



The urgency of incorporating real-life conversation into IFL learning materials

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ABSTRACT

While authenticity plays a vital role in foreign language learning, a significant disparity exists between classroom-based learning and the practical use of language in real-world contexts. IFL resources often lack authenticity, failing to mirror the genuine language encounters that learners face beyond the classroom. Therefore, this research explores the motivations, needs, and prior learning experiences of IFL learners to emphasize the importance of integrating real-life conversations into IFL learning materials. This descriptive qualitative research gathered data via surveys and semi-structured interviews with ten foreigners. The findings underscored the varied motivations of participants in learning Indonesian, including personal and familial connections, communication requirements during travel, interests in language, and cultural identity. Participants engaged in instructor-led and self-directed learning as endeavors to boost their proficiency. Intriguingly, there was a discrepancy between their learning experiences and needs. Although the provided IFL materials had successfully fulfilled the learners' needs in formal settings, they fell short of adequately equipping them for real-world interactions in the intended social settings. Hence, it is suggested that authentic, real-life conversation be incorporated into the IFL materials to meet the diverse practical communication needs of IFL learners.

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ABSTRAK

Keautentikan memainkan peranan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing, namun pada kenyataannya terdapat kesenjangan yang signifikan antara pembelajaran di kelas dan penggunaan bahasa dalam konteks kehidupan nyata. Sumber belajar Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) kerap kali kurang mencerminkan penggunaan bahasa Indonesia sesungguhnya yang dihadapi pemelajar di luar kelas. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi motivasi, kebutuhan, dan pengalaman belajar pemelajar untuk menekankan pentingnya pengintegrasian percakapan real-life dalam materi pembelajaran BIPA. Peneliti mengumpulkan data melalui survei dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Hasil penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini menyoroti beragam motivasi pemelajar dalam mempelajari bahasa Indonesia, yakni hubungan pribadi dan keluarga, kebutuhan komunikasi saat bepergian, minat terhadap bahasa, serta identitas budaya. Para pemelajar belajar bahasa Indonesia secara formal dengan instruktur dan secara mandiri sebagai usaha untuk meningkatkan kecakapan berbahasa Indonesia mereka. Meskipun begitu, masih ditemukan kesenjangan antara pengalaman belajar dan kebutuhan belajar para pemelajar BIPA. Walaupun materi BIPA yang tersedia sudah mengakomodasi kebutuhan berbahasa pemelajar di konteks formal, materi tersebut belum memadai dalam mempersiapkan pemelajar untuk interaksi autentik dalam konteks sosial yang dibutuhkan. Berdasarkan temuan dalam penelitian ini, disarankan untuk mengintegrasikan percakapan real-life ke dalam materi pembelajaran BIPA guna memenuhi kebutuhan komunikasi praktis pemelajar BIPA yang beragam.

Kata Kunci: Materi autentik; materi BIPA; percakapan kehidupan nyata

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian as a Foreign Language (IFL) has gained significant attention due to the growing interest in the Indonesian language and culture among international learners. This surge in interest has led to an increase in institutions offering the Indonesian language program for non-native speakers, the so-called *Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* (BIPA) program. The program has been facilitated both domestically and internationally. The organizers include institutions of formal education (schools and universities) and non-formal educational institutions (the Indonesian Embassy—*KBRI*, the Indonesian Consulate General—*KJRI*, and language course institutions).

Foreign learners engage in the BIPA program with diverse objectives, such as deepening their understanding of the Indonesian language and culture, traveling to Indonesia, conducting research, pursuing employment and academic opportunities, and seeking long-term residence in Indonesia (Suyitno et al., 2019; Suyitno, 2015). Furthermore, Indonesia's global significance motivates learners to enhance their Indonesian proficiency for purposes such as diplomatic relations, trade opportunities, cultural immersion, and academic endeavors (Arianto et al., 2021). These varied motivations underscore the importance of a well-rounded approach to language education that extends beyond traditional classroom instruction to encompass practical language usage and cultural understanding; thus, it is not only to prepare learners for academic or professional pursuits but also equip them with the linguistic tools necessary to navigate daily life, integrate into Indonesian society effectively, and foster meaningful cross-cultural interactions. Authenticity in language learning underlines the importance of aligning the language and social context in classroom input with real-life situations, aiding learners in practical language acquisition (Macdonald et al., 2000). IFL students' perceptions, finding that activities like listening, interviews, and teachers' use of authentic materials and social media positively impacted students' willingness to communicate (WTC) (Aguskin & Maryani, 2018). Integrating authentic materials into teaching activities can help bridge the gap between classroom and real-world contexts, enhance learners' communicative competence, and prepare them for real-world interactions (Fitria, 2023; Obiliateanu, 2015).

Within a foreign language context, Textbook conversations focused on teaching linguistic structures often fall short of capturing the authenticity of interactions native speakers engage in for different communicative purposes (Rings, 1986). Savova, in a book titled "*Conversation Analysis Criteria for Evaluating the Authenticity of ESL Textbook Conversations*" criticizes conventional textbook dialogues and conversation classes for their lack of authenticity and backs up that claim. This lack of authenticity is frequently associated with ineffective communication skills at all language proficiency levels. This is exemplified in the IFL context by the research, which sheds light on the practical challenges Jongdae, a South Korean student learning the Indonesian language, faces in his interactions with native speakers. Jongdae's experiences shared on his YouTube channel emphasize the difference between formal classroom language instruction and colloquial Indonesian used in daily interactions. He mentions using the formal pronoun *Anda* as taught in academic settings, which caused laughter among locals, illustrating the difference between textbook language and real-world usage (Maulana et al., 2022).

Several studies have been conducted regarding developing IFL learning materials for specific purposes. There is a need to develop IFL teaching materials that are enriched with the cultural context of the Indonesian spice route (Syah et al., 2023). The necessity of IFL teaching materials that cater to the academic requirements of Thai students addresses the gap in current materials that neglect aspects of academic writing (Herlina et al., 2020). Meanwhile, previous research identified a demand for engaging authentic audiovisual materials for intermediate and advanced IFL students, developing well-received prototypes deemed suitable for enhancing all four language skills (Pudjiati et al., 2020). A study explored the use of films as authentic materials, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of using films to

develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Sa'diyah, 2017). Nevertheless, no previous studies have specifically discussed IFL learners' needs for real-life conversation.

Addressing this void, the current study investigates the significance of integrating real-life conversations into IFL learning materials by scrutinizing IFL learners' motivations, needs, and prior learning experiences. The findings are expected to significantly contribute to the improvement and alignment of IFL learning materials, catering to the specific requirements of foreign learners aiming to achieve proficiency in the Indonesian language and enhancing their overall language learning experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Real-life Conversation in a Foreign Language Context

The term "real-life conversation" has been utilized in several studies to describe authentic, spontaneous verbal interactions that occur naturally in a real-life context. The interactions are characterized by their flexible and dynamic nature, with linguistic features such as echoing, repetition, and intonation being used pragmatically to suit the context and purpose of the dialogue (Hyunh, 2012; Zhang, 1998). Rigid linguistic structures do not bind the dialogues during the interactions. However, they are adjusted to meet the interlocutors' immediate communicative and social needs in a real-world context. Additionally, another research explained that in authentic conversations, language is dynamic and context-dependent, often filled with interruptions, fillers, and many utterances like the use of casual affirmations as well as informal expressions that are rarely captured in traditional language textbooks (Brinkley, 2015).

A real-life conversation is a form of authentic material, and incorporating authentic materials in language education has been advocated for its substantial benefits. Authentic materials can provide meaningful exposure to language as they are used, motivate learners, help them develop a range of communicative competencies, and enhance positive attitudes toward learning a language (Belaid & Murray, 2015). Structural and artificial language use does not mirror real-world language usage (Sadam, 2022). Therefore, authentic materials, by reflecting the language's actual usage in native contexts, assist learners in developing a more accurate and functional command of the language, making the learning experience more relevant and engaging. This real-world exposure is invaluable in preparing learners for actual communication scenarios to ensure the learning process is more relevant and practical.

Indonesian as a Foreign Language (IFL) Learning Materials

Indonesian as a Foreign Language (IFL) learning materials are educational resources designed for non-native speakers to acquire proficiency in Indonesian. They are essential tools for instructing IFL learners and directly assisting them in achieving the predetermined learning objectives (Suyitno, 2007). IFL materials encompass various educational resources, such as textbooks, workbooks, audiovisual aids, and interactive digital platforms. These resources assist educators in preparing and organizing learning activities that promote effective and efficient language acquisition.

Unlike general Indonesian language materials, IFL materials are meticulously crafted to cater to the diverse backgrounds of foreign learners. Tailoring IFL materials is crucial as it enriches the learning experience, rendering it more relevant and meaningful for the learners. The diversity in competencies, cultural backgrounds, goals, and needs of learners significantly influences the selection and design of IFL material (Suyitno et al., 2019). Hence, personalized IFL materials are needed to foster inclusivity in the learning environment and ensure learners from diverse backgrounds can effectively engage with the language. Likewise, by addressing learners' specific needs and contexts, customized materials not only overcome potential language barriers but also deepen understanding and retention of the Indonesian

language to optimize learners' language acquisition and cultural understanding, leading to more meaningful learning experiences.

METHODS

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative research approach to describe and capture the phenomena under investigation systematically (Atmowardoyo, 2018). The objective of this study is to scrutinize the urgency of incorporating real-life conversation into Indonesian as a Foreign Language (IFL) learning materials based on the perspectives of foreign learners. Through qualitative inquiry, the study seeks to gather rich, detailed insights that reveal how foreign learners perceive and value real-life conversational content in their language learning process.

There are 10 participants in this study, all foreign learners who engage in self-directed and/or instructor-led learning. Participants have a range of proficiency levels, from *BIPA 2* (beginner) to *BIPA 5* (intermediate), indicating different stages of language acquisition. The diversity among participants is essential for gaining a thorough understanding of learners' perceptions at various stages of language learning and ensuring the relevance of the findings to a wide range of learners. This approach aligns with Creswell and Poth's recommendation in their book, "*Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*" which said that purposive sampling for qualitative studies is better to focus on specific traits or experiences among participants. To ensure confidentiality, each participant is assigned a unique code. Additional information about the participants, including their proficiency levels and corresponding codes, is provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1. IFL Learners' Proficiency Levels and Codes

Participant	Indonesian Proficiency Level	Code
1	<i>BIPA 2</i>	P2KN
2	<i>BIPA 2</i>	P2FA
3	<i>BIPA 2</i>	P2ME
4	<i>BIPA 2</i>	P2OD
5	<i>BIPA 2</i>	P2MA
6	<i>BIPA 2</i>	P2ST
7	<i>BIPA 3</i>	P3MA
8	<i>BIPA 4</i>	P4CO
9	<i>BIPA 4</i>	P4GE
10	<i>BIPA 5</i>	P5MA

Source: Researchers' survey 2024

Data collection involves a survey and a semi-structured interview. The online survey via Google Forms is designed to capture a broad overview of participants' views on the importance of real-life conversation in language learning survey, as stated by Hooley et al. in a book titled "*What is Online Research?: Using the Internet for Social Science Research*". The survey includes closed and open-ended questions to capture a range of responses. Following the initial survey, semi-structured interviews are conducted via Zoom to explore individual experiences and perspectives in more depth (Janghorban et al., 2014). These interviews are designed to be flexible, allowing new questions to arise based on the interviewee's responses, thereby facilitating a more nuanced exploration of their views on incorporating real-life conversational scenarios into IFL learning materials. A set of predetermined questions and follow-up prompts direct the semi-structured interviews to uncover the participants' perspectives on motivations and the gap between their

learning needs and prior language learning experiences to explore the urgency of incorporating real-life conversation in IFL materials.

The gathered data is then analyzed using a thematic analysis framework, starting with transcribing interview recordings and organizing survey responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After transcription, the data was subjected to iterative coding to identify and categorize the patterns, themes, and categories in the participants' responses. The findings are expected to significantly contribute to designing more engaging, relevant, and effective IFL learning materials, thereby enhancing the learning experience and outcomes for foreign learners of Indonesian through tailored content and interactive learning approaches.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study yields compelling insights into learners' motivations and the discrepancy between their learning needs and prior language learning experiences. A notable finding is the significant emphasis on integrating real-life conversation scenarios into IFL learning materials. This highlights the practical communication skills learners desire, suggesting a crucial gap between classroom learning and real-world language use. Addressing this disparity is pivotal for enhancing the effectiveness of IFL instructional materials. The ensuing discussion will delve into the implications of these findings, particularly about the development of more contextually relevant and engaging learning resources.

Motivation for Learning the Indonesian Language

Participants in this study had varied motivations and orientations for learning the Indonesian language, including personal and familial connections, travel communication needs, and interests in language and cultural identity as Indonesian. Detailed information is presented in **Table 2** below.

Table 2. IFL Learners' Motivations in Learning Indonesian

Participant	Personal and Familial Connection	Traveling to Indonesia	Interest in Languages	Indonesian Nationality
P2KN	√	√		
P2FA	√	√		√
P2ME	√	√		
P2OD	√	√		
P2MA	√	√		
P2ST	√			
P3MA	√	√		
P4CO	√	√		
P4GE	√	√		
P5MA		√	√	

Source: Researchers' survey 2024

As shown in **Table 2**, most participants cited personal and familial connections as the primary motivators for learning Indonesian. Among the ten participants, nine expressed strong personal motivations tied to their relationships with Indonesian friends, boy/girlfriend, fiancée, wife/husband, son/daughter, partners' friends, and/or extended family members. Data are displayed in **Table 3**.

Table 3. IFL Learners' Personal and Familial Connections

Participant	Friends	Partners		Son/ daughter	Partners' friends	Indonesian Family	Extended family
		Fiancée/ boy/girlfriend	Wife/ Husband				
P2KN			√	√	√		√
P2FA	√					√	
P2ME			√				√
P2OD			√	√	√		√
P2MA			√	√	√		√
P2ST		√					√
P3MA	√	√			√		
P4CO	√		√		√		√
P4GE			√	√	√		√
P5MA							

Source: Researchers' survey 2024

From the interview, it was found that participants' orientation in learning Indonesian was to be able to converse effectively with Indonesian people daily. **P2ME**, for example, stated,

"It is mostly to communicate with my wife and my Indonesian family. I will use it most only to talk casually to my family and in-law."

P2OD also echoed the same motivation and orientation. Similarly, **P2FA**, an Indonesian citizen, **P2ST**, engaged to an Indonesian, and **P4CO**, **P2KN**, **P2MA**, and **P4GE**, married to an Indonesian, also aimed to improve their conversational skills for family interactions. Meanwhile, **P4CO** added,

"I like to communicate with Indonesian friends. People like to speak English to me in Indonesia, but I like to speak Indonesian to feel more Indonesian."

The statement was agreed upon by **P2FA** and **P3MA**, who concurred with it, as well as P2KN, P2OD, P2MA, P3MA, P4CO, and P4GE, who got to know their partners' friends, expanding their motivations to encompass communication with Indonesian friends and extended social circles. **P3MA**, for instance, explained her desire to communicate fluently with her Indonesian friends at the same workplace by saying,

"Small talk with friends. It is kind of catching up if you have not talked in a while. However, maybe what is going on, like, oh, I heard this person say that blah blah blah. You know how that goes. The gossip."

Meanwhile, **P4GE** mentioned,

"I want to speak better... and also follow conversations with my wife's Indonesian friends."

These examples illustrate that personal and familial relationships are a significant driving force behind the participants' language learning endeavors to speak Indonesian in daily communication for interaction purposes.

Besides personal and familial connections, the practical use of the Indonesian language for travel purposes was emphasized by most participants. Nine out of ten participants highlighted the need to learn practical conversational skills during their visits to Indonesia. **P3MA** mentioned,

"All I am working towards is someday traveling to Indonesia and having a nice holiday."

The statement was agreed upon by **P2ST**, who hoped to be able to visit Indonesia with his fiancée in the future. Highlighting the orientation aspect, **P4GE** explained,

"I am a stranger in Indonesia, but people tend to talk. Moreover, my problem so far has been that I can hardly answer them."

He pinpointed the need to use Indonesian to respond to the locals who approached out of curiosity and hospitality. **P5MA** added,

"If I travel to Indonesia and meet some people there, small talk with strangers is important in Indonesia. Not only for language purposes but also for learning the culture."

These statements emphasize the importance of daily conversations with Indonesian locals, mainly engaging in small talk. On the other hand, **P2OD**, who visited Indonesia almost every year, pointed out the challenge of understanding and responding to fast-paced, slang-filled conversations, stating,

"I can order at a restaurant, but if they return questions, they usually talk fast using 'slang' vocabulary, and I cannot answer."

This demonstrates the essential nature of practical conversation skills for *BIPA* learners to navigate real-life travel scenarios. Moreover, **P2ME** shared,

"I was with our tour guide in a big park. After walking alone, I can see that they have already left me, and I do not know how to get back to our meeting point."

P5MA added, "It would be nice to learn about some emergencies. If you need help, how do you explain it, and what do you do?" These responses indicate a demand for materials that equip learners to handle travel-related interactions and emergencies.

While personal connections and practical use for travel are predominant, participants like **P2FA** and **P5MA** were motivated to learn Indonesian due to an intrinsic interest in language and cultural identity as Indonesian. **P5MA** described,

"This is not the first language course I am attending. I am just interested in languages and cultures."

His intrinsic motivation is more academically oriented, showcasing an interest in linguistic diversity and cultural exploration. Meanwhile, **P2FA**, an Indonesian who grew up speaking English, is motivated to reconnect with his cultural roots. He explained,

"I am Indonesian, but when I was born, I spoke English, even though nobody in my family spoke English. I just wanted to learn Indonesian because it would be weird if I did not know Indonesian."

Despite being Indonesian by heritage, he primarily spoke English, which led to a sense of disconnect from his cultural identity. Learning Indonesian was a way for him to bridge this gap and integrate more fully with his cultural heritage.

In summary, the current study discovered that participants' motivations align with specific orientations, including enhancing communication with Indonesian friends, partners, and family members and effectively handling real-life situations during travel. Additionally, participants with an intrinsic interest in the language were oriented toward exploring Indonesian culture and language in depth. In contrast, those with Indonesian heritage were motivated to reconnect with their cultural roots. The results align with and extend previous studies in the field of IFL. Previous research conducted a survey using the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) at the Hana Language Center in Jakarta, involving seven *BIPA* learners from South Korea. Their research, grounded in Gardner's integrative and instrumental orientation theory, found that learners' integrative motivations were driven by the desire to communicate and integrate with Indonesian friends and society, alongside instrumental motivations linked to job assignments in Indonesia to enhance

workplace communication. The finding is in connection with the current study's result on personal connections with Indonesian people as a driving force for language learning (Defina & Sundari, 2016). The other research examined the motivations of twelve Thai learners in the *BIPA* program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU). This study emphasized how social encouragement from the *BIPA* teachers and the surrounding environment, as well as the effectiveness of *BIPA* teachers in organizing engaging teaching materials and providing detailed feedback to identify areas for improvement, was pivotal in maintaining learners interest and willingness to participate in language learning actively, highlighting the significance of external support in the learning process (Srikandi, 2022).

Comparing these studies, it is evident that motivation in learning Indonesian is multifaceted, incorporating intrinsic and extrinsic factors across different learner populations and settings. The present study extends the findings by emphasizing the value of practical travel needs and an inherent interest in language and cultural identity, which were not as prominently featured in the previous studies. This broader scope provides a more comprehensive understanding of the motivational landscape, underscoring the interplay between personal, social, and practical factors. These extended findings highlight the complexity of learning motivations and the need for tailored materials, considering the varied reasons learners are drawn to Indonesian. The diverse orientations lead to significant variations in learning needs. For those focused on personal and familial connections, the learning experience should prioritize conversational practice and culturally relevant content to facilitate meaningful interactions. Meanwhile, travelers require practical language skills to navigate transportation, order food, and manage emergencies, underscoring the necessity for practical and situational instruction. A learner interested in language and cultural exploration would benefit from Indonesian literature and media exposure, fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural context. A participant aiming to reconnect with his cultural roots may need support in grasping cultural nuances and historical contexts, enriching the connection with his heritage.

Motivation is a fundamental prerequisite for student engagement in learning, significantly contributing to academic achievement (Nguyen, 2019). The result of the study indicated a strong correlation between motivation and target language proficiency, suggesting that motivated students benefit from high-quality instruction, effective input, and enhanced communication in the target language, which collectively facilitate their linguistic development. The relationship between self-determined motivation and language learning emphasizes the roles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in enhancing student engagement and performance (Leo et al., 2022). The study advocated for applying self-determination theory in language education to address fundamental psychological needs and enhance intrinsic motivation, thereby improving learning outcomes. Motivation encompasses the desire to engage in learning activities, the persistence to continue trying despite failures, and the internal drive that sustains enthusiasm and directs learning efforts. Learners may struggle to stay focused and dedicated to their studies without motivation. When learners are motivated, they are more likely to set goals, work towards them, and overcome obstacles that may arise. Ultimately, learner motivation plays a crucial role in shaping the overall success and satisfaction of the learning experience.

The gap between Prior Language Learning Experiences and Learning Needs

The participants in this study, ten learners of Indonesian as a Foreign Language (IFL), all had varying backgrounds and experiences in their language acquisition journeys (see **Table 4**). Each had undergone formal language courses through *BIPA* classes in the Indonesian Embassy, which served as their primary structured educational experience. These classes offered a systematic approach to language learning, focusing on acquiring formal Indonesian. The *BIPA* curriculum covers all critical language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, it includes detailed instruction in grammar and vocabulary, ensuring that learners build a strong linguistic foundation. Cultural education is also a significant component of *BIPA* classes, enabling learners to understand and appreciate the social and cultural

contexts in which the language is used. This holistic approach facilitates linguistic proficiency and enables learners to effectively communicate and interact in a culturally appropriate manner in a formal setting. In addition to attending formal classes, most participants engaged in autonomous learning to complement their Indonesian language proficiency (see **Table 4**).

Table 4. BIPA Learners' Prior Language Learning Experiences

Participant	Instructor-led learning	Self-directed learning
	BIPA Class	Language App
P2KN	√	√
P2FA	√	
P2ME	√	√
P2OD	√	
P2MA	√	√
P2ST	√	√
P3MA	√	√
P4CO	√	
P4GE	√	√
P5MA	√	√
TOTAL	10	7

Source: Researcher's survey 2024

Seven out of ten learners utilized a popular language learning app known for its accessibility and gamified learning experience, Duolingo. Participants highlighted the mixed efficacy of the app as a language-learning tool. On the positive side, the language learning app's daily repetition and gamified structure were praised for maintaining engagement and promoting consistent practice. **P4GE** mentioned,

"I try to take my daily turn with Duolingo before the BIPA program starts again. It repeats words. What I see is that I have generally increased my score."

He noted the app's ability to facilitate consistent vocabulary learning through repetitive exercises. This implies that the app's structured approach to vocabulary acquisition can effectively support learners in building a foundational lexicon. **P5MA** echoed this sentiment, emphasizing Duolingo's supplementary value when paired with formal language courses, which is beneficial during semester breaks to prevent language attrition. Similarly, **P2MA** appreciated the app's feature of daily repetition, which reinforced language retention and helped maintain a regular study habit.

Despite the benefits mentioned above, the limitations of the language app were more pronounced. The seven participants criticized the app for lacking contextual learning and cultural nuances. **P2KN** highlighted this issue by explaining,

"I found that the language materials can be 'impolite' when speaking to older people. For example, the use of 'kamu'. The app did not give the context to use the word."

That shows the inadequacy of the app content, which led to potentially disrespectful interactions. This indicates a critical gap in the app's curriculum, as it neglects to teach appropriate speech levels and cultural

sensitivity, essential for respectful and effective communication in Indonesian. Additionally, **P2ME** remarked on the app's inadequacy in developing conversational skills. He said,

"Duolingo is a good source for learning vocabulary, but it will not help you so much with constructing conversations."

The app's focus on isolated vocabulary and sentences without proper context fails to equip learners for real-life interactions. **P2ST** and **P3MA** provided further criticisms regarding the relevance and practicality of the app's content. **P2ST** stated,

"Duolingo just teaches you phrases and sentences you will not always use. They do not always properly explain why it is in a certain way and not another way."

This reflects a lack of comprehensive explanations and contextual understanding of the app's lessons. **P3MA** added, "The sentences are quite unrealistic sometimes. They ask me to reorder the jumbled sentences. One of them said, 'Why do I exist?' I am like, when am I going to say that?" She is concerned about the app's content's unrealistic and sometimes impractical nature. This critique highlights the need for more relevant and practical sentence construction exercises that reflect real-life conversational scenarios.

It is crucial to explore the gap between the participants' previous language learning experience and their actual language needs to grasp their learning experiences' effectiveness fully. The findings in this study disclosed that all participants had undergone formal language courses through *BIPA* classes at the Indonesian Embassy. The primary teaching materials used were textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the *Sahabatku Indonesia BIPA* series (BIPA 1 to BIPA 7), as per previous research conducted at the Indonesian Embassy in Ankara. Despite their systematic and formal instructional design, these materials often fall short of meeting the diverse needs of learners (Anggaira, 2023). According to the previous qualitative research, an evaluation of *Sahabatku Indonesia BIPA 3* (for adult learners) and *Sahabatku Indonesia untuk Pelajar BIPA 3* (for young and teenage learners) employing Andrew Littlejohn's textbook analysis framework indicated that while both textbooks provided a comprehensive linguistic and cultural context, there were discrepancies in their practical application (Salsabilla et al., 2022). The *BIPA*'s book for adult learners had a higher percentage of written forms, whereas the *BIPA*'s book for young and teenage learners emphasized oral communication more. This discrepancy indicates a potential misalignment with the practical needs of most adult learners in this study, who prioritize conversational proficiency and practical language use over academic or formal written skills. While the *BIPA* textbooks offer a solid foundation for formal language acquisition, there is a clear need for materials that address foreign learners' practical and conversational needs to prepare them for real-life interactions and colloquial speech, as shown by current and previous studies.

Besides attending formal classes, seven participants in this study engaged in autonomous learning through Duolingo to supplement their Indonesian language knowledge. Participants praised the language app's gamified structure and daily repetition, effectively promoting engagement and consistent language practice, particularly vocabulary acquisition, even during breaks from formal courses. This resonates with previous research findings underscoring that Duolingo's structured practice significantly boosted students' vocabulary proficiency, as evidenced by pre- and post-test score improvements (Ajisoko, 2020; Fakhurriana et al., 2024; Himmah, 2024). Furthermore, Duolingo's role as a convenient, free application with motivational digital game-based learning (DGBL) features that maintain learner engagement (Loewen et al., 2019). This aligns with our study's finding that the app's gamified structure effectively promotes consistent practice. Similarly, Duolingo's merits, particularly for beginners, note its engaging gamification features and utility in reviewing and reinforcing lessons (Anugerahwati, 2023). He further stated that Duolingo is an excellent tool for vocabulary acquisition and simple sentence structure practice for beginners while providing a means for more advanced learners to maintain language skills. This echoes

our participants' feedback on the app's role in maintaining language connection for higher-level learners during breaks from formal courses. Likewise, another research provided insights, highlighting positive learner experiences with Duolingo in building English learning habits through a structured challenge (Pham & Pham, 2022).

In examining the findings on IFL learners' use of a language learning app, it becomes evident that while participants appreciated aspects such as daily practice and gamified engagement, they criticized the app for its shortcomings. This critique underscores the need for language apps to offer more practical and culturally nuanced exercises that present real-life conversational scenarios, aligning with previous research on Duolingo's limitations. Cunningham (2015) discussed Duolingo's motivational digital game-based learning features but remarked on its strict linear curriculum and lack of authentic language use, which might limit its effectiveness as a comprehensive language learning tool (Loewen et al., 2019). Besides, Loewen conducted a mixed-methods study on Duolingo's effectiveness in learning Turkish, revealing mixed outcomes where participants struggled with speaking and listening skills, which require real-time language processing (Loewen et al., 2019). The study further underlined Duolingo's pedagogical shortcomings, suggesting a need for more meaningful and task-based activities beyond the sentence level. Meanwhile, Bogdan (2016) shared personal experiences with Duolingo in learning Spanish, noting that despite reaching a significant fluency level, the app alone did not adequately prepare him for fluent conversation with native speakers (Anugerahwati, 2023). That aligns with our participants' feedback on the app's limitations in facilitating real-life conversational skills. This suggests a more comprehensive approach to language learning, which includes opportunities for authentic communication and interaction.

CONCLUSION

Understanding participants' learning motivations and aims highlights the necessity for a tailored and multifaceted approach to Indonesian language education. By aligning instructional strategies with the diverse learning goals of learners, educators can create a more engaging learning experience that resonates with their unique aspirations to ensure that their language learning journey is both relevant and fulfilling. The findings of this study underscored the necessity of incorporating real-life conversation into IFL materials that address learners' varied motivations and practical needs. Participants were motivated to learn Indonesian for several reasons, including 1) connecting and building good relations with friends, partners, and family members; 2) interacting with locals and handling emergencies during travel; and 3) engaging with the Indonesian language and culture for exploration as well as cultural identity. The formal *BIPA* courses successfully fulfilled participants' needs to learn the Indonesian language for academic endeavors. Nonetheless, most participants who desired practical communication skills found that their previous learning experiences lacked opportunities for real-life conversational materials and practices in the intended settings. The evidence indicates a notable disparity between the participants' learning needs and the learning approaches they previously employed, instructor-led and self-directed learning. Classroom and app-based learning materials do not adequately prepare learners for practical, real-world communication. In response to the issue, integrating real-life conversational elements into the IFL materials is pivotal for meeting these diverse needs to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, providing learners with the necessary skills to meet their learning objectives. To achieve that, IFL materials should incorporate authentic materials that emphasize real-life conversations that mimic real-world scenarios in the intended settings. These practical applications enhance linguistic competence and build learners' confidence in using Indonesian in various predetermined social contexts. Learners can better prepare themselves for effective communication in the target language by integrating conversational practice and real-life language use into instructional materials.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author confirms that the data and content of the article are free from plagiarism.

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