

International Students' Learning Needs for Developing an Outcome-Based BIPA Curriculum

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Abstract

The increasing internationalization of higher education has highlighted the need for BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*) programs that are responsive to the diverse learning needs of international students. This study aimed to investigate international students' learning needs as the foundation for developing an Outcome-Based BIPA curriculum at Universitas Negeri Medan. A mixed-methods needs analysis was employed, involving five international students selected through purposive sampling. Quantitative data were collected using a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire based on (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) framework of necessities, lacks, and wants, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews to support and explain the survey findings. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed consistently high levels of agreement across the three dimensions of needs analysis (overall mean ranging from 4.56 to 4.84), indicating that students highly valued communicative competence, cultural integration, authentic learning experiences, clearly defined learning outcomes, and performance-based assessment. The study demonstrates that learners' necessities, lacks, and wants provide valuable empirical evidence for aligning curriculum outcomes, learning experiences, and assessment within an Outcome-Based Education framework. These findings contribute to BIPA curriculum development by extending the application of needs analysis beyond instructional material design and offering practical insights for developing learner-centered and competency-based BIPA programs.

Keywords: *Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* (BIPA), Curriculum Development, International Students, Needs Analysis, Outcome-Based Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of higher education has increased the demand for *Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* (BIPA) as Indonesian universities expand international partnerships, student mobility, and academic collaboration. BIPA plays an important role in preparing international students to participate in Indonesian academic, social, and cultural environments. Beyond linguistic competence, learners need opportunities to use Indonesian in meaningful situations and develop an understanding of the cultural contexts in which the language is used (Kusmiatun et al., 2017). Consequently, BIPA programs need to provide learning experiences that respond to learners' diverse backgrounds, communication goals, and expectations.

In response to these needs, previous BIPA studies have explored various forms of instructional innovation, including technology-enhanced textbooks (Mardasari et al., 2022), culture-based teaching materials (Tanwin & Rosliani, 2020; Oktora & Khairina, 2023), digital and artificial intelligence-assisted learning media (Basarah, 2024; Oktora et al., 2026), and technology-supported speaking instruction (Fernanda et al., 2024; Solikhah & Nurlina, 2024). These studies contribute to the development of more contextualized and engaging BIPA instruction. However, research focusing on particular teaching materials, media, or instructional strategies does not necessarily explain how learners' needs can inform curriculum-level decisions, including the formulation of learning outcomes, the organization of learning experiences, and the selection of assessment methods. Further attention is therefore needed to examine how learner needs can provide a basis for comprehensive BIPA curriculum development.

Needs analysis is an important stage in learner-centered curriculum development because it identifies the competencies learners require, the difficulties they experience or perceive, and their expectations regarding the learning process. Hutchinson & Waters, (1987) distinguish these dimensions as necessities, lacks, and wants. This framework provides a basis for examining learners' needs from complementary perspectives. In BIPA education, such an analysis is particularly relevant because international students may have different linguistic backgrounds, educational experiences, and purposes for learning Indonesian. Understanding these differences can help curriculum developers establish more relevant learning priorities rather than relying solely on institutional assumptions or instructional preferences (Rizal & Hikmah, 2022).

Previous studies have examined difficulties experienced by foreign learners of Indonesian (Marsevani et al., 2023) and specific instructional needs, including the development of speaking materials (Asyah et al., 2021; Putra et al., 2024). Other research has focused on instructional materials and media designed to support language learning. Although this work provides valuable contributions to BIPA instruction, comparatively less attention has been given to using learners' reported necessities, lacks, and wants as a basis for program-level curriculum planning. In particular, further investigation is needed into how needs-analysis findings can inform the alignment of intended learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment within a BIPA curriculum. This issue is relevant to Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which emphasizes the specification of intended competencies and the alignment of teaching and assessment with those outcomes (Rao, 2020).

At Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED), the BIPA program has been offered since 2008 and forms part of the university's internationalization activities, including its

involvement in the Darmasiswa program. Institutional program documents describe a level-based curriculum covering BIPA 1–7, placement arrangements, progressively specified learning outcomes, project activities, performance-based evaluation, and the use of the Indonesian Language Proficiency Test (UKBI) as a proficiency measure. The program also incorporates experiential learning in local social and cultural settings in North Sumatra, providing potential contexts for learners to use Indonesian beyond routine classroom activities. These arrangements establish the institutional context for investigating international students' perspectives on their learning needs and considering how those perspectives might inform further curriculum development.

Although UNIMED's program documents describe existing curriculum arrangements, the present study does not constitute a systematic evaluation of their implementation or effectiveness. Rather, it examines international students' reported learning needs as an initial source of evidence for curriculum planning. This distinction is important because learners' perceptions can identify priorities for further consideration, but they cannot independently establish learners' proficiency levels, verify curriculum deficiencies, or determine whether existing learning outcomes and assessment practices are effective.

Against this background, the present study investigates the learning needs of five international students enrolled in the BIPA program at UNIMED using Hutchinson & Waters (1987) framework of necessities, lacks, and wants. Specifically, it examines what participants consider important for their Indonesian language learning, what aspects of their learning experiences they perceive as insufficient, and what they would prefer in future learning. The study seeks to address the following research question: What learning needs do international students at UNIMED report in terms of necessities, lacks, and wants, and how might these reported needs inform the development of an OBE-oriented BIPA curriculum?

The contribution of this study lies in providing a context-specific account of international students' reported learning priorities and considering their implications for curriculum planning. By relating needs analysis to OBE principles, the study offers an initial basis for considering the alignment of learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment in BIPA education. The findings are intended to inform subsequent curriculum development rather than establish the effectiveness of a completed or implemented curriculum.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA)

Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) refers to Indonesian language education designed for learners whose first language is not Indonesian. Beyond developing linguistic proficiency, BIPA aims to foster communicative competence and intercultural understanding that enable learners to function effectively in academic, professional, and social environments (Kusmiatun et al., 2017). Given the diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds of international learners, BIPA curricula should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate varying learning objectives, proficiency levels, and target communication contexts.

Recent studies have primarily focused on improving BIPA instruction through the development of teaching materials and innovative learning media. Mardasari et al., (2022) developed technology-based textbooks to enhance accessibility and learner engagement, while Tanwin & Rosliani (2020) and Oktora & Khairina (2023) incorporated local cultural content into teaching materials to promote contextualized language learning. Other studies have explored digital learning innovations, including Android-based speaking applications (Fernanda et al., 2024), digital media for language instruction (Basarah, 2024; Solikhah & Nurlina, 2024), interactive phonetics materials (Yoviyani et al., 2024), and web-based cultural learning resources (Mayrita et al., 2024). Although these studies have significantly enriched classroom instruction, they have predominantly concentrated on instructional materials and learning media rather than curriculum development. Consequently, relatively limited attention has been devoted to investigating learners' needs as the empirical foundation for designing a comprehensive BIPA curriculum.

2.2 Needs Analysis in Curriculum Development

Needs analysis is widely recognized as a fundamental stage of learner-centered curriculum development because it systematically identifies the competencies learners need to achieve, the gaps between their current and expected abilities, and their expectations regarding the learning process. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) conceptualize needs into three complementary dimensions: necessities, referring to the knowledge and skills learners need to function successfully in target situations; lacks, representing the discrepancies between learners' existing competencies and the desired outcomes; and wants, reflecting learners' personal preferences, expectations, and perceived priorities. Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for designing curricula that are responsive to learners' actual needs.

The importance of needs analysis has been emphasized across various educational contexts. Rizal & Hikmah (2022) argue that curriculum development should be grounded in systematic needs assessment to ensure that educational programs remain relevant to learner characteristics and societal demands. Within the BIPA context, Putra et al., (2024) demonstrated that foreign learners require speaking materials specifically designed to address authentic communicative needs, while Marsevani et al., (2023) identified linguistic and communicative challenges experienced by international students during Indonesian language learning. Similarly, Asyah et al., (2021) and Violensia et al., (2021) developed speaking materials based on learners' needs to improve communicative competence. Collectively, these studies indicate that understanding learners' necessities, lacks, and wants is essential for designing instructional components that effectively support language acquisition. However, existing research has largely focused on the development of specific teaching materials or instructional media, with relatively little attention given to applying needs analysis as the basis for curriculum development.

2.3 Outcome-Based Education (OBE)

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is a curriculum approach that begins with clearly defined graduate competencies and aligns curriculum structure, learning activities, teaching strategies, and assessment to achieve those outcomes (Rao, 2020). Through constructive alignment, OBE promotes curriculum coherence, educational accountability, and graduate readiness for academic and professional environments (Hasibuan & Harahap, 2024; Novitasari et al., 2024).

Successful implementation of OBE requires systematic curriculum planning, measurable learning outcomes, valid assessment, and continuous quality improvement (Noushad, 2024; Novrizal & Muhammad, 2025; Yusnadi et al., 2023; Mansyur et al., 2025). However, institutions often encounter challenges related to curriculum alignment, lecturer readiness, and assessment implementation, indicating that effective OBE adoption requires sustained institutional commitment (Khatun & Mouri, 2024; Manickam, 2025).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods needs analysis to explore international students' learning needs as a basis for developing an Outcome-Based Education (OBE)-oriented BIPA curriculum. Guided by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) framework, the study examined three dimensions of learning needs: necessities, lacks, and wants. Quantitative data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. The interview data were used to provide additional context for interpreting the questionnaire findings. The two datasets were considered together to develop a context-specific understanding of participants' reported learning priorities.

3.2. Participants of the Study

The participants were five international students enrolled in the BIPA program at Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED). Purposive sampling was employed to select students with direct experience of the BIPA learning process. Their experiences enabled them to provide information about their learning priorities, perceived challenges, and expectations for future curriculum development. Given the small number of participants, the findings are interpreted as context-specific insights rather than representative conclusions about international BIPA learners generally.

3.3. Instruments

Data were collected using a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was developed based on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) needs analysis framework and comprised three dimensions: necessities (five items), lacks (five items), and wants (five items). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all five participants to obtain further information about their learning experiences and expectations.

Although the questionnaire organized the items into three dimensions, some topics were related or appeared across more than one dimension. For example, cultural learning and clearly defined learning outcomes were addressed in both necessities and wants. Therefore, the dimensions were used as an analytical framework for organizing participants' responses, rather than being treated as entirely independent constructs. This overlap was considered when interpreting the findings.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations, to summarize participants' responses to the questionnaire items and describe their reported learning priorities. Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring topics relevant to participants' learning experiences, perceived gaps, and preferences. The interview findings were used to contextualize the questionnaire results and illustrate participants' perspectives.

The quantitative and qualitative findings were considered together to interpret the reported necessities, lacks, and wants. Given the small sample and the overlap among some questionnaire topics, the analysis focused on describing participants' perspectives rather than making statistical generalizations or treating recurring topics across dimensions as independent confirmation. The resulting findings provide an initial, context-specific basis for considering learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment in the subsequent development of an OBE-oriented BIPA curriculum.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Students' Learning Necessities

The necessities dimension examined the learning competencies and curriculum features that participants considered important for learning Indonesian. As presented in Table 1, the overall mean was 4.76, indicating a very high level of perceived importance. Cultural integration received the highest rating ($M = 5.00$), followed by preparation for everyday and academic communication ($M = 4.80$). Clearly defined learning outcomes and progressive language development also received high ratings ($M = 4.60$).

Table. 1 International Students' Learning Necessities

Necessities	Mean	SD	Representative Interview Response
Preparation for real-life communication	4.80	0.45	"I want to speak Indonesian confidently when interacting with local people."
Integration of Indonesian culture	5.00	0.00	"Understanding the culture helps me understand the language better."
Clearly defined learning outcomes for each level	4.60	0.55	"I need to know what I should be able to do after each level."
Preparation for academic communication	4.80	0.45	"I also need Indonesian for my university studies."
Progressive development of language competence	4.60	0.55	"Each level should build on the previous one."
Overall mean	4.76	—	Very high

The interview responses illustrate the importance participants attached to using Indonesian in everyday and academic contexts. They also emphasized cultural understanding, explicit learning targets, and continuity between proficiency levels. These findings describe participants' perceived priorities for curriculum development rather than objectively measured language requirements.

4.2 Students' Lacks

The lacks dimension explored aspects of the learning experience that participants perceived as insufficient. Table 2 shows an overall mean of 4.56, indicating a very high level of reported concern. The highest-rated items concerned cultural immersion and

experiential learning (both $M=4.80$), followed by opportunities for authentic communication ($M = 4.60$). Less explicit communication of learning outcomes received a mean of 4.40, while concerns about grammar-focused assessment received the lowest mean ($M = 4.20$).

Table. 2 International Students' Perceived Learning Gaps

Lacks	Mean	SD	Representative Interview Response
Limited opportunities for authentic communication	4.60	0.55	"Most activities happen only inside the classroom."
Insufficient cultural immersion activities	4.80	0.45	"I want more visits to local communities and cultural places."
Learning outcomes are not explicitly communicated	4.40	0.55	"Sometimes I don't know what competency I'm expected to achieve."
Assessment focuses too much on grammar	4.20	0.45	"Speaking should count more than grammar tests."
Limited experiential learning activities	4.80	0.45	"Learning outside the classroom helps me remember better."
Overall mean	4.56	—	Very high

The responses indicate that participants perceived opportunities for cultural immersion, experiential learning, and authentic communication as areas needing attention. Their comments also pointed to the importance of making expected competencies clear and ensuring that assessment reflects communicative ability. These findings represent students' perceptions; they do not independently establish deficiencies in the existing BIPA curriculum.

4.3 Students' Wants for Future BIPA Learning

The wants dimension focused on participants' preferences for future BIPA learning. As shown in Table 3, the overall mean was 4.84, indicating a very high level of preference for the proposed learning features. Experiential learning and the integration of local culture received the highest ratings (both $M = 5.00$). Clearly defined learning outcomes and progression across levels each received a mean of 4.80, while authentic performance-based assessment received a mean of 4.60.

Table. 3 International Students' Wants for an Outcome-Based BIPA Curriculum

Wants	Mean	SD	Representative Interview Response
Authentic performance-based assessment	4.60	0.55	"I want assessment based on speaking and real communication."
More experiential learning activities	5.00	0.00	"Learning outside the classroom is much more enjoyable."
Integration of local culture throughout the curriculum	5.00	0.00	"Culture should be included in every learning level."
Clearly defined learning outcomes	4.80	0.45	"Knowing the learning target motivates me."
Progressive curriculum from beginner to advanced levels	4.80	0.45	"Each level should have a clear progression."
Overall mean	4.84	—	Very high

The interview responses further illustrate participants' preferences for practical learning experiences and clear learning targets. Overall, the findings identify the curriculum features that participants would like to see prioritized in future BIPA learning.

They provide an initial basis for curriculum planning but do not establish the effectiveness of any proposed curriculum changes.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the five participants considered cultural integration, communicative competence, and clearly defined learning outcomes important priorities in BIPA learning. Cultural integration received the highest rating among the necessity items, suggesting that participants viewed cultural understanding as an important component of Indonesian language learning. This finding is consistent with previous BIPA studies incorporating local culture into instructional materials. Tanwin & Rosliani (2020) examined the use of local content in BIPA teaching materials, while Oktora & Khairina (2023) explored North Sumatran cultural content for beginner-level learners. Similarly, Manurung et al., (2024) investigated the incorporation of local wisdom, including Toba Batak culinary traditions, into language learning. These studies provide relevant support for considering cultural content in BIPA curriculum development. However, the present findings reflect participants' reported priorities and do not establish the effectiveness of particular cultural materials or determine the appropriate amount of cultural content at each proficiency level.

Participants also expressed a preference for authentic communication and experiential learning. Their responses highlighted opportunities to interact with Indonesian speakers and engage in learning experiences beyond the classroom. This finding is consistent with Kusmiatun et al., (2017), who emphasized meaningful language use in BIPA learning, and Putra et al., (2024), who examined speaking materials designed around foreign learners' communicative needs. Research on digital technology, Android-based speaking applications, and interactive learning media (Basarah, 2024; Fernanda et al., 2024; Wicaksono, 2022) also provides relevant perspectives on supporting learner engagement. The present study contributes a curriculum-oriented perspective by identifying authentic communication and experiential learning as priorities reported by participants. These priorities suggest that curriculum planning could incorporate communicative tasks and context-based activities alongside classroom instruction. Nevertheless, the study did not evaluate the implementation or effectiveness of such activities.

Regarding perceived learning gaps, participants reported concerns about limited opportunities for experiential learning and cultural immersion, as well as the communication of learning outcomes and the emphasis placed on grammar in assessment. These responses should be interpreted as learners' perceptions rather than verified shortcomings in the existing BIPA program. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) framework distinguishes learners' lacks from their necessities and wants, enabling curriculum developers to consider perceived differences between current learning experiences and desired learning conditions. In this respect, the findings are consistent with Rizal & Hikmah (2022), who emphasized the importance of needs analysis in curriculum development. However, confirming the extent and causes of the reported gaps would require additional evidence, such as curriculum-document analysis, classroom observations, and assessment data.

The findings also indicate the relevance of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) as a framework for responding to the learning priorities identified in this study. Participants expressed preferences for clearly articulated learning outcomes, progression across

proficiency levels, and assessment involving authentic communicative performance. These preferences are relevant to OBE principles, which emphasize defining intended learning outcomes and aligning learning activities and assessment with those outcomes (Rao, 2020); Thirumorthy, 2021; Noushad, 2024). For BIPA curriculum planning, this alignment could involve specifying what learners should be able to do at each level, providing opportunities to practise those competencies in meaningful contexts, and assessing performance through tasks appropriate to the intended outcomes. The present study does not produce or validate a complete OBE curriculum; rather, its findings offer an initial needs-based reference for subsequent curriculum design.

To illustrate how the reported learning priorities might inform OBE-oriented curriculum planning, Table 4 presents a proposed alignment between students' reported needs, intended learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment criteria. The examples demonstrate how the findings could be translated into observable learning expectations and corresponding assessment practices. However, this mapping is illustrative rather than a validated curriculum design. The proposed components require further review by BIPA instructors and curriculum experts and should be adapted to the proficiency levels and institutional requirements of the UNIMED BIPA program.

Table. 4 Illustrative Alignment of Reported Learning Needs with Proposed OBE Curriculum Components

Reported learning need	Proposed learning outcome	Illustrative learning activity	Assessment criteria
Every day and academic communication	Students can communicate relevant information in Indonesian in a familiar every day or academic situation.	Role-play a campus interaction or complete an information-gap task.	Task completion, comprehensibility, appropriate vocabulary, and interaction.
Cultural understanding	Students can describe a local cultural practice in Indonesian and respond to questions about it.	Conduct a guided interview about a local cultural practice or prepare a short cultural presentation.	Relevant vocabulary, clarity of description, and appropriate responses.
Experiential learning	Students can use Indonesian to complete a practical communicative task in a real-life or simulated context.	Complete a guided campus or community task and submit a short oral or written reflection.	Successful task completion, comprehensibility, and relevance of the reflection.
Clear learning outcomes and progression	Students can identify the target competency for a learning unit and demonstrate it through an appropriate task.	Review the stated learning outcomes and success criteria, then complete a level-appropriate task.	Achievement of the stated competency according to a published rubric.
Communicative performance assessment	Students can demonstrate their Indonesian communication skills in a realistic interaction.	Conduct a paired role-play or simulated everyday conversation.	Achievement of the communicative purpose, intelligibility, interaction, and appropriate language use.

Note. The proposed outcomes, activities, and assessment criteria are illustrative suggestions derived from the participants' reported priorities. They were not implemented or validated in this study and require review against UNIMED's BIPA curriculum and proficiency-level expectations.

Compared with previous BIPA studies, the contribution of this research lies in its focus on curriculum-level needs analysis. Previous studies have examined the development of teaching materials (Utami, 2020; Asyah et al., 2021; Violensia et al., 2021; Muzaki, 2024), digital learning media (Basarah, 2024; Indriyani et al., 2024; Nurramdhani et al., 2024), and culture-based instructional resources (Tanwin & Rosliani, 2020; Oktora et al., 2025; Marsevani et al., 2024). These areas remain important for improving BIPA instruction. The present study complements this work by examining learners' necessities, lacks, and wants as potential inputs for curriculum development. By relating these dimensions to OBE principles, the study highlights how learners' perspectives may inform the formulation of learning outcomes, the organization of learning experiences, and the selection of assessment practices. Given the small number of participants, however, the findings should be understood as context-specific insights rather than representative conclusions about international BIPA learners generally.

Overall, the findings support using needs analysis as an initial step in developing an Outcome-Based BIPA curriculum. The combination of learners' reported necessities, perceived lacks, and preferred learning experiences offers a basis for considering how intended outcomes, learning activities, and assessment might be aligned. The study's contribution is to connect Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) needs analysis framework with OBE-oriented curriculum planning in the UNIMED context. Further work should validate these initial findings through broader learner participation and analysis of curriculum documents and learning practices before the proposed priorities are translated into a complete curriculum.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that understanding international students' learning needs is fundamental to developing an Outcome-Based BIPA curriculum. The consistently high levels of agreement across the three dimensions of needs analysis (overall mean = 4.56–4.84) suggest that learners strongly value curricula that integrate communicative competence, cultural learning, authentic experiences, and clearly defined learning outcomes. These findings reinforce the role of needs analysis as a strategic foundation for curriculum development and provide practical guidance for designing learner-centered and competency-based BIPA programs. Future studies should extend this work by implementing and evaluating Outcome-Based BIPA curricula across diverse institutional contexts.

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