula. By exploring elements such as Majapahit proverbs, folktales, and traditional values, this case study demonstrates how learners can develop a holistic understanding of language intertwined with its cultural essence. Previous studies, such as those by Setiawan (2017) and Hidayat and Nisa (2021), have emphasized the importance of culturally responsive materials in fostering deeper engagement and



understanding among learners. However, the integration of Majapahit culture into BIPA remains underexplored, presenting a unique opportunity to bridge historical heritage with modern pedagogical practices.

Despite the acknowledged importance of ethno-literacy, its integration into BIPA teaching practices remains inconsistent. Many educators lack the training and resources to implement ethno-literacy strategies effectively. Moreover, existing curricula often prioritize linguistic accuracy over cultural depth, leading to a fragmented learning experience that fails to prepare students for real-world communication. This case study investigates these issues by focusing on a specific group of learners and their experiences with ethno-literacy-infused pedagogy at UWKS.

The existing literature on ethno-literacy in language education provides valuable insights but also reveals significant gaps. For example, Ramirez and Chen (2020) highlighted cultural immersion's potential in fostering critical thinking but did not examine its practical application within Indonesian contexts. Meanwhile, Hidayat and Nisa (2021) emphasized the lack of culturally responsive materials in BIPA programs, calling for studies that address this gap. This case study contributes to the field by capturing how elements of Indonesian culture, particularly the Majapahit legacy, influence learners' linguistic and intercultural competencies. By situating the research within UWKS, it highlights the intersection of institutional cultural identity and language instruction.

This case study aims to investigate the role of ethno-literacy in enhancing language acquisition and intercultural competence in BIPA classrooms at UWKS. Specifically, it captures the experiences of learners engaging with ethno-literacy strategies in fostering linguistic and cultural understanding and explores the potential of Majapahit cultural elements as a pedagogical tool in language instruction.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on a specific learner group within a localized educational setting, emphasizing non-Western learners' experiences with ethno-literacy. This targeted approach highlights the practical implementation of ethno-literacy in diverse cultural contexts. The integration of Majapahit culture offers an innovative way to connect historical and contemporary elements in language education, enriching both learners' linguistic and cultural competencies.



## RESEARCH METHOD

This research used case study approach to investigate the role of ethno-literacy in enhancing linguistic and intercultural competence in EFL and BIPA classrooms. The study focused on the experiences of seven international students from the Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) scholarship program at Universitas Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya (UWKS). These participants, aged between 19 and 25, represented diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, providing a rich context for examining the impact of ethno-literacy strategies. The participants engaged in various activities, including analyzing culturally significant texts such as Majapahit proverbs and folktales, role-playing intercultural communication scenarios, and exploring linguistic comparisons between English, Bahasa Indonesia, and Majapahit cultural elements. These exercises were designed to bridge linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding, offering insights into how ethno-literacy can be effectively integrated into language education.

To capture participants' experiences, the research employed multiple qualitative instruments, including semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews provided in-depth insights into participants' perceptions of ethno-literacy activities, while reflective journals documented their learning processes and moments of cultural and linguistic discovery. Classroom observations further enriched the data by capturing real-time interactions and engagement during lessons. The collected data were analyzed thematically, focusing on recurring patterns related to intercultural awareness, linguistic skill development, and learner engagement. The findings emphasize the transformative potential of ethno-literacy in fostering meaningful language learning and intercultural competence, aligning with prior studies on culturally responsive teaching and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997; Hidayat & Nisa, 2021; Kramsch, 2013).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### *Intercultural Awareness and Empathy*

One of the most significant findings was the role of Majapahit cultural integration in enhancing learners' intercultural awareness. Participants reported a deeper appreciation for



the cultural dimensions of Bahasa Indonesia, viewing it as more than a linguistic tool. A participant reflected, “Learning about Majapahit culture made me see Bahasa Indonesia as more than just words; it’s a connection to history and people.” This aligns with Byram’s (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence, which emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural contexts in language learning.

Reflective journals revealed how participants drew parallels between Indonesian traditions and their own cultural backgrounds. For example, one learner noted, “Majapahit proverbs remind me of how my own culture uses idioms to teach values. This comparison made me appreciate both traditions more.” Such reflections not only fostered empathy but also highlighted the universality of cultural expressions, encouraging learners to approach cultural differences with curiosity and respect.

The inclusion of Majapahit elements such as proverbs, folktales, and art enabled participants to explore Indonesian values and societal norms. Through these cultural artifacts, learners gained insights into historical contexts and their influence on contemporary Indonesian society. This understanding enriched their interactions with native speakers, as they could relate to cultural references and idiomatic expressions more effectively.

### ***Linguistic Skill Development***

Majapahit-based activities also had a profound impact on linguistic skill development. By incorporating authentic cultural materials, the program provided learners with meaningful contexts for language use. For instance, a session comparing English idioms to Majapahit proverbs helped participants understand the metaphorical richness of both languages. One participant shared, “Studying proverbs taught me how cultural wisdom shapes communication, making it easier to remember and use idiomatic expressions naturally.”

Classroom observations confirmed increased engagement and practical application of language during culturally enriched lessons. In one activity, learners analyzed a Majapahit folktale and then re-enacted it in Bahasa Indonesia. This not only reinforced vocabulary and grammar but also allowed participants to practice storytelling techniques, enhancing their fluency and confidence. Such activities demonstrated how culturally integrated lessons bridge the gap between abstract language concepts and their real-world applications.



Participants also highlighted how cultural immersion facilitated better retention of vocabulary and grammar. A learner remarked, “Learning idioms through cultural stories made it easier for me to remember their meanings and use them in conversations.” This approach aligns with Krashen’s (2013) argument that language acquisition is most effective when learners engage with its cultural contexts.

### ***Learner Engagement and Motivation***

Cultural integration emerged as a key driver of learner engagement and motivation. Participants consistently described the lessons as “enjoyable,” “inspiring,” and “meaningful.” The use of Majapahit content, such as traditional narratives and art, transformed language learning into an immersive experience. One participant noted, “The lessons felt like an adventure into history, making learning fun and memorable.”

Classroom observations further highlighted heightened levels of participation during activities involving Majapahit culture. For example, during a role-playing exercise based on historical Majapahit scenarios, learners exhibited enthusiasm and collaboration, using both Bahasa Indonesia and English fluently. This demonstrated how cultural content not only enhanced linguistic skills but also fostered teamwork and critical thinking.

The integration of cultural content also inspired self-reflection and a sense of accomplishment among learners. Participants frequently expressed pride in their linguistic progress and cultural knowledge. A journal entry read, “Understanding the stories and values behind Bahasa Indonesia makes me feel connected to the culture and confident in my ability to communicate.” This emotional connection contributed to sustained engagement and intrinsic motivation.

## **Discussion**

### ***Ethnoliteracy as a Transformative Pedagogical Tool***

The findings of this study align with existing research on the transformative potential of ethnoliteracy in language education. Scholars such as Smith and Lee (2021) have emphasized the role of cultural context in fostering deeper engagement with linguistic materials, while Ahmad et al. (2020) demonstrated its impact on learner motivation and retention. This study builds upon these insights by showcasing the effectiveness of ethnoliteracy strategies in non-Western contexts, particularly within BIPA programs.

Participants’ accounts indicated a paradigm shift in their understanding of language as



a cultural construct. They moved beyond viewing language as a mere communicative tool to appreciating its role in conveying cultural values, historical narratives, and social norms. For example, the integration of Majapahit proverbs allowed learners to grasp the metaphorical richness of both English and Bahasa Indonesia, promoting cognitive flexibility and critical thinking.

### ***The Role of Local Heritage in Language Learning***

Majapahit culture, with its emphasis on unity in diversity, served as an effective bridge between linguistic and intercultural competencies. By exploring elements such as traditional art, narratives, and values, participants developed a nuanced understanding of Indonesian culture while enhancing their language skills. This approach aligns with the theoretical framework of culturally responsive teaching, which prioritizes the integration of local heritage into educational practices to make learning more relevant and impactful.

The inclusion of Majapahit content also encouraged participants to draw connections between their own cultural backgrounds and the Indonesian context. This intercultural comparison enriched the learning experience, fostering empathy and a broader worldview. For example, a participant noted, “The lessons helped me see the similarities between my own culture and Majapahit traditions, which made me respect and value both even more.” Such outcomes underscore the importance of leveraging local heritage in language instruction to promote both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness.

#### **Practical Implications for EFL and BIPA Programs**

The success of this program highlights the need for curricula that balance linguistic accuracy with cultural depth. For EFL programs, integrating local cultural elements alongside global English materials could provide learners with a holistic understanding of the language’s diverse applications. Similarly, BIPA programs stand to benefit from the inclusion of Indonesian heritage in their curricula. By emphasizing cultural immersion through authentic materials such as Majapahit narratives and proverbs, educators can create a more engaging and meaningful learning experience.

Participants’ positive feedback underscores the value of culturally integrated lessons in fostering motivation, retention, and practical language skills. For instance, a participant shared, “These lessons didn’t just teach me a language; they taught me a way of thinking and connecting with others.” This highlights the potential of ethno-literacy strategies to



prepare learners for real-world communication and intercultural interactions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### Conclusion

The integration of Majapahit cultural elements into BIPA programs has demonstrated profound impacts on learners' intercultural awareness, linguistic proficiency, and overall engagement. The Majapahit Empire, with its rich heritage of literature, proverbs, and art, provided a unique cultural framework that linked language learning with historical and societal values. This study concludes the transformative potential of integrating ethno-literacy, particularly Majapahit cultural elements, into BIPA programs. By bridging linguistic competence with intercultural awareness, these strategies not only enhance language acquisition but also foster empathy, critical thinking, and global citizenship.

### Suggestion

Future research could address these challenges by exploring innovative methods for integrating ethno-literacy into digital platforms. Interactive applications or virtual reality experiences could provide learners with immersive cultural encounters, enhancing their understanding of linguistic and cultural contexts. For example, a virtual tour of Majapahit heritage sites could complement traditional lessons, offering learners a more dynamic and engaging experience.

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