PREPARING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FOR THE LABOR MARKET DIFFERENTLY: LESSONS FROM THE BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAM (BIP)

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Abstract

This article examines how a Blended Intensive Program (BIP) can support the development of key labor-market competencies. The aim is to explore how participation in a BIP contributes to students' acquisition of future-ready skills. The authors qualitatively analyzed final posters from international student teams in a 2025 BIP on "AI in Practice" within the Euroregion Neisse. The reported learning outcomes were mapped to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2025 taxonomy. Results indicate concurrent development of technical skills (Artificial Intelligence or AI and data literacy) and transversal capabilities (analytical thinking, leadership, empathy, multilingualism). The study empirically proves that short, international, collaborative, blended formats foster future-ready competencies.

Keywords

Blended learning; AI; Generation Z; International cooperation; Employability; Euroregion Neisse.

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving labor market, integrating AI into business processes has become one of the most transformative trends (World Economic Forum, 2025). Young professionals, particularly university students, face the challenge of preparing for careers connected with digitalization and Industry 4.0 (Aranda-Jiménez et al., 2024). Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to bridge the gap between formal academic instruction and the real-world demands of workplaces (Jo et al., 2024; OECD, 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on AI and workforce transformation, limited attention has been paid to how students of Generation Z themselves perceive these changes and develop relevant competencies towards the labor market (Hovořáková & Pauknerová, 2024). The BIP combines virtual and physical mobility in international and mostly interdisciplinary learning environments, mainly as a short-term learning format (Laine et al., 2025). While
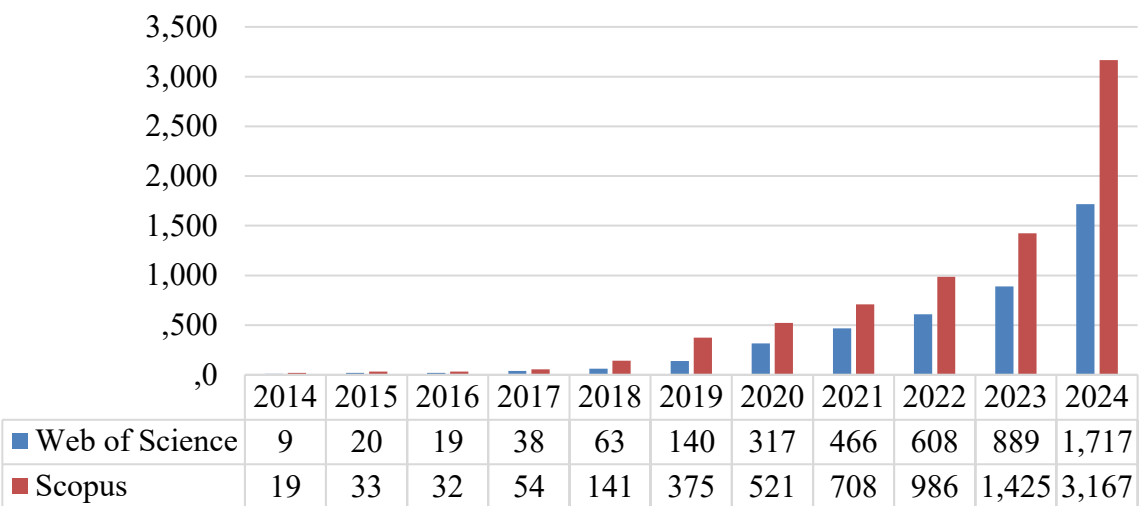
BIPs are recognized for promoting skills in different fields, there is still little empirical evidence on whether BIPs can be implemented in AI.

The primary goal of this article is to explore how participation in a selected BIP can contribute to developing key competencies required for the labor market. The authors used a qualitative content analysis method of the final posters created during the BIP. The article's structure is as follows. The first section presents the literature review with a theoretical background. The following section explains the applied methodology. The third section summarizes the key findings discussed in the next section, including the limitations of this research. The conclusion brings new ideas for further research.

1 Literature Review

Numerous studies highlight the impact of AI on employment and workplace transformation, emphasizing the need for technical and transversal skills (Eger & Žižka, 2024; Jo et al., 2024; OECD, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2025).

As shown by literary research in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, AI has seen a substantial rise in academic attention across disciplines related to Economics, Management, and Business. Figure 1 demonstrates that the number of AI-related scientific articles in these fields has grown steadily over the last decade.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Web of Science	9	20	19	38	63	140	317	466	608	889	1,717
Scopus	19	33	32	54	141	375	521	708	986	1,425	3,167

Source: Own processing of Web of Science and Scopus databases on 14th June 2025

Fig. 1: *Published articles related to AI in Business, Economics, and Management (2014–2024)*

The number of publications indexed in the Scopus database increased from 19 in 2014 to 3,167 in 2024, while it rose in the Web of Science database from 9 to 1,717 in the same period. This development signals the growing importance of AI not only in technical disciplines but also in business and economics-oriented research. This trend reflects not only the technological advancement of AI but also its growing relevance for management practice, policy-making, and academic inquiry. Moreover, AI awareness can positively influence career competencies and job burnout (Kong et al., 2021). Also, higher education is focusing more and more on AI-related topics (Crompton & Burke, 2023).

The concept of BIP has gained increasing scientific attention as a tool for enhancing professional and other competencies in different industries, such as medicine (Duś-Ilnicka et al., 2024), geophysical and archaeological fields (Rabbel et al., 2023), art and design (de Castro et al., 2025), or education (Tsvetkova, 2023). According to Laine et al. (2025), BIP

creates a unique learning space that encourages students to collaborate with a positive impact on the entrepreneurial ecosystem. These programs foster collaboration and critical thinking (de Castro et al., 2025), both essential for preparing students for complex careers (Duś-Ilnicka et al., 2024; Frampton et al., 2025). The BIP supports the development of professional skills and soft skills, which are needed to develop, especially in higher education (Coelho & Martins, 2022). Moreover, BIP can enhance other competencies, such as the intercultural skills of participants (Tsvetkova, 2023). BIP represents an alternative that allows learners to address different topics through collaboration, reflection, and peer feedback, both in person and online. BIP could also be an appropriate tool for the development of Generation Z and employees from this cohort (Trávníčková, 2023).

A deeper understanding of Generation Z's defining characteristics helps contextualize how and why BIP may be particularly effective for this group. Unlike preceding cohorts, Generation Z has grown up in pervasive digital connectivity, economic uncertainty, and heightened social consciousness. Several defining characteristics emerge from the literature:

- **Digital natives and AI-savvy** – Generation Z has interacted with algorithm-driven platforms such as social media, voice assistants, and recommendation systems from an early age. As noted by Crompton & Burke (2023) and Eger & Žižka (2024), they expect seamless integration of AI in both education and work environments and quickly acquire basic data literacy.

- **Value orientation focused on authenticity, inclusion, and impact** – According to Hovořáková & Pauknerová (2024) and Kong et al. (2021), Generation Z prefers meaningful, purpose-driven careers and emphasizes ethical, inclusive, and sustainable values when evaluating potential employers.

- **Preference of collaborative, experiential learning styles** – Having experienced online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, Generation Z favors project-based formats that mix virtual and in-person interaction. The BIP structure aligns closely with this learning preference (Laine et al., 2025).

- **Multichannel communication habits** – Generation Z prefers informal, fast-paced communication via instant messaging, short videos, and collaborative platforms. Practical pedagogy leverages tools such as digital whiteboards, asynchronous video reflection, and microlearning (Jo et al., 2024).

- **Resilience amid economic volatility** – Having grown up amid global crises, Generation Z balances a pragmatic approach to job security with openness to freelance and portfolio careers. This drives demand for technical skills and soft-skill adaptability (OECD, 2024).

Integrating these generational traits with the broader discourse on AI-driven labor market transformation further underscores the relevance of BIP as a learning format. By combining AI-focused content with collaborative, multimodal delivery, BIP addresses the values, preferences, and competencies Generation Z needs to thrive in future workplaces (World Economic Forum, 2025).

2 Methodology

To achieve this article's main objective, a stepwise methodological approach was adopted.

First, a literature review was conducted in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, the main findings of which were described in the previous section.

Second, an analysis of secondary data was carried out with a focus on labor market requirements. The Future of Jobs Report 2025 (World Economic Forum, 2025) was selected

because it provides a well-established and up-to-date taxonomy of future skills, broadly recognized in research and practice. The taxonomy reflects insights from more than 1,000 leading global employers, covering over 14 million employees across 22 industries and 55 economies worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2025). Such a broad perspective ensures that the identified competencies are theoretically grounded and mirror the most recent expectations of the labor market. Therefore, this framework was used as a reference point for categorizing student-reported competencies and linking the findings to current global trends in employability.

Based on the literature review and the secondary analysis of the Future of Jobs Report (World Economic Forum, 2025), the following research questions (RQ) were formulated:

RQ1: Which key competencies defined by the World Economic Forum (2025) have been enhanced among participants of the selected BIP?

RQ2: How do participants perceive the opportunities and risks associated with artificial intelligence after completing the selected BIP?

Third, primary data collection was conducted. An international BIP was selected. BIP was held in spring 2025 on the topic "Artificial Intelligence in Practice — Its Contribution to the Development of the Euroregion Neisse" (further "AI in Practice"). A total of 50 students came from six universities in Central Europe, reflecting the cross-border collaboration on the topic of "AI in Practice" connected with the Euroregion Neissa, which consists of the Liberec Region in Czechia, the Lower Silesian Province in Poland, and the Bautzen and Görlitz districts in Germany. The first meeting was held online in April 2025, followed by a five-day in-person meeting in May 2025. The students were split into eight diverse teams, each comprising members from different universities.

The learning process during this BIP combined lectures, practical workshops, and company visits, such as ŠKODA Auto, one of the most awarded employers in the Czech Republic. The topic was also discussed during the practical workshop delivered by Beey.io. Additional lectures during both the online and in-person phases further deepened participants' knowledge of AI implementation, which was presented in more detail on the ACC Forum 2025 websites (ACC, 2025).

As part of the BIP, each student team was expected during the whole BIP to prepare a final poster addressing the two following points:

1. Identify five key takeaways from the ACC Forum 2025, particularly those connected to AI, drawing on experiences from lectures and workshops with emphasis on what was surprising, inspiring, or relevant for their future careers; select one concept or theory that supports one of these takeaways and present it using real data, forecasts, and a relevant visual such as a chart or model; reflect on the Škoda Auto visit and summarize the most impactful insights related to AI.

2. The second section of the poster should focus on skills and competencies development, encouraging students to reflect on when and how they developed specific competencies during the program, with each team member contributing at least one skill or learning outcome. In this way, each team created a poster addressing areas of particular interest to its members, voluntarily selecting the focus and assigning an appropriate title.

Finally, the data were collected as final posters, which were presented by teams on the last day of the BIP. Afterwards, the data were analyzed through thematic analysis to explore how students perceived and reflected on their experiences in a selected BIP. Thematic analysis is

suitable for analyzing patterns within qualitative data and is valued for its flexibility and potential to generate trustworthy insights (Nowell et al., 2017).

In the first step, competencies reported in posters were coded and categorized according to the World Economic Forum's taxonomy of future skills (World Economic Forum, 2025). In the second step, poster reflections on AI were examined to identify opportunities, risks, and participants' overall awareness of AI. To enhance the reliability of the findings, all authors cross-checked the results of the analysis. This multi-layered approach ensured coherence between the conceptual background, the formulated research questions, and the empirical findings derived from the BIP.
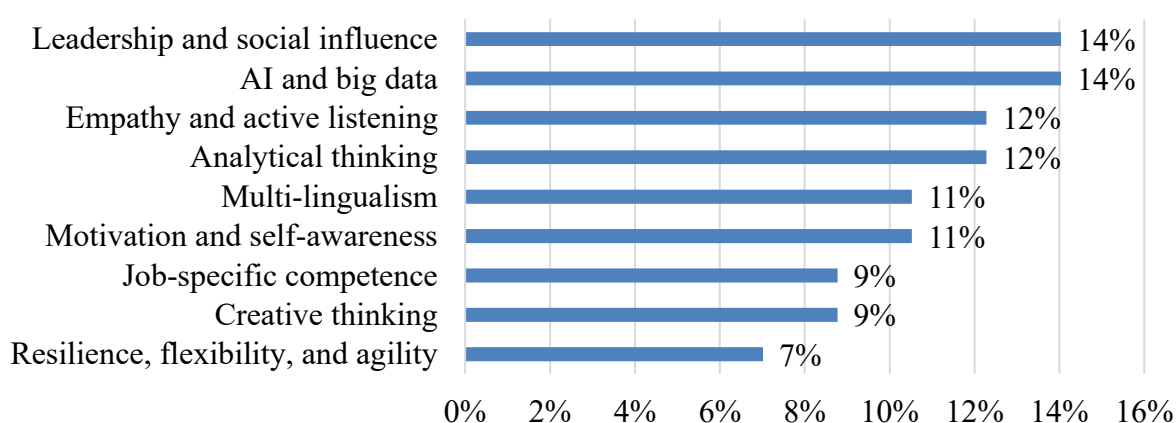
3   Results

The results are structured according to the two main research questions. They are based on analyzing student-generated digital posters created by the students' team during the selected BIP.

3.1   Competencies Developed during BIP

RQ1 (research question 1) explores which competencies related to the labor market can be developed through participation in a BIP. Students' self-reported learning outcomes were categorized using the World Economic Forum's taxonomy of future skills (World Economic Forum, 2025).

The most frequently developed competencies include leadership and social influence, as well as AI and big data literacy, reported by 14% of students. These are followed by key soft skills such as empathy, active listening, analytical thinking (12% each), motivation and self-awareness, and multilingualism (11% each). Competencies, such as creative thinking and flexibility, were also mentioned. Related to BIP, 9% of the mentioned competencies were connected to some specific job tasks.

Figure 2 presents the relative frequency of competency development presented in final posters according to the World Economic Forum (2025), which highlights the following combination of technical and soft competencies enhanced through BIP experience.

Source: Own processing based on student poster analysis

Fig. 2:   *Competencies categorized according to the World Economic Forum (2025), which were developed through BIP based on student reflections on final posters*

Thematic analysis of the posters shows that students were not only able to identify a broad set of future-oriented competencies but also described them in reflective terms, suggesting deeper self-awareness of their personal and professional development. The prominence of human-

centered skills—such as empathy, active listening, and intercultural communication—suggests that the international and collaborative setting of the BIP fostered meaningful personal growth. At the same time, frequent references to AI and big data literacy indicate that students internalized the technological content and linked it to their employability potential. These findings demonstrate that short-term, blended, and experience-based learning formats can be practical tools for developing technical and transversal competencies in higher education.

3.2 Perceived Opportunities and Risks of AI

To address RQ2 (research question 2), students reflected on the pros and cons of AI implementation. Based on their final posters, these insights were synthesized into Table 1.

Tab. 1: *Student's reflections on the pros and cons of AI*

Poster Title	Pros of AI	Cons of AI
AI-driven supply chain intelligence	Prompting, tools, and automation.	Ethical concerns.
AI is smart, not wise	Human-like behavior, support of diversity and inclusion.	Black box, limited real understanding.
Linguaneisse	Data quality, critical thinking.	Cybersecurity, resistance, and education gaps.
AI-nization of Euro-Nysa	Accuracy, big data, analytics.	Hallucinations, overreliance.
StAI in the Euroregion Neisse	Predictive help, support roles.	Bias, data diversity issues.
AI: Is it making us faster...?	Efficiency, prompting.	Dependence on strategic AI.
AI across the border	Automatization, support tool.	Ethical issues, lack of transparency, and importance of data input.
AI travel agent in the Oder-Neisse Region	Cost reduction, automatization, and availability.	Job displacement, privacy concerns, and a lack of human judgment.

Source: Own processing based on student poster analysis

Each student team provided a unique perspective on their AI implementation case. The "Linguaneisse" team, for example, linked AI to language processing challenges, while the team with the topic "AI: Is it making us faster...?" focused on AI's impact on the speed and efficiency of humans and AI. Ethical concerns such as transparency, bias, and overreliance were noted across almost all teams, indicating a shared awareness of AI's limitations. At the same time, students valued automation, accessibility, and support functions, emphasizing AI's enabling role in augmenting rather than replacing human decision-making. These reflections indicate that students gained technical understanding and developed the capacity for critical thinking about societal and ethical dimensions of AI.

4   Discussion

The findings regarding RQ1 (research question 1) show that students developed a broad range of technical and transversal competencies, especially leadership, AI literacy, and empathy. Regarding RQ2 (research question 2), participants demonstrated increased awareness of the potential and challenges of AI through poster reflections that addressed ethical, practical, and societal dimensions. The findings demonstrate that participation in the BIP "AI in Practice" supported developing technical and transversal competencies aligned with global labor market trends. Students' most frequently reported competencies, such as AI and big data leadership, social influence, empathy, and active listening, correspond with the top-ranked skills listed in the Future of Jobs Report 2025 (World Economic Forum, 2025).

This indicates that international, interdisciplinary, and experiential learning formats such as BIP are highly effective in preparing students for the changing nature of work. In comparison with Laine et al. (2025), who emphasize BIP importance for shareholders such as universities, industry, or government, our findings suggest that BIP develops not only technical (AI and big data related competencies) but mainly personal competencies, such as leadership, communication, empathy, or analytical thinking. All relate to the requirements of employers for the current and future labor market (World Economic Forum, 2025). AI awareness also enhances career competencies (Kong et al., 2021).

While the variety of developed competencies reflects the holistic character of the BIP approach, it is important to note some limitations. First, the data were collected through qualitative reflections and may reflect individual subjective bias or variability in team dynamics. Second, the competencies were self-reported, not measured through external evaluation. Finally, the findings are limited to a single BIP case in the Euroregion Neisse and may not be generalizable to all student populations or disciplines.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into how innovative formats like BIP can complement traditional university education and provide a responsive, practice-oriented framework for developing future-ready graduates.

Conclusion

This article presented a case study of a BIP as an innovative educational model to support university students in developing competencies relevant to the present labor market. The study identified diverse technical and human-centered skills developed during BIP through a qualitative content analysis of student-generated final outputs. These included AI and data literacy, leadership, empathy, critical thinking, and others, aligned with competencies currently prioritized by employers worldwide.

The results show that BIP can provide a meaningful platform for enhancing students' competencies in different disciplines, including technology-oriented topics. Students in this BIP explored AI's pros and cons and reflected on its ethical risks and sector-specific applications.

Future research should further explore the impact of BIP participation on students' career competencies and investigate how such programs can be adapted across different fields. Quantitative validation of competency development would also strengthen the integration of BIP into higher education.

In practice, universities are encouraged to implement BIP into their curricula, particularly in collaboration with external stakeholders. As AI continues to reshape the world of work, experiential and collaborative learning models like BIP will be increasingly essential in preparing graduates to adapt and lead.

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PŘÍPRAVA VYSOKOŠKOLSKÝCH STUDENTŮ NA TRH PRÁCE JINÝM ZPŮSOBEM: POZNATKY Z KOMBINOVANÉHO INTENZIVNÍHO PROGRAMU (BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAM – BIP)

Tento článek zkoumá, jak může kombinovaný intenzivní program (Blended Intensive Program – BIP) podpořit rozvoj klíčových kompetencí na trhu práce. Cílem je prozkoumat, jak účast v programu BIP přispívá k získávání dovedností studentů potřebných pro budoucnost. Autoři kvalitativně analyzovali závěrečné plakáty mezinárodních studentských týmů v programu BIP 2025 na téma „AI v praxi" v Euroregionu Nisa. Zaznamenané výsledky učení byly zmapovány podle taxonomie Světového ekonomického fóra „Budoucnost pracovních míst 2025". Výsledky ukazují souběžný rozvoj technických dovedností (umělá inteligence nebo AI a datová gramotnost) a transverzálních schopností (analytické myšlení, leadership, empatie, mnohojazyčnost). Studie empiricky dokazuje, že krátké, mezinárodní, kolaborativní, kombinované formáty podporují kompetence připravené na budoucnost.

DIE VORBEREITUNG VON HOCHSCHULSTUDIERENDEN AUF DEN ARBEITSMARKT ANDERS: ERKENNTNISSE AUS DEM BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAM (BIP)

Dieser Artikel untersucht, wie ein kombiniertes Intensivprogramm (BIP) die Entwicklung von Schlüsselkompetenzen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt fördern kann. Ziel ist es, zu untersuchen, wie die Teilnahme am BIP-Programm dazu beiträgt, dass Studierende die für die Zukunft erforderlichen Fähigkeiten erwerben. Die Autoren haben die Abschlussplakate internationaler Studententeams des BIP-Programms 2025 zum Thema „KI in der Praxis" in der Euroregion Neiße qualitativ analysiert. Die erfassten Lernergebnisse wurden anhand der Taxonomie „Die Zukunft der Arbeitsplätze 2025" des Weltwirtschaftsforums kartiert. Die Ergebnisse zeigen eine parallele Entwicklung von technischen Fähigkeiten (künstliche Intelligenz oder KI und Datenkompetenz) und transversalen Fähigkeiten (analytisches Denken, Führungsqualitäten, Empathie, Mehrsprachigkeit). Die Studie belegt empirisch, dass kurze, internationale, kollaborative, kombinierte Formate zukunftsfähige Kompetenzen fördern.

PRZYGOTOWANIE STUDENTÓW UNIWERSYTETU DO RYNKU PRACY INACZEJ: WNIOSKI Z MIESZANEGO KURSU INTENSYWNEGO (BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAM – BIP)

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje, w jaki sposób mieszany kurs intensywny (Blended Intensive Program – BIP) może wesprzeć rozwój kluczowych kompetencji na rynku pracy. Celem jest zbadanie, w jaki sposób udział w programie BIP przyczynia się do zdobywania przez studentów umiejętności przydatnych w przyszłości. Autorzy przeprowadzili jakościową analizę plakatów stworzonych przez międzynarodowe zespoły studentów w programie BIP 2025 na temat „AI w praktyce" w Euroregionie Nysa. Odnotowane efekty kształcenia studentów zostały zmapowane zgodnie z taksonomią Światowego Forum Ekonomicznego „Przyszłość miejsc pracy 2025". Wyniki pokazują równoległy rozwój umiejętności technicznych (sztuczna inteligencja lub AI oraz kompetencje w zakresie danych) i umiejętności przekrojowych (myślenie analityczne, przywództwo, empatia, wielojęzyczność). Badanie empirycznie dowodzi, że krótkie, międzynarodowe, oparte na współpracy i mieszane formaty wspomagają kompetencje przygotowane na przyszłość.