

Bridging education and global apprenticeship through a work-based learning approach in language and soft-skills training

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Abstract: This study examines how Bright Education Indonesia (BEI) implements a preparatory work-based learning (WBL) model to prepare Indonesian students for the German Ausbildung program, a dual vocational apprenticeship system in Europe. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving trainees, alumni, instructors, and administrators. Thematic analysis was used to document participants' experiences and perceptions of BEI's training approach. The findings indicate that BEI combines intensive language training, soft skills development focused on workplace readiness, and cultural orientation into a comprehensive preparatory WBL model. This approach helps learners develop essential communication skills, discipline, adaptability, and collaboration competencies before entering the German apprenticeship system. Alumni reported that this preparatory stage significantly reduced cultural and linguistic barriers and improved their overall readiness for international WBL participation. The study concludes that preparatory WBL models can effectively bridge the gap between domestic training and international apprenticeship systems by addressing both technical and socio-cultural preparedness. The novelty of this research lies in extending the WBL framework beyond direct workplace engagement to include preparatory institutional contexts, demonstrating how training institutions can serve as vital intermediaries in global labor mobility pathways. Practically, the study offers a replicable model for institutions aiming to facilitate student integration into international apprenticeship systems. Theoretically, it contributes to WBL literature by conceptualizing preparatory training as a legitimate and valuable phase within broader work-based learning ecosystems, especially in cross-cultural vocational education contexts.

Keywords: *Ausbildung program, International labor mobility, Language training, Work-based learning.*

1. Introduction

The demand for a highly qualified workforce has become a central concern across nations in the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement [1, 2]. The structure of employment has been significantly altered by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, necessitating not only technical proficiency but also adaptability, communication, and cross-cultural competencies [3]. In the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, soft skills are key for individuals and organizations to compete in the ever-changing job market. To address these global challenges, countries have progressively implemented work-based learning (WBL) models to facilitate the transition between formal education and the demands of the workplace [4]. Recognition has been accorded to WBL as a strategic approach to preparing learners for real-world professional environments, particularly in vocational and industrial contexts where practical engagement is essential [5, 6]. The German Ausbildung program has established itself as a standard in Europe for the integration of vocational education and training with industry requirements. This program guarantees that students are actively involved in workplace practices while acquiring both technical and soft skills [7]. This model has garnered attention beyond Europe, as numerous

developing countries are pursuing comparable initiatives to fortify their human resources and comply with international labor standards.

Indonesia still faces challenges in aligning education with the labor market, particularly in vocational and professional training. Numerous challenges remain in connecting and matching skills with those needed in the labor market [8, 9]. The government continues to build a link-and-match ecosystem in the labor market to address employment issues. Despite continuous reforms, the gap between graduates' competencies and industry requirements persists, resulting in skill mismatches and limited employability among young professionals. This condition is especially critical in the context of international labor mobility, where Indonesian workers are expected to meet not only technical qualifications but also linguistic, cultural, and soft-skill demands to compete globally [10, 11]. Recognizing the success of the German *Ausbildung* as a leading WBL model, various Indonesian institutions have initiated preparatory programs to equip students with the competencies required to participate in such international apprenticeship systems [12]. Bright Education Indonesia (BEI), for instance, has established a training program that integrates German language instruction, workplace-oriented soft skills, and cultural orientation, serving as a transitional learning model to prepare students before their entry into the *Ausbildung*.

Most recent major studies examine WBL as a direct engagement in workplace practices, highlighting skills development, professional identity training, and collaboration between industry and education [13]. Much research on WBL has focused on its use in industrial and vocational settings. There is still a lack of research on its role as a work preparation framework in placement institutions [14, 15]. However, less focus has been placed on how preparation institutions, such as language and cultural training centers, can creatively apply WBL concepts to facilitate student transfer to organized international apprenticeship systems, such as Germany's *Ausbildung*. This study addresses this gap by examining how a preparation and placement institution (Bright Education Indonesia) configures WBL practices to enable successful placement and readiness for apprentices in the global.

This study investigates the integration of language training, soft skills development, and cultural adaptation within the BEI preparation model, thus expanding the scope of work-based learning theory beyond conventional work experience. This study explores the perspectives of participants, alumni, instructors, and institutional administrators regarding the contribution of BEI training to their students' readiness for the German *Ausbildung* program. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the training model implemented by Bright Education Indonesia (BEI), an institution that provides language education, soft skills training, and cultural orientation for Indonesian students preparing for the *Ausbildung* program in Germany. Based on the research objectives that we have mentioned, the research problem is formulated as follows: how Bright Education Indonesia (BEI) implements language training, soft skills development, and cultural orientation as part of its preparatory model for students entering the German *Ausbildung* program; how trainees, alumni, instructors, and administrators perceive the effectiveness of BEI's training in enhancing students' readiness for a global apprenticeship; and how BEI's preparatory approach contributes to the theoretical expansion of the work-based learning framework beyond direct workplace immersion.

Theoretically, this study extends the Work-Based Learning framework to the context of preparatory institutions. Practically, this study proposes an innovative syntactic model that can serve as a model for similar institutions in supporting international labor mobility and enhancing student readiness for the global apprenticeship system. The novelty of this research lies in positioning preparatory institutions as legitimate sites for Work-Based Learning (WBL). Unlike most previous studies that have concentrated on WBL within direct industrial or vocational contexts, this study demonstrates how BEI innovatively applies WBL principles in a preparatory stage to reduce linguistic, cultural, and psychological barriers before students enter the German *Ausbildung* system.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Participants

The study involved four groups of stakeholders directly connected to Bright Education Indonesia (BEI), a preparatory institution for Indonesian students entering the German Ausbildung program. The participants consisted of (a) trainees currently enrolled in BEI's language and soft-skills training program ($n = 5$), (b) alumni who had successfully transitioned to the Ausbildung in Germany ($n = 3$), (c) instructors responsible for delivering the language and soft-skills curriculum ($n = 2$), and (d) institutional administrators overseeing program design and management ($n = 3$). A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the selection of participants who could provide rich, relevant insights into BEI's preparatory training model. Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of respondents' identities.

2.2. Study Organization

This research adopted a qualitative case study design to investigate BEI's approach in integrating language instruction, soft-skills training, and cultural orientation as a preparatory form of work-based learning (WBL). Data collection employed three methods: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and evaluations of the program, while observations focused on pedagogical practices, classroom dynamics, and the integration of WBL elements into the training. Document analysis involved curriculum outlines, teaching materials, and institutional reports to triangulate findings. The research procedure was organized into four distinct phases to ensure systematic data collection and analysis [16]. Each phase is summarized in Table 1, which outlines the main activities, outputs, and their sequential relationship.

Table 1.
Research Procedure.

Phase	Activities	Output
Planning	Identification of research questions; development of interview guides; ethical clearance	Research protocol and ethical approval.
Data Collection	Semi-structured interviews with trainees, alumni, instructors, administrators; classroom observations; document analysis.	Raw qualitative data (transcripts, notes, documents).
Data Analysis	Thematic coding following [17]; use of NVivo for code frequency and co-occurrence.	Initial codes, categories, and emerging themes.
Synthesis	Integration of interview, observation, and document findings; construction of BEI's preparatory WBL model.	Refined themes and proposed syntactic model

This structured procedure provided a coherent pathway from planning to synthesis, allowing the study to capture the experiences and perceptions of different stakeholders while ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings [16]. This research design and procedure ensured a systematic exploration of how BEI functions as a bridging institution between national education and the German apprenticeship system.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Elements of descriptive statistical analysis were incorporated to strengthen the presentation of findings, although the study primarily relied on qualitative methods. The coding process was supported by qualitative data analysis software (NVivo), which facilitated the calculation of code frequency and co-occurrence patterns. These numerical summaries complemented thematic findings, ensuring rigor and clarity in data interpretation [18]. The integration of descriptive statistics with thematic analysis enabled a balanced presentation of qualitative narratives and quantifiable trends in participants' responses.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The results of the thematic analysis obtained through NVivo are presented in the form of a summary of themes, subthemes, frequency of code occurrence, and representative quotes from participants. This presentation aims to demonstrate the connection between qualitative narratives and more structured empirical evidence.

Table 2.

Summary of Themes and Codes.

Theme	Code/Sub-Theme	Frequency (n)
Language Competence as Foundation	Workplace communication practice	12
	Progressive levels	8
Soft-Skills Development	Teamwork & negotiation	9
	Time management & discipline	11
Cultural Orientation	Etiquette & formal communication	7
	Workplace simulation (role play, mock interview)	6

The table shows that language competence was the most dominant theme, particularly related to workplace communication skills. Furthermore, soft skills such as teamwork, discipline, and time management also appeared repeatedly in respondents' statements, emphasizing their role as a bridge to success in the Ausbildung system. Cultural orientation, although less frequent, still plays a crucial role in preparing participants for the diverse social and professional contexts in Germany.

3.2. Language Competence as the Core of Preparation

The results of the thematic analysis obtained through NVivo are presented in the form of a summary of themes, subthemes, frequency of code occurrence, and representative quotes from participants. This presentation aims to demonstrate the connection between qualitative narratives and more structured empirical evidence. The analysis revealed that participants consistently perceived German language mastery as the most essential element of their preparation at Bright Education Indonesia (BEI). Trainees highlighted that the structured language courses, delivered in progressive levels, gave them confidence in handling everyday communication. Many respondents emphasized that beyond grammar and vocabulary, BEI instructors integrated workplace-related dialogues, such as greetings with colleagues, reporting to supervisors, or discussing daily tasks, which created an authentic simulation of the workplace. Alumni confirmed that these language practices significantly reduced the cultural and linguistic barriers upon entering the Ausbildung system in Germany, enabling them to focus more effectively on technical training.

3.3. Soft-Skills Development as a Bridge to Work-Based Learning

A second theme centered on the importance of soft skills training. Participants described how BEI deliberately incorporated teamwork exercises, role-play sessions, and problem-solving discussions into the classroom context. For example, small group projects were used to simulate collaboration and negotiation tasks often found in the workplace. Alumni noted that these exercises not only improved communication but also helped them adapt to the more egalitarian and collaborative work culture in Germany. Instructors emphasized that soft skills such as punctuality, time management, and discipline were repeatedly stressed throughout the training. Observations of classroom activities confirmed that these attributes were embedded into both formal instruction and informal learning settings, making them inseparable from language acquisition.

3.4. Cultural Orientation

Another critical finding was the systematic introduction of German workplace culture within the training program. BEI included cultural orientation sessions that explained hierarchical relationships in

German companies, common etiquette, and the importance of direct communication styles. Trainees mentioned that role-play activities, such as mock interviews and simulations of workplace meetings, helped them visualize the environment they would encounter. Alumni reflected that this exposure made them less anxious when they first entered training companies in Germany. They highlighted specific examples, such as addressing supervisors with the appropriate formality or understanding expectations regarding task deadlines, as key cultural learnings gained from BEI.

Based on the integration of these findings, a syntactic innovation of preparatory WBL was developed, consisting of three sequential stages: (1) language acquisition, (2) soft-skills development, and (3) cultural orientation. This syntactic model is illustrated in Figure 1.

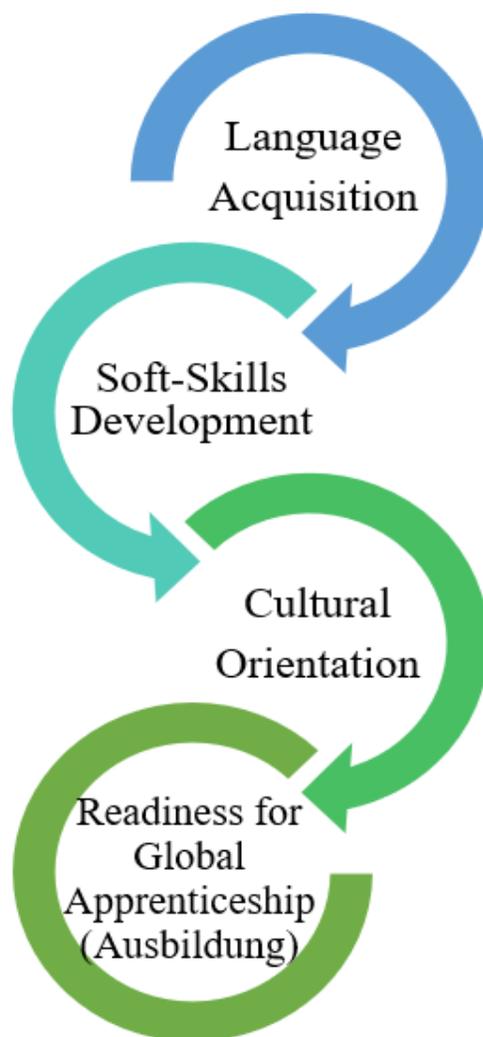


Figure 1.
BEI Work-Based Learning Innovation Syntax.

From the perspective of instructors and administrators, BEI's training model was deliberately designed as a preparatory adaptation of work-based learning (WBL). Rather than immersing students directly into a workplace, BEI recreated certain elements of WBL through classroom simulations and performance-based assessments. Administrators explained that the training was organized into phases: foundational language instruction, intermediate practice integrating soft skills, and advanced sessions

focusing on workplace readiness. The inclusion of project-based learning and scenario-based assessments reflected an intentional alignment with WBL principles. This design was seen as essential in preparing students to transition smoothly into the Ausbildung system abroad.

Thematic analysis of alumni and trainee perceptions indicated a high level of satisfaction with the effectiveness of BEI's training. Most participants reported feeling more confident and prepared, not only linguistically but also in their adaptability and interpersonal interactions. Alumni testimonies suggested that the preparatory program played a decisive role in their successful adjustment to the *Ausbildung*. However, some alumni also pointed out gaps, such as the limited exposure to technical terminology related to specific vocational fields, suggesting that BEI's focus remained more general rather than profession-specific. Administrators acknowledged this limitation but argued that the preparatory program was intentionally broad, with the expectation that technical knowledge would be developed directly in Germany.

Overall, findings suggest that BEI's model represents an innovative adaptation of WBL principles in a preparatory institutional context. Unlike traditional WBL, which emphasizes immediate workplace immersion, BEI operationalized WBL syntactically by combining language acquisition, soft-skill training, and cultural orientation within simulated environments. This hybrid approach served as a transitional model that bridged students from their local educational context to the highly structured German Ausbildung system. Participants' narratives highlighted that this preparatory stage was crucial in reducing barriers, enhancing readiness, and fostering the competencies needed for global apprenticeship integration.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that language competence, soft-skill development, and cultural orientation are indispensable components of preparing Indonesian students for the German Ausbildung system. These results reinforce the idea that work-based learning (WBL) is not limited to direct workplace immersion but can also be adapted in preparatory institutional contexts. In line with Dewey's theory of experiential learning [19], BEI provided students with opportunities to engage in authentic, practice-oriented learning experiences that simulated the workplace. For example, role-play and project-based activities offered participants a chance to reflect on their actions and apply knowledge in a context that closely mirrors real employment situations [20]. This experiential dimension created a bridge between classroom instruction and the demands of a professional environment abroad. Thus, participants will be better prepared in terms of skills, attitudes, and understanding of work culture to face global demands.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle also provides a valuable lens to interpret these findings [21]. Trainees moved through concrete experiences (e.g., simulations of interviews and workplace dialogues), engaged in reflective observation during feedback sessions, developed abstract conceptualizations about workplace culture and communication, and applied these insights through active experimentation in subsequent training exercises. This iterative process enhanced their preparedness not only in terms of linguistic mastery but also in the acquisition of transferable skills such as teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving.

From a constructivist perspective, the program at BEI emphasized learning as a process of meaning-making. Students did not merely memorize vocabulary or grammatical rules; instead, they co-constructed knowledge through collaborative tasks, peer discussions, and guided reflection. This aligns with Vygotskian principles of social constructivism, where knowledge develops through interaction within a sociocultural context [22]. In BEI, the sociocultural context was deliberately shaped to reflect German workplace norms, thereby scaffolding students' readiness for global apprenticeship.

The findings also resonate with progressivist educational philosophy, which emphasizes preparing learners for life by focusing on problem-solving, adaptability, and active engagement with real-world contexts [23, 24]. BEI's emphasis on punctuality, discipline, and cultural orientation demonstrates a commitment to progressive ideals by ensuring that education extends beyond academic achievement to

encompass holistic readiness for professional and social life abroad. Similarly, from the lens of pragmatism, the institution's approach reflects an emphasis on the practical utility of knowledge. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic accuracy, BEI prioritized functional communication and workplace applicability, thereby ensuring that students' learning had direct relevance to their future careers.

Comparing these results to existing studies, this research expands the scope of WBL scholarship. Previous studies have predominantly examined WBL within industries and vocational schools, where students learn by directly engaging in workplace practices [25, 26]. However, limited attention has been given to how WBL principles can be syntactically adapted by preparatory institutions that do not directly place students in workplaces but serve as gateways to international apprenticeship systems. By documenting BEI's model, this study contributes to filling this gap, demonstrating that preparatory WBL can effectively reduce linguistic, cultural, and psychological barriers before students enter structured training abroad.

Alumni testimonies reveal that BEI not only effectively developed general language and soft skills, but also placed less emphasis on technical or occupation-specific terminology. This suggests a division of labor between preparatory institutions and apprenticeship providers: BEI focuses on foundational readiness, while technical specialization is acquired within the *Ausbildung*. This insight contributes to the theoretical expansion of WBL by proposing a two-phase model: a preparatory WBL in the sending country, followed by workplace-based WBL in the host country. Such a model aligns with emerging scholarship on transnational education and labor mobility, where institutions act as intermediaries facilitating global workforce integration [27].

In summary, this study advances the theoretical understanding of WBL by positioning preparatory institutions as legitimate sites for work-based learning innovation. Practically, it provides a syntactic model that can be replicated or adapted by other institutions seeking to prepare students for international apprenticeship programs.

5. Conclusions

This study investigated the role of Bright Education Indonesia (BEI) as a preparatory institution that integrates language training, soft skills development, and cultural orientation into a work-based learning (WBL) framework for Indonesian students entering the German *Ausbildung* program. The findings demonstrated that BEI's training design effectively enhanced students' linguistic competence, professional adaptability, and intercultural readiness, thereby reducing barriers commonly experienced in transnational apprenticeship systems. Thematically, the study revealed three pillars of preparatory WBL: (1) language mastery as the foundation, (2) soft skills training as the bridge to workplace practices, and (3) cultural orientation as the contextual enabler for integration into the German labor market. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the expansion of the WBL framework by extending its application beyond direct workplace contexts. The results suggest that WBL can also be implemented syntactically in preparatory institutions, functioning as a transitional stage before learners engage in structured apprenticeships abroad. This adds a new dimension to existing WBL scholarship, which has predominantly focused on industrial and vocational school settings. In conclusion, BEI's innovative model positions preparatory WBL as a critical enabler of international apprenticeship success. By operationalizing WBL principles through language, soft skills, and cultural readiness, the institution provides a syntactic innovation that supports global workforce integration.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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