

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGE INTENSIVE PROGRAM FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS AT UIN IMAM BONJOL PADANG

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of an intensive Indonesian language program for international students at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. The program aims to enhance communicative competence, academic literacy, and intercultural adaptation among foreign learners enrolled in various study programs. Using a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measures, this study involved 32 international students participating in a 12-week intensive Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) program. Data were collected through language proficiency tests, self-efficacy questionnaires, and classroom observations. The findings indicate a significant improvement in students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills after program completion. Additionally, students reported higher academic confidence and improved sociocultural adjustment. The results suggest that structured intensive instruction combined with contextual and intercultural approaches effectively supports foreign students' linguistic and academic integration. The study recommends strengthening curriculum design, digital learning integration, and continuous evaluation to sustain program quality.

Introduction

The globalization of higher education has accelerated the mobility of students across countries and encouraged educational institutions to strengthen internationalization strategies. In the context of Southeast Asia, increasing regional academic cooperation through various student exchange schemes and international scholarships has also driven the need for systematic language support for foreign students (Knight, 2020; OECD, 2022). Language is not only a communication tool, but also a primary medium of access to knowledge, social participation, and academic success in the college environment (Rose et al., 2020).

In the study of second language acquisition, the intensity of language exposure and the quality of communicative interaction are two key factors for learning success (Ellis, 2020; Richards, 2022). Intensive language programs are designed to provide structured, ongoing, and contextual linguistic exposure in a relatively short period of time. Nation and Macalister (2020) emphasized that an effective language curriculum must consider needs analysis, clear learning objectives, and competency-based evaluation.

In Indonesia, the development of the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program is part of the strategy of cultural diplomacy and internationalization of national languages (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2023). The demand for BIPA programs has increased significantly in the last five years, especially in universities that accept foreign students through government scholarships and institutional cooperation. However, the quality of BIPA program implementation still varies between institutions, especially in the aspects of curriculum design, learning methods, and evaluation systems (Suyitno, 2021).

Theoretically, the communicative approach (Communicative Language Teaching / CLT) remains the dominant paradigm in modern foreign language teaching (Richards, 2022). This approach emphasizes the use of language in real contexts, meaningful interactions, and the development of communicative competencies that include grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic aspects. In addition, the task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach is increasingly recognized as effective in improving students' speaking skills and academic collaboration (Ellis et al., 2020). Recent research shows that the integration of authentic assignments based on academic context is able to increase the readiness of foreign students to attend regular lectures (Anderson & Mak, 2021).

Foreign students often face linguistic as well as psychosocial challenges when entering a new academic environment. Language barriers can have an impact on low class participation, difficulty understanding lecture materials, and limited social interaction with local students (Smith & Khawaja, 2021). Within the framework of acculturation theory, language skills are the main predictors of successful cultural and academic adaptation (Zhang & Goodson, 2022). Therefore, intensive language programs serve not only as linguistic training, but also as a transition mechanism towards broader social integration.

Recent research shows that international students who attend pre-academic language programs have higher retention rates and academic achievement than those who do not participate in such programs (Rose et al., 2020). In addition, structured language support contributes to increased academic self-efficacy and decreased academic stress (Kim & Kim, 2021). Academic self-efficacy, as described in a social-cognitive framework, plays an important role in mediating the relationship between language skills and academic performance (Usher & Weidner, 2021).

In the context of language learning in Islamic universities, the cultural dimension and religious values are also important factors. The integration of local and religious values in language learning can increase the relevance of the context and strengthen students' intercultural identities (Hidayati, 2022). Culture-based language instruction has been shown to increase the intrinsic motivation and pragmatic understanding of foreign students (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2021). Therefore, language programs in Islamic universities are not only oriented towards linguistic competence, but also on the formation of cultural sensitivity.

In addition to the pedagogical aspect, digital transformation in higher education also affects the design of language programs. The use of e-learning platforms, blended learning, and interactive applications has been proven to increase student engagement and learning flexibility (Hampel & Stickler, 2021). Recent studies have shown that the integration of digital technology in intensive language learning is able to improve listening and speaking skills through interactive simulations and audio-visual recordings (Godwin-Jones, 2022). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the technology remains dependent on instructor readiness and systematic instructional design.

Evaluating the effectiveness of intensive language programs requires a multidimensional approach that includes measures of linguistic competence, academic confidence, and social adaptation (OECD, 2022). The use of pre-test and post-test designs is a common method in assessing quantitative improvement of language skills (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). However, qualitative approaches such as interviews and classroom observations are also important to understand students' learning experiences more deeply (Mackey & Gass, 2021).

Although various international studies have examined the effectiveness of language-intensive programs, empirical studies in the context of BIPA in public Islamic universities are still relatively limited. Most BIPA research focuses more on methodological aspects or the development of teaching materials, while comprehensive evaluation of the impact of programs on the academic readiness of foreign students has not been widely carried out (Suyitno, 2021; Hidayati, 2022). This gap demonstrates the need for empirical data-driven research that examines the effectiveness of programs as a whole.

As an institution that continues to develop international networks, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang has an academic responsibility to ensure that foreign students receive adequate linguistic support. The Indonesian Language Intensive Program is a strategic instrument in supporting the vision of campus internationalization. However, to ensure sustainability and quality improvement, research-based evaluation is an urgent need.

Taking into account the latest literature developments (2020–2025), this study seeks to fill this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of the Indonesian Language Intensive Program for Foreign Students. This study not only measures the improvement of language competence, but also analyzes its impact on academic self-efficacy and social adaptation of students. This approach is in line with the inclusive higher education paradigm that places language support as an integral part of the academic success of international students

The internationalization of higher education has become a strategic agenda for many universities in Indonesia. Cross-border student mobility is increasing along with regional and global academic cooperation. In this context, language proficiency is a key factor in the academic success of foreign students (Knight, 2020). Indonesian as the main language of instruction in higher education requires a systematic learning program for international students who do not have adequate linguistic competence.

The Indonesian Language Program for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) has grown rapidly in the past decade as part of Indonesia's language and culture diplomacy (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). Pedagogically, second language learning emphasizes the importance of communicative approaches, meaningful interactions, and authentic contexts (Richards, 2022). Intensive programs are one of the models that are considered effective because they provide more structured and sustainable language exposure in a relatively short time (Nation & Macalister, 2020).

As a state Islamic university that has international students from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang organizes an intensive Indonesian language program to support the academic and social integration of foreign students. The program is designed in the form of intensive classes for 12 weeks with a focus on four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as an introduction to the local Minangkabau culture.

Previous research has shown that intensive language programs can improve linguistic competence while strengthening the social adaptation of international students (Anderson & Mak, 2021; Zhang & Goodson, 2022). In addition, adequate language support is positively correlated with the academic success and psychological well-being of foreign students (Smith & Khawaja, 2021). However, program effectiveness is heavily influenced by curriculum design, learning methods, and continuous evaluation (Brown & Lee, 2021).

Until now, empirical studies on the effectiveness of the BIPA program in state Islamic universities are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Indonesian Language Intensive Program for Foreign Students at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang in improving language competence and academic adaptation of students.

The questions of this study are: 1) Is there a significant improvement in foreign students' language skills after participating in the intensive program? , 2) How does the program affect students' academic confidence and social adaptation?

Method

Research Design

This study used a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test approach in one group (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This design was chosen to measure changes in language skills before and after intensive program interventions.

Participants

The research participants were 32 foreign students who participated in the Indonesian Language Intensive Program for the 2025/2026 academic year. Students come from Thailand, Malaysia, Sudan, and Yemen. The initial ability level is at the beginner to early intermediate level based on an internal placement test.

Program Description

The program lasts for 12 weeks with a total of 240 hours of learning. The curriculum includes:

1. Listening and speaking skills based on daily communication and academics.
2. Reading academic texts is simple.
3. Write short paragraphs and essays.
4. Introduction to Minangkabau culture through field activities.

The approaches used are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (Richards, 2022).

Instruments

1. Indonesian Language Proficiency Test (pre-test and post-test).
2. Academic Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (adaptation of Bandura, 1997; adapted to language context).
3. Class observations and semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using a paired t-test to see the difference in scores before and after the program. Qualitative data are analyzed thematically to identify patterns of student learning experiences.

Results and Discussion

Improved Language Competency Score

Quantitative analysis was conducted using a paired sample t-test to compare pre-test and post-test scores on four language skills. The results showed a significant improvement in all aspects of linguistic competence ($p < .001$). Details of the scores are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Language Competency Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores (n = 32)

Skills	Mean Pre-Test	Mean Post-Test	Differences	Sig. (p)
Listening	60.2	82.5	+22.3	.000
Speaking	55.8	80.4	+24.6	.000
Reading	59.5	77.1	+17.6	.001
Writing	57.9	73.8	+15.9	.002
Total Mean	58.4	78.9	+20.5	.000

The biggest improvement occurred in speaking (+24.6) and listening skills (+22.3). This shows the effectiveness of the communicative and task-based learning approach applied during the program. These findings are consistent with the research of Ellis et al. (2020) who stated that intensive communicative interaction accelerates the development of verbal skills in second language learning. In addition, Nation and Macalister (2020) emphasized that exposure to dense and structured language in intensive programs is able to improve input processing and retention of academic vocabulary.

Improvement of Academic Self-Efficacy

In addition to language skills, this study also measured changes in students' academic self-efficacy using a Likert scale of 1–5. The results of the analysis showed a significant increase ($p < .01$).

Table 2. Changes in Academic Self-Efficacy Scores

Aspects of Self-Efficacy	Pre-test means	Post-Test Mean	Differences	Sig. (p)
Understanding Lecture Materials	2.8	4.1	+1.3	.003
Discussion Participation	2.6	4.0	+1.4	.002
Academic Presentations	2.5	3.9	+1.4	.001
Writing Academic Assignments	2.7	3.8	+1.1	.004
Average	2.65	3.95	+1.30	.002

This improvement shows that language competence contributes significantly to students' academic confidence. Kim and Kim (2021) found that improved language skills were positively correlated with self-efficacy and participation in international student classes.

Social and Intercultural Adaptation

The qualitative data from the interviews show three main themes:

1. Increased courage to interact with local students
2. Understanding of Minangkabau cultural communication norms
3. Reduction of language anxiety

These findings support the research of Zhang and Goodson (2022) who stated that language proficiency is the main predictor of intercultural adaptation of foreign students.

Language Proficiency Enhancement

The results of the analysis showed a significant increase in the average score from 58.4 (pre-test) to 78.9 (post-test) ($p < 0.001$). The highest improvement occurred in speaking and listening skills, while a moderate improvement was seen in academic writing skills.

In detail:

- Listening increased by 22%
- Speaking increased by 25%
- Reading up 18%
- Writing increased by 15%

These findings show that intensive programs are effective in improving the communicative competence of foreign students.

Academic Self-Efficacy and Social Adaptation

The average score of academic self-efficacy increased significantly after the program ($p < 0.01$). Students reported increased confidence in attending regular lectures, understanding lecturer materials, and interacting with local students. Interview data showed that cultural immersion activities helped students understand social norms and local communication contexts. This reinforces the finding that language and culture integration contributes to intercultural adaptation (Zhang & Goodson, 2022).

Discussion

1. The Effectiveness of Intensive Programs on Linguistic Competency

The total average increase of +20.5 points shows the substantial impact of intensive programs on foreign students' language skills. These results reinforce the argument that time intensity and systematic curriculum structure play an important role in second language learning (Richards, 2022).

In the perspective of the input hypothesis theory, a significant improvement in listening skills suggests that students gain sufficient language exposure through classroom interactions and authentic activities. Ellis (2020) explains that meaning-focused input in the context of real tasks improves language processing implicitly. Speaking skills show the highest improvement. This is likely due to the implementation of group discussions, presentation simulations, and academic communication practices. Brown and Lee (2021) emphasized that speaking exercises based on academic context improve fluency and pragmatic competence. However, the improvement in writing skills is relatively lower than that of oral skills. This phenomenon is in line with the research of Rose et al. (2020) who showed that mastering academic literacy takes longer because it involves complex syntactic structures and argumentative skills.

2. Language and Academic Self-Efficacy

The results of this study show that the improvement of language skills is directly proportional to the increase in academic self-efficacy. Usher and Weidner (2021) state that mastery experience is the main source of self-efficacy. When students are able to understand the material and actively participate, their perception of self-competence increases.

These findings also support a study by Smith and Khawaja (2021) that showed that early language support reduces academic stress and improves the psychological well-being of international students. In this context, intensive programs serve as a bridging program that facilitates academic transition.

3. Cultural Integration as a Supporting Factor

The cultural immersion component in the program makes a significant contribution to the social adaptation of students. Liddicoat and Scarino (2021) emphasized that language learning cannot be separated from the cultural context. Understanding local communication norms helps students avoid pragmatic misunderstandings.

The study of Hidayati (2022) also shows that the integration of local culture in BIPA learning increases the intrinsic motivation and involvement of foreign students. In this study, cultural visits and interactions with local students were proven to accelerate social adaptation.

4. The Role of Technology in Intensive Programs

The program leverages an online learning platform for additional practice and assignment collection. Technology integration supports learning flexibility and reinforcement of material outside the classroom. Godwin-Jones (2022) states that the use of interactive digital media can improve listening and speaking skills through audio recordings and conversation simulations.

Hampel and Stickler (2021) added that blended learning in language learning strengthens student engagement and increases the effectiveness of synchronous and asynchronous learning. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of technology still depends on the pedagogical readiness of the instructor.

5. Academic and Institutional Implications

Institutionally, the results of this study provide several important implications:

1. Expansion of the duration of academic literacy programs to improve writing skills.
2. Strengthening of academic task-based modules such as seminar presentations and argumentative essay writing.
3. Continuous data-driven evaluation to ensure program quality.

The OECD (2022) emphasizes that the internationalization of higher education must be accompanied by a structured language support system so that foreign students can participate optimally in the academic process.

6. Conceptual Model of Program Impact

Based on the results of the research, the following conceptual models can be formulated:

Intensive Program → Language Competency Improvement → Self-Efficacy Enhancement → Academic and Social Adaptation

This model is aligned with the theoretical frameworks of acculturation and social cognitive theory (Kim & Kim, 2021; Usher & Weidner, 2021). Language acts as a mediator between educational interventions and the academic success of foreign students. The results of this study confirm that the Indonesian language intensive program has a positive impact on improving the linguistic competence of foreign students. Significant improvements in speaking and listening skills showed the effectiveness of the communicative approach used. These findings are in line with second language learning theories that emphasize the importance of meaningful interaction and input (Nation & Macalister, 2020).

Increased academic self-efficacy shows that language mastery correlates with student confidence in academic contexts (Bandura, 1997). This supports previous research that stated that early language support plays an important role in reducing the academic stress of international students (Smith & Khawaja, 2021). The integration of Minangkabau cultural elements in the curriculum is also a supporting factor for the success of the program. Language learning that is contextualized with local culture increases the relevance and motivation of learning (Brown & Lee, 2021). This approach reinforces the intercultural dimension of students, which is important in global education.

However, the improvement of academic writing skills is still relatively lower than that of oral skills. This shows the need to strengthen the academic literacy module, especially in the structure of argumentation and the use of academic formal language. Institutionally, the results of this study provide strategic implications for the development of the BIPA program at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. Continuous evaluation, lecturer training, and integration of digital learning technology can improve the quality of the program in an ongoing manner.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Indonesian Language Intensive Program for Foreign Students at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang is effective in improving language competence and academic confidence of international students. Programs based on communicative approaches and integration of local cultures have been proven to support students' academic and social adaptation.

The recommendations of this research include strengthening academic literacy, developing interactive digital modules, and longitudinal studies to measure the long-term impact on the academic achievement of foreign students. Overall, the results showed that the Indonesian language intensive program was effective in significantly improving: linguistic competence, academic confidence, social and intercultural adaptation

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