

## Dancing with Words: Integrating Culture into BIPA Speaking and Listening Instruction

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**Abstract:** *Language and cultural elements are essential in BIPA learning. Merak Dance is one of Indonesia's cultural heritages from West Java. It has great potential to serve as a learning resource in BIPA. This study examines the integration of Merak dance, a traditional West Javanese art form, into Indonesian language instruction for BIPA learners. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, involving five BIPA learners at Balai Bahasa Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The dance instruction in Indonesian used to deliver numerical counts, directions, and movement descriptions. The results indicate that they gave positive feedback and showed enthusiasm during their Merak Dance practice and performance at UPI's 2023 Dies Natalis celebration. These findings may serve as a reference for educators seeking to integrate language instruction with local cultures across diverse Indonesian regions.*

**Keywords:** BIPA, Culture in Language Learning, Merak Dance, West Java Culture

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) is a program to facilitate foreigners learning the Indonesian language through meaningful instruction. Internalizing the social norms, values, and cultural concepts must be embedded within the target language (Attaviryanupap, 2025; Bagea, 2023; Sekkal, 2023; Stone, 2023). A full understanding of the target language can be achieved by learners' schemata (Karlik, 2023; Kustina et al., 2024; Saisai, 2023; Saud et al., 2024). Through Indonesian language in BIPA learning, learners can understand and appreciate Indonesia's culture (Masruddin & Abduh, 2024; Putri et al., 2025; Susianti et al., 2024). Traditional dance is one of Indonesia's cultural heritages that can be integrated in BIPA learning.

The Merak (Peacock) dance is a traditional Sundanese performance art from West Java, Indonesia. It first choreographed by Raden Tjetje Somantri in the 1950s and reinterpreted by Irawati Durban Ardjo in the mid-1960s. The standard choreography used today is Irawati's reinterpreted version. The graceful movements of a peacock reflected in this dance through expressive arm and body gestures, symbolizing beauty and elegance in Sundanese culture (Fauzi et al., 2022; Hidayat, 2020; Kartiyani, 2018). The dance also offers pedagogical benefits as its practice involves numerical counting, spatial orientation, and descriptive expressions. It an effective medium for drilling vocabulary and enhancing learners' listening and speaking skills in communicative contexts. Learners can acquire language through a combination of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic inputs (Chen, 2024; Huang et al., 2024; Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024). Several studies also show that traditional dance can enhances learner engagement and intercultural competence (Azizah & Sukmawan, 2022; Bunga et al., 2024).

This study is grounded in two theoretical perspectives. First, experiential learning theory emphasizes that knowledge is best constructed through direct experience. Learners move through cycles of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and experimenting (Aithal & Mishra, 2024; Sheng et al., 2023; Zhuang, 2023). In the context of BIPA, engaging learners in Merak

dance practice provides a concrete experience that requires them to process instructions, perform actions, and reflect on language use. These will strengthen their listening and speaking skills. Second, the principle of language and culture integration asserts that language learning is inseparable from the cultural values and practices of its speakers (Kitani & Sakil, 2025; Raud, 2017; Trisha et al., 2025). Through the embodied performance of Merak dance, learners not only gain linguistic competence but also develop intercultural awareness by engaging with Sundanese cultural symbols of grace and identity.

Studies reveal that Indonesian culture can be integrated into BIPA learning and its effectiveness in enhancing learners' language skills, like Indonesian cuisine (Aini et al., 2025; Istanti, Yuniawan, et al., 2025; Saddhono et al., 2024; Yulianeta, Hardini, et al., 2024); music and traditional instruments (Hieu & Andriana, 2025; Istanti, Kusumastuti, et al., 2025; Nugraha et al., 2024; Simanjuntak et al., 2024); habits (Amala & Asteria, 2025; Andriyanto et al., 2025; Ekasiswanto et al., 2024; Zaka, 2024); and Indonesian literary works (Afrani et al., 2024; Farichah et al., 2025; Telaumbanua et al., 2025; Wuriyanto, 2025; Yulianeta, Amandangi, et al., 2024). On the other hand, several studies also highlight the use of traditional dance in BIPA learning to promote learners' cultural understanding (Azizah & Sukmawan, 2022; Bunga et al., 2024). However, there are not many studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of BIPA instruction using traditional dance as its context to drill learners' understanding of vocabulary and strengthen their listening and speaking skills.

This study aims to describe how Merak dance is integrated into BIPA instruction to enhance learners' listening and speaking skills, and to analyze learners' responses to the use of this cultural practice. Theoretically, it extends the discussion of language and culture integration by presenting traditional dance as a medium for developing communicative skills in BIPA. Practically, it provides teachers with a model of multimodal and experiential learning that can be adapted to other local cultural resources. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that a West Javanese dance can be transformed into a pedagogical tool that simultaneously strengthens linguistic competence and preserves cultural heritage. Thus, this study not only advances the pedagogical practice of BIPA but also contributes to the preservation and international recognition of Indonesian cultural heritage.

## **METHOD**

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to explore the integration of Merak dance into BIPA instruction. Five learners in BIPA program at Balai Bahasa Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia involved in this study. Their involvement was observed with a focus on vocabulary drills, listening comprehension, and spoken interaction. Their perceptions after practice sessions formed the basis of feedback on the language instruction. This procedure allowed the researcher to describe the learning process and emphasize the potential of Merak dance as a tool for improving learners' language skills.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The Merak dance taught to the learners is a type of creation that has several key choreographies symbolizing peacock movements. The duration of the dance is only 2 minutes and 40 seconds, as it is limited to the performance stage allocated by each faculty/unit at the UPI's 2023 Dies Natalis celebration. During 6 times of practice sessions, learners were exposed to repetitive verbal input, including numerical counts, directional cues, and descriptions of movement. The following tables provide a more detailed description of these contexts in terms of vocabulary used.

**Table 1. The Vocabulary Used in Merak Dance Practice Sessions**

Context	Vocabulary
Numerical Counts	<i>satu, dua, tiga, empat, lima, enam, tujuh, delapan.</i>
Directional Cues	<i>ke depan, ke belakang, ke kiri, ke kanan, ke atas, ke bawah serong kiri, serong kanan, ... langkah ke depan, ... langkah ke belakang, ... langkah ke kiri, ... langkah ke kanan.</i>
Movement Descriptions	The names of sundanese dance movements in merak dance: <i>rengkuh, ukel, ngayun soder, tumpang tali, kiprah merak kuncung, keupat merak, merak ulin, etc.</i> The movements vocabulary in Indonesian: <i>Diam, bergerak, tegak, berputar, buka, tutup, cepat, pelan, jinjit.</i>

The instructor demonstrates each movement with Indonesian numerical counts. The learners follow the movements and attempt to synchronize their movements with the music of the Merak dance. Over time, they became more responsive to these instructions, indicating an increase in their listening comprehension. Learners also began to reproduce some of the frequently used vocabulary, both by repeating the teacher’s words and by applying them in short responses. This is in line with the combination result of auditory input and kinesthetic practice supports learners in internalizing new language more effectively (Farran & Morett, 2024; Saito et al., 2024; Zhang, 2025).

Although the practice was not designed as a conversation class, learners naturally produced oral language when responding to instructions or confirming their understanding with peers. They often asked for clarification, repeated words aloud, or attempted to imitate the instructor’s phrases. These instances highlight that an embodied task can trigger spontaneous speech in a low-anxiety environment. Learners feel motivated to try without fear of error. Outcomes are consistent with the idea that communicative competence is best fostered through meaningful and engaging activities rather than isolated drills (Jeet & Pant, 2023; Ngoc, 2024; Salendab & Laguda, 2023).

The cultural dimension of this practice also played a vital role. Learners expressed excitement in engaging with a traditional Indonesian dance that carries symbolic meaning in Sundanese culture. The table below shows their feedback after they completed the practice sessions and performed on stage.

**Table 2. Learners’ Feedback on The Merak Dance Instruction**

Name	Feedback
L V	I am happy to join the dance practice because it was something new for me. Although I had some difficulties with the movements, I enjoyed the lesson and I want to learn more about Merak dance.
A	I appreciated that the instructions were repeated multiple times, making it easier for me to remember the words. The vocabulary I often heard during practice stayed in my mind and helped me respond more quickly.
S S	Learning through dance was fun for me because I could practice language while moving my body. I also managed to express my needs and challenges in the Indonesian language when I had trouble with the steps.
H L	I am excited to be part of the performance, and I feel motivated to understand the Merak dance. Although some instructions were initially difficult to follow, the more I heard them, the easier it became.
S Sh	I enjoyed practicing the Merak dance together with my classmates, and it made me feel closer to Indonesian culture. I still found some parts challenging, but I could explain my problems in the Indonesian language.

Their feedback revealed that the dance practice helped them feel closer to the local community and increased their appreciation for Indonesian traditions. They perceived this practice as a cultural and language immersion that enriched their overall learning experience. Learners faced several challenges. They struggled with vocabulary items related to abstract or

less familiar movements. For example, terms related to subtle gestures were more challenging to grasp than simple directional commands. Additional non-verbal support from teacher such as hand signals or physical demonstrations are important to ensure learners comprehension. The effectiveness of such integration depended on the teacher's ability to strike a balance between linguistic clarity and cultural authenticity (Cao, 2022; Yan & Jr, 2024). These findings imply that further development of instructional strategies is needed to maximize the pedagogical value of traditional arts in BIPA classrooms.

## CONCLUSION

The integration of Merak dance into BIPA instruction supported learners in improving their listening and speaking skills. The language input easier to respond to in numerical counts, directional cues, and movement descriptions. Learners are encouraged to engage with Sundanese cultural values. These findings underscore the importance of experiential learning and language-culture integration in fostering communicative competence. Therefore, traditional dance can leverage as a learning resource for BIPA instruction. This study was limited to a small group of learners and short practice sessions, highlighting the potential for further exploration. Future studies may investigate other cultural practices in different regions to enrich BIPA learning with both linguistic and cultural benefits.

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