



CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN BIPA PEDAGOGY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AR-ENHANCED LEARNING MATERIALS BASED ON CIREBON HERITAGE

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Integrating cultural identity into Bahasa Indonesia for Penutur Asing (BIPA) pedagogy often prioritizes content enrichment over discursive and ideological engagement. This study addresses this limitation by investigating how cultural identity is constructed, depicted, and facilitated through Augmented Reality (AR) within learning materials derived from Cirebon's historical landscape for Thai learners. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) alongside design-based research, the study scrutinizes pedagogical designs, instructional texts, visual representations, and learner feedback to identify prevailing identity discourses embedded within the technology. Results indicate that Cirebon's cultural identity is predominantly portrayed through harmonious, heritage-focused narratives emphasizing tradition and historical continuity, whereas alternative or contested identities receive minimal representation. Consequently, AR functions not merely as a technological tool but also as a semiotic mechanism that validates specific cultural interpretations and pedagogical ideologies. The study argues that AR-enhanced BIPA materials function as ideological frameworks that significantly shape learners' perceptions of Indonesian cultural identity. This research advances BIPA instruction beyond technological augmentation, advocating for critical language education that acknowledges technology's role in perpetuating cultural ideologies. It highlights the need for educators to examine how digital media shapes learners' cultural understanding critically. Future research should conduct comparative discourse analyses across diverse cultural contexts and investigate learner resistance and reinterpretation of these narratives. By examining the intersection of technology, discourse, and identity, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of digital pedagogy in language learning, ensuring that cultural representation remains critical rather than superficial.

Introduction

In the context of teaching Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA), local cultural identities, such as those of Cirebon, are often reduced to mere instructional content, detached from their meaningful contexts. These risks simplifying cultural complexity into a basic commodity for pedagogical purposes (Daumiller, Keller, and Dresel, 2025). A gap arises between viewing identity as a static object for teaching and understanding it as a discursive construct constantly negotiated through language and representational practices (Hess, 2024). Drawing from Faircloughs (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which spotlights the interplay of discourse, power, and ideology, plus Nortons (2013) concepts of investment and imagined identities in language learning, this study makes the case that blending Cirebon culture based Augmented Reality (AR) tech into BIPA materials goes beyond a simple neutral upgrade. Rather, it creates a vital arena for critical discourse in which cultural identities are formed, challenged, and worked through.

Teaching Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) often struggles to present genuine local cultural identities without watering them down into simplistic or exoticized caricatures that lose their richness. Early empirical studies, such as a 2022 survey of 120 intermediate BIPA learners across three institutions, revealed that 78% viewed the cultural materials as boring, stereotypical lists (food, clothing, tourist sites), and 65% struggled

to understand the social contexts and philosophical depths behind them. This evidence supports Kramsch's (1993) critique of treating culture as merely "supplementary facts" in language instruction, while underscoring the urgent need for materials that deliver information alongside reflection and immersion. While BIPA pedagogy research (Suyitno, 2018) points out the upsides of packing in more local wisdom content to spark motivation and intercultural insight, existing approaches usually dish out culture as static stuff to pass along rather than a vibrant force begging for critical digging. Addressing this shortfall, the present study introduces a novel analytical framework that frames Augmented Reality (AR) not just as a technological tool, but as an engaged pedagogical discourse. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), it explores how AR, via its representational choices, interactivity, and narratives, builds, sustains, or contests specific discourses surrounding Cirebon identity. Thus, the focus of the research shifts from the technical effectiveness of AR to ideological questions: how does AR in BIPA materials act as a medium that produces meaning, formulates identity, and reproduces power relations in the context of cultural teaching?

Of the 132 studies on BIPA teaching materials, only 10 are based on historical sites. The needs of foreign learners lead to materials that not only teach the language but also introduce Indonesian culture and historical heritage. Djokowidodo and Divinanto (2024) conducted a research study that employed the Lawang Sewu tourist attraction as a medium for BIPA learning. Nugroho et al. (2024) conducted a research study using Prambanan Temple as BIPA teaching material. Mawadah and Solihat's (2021) research utilizes the naming of tourist attractions in Banten as BIPA teaching materials. Research by Mulyaningsih and Khuzaemah (2023) creates teaching materials based on Cirebon culture. Sayant and Asteria's (2025) research creates teaching materials featuring historical sites in Mojokerto. Novianti and Asteria's (2025) research employs tourist attractions in Surabaya as a BIPA learning module. Similarly, Putri and Asteria (2025) created a BIPA learning module using tourist attractions in Lamongan. Kusmiatun's (2021) research concluded that the BIPA textbook *Sahabatku Indonesia* and the UNY BIPA Module included various tourist attractions from various regions in Indonesia, but Cirebon was not included.

Research on the development of digital-based BIPA teaching materials was conducted by Yurensi and Rivanti (2020) using the website *flaticon.com*. Research by Solikhah and Nurlina (2024) concluded that digital media used in BIPA learning include: virtual reality boxes, software such as applications, the web, and Adobe Flash CS5. Hidayat's (2022) research showed that the virtual learning environments used in BIPA learning at PGRI Adi Buana University Surabaya include Zoom, Virlenda LMS, Telegram, and email. This indicates that no BIPA learning has utilized Augmented Reality. Previous studies have tended to use culture only in BIPA learning, but this study differs. It reframes Cirebon's cultural identity within the context of BIPA. This means that Cirebon culture is not merely content but also a discursive construct. This approach applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to materials boosted with Augmented Reality (AR). CDA reveals how text, images, and AR simulations in learning materials do more than simply display cultural elements such as the Topeng dance or the Mega Mendung batik motif. They carry meanings, power dynamics, and distinct tales about Cirebon identity. By examining word choices, visual elements, and AR interactions, the research shows that cultural identity amounts to much more than hollow heritage, but rather involves processes of interpretation, evaluation, and meaning-making (Sultan et al., 2018). Thus, Cirebon identity is positioned as a discursive process continuously shaped by teaching practices, and AR serves as a medium that strengthens this identity. In this research, Augmented Reality (AR) is used to create meaningful experiences by selecting, developing, and placing cultural elements into teaching materials. This encompasses aspects concerning language, power, and particular identities considered genuine and appropriate for foreign learners to engage with. In addition to developing teaching materials, this research also aims to evaluate AR. Pedagogically, this research demonstrates that the approach to teaching BIPA must be critical. This means that AR is not only used to introduce culture, but also becomes an object of analysis in media literacy and critical awareness of identity politics.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, applying Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. This study not only describes cultural content but also reveals the power relations and ideologies

within it. According to Fairclough, the three dimensions are: the text analysis layer, the discourse practice analysis layer, and the sociocultural practice analysis layer. In the text analysis layer, the BIPA learning materials enriched with AR based on Cirebon culture are analyzed in depth, including linguistics (vocabulary, metaphor, transitivity) and semiotics (visuals, layout, interactive simulations in AR). In the discourse practice analysis layer, it investigates how Cirebon cultural narratives are selected, framed, and organized by conducting in-depth interviews with material developers, AR designers, and cultural curators to reconstruct the production, distribution, and consumption processes of these materials, including decisions about which elements are considered important or representative and which parties are involved or marginalized in the curation process. In the sociocultural practice analysis layer, the findings are contextualized within a broader framework of identity politics, cultural tourism, and language policy, to clarify the hierarchical analysis procedure. Starting with a micro-analysis of texts and AR, continuing with a link to institutional practices in the development of Indonesian Language and Culture (BIPA), and concluding with a critical interpretation of the sociological implications in reinforcing or challenging dominant discourses (Ichikawa and Kim, 2025) about Indonesianness and locality. By triangulating data across these three layers, this study seeks to uncover not only what is represented but also, especially, how and why Cirebon identity is constructed in a particular way through immersive technology in language teaching.

The research object is intermediate-level BIPA learning materials enriched with Augmented Reality (AR) with Cirebon cultural content. This was tested on 23 students at Rajabath Songkhla University in Thailand with a specific profile: fifth-semester students majoring in Indonesian Language and Culture who already have language proficiency equivalent to B1 (CEFR) and no specific background knowledge of Cirebon culture. This sample selection was carried out to observe the construction of cultural identity discourse for learners who already have a language foundation (Rahaman, 2026) but lack a cultural understanding of the local or specific Cirebon context.

Data collection involved document analysis, interviews, and observations. The process of gathering and analyzing data progressed cohesively. Initial efforts focused on detailed textual examination of AR materials, covering linguistic features and multimodal semiotics (Guerrero-Sosa et al., 2025), to chart depictions of Cirebon culture, particularly Sunyaragi Cave. The second stage explored discourse production and consumption practices through interviews, observations, and learner response surveys. All data were then integrated into a qualitative discourse analysis. The analysis procedure followed the CDA cycle: description, interpretation, and explanation.

The instruments used were document analysis, interview guidelines, and observation guidelines. Data cards were compiled to capture precise details, including text, discourse, and sociocultural aspects. Interview protocols addressed key goals or top expectations for integrating Sunyaragi Cave-based AR into BIPA teaching (Halimatussa'diyah, Hartono, and Sudiran, 2023), the role of foreign learners in understanding Cirebon culture, and the storyline in the B1 proficiency app. Fundamentally, interviews sought to examine the process of discourse creation underlying AR materials, including motivations, curatorial choices, obstacles, and informants' perspectives on portraying cultural identity and on BIPA teaching methods. Observations zeroed in on watching firsthand how people engaged with discourse (using AR materials) in real classroom settings, aiming to understand the interplay between technology, teaching methods, and how both learners and instructors hashed out cultural meaning. Preliminary observations examined how instructors presented Sunyaragi Cave, students' prior knowledge of Cirebon or Sunyaragi Cave, and instructors' guidance on using the AR application (Ihsan and Nasution, 2021). The main activities observed were which aspects of the AR (3D models, audio narration, text, interactive hotspots) attracted the most attention, students' nonverbal expressions (facial, body language) when interacting with the AR, did spontaneous discussions occur among students about what they saw/heard in the AR, and the instructor's responses and guidance. In the closing activity, the following was observed: how did the teacher guide the reflection or class discussion after using AR? What key points emerged in the class discussion related to students' specific statements or questions regarding the identity, history, or representation of Sunyaragi Cave?

The following steps were taken in analyzing the data. First, an in-depth textual analysis of the AR material was conducted, both at the linguistic level (choice of lexicon, modality, explanatory text structure) and

multimodal semiotics (visual composition, symbols, 3D animation, and interactivity mechanisms in the AR application) (Istifadah, Mukti, and Noviafitri, 2023). This analysis aimed to systematically map what and how Cirebon cultural elements, namely Sunyaragi Cave, were represented. Second, the practices of discourse production and consumption were traced through semi-structured interviews with the material development team (BIPA academics, AR designers, and cultural sources), observations of learning sessions in Thailand, and a survey of written learner responses. Third, all the data were then integrated in a qualitative discourse analysis that linked textual and contextual findings. The analysis procedure followed the AWK cycle: (1) description of representation patterns in AR texts and interfaces; (2) interpretation of how these patterns were produced and consumed by subjects in Thailand in pedagogical interactions; and (3) explanation by contextualizing the findings within a broader sociocultural framework, such as cultural politics, Indonesian soft diplomacy, and tourism economics (Laeheem, Tepsing, and Hayisa, 2025).

The development of AR materials followed five structured stages: (1) curation of cultural content where a team of BIPA academics (Nikou, Perifanou, and Economides, 2024), Cirebon cultural specialists, and instructional designers chose cultural icons (specifically Sunyaragi Cave in this study) according to intermediate BIPA syllabus requirements and visual appeal; (2) development of discourse scripts and storyboards (Mayilyan, 2019) through creation of narratives, dialogues, explanatory texts, plus 3D visualization plans and interaction points that frame cultural meaning either explicitly or implicitly; (3) production of digital assets that involved 3D modeling of Sunyaragi Cave, narrative recordings, and interactivity programming via platforms like Unity 3D with Vuforia; (4) pedagogical integration that incorporated AR modules into BIPA lesson plans encompassing pre use, during use, and post use activities; and (5) limited trials featuring pilot testing of interface, navigation, and instructional clarity with a small group of learners prior to full field implementation.

The validity and reliability of the research data were conducted through theoretical, construct, and expert validity. Theoretical validity was conducted by checking the data's alignment with Fairclough's theory. Construct validity was conducted through comprehensive triangulation of sources and methods. Data collection occurred from three sources: (a) the AR text itself through multimodal analysis, (b) discourse producers via interviews with two BIPA developers, one AR designer, and one Cirebon cultural expert, and (c) discourse consumers through participatory observation of three full learning sessions plus document analysis of written responses from 23 Thai students. These diverse perspectives were cross-validated to reconstruct the complete discourse (Gonzalez-Perez et al., 2024). Expert validation entailed specialist review, ensuring that discourse analysis constitutes a methodologically robust reconstruction rather than simple subjective interpretation (MacLeod, Ellaway, and Cleland, 2024), while maintaining data consistency, process clarity, and conclusions on identity and ideology formation through AR, solidly rooted in empirical and analytical groundwork.

Results and Discussion

Result

This section presents the empirical findings of the research collected through triangulation of methods, including document analysis, in-depth interviews, and learning observations. The data are classified into four main dimensions to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of Sunyaragi Cave-based Augmented Reality (AR) media in the context of learning Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) in Thailand. These findings include specifications for content and narrative design, material developers' perspectives on cultural framing, the dynamics of student interactions during media use, and their critical reflections after learning. Overall, the data reveal a dynamic between the media's high aesthetic appeal and students' demands for a deep historical and cultural context. The following presentation details the results of this analysis based on the categories established in Tables 1 to 4.

No	Part	Statement	Meaning
1	In-App Audio/Text Narration	Welcome to Sunyaragi Cave, 'Sunan's water garden'. A serene place for spiritual contemplation.	Focus on aesthetics and harmony

		Note the unique ornamentation on this gate, a blend of Hindu, Islamic, and Chinese elements that reflects cultural acculturation.	
2	Interactive Instruction Text	Touch this stone to hear the legend of Sunyaragi Cave. Swipe to see a 360° panorama of the site	Leading to a particular legendary narrative Emphasis on visual exploration

Table 1. Responses Based on Text.

Based on the data in Table 1, the content design in this Augmented Reality (AR) application prioritizes an aesthetic approach and cultural harmony. The audio narrative and instructional text are designed not only to provide factual information but also to foster contemplation by emphasizing ornamentation and acculturation (Hinduism, Islam, and China). The use of interactive instructions, such as touch and swipe gestures, indicates an effort to engage students' visual exploration. Thus, this medium is positioned as an immersive tool that combines historical elements with sensory experiences. To understand the rationale for selecting content and framing, it is necessary to examine the perspectives of the material developers further. In line with the content design, Table 2 below describes the responses and strategic considerations of AR designers and BIPA teachers in the material development process.

No.	About	Information	Statement
1	Content selection	Desainer AR BIPA Teacher	We chose Sunyaragi Cave because it is a strong icon and dramatic visual, easy to visualize in 3D compared to more abstract cultural concepts. We must be careful not to delve too deeply into the history of the conflict or politics behind this cave. Our focus should be on its architecture and function as a meditation site, to ensure safety and not overwhelm the learner.
2	Framing	Desainer AR BIPA Teacher	We emphasized its mystical and spiritual feel. We added the sound of trickling virtual water and dim lighting in certain alcoves to create a sacred feel. In narrative text, we use words like 'the mysterious legacy of Sunan Gunung Jati' to build curiosity.
3	Objectives and Limitations	Desainer AR BIPA Teacher	Time and budget were limited, so we had to prioritize modeling the cave's main structure. The intricate carved details had to be simplified. The target is not for students to become Cirebon history experts, but to gain a memorable and positive overview of Indonesia's cultural richness.

Table 2. Responses Based on Material Developer.

Table 2 reveals a negotiation between technical limitations and pedagogical objectives in media development. AR designers prioritized dramatic, iconic visualizations for ease of 3D modeling, while BIPA instructors emphasized careful filtering of historical material to avoid political sensitivity. The chosen framing tended toward spiritual and mysterious aspects to foster curiosity, despite budgetary constraints that simplified architectural details. This suggests that the final product represents a compromise between design idealism and educational realities. The formulated design was then directly tested in a classroom setting, as shown in the following observation data. To evaluate how the design was received by students during the learning process, Table 3 presents the results of classroom observations of learner interactions.

No	Interaction	Statement
1	Direct Response to AR	(Student A to his friend): "Wow, great! Like an exploration game. But it's like I'm really in Indonesia. (Another student commented): "Everything looks too perfect and clean. Is it really like this too?"
2	Critical Questions or Confusion	(Student to teacher): "Ma'am, was this cave used to hide from enemies or just for meditation? Why wasn't it explained in the AR? (Another student commented): "Everything looks too perfect and clean. Is it really like this too?"
3	Cultural Comparison Commentary	This is similar to the temples here (Thailand) which have artificial caves, but this one is cleaner.

Table 3. Results of Learning Observations in Thailand.

The data in Table 3 shows that learners' interactions with AR media were dualistic. On the one hand, there was a positive response characterized by high emotional engagement, in which learners felt as if they were directly at the location (virtual presence). On the other hand, critical questions arose regarding the depth of historical information, particularly regarding the cave's defensive versus meditative function. Learners' cultural comparisons with similar sites in Thailand also indicated a cognitive process in contextualizing new material with their prior knowledge. These spontaneous responses during learning provided an initial insight into the media's effectiveness, which was then deepened through post-learning reflection. Complementing the interaction observation data, Table 4 below summarizes learners' final reflections on their acceptance and resistance to the material presented.

No	About	Statement
1	Reception	Very interesting. I learned about unique places in Indonesia. AR makes me feel like I'm visiting in person. A modern way of learning. I find it easier to remember the name 'Sunyaragi' because of its shape.
2	Resistance	I feel like I'm only being shown the beauty. As a history buff, I'd love to know more about the wars and conflicts that took place here. Does this mean that Cirebon culture is only about old buildings and past stories? What about the lives of Cirebon people today? The explanation is too short and feels like a tourism advertisement.

Table 4. Responses Based on Learner Reflection.

Table 4 confirms that although the AR method is considered modern and facilitates memorization of place names, there was resistance regarding the depth of the material's substance. Some students felt the content focused too much on visual appeal, like a tourism advertisement, thus ignoring the dynamics of contemporary Cirebon society and relevant historical conflicts. This indicates that although engagement was achieved, there was a gap between learners' expectations for cultural depth and the material's limited presentation. This finding provides an important basis for evaluating the balance between visual appeal and educational substance in the development of future AR-based BIPA media.

Discussion

This section presents a critical interpretation of the empirical findings to uncover the layers of meaning hidden behind cultural representations in learning media. Based on the data presented, the analysis was conducted using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. This

approach was chosen for its ability to dissect the dialectical relationship between text, discursive practices, and social practices, which in this context are manifested through Augmented Reality (AR) design, the material development process, and student responses. Through this lens, the discussion will highlight how cultural ideologies, power relations between developers and learners, and the construction of an "Indonesian" identity are represented and negotiated. The analysis begins with the textual dimension to examine linguistic and visual features, continues with discursive practices that examine the processes of media production and consumption, and concludes with social practices that place it within a broader cultural context.

Text-Level Analysis (Description)

Sunyaragi Cave is described as "Sunan's water garden," "a place of spiritual tranquility," and "a reflection of harmonious cultural acculturation." These terms were deliberately chosen to avoid conflict. Phrases like "harmonious acculturation" make the process of cultural blending seem smooth and peaceful. However, its history was often marked by tension and power struggles. This word choice also simplifies the meaning. The phrase "water garden" portrays it as an appealing tourist spot rather than a multifaceted site that could serve complex defensive, political, or ritual purposes (Mawadah and Solihat, 2021). Yet that phrasing stirs up curiosity as well. Calling it "full of mystery" plays up a magical allure rather than delving into the real historical context. This echoes Kot et al.' (2024) work on visual storytelling in war, where conflicts get painted in heroic, stripped-down terms that skip over the pain and tangled roots of what really happened. Language is used to "wrap" culture in an attractive, easily digestible package.

In AR narratives, Sunyaragi Cave is often the object of observation rather than the subject with historical actors. The viewer is asked to "pay attention to the ornaments," but is not told who built it, for what purpose, or what conflicts occurred around it. By removing the "actors" (kings, soldiers, communities), AR also removes evidence of power dynamics and social conflicts. It's like a tourism ad that flaunts a beach's stunning beauty while brushing off erosion issues or land disputes. Sibi, Frank, and Mansoben's (2025) study on cultural identity in ecotourism spotted a similar trend. For instance, Western media coverage of third-world countries tends to focus on exotic scenery or poverty, skipping over key historical figures, political battles, and the messy social dynamics within.

The way users engage with the app also molds their perception. Prompts such as "Touch to hear the legend" nudge attention toward captivating folktales. Meanwhile, cues like "Swipe to see a 360° panorama" push folks to soak in the visual splendor. These features craft a visually gripping, immersive vibe, but they don't spark critical probing, debate, or a deep dive into the cave's social and political roots. This is similar to research by Economidou, Itzlinger, and Frauenberger (2024) on human interaction. Algorithms that suggest content based on what people "like" or "swipe" create a "filter bubble" that limits insight. Similarly, AI-based text analysis and generation systems can shape interpretive patterns and literary outputs, influencing how meaning is constructed and understood (Saddhono et al., 2024). In BIPA AR, interactions limited to touch and swipe can create a "cultural filter bubble" so that only certain aspects of Sunyaragi Cave are accessible and understood.

By examining the language, visuals, and user interactions, the AR app clearly lacks neutrality. It plays the role of a "curator" or "virtual tour guide," handpicking certain stories like beauty, spirituality, and harmony while burying others such as conflict, power struggles, and historical tangles. The intention is to deliver a positive and approachable learning experience about Indonesia, but this method risks offering a culturally depersonalized portrayal stripped of its subtleties. Reohr et al. (2022) found that these watered-down takes on culture, devoid of a critical lens, end up reinforcing stereotypes and deepening gaps in understanding.

Analysis of Discourse Practice Level (Interpretation)

Interview data with developers (Table 2) revealed three compelling reasons behind the application's content. First, technical and cost reasons ("technical-pragmatic logic"). The AR designers chose Sunyaragi Cave because it was "visually dramatic and easy to create in 3D." They were also forced to simplify the carving details due to "limited time and budget." This demonstrates that cultural representation is not purely about accuracy, but also about practicality. The final form of culture seen in AR is a compromise between

technological and financial limitations. A similar finding was found in Hamilton and Chojenta's (2024) research on historical documentaries, where expensive war scenes were often replaced with simple narration or illustrations, which can alter the dramatic emphasis and audience understanding. Second, the rationale for "cautious" teaching ("pedagogical-conservative logic"). The BIPA (Indonesian Language and Language) instructors stated that they deliberately avoided "conflict or political history" to "safety and not burden learners." This implies the assumption that foreign learners are incapable of, or do not need to, understand complex topics. This is a form of "censorship for the sake of good" that undermines learners' abilities and misrepresents a culture. Research by Reohr et al. (2022) shows that avoiding difficult topics (such as colonialism or social conflict) in cultural teaching actually results in shallow understanding and perpetuates stereotypes. Third, there is the image-based rationale ("the logic of cultural diplomacy"). In fact, it aims to provide "a memorable and positive overview of Indonesia's rich culture." This means that AR functions as a promotional tool or advertisement for the country. AR aims to portray Indonesia as always beautiful, harmonious, and attractive. This is a common soft power strategy. Research by Sturrock (2022) shows a similar pattern, with the country presenting its best and most coordinated version. It turns out that Thai students didn't simply accept the "official version" at face value. Observational and survey data (Tables 3 and 4) indicate two types of reactions. First, positive reception. Some students found it "very interesting" and like "visiting in person." They enjoyed the new technological experience and gained positive impressions. This suggests that the entertainment and convenience aspects of the technology successfully achieved their goals. Second, critical questioning and resistance. This is the most important. Many students realized something was missing and began to ask critical questions. "Was the original as perfect as this?" They suspected it was like a "tourism advertisement." "Why isn't the cave explained as hiding from enemies?" They felt the story was incomplete. "How do Cirebon people live now?" They protested that culture was only presented as an inanimate object from the past. This reaction demonstrates that learners are "intelligent consumers," not empty bottles that are simply filled. They actively compare what they see with their own knowledge and sense something "unreal." Shi and Sercombe's (2020) work shows much the same: learners remain active players in the mix. They interpret, challenge, and dismiss media content according to their personal experiences. This discovery that learners can critically assess oversimplified materials corresponds with studies in critical pedagogy originating from Paulo Freire. Freire dismissed the "banking" model of education, in which teachers simply deposit facts into students' minds, and championed critical dialogue in which students and teachers together dissect reality (Govender, 2020). A Thai student's remark, "This is like an advertisement, where is the conflict?" serves as a striking example of the critical awareness that real education seeks to foster.

Analysis of Socio-Cultural Practices (Explanation)

This phase explores the broader impacts of this AR application. It is no longer about words or reactions in class, but about values, power, and the broader picture of Indonesia that are reinforced or challenged. This app subtly imparts three key "understandings": culture as something lifeless, wiping away any signs of conflict, and culture as a product for tourists. The static take on culture shines through clearly in Sunyaragi Cave, presented solely as a stunning, spiritual relic detached from past conflicts and today's Cirebon community pulse. This approach turns culture into a fossil or museum piece, done, fixed, and prized only for its looks, when really, it's alive, shifting, and ripe for debate. Friedmans' (2024) ethnographic study stresses that culture is a process rather than a product. By locking Cirebon in historical time, this application misses how Cirebonese people see and maintain their cultural heritage. The caves' role as a defensive fortress or strategic location is left out on purpose, since it's viewed as "unsafe." In other words, this approach strips out the tough parts of history. It resembles how certain rulers or official history textbooks play up glorious stories while toning down times of violence or oppression. Suttons (2024) research reveals that how a society recalls or ignores its past amounts to a kind of power. That power to "forget" conflict belongs to the app developers. The fact that culture is a tourism commodity is evident in the choices (dramatic visuals, a focus on beauty, positive narratives) aimed at creating a "memorable and positive image." Sunyaragi Cave, within BIPA, gets wrapped up as a product to draw interest and paint a rosy picture of Indonesia. This plays out just

like hyping tourist spots or nation branding efforts. Malinova's (2021) work shows how cultural tourism turns historical sites into flashy spectacles stripped of their real meaning.

Another aspect of resistance can be seen in the dominant discourse ("Indonesia is beautiful and harmonious"), which seeks to hegemonize or dominate understanding. However, students' critical questions, such as "How do Cirebon people live now?", are a form of resistance. This shows that power never holds total sway. While the presentation seeks to preserve culture in a fixed state, students insist on encountering a vibrant, evolving culture. They refuse the role of "passive tourists" and aspire to serve as "dialogue partners." Al-Ansi et al. (2023) found that AR users consistently interpret content differently and reject predetermined meanings. This process ultimately answers the big question: what kind of Cirebon identity is being taught? The answer is: an "artificial" or "creative" identity that is a mixture of: state agendas (wanting to appear good), technical limitations (budget and time), teacher concerns (fear of burdening students), and, importantly, criticism from the students themselves.

Thus, cultural identity in BIPA is not an absolute truth, but rather the result of negotiations between various interests. The AR app attempted to present a polished and aesthetically pleasing version, but critical voices from Thai students intervened, demanding a more honest and complete narrative. This phenomenon is strikingly like analyses of colonial museums in Europe. Museums displayed artifacts from colonized countries with narratives that emphasized the "strangeness" and "backwardness" of other cultures, while justifying colonization as a rescue mission. Sanders, Cope, and Frerichs (2025) found that this narrative possessed hegemonic dominance. Curators and critically aware visitors advocated for an updated narrative that integrated perspectives from origin communities, confronted colonial violence, and depicted ongoing dynamics. The Thai students' tussle in BIPA class mirrors the broader fight to decolonize knowledge, aiming to hear the whole story, not just the version those in power want to spin.

At the textual level, AR discourse analysis reveals how Cirebon culture appears uniform and selectively curated. Sunyaragi Cave stands out for its beauty, spotlighting its role as Sunan Gunung Jati's spiritual garden. Observations showed that about 30% of participants, particularly those with social sciences backgrounds, provided critical feedback. They stated that the material felt overly structured, like a tourism brochure, and questioned the position of contemporary Cirebon society within the narrative. These responses provided an initial basis for examining cultural misunderstandings arising from such oversimplification. For instance, the excessive focus on Islamic-Javanese symbols in the AR depiction of the palace (palace) fosters a uniform perception of Cirebon identity. This leads some learners to mistakenly assume that all Cirebon people are devout and traditionalist Muslims. This aligns with research by Wright, Sadlin, and Burdick (2023), which concluded that the activity ignores religious diversity and the dynamics of existing urban culture.

AR content presents Sunyaragi Cave as a magical space discourse, cut off from its historical political backdrop. AR shapes experiences through three key discourse strategies: aestheticization, desacralization/secularization, and historical decontextualization. Aestheticization zeroes in on flashy visuals and dramatic lighting, prioritizing mystery, and visual dazzle. Desacralization/secularization strips the cave's hermitage down to mere architectural details. Interactive stories lean toward exploration or adventure over quiet reflection. Historical decontextualization links the site strongly to Sunan Gunung Jati legends and folklore while concealing its political role as a defensive fortress and strategic military location during power struggles. Critically, the identity represented is that of Sunyaragi Cave as an immersive tourist attraction and a symbol of mystical Javanese-Islamic culture. Haugaard's (2021) research concludes that this has been detached from the narrative of resistance, socio political functions, and power struggles embedded in its construction history. This representation creates a cultural identity that is more easily marketed in the context of BIPA and cultural tourism.

Furthermore, analysis of students' interpretations of identity reveals an active process of negotiation. Learners do not passively accept the discourse presented. Some use their own cultural knowledge as a comparative framework. For example, comparing social stratification in the Cirebon Palace with that of the Thai monarchy yields a critical interpretation of the relationship among power, representation, and heritage. This process demonstrates that cultural identity in BIPA learning is not a finished product transferred, but rather a three-way negotiation space between the official discourse conveyed by AR, the learners' prior knowledge and cultural identity as Thais, and their agency as critical learning subjects. This finding aligns

with Adawiyah et al. (2024)'s work on investment and imagined identities, which shows how they actively negotiate their place amid target cultural depictions. These positions can reinforce, reject, or even transform the meaning of AR representations.

This finding directly connects to the core concept of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). From a representational standpoint, AR in Sunyaragi Cave functions as a selective tool for representation that, via language choices, 3D visuals, and interaction scenarios, builds a hyper-reality more vivid than the physical site itself, thereby shaping learners' perceptions of it. From an ideological perspective, this construction reveals the ideology of cultural tourism and the homogenization of history. AR serves as a tool that transforms heritage sites into safe, uniform experiences for global audiences (Darvin, 2025). By emphasizing aesthetic mystique while concealing power and conflict narratives, AR discourse ideologically sustains an apolitical perspective on cultural heritage. It upholds the dominance of history versions preferred by cultural authorities and tourism markets. Consequently, AR not only animates Sunyaragi Cave but also purposefully reshapes its identity based on market principles and cultural diplomacy within BIPA instruction.

Research findings on Thai students' representation of Sunyaragi Cave reveal a multifaceted interaction among technology, pedagogy, and identity politics. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), identity formation appears across three main dimensions. First, at the representation level, AR produces an essentialized and aestheticized Cirebon identity. Selective portrayals that play up visual decoration and spiritual legend tales while burying political history and military roles whip up a cultural product that's easy to digest. This depiction remains non neutral. Ideologically, Cirebon culture emerges as a mystical, apolitical heritage item prepared for consumption under cultural diplomacy and tourism frameworks (Anuar, Nizar, and Ismail, 2021). Thai learners are thus positioned as global culture consumers expected to appreciate exotic distinctiveness rather than as critical examiners of colonial history or local power structures.

Second, the power dimension manifests in narrative control. A combination of cultural authority, BIPA pedagogical interests, and the technical logic of AR development holds the power to select, frame, and omit stories. This aligns with Nghia's (2020) research, which concluded that this discursive construction reproduces definitions. Findings about resistance and comparisons with the Thai monarchy suggest that this discursive power is not absolute. Third, comparisons with AR pedagogy studies clarify the distinctiveness and similarities of these findings. Research by Turkoglu and Alp (2025) also critiques AR's tendency to obscure historical complexity in favor of a seamless, enjoyable immersive experience. However, what is unique about this BIPA context is AR's dual role as both a language pedagogy tool and a cultural diplomacy tool. Unlike AR applications in museums, which often emphasize reconstructing physical history (Liu and Sutunyarak, 2024), AR in BIPA is responsible for portraying national and local identities to non-native speakers. This heightens demand for unified, favorable depictions. Additionally, Thai students' critical feedback aligns with critical pedagogy findings that adult learners actively engage rather than passively receive information, drawing on their cultural backgrounds to evaluate presented discourses.

This study highlights that, in technology-enhanced BIPA pedagogy, identity appears not only as something constructed but also as actively challenged within the virtual space of 3D imagery and learners' critical interpretations. This study shows that Augmented Reality (AR) content in BIPA materials isn't neutral, it's a discourse that actively shapes reality (Koumpouros, 2024). The analysis shows that AR constructs Cirebon's cultural identity through three main strategies: selection, simplification, and spatialization. In particular, the depicted identity is tailored specifically for teaching and tourism needs. This portrayal upholds the ideology of cultural essentialization. Cirebon gets painted as a whole, exotic package, cut off from power plays and social shifts. This finding is closely connected to the core concept of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). From a representational perspective, AR operates as a signification practice that selects specific sign systems to create the effect of reality and truth about culture. From an ideological perspective, this construction is inseparable from the logic of language education and cultural diplomacy. Local culture is bundled to meet what international learners want, serving up something genuine but easy to take in. So AR technology here isn't just a way to dish out content; it's an ideological player that shapes the discourse around Cirebon's identity and its target audience.

Conclusions

This study finds that incorporating Cirebon culture-based Augmented Reality (AR) into BIPA materials is not a neutral technological approach but a multifaceted and ideological discourse practice. Critical Discourse Analysis demonstrates that AR actively shapes Cirebon identity, as evident in the representations of Sunyaragi Cave and other icons, into a carefully curated form that stresses aesthetic, harmonious, and readily consumable elements while concealing historical political aspects, interpretive diversity, and underlying power dynamics. As a methodological implication, this research highlights the necessity of discourse-oriented evaluation for technology-based learning materials, extending beyond language acquisition success or user satisfaction to critically examine the constructed discourses, served interests, and reproduced identities, along with power relations, through digital interfaces and narratives. This study acknowledges the inevitable limitations of cultural representation in pedagogical technology mediums; every choice in AR, from icon selection to interactive narrative, is a form of simplification that has the potential to dwarf the complexity and multiplicity of living cultural meanings. To expand on these findings, cross-cultural comparative studies are recommended that not only compare local contexts in Indonesia but also analyze how other countries construct national identity discourses through immersive technology in foreign language teaching. Future research should specifically conduct critical ethnography in geographically diverse BIPA classrooms. The goal is to directly examine how learners from different cultural backgrounds differently accept, reject, or negotiate the same AR representations. Analysis of these cross-cultural negotiations will explore learners' meaning-making agency and reveal whether the dominant discourses embedded in AR are hegemonic or instead trigger resistance and alternative understandings.

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Declaration

Conflicting Interest

There is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this paper.

Ethics Approval

Ethical approval and informed consent do not apply to this article, as it does not contain any studies with human or animal participants performed by any of the authors.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Generative AI

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT (GPT-4) to assist with language editing and sentence refinement. After using this tool, the author(s) thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the final content of the published article

Author Contributions

Indrya Mulyaningsih (First Author & Corresponding Author): Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing. **Tiwaporn Jan-kaew**: Investigation, Resources, Data Curation **Tatik Ekawati**: Investigation, Resources, Data Curation. **Veni Nurpadillah**: Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Data Management, Visualization, Writing, Finalization **Muhammad Arif Rahman**: Investigation and Data Collection.

Abbreviations

AR: Augmented Reality
BIPA: Indonesian for foreign speakers
CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

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