# CHALLENGES OF TEACHING INDONESIAN FOR FOREIGN SPEAKERS (BAHASA INDONESIA BAGI PENUTUR ASING/BIPA) IN AUSTRIA DURING THE PANDEMIC COVID-19

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## **Abstract**

Austria is one of the forty-one countries that run the Indonesian Language Learning Program for Foreign Speakers. The program is in collaboration with the Language Development and Cultivation Agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. When the learning went online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers, students, Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers class organizers, and the Indonesian Embassy in Vienna together with the University of Vienna, faced teaching and technical issues as challenges. Based on this background, this study aims to describe the challenges of Indonesian Language teachers for Austrian when they implement the learning by online. This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of case study research. The data was collected through interviews with 2 respondents and questionnaires with 4 respondents that consist of teachers and staff supporters from the embassy for BIPA in Austria from winter 2020 to winter 2021. Besides that, the data was also strengthened by literature studies. As a result, teachers face various challenges such as technical issues with the devices and internet networks, and time gaps between Indonesia and Austria. Even though online classes are widely open to everyone in Austria, the number of students is reduced because some of them preferred to do it face to face. Teachers also found the difficulty of managing online classes with high heterogeneity. Therefore, teachers made some efforts in responding to these challenges such as varying learning activities, opening communication spaces with students through various platforms, utilizing various online platforms that are relevant to learning topics, and organizing and inviting guest lecturers for a speaking class and cultural topics.

**Keywords:** Teachers' challenges, Online Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers, Indonesian Language for Austrian, Online Learning, BIPA

## INTRODUCTION

Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA), known as the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers, Indonesian Language as a Foreign Language, or Indonesian language as a Language of Other Than English (LOTE), is a program to teach the Indonesian language to foreign speakers, either in Indonesia or abroad. The foreign speaker here is referred to as the speaker who does not speak the Indonesian language as their first language or as their

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mother language. This program is designed to teach the Indonesian language and culture to foreigners who have specific purposes in learning Bahasa Indonesia. Kursmiatun (2016) added that this BIPA class is designed for foreign parties as learners with systematic activity.

Data from the Ministry of National Education shows that there are 219 higher education institutions in 40 countries that have implemented the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers programs (Kusmiatun, 2016: 10). However, at the end of 2020, there are 355 institutions were administering the BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*/Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) program in 41 countries with a total of 72,746 students, including 146 institutions that had been facilitated by the Language Development and Cultivation Agency (Aziz, 2021). The data shows that foreigners' interest in learning the Indonesian language continuously increase in various parts of the world, including Austria.

In Austria, the Indonesian Embassy together with the University of Vienna and Language Development Agencyunder the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia has run the BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*/Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) program since 2018. Before the pandemic Covid-19 began, the classes were only open to those who live in Vienna or those who were able to attend the class in Vienna. However, the pandemic Covid-19 started at the end of 2019, and it has had an impact on all sectors of human life. (Maqbulin, 2021). One sector that must adapt quickly to this situation is education (Siahaan, 2020). Teachers and students must adapt instantly to virtual face-to-face learning. It also impacted the program in Austria in the summer semester of 2020, the teachers and students must do the learning activities remotely. Besides, in the summer and winter semesters of 2021, some teachers were in Indonesia while the students were in Austria. It is challenging to do the program online since many things have never been prepared to face this situation, such as kids and adult learners are not familiar with online learning platforms and some students use an old devise so it does not support the activities that have been set by teachers.

During the pandemic, teachers are required to use technology maximized (Klein, 2021). Teachers were facing a situation on how to implement the learning activity, which was initially face-to-face, but it has turned online, as stated by Hardini et al (2021) that during pandemic Covid-19, BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*/Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) teachers have to do the classes remotely. Diani and Dewi (2020) also noted the same things in their research on learning, which was focused on the challenges of BIPA teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of their study explain the various challenges faced, starting from preparing teaching materials, participating in training on the use of teleconferencing applications, and holding the online learning itself. However, the description of the challenges faced by teachers in the evaluation stage has not been presented properly. Likewise, the innovations made by teachers in responding to challenges have not been described in detail by only focusing on training in the use of teleconferencing applications.

Previous research about the challenges of BIPA teachers during the pandemic was explained by Maharany et al (2021), the challenges that were found in the class during the pandemic were related to the learning system, teachers, internet conditions, and digital literacy. However, the explanation of the challenges of the teachers during the pandemic was not presented in detail, especially regarding the implementation of learning. Other previous research, namely the digitalization strategy in distance learning of BIPA in Vienna Austria by Septriani (2021), the study identified the use of various digital media in online BIPA

teaching for students in Austria. Although they have similarities in location (Austria), they differ in the sample and research focus.

Many researchers explain the situation of the BIPA program, either from the teacher's or student's point of view. Abrian and Sulistiawati (2022), Zunaidah et al (2021), and Zamzamy (2021) found that there are new problems or obstacles to the learning activity. The problems are limitations in mobility, space, time, and many more that impose the teachers and students to keep doing the program. On the other hand, Defina (2021) also found that students prefer face-to-face learning to online learning. This could be defined that online learning in the program is a new thing for everyone and no one is ready for this situation. That is why teachers and researchers need to explore more about the challenging things in the BIPA online learning program and solve the problems.

Based on those backgrounds supported by previous research, this research focused on discussing the challenges of teaching Indonesian to foreign speakers/*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* (BIPA) in Austria during the pandemic Covid-19. Thus, what was the challenges faced by the BIPA teachers during the pandemic situation and how to solve those challenges? Do the challenges only comes from the teachers' capability to manage the classes?

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach. This research approach aims to find meaning and patterns based on the results of observations and in-depth interviews submitted by participants about research problems (Creswell, 2012). Meanwhile, according to Sukmadinata (2005: 60), qualitative research is a study aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people individually and in groups. Thus, this research approach was chosen based on the research objective, which is to describe the challenges of teaching the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*/BIPA) in distance learning or online.

Based on the research objectives, the type of research used is a case study based on the existence of special conditions. The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on learning activities. A case study is a research strategy used in the careful investigation of a case, program, event, activity, process, or group of individuals (Creswell, 2012:200). The case in this study is that there are problems in online learning from the point of view of teachers (teachers or lecturers) who are trying to answer challenges in the midst of changing learning during the pandemic. This is interesting because online learning is currently one of the most widely used options as a result of the pandemic.

This research is categorized as qualitative research because the data used are words and the final result is a description (Moleong, 2006). The data was obtained through interviews with BIPA teachers for Austria and taught from the 2020 summer semester to the 2021 winter semester. The following is the respondent's data in this study.

Table 1. Questionnaire and Interview Respondents

Respondent	Gender	Role	Session	Working area
names				

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P1	Female	Teacher	Winter 2021	University of Vienna
P2	Female	Teacher	Summer 2021	Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Vienna & University of Vienna
P3	Female	Teacher	Winter 2022	Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Vienna
P4	Female	Teacher	Winter 2022	Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Vienna & University of Vienna
P5	Female	Supporter	-	Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Vienna

Interviews were conducted via telephone and ZOOM, while questionnaires were distributed via Google Form. This method was chosen as a form of obedience to the government's appeal to carry out physical restrictions. As Marlini (2020) states that the Minister of Education directly instructed that all elements of education must be online. In addition, the data was strengthened through literature studies in previous studies that were on the research theme. After the research data was obtained, the data were analysed using interactive analysis adopting Miles and Huberman which consisted of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Sugiyono, 2010:91).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To discuss the result of this research, we split the discussions into three parts. Part (A), there is an explanation of the implementation of BIPA learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in Austria. This is important to know because from this explanation we are able to find how teachers prepare and manage their classes. Part (B), explains the challenges that have been faced by the teachers. In this part, there is an explanation of the components that made the teachers face the challenges during online teaching-learning activities. Part (C), is the actions taken by the teachers to face those challenges. In this part, we are able to find the innovation teachers take to solve the problems. All of these explanations are described qualitatively.

# 1. Implementation of BIPA Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Austria.

The implementation of online learning is generally as same as common learning, including the preparation, implementation, and evaluation. However, online learning conditions use technology more, so there is still interaction between teachers and students. The following is the implementation of Austrian BIPA online learning from the 2020 summer semester to the 2021 winter semester.

# 1. Preparation of BIPA Online Class in Austria

Based on the results of questionnaires and interviews, the preparation stage at BIPA Austria is quite well-organized, especially for the implementation of the learning at the University of Vienna. Teachers started the preparation stage by preparing a syllabus. It is adapted to the curriculum, preparing learning media that are relevant, designing learning activities and interactive games, as well as compiling class schedules and rules.

"... the curriculum used in BIPA classes for Austria is generally the same as other BIPA classes, which refers to the BIPA SKL." (P1)

Students in BIPA classes in Austria are heterogeneous students, both related to age and proficiency in the Indonesian language, as well as the purpose or motivation of learning.

This heterogeneity can be found in every class, both at elementary and advanced levels. The teachers need to prepare varied and interesting learning activities for students so that students are not easily bored. As experienced by teacher [P1], the preparation includes making PowerPoint slides, interactive games for the class, and analyzing the main book or main reference. The other preparations are extra preparations in the schedule for a semester, class rules, et cetera in detail because the student is a perfectionist and critical (P4).

After making administrative preparations, teachers will get student contacts to be able to send emails for preparation. This is also done by teacher P3.

Preparation starts from the syllabus, then after being able to contact the students, they immediately send an e-mail (introducing themselves and also a brief description of what will be studied during the class and providing a zoom link and opening a Q&A) (P3).

At this stage, the teacher will provide a brief overview of what will be studied during the semester. Then, the teacher also includes a ZOOM link in the email and allows students to ask questions regarding class preparation or anything they want to ask. In addition, the lecturers and the Indonesian Embassy and the University of Vienna will also coordinate to re-check the preparation of classes that will take place each semester. In general, it can be concluded that the preparation stage carried out by Austrian BIPA teachers is good with the preparation of learning devices, learning media, learning methods and strategies to support facilities in online learning.

2. Implementation of BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*/Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) Online Class in Austria

BIPA learning in Austria, both the Indonesian Embassy class and the University of Vienna class, lasts for four months in each season or each semester. In the winter semester, classes are held from October to January. Whereas, in the summer semester, classes are held from March to June. Then, in the implementation of learning, the teacher does not only do synchronous learning but also asynchronously. *However, synchronous learning in Austrian BIPA classes takes precedence over asynchronous learning* (P1). Some classes have a schedule twice a week and some only meet once per week. So, it can be said that the number of meetings for each class in one semester is not the same. The highest number of meetings for classes that meet twice a week is usually 28-30 meetings, or equivalent to 42-45 hours in one semester.

In the implementation of Austrian online BIPA learning, there are general classes and university classes. The BIPA class at the University of Vienna can be claimed by University Credit Unit (SKS) as part of the lectures at the student's home university, while the BIPA class at the Indonesian Embassy does not provide an SKS claim. As for the implementation, university BIPA classes are held within the period of studying at the university, from 09.00 to 15.00 CET (Central European Time) or the same as 15.00 to 21.00 WIB (Western Indonesian Time) when the time difference is six hours. Meanwhile, another BIPA class held by the Indonesian embassy starts from 17.00 to 18.30 CET or the same as 23.00 to 00.30 WIB.

Related to the attendance, students in the university class were more consistently present than in the Indonesian class in Embassy. As stated by P1 during the interview,

"In the SKS, there are grades obtained, while in the Indonesian Embassy class no grades are obtained, even if there are grades, these grades are not used for anything". [P1]

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It means that providing a credit claim system for BIPA students in the University of Vienna class makes students more engaged and motivated in the learning and assessment process. As a result, the implementation of learning activity is gathered to the plan and the delivery of material can be carried out in a structured and sustainable manner. Another impact is that the assessment has become easier and clearer.

Online learning is never separated from the use of digital platforms, both as teaching resources, teaching media, and communication media, as well as a means for evaluating learning itself. For example, teacher P1 uses zoom meeting, G-Suite for education, wordwall, padlet, whiteboard fi, quizziz, and etcetera. Teacher P2 only uses email, video, audio, and learning apps. Then, teacher P3 uses Kahoot, learning apps, and wordwall (P3). Finally, teacher P4 use Zoom, Google Classroom, email, Padlet, WordWall, and Kahoot (P4) for the class. Thus, the platforms that BIPA teachers use for BIPA online learning in Austria are email, audiovisual media, ZOOM, G-Suite for Education, Wordwall, Padlet, Whiteboard Fi, Quizziz, Kahoot, and Google Classroom.

The results of the questionnaire show that BIPA teachers in Austria use many platforms to facilitate learning activities. In consonance with teachers P4, the reason for using all of those platforms is simple and easy to use (P4). Besides that, teacher P2 stated that those platforms are relevant to introducing and practicing the listening skill. It helps the teacher to manage the learning activities and motivate learners to help them learn the Indonesian language easier (P2). With the variety of platforms used, it shows that the teacher has carried out a thorough preparation stage. It has also achieved the communicative and interactive aspects of learning and it is easy to use.

3. Learning Evaluation for BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*/Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) Online Class in Austria

Learning evaluation is a systematic, continuous, and comprehensive process or activity in the context of controlling, guaranteeing, and determining the quality (value and meaning) of learning on various learning components, based on consideration of certain criteria as a form of teacher responsibility in carrying out learning (Arifin, 2010: 6). Learning evaluation is the whole process of activities that systematically determine the results during the learning process. Evaluation of learning in BIPA online classes consists of quizzes, midterm exams, and end-of-semester exams. However, since the number of meetings for several classes is still limited, the evaluation is only intended as a tool to measure the development of students' Indonesian language skills.

The learning evaluation that has been done by teacher P1 is: Students' speaking and writing skills improve, as can be seen from the use of good and correct sentence structures (P1). However, teacher P3 had a different opinion that evaluation activities start from a midterm test (by giving the students an assignment). Then, a quiz for every couple of meetings as a review of the previous material, and then a final exam that is divided into two meetings. The first one is reading and speaking, and the other one is a final quiz (P3). As a result of the interview, the evaluation activities generally consisted of mid-term tests and a final exam that consisted of reading, speaking, writing, and listening tests. In conclusion, students' skills in using the Indonesian language improved well, including speaking and writing skills. Thus, the evaluation process of Austrian Online BIPA learning is still dominated by summative assessments such as midterm tests, final exams and daily tests, compared to formative assessments.

# 2. Challenges of BIPA Teachers in Online Learning in Austria

Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires, online BIPA learning in Austria has been going well and smoothly. However, there are several obstacles that BIPA teachers need to anticipate or find solutions for. Some of the obstacles identified by every Austrian BIPA teacher are adjusting the time gaps between Indonesia and Austria. It happens when BIPA teachers do the class, especially for classes at the Indonesian Embassy (P1). Then, adjustment of teaching materials to student skills. Moreover, time is nearly midnight in Indonesia, recordings that cannot be distributed without asking permission or certain needs (P2), and how to keep the class interesting so that students don't feel bored during the lesson (P3). In addition to the three teachers, teacher P4 experienced all the challenges and obstacles faced by the previous teachers starting from something related to age gaps and students' background, students' profession, and different learning motivations in one class, students' skills to use the Indonesian language is not matching to their BIPA level and teaching in the midnight or early hour in the morning, etc. (P4)

The description of these constraints can be further explained as follows. The first obstacle is the time difference between Indonesia-Austria which reaches 5-6 hours making online BIPA classes for teachers in Indonesia held at night, especially for the Indonesian Embassy class. The Indonesian Embassy class starts at 17.00 CET (Central European Time), or the same as at 23.00 WIB (Indonesian Western Time) when the time difference is six hours. The first obstacle has an impact on the limited time to provide feedback on student assignments and the limited opportunities for students to interact directly.

The second obstacle relates to technical matters such as (1) the quality of the internet network, both at the teacher's place and at the student's place, (2) the devices used, both cameras and microphones on computers, and (3) the situation of power outages in Indonesia which suddenly. The quality of the internet network, both in Indonesia and in Austria, is sometimes unstable, depending on the weather during the class and the quality of the internet network itself. Meanwhile, related the devices used, both by teachers and students, turned out to cause problems, for example (1) the computer used by the students did not provide a camera, and (2) the ringing of the laptop machine sounded loud enough to interfere with communication during learning, (3) students do not use laptops or computers, but use cellphones so that when the implementation of interactive writing activities is disrupted, and (4) students' skills in using computers and digital media are not the same so that students.

The third obstacle is the emergence of heterogeneity and homogeneity of students at the same time. The heterogeneity that appears in each class is related to age, professional background, learning motivation, the intensity of class attendance, and Indonesian language skills. However, among all these factors, the most influential aspect is the heterogeneity of the ability of BIPA students in one grade level. This heterogeneity arises because students who have just learned Indonesian are placed in the same class as students who have studied or have experience speaking Indonesian. Even though these students are at the same BIPA level, the presence of these students who have experience speaking Indonesian creates inequality and psychological impact on other students. The following is an excerpt from the interview with P1.

"... students who are slower than their friends, I will equate the frequency of learning with those students who are slow or have limited opportunities in using their Indonesian language. So, they don't feel inferior or why do I feel that I am the weakest in the class, even though he frequently attends class ..." [P1]

Based on this situation, the impact is that there is a discrepancy between the level of language skills with the BIPA level of the BIPA student. For example, there are students at the B1

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level (BIPA 3) whose language skills are more suitable for the A2 level (BIPA 2). The standard or basis for determining the suitability of language skills with the BIPA level is supposed to be based on the BIPA level criteria in the BIPA SKL.

Furthermore, as explained by the [P1] teacher in the interview excerpt,

"... there are students whose childhood was in Indonesia (for) seven years. There are those who have relationships with Indonesians in the business. It will influence their ability to communicate, and they are faster in absorbing the material I convey". [P1]

It means, there are different situations among students in one class and this impacts students' heterogeneity in that class. Merging the students who have studied BIPA with students who have never studied BIPA in class A1 or BIPA 1 makes those who have just learned Indonesian seem to have a low capability in using the Indonesian language, while students who have studied Indonesian have better. Students who already have experience and insight into the Indonesian language are more confident than those who are just starting to learn. This inequality becomes a problem in itself during the learning process.

Another challenge during this pandemic is that the number of students who are interested in taking BIPA classes online is not as much as in the pre-pandemic period (P5). This is caused by several factors, but the most dominant factor is that students prefer face-to-face and direct interaction because of reciprocity in the learning process. The nuances of face-to-face learning are not the same as online or virtual learning. Interaction in the face-to-face learning process is considered not only capable of providing feedback on teaching materials, but also engaging students in learning BIPA. This kind of situation was also found in Defina's research (2021) that the students prefer face-to-face learning than online learning. This situation is challenging the teachers to make that online learning as fine as face-to-face learning.

# 3. Learning Innovation on BIPA Online Learning in Austria

Facing various challenges that arise in the implementation of Austrian online BIPA learning, teachers have made several innovations. One of the learning innovations chosen by the teacher [P2] that is

"inviting various speakers to be native speakers of the Indonesian language." [P2]

Teacher [P3] later stated that

"although there were two culture classes attended by all students, I also made a culture class for the class I was teaching." [P3]

Different ideas had taken by teacher [P1], who prefers to use more platforms than the other teachers. Teacher [P1] stated that

"the execution of BIPA online learning needs platforms, teaching styles that are suitable to the student's needs, and cultural topics that I always add at the end of the topic discussion." [P1]

Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires with several BIPA teachers, it can be concluded that three learning innovations have been chosen to deal with learning challenges from the pandemic period, those are:

Using various digital platforms such as learning media, quizzes, and interactive games,

Holding cultural classes by making teachers as resource persons or bringing in other sources as expert sources,

Inviting native Indonesian speakers to practice speaking Indonesian directly.

Among those three innovations, cultural classes and bringing in Indonesian native speakers are the key to respond the learning challenges during the pandemic, in addition, to use digital platforms to support learning activities.

Meanwhile, regarding the emergence of homogeneity and heterogeneity in these BIPA classes, teachers need to prepare more varied exploration activities, for example by involving interactive games, interactive platforms, and interactive quizzes. The goal is that students can still actively participate in learning. Teachers also need to be careful in designing each of their learning activities so that learning objectives are achieved and minimize student boredom. However, there has been no specific innovation to overcome learning obstacles related to the time difference between Indonesia and Austria. So, preparing varied, interactive, and interesting lessons is one thing that can be done to face the challenges of online BIPA learning in Austria.

## **CONCLUSION**

Online learning in BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*/Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) teaching is one of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers and students cannot learn face to face. In a short time, teachers and students have to switch the learning mode to virtual learning, usually via ZOOM. Online learning requires special preparation, starting from a stable internet network, the devices used, and the transition of teaching media, as well as teaching methods and techniques that are suitable for online learning. However, teachers and students do not have much time to prepare for this due to the current Covid-19 pandemic.

In the enforcement of BIPA online learning in Austria, there are several challenges, ranging from time gaps between Indonesia-Austria to technical issues such as low quality of internet connection and the devices students used. Besides that, the heterogeneity of students in one class also gave an impact, especially related to age and capability to develop and use the Indonesian language. As a result, teachers need to prepare well, starting from compiling a syllabus that is by the curriculum, determining the platform that will be used in learning activities, and designing active and interactive learning activities. In addition, in an effort to keep learning interesting and interactive, the teacher also invites Indonesian native speakers and cultural experts. The presence of native speakers in the speaking class and having cultural experts are expected to be a special attraction for BIPA students in this online learning.

It can be concluded that the implementation of BIPA online learning in Austria has its challenges and requires special efforts in anticipating or overcoming them. Teachers need to motivate students to always be present and actively participate in class. Teachers have to choose the right platform to reach learning goals to create effective and meaningful learning even in a pandemic condition.

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