

INDONESIAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY STRATEGY THROUGH THE BIPA PROGRAM IN BUILDING AN ECOSYSTEM OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN GERMANY, 2023–2025

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Abstract. As part of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy and language internationalization agenda, the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers Program, known as BIPA, has become an important instrument for promoting Indonesian language and culture abroad. This study examines how the BIPA Program functions as a strategy of Indonesian cultural diplomacy in building an ecosystem of Indonesian language learners in Germany during the 2023–2025 period. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study draws on policy documents, relevant literature, institutional reports, and interviews with stakeholders involved in BIPA implementation. The findings show that the BIPA Program in Germany is supported by a strong legal and policy foundation, particularly Law No. 24 of 2009 and related regulations on the internationalization of the Indonesian language. The implementation of BIPA in Germany is carried out through cooperation between Indonesian government institutions, diplomatic representatives, APPBIPA, and German higher education institutions. The study identifies three main strategies: connection, consistency, and innovation. The connection strategy is reflected in institutional networks and diplomatic cooperation; consistency is shown through curriculum development, teacher training, and sustainable program implementation; while innovation appears in the use of digital media, culturally contextualized materials, and interactive learning methods. However, the program still faces several challenges, including limited authentic language environments, bureaucratic constraints, unequal institutional support, and competition with other global languages. The study concludes that BIPA has significant potential to strengthen Indonesia's soft power in Germany, but its sustainability requires stronger policy coordination, broader promotion, improved teacher capacity, and more adaptive learning innovation.

Keywords: BIPA Program; cultural diplomacy; Indonesian language internationalization; soft power; language learner ecosystem

I. INTRODUCTION

Language has increasingly become a strategic instrument in contemporary international relations, particularly in the practice of cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy. In the current global context, a country's influence is not determined only by military or economic power, but also by its ability to promote cultural values, build international trust, and create long-term people-to-people connections through education, language, and cultural exchange. For Indonesia, the internationalization of Bahasa Indonesia has become an important national agenda because language represents cultural identity, national values, historical experience, and diplomatic presence in the global arena. The recognition of Bahasa Indonesia as one of the official languages of the UNESCO General Conference in 2023 further strengthened the international position of the Indonesian language and opened wider opportunities for Indonesia to expand its linguistic and cultural diplomacy [1], [2].

One of the most important instruments in promoting Bahasa Indonesia globally is the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers Program, known as Bahasa Indonesia bagi

Penutur Asing (BIPA). BIPA is not merely a language teaching program; it is also a cultural diplomacy platform that introduces Indonesian cultural values, social norms, traditions, and national identity to foreign learners.

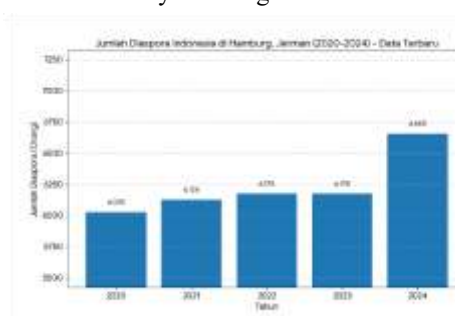


Figure 1. Number of Indonesian Diaspora in Hamburg, Germany (2020-2024)

Through BIPA, language learning becomes a medium for transferring cultural knowledge and strengthening mutual understanding between Indonesia and other countries. Recent studies on Indonesian language policy show that BIPA is

closely connected to national language planning, internationalization policy, and Indonesia's broader cultural diplomacy agenda [3]. In this sense, the BIPA Program has a strategic function in expanding Indonesia's soft power through education, language learning, academic cooperation, and intercultural engagement.

The development of BIPA is also supported by digital transformation and institutional networking. The BIPA Daring platform, developed by the Language Development and Cultivation Agency, provides digital services and information systems to support BIPA learning, teaching, institutional mapping, teacher activities, and online learning management [4]. Through modules such as Jaga BIPA, Bakti BIPA, Tebar BIPA, and other digital features, BIPA has become more accessible to learners, teachers, institutions, and communities in Indonesia and abroad [5]. This digital infrastructure is important because the internationalization of language requires not only formal policy support, but also a sustainable learning ecosystem that connects learners, teachers, teaching materials, institutions, and diplomatic networks.

Previous studies have indicated that BIPA can function as a form of Indonesian cultural diplomacy. For example, research on BIPA implementation in Vietnam shows that Indonesian language teaching can become an instrument for introducing Indonesian culture and strengthening bilateral relations [6]. Similar findings appear in studies of BIPA as a soft diplomacy program in Southeast Asia and other international contexts, where language learning is used to increase foreign public interest in Indonesia and strengthen cultural relations [7], [8]. In addition, recent discussions on BIPA and public diplomacy emphasize that Indonesian language teaching abroad can contribute to the formation of a positive image of Indonesia, particularly when language instruction is integrated with cultural content, digital media, and institutional collaboration [9].

Germany is a particularly important context for examining the role of BIPA in Indonesian cultural diplomacy. Indonesia and Germany have maintained long-standing diplomatic relations and continue to develop cooperation in education, culture, economy, science, and technology. Germany is one of Indonesia's strategic partners in Europe, while Indonesia is significant for Germany because of its geopolitical position in Southeast Asia, its role in ASEAN, and its growing economic and cultural potential [10], [11]. In the field of education and culture, Germany has a strong academic tradition in Southeast Asian studies and Indonesian studies. Several German universities and academic communities have shown interest in Indonesian language and culture, making Germany a relevant site for analyzing how BIPA contributes to the development of Indonesian language learner ecosystems in Europe.

Despite its strategic potential, the implementation of BIPA in Germany still faces several challenges. These include limited authentic Indonesian-speaking environments, differences between Indonesian and German sociocultural contexts, limited availability of standardized teaching materials, uneven institutional support, and competition with other global languages. In addition, although BIPA has received policy support from the Indonesian government, its

implementation abroad often depends on the strength of institutional cooperation, teacher capacity, diplomatic facilitation, and the ability to adapt learning materials to local learner characteristics. Recent studies on BIPA teaching materials and digital-based Indonesian language learning also emphasize that culturally contextualized materials, interactive learning strategies, and digital innovation are essential to improving foreign learners' motivation and competence [12]–[14].

However, existing research has not sufficiently examined how the BIPA Program functions specifically as a cultural diplomacy strategy in Germany during the 2023–2025 period. Most previous studies have focused on BIPA implementation in general, BIPA in Southeast Asian countries, teaching material development, or language policy at the national level. Limited attention has been given to how BIPA in Germany builds an ecosystem of Indonesian language learners through policy support, institutional cooperation, teacher development, cultural integration, and learning innovation. This gap is important because Germany occupies a strategic position in Europe and has the potential to become one of the centers for Indonesian language and culture promotion in the region.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze the strategy of Indonesian cultural diplomacy through the BIPA Program in building an ecosystem of Indonesian language learners in Germany during the 2023–2025 period. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the policy foundation of BIPA internationalization, the forms of institutional cooperation involved in BIPA implementation in Germany, the strategies used to strengthen the learner ecosystem, and the challenges faced in sustaining the program. By focusing on connection, consistency, and innovation as the main strategic dimensions, this study is expected to contribute to the literature on cultural diplomacy, language internationalization, Indonesian foreign policy, and BIPA development in the European context [15].

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze Indonesia's cultural diplomacy strategy through the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers Program, known as BIPA, in building an ecosystem of Indonesian language learners in Germany during the 2023–2025 period. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand the meaning, process, strategy, institutional interaction, and contextual dynamics behind the implementation of the BIPA Program rather than to measure statistical relationships among variables. Qualitative research enables researchers to classify, interpret, and construct meaning from textual, verbal, institutional, and contextual data related to social and cultural phenomena [16]. In this study, the qualitative approach was used to examine how BIPA functions as a cultural diplomacy instrument, how the program is implemented in the German context, and what challenges influence the sustainability of the Indonesian language learner ecosystem.

The research design used in this study was descriptive qualitative research. This design was selected because the study sought to describe and interpret the implementation of the BIPA Program in Germany systematically, contextually, and analytically. Descriptive qualitative research allows the researcher to present data in the form of words, explanations, narratives, and interpretations that reflect the actual conditions of the phenomenon being studied [17]. Therefore, this study did not attempt to test hypotheses quantitatively, but rather to explain the relationship between policy foundations, institutional cooperation, teaching practices, learner motivation, and cultural diplomacy strategies in the implementation of BIPA in Germany.

The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews with stakeholders who were directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of the BIPA Program, including representatives of government institutions, BIPA-related associations, and actors connected to Indonesian language teaching and cultural diplomacy. The interviews were directed toward obtaining information about policy orientation, implementation strategies, institutional cooperation, teaching practices, learner characteristics, program challenges, and future development of BIPA in Germany. Secondary data were collected from official policy documents, government reports, institutional publications, academic literature, BIPA-related documents, and other relevant sources discussing Indonesian language internationalization, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and foreign language teaching.

Data collection was conducted through three techniques: document analysis, interviews, and literature review. Document analysis was used to examine regulations, policy documents, institutional reports, and official information related to the internationalization of the Indonesian language and the implementation of BIPA abroad. Interviews were used to collect empirical information from stakeholders regarding the implementation of the BIPA Program in Germany. Meanwhile, the literature review was conducted to strengthen the conceptual and theoretical basis of the study, particularly in relation to cultural diplomacy, soft power, public diplomacy, and language policy. The concept of soft power was used as the main theoretical lens because the BIPA Program is understood as a diplomatic instrument that promotes Indonesia's cultural attractiveness, values, identity, and international influence through language education rather than coercive power [18].

The data analysis technique used in this study followed an interactive qualitative analysis process. First, the collected data were reduced by selecting information relevant to the research focus, particularly data related to policy support, institutional cooperation, learning strategies, cultural integration, and implementation challenges. Second, the data were categorized into several analytical themes, namely policy foundation, diplomacy, institutional connection, program consistency, learning innovation, learner ecosystem, and implementation barriers. Third, the categorized data were interpreted using the concepts of cultural diplomacy and soft power to explain how BIPA contributes to the strengthening of Indonesia's international cultural presence in Germany.

Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying the relationship between policy orientation, field implementation, and the sustainability of the Indonesian language learner ecosystem.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study used source triangulation and data triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, policy documents, official institutional data, and previous academic studies. Data triangulation was carried out by examining whether the information gathered from different sources supported, complemented, or contradicted one another. This process was important to avoid relying only on a single source of information and to strengthen the validity of the interpretation. The use of triangulation also helped the researcher identify the gap between macro-level policy objectives and micro-level implementation practices in the BIPA Program in Germany.

The scope of this study was limited to the analysis of the BIPA Program as an instrument of Indonesian cultural diplomacy in Germany during the 2023–2025 period. The study focused on policy foundation, institutional cooperation, learning strategies, cultural integration, and program challenges. It did not provide a comparative analysis with BIPA implementation in other countries, nor did it measure the effectiveness of the program using quantitative indicators. Therefore, the findings should be understood as a contextual qualitative analysis of BIPA implementation in Germany. Future studies may expand the analysis by comparing BIPA implementation across several European countries or by using mixed methods to measure learner outcomes, institutional effectiveness, and the long-term impact of BIPA on Indonesia's cultural diplomacy.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy Foundation of BIPA as Indonesian Language Internationalization Strategy

The findings show that the BIPA Program in Germany is closely connected to Indonesia's broader agenda of language internationalization and cultural diplomacy. BIPA is not only implemented as a language learning program, but also as a strategic instrument to introduce Indonesian culture, values, identity, and national image to foreign learners. In this context, the development of BIPA requires a strong policy foundation, institutional support, and sustainable learning infrastructure. The existence of official BIPA learning platforms, such as Belajar BIPA and Tebar BIPA, shows that the Indonesian government has attempted to strengthen the accessibility of Indonesian language learning materials for foreign learners and teachers through digital services [19], [20]. These platforms provide an important foundation for expanding BIPA beyond classroom-based instruction because learners and teachers can access learning materials, supporting resources, and online learning facilities more flexibly.

In the German context, this policy foundation is significant because BIPA must operate within a foreign educational, cultural, and institutional environment. The success of BIPA in Germany therefore depends not only on Indonesian government policy, but also on how the policy is translated into cooperation with universities, cultural

institutions, diplomatic missions, teachers, and learner communities. The findings indicate that policy support at the national level has created a formal basis for BIPA development, but the effectiveness of implementation still depends on institutional coordination and adaptation to the local context. This means that BIPA should be understood as a multi-actor program involving state institutions, professional associations, academic partners, and learners.

Institutional Cooperation and Learner Ecosystem in Germany

The implementation of BIPA in Germany demonstrates the importance of institutional cooperation in building an ecosystem of Indonesian language learners. The learner ecosystem does not consist only of students who attend Indonesian language classes, but also includes teachers, universities, Indonesian diplomatic representatives, professional associations, cultural communities, teaching materials, digital platforms, and academic networks. APPBIPA plays an important role in this ecosystem because it functions as a professional organization for BIPA teachers and activists, with a mission to promote the dignity of Bahasa Indonesia and introduce Indonesian language and culture to foreign communities [21]. This role is important because language diplomacy requires not only policy direction but also professional competence and continuous collaboration among practitioners.



Figure 2. Number of Indonesian speakers in different parts of the world

The findings suggest that BIPA implementation in Germany benefits from existing academic interest in Indonesian language and Southeast Asian studies. However, the sustainability of the program still depends on the extent to which cooperation can be maintained among Indonesian institutions, German universities, teachers, and learner communities. Recent research on BIPA emphasizes that learner expectations, institutional quality, teaching strategies, and program relevance are important factors in improving the effectiveness of Indonesian language learning for foreign speakers [22]. Therefore, BIPA in Germany should not be managed only as a temporary language program, but as a long-term ecosystem that integrates academic learning, cultural exposure, digital resources, and diplomatic engagement.

Connection Strategy: Strengthening Diplomatic and Institutional Networks

The first major strategy identified in this study is the connection strategy. This strategy refers to the effort to build

and maintain networks among Indonesian government institutions, diplomatic representatives, German academic institutions, BIPA teachers, APPBIPA, and Indonesian cultural communities. The connection strategy is crucial because BIPA cannot develop sustainably without institutional partners that provide learning spaces, curriculum support, academic recognition, and access to potential learners. In this regard, BIPA becomes a form of cultural diplomacy that works through educational and cultural networks rather than through formal political negotiation alone.

The connection strategy also allows Indonesia to promote its language and culture through academic cooperation. In Germany, universities and cultural institutions can become strategic partners because they provide intellectual legitimacy and access to international learners. Studies on BIPA development show that Indonesian language learning for foreign speakers has increasingly become relevant in global contexts, especially after Bahasa Indonesia gained broader international recognition and after foreign learners began to require more specific learning materials for academic, professional, and cultural purposes [23]. This finding strengthens the argument that BIPA in Germany must be connected to the needs of learners, host institutions, and bilateral cooperation agendas.

Consistency Strategy: Sustaining Curriculum, Teacher Quality, and Program Continuity

The second strategy is consistency. The findings show that consistency is necessary to maintain the credibility and sustainability of BIPA implementation in Germany. Consistency refers to continuous curriculum development, teacher training, institutional cooperation, teaching quality, and learning evaluation. Without consistency, BIPA may become fragmented, dependent on individual teachers, or limited to short-term cultural promotion. Therefore, the program must be supported by stable teaching standards, qualified teachers, relevant materials, and continuous institutional commitment.

Consistency is also important because foreign language learning requires repeated exposure, structured progression, and long-term engagement. Research on BIPA and cultural adaptation indicates that Indonesian language learning can support foreign learners in understanding Indonesian social norms, cultural meanings, and intercultural communication practices [24]. This implies that BIPA should not only teach grammar and vocabulary, but also provide gradual cultural understanding. For learners in Germany, consistency in teaching Indonesian language and culture is especially important because they have limited daily exposure to authentic Indonesian-speaking environments. Therefore, teaching quality, curriculum continuity, and institutional support must be maintained so that learners can develop both linguistic competence and intercultural awareness.

Innovation Strategy: Digital Media and Culturally Contextualized Materials

The third strategy is innovation. The findings indicate that innovation is essential for strengthening BIPA attractiveness in Germany, particularly because European learners are generally familiar with digital learning environments and expect interactive, flexible, and culturally meaningful learning experiences. Innovation in BIPA can be

developed through digital learning platforms, multimedia materials, online learning resources, gamification, interactive tasks, and culturally contextualized teaching materials. Recent studies show that online BIPA materials and digital learning media are increasingly important because BIPA learners need accessible, engaging, and context-sensitive resources [25], [26].



Figure 3. Distribution map of BIPA institutions in Germany

Innovation is also reflected in the integration of Indonesian culture into teaching materials. Culturally based BIPA materials can introduce learners to Indonesian traditions, social practices, local wisdom, culinary culture, arts, and everyday communication contexts. Research on BIPA teaching materials containing East Javanese culture shows that cultural integration can make language learning more meaningful because learners do not only study linguistic forms but also understand the cultural context in which the language is used [27]. Similar studies on local-wisdom-based e-modules and cross-cultural business communication also suggest that contextual and culturally grounded materials can increase relevance, learner motivation, and communicative competence [28], [29].

In the German context, innovation should be directed toward materials that compare Indonesian and German cultural contexts. Such an approach can help learners understand pragmatic differences, politeness norms, social expressions, and cultural meanings in Indonesian communication. Digital phonology materials, visual media, and multimedia-based learning can also support learners in overcoming pronunciation, listening, and speaking challenges [30]. Therefore, innovation in BIPA should not be limited to technology use, but should integrate pedagogy, culture, digital resources, and learner needs.

Challenges in BIPA Implementation in Germany

Although BIPA has strategic potential in Germany, the findings show that several challenges remain. The first challenge is the limited authentic Indonesian-speaking environment. Unlike English, French, or Spanish, Indonesian does not yet have a broad everyday communication ecosystem in Europe. As a result, learners may have limited opportunities to practice Indonesian outside the classroom. This condition can reduce communicative exposure and slow the development of speaking fluency.

The second challenge is competition with other global languages and cultural products. Learners often choose foreign languages based on academic, professional, economic, and cultural benefits. Therefore, Indonesian must compete with

languages that have stronger global visibility and clearer career incentives. Studies on declining interest in Indonesian language learning in other international contexts suggest that language promotion must be supported by strong cultural branding, practical benefits, and institutional sustainability [31]. This condition is relevant for Germany because BIPA must be positioned not only as a cultural program, but also as a language with academic, professional, diplomatic, and economic relevance.

The third challenge concerns teacher capacity and institutional support. BIPA teachers abroad are expected to master language pedagogy, intercultural communication, digital media, curriculum adaptation, and cultural diplomacy. Therefore, teacher development should become a continuous priority. Recent studies on digital media in BIPA learning emphasize that teacher digital competence is necessary for developing effective and sustainable online and blended learning environments [32]. Without adequate teacher training and institutional support, innovation in BIPA may remain limited and uneven across institutions.

The fourth challenge is the gap between macro-level policy and micro-level implementation. At the policy level, BIPA is promoted as an instrument of language internationalization and cultural diplomacy. However, at the implementation level, teachers and institutions may face practical constraints, such as limited teaching materials, different learner backgrounds, administrative barriers, limited funding, and varying levels of institutional commitment. Therefore, the sustainability of BIPA in Germany requires stronger coordination among policymakers, diplomatic missions, universities, professional associations, and BIPA practitioners.

Strategic Implications for Indonesian Cultural Diplomacy

The findings indicate that BIPA in Germany has significant potential to strengthen Indonesia's cultural diplomacy if it is developed as an integrated ecosystem rather than as a fragmented language course. The three strategies of connection, consistency, and innovation provide a practical framework for strengthening BIPA implementation. Connection strengthens institutional networks and diplomatic cooperation; consistency ensures program continuity and teaching quality; while innovation increases learner engagement through digital media, contextual materials, and cultural integration.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, BIPA can help Indonesia build long-term relationships with foreign publics. Learners who study Bahasa Indonesia may develop deeper understanding of Indonesian culture, society, and values. In the long term, this can support Indonesia's positive image and strengthen people-to-people relations between Indonesia and Germany. However, this potential can only be achieved if BIPA is supported by stronger promotion, professional teacher development, adaptive curriculum design, and clear institutional coordination. Current developments in BIPA teaching materials, digital platforms, and professional networks show that the program already has important supporting resources, but these resources need to be connected more systematically to Germany's academic and cultural environment [33].

Overall, the results show that BIPA in Germany functions as a strategic cultural diplomacy instrument through policy support, institutional cooperation, cultural learning, teacher professionalism, and digital innovation. Nevertheless, its sustainability depends on the ability of Indonesian stakeholders to transform BIPA from a language teaching program into a broader ecosystem of learners, teachers, institutions, cultural actors, and diplomatic networks. Therefore, the future development of BIPA in Germany should prioritize long-term institutional partnerships, culturally adaptive teaching materials, digital learning innovation, and stronger recognition of Bahasa Indonesia as a language of academic, cultural, and professional significance.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of research and analysis that has been done, it can be concluded that the BIPA program is a strategic instrument in the effort to internationalize the Indonesian language supported by National Policy and language diplomacy framework. The Program has shown significant development through global dissemination, institutional cooperation, as well as cultural integration in learning. However, the results showed a gap between macro policy and implementation at the micro level. Governments tend to use quantitative indicators in assessing program success, while practice in the field shows that qualitative factors such as learner motivation, learning experience, and language environment have a more significant influence on learning success. In addition, the challenges faced by the BIPA program are not only structural, but also include sociocultural and competitive aspects at the global level. The low competitiveness of Indonesian compared to other languages and the limited support of the language environment are the main obstacles in increasing interest and sustainability of learning. Nevertheless, the BIPA program has great potential to develop, especially supported by strong diplomatic relations, international cooperation, as well as increasing interest in Indonesia in various sectors. For this reason, a more integrated strategy between government policy and practice in the field is needed, as well as increased support in aspects of promotion, teacher development, and learning innovation. Thus, it can be affirmed that the success of the BIPA program in the future will depend on the ability of the government and stakeholders to integrate policy approaches and practical needs in a balanced manner, so that the goal of making Indonesian an international language can be achieved more effectively and sustainably.

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