

Utilizing the *Jajan Squad* webtoon as multimodal teaching material for BIPA learning

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: BIPA; cultural competence; multimodal teaching materials; social semiotics; Webtoon <i>Jajan Squad</i> Article History Received: 2026-06-21 Reviewed: 2026-07-17 Accepted: 2026-08-15  License: CC BY-SA 4.0	Current BIPA teaching materials are still predominantly based on unimodal texts, limiting their ability to present the Indonesian language and culture authentically to foreign learners. This study examines the potential of Dito Satrio's <i>Jajan Squad</i> Webtoon as multimodal teaching material for BIPA learners at the B1–B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The analysis encompasses linguistic, visual, and cultural dimensions through a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach grounded in a social semiotic framework that integrates Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), Kress's theory of multimodality, and visual grammar. The selected units of analysis consisted of Episode 9 (<i>Bir Pletok</i>), Episode 11 (<i>Tukang Roti Keliling</i>), and Episode 13 (<i>Roti Buaya Mini</i>), which represent the highest density of semiotic modes and the most comprehensive coverage of B1–B2 competencies. The data were analyzed through unitization, semiotic mode coding, competency categorization, and pedagogical interpretation. The findings reveal that <i>Jajan Squad</i> operates through four synergistic semiotic modes (linguistic, visual, gestural, and spatial) with increasingly diverse intermodal functions across episodes. This study concludes that <i>Jajan Squad</i> has strong potential to be developed into structured BIPA teaching material covering vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and cultural learning.
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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian has attracted increasing global attention alongside Indonesia's growing strategic role in the international economic, political, and cultural landscape. This trend is reflected in the significant increase in the number of learners of Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) across various regions, particularly in Southeast Asia, East Asia, Australia, and Europe (Hardini et al., 2023). Within the ASEAN region, in particular, interest in learning Indonesian continues to expand, driven by increasing cross-border mobility, regional economic cooperation, and more intensive cultural exchanges. These developments highlight the need for BIPA teaching materials that extend beyond grammatical and linguistic content to provide authentic, culturally contextualized learning experiences while accommodating the characteristics of today's digital learners, who are accustomed to visual, interactive, and contextually relevant learning environments (Solikhah & Nurlina, 2024).

A major challenge in the development of BIPA teaching materials lies in the gap between learners' needs and the availability of appropriate instructional resources. Recent studies indicate that most existing BIPA materials continue to rely on conventional unimodal texts, emphasizing verbal language (Rasimin et al., 2024) while providing little meaningful integration of visual, audio, gestural, or spatial elements (Solikhah & Nurlina, 2024). This condition gives rise to at least three fundamental issues. First, unimodal materials tend to present Indonesian in formal registers that differ considerably from authentic language use by native speakers, resulting in a substantial gap between learners' grammatical competence and their communicative competence. Second, representations of Indonesian culture in conventional teaching materials are often expository and

artificial, limiting learners' opportunities to develop a holistic and contextual understanding of the target culture. Third, the limited variety of instructional formats reduces learners' long-term motivation and engagement, particularly among contemporary learners who are accustomed to digitally mediated content that is rich in visual and narrative elements (Rasimin et al., 2024).

In this context, a multimodal approach offers a promising and relevant alternative. Kress defines multimodality as the process through which people construct meaning by simultaneously combining multiple semiotic modes, including verbal text, images, color, layout, gestures, and other visual elements (Kress, 2010). This approach has proven effective in foreign language learning because it accommodates diverse learning styles, facilitates contextual vocabulary acquisition, and introduces cultural dimensions in a richer and more holistic manner. Huang & Kearney (2025) demonstrated the transformative impact of multimodal design in the context of intercultural virtual exchange, showing that learners exposed to multimodal texts not only improved their linguistic competence but also developed deeper intercultural awareness through active engagement with cross-cultural perspectives. These findings are further supported by Rasimin et al. (2024), who reported that foreign language learners using multimodal teaching materials exhibited significantly higher levels of learning motivation, engagement, and sustained learning intention than those relying solely on unimodal texts. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, this phenomenon can be explained through the Dual Coding Theory (Jared et al., 2013; Luo, 2022; Paivio, 2006; Wong & Samudra, 2021), which posits that information encoded simultaneously through verbal and visual representations is more effectively retained in long-term memory because it activates two distinct mental representation systems at the same time.

As a vertically scrolling digital comic format that integrates verbal text, images, color, and layout into a cohesive medium, Webtoon represents a concrete form of multimodal text with considerable potential as a language teaching resource. Jeanmaire & Kim (2023) found that the Webtoon format inherently encourages readers' active engagement in the process of meaning-making, as readers do not merely receive information passively but actively interpret the relationships between verbal and visual elements in each panel. Furthermore, their study revealed that Webtoons can foster learners' intercultural awareness by authentically portraying the sociocultural realities of everyday life through contextualized visual narratives. Yang, Jia, et al. (2025) and Yang, Lin, et al. (2025) further argued that multimodal texts such as Webtoons structurally create conditions of intertextual multimodality, enabling learners to employ different reading strategies within a continuous reading experience. This ability has been identified as an indicator of literacy development at the intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. In the context of BIPA, popular culture-based media produced by Indonesian creators offer a more authentic and contextualized understanding of Indonesian culture than conventional texts because they present language and culture as they are naturally experienced by native speakers in everyday life (Tantri et al., 2025).

Although the potential of Webtoons as language teaching materials has begun to receive attention in recent studies, several significant research gaps remain to be addressed. First, existing studies have yet to specifically examine Webtoons based on Indonesian popular culture that are produced by local creators and authentically reflect the dynamics of everyday Indonesian life. Second, no previous study has comprehensively analyzed the integration of semiotic modes in Webtoons as structured BIPA teaching materials within a comprehensive multimodality framework. Third, previous research has not explicitly considered the alignment between Webtoon content and BIPA learners' proficiency levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Fourth, research on cultural competence in digital media-based BIPA teaching materials remains limited, despite cultural competence being an integral component of communicative competence in foreign language learning (Bøhn et al., 2025). These gaps underscore not only the academic significance of investigating the potential of Webtoons as BIPA teaching materials but also the practical urgency of addressing this issue.

Jajan Squad is a Webtoon created by the Indonesian comic artist Dito Satrio, consisting of 186 episodes that are freely accessible through the official Webtoon platform. The series portrays everyday life, culinary culture, and the social dynamics of urban Indonesian society through natural conversations, contextual humor, and culturally rich illustrations. Its linguistic complexity (including formal and informal language varieties, diverse lexical registers, and rich cultural

representations) makes *Jajan Squad* a potentially valuable teaching resource for intermediate and upper-intermediate BIPA learners (CEFR B1–B2). However, to date, no study has specifically examined the multimodal potential of *Jajan Squad* as BIPA teaching material from linguistic, visual, and cultural perspectives. Drawing on the background and research gaps identified above, this study aims to analyze the potential of the *Jajan Squad* Webtoon as multimodal teaching material for BIPA learning at the CEFR B1–B2 levels. Specifically, it focuses on identifying and interpreting linguistic, visual, and cultural elements that contribute to the development of learners' vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and cultural competence.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical research design. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore and interpret the meanings and pedagogical potential embedded in the *Jajan Squad* Webtoon in a comprehensive, contextual, and holistic manner rather than merely measuring or quantifying the observed phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive-analytical design enabled the researchers to systematically describe the characteristics of the object of study and subsequently analyze them within relevant theoretical frameworks to generate meaningful interpretations for the development of BIPA teaching materials.

The study was grounded in a three-layered theoretical framework that operated hierarchically and complementarily. At the macro level, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) served as the overarching analytical framework, conceptualizing multimodal texts as socially constructed semiotic systems situated within specific cultural and contextual settings. At the meso level, Kress's theory of multimodality (Kress, 2010) provided the taxonomy of semiotic modes used as the coding framework, comprising linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modes. However, the audio mode was not operationalized because *Jajan Squad* is a static visual-verbal medium that contains no auditory elements. Consequently, the analysis focused exclusively on four semiotic modes: linguistic, visual, gestural, and spatial. At the micro level, visual grammar (Kress, 2010) was employed to examine the representational, interactional, and compositional functions of visual elements in each Webtoon panel. These three theoretical layers were applied in an integrated manner throughout the analytical process.

The primary data source consisted of the *Jajan Squad* Webtoon by Dito Satrio, which is publicly available on the official Webtoon platform (webtoon.com). The selection of *Jajan Squad* as the object of analysis was based on three considerations: (1) it is an Indonesian-created Webtoon that authentically portrays everyday life, culinary culture, and the social dynamics of Indonesian society; (2) it employs natural and contextual informal varieties of Indonesian; and (3) it contains rich visual and cultural elements relevant to the learning needs of BIPA students.

From a total of 186 available episodes, three episodes were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: the richness of semiotic modes, the diversity of culinary and cultural themes, and their relevance to the core competencies of intermediate-level BIPA learners (CEFR B1–B2). The three selected units of analysis were Episode 9 (*Bir Pletok*), Episode 11 (*Tukang Roti Keliling*), and Episode 13 (*Roti Buaya Mini*), chosen because they exhibited the highest density of semiotic modes and the most comprehensive representation of BIPA competencies among the available episodes. Data were collected through systematic documentation of the selected episodes, including downloading and archiving Webtoon panels, transcribing all verbal dialogues and narratives, and identifying visually salient semiotic elements.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis following the procedures proposed by Krippendorff (2022), which enable the interpretive examination of meaning, context, and pedagogical function. The analysis was conducted in four sequential stages. First, unitization, in which the Webtoon content was divided into units of analysis consisting of individual panels, dialogue sequences, or complete episodes, depending on the complexity of the elements under investigation. Second, coding, in which each unit of analysis was classified according to four semiotic modes (linguistic, visual, gestural, and spatial) based on Kress's multimodality framework (Kress, 2010), further elaborated through the principles of visual grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Each unit was coded according to its dominant semiotic mode and its pedagogical function within the context of BIPA learning. Third, categorization, whereby the

coded data were organized into four core BIPA competency domains: vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and cultural competence. Finally, interpretation involved examining the findings holistically in relation to the development of multimodal BIPA teaching materials, taking into account the CEFR descriptors for the B1–B2 proficiency levels as well as the pedagogical suitability of the instructional materials.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings obtained through a qualitative content analysis of the *Jajan Squad* Webtoon. Three episodes were selected as the primary units of analysis: Episode 9 (*Bir Pletok*), Episode 11 (*Tukang Roti Keliling*), and Episode 13 (*Roti Buaya Mini*). These episodes were purposively selected based on their thematic diversity, the richness of their semiotic modes, and their comprehensive representation of BIPA competencies within the corpus. The findings are organized into five categories that correspond to the BIPA competencies examined in this study: (1) the diversity and functions of semiotic modes; (2) the potential for vocabulary and grammar development; (3) the relevance of the Webtoon for multimodal reading comprehension; (4) cultural content as a means of developing cultural competence; and (5) pedagogical implications for BIPA instruction at the CEFR B1–B2 levels. Each finding is interpreted in relation to the research objectives using Kress (2010) theory of multimodality as the primary theoretical framework.

The diversity and functions of semiotic modes in *Jajan Squad*

The first finding indicates that *Jajan Squad* consistently incorporates a rich and complementary combination of semiotic modes throughout the analyzed corpus. Analysis of the three selected episodes identified four primary semiotic modes operating simultaneously: linguistic, visual, gestural, and typographic modes. These modes perform diverse intermodal functions depending on the narrative context. To document the coding results, Table 1 presents the coding matrix summarizing the frequency of simultaneous combinations of semiotic modes across the 57 units of analysis derived from the three selected episodes. Each unit was coded according to the presence of four operationally defined modes: linguistic mode (LM), visual mode (VM), gestural mode (GM), and typographic mode (TM). Because the coding scheme was non-exclusive, a single unit of analysis could contain multiple semiotic modes simultaneously.

Table 1. Frequency of simultaneous semiotic mode combinations in the *Jajan Squad* corpus

No.	Mode Combination	Episode 9	Episode 11	Episode 13	Total	%	Representative Panel Example
1.	LM + VM + GM + TM (four modes)	5	4	6	15	26.3	Episode 9: conflict “ <i>Kagak boleh, Bang!</i> ” (“You can’t do that, Bang!”) + angry facial expression + radical background + graphological marker
2.	LM + VM + GM (three modes)	9	7	7	23	40.4	Episode 11: appearance of the bread cart + exclamation “ <i>Uooh!</i> ” + Gema’s waving gesture
3.	LM + VM + TM (three modes)	3	2	2	7	12.3	Episode 9: narrative on the origin of Bir Pletok + visual of the character drinking + onomatopoeia <i>GLEK GLEK</i>
4.	LM + VM (two modes)	4	3	4	11	19.3	Episode 13: dialogue about searching for traditional bread + visual of the bread cart
5.	LM + TM (two modes)	—	1	—	1	1.8	Episode 11: silent panel containing only “.....”

Based on Table 1, 78.9% of the units of analysis (45 out of 57) involve the simultaneous use of at least three semiotic modes. All four modes co-occur in 26.3% of the units, with the highest frequency observed in Episode 13, which contains the most culturally complex content among the analyzed episodes.

In Episode 9 (*Bir Pletok*), panel 5 provides one of the clearest examples of a multimodal ensemble (Kress, 2010), namely a configuration of semiotic modes that work synergistically to construct a unified meaning that cannot be reduced to any single mode. In this panel, the linguistic mode is represented by the interjection “*Setdah!*”, which functions as a sociolinguistic marker characteristic of the informal Jakarta–Betawi register. The visual mode is embodied in a food cart bearing the label “*BIR PLETOK – BANG JAMUN – MINUMAN ASLI BETAWI*”, serving as a cultural artifact that encodes ethnic identity and geographical locality. Meanwhile, the gestural mode is expressed through the vendor’s open body posture, representing affection and pride in the product being offered. Together, these three modes perform a complementary function, with each contributing a distinct layer of meaning that cannot be replaced by the others, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. *Bir Pletok*

A different intermodal function is observed in Episode 11 (*Tukang Roti Keliling*). One panel features the onomatopoeic expression “*tulit tulit*”, which functions as a narrative transition anticipating the appearance of an object before it becomes visually visible. In comics semiotics, this technique is commonly referred to as a sound bridge. In this case, the typographic representation of sound prepares readers to process the visual information presented in the subsequent panel. The following panels further depict the bread cart and bakery products through close-up illustrations that explicitly borrow the visual conventions of food advertising. This creates what may be described as intertextual visual irony, a semiotic device that implicitly celebrates the commodification of street food by employing aesthetic conventions more commonly associated with premium commercial products.

Episode 13 (*Roti Buaya Mini*) presents the clearest example of an integrative intermodal function. An illustration of miniature crocodile-shaped bread placed on a fork against a golden-yellow sunburst background is combined with the verbal label “*Roti buaya versi mini!*”. Together, these elements create an inseparable unit of cultural meaning, as the unusual representation of a crocodile in the form of food serves as a cognitive entry point that encourages readers to question the cultural significance behind its shape. Furthermore, a subsequent panel introduces a feature absent from the other two episodes: a silent panel consisting solely of seven ellipsis marks placed against an otherwise empty background. This panel represents speechlessness resulting from surprise describe as specialization, in which the typographic mode alone carries the entire emotional burden of meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Overall, the three analyzed episodes demonstrate that *Jajan Squad* consistently employs increasingly diverse and complementary intermodal functions. These findings reinforce the view that semiotic resources in multimodal texts are not neutral but are inherently embedded with social and cultural meanings. Within the context of BIPA instruction, this richness of semiotic functions positions *Jajan Squad* as a multimodal text capable of creating learning experiences that extend far beyond what can be achieved through conventional verbal-text-based teaching materials.

Potential for vocabulary and grammar development

The second finding reveals that *Jajan Squad* contains a rich, authentic, and register-stratified repertoire of Indonesian vocabulary, encompassing both formal and informal language varieties commonly used in the everyday interactions of native speakers.

At the lexical level, analysis of the three selected episodes identified at least three distinct lexical registers. First, the Betawi dialect lexicon, including *engkong* (grandfather), *ane* and *aye* (I/me), *kagak* (no/not), and *entar* (later) in Episode 9, as well as the address terms *Bang* and *Mas*, which function as markers of social relationships. Second, the culinary and botanical lexicon, consisting of the twelve spices used in *Bir Pletok* (*kayu secang*, *jahe*, *sereh*, *kapulaga*, *cabe jawa*, and others) presented in the labeled diagram in Episode 9, together with the names of bread varieties (*pisang coklat*, *abon*, *bolu*, *kelapa*, *srikaya*, and *kacang*) featured in Episode 11. Third, the contemporary colloquial Jakarta lexicon, including expressions such as *mantep*, *penglaris*, *molor*, and *curhat*, which naturally occur in interactions among the characters.

The diversity of these lexical registers reflects the principle of authenticity in language teaching, which emphasizes learners' exposure to language as it is genuinely used by native speakers. In this context, the inclusion of local culinary vocabulary strengthens cultural immersion by enabling learners to acquire language through socially and culturally meaningful contexts. Introducing traditional foods has been shown to facilitate language learning by connecting linguistic forms with the social practices and philosophical values embedded in Indonesian cuisine (Andriyanto et al., 2025). Furthermore, the representation of local culinary culture in the comic functions as a form of *cultura franca*, representing specific cultural identities while simultaneously serving as widely recognized cultural references across Indonesia (Widianto & Pusse, 2025).

The vocabulary presented in the Webtoon is not merely introduced as isolated word lists but is systematically integrated into visual contexts that facilitate comprehension. In Episode 9, for example, the panel depicting a visual diagram of twelve labeled spices functions as a contextual visual glossary, presenting vocabulary in a format that is cognitively easier to process than conventional linear vocabulary lists. This finding supports Dual Coding Theory (Jared et al., 2013; Paivio, 2006), which argues that information encoded simultaneously through verbal and visual representations is retained more effectively in long-term memory. Moreover, the recurring *Jajanpedia* feature organically introduces vocabulary through expository and informational texts without separating lexical items from their meaningful contexts of use.

The integration of verbal information and visual illustrations has likewise been adopted in the development of contemporary teaching materials to facilitate intercultural understanding in everyday communicative situations (Luebaesa et al., 2026). The use of visual components and the *Jajanpedia* feature also responds to current instructional needs, as international learners increasingly expect multimodal learning environments (including digital storyboards and online platforms) to support language acquisition (Bakri et al., 2025). Through *Jajanpedia*, vocabulary is introduced organically within an expository-informational genre while remaining embedded in authentic contexts of use.

At the grammatical level, the Webtoon presents a variety of grammatical structures in authentic communicative contexts. Indirect imperative expressions, such as "*Kalau ngomong yang sopan, Dek*" ("Speak politely, Dek") in Episode 11 and "*Lakas berangkat sana, biar nggak kelamaan*" ("Go now, so you won't be late") in Episode 13, illustrate positive politeness strategies characteristic of intergenerational interaction in Indonesian. Epistemic modality markers, including the particles *mah* and *nih* as well as the expression "*katanya sih*", provide pragmatic nuances that are rarely taught explicitly in formal BIPA syllabi. Likewise, the nominal ellipsis commonly found in informal Indonesian, illustrated by the omission of the repeated noun *roti* ("bread") in the vendor's sales offer, "*Atau bolu? Kelapa? Srikaya? Kacang?*" ("Or sponge cake? Coconut? Pandan custard? Peanut?") in Episode 11, represents an important grammatical pattern for intermediate-level learners to master.

The presentation of these grammatical and pragmatic structures becomes particularly meaningful because the comic situates learners within authentic social settings, such as traditional markets, allowing them to experience language in realistic communicative contexts. This contextual approach has been shown to enhance learners' motivation while simultaneously

providing practical cultural insights (Idawati et al., 2025). The integration of pragmatic dimensions further supports the view that language competence should be closely linked to cultural competence to minimize communicative misunderstandings when learners engage in real-world interactions (Tiawati et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that *Jajan Squad* integrates multiple semiotic modes to represent Indonesian language and culture in a coherent and meaningful manner. This multimodal representation highlights the potential of digital comics as context-rich learning resources for BIPA instruction. The findings are consistent with those of Jeanmaire & Kim (2023), who argue that multimodal texts can effectively support language learning, particularly vocabulary acquisition. Nevertheless, the present study does not examine the effectiveness of digital comics in improving learning outcomes; rather, it focuses on analyzing their multimodal representations and pedagogical implications.

From a sociocultural perspective, the use of a popular digital medium such as Webtoon is highly compatible with the digital lifestyles of contemporary university students while supporting BIPA learners in using social media to construct their plurilingual identities (Cholsy & Asteria, 2026). Accordingly, *Jajan Squad* provides a lexical and grammatical ecosystem that aligns with the characteristics and learning needs of CEFR B1–B2 BIPA learners by offering authentic linguistic input with an appropriate level of complexity without exceeding learners' zones of proximal development.

Relevance to multimodal reading comprehension

The third finding concerns the potential of *Jajan Squad* to foster the reading comprehension skills of BIPA learners, particularly in relation to multimodal texts that require the simultaneous activation of verbal and visual inferencing strategies. This finding is consistent with Yulianeta et al. (2022), who demonstrated that an integrative model supported by digital technology is highly feasible and effectively promotes learners' independent learning. Similarly, Andriyanto et al. (2025) highlighted the growing role of digital transformation in BIPA instruction, arguing that platforms such as digital comics, YouTube, and language-learning applications constitute innovative strategies for reducing learner boredom and increasing classroom engagement.

The episodic narrative structure of *Jajan Squad*, organized around everyday culinary themes and presented through sequential comic panels, enables learners to follow the storyline while anticipating meaning from both visual and verbal contexts. This finding is consistent with Jeanmaire & Kim (2023), who argued that the Webtoon format encourages readers to actively construct meaning through the interaction between text and visual elements. Beyond supporting literal comprehension, the visual components of *Jajan Squad* function as contextual cues that enable learners to infer the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary without relying on dictionaries, thereby fostering learner autonomy at the CEFR B1–B2 levels.

The reading strategies required by *Jajan Squad* vary according to the characteristics of each panel. Narrative panels, such as the caption "*Di sebuah pagi yang lumayan damai...*" ("On a rather peaceful morning...") in Episode 11, require readers to interpret pragmatic nuances conveyed through affective lexical choices. The modifier *lumayan* ("rather/fairly") functions as a modality marker qualifying the adjective *damai* ("peaceful"), implying that the peacefulness is only relative and may soon be disrupted. Interpreting such pragmatic nuances represents an upper-intermediate reading skill (equivalent to CEFR B2), yet this competence is rarely addressed explicitly in conventional teaching materials. By contrast, the *Jajanpedia* feature, which appears in every episode, introduces an expository-informational genre that differs fundamentally from the comic's narrative genre. Consequently, learners are implicitly trained to alternate between two complementary reading modes (visual-verbal narrative reading and informational text reading) within a single continuous reading experience.

One of the most pedagogically significant findings relates to the role of cross-panel inferencing strategies. In Episode 13, a sequence of panels presents a productive misunderstanding in which a character proposes an inaccurate folklore narrative that is immediately corrected by the concise response "*Nggak.*" ("No."). This pattern of correction through simple negation illustrates a direct refusal speech act that differs from the more elaborate refusal strategies commonly found in many European languages. Learners with well-developed

multimodal reading competence are able to recognize that “*Nggak*” in this context functions not merely as a negative response but as a narrative transition inviting further explanation. Such contextual inferencing reflects the pragmatic fluency expected of learners at the CEFR B2 level.

The coexistence of two distinct genres within a single medium (the narrative comic and the encyclopedic *Jajanpedia* feature) creates a pedagogically rich form of intertextual multimodality. This arrangement trains BIPA learners to employ different reading strategies while navigating a continuous multimodal text, a capability that has been identified as an important indicator of literacy development at the intermediate and upper-intermediate levels (Yang, Jia, et al., 2025; Yang, Lin, et al., 2025). Consequently, *Jajan Squad* functions not only as an engaging reading medium but also as a resource that systematically develops contextualized and progressively challenging reading comprehension skills, in accordance with the principles of authentic text-based language learning.

These findings are further supported by Pratiwi et al. (2023), who argued that instructional materials integrating text, images, color, and effective layout are highly successful in fostering cultural and moral values among foreign language learners. Likewise, Andajani et al. (2024) emphasized that visual elements in instructional materials should not be viewed merely as illustrations but as discursive resources that contribute to learners' character development. Collectively, these studies suggest that multimodal elements enhance learners' understanding of cultural contexts more effectively than verbal texts alone.

Cultural content and the development of intercultural competence

The fourth and most prominent finding concerns the richness of Indonesian cultural content embedded naturally within the narrative of *Jajan Squad*. Rather than presenting culture through artificial expository descriptions, the Webtoon represents Indonesian culture implicitly and contextually through the unfolding of its narrative. This finding is consistent with Nugraheni et al. (2026), who developed Indonesian culture-based digital comics to enhance the cultural literacy of Thai BIPA learners. Their study reported a high level of instructional practicality (89.8%) and demonstrated that the digital comics significantly improved learners' cultural literacy.

At the level of foundational cultural competence, the three analyzed episodes provide rich and contextualized representations of Indonesian culinary culture. Episode 9 introduces *Bir Pletok* as a Betawi culinary artifact shaped by the process of colonial hybridity; Episode 11 presents the itinerant bread vendor as a distinctive socio-economic feature of urban Indonesian life; and Episode 13 explores *roti buaya* (crocodile-shaped bread) as a ceremonial artifact in Betawi wedding traditions (Siregar & Yahaya, 2022). These culinary representations function not merely as factual information but also as entry points for understanding the values, social relationships, and historical experiences embedded within everyday Indonesian food culture. This finding supports the view that cultural competence constitutes an inseparable component of communicative competence in foreign language learning (Tantri et al., 2025; Tiffany et al., 2023).

At the level of advanced cultural competence, Episode 9 provides the most explicit representation of colonial hybridity through the sequence of panels on pages 10–12. The visual transition from European beer to colonial Indies-style architecture featuring a woman dressed in *kebaya*, accompanied by the narration “*Nah, orang Betawi tuh nggak mau kalah dari orang Belanda, Bang*” (“Well, the Betawi people didn't want to be outdone by the Dutch, Bang”), positions the Betawi community not as passive subjects of colonialism but as creative agents capable of adaptation and cultural transformation. This narrative construction introduces learners to a more sophisticated dimension of cultural competence by emphasizing the concept of cultural hybridity rather than limiting cultural learning to knowledge of traditions and customs.

One of the most distinctive cross-episode findings concerns the phenomenon of cultural polysemy, illustrated through the lexeme *buaya* (“crocodile”) in Episode 13. The episode organically brings together two historically and evaluatively contrasting systems of meaning, *buaya* as a symbol of loyalty, patience, and protection in Betawi tradition (Tiffany et al., 2023), and *buaya darat* (“playboy” or “womanizer”) as a negative idiomatic expression in contemporary Indonesian slang. Rather than explaining this semantic contrast through explicit metalinguistic description, the comic constructs it through situational irony. After explaining that the crocodile symbolizes fidelity, the bread vendor is later depicted romantically involved with another woman.

This semantic contrast provides learners with insights into semantic shift in Indonesian and exemplifies an advanced lexico-cultural competence that cannot be acquired through conventional vocabulary instruction alone.

Another significant cultural dimension is the representation of Indonesia's complex intergenerational system of address. In Episode 13, the first five panels alone contain no fewer than eight different address forms (*Bu, Ibu, Tante, Bang, Mas, Mbak, Kak, and Dek*) each used according to specific social contexts. This diversity reflects the complexity of Indonesian social deixis, a feature that is often oversimplified in conventional BIPA teaching materials. From the perspective of interlanguage pragmatics, address forms are widely recognized as one of the most common sources of pragmatic errors among foreign language learners. Consequently, authentic exposure to these expressions within meaningful narrative contexts provides a highly relevant learning experience. Compared with conventional BIPA teaching materials, which often present Indonesian culture explicitly and in a decontextualized manner, *Jajan Squad* portrays culture as it is naturally experienced by native speakers in everyday life. Such authentic representation has considerable potential to foster learners' intercultural competence, supporting the findings of Bøhn et al. (2025) regarding the importance of authentic cultural exposure in foreign language education.

Pedagogical implications for BIPA instruction at the CEFR B1–B2 levels

Based on the four findings discussed above, this study demonstrates that *Jajan Squad* has considerable potential as an alternative multimodal teaching resource for BIPA instruction, particularly for learners at the CEFR B1–B2 proficiency levels. This conclusion is supported by three complementary considerations.

First, the linguistic complexity of *Jajan Squad* aligns well with the CEFR descriptors for the B1–B2 levels. Learners at these stages generally possess sufficient linguistic competence to follow natural conversations and informal language varieties, while still requiring authentic cultural exposure to further develop their communicative competence. The conversational language, idiomatic expressions, register variation, and popular cultural references embedded naturally throughout *Jajan Squad* provide productive learning challenges that are sufficiently demanding to promote language development without exceeding learners' Zone of Proximal Development. Although the Webtoon could also be used with lower-level learners (A1–A2), its implementation would require more extensive pedagogical adaptation, including visual glossaries and panel-based reading guides.

Second, *Jajan Squad* simultaneously incorporates five pedagogical dimensions that correspond closely to the objectives of a holistic BIPA curriculum. At the vocabulary level, each episode introduces at least three distinct lexical registers. At the grammatical level, a variety of sentence types (including interrogative, imperative, exclamatory, and declarative constructions) are presented in authentic communicative contexts. At the reading comprehension level, two different text genres, namely narrative and expository texts, require learners to employ complementary reading strategies. At the cultural level, the narratives organically introduce themes of colonial hybridity, the social functions of culinary traditions, and the construction of ethnic identity. Finally, at the pragmatic level, diverse speech acts are demonstrated through naturalistic interactions among the characters. This five-layered pedagogical configuration reflects describe as the transformative work of sign-making, whereby readers actively construct meaning through the negotiation of multiple semiotic modes rather than passively receiving information (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Third, each *Jajan Squad* episode functions as an independent instructional unit while simultaneously complementing the others. Episode 9 is particularly valuable for its rich Betawi dialectal register and its narrative of colonial hybridity. Episode 11 provides authentic representations of interactions in Indonesia's informal economic sector as well as age-based register variation. Episode 13 offers the richest cultural content through the cultural polysemy of *buaya* ("crocodile"), the curhat genre as a distinctive sociolinguistic practice in Indonesia, and the most diverse system of intergenerational address forms. These complementary strengths suggest that episodes should be selected strategically according to the specific learning objectives of each instructional unit rather than being used randomly.

The practical implication of these findings is the need to develop BIPA instructional modules that systematically integrate *Jajan Squad* panels with structured language-learning activities appropriate to different proficiency levels. Such activities may include visual context-based vocabulary inferencing tasks for B1 learners, analyses of the pragmatic functions of dialogue for B2 learners, narrative-based discussions of cultural competence, and productive language tasks inspired by the themes presented in the Webtoon. In this way, *Jajan Squad* functions not merely as a source of entertainment but as a rich and authentic language-learning ecosystem that is well aligned with the characteristics and learning preferences of today's digital learners.

Finally, these findings highlight an important direction for future research, namely the development and empirical evaluation of *Jajan Squad*-based BIPA instructional modules in authentic classroom settings. Overall, the findings suggest that *Jajan Squad*, with its focus on everyday Indonesian culinary culture, has strong potential to serve as a multimodal enrichment resource for BIPA learners, particularly at the elementary to intermediate proficiency levels.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Jajan Squad*, a Webtoon created by Dito Satrio, has significant pedagogical potential as a multimodal teaching resource for BIPA instruction at the CEFR B1–B2 levels. A social semiotic analysis of Episode 9 (*Bir Pletok*), Episode 11 (*Tukang Roti Keliling*), and Episode 13 (*Roti Buaya Mini*) revealed that *Jajan Squad* consistently employs four semiotic modes (linguistic, visual, gestural, and spatial) through increasingly complex intermodal functions across episodes, ranging from complementary and reinforcing functions to functions of specialization and meaning integration. The vocabulary identified comprises three layers of authentic language varieties: Betawi dialectal lexicon, culinary-botanical vocabulary, and contemporary colloquial Jakarta expressions, all of which are integrated into meaningful visual contexts that facilitate natural language acquisition. In addition, diverse grammatical structures and pragmatic features, including modality particles, nominal ellipsis, and intergenerational politeness strategies, are presented within authentic communicative contexts, extending beyond the linguistic content typically provided in formal BIPA curricula. The episodic structure, which integrates narrative storytelling with the expository Jajanpedia feature, encourages learners to employ two complementary reading strategies within a continuous learning experience, thereby reflecting the multimodal literacy competence expected at the CEFR B1–B2 levels.

Furthermore, cultural content (including the colonial hybridity narrative surrounding *Bir Pletok*, the socio-economic phenomenon of itinerant bread vendors, the cultural polysemy of *buaya* that connects Betawi cultural values with contemporary Indonesian idiomatic usage, and the diverse system of intergenerational address forms) is embedded naturally within the narrative rather than presented through decontextualized cultural explanations. Consequently, *Jajan Squad* offers richer opportunities for developing cultural competence than conventional BIPA teaching materials. Based on these findings, future studies are recommended to develop and empirically evaluate structured *Jajan Squad*-based BIPA instructional modules in authentic classroom settings. Such modules should incorporate carefully selected and complementary episodes aligned with specific learning objectives, for example, visual context-based vocabulary inferencing activities for B1 learners and pragmatic analysis of dialogue for B2 learners.

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Author contributions

R.A. conceptualized the study, developed the research framework, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the findings, and drafted and revised the manuscript. M.M. contributed to the development of the BIPA learning perspective, provided input on the relevance of the webtoon as BIPA learning material, reviewed the analysis and manuscript, and contributed to the revision of the final manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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