

## GETTING AROUND IN INDONESIA: SURVIVAL MOBILITY LITERACY NEEDS OF BASIC BIPA LEARNERS AND DIGITAL MULTIMODE COMIC RATIONALE

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### Abstract

The increasing number of BIPA (Indonesian as a Foreign Language), learners highlights the need for contextual and functional learning materials, particularly for beginner-level learners who face real life communication challenges in Indonesia. One essential competency is survival mobility literacy, which refers to the ability to communicate effectively in public transportation contexts. However, learning materials addressing this competency remain limited. This study aims to identify the difficulties and learning material needs of beginner-level BIPA learners related to survival mobility literacy and to formulate a design rationale for a digital multimode comic. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed, involving 15 basic-level BIPA learners from various countries through a questionnaire using a four-point Likert scale. The findings reveal that learners experience difficulties in using dialogues, asking questions, and understanding transportation-related vocabulary. The results also indicate strong preferences for contextual content, visual support, and digitally accessible materials. Based on these findings, a digital multimode comic is proposed as a theoretically and empirically grounded design framework for developing survival mobility literacy materials. This study contributes to the development of contextual, functional, and learner-centered BIPA teaching materials.

**Keywords:** *BIPA, Literacy, Transportation, Multimode, Digital comic*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesian language learning for foreign language has been growing year on year. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, by 2026 a total of 2,154 instructors had been deployed to serve 194,192 BIPA learners across 56 countries that facilitate the development of BIPA programmes (Kemendikdasmen, 2026). This increase reflects the high level of interest among foreign learners, driven by various factors such as the growing number of student exchanges and foreign workers employed in Indonesia. These trends position the Indonesian language as a potential international communication medium and a vehicle for strategic language diplomacy. The continuous growth in the number of BIPA learners each year has made the need for functional and contextual teaching materials increasingly urgent, particularly for beginner-level learners who are just beginning their daily lives in an Indonesian-speaking environment.

The quantitative growth of BIPA instruction is not always matched by a corresponding improvement in instructional quality. This is evident from the limited availability of teaching materials for Indonesian language learners (Prasetyo, 2015). Research by Oktora and Khairina (2023), reveals deficiencies in existing BIPA teaching materials, noting that the materials in use are regarded as repetitive and traditional, with few interactive elements. Such an approach is insufficiently effective for beginner-level learners who have limited linguistic competence and require rich contextual support to understand Indonesian language instruction. For teaching materials to be truly suited to BIPA learners' needs, they must address the challenges inherent in each learner's proficiency level. One of the concrete challenges faced by beginner-level BIPA learners is the ability to use public transportation in Indonesia independently. Situations such as asking for directions, purchasing tickets, and communicating with transport personnel are contexts frequently encountered in daily life, yet they often cause confusion for beginner BIPA learners. The capacity to navigate these situations does not depend solely on general vocabulary knowledge, but on survival mobility literacy the ability to read, understand, and respond to

various instructions, signs, and conversations in the context of public transportation use (Perin, 2011). Specific scholarship on mobility literacy in the BIPA context remains very limited. The BIPA teaching materials currently available generally focus on broad language skills or thematic areas, and have not explicitly accommodated learners' needs in public transportation contexts. This gap reflects the necessity of developing teaching materials that are purposefully designed to address such situational literacy needs. In the context of teaching material development, the essential first step and foundational basis is needs analysis. Hutchinson and Waters (2008) affirm that the effective design of teaching materials must be grounded in learners needs both target needs and learning needs ensuring that the resulting materials are responsive, relevant, and oriented toward authentic language use contexts.

In line with technological advances and the evolving learning characteristics of the digital era, language teaching materials are also expected to be more adaptive and attuned to learners needs. Multimode learning opens opportunities for the use of more diverse and innovative media in language instruction. One medium with particular potential is the multimode digital comic, which integrates visual, textual, and narrative elements within a single learning medium. The integration of various semiotic modes enables the presentation of communication contexts that are more concrete and engaging for learners (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

A number of studies also indicate that digital comics have significant potential in supporting literacy development and language learning. Chaves-Yuste and De-La-Pena (2025), for example, provide empirical evidence that digital comics not only excel in terms of multimodality, but also contribute positively to the improvement of foreign language learners' literacy skills. On these grounds, multimode digital comics are viewed as a potentially valuable alternative medium capable of addressing the need for contextual, visual, and accessible teaching materials for beginner-level BIPA learners. Accordingly, the findings of the needs analysis in this study are expected to provide an empirical basis for formulating a design rationale for the development of multimode digital comic-based teaching materials in the context of survival mobility literacy.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Beginner-Level BIPA and Functional Competence**

Beginner-level BIPA learners at the BIPA 1 and 2 levels under the 2017 BIPA Graduate Competency Standards (SKL), equivalent to the A1 and A2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), face significant challenges. At the initial stage of learning, knowledge of the Indonesian language is generally very limited, encompassing vocabulary, sentence structure, and linguistic meaning (Council of Europe, 2001). Consequently, instruction at the beginner level typically focuses on introducing Indonesian to fulfil the needs of simple communication in everyday contexts. These characteristics underscore the importance of instruction oriented toward real situational contexts, rather than mere mastery of grammatical structures.

### **Survival Mobility Literacy**

Literacy skills refer to the ability to understand and use written language in social, cultural, and communicative contexts (Kern, 2000), while mobility entails not merely physical movement from one place to another, but also the social and cultural practices and communicative interactions that accompany it (Rodrigue, 2017). Survival mobility literacy in this study is focused on the context of public transportation use as a basic communicative need of BIPA learners, such as understanding routes, reading information, and asking for directions. In the context of foreign language learning, mobility literacy constitutes a critical survival competency, particularly for those living and conducting daily activities in areas with complex public transportation systems.

### **Needs Analysis in Teaching Material Development**

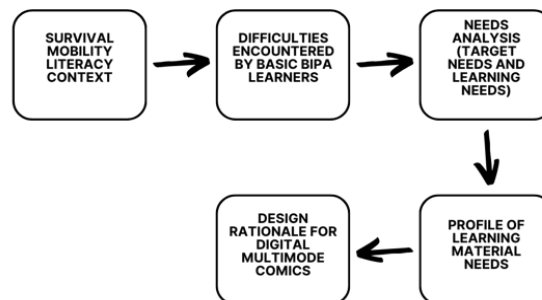
Needs analysis is a systematic procedure for identifying the gap between learners current condition and their desired condition, so that the teaching materials developed can effectively address those needs. Hutchinson and Waters (2008) distinguish needs into two principal dimensions: target needs, pertaining to the context of language use in the real world, and learning needs, pertaining to the learning process itself. Brindley (1989) further adds the dimensions of objective and subjective needs, where subjective needs encompass learners' preferences, expectations, and learning styles. These two dimensions serve as the framework for the questionnaire instrument used in this study.

### **Multimode Digital Comics as a Design Rationale**

Multimodality as the construction of meaning built through the interaction of various semiotic modes such as language, image, layout, and gesture each of which contributes significantly to the meaning-making process (Kress

& van Leeuwen, 2001). A mode is understood as a socially and culturally shaped resource for communicating meaning (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). Accordingly, a multimode approach is expected to broaden perspectives on language learning by emphasising the role of visual and contextual experience, particularly for beginner-level language learners. McCloud (2022) states that comics are a sequential art form capable of conveying meaning through an interrelated series of text and images. Meaning in comics is also constructed through the relationships between narrative panels, prompting readers to engage in the process of closure that is, independently comprehending the sequence and meaning of the story. These characteristics make comics a multimode text that enables readers to understand levels of meaning and events with limited verbal text. Drawing on this theoretical foundation, as well as prior research findings on the use of multimode digital comics in language learning, the characteristics of multimode digital comics are viewed as having the potential to support the needs of beginner-level BIPA learners. As such, multimode digital comics may be considered as a design rationale for the development of survival mobility literacy teaching materials commensurate with the learners' needs profile.

**Framework Of Thinking**



**Figure 1.** Framework of Thinking

**METHOD**

This study employs a quantitative descriptive approach aimed at systematically describing the difficulties and teaching material needs of beginner-level BIPA learners based on questionnaire data. This approach was selected to objectively map the percentage of learner responses on each indicator (Creswell, 2014). The research subjects were 15 beginner-level BIPA learners from various countries, namely China, Mozambique, Timor-Leste, Rwanda, Uzbekistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Hungary, Pakistan, Ghana, and Honduras. All subjects were formally enrolled in an Indonesian language learning programme at an educational institution in Indonesia.

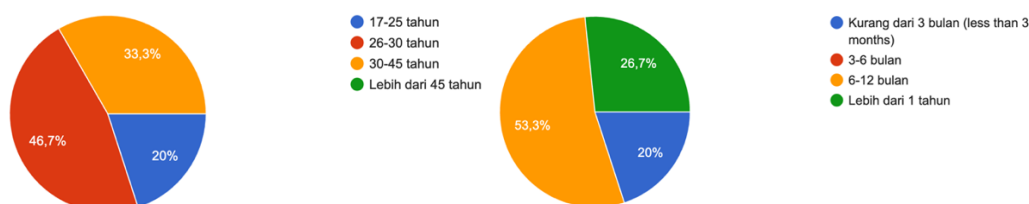
The instrument used was a closed-ended Google Form questionnaire developed based on two principal dimensions: (1) the dimension of survival mobility literacy difficulties, encompassing mastery of transportation vocabulary, asking for directions, conversations when using transportation, writing short texts, and simple readings related to digital transportation; and (2) the dimension of teaching material media needs, encompassing preferences for simple and contextual language, the use of multimode elements in teaching materials, and digital accessibility via mobile devices. Each questionnaire item used a four-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques in the form of frequency distribution and percentage per indicator. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of tables and diagrams to facilitate interpretation of dominant difficulty and need patterns. The findings of the needs analysis subsequently serve as the basis for formulating the design rationale for the development of multimode digital comics.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Respondent Profile**

This study involved 15 beginner-level BIPA learners from 15 different countries. The diversity of backgrounds and ages indicates that interest in learning the Indonesian language is increasingly widespread. The following presents the respondent profile of beginner-level BIPA learners.



**Figure 2.** Learner age and duration of study

The age of beginner-level BIPA learners is dominated by the 26–30 age group at 46.7% (n=7), with the minimum proportion being 20% in the 17–25 age group (n=3). As for the duration of Indonesian language study, the most dominant range is 6–12 months at 53.3% (n=8). This profile indicates that the majority of respondents have prior experience studying Indonesian and are of productive age, making the need for contextual and functional teaching materials particularly relevant.

**BIPA Learners' Difficulties in Survival Mobility Literacy**

The first questionnaire measures the difficulties experienced by beginner-level BIPA learners in literacy related to the use of public transportation in Indonesia. The Likert scale used ranges from 1 to 4; 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), 4 (strongly agree)

**Table 1.** Interval and Category.

Interval	Category
3,36-4,00	Strongly Agree
2,51-3,25	Agree
1,76-2,50	Disagree
1,00-1,75	Strongly Disagree

**Table 2.** Frequency Distribution and Mean of the Survival Mobility Literacy Difficulty Dimension.

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	A (3)	SA (4)	Mean	Category
1	I have difficulty understanding vocabulary related to transportation in Indonesia.	1	5	9	0	2.53	Agree
2	I have difficulty asking for and giving directions in Indonesia.	1	4	9	1	2.67	Agree
3	I have difficulty communicating in everyday situations when talking about transportation.	1	4	9	1	2.67	Agree
4	I have difficulty understanding simple texts about public transportation in Indonesia.	1	3	11	0	2.67	Agree
5	I have difficulty writing simple sentences and using dialogues about how to use public transportation, such as buying tickets or asking staff for help	1	2	12	0	2.73	Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>						2.65	Agree

All items in the difficulty dimension fall within the agree category, with a grand mean of 2.65. The highest level of difficulty was found in the aspect of using dialogue and writing simple sentences about public transportation (mean 2.73), with 80% of respondents (N=12) expressing agreement. This indicates that learners face obstacles not only in receptively understanding the language, but also in using it productively in real-world situations, such as purchasing tickets or asking transport personnel for assistance. Significant difficulty was also observed with the statements on difficulty asking for directions and difficulty communicating in everyday transportation situations, with 60% of respondents agreeing (N=9) and 6.7% strongly agreeing (N=1). Following this was difficulty understanding simple texts about public transportation in Indonesia, with 73.3% of respondents (N=11) agreeing.

These three difficulties share the same mean of 2.67. Meanwhile, difficulty with transportation vocabulary was the lowest among the five statements, yet remained in the agree category with 60% of respondents (N=9) agreeing and a mean of 2.53. These findings are consistent with Hutchinson and Waters (2008), who assert that language learning needs to be based on communication needs within the target situation; consequently, learners require a command of vocabulary and language structures relevant to the contexts of language use they will encounter. These limitations directly hinder learners' independence when travelling by public transport in Indonesia.

**BIPA Teaching Material Needs**

The questionnaire identified the needs and media preferences of beginner-level BIPA learners for teaching materials. The results of the frequency distribution and mean analysis are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Frequency Distribution and Mean of the BIPA Survival Teaching Material Needs Dimension

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	A (3)	SA (4)	Mean	Category
1	I need short texts that explain how to use public transportation in Indonesia.	1	2	11	1	2,67	Agree
2	I have difficulty understanding Indonesia learning materials without help of pictures.	0	2	11	2	3,00	Agree
3	I find it easier to remember vocabulary and grammar through picture stories or comic.	0	0	11	4	3,27	Strongly Agree
4	Pictures help me understand Indonesia texts more easily.	0	0	11	4	3,27	Strongly Agree
5	Digital Media can help me learn Indonesia language.	0	0	11	4	3,27	Strongly Agree
<b>Grand Mean</b>						3,10	Agree

The findings in Table 3 reveal a highly positive response. Three of the four items achieved a mean of 3.27, with 100% of respondents either agreeing (N=11) or strongly agreeing (N=4). Not a single respondent expressed disagreement or partial disagreement with the need for digital, image-aided BIPA teaching materials. The grand mean for this table is 3.10, falling within the agree category, while the final three items individually reach the strongly agree category. This uniformity of response demonstrates that the need for visual and digital media in language learning is universal, transcending differences in cultural background and mother tongue. These findings reinforce the argument of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) that in the era of multimode communication, meaning can no longer be conveyed through verbal text alone, but requires the integration of multiple semiotic modes, including visual, gestural, and spatial.

The aspect of difficulty without pictorial support also showed a high percentage, with a mean of 3.00. 73.3% of respondents agreed (N=11) and 13.3% strongly agreed (N=2). This indicates that visual elements are not merely supplementary, but constitute an essential component of beginner-level BIPA teaching materials. Furthermore, 80% of respondents expressed a need for short texts explaining how to use public transportation in Indonesia (mean 2.67), indicating a preference for teaching materials that are concise, contextual, and do not burden beginner-level BIPA learners with lengthy texts.

**Design Rationale: Multimode Digital Comics as a Response to Learner Needs**

Based on the analysis of the needs and difficulties of beginner-level BIPA learners, a design rationale can be formulated for subsequent development into survival mobility literacy teaching materials. Table 4 maps the relationship between empirical findings and the characteristics of multimode digital comics that offer solutions to BIPA learners' difficulties in using public transportation.

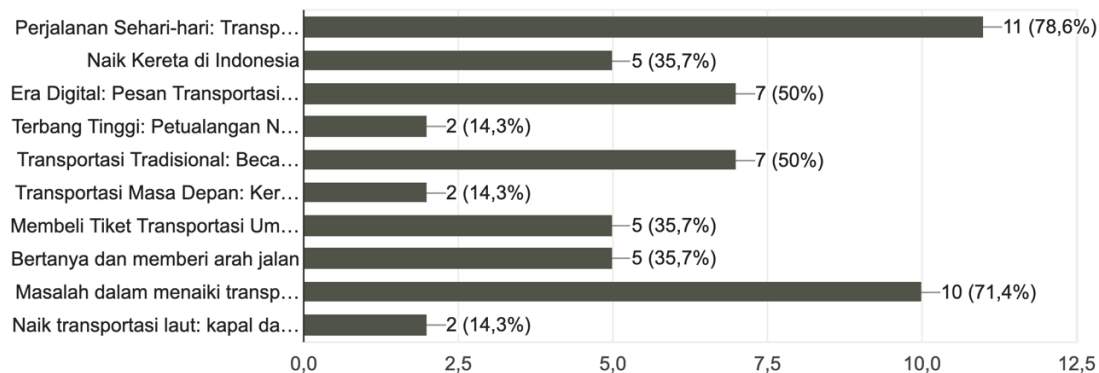
**Table 4.** Design Rationale: Mapping of Findings to Multimode Digital Comic Characteristics

Needs Analysis Finding	Percentage	Multimode Digital Comic Justification
Difficulty writing simple sentences and using dialogues about how to use public transportation	80% (Mean=2.73)	Comic speech bubbles naturally employ short, direct, situational sentences that reflect real conversations in transportation contexts.
difficulty asking for and giving directions, communicating, understanding simple texts about public transportation in Indonesia.	73.3% (Mean=2.67)	Comics present texts within a visual narrative context alongside route maps, allowing learners to comprehend reading material while simultaneously observing the situation directly.
Easier to remember vocabulary and grammar through picture stories or comic.	100% (Mean=3.27)	The visual mode is the core of multimode digital comics, harmoniously integrating images, text, and narrative learners (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).
Pictures help me understand Indonesia texts more easily.	100% (Mean=3.27)	Digital comics present every transportation situation visually, supporting contextual comprehension for beginner-level learners.
Digital Media can help me learn Indonesia language.	100% (Mean=3.27)	The digital comic format is compatible with various mobile devices, supporting independent learning anytime and anywhere.

Each key finding from the needs analysis corresponds directly to a characteristic and strength of multimode digital comics as a learning medium. Digital comics do not merely address a single aspect of need; they simultaneously accommodate linguistic needs (contextual vocabulary and dialogue), semiotic needs (situational visual comprehension), and digital needs (accessibility via mobile devices). This is consistent with the principle of multimodality proposed by (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), namely that the most effective meaning is constructed through the harmonious integration of multiple semiotic modes. Liu (2004) and Ranker (2007) have also demonstrated empirically that comics are effective in improving contextual comprehension and vocabulary acquisition in foreign language learning, further strengthening the justification for their use in the BIPA context. Accordingly, multimode digital comics represent not merely an innovative media choice, but an empirically and theoretically justified response to the genuine needs of beginner-level BIPA learners in the context of survival mobility literacy.

**Most Needed Teaching Material Themes for Learners**

In addition to identifying difficulties and media preferences, the researcher also asked respondents to select four teaching material themes from a provided list, in order to identify themes most aligned with the needs of beginner BIPA learners.



**Figure 3.** Chart of the most appealing themes.

Theme 'Everyday Journeys: Public Transportation in Indonesia' was the most popular, selected by 11 of 15 respondents (73.3%). Second place was occupied by 'Problems When Using Public Transportation' (66.7%), which

directly reflects the genuine challenges learners encounter in daily life. Both top-ranking themes are consistent with the findings on the difficulty dimension, confirming that learners' thematic preferences are rooted in their actual experiences and needs. The themes 'The Digital Era: Ordering Online Transportation' and 'Traditional Transportation: Becak, Delman, and Bajai' were each selected by 46.7% of respondents, demonstrating a balanced interest in both modern and traditional Indonesian transportation contexts. These findings provide concrete guidance for the compilation of units in the multimode digital comic teaching materials. The four top-ranked themes can serve as the primary narrative contexts in the proposed design for multimode digital comic teaching materials intended for beginner-level BIPA learners.

## CONCLUSION

This study was able to identify the difficulties and needs of 15 beginner-level BIPA learners in the context of survival mobility literacy, through a closed-ended Likert scale (1–4) questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Based on the questionnaire results, beginner-level BIPA learners encounter difficulties in the linguistic, semiotic, and digital dimensions of everyday public transportation use in Indonesia. The three most dominant media needs are: teaching materials that use simple and contextual language, are rich in visual elements, and can be accessed digitally via electronic devices (mobile phones, tablets, computers). Based on these findings, multimode digital comics were formulated as the most responsive and empirically as well as theoretically justified teaching material medium. Each identified difficulty has a direct correspondence with a characteristic of multimode digital comics: (1) dialogue difficulties can be addressed through the format of situational conversations in speech bubbles; (2) difficulties in reading texts through visual narrative presentation; (3) visual needs are met by the integration of image and text modes; (4) image presentation can support the comprehension of beginner-level BIPA learners; and (5) digital needs are accommodated by the accessibility of the comic format through mobile devices. This foundation aligns with the multimodality principles of (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), which hold that meaning is most effectively constructed through the harmonious integration of multiple semiotic modes. This study contributes to the development of more contextual and functional BIPA teaching materials, particularly in the area of situational literacy, which has thus far received limited exploration. For future research, it is recommended that a multimode digital comic prototype be developed based on the design rationale formulated here, followed by expert validation in terms of both content and media, as well as field trials to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of the materials in improving the survival mobility literacy of beginner-level BIPA learners

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