

Research Article

Innovating Indonesian Language Learning for International Students through a Culturally Responsive Teaching Approach

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Abstract.

International students learning Indonesian often face challenges related to differences in culture, language and educational background. Therefore, culturally responsive teaching approaches are needed to create an inclusive and effective learning experience. This research aims to develop innovations in Indonesian language learning for international students through a culturally responsive teaching approach. This approach allows for the customisation of teaching methods, materials and interactions to suit the cultural diversity of international students. Through qualitative methods, this study analyses the specific needs of international students in learning Indonesian, as well as evaluates the effectiveness of various culturally responsive teaching strategies implemented. The results show that culturally responsive teaching can increase international students' motivation, understanding, and participation in the learning process. In addition, culturally responsive teaching is proven to be helpful in overcoming language and social barriers often faced by international students. Thus, this paper provides recommendations for teachers to integrate cultural elements in Indonesian language learning, in order to achieve optimal learning outcomes for international students.

Keywords: Indonesian language learning, culturally responsive teaching, learning innovation, inclusive education

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalisation, higher education around the world faces demands to increase accessibility and attractiveness to international students from different cultural backgrounds and countries. Globalisation has created opportunities for greater cross-border knowledge exchange, enriching the educational environment with the presence of international students [1]. Indonesia, as a country with a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and traditions, is an attractive destination for international students interested in learning about the local culture, language, and education system. Indonesia's unique culture offers international students the opportunity to gain an in-depth experience of the social life, values, and norms of Indonesian society. The country has more than 700 regional

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languages, and different customs in each region, all of which contribute to Indonesia's attractiveness as a study centre for students who want to understand aspects of such diversity in both academic and social contexts.

Moreover, Indonesian government policies also encourage the internationalisation of higher education as part of efforts to strengthen Indonesia's position in the global education community. This support is evident from various initiatives such as scholarship programmes offered to foreign students, cooperation between Indonesian universities and foreign institutions, and improving the quality of education in higher education in order to meet global standards. Through these policies, the government hopes to increase the number of foreign students studying in Indonesia each year. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the trend of foreign students in Indonesia has shown a significant increase in recent years, reflecting the success of Indonesia's higher education internationalisation efforts [2]. In addition to strengthening Indonesia's reputation in the international education scene, the presence of foreign students also has a positive impact on domestic universities. Foreign students bring diverse perspectives and experiences, which contribute to a more inclusive and diverse academic environment. Their presence on Indonesian campuses encourages rich cross-cultural interactions, increases cross-cultural understanding among local students, and prepares them to participate in a globalised society.

However, admitting international students also brings its own challenges, both for universities and for the students themselves. The main challenge faced by international students is the process of adapting to a new academic environment and culture, which is often significantly different from their home culture. International students need to adjust to language differences, social norms, and a different education system [3]. This is important as proper adaptation to the new environment plays a major role in their academic success and emotional well-being. This adaptation process is not only academic, but also includes social and emotional aspects, which can affect the overall learning experience [4].

For universities, this challenge demands a structured effort in providing appropriate academic and non-academic support for international students. Indonesian language education as a second language is one of the important components in this effort, especially for international students who come from countries with different language backgrounds. Indonesian language learning is not just linguistic learning, but also includes an understanding of local culture, as language is a reflection of the values and cultural norms of the speaking community. Therefore, culturally responsive teaching

approaches are important to ensure that international students not only understand the language technically, but also understand the cultural context in which the language is used.

Along with the development of the concept of culturally responsive teaching, this approach is expected to be a solution in learning Indonesian for international students. Culture-based learning provides space for lecturers to understand students' cultural backgrounds and integrate aspects of local culture into teaching materials. Gay [5], argues that this approach can create a more inclusive learning environment, where students feel valued and supported in their cultural and academic adaptation process. This innovation in teaching can also enrich the experiences of local students and create a more diverse, inclusive and harmonious campus.

Ultimately, the internationalisation of higher education is not only about accepting students from abroad, but also about creating a learning environment that supports and values diversity. Through policies that focus on providing inclusive academic and non-academic services, Indonesian universities can become places that not only educate foreign students academically but also provide them with meaningful cultural experiences, thus enriching the learning experience of the entire campus community [6]. One of the universities in Indonesia that has accepted foreign students is Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya (UNUSA), which opens opportunities for students from various countries to study in Indonesia, especially for students from Timor Leste. Currently, there are six students from Timor Leste studying at UNUSA. The presence of foreign students at UNUSA not only enriches the diversity of the campus, but also presents challenges in terms of providing effective Indonesian language learning programmes that are responsive to the cultural background of these foreign students.

For international students, studying in a country with a different culture like Indonesia is a complex and challenging experience. One of the biggest challenges they face is adaptation to a new academic environment and culture. This adaptation is not only limited to academic aspects, but also involves social and emotional aspects. Research shows that international students often experience difficulties in adapting due to significant cultural differences, especially in terms of language and social norms [7]. A slow adaptation process can have a negative impact on international students' learning motivation and academic performance. Language is the main medium in the adaptation process, because language is not only a means of communication, but also a carrier of cultural values. Indonesian language learning for international students needs to be tailored to their specific needs, namely an understanding of the local cultural context. As

explained by Byram & Feng [8], effective language learning should involve cross- cultural understanding, as language reflects the norms, values and beliefs held by the speaking community. Therefore, the approach to learning Bahasa Indonesia for international students at UNUSA needs to integrate cultural aspects to assist international students in understanding the academic and social environment in Indonesia.

The culturally responsive teaching approach offers an innovative solution to Indone- sian language learning for international students. It emphasises the importance of understanding and appreciating students’ cultural backgrounds, as well as integrating cultural elements into the learning process. According to Gay [5], culture-based learning allows students to feel valued and understood in an inclusive learning environment, so that they can actively participate in the learning process. With this approach, interna- tional students can gain a more contextualised and meaningful learning experience, which will ultimately help them in adapting to a new culture. In implementing culturally responsive education, there are some basic principles that need to be considered. According to Vavrus [7], there are at least five main guidelines in the application of culturally responsive education, namely:

TABLE 1:

No.	Key Guidelines for Implementing Culturally Responsive Education
1	Recognition of the importance of culture as an integral part of the educational process
2	Knowledge is formed as a social construction influenced by the environment and social interaction.
3	Implementation of cultural inclusivity in learning
4	Academic achievement that is not only focused on intellectual aspects, but also includes emotional and social dimensions
5	Balance between unity and diversity in the education process

Firstly, there is recognition that culture plays an important role as an integral part of the educational process. This means that culture is not just a background or addition to the teaching-learning process, but an essential element that helps shape learners’ identities and perspectives. By understanding the value of this culture, teachers can create a more inclusive learning environment that suits the needs of each individual. Secondly, this principle recognises that knowledge is formed as a social construction influenced by the environment and social interaction. In this context, the learning process does not only occur individually but also through social relationships and the surrounding environment. This concept encourages teachers to not only teach in a structured way, but also pay attention to how learners learn from interactions with

others and their environment, as well as how their social and cultural context plays a role in understanding the subject matter.

Third, culturally responsive education emphasises cultural inclusivity in the learning process. This means that learners from different cultural backgrounds have equal space to contribute and feel valued for their cultural identity. Teachers who implement cultural inclusivity can encourage learners to feel valued without having to give up their cultural identity. This not only strengthens bonds in the classroom but also creates a learning environment that supports diversity. Fourth, academic achievement is not only limited to intellectual aspects, but also includes emotional and social dimensions. In culturally responsive education, academic success is not only seen from cognitive learning outcomes but also from learners’ emotional development and social skills. This principle is important because learners who feel emotionally connected to their learning environment tend to have higher motivation to learn and perform better. Fifth, there is a need to achieve a balance between unity and diversity in the education process. This means that while there is an effort to unite learners in one learning objective, teachers must still respect their individual and cultural differences. This principle demands a balance between providing a unified learning experience while respecting the diversity of learners’ views and identities.

Meanwhile, Villegas & Lucas [9] identified six characteristics that culturally responsive teachers need to possess, namely:

TABLE 2:

No.	Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Educators
1	Have a deep socio-cultural awareness
2	Demonstrate affirmation of the diversity of learners’ backgrounds
3	Have strong self-confidence in carrying out their duties
4	Understand how learners construct knowledge and encourage them to develop knowledge construction independently
5	Know the lifestyles and cultural context of learners
6	Able to use information about learners’ cultural background in designing meaningful learning

Based on this table, Villegas & Lucas [9] emphasise six characteristics that a culturally responsive teacher must possess. Firstly, a culturally responsive teacher must have a deep socio- cultural awareness. This awareness not only means knowing that learners come from different backgrounds, but also understanding how these differences affect their learning process. Thus, teachers can adapt relevant teaching methods and approaches.

Second, culturally responsive teachers show affirmation or appreciation of the diversity of learners' backgrounds. This affirmation is seen in the way teachers encourage active participation from all learners and ensure every voice and perspective is valued in the classroom. This helps learners feel comfortable and valued, which in turn increases their confidence to participate. Thirdly, culturally responsive teachers have strong self-confidence in carrying out their duties, especially in dealing with cultural diversity. This confidence enables teachers to not only overcome challenges in a diverse classroom but also create a positive and inclusive learning environment. Teachers with this confidence will find it easier to guide learners with various cultural backgrounds effectively. Fourth, teachers understand how learners construct knowledge and play a role in encouraging them to develop their knowledge construction independently. Culturally responsive teachers realise that the way each learner understands and develops concepts can vary depending on their cultural background. Therefore, teachers not only provide information but also facilitate the learning process so that learners can build their own understanding actively.

Fifth, culturally responsive teachers know the learner's lifestyle and cultural context, including the traditions, customs, values and norms they bring with them from their family and community environment. This knowledge is important so that teachers can design learning that is not only relevant but also meaningful to learners. Understanding these lifestyles gives teachers greater insight into the factors that influence learners' attitudes and behaviour. Sixth, culturally responsive teachers are able to use information about learners' cultural backgrounds in designing meaningful learning. This means teachers use learners' cultural knowledge as a foundation in developing more contextualised learning materials, activities and approaches. This is important to ensure that the learning process becomes relevant and close to learners' real lives, so that learning materials can be better received and internalised more effectively.

Therefore, culturally responsive teacher education not only aims to develop awareness of learners' cultural diversity, but also teaches how to respect and recognise the different values of diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic and tribal backgrounds. Moreover, teachers are also equipped with in-depth knowledge of learners' cultural uniqueness and use this as a foundation in designing and implementing learning that is relevant and responsive to their needs [5]. With this approach, teachers can build inclusive classrooms where learners feel valued and supported to develop optimally, both in academic and social-emotional aspects. At UNUSA, the implementation of culture-based Indonesian language learning can be realised through various innovations. One

of them is by developing a curriculum that does not only focus on linguistic aspects, but also includes relevant cultural materials. This material can include various aspects of Indonesian life, such as family values, mutual cooperation, customs, and prevailing social norms. In addition, lecturers can also design learning activities that involve international students in local cultural activities, such as participating in traditional ceremonies, attending religious activities, or participating in social activities of the surrounding community.

In addition, collaborative learning approaches can also be applied to encourage interaction between international students and local students, resulting in a process of learning about each other's cultures. This interaction not only helps foreign students understand Indonesian in a broader context, but also enriches the learning experience of local students. Thus, culture-based learning innovations at UNUSA not only impact international students, but also enrich the diversity and inclusiveness of the academic environment as a whole.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach to six students from Timor Leste who study at UNUSA and programme Indonesian language courses. Data was obtained during Indonesian language lectures through interviews, observations, and document analysis (assignments). Interviews were conducted to explore students' experiences related to learning Indonesian and their adaptation to the academic environment in Indonesia. Observations were made to monitor the process of student interaction with teachers and fellow students. Document (assignment) analysis was conducted on the curriculum and Indonesian language learning materials used at UNUSA.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Indonesian Language Learning Challenges for East Timorese Students

Students from Timor Leste generally have diverse language backgrounds, including Portuguese, Tetun, and little command of Bahasa Indonesia. This results in challenges in understanding grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure in Indonesian. In addition,

cultural differences also cause students to face difficulties in understanding the cultural context attached to language.

TABLE 3: Background, Challenges, and Impact on Learning.

No.	Student Name	Language Background (Foreign Language Proficiency)	Key Challenges in Indonesian Language Learning	Impact of Challenges on Learning
1	Student A	Portuguese, Tetun	Difficulty understanding grammar	Lowering reading comprehension
2	Student B	Tetun, English	Vocabulary is less extensive	Difficulty constructing sentences
3	Student C	Portuguese, Tetun, a little Bahasa Indonesia	Confusing sentence structure	Slow in doing assignments
4	Student D	Tetun, Portuguese	Understand the cultural context	Difficulty in understanding the content of the text
5	Student E	English, Tetun	Cultural differences in language use	Hesitant to interact in class
6	Student F	Tetun, Portuguese, a little Bahasa Indonesia	Challenges in vocabulary and cultural context	Not confident in discussion

East Timorese students learning Indonesian are faced with a variety of linguistic and cultural challenges. In general, they come with diverse language backgrounds, including Portuguese, Tetun, and some of them have little command of Indonesian. This diversity creates problems in mastering Indonesian grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure, as well as understanding the cultural contexts associated with their use. One of the main challenges these students experience is difficulty in understanding grammar and sentence structure. Students with Portuguese and Tetun backgrounds, such as Student A and Student C, often feel confused by sentence patterns in Indonesian. The languages they master have different patterns and structural rules, so they often make mistakes in understanding and forming appropriate sentences.

Ellis [10] emphasises that the difference between the structure of the native language and the target language can be a big obstacle in the learning process, especially in understanding the active-passive form and the use of affixes that characterise Indonesian. In addition, vocabulary problems are also often an obstacle. Student B and Student F found it difficult to expand their vocabulary. This limitation causes them to not only find it difficult to understand the reading material, but also feel less confident in composing sentences when communicating. According to Alwasilah [11], vocabulary is the main foundation of language skills, and if the amount of vocabulary mastered is minimal,

communication skills will be hampered, especially in composing logical and coherent sentences.

Other students, such as Student D and Student E, faced problems in understanding the cultural context inherent in Indonesian. They often do not understand expressions, idioms, or ways of delivery that are unique to Indonesian culture. Brown [12] explains that language is a reflection of culture; hence, to truly understand a language, one must also recognise the culture that shapes it. These students often feel confused and hesitant when it comes to interacting in class, especially if the topic of discussion involves different cultural values. These constraints have a direct impact on their learning process. Difficulties in grammar reduce their reading comprehension, while limited vocabulary hampers their ability to construct appropriate sentences. Meanwhile, a lack of understanding of the cultural context and low confidence in communication also reduce their active participation in class. As a solution, several approaches are suggested to help them overcome this challenge. A contextualised learning approach that incorporates culture in teaching-learning activities can help students understand the use of Indonesian in various contexts. Explicit grammar exercises on typical Indonesian sentence patterns can also overcome their difficulties in sentence structure. In addition, a vocabulary enrichment program through practical activities and visualisation is expected to build their confidence in using Indonesian.

With the right approach, Timorese students can more easily adapt and master Bahasa Indonesia, allowing them to learn and interact more smoothly in this new academic environment.

3.2. Implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching

A culturally responsive teaching approach involves adapting learning materials that are relevant to students' backgrounds. For example, teachers at UNUSA use examples related to Timorese culture to help students feel more connected and understand the Indonesian context. Teachers also use participatory approaches that allow students to share their cultural experiences, making the classroom atmosphere more inclusive and interactive.

The culturally responsive teaching approach at UNUSA in learning Indonesian for students from Timor Leste faces unique challenges. With a diverse language background, including Portuguese, Tetun and a little Bahasa Indonesia, Timorese students have difficulty in understanding Indonesian grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure.

TABLE 4: Participation and Understanding of Timor Leste Students in Learning Indonesian with a Culturally Responsive Approach at UNUSA.

No.	Student Name	Language Background	Participation in Discussion	Level of Understanding (Scale 1-5)	Involvement in Cultural Activities (Scale 1-5)	Teacher Comments
1	Student A	Portuguese, Tetun	On	4	5	Very responsive and quick to understand when it comes to Timorese culture
2	Student B	Tetun, English	Active Enough	3	4	Need simpler examples, but very interested in the cultural approach
3	Student C	Portuguese, Tetun, a little Indonesian	Very Active	5	5	Full of enthusiasm, often sharing Timor Leste's cultural stories with classmates
4	Student D	Tetun, Portuguese	Less Active	2	3	Requires a more personalised approach to encourage further engagement
5	Student E	English, Tetun	Active Enough	4	4	Getting used to the material and understanding more easily when examples are linked to culture
6	Student F	Tetun, Portuguese, a little Indonesian	Very Active	3	5	Highly adaptive and has a strong understanding when cultural concepts are introduced

Teachers' culturally responsive approach plays an important role in helping students overcome these barriers by providing examples relevant to their culture, thus creating a more inclusive and interactive learning environment.

Further analysis shows that the adaptation of culturally relevant learning materials to students is one of the key factors that support successful learning [13, 14]. Gay [13] explains that culturally responsive teaching allows teachers to build better relationships with students from different cultural backgrounds, through the application of contexts that are relevant to their daily lives. For example, students who are familiar with the

culture of Timor Leste will find it easier to understand Bahasa Indonesia if given examples related to their culture and life. This was seen in students C and F who showed higher comprehension because they were able to relate the language material to their personal experiences.

This approach also emphasises the importance of students' participation in discussions that include their cultural context, which is in line with Ladson-Billings' [14] principle that accommodating students' culture in the teaching-learning process increases their motivation and confidence. In this study, C and F students who were more actively involved in sharing cultural experiences in class showed increased understanding and comfort when interacting. This engagement in discussion allowed them to feel valued and more motivated in learning. In addition, research from Nieto [15] states that a culturally responsive approach also helps to overcome social and psychological barriers often faced by students from minority or foreign cultural backgrounds. Here, students who were involved in classroom cultural activities, such as students A and E, experienced improved understanding of the material when learning concepts were linked to their own culture. This shows the importance of giving students space to share stories or experiences that can strengthen the connection between academic concepts and their personal context.

Instructor comments on student engagement and contributions have also been shown to be an important motivator in improving classroom interaction [16]. When students feel that the instructor recognises and values their contributions, they are more likely to be active and show more confidence in class discussions. For example, student B with a Tetun and English background was more engaged when the instructor provided simple examples relevant to their cultural background, as recommended by Banks [16]. Overall, this culturally responsive teaching approach at UNUSA not only succeeded in improving the comprehension of Indonesian for Timorese students but also created a more inclusive learning environment, where students felt valued and emotionally connected to the material being taught. This approach also confirms that cultural interaction in teaching is an important element in creating an effective learning process for students from diverse backgrounds [13, 15, 16].

3.3. The impact of a culturally responsive approach on learning outcomes

Observations showed that East Timorese students taught with a culturally responsive approach tended to participate more actively in class. They also felt more motivated and showed improvement in their ability to understand the learning material. In addition, this approach helped them overcome their awkwardness in interacting with Indonesian students, creating a more collaborative learning environment.

TABLE 5: Impact of Culturally Responsive Approach on Participation, Motivation, and Interaction of Timor Leste Students in Indonesian Language Learning at UNUSA.

No.	Student Name	Class Participation	Learning Motivation (Scale 1-5)	Improved Understanding of Material (Scale 1-5)	Engagement with Indonesian Students	Comment
1	Student A	Very Active	5	5	High	Seems on findt and often leads group discussions
2	Student B	On	4	4	Medium	Starting to ask questions and share views
3	Student C	On	5	5	High	Frequently share cultural experiences with classmates
4	Student D	Active Enough	3	4	Low	Still awkward in interacting with other students
5	Student E	Very Active	5	5	High	Very enthusiastic and often support other friends in understanding the material
6	Student F	On	4	4	Medium	Looking more comfortable after the culturally responsive approach was implemented

The culturally responsive learning approach applied at Nahdlatul Ulama University Surabaya (UNUSA) to students from Timor Leste has had a significant positive impact on various aspects of their learning. Based on the results of observations, students who took Indonesian language courses with this approach showed an increase in active participation, learning motivation, understanding of the material, and social involvement

with Indonesian students. Students with Portuguese and Tetun language backgrounds, such as Student A and Student C, felt more connected to the learning material when the teaching was adapted to examples related to their home culture. This finding is in line with Gay's [17] view, which emphasizes that culturally responsive learning can increase students' sense of belonging and emotional involvement in the learning process. When students' experiences and cultures are recognized, they tend to be more active in participating in class discussions, even leading a number of group activities. Cultural integration in the learning process also increases appreciation for students' cultural identities. This is in line with the theory of learning engagement put forward by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris [18], which states that positive emotional involvement is closely correlated with increased academic participation. Students who feel valued show higher involvement in class activities. In addition, students' learning motivation increased significantly after the implementation of the culturally responsive learning approach. Students such as Student C showed high enthusiasm by sharing stories about Timor Leste culture with their friends. This finding supports the concept of Self-Determination Theory from Deci and Ryan [19], which emphasizes that intrinsic motivation can grow strongly if students feel they have autonomy, social connectedness, and competence in their learning process. An increase in understanding of the material was also observed in students with high motivation, such as Student A and Student C. They found it easier to understand Indonesian when the learning material was linked to their cultural experiences.

This approach is in line with Vygotsky's [20] constructivism theory (1978), which states that learning becomes more meaningful when students are able to link new concepts to experiences they have had before. Furthermore, the implementation of the culturally responsive approach has a positive impact on the social engagement of Timor Leste students. Students such as Student C and Student F became more confident in interacting with classmates from Indonesia, sharing cultural experiences, and actively participating in discussions. This is in line with the concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy introduced by Ladson-Billings [14], which emphasizes the importance of connecting academic learning with cultural contexts to strengthen social relationships and build a sense of community in the learning environment. However, not all students experience the same social development. For example, Student D, although showing improvement in understanding the material, still has difficulty in social interaction. This phenomenon strengthens Nieto's [21] opinion that social adaptation in a new cultural context takes time, and its success is highly dependent on individual factors

and available social support. Overall, the implementation of a culturally responsive learning approach has succeeded in creating a more inclusive, collaborative classroom atmosphere that supports the academic and social growth of international students. This finding reinforces the importance of developing teaching strategies that take into account students' cultural backgrounds, especially in the context of multicultural higher education.

3.4. Steps for Culturally Responsive Indonesian Language Learning

Indonesian language learning for international students with a culturally responsive approach is designed to combine language teaching with a deep understanding of Indonesian culture. This process begins with getting to know the students' backgrounds, such as their culture of origin, mother tongue, and previous learning experiences. This step helps educators adjust the learning materials to be more relevant and interesting, as stated by Gay [17] who emphasized that understanding students' cultural context is an important foundation in building effective learning. The materials chosen in learning, such as folklore, regional songs, and local Indonesian traditions, not only enrich students' understanding and language structure, but also build emotional connection with the new culture. In line with the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy approach from Ladson-Billings [14], which emphasizes the need for academic learning to meet students' cultures to increase academic engagement and success. The cultural introduction stage is carried out through interactive activities, such as word games, light discussions, and the use of visual media (videos and images of Indonesian traditions). This activity aims to create curiosity and a sense of connection between cultures. According to Vygotsky [20], social interaction in learning helps students build new meanings through their previous experiences with new experiences gained in the learning environment. In the exploration stage, students read or listen to Indonesian cultural stories and discuss them in small groups. This activity strengthens their cross-cultural understanding and encourages meaningful learning as explained by Ausubel [22], where new understanding is built on existing experiences. The next stage is the development of language skills, which is carried out through simulations of real situations such as interacting in traditional markets (role play) and writing essays about their cultural experiences. Providing constructive feedback is not only to improve language use, but also to deepen cultural understanding. This supports the theory of active learning (Active Learning) proposed by

TABLE 6: Steps for Culturally Responsive Indonesian Language Learning for Foreign Students.

Stages	Steps	Details
Initial Preparation	Identification of Student Background	Understand the student's culture, mother tongue, and learning experience.
		Identifying special needs in Indonesian language learning.
	Collection of teaching materials	Choose relevant materials, such as folktales, folk songs, and articles about the customs of Indonesian people.
Introduction Stage	Lesson Plan Preparation	Set learning objectives based on communication competence and cross-cultural understanding.
	Interactive Approach	Use ice-breaking methods such as games that introduce cultural vocabulary (e.g. names of speciality foods, traditional clothing).
		Show videos or pictures depicting Indonesian culture as an introduction.
	Introduction to Culture	Discuss the differences and similarities between student culture and Indonesian culture.
Exploration Stage	Understanding Cultural Context	Encourage students to read or listen to Indonesian cultural texts, such as folktales or descriptions of traditions.
		Use the question-and-answer method to explore the meaning of the text.
	Collaborative Discussion	Group students to discuss how their culture compares to the culture in the text.
		Ask them to share relevant personal experiences.
Skill Development Stage	Speaking Practice	Simulate everyday situations that involve cultural elements, such as asking for directions in a traditional market.
		Use role-play to practise conversations in specific cultural contexts.
	Writing Exercise	Ask students to write a short essay or story based on their cultural experience in Indonesia.
		Provide feedback emphasising linguistic aspects and culturally responsive content.
Integration Stage	Culture Project	Assign students to create a presentation or video on their chosen topic of Indonesian culture.
		Encourage the use of Indonesian language in the presentation.
	Intercultural Collaboration	Involve local students to co-operate with international students in cultural activities (such as cooking together or performing traditional dances).
Reflection and Evaluation	Joint Reflection	Encourage students to share their learning experiences. Ask them what they learnt about Indonesian culture and their own culture.
	Process and Outcome Based Evaluation	Use rubrics that assess cultural understanding, communication skills, and active participation in learning.
	Refinement of teaching materials	Evaluate the effectiveness of the materials and approaches used for future improvements.
Cover	Values Absorption	Encourage students to adopt positive values from Indonesian culture that are relevant to their daily lives.
	Appreciation	Acknowledge student achievement in Indonesian language learning with appreciation.

Bonwell and Eison [23], which states that students' active involvement in context-based

tasks improves the quality of learning. In the integration stage, students work on cultural projects in the form of presentations or videos about aspects of Indonesian culture that they choose. This collaborative activity strengthens their academic and social skills. Intercultural collaboration carried out through activities such as cooking or dancing with Indonesian students enriches the learning experience and encourages social integration. According to Banks [24], cross-cultural experiences directly help students develop multicultural awareness and improve intercultural communication competency. The reflection stage at the end of the learning allows students to begin their learning journey and think about Indonesian cultural values that can be applied in their own lives. This reflection is important because it supports the development of metacognitive awareness, as emphasized by Schön [25], that critical reflection on experiences strengthens the continuous learning process. Overall, this responsive learning approach has proven effective in improving the learning outcomes of Timor Leste students at UNUSA. Increased active participation, understanding of the material, confidence in speaking Indonesian, and stronger social involvement indicate that appreciating and integrating students' cultural backgrounds creates a more meaningful, effective, and harmonious learning experience. This approach is evidence that in the context of multicultural education, recognition of students' cultural diversity not only fosters the learning process, but also shapes character and 21st century skills.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Teaching Indonesian to international students, particularly those from Timor Leste, requires a thoughtful and culturally responsive approach. This approach is critical not only for increasing motivation and participation in learning but also for fostering a deeper connection between the students and the learning process itself. Students from Timor Leste often bring with them diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which can both enrich the learning environment and present unique challenges. These challenges often include adapting to a new language system, understanding unfamiliar cultural contexts embedded in the language, and overcoming the social and linguistic barriers that naturally arise when learning a new language in a foreign setting.

A culturally responsive approach involves recognizing and valuing the cultural backgrounds of students as a fundamental aspect of the teaching process. This includes understanding their prior linguistic experiences, cultural norms, and social values that shape their worldview. When teachers incorporate these elements into their teaching

strategies, students are more likely to feel respected, included, and understood. This sense of inclusion can significantly enhance their motivation to learn and their willingness to participate actively in the classroom. For example, integrating elements of Timor Leste's culture into teaching materials—such as using familiar cultural references, incorporating examples that resonate with their daily lives, or drawing parallels between Indonesian and Tetun language structures—can create a more relatable and engaging learning experience. Similarly, participatory methods, such as collaborative projects, role-playing activities, and discussions that allow students to share their cultural perspectives, can foster a sense of ownership and involvement in the learning process. These strategies not only help students overcome linguistic hurdles but also build their confidence in navigating both the language and the cultural environment of Indonesia.

Moreover, culturally responsive teaching helps to bridge the gap between the students' home culture and the academic culture they are entering. By addressing the social dimensions of language learning, this approach enables students to navigate classroom dynamics more effectively and form meaningful relationships with their peers and teachers. It also helps to reduce the sense of alienation that international students may feel, providing them with a supportive environment where they can thrive academically and socially. Teachers, therefore, play a crucial role in ensuring the success of this approach. They must not only possess a strong understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds but also continuously refine their teaching methods to be more inclusive and adaptable. Professional development opportunities, such as training sessions on culturally responsive teaching practices, can equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to implement these strategies effectively. Furthermore, fostering a school-wide culture that values diversity and inclusion can create a broader institutional framework that supports international students in their academic journey. In conclusion, teaching Indonesian to international students, especially those from Timor Leste, is more than just a linguistic endeavor—it is an opportunity to create a culturally enriching experience for both students and educators. By integrating cultural elements and participatory methods, teachers can help students overcome barriers, build confidence, and achieve greater success in their language learning journey. This approach not only benefits the students but also contributes to a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment that celebrates cultural diversity.

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