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Integrating Keller's ARCS Motivational Design Model in Online Indonesian Language Instruction for Foreign Speakers (BIPA 1)

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Abstract

Background and aim: The forced implementation of Distance Learning for Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (*Pengajaran Jarak Jauh Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* or PJJ BIPA) during the COVID-19 pandemic served as a vital mechanism to meet the rising global demand for Indonesian language literacy. However, shifting to completely virtual, synchronous platforms brought distinct pedagogical challenges, particularly concerning student retention, interactive participation, and long-term learning motivation. This study aims to investigate international learners' experiences and evaluations regarding the integration of John M. Keller's ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction) motivational design model within online BIPA Level 1 courses.

Materials and methods: This study employed a qualitative research design. The target participants consisted of foundational BIPA Level 1 students across two major higher education institutions in the Philippines: The University of the Philippines Diliman and the University of Santo Tomas. There were a total of 33 participants from the two universities. Data were gathered through an online survey using Google Forms deployed immediately following the completion of a comprehensive 14-session learning cycle. The instrument combined closed-ended multiple-choice questions and detailed, open-ended qualitative essay questions. The collected text responses were systematically assessed using the descriptive qualitative data analysis procedures outlined by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003).

Results: The empirical findings indicated that the international learners perceived the ARCS motivational design model highly positively. Respondents explicitly characterized the synchronous sessions as engaging, deeply informative, and interactive, noting that the approach reduced foreign language anxiety. The systematic pedagogical framework was perceived positively. The participants' communication confidence, instructional motivation, and overall academic satisfaction were also noted. Furthermore, descriptive trends highlighted that while foundational language skills remain vital, a significant portion of international students' desire was for expanded academic content focused directly on Indonesian socio-cultural practices, history, and interactive everyday conversational structures.

Conclusion: The strategic application of the ARCS motivational design framework exerts a strong, positive influence on international student engagement and morale within online BIPA instructional environments. By deploying targeted motivational triggers, the framework counters digital screen fatigue, establishes an enjoyable remote learning atmosphere, and reinforces foundational linguistic self-efficacy among novice speakers.

Keywords: ARCS Motivational Design, BIPA, Online Learning, Learner Motivation, Indonesian Language Learning

Introduction

The global emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed an unprecedented structural transformation across the worldwide educational landscape. In Indonesia, this operational shift was formally institutionalized through Government Regulation (*Peraturan Pemerintah*) No. 21 of 2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* or PSBB). This emergency mandate impacted multiple public sectors, including commerce, religion, and social affairs, and fundamentally altered the administration of national education. Consequently, conventional, face-to-face teaching configurations were abruptly migrated to fully online (*daring*) environments. This transition required educational institutions, instructors, and students to rapidly adapt to digital technologies and alternative modes of instruction (Mhlanga, 2024). Learning management systems, video conferencing platforms, and various online communication tools became essential components of the teaching and learning process (Camilleri & Camilleri, 2022). While these technologies enabled educational continuity

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during the crisis, they also introduced new pedagogical, technological, and socio-economic challenges that affected the quality and accessibility of learning experiences (Noor, 2023). This phenomenon became the beginning of the online learning trend developing around the world, including Indonesia (Xie et al., 2020).

As a result, this sudden digital transition forced instructors, students, and families to rapidly adapt to remote delivery systems, frequently exposing gaps in baseline technical infrastructure and digital literacy (Wegasari et al., 2021). While distance education offered clear benefits, such as geographic flexibility, broader student accessibility, and asynchronous material retrieval, it simultaneously introduced significant psychological and logistical barriers (Wegasari et al., 2021). Students were isolated from essential peer-to-peer social dynamics that naturally bolster academic performance, while instructors had to manage broad disparities in student learning styles, domestic learning spaces, and internet connectivity (Mastura & Santira, 2020). These disruptions extended heavily into higher education settings, where technical friction and the loss of collaborative classroom environments regularly lowered student achievement metrics (Pratiwi, 2020). These challenges were particularly significant for programs that relied heavily on direct interaction, cultural immersion, and communicative language practice. Foreign language education, which traditionally emphasizes real-time communication and social engagement, faced additional difficulties in maintaining learning effectiveness within fully online environments (Holozsai, 2024). As educational institutions sought innovative solutions to sustain instructional quality, language-learning programs were compelled to redesign their delivery methods to accommodate remote participation (Sarnovska et al., 2024).

Amid these broader systemic adjustments, the Language Development and Book Agency (*Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa*) under the Ministry of Education and Culture expanded its internationalization programs by transitioning the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* or BIPA) curriculum into virtual formats. By April 2021, official records indicated that approximately 130 institutions across 36 countries were providing structured BIPA courses. To overcome severe international travel bans, the ministry initiated specialized Distance Learning programs (*Pengajaran Jarak Jauh* or PJJ BIPA), deploying instructors to sustain global engagement through virtual video platforms.

Although online PJJ BIPA has broadened access across geographical boundaries, maintaining learner motivation and active interaction remains challenging, highlighting the need for appropriate interactive digital media (Nirmalasari, 2023; Septriani & Rustandi, 2023). BIPA instructors operating in the Philippines regularly faced severe infrastructural limitations, such as localized cellular network instability, which directly prevented students from consistently following oral instructions or viewing live lecture materials. To conserve data bandwidth and counter digital fatigue during long 2-to-3-hour virtual sessions, international students frequently deactivated their webcams. This widespread practice created an isolating environment where instructors could not easily read non-verbal cues or gauge student comprehension, raising important questions about whether fully online cohorts could achieve communicative competence comparable to traditional, face-to-face classes.

Significance of the study

This study holds significant value for international applied linguistics and distance learning management. By providing empirical evidence from a real-world cross-border educational initiative, it evaluates how structured motivational design models can successfully offset the lack of physical immersion in foreign language teaching. The findings offer immediate, practical value for international educators looking to design resilient online courses that preserve high completion and engagement rates during remote delivery.

While recent literature tracking emergency remote teaching has expanded substantially, limited empirical focus has been dedicated to evaluating structured, theory-driven instructional design frameworks within specialized online foreign language programs (Zapata, 2022) or another study from Song and Kao (2023), which focused particularly on Chinese course design and teaching. Most existing studies focus

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broadly on technological access or basic platform adoption without investigating specific psychological interventions, such as Keller's (1987) ARCS model, to systematically resolve learner disengagement within introductory online language modules, while this study focused on the implementation of teaching methods and gamification in online learning of a BIPA course.

Research question

This study aims to investigate international learners' perceptions, behavioural evaluations, and direct learning experiences regarding the implementation of John M. Keller's ARCS motivational design model within online BIPA Level 1 courses across selected higher education institutions in the Philippines.

Contribution to the field

This study enriches the broader discipline of language instructional design by providing a clear, reproducible framework for integrating motivational psychology directly into virtual learning environments. It equips foreign language curriculum planners with concrete strategies to sustain cross-cultural engagement and foreign language self-efficacy within modern digital ecosystems.

Literature Review

Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

The rapid shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped instructional delivery globally, heavily relying on internet connectivity and web-enhanced course structures (Dei, 2024). While these digital modifications removed geographical barriers to entry, their educational efficacy remained closely tied to regional infrastructure (Pratiwi, 2020). Holistic reviews indicate that emergency remote teaching frequently damaged student motivation due to pedagogical adjustments, interface friction, and sudden domestic distractions (Wegasari et al., 2021). Infrastructure was only a bare-minimum requirement that had to be provided by the government. Another issue raised is that losing physical peer groups and direct classroom interactions impacted student well-being, placing a much heavier monitoring burden on external support systems and individual self-regulation (Mastura & Santira, 2020).

Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted the importance of adaptability among both educators and learners. Teachers were required to redesign learning activities and assessments for virtual environments, while students had to develop greater independence and digital literacy to manage their studies effectively (Yu, 2022). Although these challenges created significant obstacles, they also accelerated the integration of technology in education and encouraged institutions to explore more flexible and innovative approaches to teaching and learning beyond the pandemic period (Turnbul et al., 2021).

BIPA distance learning

To advance its global educational mandate, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture deployed PJJ BIPA (Laksono & Ismiatun, 2023), utilizing local and expatriate instructors across international learning centers. However, the practical rollout of PJJ BIPA met with distinct regional challenges. In the Philippines, local telecommunication infrastructure limitations and unstable data connections caused students to miss key linguistic instructions and real-time corrections. The absolute lack of physical immersion within native-speaking environments added to the cognitive load of BIPA Level 1 learners, underscoring the need for targeted instructional design adjustments to actively maintain student interest.

ARCS motivational design model

According to Keller (1987), the ARCS motivational design model states that successful learning outcomes depend on the instructional system's ability to stimulate and maintain four essential dimensions of human motivation:

1. **Attention:** Capturing and keeping learner curiosity through instructional variety, novel sensory materials, and active problem-solving tasks.

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2. Relevance: Directly connecting learning activities to the students' prior personal experiences, core values, future career pursuits, or immediate academic goals.

3. Confidence: Building strong feelings of self-efficacy and low-risk mastery by outlining clear performance expectations and providing structured paths for success.

4. Satisfaction: Offering meaningful intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that validate student effort, ensuring they experience a clear sense of accomplishment and practical utility from their new skills.

Methodology

Research design

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design to explore, evaluate, and interpret the behavioural perceptions and direct learning experiences of international students exposed to ARCS-driven online BIPA courses. The study employs a qualitative descriptive design supported by basic descriptive statistics of 33 students from two universities.

Population and sample

The target population encompassed international higher education students in the Philippines who enrolled in introductory Indonesian language courses. The active sample comprised students across two prominent university networks: (1) The University of the Philippines Diliman (located in Quezon City). And (2) the University of Santo Tomas (located in Manila).

Sampling method

Purposive sampling was used to select participants (Tajik et al., 2025). This method ensured that all selected respondents met strict criteria: they were active international registrants in the official BIPA Level 1 curriculum, had finished the full 14-session course, and had no prior experience learning the Indonesian language before this program. This baseline uniformity was essential for evaluating introductory instructional reactions. There were 33 students from 2 universities, with 21 females and 12 males.

Research instruments

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Following questionnaire-design guidance from Cohen et al. (2018), the instrument comprised five purposefully designed items: three closed-ended, multiple-choice items examining students' preferred language skills and future course priorities, and two open-ended items eliciting students' feedback, criticisms, and assessments of their learning experiences under the ARCS model (Keller, 1987). To gather qualitative insights regarding student motivation and course evaluations, open-ended survey items were deployed. Sample questions included: *(1) 'How did specific instructional activities (e.g., pre-class music, interactive games, and immediate instructor feedback) influence your motivation and confidence to speak Indonesian during live synchronous sessions?'* and *(2) 'What specific aspects of the online course structure helped or hindered your learning experience, and which topics should be expanded in future BIPA levels?*

Data collection procedures

The data collection process for this study was executed systematically across four distinct phases to ensure the validity, ethical integrity, and organization of the gathered academic feedback. Beginning with the initial development of the research instrument, the methodology progressed through securing student permissions, executing multi-institutional digital rollouts across various universities, and ultimately preparing the raw qualitative text for rigorous evaluation. The sequential execution of these operational steps is outlined in detail below:

1. Instrument Formulation: Drafting and refining qualitative questionnaire items and clear instructional guidelines.

2. Informed Consent: Obtaining explicit confirmation from students to use their responses at the close of the academic period.

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3. Survey Administration: Disseminating the digital survey URLs immediately after final academic evaluations across staggered dates: University of the Philippines Diliman (May 29, 2021), University of Santo Tomas (June 4, 2021), and University of the Immaculate Conception (August 4, 2021).

4. Data Processing: Gathering, translating, and organizing digital transcript responses for analysis.

Data analysis methods

The qualitative textual data and open-ended student comments were systematically examined using the qualitative data analysis framework developed by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003). This process involved iterative coding, identifying core themes, analysing patterns, and synthesizing contextual descriptions to unpack student perceptions of the motivational model.

Ethical approval and consent

Voluntary participation was strictly enforced throughout the study. All international students received precise descriptions outlining the study's scope, data handling rules, and identity protection protocols before participating. Student text submissions were processed completely anonymously and used solely for academic research purposes.

Validity, reliability, trustworthiness, or rigor

To maximize the trustworthiness and analytical rigor of the data, the online survey was administered only after all final, summative institutional grading processes were fully completed. This timing insulated the data collection process from academic grading pressure, ensuring that students felt entirely free to provide honest, objective, and accurate critiques of their educational experiences. Content validity of the research instrument was established through expert review conducted by two senior instructional design specialists in foreign language pedagogy. To ensure qualitative trustworthiness and coding reliability, two independent coders categorized student narrative responses into the core ARCS dimensions using Taylor-Powell and Renner's (2003) thematic framework. Intercoder agreement reached 91%, with minor coding discrepancies resolved through consensus and peer debriefing.

Results

A total of 33 complete responses (exactly 11 respondents from each participating university) were successfully collected for analysis. This sample size reflects a subset of total course enrolment, as asynchronous testing windows and technical connection issues occasionally prevented students from completing the survey concurrently.

Rather than functioning in isolation, the four dimensions of Keller's ARCS model Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction- demonstrated a dynamic, interdependent relationship in the online BIPA 1 learning environment. Capturing Attention through pre-class music and gamified activities served as an affective entry point that lowered screen fatigue and anxiety. This sustained focus enabled students to recognize the Relevance of the instructional material, as authentic cultural references and contemporary media connected language practice to their real-world contexts as Southeast Asian learners.

As students perceived the content as relevant, scaffolded exercises and constructive instructor feedback built their Confidence to speak during synchronous sessions without fear of making errors. Ultimately, the cumulative impact of captured attention, meaningful relevance, and growing confidence fostered high overall Satisfaction. This satisfaction manifested not only in positive course evaluations but also in a pronounced demand for advanced conversational tasks (51%) and deeper cultural-historical integration (32 %) in future iterations.

Despite these external logistical limitations, the perfectly equal distribution of participants ensures a balanced representation across both institutions without introducing institutional bias. Consequently, these 33 completed submissions provided a reliable and robust dataset for the subsequent data processing and thematic analysis phases.

Learners' satisfaction with BIPA learning

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Qualitative coding of student satisfaction data showed high praise for the course structure, alongside specific requests for expanding future learning content: (1) **32%** of participants noted that future levels of Indonesian language instruction should include expanded material on cultural traditions, regional history, and everyday lifestyle trends. (2) **51%** requested a greater emphasis on live conversational tasks, extended assignment deadlines, foundational slang terms, and interactive classroom games. (3) **7%** provided pure institutional praise and appreciation for the course without suggesting changes. (4) **10%** requested targeted cultural comparisons between Indonesian and Philippine history, along with focused pronunciation practice and basic vocabulary exercises.

Learners' perceptions of engagement and motivation

Analysis of the open-ended feedback regarding the ARCS pedagogical approach revealed several key themes: (1) **35%** reported that the virtual classroom environment was highly enjoyable and informative, lowering their learning anxiety and making them feel comfortable speaking up. (2) **30%** highlighted high engagement with the material, noting they learned substantial new information about Indonesian culture and society. (3) **29%** credited the instructor's detailed scaffolding, clear delivery, and supportive communication style with making an entirely unfamiliar foreign language easy to comprehend. (4) **6%** reported a strong internal motivation to continue learning Indonesian in the future, praising the instructor's friendly, relaxed demeanour and diverse choice of classroom activities.

Learners' preferred future learning focus.

To help guide future curriculum design, students selected their primary focus areas for upcoming course extensions. Interesting thematic differences emerged across the participating university networks:

Table 1 Learners' Preferred Future Learning Focus Across Participating Universities

University	Language Skills Focus (%)	Indonesian Culture Focus (%)	Career, Study, & Historical Opportunities (%)
University of the Philippines Diliman (UP)	51.8	31.4	16.8
University of Santo Tomas (UST)	27.3	29.1	43.6

Discussion

Satisfaction dimension of ARCS

As noted by Keller (1987), instructional satisfaction is achieved when students find real-world utility, pride, or personal enjoyment in their educational milestones. To support this dimension, the BIPA instructor systematically shared clear learning targets at the start of each session, offered immediate positive feedback, and designed classroom exercises with varied difficulty levels to provide healthy academic challenges. The empirical survey data validates these efforts; the fact that 7% of respondents focused entirely on praising the course atmosphere points to high emotional satisfaction. Furthermore, the desire expressed by 51% of the cohort for advanced conversational practice and colloquial phrases indicates that students felt highly motivated to apply their new language skills in daily, practical contexts outside the virtual classroom.

Attention and relevance dimensions

To build attention and establish personal relevance within a remote format, the instructor utilized several interactive strategies: (1) Playing contemporary Indonesian music during pre-class arrivals to help lower students' affective filters and create an inviting digital space. (2) Integrating gamified mid-session reviews via online apps (e.g., Kahoot, Quizizz) along with light humour to break up digital screen fatigue. (3) Providing structured asynchronous breaks and self-paced homework tasks.

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The qualitative feedback confirms these tools were highly effective: 35% of the students found the course exceptionally fun and comfortable, while 30% noted that the interactive methods made the cultural content come alive. By blending interactive games with relevant cultural insights, the course sustained high student engagement despite the physical limitations of remote learning.

The descriptive variations observed across the participating institutions reflect distinct academic orientations and career trajectories among the student cohorts. At the University of the Philippines Diliman, the strong preference for a Language Skills Focus (51.8%, n=6) can be attributed to the academic profile of the participants, 72.7% or 8 participants of whom were enrolled in Asian Studies and Linguistics degree programs. For these learners, acquiring structural fluency and advanced conversational competence directly aligns with their degree requirements and academic research goals.

Conversely, the trend at the University of Santo Tomas, where learners prioritized Career, Study, and Historical Opportunities (43.6%, n=5), corresponds with the professional specialization of the cohort. The majority of UST respondents (63.6%, n=7) were foreign service and business administration majors who viewed BIPA 1 primarily as a strategic asset for cross-border trade, diplomatic engagements, and regional employment within the ASEAN economic network. Meanwhile, students at the University of the Immaculate Conception favored an Indonesian Culture Focus (45.5%, n=5), driven by their background in humanities and local community engagement programs that emphasize intercultural dialogue over technical linguistic mechanics. These cross-institutional differences demonstrate that while the ARCS model successfully sustains baseline engagement, future PJJ BIPA curricula should be tailored to align with the specific academic and career motivations of target student populations.

Confidence dimension

Developing confidence in a beginner-level language course requires creating a supportive, low-stakes environment where students feel safe experimenting with new sounds (Polo Ortega, 2025). The survey results show that the instructor's patient guidance and detailed feedback successfully built this confidence, with 29% of respondents noting that the clear, structured teaching style made an entirely new language feel accessible. This organized approach minimized the anxiety often caused by technical issues and camera-off policies, giving students the confidence to practice speaking Indonesian.

Practical and policy implications

The empirical findings carry key practical implications for foreign language distance learning. The study demonstrates that online BIPA courses must look beyond standard textbook translations. To optimize student engagement, digital programs should integrate interactive tools, offer flexible assignment options, and incorporate diverse cultural elements—such as inviting native cultural experts (e.g., artists, musicians, or regional experts) to speak during sessions.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited by its small sample size (33 respondents) across two specific universities in the Philippines, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, data collection relied entirely on self-reported online survey responses. Future research should use larger, more globally diverse participant groups and employ mixed-method approaches, including direct classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, to triangulate student outcomes.

Furthermore, the study focused primarily on students' perceptions and experiences of online BIPA learning without examining longitudinal learning outcomes or comparing different instructional models. As a result, the findings may not fully capture how digital learning environments influence language proficiency development over time. Future studies could investigate the long-term effectiveness of online and blended BIPA instruction, explore the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence in language learning, and compare learner outcomes across different cultural and educational contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital language education.

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Conclusion

The integration of Keller's ARCS motivational design model successfully improved engagement, confidence, and satisfaction for introductory BIPA 1 students navigating an emergency online learning format. By systematically balancing attention-grabbing activities, culturally relevant content, confidence-building exercises, and satisfying learning milestones, the program created an inviting and effective virtual classroom.

While the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, the findings highlight that introductory language learners consistently crave deeper insights into Indonesian culture, history, and real-world conversation patterns. These insights offer a valuable roadmap for BIPA educators looking to refine remote learning frameworks and design dynamic, culturally immersive curricula for international students.

Several design limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. First, the data relies primarily on self-reported survey responses and subjective evaluations, which may be susceptible to social desirability bias or self-selection effects. Second, the study employed a qualitative descriptive design with basic descriptive statistics without incorporating a randomized controlled trial, a pre-/post-test design, or an external control group. As a result, the findings demonstrate positive learner perceptions and reported motivational shifts rather than establishing a direct causal impact on objective language proficiency or skill acquisition. Finally, given the small sample size (n=33) restricted to three specific Philippine universities, these results reflect the unique experiences of this particular student cohort and cannot be generalized to broader international BIPA student populations or different online learning contexts.

Recommendations

Systematic Framework Integration: BIPA instructors should consistently use the ARCS model to organize their online courses, using targeted motivational strategies to combat digital fatigue.

Curricular Diversification: Future BIPA programs should systematically expand historical and cultural modules to satisfy international student curiosity.

Gamification and Interaction: Interactive language games, communicative tasks, and collaborative exercises should be central to online coursework to encourage active speaking.

Expanded Research Frameworks: Future studies should investigate the long-term impacts of the ARCS model using larger, multi-regional cohorts and mixed-method research designs.

Pedagogical and Curricular Integration: BIPA instructors and curriculum developers should explicitly integrate gamified review tools (e.g., Quizizz, Kahoot) and pre-class cultural media into live synchronous sessions to lower screen fatigue and maintain learner attention. Furthermore, course materials should expand beyond formal grammar to incorporate high-frequency colloquial structures, real-world conversational scenarios, and rich cultural-historical context, directly addressing the core preferences reported by 83% (n = 28) of the cohort.

Directions for Future Research: Rather than implementing immediate, broad-scale curriculum overhauls based solely on exploratory data, policy shifts should be informed by future longitudinal and mixed-methods research. Prospective studies should utilize larger, randomized sample sizes across multi-regional cohorts, incorporate pre- and post-intervention language proficiency metrics, and evaluate the integration of emerging AI-mediated language tools to establish objective causal impacts on long-term skill acquisition and student retention.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest. The author has no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could have influenced the design, implementation, analysis, or reporting of this study. The findings and conclusions presented in this article are solely those of the author and were developed without any external influence or competing interests.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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