



From Classroom to Diplomacy: Reflections on BIPA Teaching by Timorese Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to explore the experiences of local educators teaching Indonesian as a Foreign Language (BIPA) in Timor-Leste, specifically at two educational institutions: Escola Secundaria Geral (ESG) and Escola Técnica Vocacional (ESTV). Using a reflective qualitative approach with a collective case study design, the research involved six active teachers as key participants. Data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and analysis of instructional documents, then examined using thematic coding and narrative reflection. The findings show that teachers developed task-based learning strategies, culturally relevant media, and contextual approaches despite facing structural limitations. Lesson plans generally demonstrated moderate alignment with Graduate Competency Standards (SKL), though they need improvement in goal setting, cultural integration, and rubric-based assessment. This study emphasizes teachers' voices as essential sources of curricular knowledge, shifting focus from macro-level policy to reflective classroom practice. Consequently, BIPA is seen not just as a language teaching initiative but as a form of soft diplomacy that strengthens bilateral relations between Indonesia and Timor-Leste through intercultural education.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the Indonesian language has gained increasing symbolic, educational, and functional importance in Timor-Leste. Despite the formal political separation between the two countries in 2002, cultural and linguistic ties remain strong, rooted in shared historical experiences and geographic proximity. In this context, Bahasa Indonesia functions not only as a means of informal communication but also as an aspirational language associated with academic mobility, regional integration, and professional growth. Sudarmanto et al. (2025) highlight its dominance in border areas, shaped by colonial legacies, cultural closeness, and cross-border kinship. Meanwhile, it draws attention to the limited public representation of local languages such as Tetun and Dawan, despite their continued use in daily life. This linguistic imbalance reflects broader tensions in identity formation and language policy. At the same time, multilingual education frameworks promoted by UNESCO and UNICEF (2025, p. 2) emphasize incorporating mother tongues into formal curricula to foster inclusion and preserve cultural identity. By emphasizing the relationship between language, identity, and educational policy, this section lays a foundation that highlights teachers' voices as crucial in developing intercultural and contextually responsive language education.

According to Ximenes, P. B (2025), Indonesian is used as a working and instructional language at several higher education institutions in Timor-Leste, although not all universities offer specific Indonesian language courses. Furthermore, Indonesia's cultural diplomacy programs in education and culture implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Indonesian Embassy in Dili from 2016 to 2023 demonstrate a strong commitment to expanding the influence of

the Indonesian language in Timor-Leste (Gurning et al., 2024). The Bahasa Indonesia for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program organized by the Language Agency in 2024 highlights the growing sociolinguistic importance of Bahasa Indonesia in Timor-Leste. The language serves not only as a tool for informal communication but also as a means for educational advancement and intercultural exchange. The program saw active participation from various societal groups, including university students, security personnel, and local educators, indicating a strong interest in learning Bahasa Indonesia for academic, professional, and diplomatic goals. Support from key figures such as Ambassador Okto Darius Manik and Education Attaché Prof. Ikhfan Haris further underscores the program's role as a form of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy.

As part of Indonesia's broader strategy for the internationalization of its language and culture, the BIPA program is designed to expand cross-national institutional networks, incorporate local cultural content into the curriculum, and provide language training and certification for foreign participants (Simanullang et al., 2024). This initiative aligns with Indonesia's soft diplomacy policy, which aims to strengthen linguistic ties, foster mutual understanding, and promote regional integration through language education (*BOOKLET BIPA Universitas Airlangga, Simanullang et al., 2024*).

The sociolinguistic landscape of Timor-Leste features linguistic diversity, with Tetun and Portuguese serving as official languages alongside various local languages such as Mambae, Makasae, and Fataluku. Although Portuguese has formal institutional recognition, its practical use among younger generations remains limited. Conversely, Indonesian is easily accessible through media, music, television broadcasts, and interpersonal interactions, offering a more familiar and understandable linguistic option for many learners (Susana Alfonso, 2012). This accessibility has made Indonesian a de facto auxiliary language, particularly in border areas and urban centers where exposure to Indonesian culture and resources is greater.

Teaching Indonesian as a foreign language (TIFL) is becoming increasingly important in Timor-Leste, aligning with the rising need for cross-border communication and regional cooperation. The BIPA program acts as the official framework for TIFL, emphasizing not only language skills but also communicative competence, cultural understanding, and intercultural sensitivity. Recent studies (Tiawati et al., 2024) highlight BIPA's role as a cultural diplomacy tool that promotes socio-political harmony and strengthens Indonesia-Timor-Leste relations. Support from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Indonesian Embassy in Dili has helped deploy BIPA instructors and improve learning evaluation systems. Despite challenges such as the lack of a standardized curriculum and limited resources, local educators have shown innovation through contextualized methods and authentic media, positioning BIPA as a strategic bridge for intercultural dialogue in Southeast Asia.

Specifically, the BIPA program is a key part of Indonesia's modern soft power diplomacy strategy, where language acts as a bridge to expand influence, strengthen bilateral ties, and promote regional integration. Recent studies and policy analyses (Wibowo, 2025; Nuaba, 2025) highlight that BIPA is no longer just a language program but a strategic cultural tool that is part of Indonesia's foreign policy. The development of BIPA Graduate Competency Standards, especially Levels 1 and 2, has been updated to match global benchmarks like the CEFR and Indonesia's National Qualification

Framework (KKNI), aiming to standardize learning outcomes for foreign learners (APPBIPA, 2023; Language Center UNRAM, 2025). However, while these standards are approved nationally, applying them in Timor-Leste depends heavily on local teachers managing complex realities, such as limited resources, diverse student backgrounds, and minimal institutional infrastructure. In this situation, teacher agency and adapting to local contexts are vital to ensure that BIPA serves not only as a teaching tool but also as a means for intercultural dialogue and regional unity.

Unlike Indonesia or other countries with official BIPA centers, BIPA education in Timor-Leste is often grassroots-led, improvisational, and highly dependent on the dedication of local teachers. Many of these educators are alumni of Indonesian universities or are self-trained, serving as cultural mediators and instructional designers within their communities. Recent studies (Rejeki & Asari, 2019) highlight how these teachers create materials, tailor lessons to varied learner needs, and develop innovative teaching methods—often without access to formal training, standardized curricula, or institutional support. Despite these constraints, their pedagogical ingenuity, such as task-based learning and the use of authentic, culturally relevant media, has effectively enhanced BIPA's role as a tool for intercultural dialogue and soft power diplomacy. This informal yet impactful TIFL model provides valuable insights into how language education develops at the community level and how teachers adapt to complex teaching challenges.

In this context, there is a critical need to document, analyze, and reflect on the lived experiences of these teachers. Their perspectives are crucial not only for understanding local conditions but also for providing valuable lessons that can guide curriculum design, teacher training, and future BIPA program development in postcolonial and multilingual societies. As highlighted by Taba (1962) in Gallimore (2020), curriculum development must be grounded in contextual understanding and based on the direct experiences of practitioners who are closest to the learners.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of Timorese educators in teaching BIPA and to contribute to TIFL practices from a bottom-up perspective. This chapter synthesizes field observations, teacher reflections, and practical strategies used in real classroom settings. Its goal is to provide a view of how BIPA is taught, shaped, and maintained in educational environments that are challenging but full of hope.

This study aims to explore the pedagogical reflections of local BIPA practitioners in Timor-Leste, capturing nuanced insights into effective strategies, ongoing challenges, and evolving practices in teaching Bahasa Indonesia. Instead of criticizing the national BIPA framework, the research seeks to provide grassroots perspectives to inform more adaptable, inclusive, and contextually grounded approaches to Teaching Indonesian as a Foreign Language (TIFL). Situated within a complex web of historical, linguistic, and educational factors, the study responds to an urgent need to highlight practitioner voices as a vital source of curricular knowledge. In this context, teacher reflections are seen not only as authentic expressions of lived experience but also as strategic contributions to designing sustainable and locally responsive language education. (Abdullah & Gani, 2022) underscore the critical role of teacher agency in curriculum development, advocating for pedagogical models that match learners' sociocultural realities. At the same time, multilingual education policies promoted by UNESCO and UNICEF (2025) emphasize incorporating mother tongues into formal instruction to improve educational inclusion, student retention, and cultural continuity. Using a

qualitative approach that values narrative depth and participatory engagement, this research broadens the scope of BIPA scholarship in Southeast Asia and proposes a conceptual framework that promotes intercultural understanding, educational equity, and soft diplomacy through language.

Teacher agency, cultural adaptability, and contextual responsiveness are crucial components for the success of BIPA programs in Timor-Leste. Educators' ability to adapt instructional approaches to local conditions significantly affects the effectiveness of teaching Indonesian as a foreign language, especially in multilingual and postcolonial settings (Lutfiani et al., 2025; Damanik & Tambunan, 2025). Cultural adaptability in BIPA pedagogy is increasingly important in these contexts, with recent research highlighting how incorporating multicultural literature and pluricultural competence into curricula promotes intercultural understanding (Asteria et al., 2025). At the same time, contextual teaching strategies aligned with national policies are influenced by linguistic mapping and reflective practice, allowing educators to modify lesson plans to fit local realities while preserving pedagogical agency (Khoirunnisa & Sauri, 2023). Documenting and analyzing local teachers' experiences helps develop a deeper understanding of TIFL and emphasizes the role of language education in enhancing international cooperation. This chapter offers both theoretical insights and practical contributions to the development of studies and practices related to teaching Indonesian as a foreign language in developing and post-independence countries.

Research Problem

How do local educators teach Indonesian as a foreign language (BIPA) in Timor-Leste given limited resources, focusing on pedagogical strategies, cultural adaptation, and curriculum contextualization?

Research Objective

To explore the experiences of local educators in teaching BIPA in Timor-Leste, with a focus on pedagogical strategies, cultural adaptation, and curriculum contextualization in conditions of limited resources and institutional support.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a reflective qualitative approach to explore the experiences and cultural diplomacy practices of BIPA educators at two educational institutions in Timor-Leste, namely Escola Secundaria Geral (ESG) and Escola Técnica Vocacional (ESTV). This approach allows the researcher to understand meanings built through subjective experiences and critical reflection on social practices (Moleong, 2017: 6; Supriatna & Permatasari, 2025: 157). The participants, including six teachers, three men and three women, were purposively selected based on their active involvement in language instruction and intercultural engagement. This technique emphasizes that qualitative methods are designed to gather rich, detailed insights rather than to produce statistically generalizable results, making them especially suitable for educational and intercultural research (Sugiyono, 2022).

This study used a qualitative approach, utilizing data collection methods such as classroom observation of BIPA sessions, open-ended questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. Direct observation aimed to capture authentic teaching practices, while in-depth interviews explored educators' reflections. The open-ended questionnaires complemented these methods by giving participants a structured space to express their

views in writing. Together, these three techniques provided a comprehensive understanding of teaching practices and teacher experiences in the context of BIPA instruction in a post-independence nation.

Interview data were fully transcribed, and observation notes were systematically compiled. Data reduction involved filtering information relevant to the research focus, ensuring only meaningful and contextually grounded data were analyzed further. The coding process involved assigning thematic codes based on keywords, narrative patterns, and recurring issues within the reduced data. This coding aimed to organize the data systematically for thematic analysis and was performed manually and with the help of qualitative analysis software to ensure consistency and transparency.

The collaboration with sources referred to the triangulation process, which involved comparing findings from interviews, observations, and questionnaires to ensure the results' validity. The researcher also engaged in clarification and open discussions with several participants to review initial interpretations, making sure that the meanings derived genuinely reflected their lived experiences. The developed codes were then grouped into thematic categories such as pedagogical strategies, cultural adaptation, and teacher interaction, which formed the basis for the main interpretive themes.

The researcher also reflected on their positionality and methodological approach to show how their background and perspective influenced the analytical process. The findings are presented as thematic narratives supported by direct quotations from participants and are discussed in detail to emphasize the educational and diplomatic implications of the study.

In thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke (2006) outline a six-phase process that provides a structured yet flexible framework for analyzing qualitative data. The analysis starts with familiarization, where researchers immerse themselves in the data to gain a thorough understanding. This is followed by generating initial codes that identify key features across the dataset. The third phase involves searching for potential themes, which are then reviewed to ensure consistency and alignment with the data. In the fifth phase, themes are clearly defined and named to capture their main significance. Finally, the sixth phase focuses on creating a well-organized report that weaves the themes into a compelling narrative, connecting findings to research questions and theoretical frameworks.

1. **Data Collection:** The initial stage involved in-depth interviews with BIPA instructors and direct classroom observations. The interviews aimed to uncover teachers' personal reflections and professional experiences, while the observations captured authentic teaching practices and learner interactions within the classroom. These methods were used to gather rich, contextual data on the dynamics of teaching Bahasa Indonesia as a foreign language in Timor-Leste.
2. **Transcription and Data Reduction:** Interview data were fully transcribed, and observation notes were systematically compiled. Data reduction was done by selecting information relevant to the research focus namely pedagogical practices, cultural adaptation, and teachers' contextual responses. This process ensured that only meaningful and detailed data were retained for further analysis.

3. **Data Coding:** Data coding involved assigning thematic codes to data segments based on keywords, narrative patterns, and recurring issues. During this process, the researcher highlighted significant parts of interview transcripts and observation notes that held reflective meaning. Coding also included a collaborative effort, involving triangulation across data sources (interviews and observations) and member checking with informants to confirm initial interpretations.
4. **Categorization and Theme Development:** Identified codes were grouped into themes such as pedagogical strategies, cultural adaptation, and teacher interaction. Each theme served as a basis for analysis and interpretation. These themes captured conceptual patterns from teachers' experiences and classroom dynamics.
5. **Researcher Reflexivity:** The researcher engaged in reflective analysis by connecting theoretical frameworks with field experiences. This reflection encompassed the researcher's positionality, methodological approach, and understanding of the educational social reality. This step was essential to ensure depth and transparency in the analysis.
6. **Findings and Narrative Construction:** The research findings were presented as thematic narratives supported by direct quotations from participants. The researcher outlined the main themes and clearly stated their analytical stance. Educational and diplomatic implications were also discussed to emphasize the importance of the findings in strengthening cross-national collaboration through language education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research was conducted from March to April 2025. The activities started with observing the learning process in Timor-Leste. The observation took place in Class 2 STB, in the Accounting Department. The following are the results of that observation.



Figure 1. Observation of the Learning Process in Class 2 Accounting.

Based on the observation, it was found that the BIBA learning process was too monotonous, which made it difficult for students to understand BIPA lessons. Therefore, students need to experience a more engaging and dynamic learning process. This research will take learners beyond the classroom and into the realm of diplomacy. Ultimately, it aims to ensure that language teaching in the classroom, especially BIPA,

has a broader impact, serving as a tool for cultural diplomacy and strengthening international relations.

An analysis of six Lesson Plans (RPP) prepared by BIPA instructors shows a tendency to fall within the *Moderately Aligned* category regarding the Graduate Competency Standards (SKL), scoring between 15 and 22 out of 28 indicators. Although the instructional flow follows a structured sequence (opening → core → closing), the vertical integration of learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessments does not yet fully display a cohesive alignment with the SKL framework as outlined in the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020.



Figure 2. Interviews of the Learning Process in Class 2 Accounting.

Most of the lesson plans do not explicitly reference SKL codes (SKL-I), which makes it hard to map graduate competencies and track achievement. The learning objectives are mostly broad and haven't been formulated using SMART principles (*Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound*), limiting the ability to design precise and valid evaluations.

Instructional materials are relevant for novice learners, especially on topics like greetings and self-introduction; however, they lack integration of cultural values and cross-cultural skills, which are crucial parts of the BIPA framework. Although the communicative approach is common, task-based language teaching (TBLT) and project-based learning (PBL), which could boost learner engagement and practical language use, have not yet been implemented.

The learning media are often generic and lack explanation about their interactivity or relevance to specific language skills, such as listening or writing. Assessment strategies mainly focus on speaking skills but are not supported by rubrics or well-defined success indicators. Overall, the lesson plans show a solid basic structure, but there is still considerable room for improvement in:

1. The formulation of SMART-aligned learning objectives clearly connected to SKL;
2. The integration of task- or project-based approaches to enhance learner autonomy and interaction; and
3. The strategic development of evaluations supported by rubrics and standard success criteria.

These findings provide a crucial foundation for improving creating targeted recommendations to enhance BIPA lesson planning practices, ensuring better coherence, cultural integration, and competency-based teaching methods.

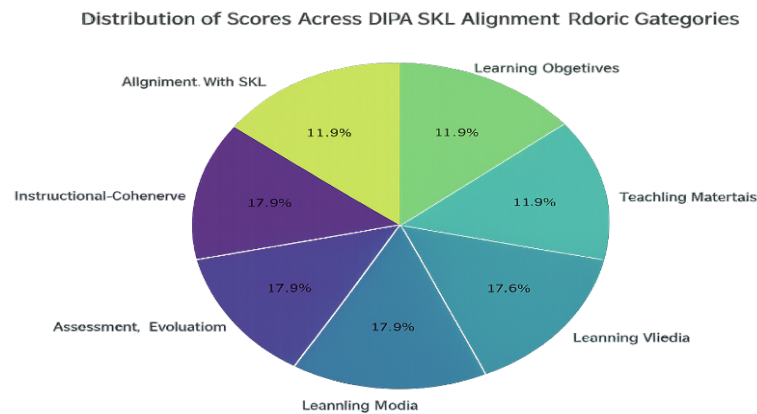


Figure 3. Distribution of Scores Across DIPA-SKL Alignment Rubric Categories

Figure 3 shows how emphasis is distributed across six key parts of the BIPA lesson plan evaluation rubric. Three categories—Alignment with SKL, Learning Objectives, and Teaching Materials—each comprise 11.9% of the total score, showing they have a relatively small weight in the overall rubric. Meanwhile, Learning Media has a higher share at 17.6%, and Assessment & Evaluation and Instructional Coherence are the most emphasized, each making 17.9% of the total. This distribution indicates that evaluators focus more on how lessons are assessed and how coherently they are structured, rather than their alignment with standards or the clarity of objectives and materials. The chart provides a clear view of pedagogical priorities within the rubric, pointing out areas that might need more focus or development in future curriculum planning.

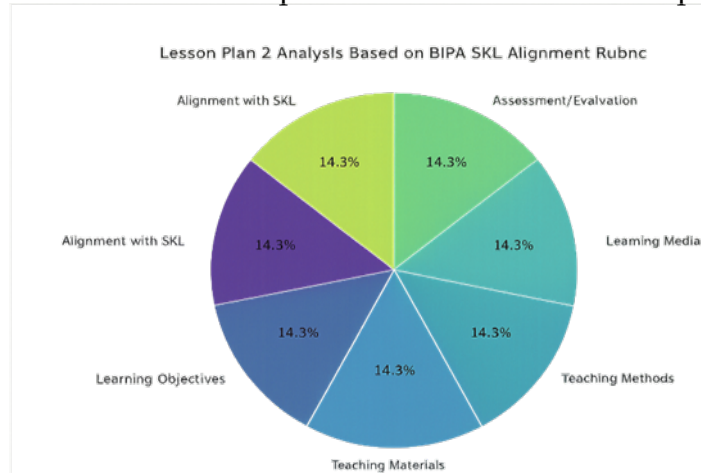


Figure 4. Analysis of Lesson Plan 2 Using the BIPA SKL Alignment Rubric

Figure 4 shows an even distribution across seven key rubric components, each making up 14.3% of the total. The categories include Alignment with SKL, Assessment/Evaluation, Learning Media, Teaching Methods, Teaching Materials, and Learning Objectives, with Alignment with SKL listed twice, likely due to a labeling mistake.

This equal segmentation indicates that, in Lesson Plan 2, all components are given equal importance. Unlike Lesson Plan 1, which displayed varied emphasis across categories, this chart shows a more standardized or overall approach to rubric application. It could suggest either a conscious effort to balance instructional design or a lack of differentiation in scoring. For curriculum developers, this might lead to

considering whether equal weighting truly reflects pedagogical priorities or if certain elements like assessment or instructional coherence should be given more focus.

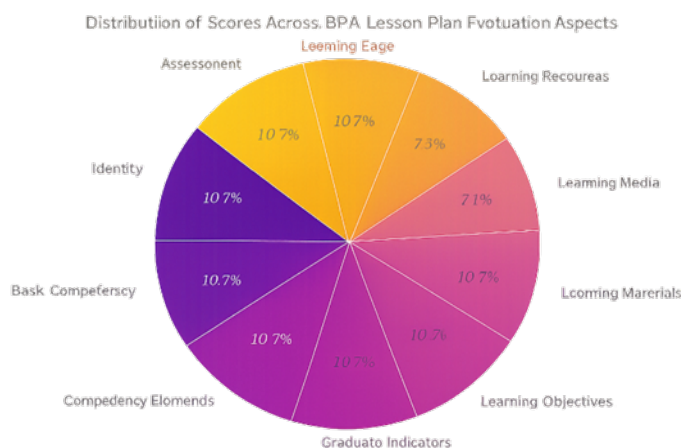


Figure 5. Distribution of Scores for BPA Lesson Plan Evaluation Aspects

Figure 5 shows how different components are weighted in evaluating a lesson plan. Of the ten listed aspects, nine categories—Learning Edge, Learning Materials, Learning Objectives, Graduate Indicators, Competency Elements, Basic Competency, Identity, and Assessment—each receive 10.7%, reflecting a balanced focus on key instructional and evaluative elements.

In contrast, Learning Resources and Learning Media are weighted slightly lower at 7.3% and 7.1%, respectively. This indicates that while these two factors are considered in the evaluation, they may be seen more as supporting elements rather than central parts of instructional design.

Overall, the chart shows a fairly uniform distribution of importance across most categories, with minor variations that could guide future rubric improvements. It emphasizes the evaluators' aim to maintain

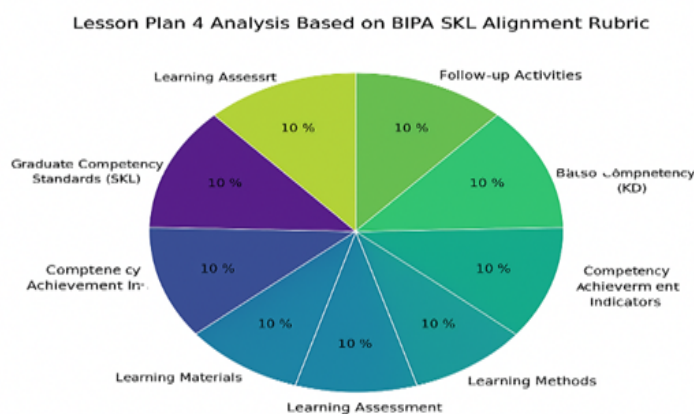


Figure 6. Analysis of Lesson Plan 4 Using BIPA SKL Alignment Rubric

Figure 6 shows an equal distribution across eight key components of lesson plan evaluation, with each category contributing 10% to the total score. The components include Learning Assessment, Follow-up Activities, Basic Competency (KD), Competency Achievement Indicators, Learning Methods, Learning Materials, and Graduate Competency Standards (SKL).

This equal segmentation indicates a comprehensive approach to lesson planning, where each component is equally important in aligning with BIPA's SKL framework. Including both assessment and follow-up activities emphasizes attention not only to instructional delivery but also to learner progress and reinforcement. The presence of Basic Competency and Graduate Competency Standards shows a structured alignment with national benchmarks, while Learning Methods and Materials ensure pedagogical relevance.

Overall, the chart highlights a consistent rubric application, encouraging uniformity and thoroughness in lesson plan evaluation. If you'd like, I can assist in combining this with previous lesson plan analyses to find patterns or changes in teaching focus.

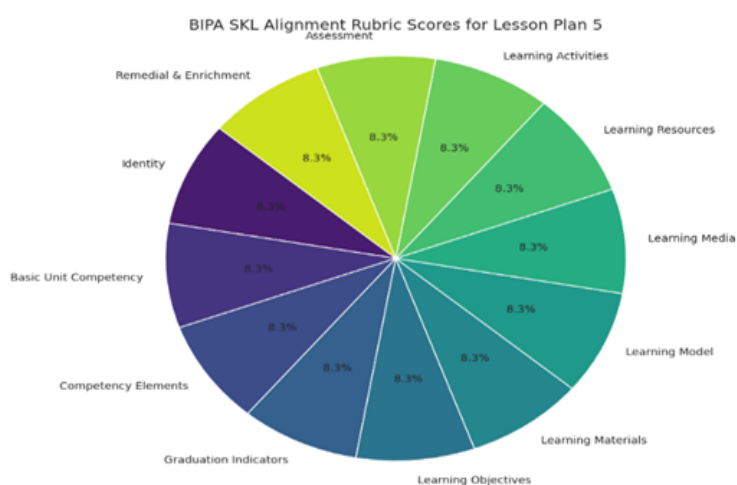


Figure 7. BIPA SKL Alignment Rubric Scores for Lesson Plan 5

Figure 7 shows a perfectly balanced distribution across twelve instructional components, with each category making up 8.3% of the total rubric. The categories include Assessment, Learning Activities, Learning Resources, Learning Media, Learning Model, Learning Materials, Learning Objectives, Graduation Indicators, Competency Elements, Basic Unit Competency, Identity, and Remedial & Enrichment.

This equal weighting indicates a comprehensive and standardized approach to lesson plan evaluation, where no single component is given precedence over others. Such uniformity may demonstrate an effort to ensure holistic instructional design, highlighting that each element, from foundational skills to enrichment strategies, plays an equally important role in aligning with BIPA's Graduate Competency Standards (SKL).

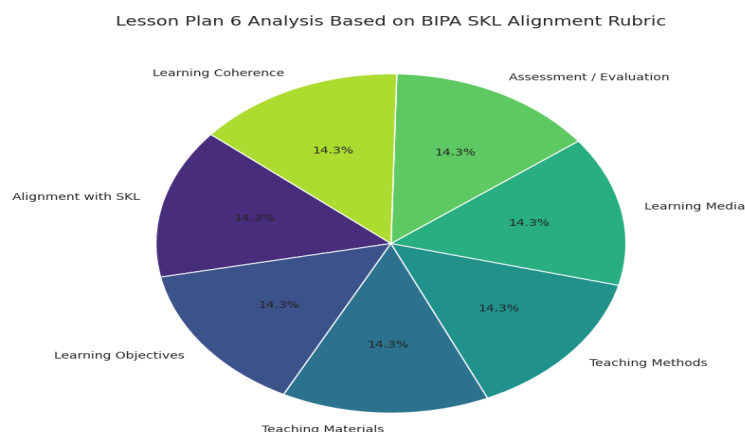


Figure 8. Analysis of Lesson Plan 6 showing a balanced distribution of evaluation.

The alignment rubric assigns an equal proportion of 14.3% to each aspect, including Learning Coherence, Assessment/Evaluation, Learning Media, Teaching Methods, Teaching Materials, Learning Objectives, *and* Alignment with SKL.

This equal distribution indicates that the lesson plan was created with roughly equal focus on all key parts of the learning process. No part appears notably stronger or weaker, which might be a conscious effort to balance planning, execution, and assessment.

However, such uniformity also prompts further reflection. Does this equality truly represent balanced quality across all areas, or might it suggest a lack of differentiation in the evaluation? To answer this, actual scoring data and teacher reflections for each aspect are necessary. This is crucial to ensure the analysis goes beyond simple description and captures the subtle strengths and areas for improvement within the lesson plan.

Overall, Lesson Plan 6 shows a strong foundation in structure and alignment with BIPA SKL. The next step is to explore the quality of each aspect in more detail through qualitative and quantitative assessments, and to engage in conversations with teachers about their lived experiences in the classroom.

Qualitative Analysis Approach

To evaluate the quality of instructional design, especially within the BIPA curriculum and similar programs, a qualitative analysis using thematic coding was carried out. This process aimed to identify and categorize key elements in instructional documents, such as competencies (SKL), learning objectives, media, and evaluation, while distinguishing between statements that are explicit and measurable and those that remain general or minimal.

The analysis aims to assess how effectively these elements align with sound instructional design principles, support contextual and participatory approaches, and provide a data-driven basis for future lesson plan improvements.

Table 1. Summary of Lesson Plan Evaluation (RPP)

RPP	Score	Category	Key Features
1	17/28	Moderately Aligned	Objectives are not SMART, SKL is not explicitly stated
2	21/28	Aligned	Listening focus, good audio media, but rubric incomplete
3	28/30	Highly Aligned	Critical thinking and culture, media lacks variety
4	30/30	Highly Aligned	TBLT approach, complete components
5	36/36	Highly Aligned	Local cultural context, highly interactive
6	21/28	Aligned	Listening focus, structured, but evaluation improvement needed.

Discussion

An analysis of six BIPA lesson plans (RPP) in Timor-Leste shows that these documents generally meet the formal components required by Indonesia's national curriculum, including Graduate Competency Standards (SKL), Basic Competencies (KD), and competency indicators (Rohmah, 2024; Sukma Eka Wijaya et al., 2024). These elements ensure alignment between instructional goals and student learning outcomes. However, the pedagogical strength of an RPP depends not just on its technical compliance but on how teachers interpret and implement it through reflective practices rooted in their own experiences and those of their students.

Teacher reflection is widely recognized as a vital part of professional development and instructional quality (Kolajo, 2025; Suphasri, 2021). In the Timor-Leste context, BIPA educators do more than just create lesson plans; they foster learning environments that connect language instruction with the social realities of their students. Instructional materials like market activities, family interactions, and local customs are chosen not arbitrarily but through careful observation of students' daily lives. These choices demonstrate a commitment to making language learning meaningful and relevant.

Thematic instruction, grounded in students' lived experiences, has become a particularly effective way to improve engagement and understanding. By combining multiple subjects around a common theme, this approach boosts motivation and helps students connect lessons to real life (Kushnir, 2025; Mulyasari et al., 2025). As one teacher observed, "If the material isn't close to their experience, students just memorize it's not real understanding," highlighting the importance of aligning content with students' realities. In a postcolonial context like Timor-Leste, such methods are not just educational but also political, making Bahasa Indonesia a meaningful communication tool rather than a symbolic imposition (Independent Education Consultant & Burns, 2017).

Assessment practices still face ongoing challenges. Although attitudinal and pragmatic indicators are officially included in the RPPs, teachers say that current tools often miss the subtlety of intercultural interactions. Rubrics created by AAC&U (2024) provide more detailed frameworks for assessing cultural awareness, communication styles, and social behaviors. However, teachers in Timor-Leste stress the need for more flexible, experience-based assessment methods. One teacher commented, "Assessing the attitudes of foreign students is complex. They're polite, but their expressions are different," illustrating the limits of standardized rubrics in diverse classroom settings.

Flexibility in teaching methods also emerged as a common theme in teacher reflections. While most RPPs adopt Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), educators often adjust their strategies based on classroom dynamics and student preferences. TBLT encourages authentic language use through meaningful tasks and has been

shown to develop communicative competence and learner autonomy (Chunliu et al., 2025; Tozcu, 2025). One teacher shared, “Sometimes I change the method mid-way, because students from Timor-Leste are more comfortable with group work than individual presentations,” illustrating the importance of pedagogical responsiveness to local learning cultures.

Additionally, teachers highlighted the essential role of clearly defined Graduate Competency Standards (SKL) in creating purposeful instruction. Without explicit SKL, teaching methods tend to become improvisational and inconsistent among educators. This concern is consistent with the Ministry of Education and Culture’s guidelines, which state that SKL should encompass measurable competencies in language, culture, and intercultural communication. Teachers in Timor-Leste see SKL not as a bureaucratic formality, but as a strategic tool for guiding meaningful and cohesive instruction.

Finally, the use of authentic, multisensory materials such as regional songs, tourism brochures, and real-life conversation videos has become a powerful strategy to boost learner engagement and deepen contextual understanding in BIPA instruction. Recent studies highlight that multimodal materials, which combine visual, auditory, and cultural elements, greatly enhance the learning experience and promote real-world language use (Zamzamy, 2021; Nurichsanía et al., 2024). In Timor-Leste, BIPA educators carefully select resources that are not only linguistically appropriate but also culturally meaningful, often drawing from local contexts to create immersive and impactful learning environments despite limited institutional support.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that local teacher reflections in BIPA instruction in Timor-Leste act as an authentic and transformative source of curriculum knowledge, where contextual, flexible, and experience-based methods have proven to boost pedagogical effectiveness while emphasizing the strategic role of language as a soft diplomacy tool. These findings have important implications for BIPA curriculum development in postcolonial and multilingual contexts, especially in fostering instructional designs that are culturally responsive, locally relevant, and sensitive to intercultural interactions. However, the study is limited to two educational institutions and six key informants, with inconsistent access to national curriculum documents, making the results less broadly applicable. Therefore, future research should broaden its geographical scope, include more stakeholders, and conduct longitudinal studies on the impact of BIPA learning, including the development of assessment tools that are adaptable and grounded in local experiences.

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