

# The Role of Study Visit in Learning, Motivation, and Intercultural Understanding of German Literature Students

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## Abstract

This research analyzes the role of study visits to Germany on language learning, motivation, and intercultural understanding of German Literature students at State University of Malang. A qualitative method with a phenomenological approach was used to explore the experiences of program participants. The results show that the 10-day program strengthens learning motivation through direct exposure to German culture and academic environment, encourages reflection, and changes learning strategies. According to Kolb's Experiential Learning theory, participants experienced all stages of experiential learning, which strengthened their cultural awareness, language confidence, and career goals in international contexts.

**Keywords:** *Study Visit, Motivation, Language Learning*

## Introduction

Learning a language is a process that explores how to communicate, think and interact like a native speaker, taking into account the social, cultural and historical context that accompanies it. In Indonesia, German is one of the foreign languages taught at the high school and college levels, this cannot be separated from the many job opportunities available in Germany. Peter Hille in Tamaela (2023) stated that Germany currently needs about 400,000 skilled workers from abroad every year. One of the main requirements to fulfill this need is the ability to speak German. In line with this, Arik Jahn in an article from DW (2024) stated that people see that their opportunities to enter the German labor market are greater than ever, and having a good knowledge of German is the key to a long-term perspective in this country. Tomasouw, et al. (2022) asserted that good proficiency in German can help learners to expand their way of thinking and improve their understanding and knowledge. This is reinforced by research conducted by Tamaela (2022), who explains that mastery of a foreign language, especially German, allows one to communicate more widely and open up new horizons. In addition, this ability is an important asset to face the era of globalization. Seeing from the existing data, German is one of the important foreign languages to learn.

To strengthen the mastery of German language learning, there are various learning methods and programs that can be applied, such as study mobility programs and short courses, which provide direct learning experience in a native speaker environment.

The program helps improve language skills, but also enriches students' intercultural horizons through direct interaction with the host culture. The program provides structured activities and opportunities for intensive cultural interaction (Iskhakova et al., 2022). Fang and Baker (2017) in Pawel Sobkowiak say that short-term study abroad contributes to changes

in students' attitudes and behaviors that lead to a better understanding of other people and cultures, more openness to diversity, broadened perspectives, and the development of a more open mind towards the world. Research by Fisher C (2022), cited from the Institute of International Education 2020, 2021 explains that short-term education programs lasting eight weeks or less have contributed to most of the growth (103%) in education abroad experiences in the last fifteen years.

Short-term study abroad programs offer significant personal development benefits, such as an understanding of global interdependence, improved intercultural attitudes, and openness to diversity and challenges, in addition to an overall increase in self-confidence (Dou, 2023). As stated by Fukuda and Chávez (2021), experiences related to language use in real contexts can promote the improvement of language skills as well as strengthen confidence in its use. Through participation in study visits, students can experience firsthand the use of German in everyday situations, thus broadening their horizons about German culture and helping to build more natural and contextualized communication competence. Therefore, this research focuses on the role of study visits in the aspects of learning, motivation, and intercultural understanding of German Literature students.

At the State University of Malang, the German Language Education study program provides various opportunities for students to learn German, including visiting study programs. The learning process focuses on grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. As a language learner, understanding the culture of the country that uses the language is very important. As stated by Amral and Sumiharti (2022), language is a reflection of culture because the expressions used by a person reflect the values, norms, and habits of their native society. Through language, we can understand culture, both from the way of communication, word choice, and expressions used by individuals in various contexts. Therefore, the ideal German language learning should include an understanding of German culture itself.

Although this program has enormous benefits, the participation of German language education students at the State University of Malang in the study visit program is still relatively low. In fact, the hands-on experience offered by this program has great potential to support language learning and the development of students' cultural competence. This research aims to analyze the role of study visits to Germany on German language learning, focusing on motivation, intercultural understanding and the development of German language learning experienced and felt by participants. This research is expected to provide recommendations to increase participation and effectiveness of the program in the future.

## **Method**

### **Theoretical Background**

#### **Experiential Learning**

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) developed by David Kolb in 1999, defines learning as a process in which experience is transformed into knowledge through transformation. Learning occurs optimally when individuals experience the process directly and then reflect on the experience. This theory emphasizes that experience is the main basis of the learning process. In experiential learning, learners are involved, active, emotionally involved, participants in the learning process. Learner participation is the main thing, where "learning by doing" is the basic concept (Munge et al., 2018 in Morris T. H. 2020).

In the paper entitled *Experiential Learning: An Overview* written by Bartle E. (2015) page 4, the steps in experiential learning based on Kolb's (1984) model include four interrelated

stages. The first stage is Concrete Experience. In this stage, participants are directly involved in practical activities, projects, or real situations that are relevant to the learning context. In the second stage, participants enter the Reflective Observation phase. This phase they revisit, and observe what happened by considering the feelings, reactions and outcomes of the experience. The third phase, is the Conceptual Consolidation (Abstract Conceptualization). Participants try to relate the experience to previously learned theories or concepts. They begin to build a deeper understanding by analyzing and synthesizing information. Finally, the fourth stage is Active Experimentation, where participants put what they have learned into practice. They try new things, test ideas, and implement learning lessons in new situations.

The characteristics of the Experiential Learning model lie in learning by learning that can be seen through the process, not just by looking at the achievement of the last result, is a continuous learning process based on student experience, requires conflict resolution between various kinds of learning styles that are dialectically opposite, is a holistic learning process, involves a relationship between a person and the environment, creates combined knowledge, namely social knowledge and personal knowledge (Pamungkas and Sunarti, 2018: 33). Experiential Learning theory is used in this research because it is considered relevant for the study visit program to Germany. This process provides an opportunity for students to critically observe and evaluate the differences and similarities between their own culture and German culture (Marlina et al., 2021).

## Results & Discussion

### Participants' Meanings and Views on the Visit Study Program

Highlighting the visit study program, seen from the name of the program itself consists of the words "*Study*" and "*Visit*". "*Study*" is an English word that means to learn or to give time and attention to gain knowledge about a subject. While "*Visit*" means the act of going to see someone or something for pleasure, socially, professionally, or staying for a while. So that the *Study Visit* program linguistically means a temporary visit to a place that aims to gain knowledge through direct experience, both in academic and socio-cultural contexts. The study visit program can be classified as a short course program, seeing that its implementation is only in a short time. Chiocca (2021) explained in his research, in the context of education, short courses refer to learning programs that last for a short period of time, usually less than eight weeks. The program is designed to provide an intensive learning experience that focuses on practical applications and can cover a variety of areas, such as language, culture or professional skills. Participants can often gain insight into the local culture and develop intercultural competence through direct interaction with the local community. This is supported by research conducted by Dou (2023), who explains that although short-term study abroad programs have a relatively short duration of up to eight weeks, they can be an effective way to support young adults' personal development. Through *short courses*, students involved in these programs often report increased motivation, which is recognized as one of the keys to success in language learning (Arcipe & Balones, 2023).

Based on information obtained from respondents who are participants in the *study visit* program, this activity is an academic visit to Germany which was attended by seven German Literature students from the classes of 2021, 2022, and 2023. The program lasted for ten days, with two days allocated for travel and eight effective days for the implementation of activities in Germany. During the program, participants had the opportunity to visit several

cities in Germany such as Schwäbisch Gmünd, Stuttgart, and Ulm. In these cities, participants visited various historical and educational sites, such as churches (*Kirche*), museums, cinemas (*Kino*), and the Albert Einstein monument. In addition, students also attended four to five lecture meetings at the *Pädagogische Hochschule Schwäbisch Gmünd*, which provided hands-on learning experience in a German academic environment. At the end of the program, participants are involved in a dinner with international students, which is one of the key moments for building cross-cultural relationships. The program does not require a certain level of German language proficiency and does not require a selection test, so it can be attended by anyone who is interested, regardless of language level.

Although etymologically *Study Visit* reflects a visit accompanied by learning, participants interpreted this program as more inclined to the aspect of "visit" than "study". This is influenced by the structure of the program, which lasts for only 10 days, with limited class allocations. As explained in data (1), the learning that was followed in Germany was not directly related to lecture material in Indonesia, and was not even considered to deepen previous learning.

*"...we can give more insight into the 'visit', because we only attended a few classes, and the rest of the time we walked around to see the facilities in Germany." (C01)*

A similar view was expressed by respondent J02, who saw these activities more as a means of cultural observation and social experience than reinforcement of academic material.

(1) *"...it's more about traveling and observing how the culture and tourism in Germany is, not about learning." (J02)*

Based on these findings, it can be seen that although the program is labeled as a "Study Visit", in practice participants feel more benefit in the aspect of cultural exploration and observation of the academic environment in general, not in the deepening of teaching materials. The meaning of "Study" in the context of this program is more non-formal and contextual, not structured and in-depth academic learning.

### **The Role of Study Visit in the Development of Learning Motivation**

Motivation is an impetus that can cause certain behaviors that are directed towards achieving a certain goal (Rahman, 2022). According to [Zulfiana \(2022\)](#), learning motivation is an internal driver that moves a person to act and engage in the learning process in order to achieve predetermined goals. The existence of motivation in an individual can be a reason to keep trying new things that are in line with goals. This is reinforced by the opinion of Arcipe & Balones (2023), that when students are motivated to learn, they will tend to strive to learn, practice, and use the language. Students' motivation in participating in this study visit is certainly based on something. As can be seen in data (3).

(2) *"So far I have never been able to imagine going abroad and maybe initially as a dream to go abroad and even after graduating from college. It turned out that there was information about this study visit in semester 3 or 4, so I was immediately excited to participate." (C01)*

Based on data (3), motivation is formed by a personal desire to go abroad and long-term goals related to studying or working in Germany. On campus, German is studied as a provision in continuing a career after graduation. In accordance with the data listed on the UM German Literature Study Program, after graduation, German language education graduates have the

spirit of Pancasila, master the basics of German linguistics, culture and literature, are able to design, implement, and evaluate German language learning, and are able to implement it in various businesses in relevant sectors creatively and innovatively in accordance with the development of science and technology. The emergence of information about the *study visit* program in the middle of college was the main thing that made me immediately interested in participating. *Study visit* in this case is considered as an opening path in achieving its goal, which is to be able to work abroad after graduating from college, especially in Germany.

In addition to the inner motivation possessed by students, the existence of external support is also a reinforcement for the participation of the *study visit* program. This is explained in data (3).

- (3) *"I was allowed by my parents, my parents told me to apply to lecturers."*  
(J02)

It can be examined in data (4) that the existence of support from outside parties makes the motivation to follow the *study visit* is getting stronger. In the statement "allowed" this refers to the existence of social support that is given by parents to students as prospective participants in the *study visit* program. Social support from parents can be classified into three types, namely moral support, material support, and support in the form of appreciation or appreciation ([Zulfiana, 2022](#)). According to [Rizkan \(2021\)](#), social support from parents is a close emotional relationship between children and their parents, which is realized through providing information or advice, affection, appreciation, and assistance in both material and non-material forms. Reviewing the respondents' statements, in the context of *Study Visit*, the existence of social support makes the participants' determination stronger in achieving the goals they want to achieve, without having to think about obstacles such as licensing and finance. Parental support can be an important factor that encourages students to participate and make the most of the experience.

Learning motivation consists of three main aspects contained in the individual, namely awareness of the needs that must be met, factors that become the driving force to act, and the ultimate goal to be achieved through the learning process ([Zulfiana, 2022](#)). Moving on from the existence of learning motivation, the goals of the program participants are also increasingly clear. For participants, participation in this program is not just a visit to Germany, but also a field to seek experience and provisions to work there. The program is seen as a bridge to academic and professional goals.

- (4) *"This program can bridge my future goals."* (C01)  
(5) *"To find new experiences, secondly, I also want to experience learning German directly in a German country."* (J02)

As shown in data (5) and (6), which state that *study visits* have an important role for the continuation of the career and learning process of the participants. For them, learning directly in the destination country will certainly deepen their understanding. With the picture obtained after learning directly can be a very sufficient provision for them when they will live in Germany later. This is in line with the opinion of Giorgio (2019), that studying abroad can provide students with the opportunity to acquire various skills that allow them to compete successfully in the labor market.

The *study visit* program is able to provide a meaningful experience for its participants. With the *study visit*, the knowledge that participants have while studying on campus is increasingly developed and becomes an understanding that can be applied in the real world. It can be seen in data (7) and (8) which describe the experience during the *study visit*.

(6) "The places visited are historical, such as kirche, museum, Einstein monument. So you can know the technology in Germany and thirdly you can attend lectures there." (C01)

(7) "I was able to take part in classes on campus there and also experience driving public facilities in Germany." (J02)

Data (7) and (8) show that what has been learned in college can be practiced directly in Germany. By participating in experiential learning programs, students not only find the relevance of the knowledge or theories they learn in lecture halls, but also can be applied in everyday life (Rameli, et. al., 2018). So far, students have learned a lot of theories from books and other media. But by participating in a *study visit*, participants can get firsthand what they have learned before.

In addition, participants also have the opportunity to directly attend lectures in Germany, which will certainly broaden their cross-cultural horizons academic skills that they have. The existence of new cultural encounters felt by participants can shape their personalities for the better and be more prepared to adjust to the new environment later. In *Experiential Learning* theory, this activity is included in the first stage, namely *concrete experience*. At this stage, students are directly involved in real activities such as attending lectures in Germany, visiting historical places, and experiencing daily life in the destination country. This direct experience is an important initial foundation in the experiential learning process.

In the second stage of *experiential learning* theory, called the *reflective observation* stage, there will be an indication of reflection and comparison made by participants regarding the way they felt *before* and *after the* program. They realize that their learning has been passive, directionless, and that listening is important. Based on interview data, the experience of participating in the *study visit* program has a real impact on the way students learn and their motivation in learning German.

Before departure, respondents generally studied German in a limited and passive context, namely only through classroom lectures without any long-term targets or goals. One respondent stated that before going to Germany, she only followed the learning directions and materials provided by the lecturer and occasionally did exercise questions independently. She also admitted that she had no background in German from her previous education.

(8) "I only learned German at university. When I study, I only follow what is taught in class, other than that, I study independently and only try to practice questions." (C01)

Respondents with other backgrounds also said the same thing. Although he had studied German in high school, he admitted that his motivation at that time was not clearly formed. This can be seen in the following data:

(9) "When I was in high school, I also had German, but I was just studying. I haven't found a goal like learning German with the intention of *Ausbildung* and the like, so it's just pure learning." (J02)

However, after participating in the *study visit* program, both experienced changes in their learning approach. Respondents emphasized the importance of listening skills, which they realized after hearing many German conversations during the program. After the program, new learning methods began to be applied, such as finding additional learning resources in the form of German films to enrich vocabulary.

(10) "After returning from Germany, I realized that I should often hone my listening skills. From listening, at least I can know more vocabulary that can eventually be used for *sprechen*." (C01)

This response shows that participants have reached the third stage in *Experiential Learning* theory, namely the *Abstract Conceptualization* stage. Through reflections such as those presented, participants develop a new understanding that listening skills are an important aspect of language learning, so they begin to develop new learning strategies such as watching German films to expand vocabulary. Meanwhile, respondent J02 stated that his desire to return to Germany to continue his education through channels such as *Ausbildung* or joining the *AU-Pair* program encouraged him to study more diligently and purposefully.

(11) "After participating in the *study visit*, learning became more focused because after returning from Germany, I felt like going back to Germany again, whether it was for *Ausbildung* or *AU Pair*, or just a vacation." (J02)

(12) This data shows that direct involvement in a native-speaking environment can increase linguistic awareness, generate intrinsic motivation, and encourage students to develop more independent and planned language learning strategies. Both answers from respondents indicate that direct experience in a native country is able to form instrumental learning motivation, namely learning to achieve certain goals that are more concrete and realistic. In line with Gardner's Instrumental Motivation theory explained by Kholid (2017), where learners are motivated to learn the target language because they realize that this ability is the key to opening access to better life opportunities, both in education and career. The sense of enthusiasm in learning German increases after he understands well about what he needs in the future. In this case, good German language skills are one of the important standards that need to be possessed.

In addition to generating a desire to return to Germany, the *study visit* experience also shaped participants' perceptions of the possibility of working abroad. When asked whether the idea of working in Germany had become clearer, responses showed an increase in confidence.

(13) "For me, I feel like I can work in Germany." (J02)

The *study visit* in this case was not only a means of broadening cultural horizons, but also strengthened the instrumental motivation of the participants. On the contrary, one respondent revealed that although the desire is there, the confidence to work in Germany is still hampered by limited language skills.

(14) "Given that the language ability has not been developed until now, so it seems to be vague." (C01)

These two answers represent an interesting spectrum. On the one hand, the *study visit* raises hopes and images of the future. But on the other hand, the program also highlights the challenges that still have to be faced, especially in terms of language competence. This

confirms that motivation to learn German does not arise instantly or absolutely, but rather grows through personal reflection on direct experience in a native-speaking environment. In this regard, integrative motivation often encourages students to share experiences with individuals from different cultures, thus strengthening their language learning (Mahendra et al., 2021).

### **The Role of *Study Visit* in Language Learning Development**

In learning a foreign language, besides having to understand *grammar* and *usage*, learning about the culture of the country is also mandatory for language learners. Awareness that the culture of each country is different is very important to apply the language correctly. Culture manifests itself in language patterns and forms of activity and behavior that serve as models for self-adjustment actions and communication styles that allow people to live in a society in a certain geographical environment at a certain level of technical development and at a certain time (Porter and Samovar, In Mulyana and Rakhmat 2009: 18). Cultural learning is not limited, it can be done through videos, books, articles and so on. However, learning will be more effective if done directly in the destination country such as a *Study Visit*, because the atmosphere and experience gained will be more real.

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with two respondents who were *Study Visit* participants, data were obtained which showed that the four stages in Kolb's learning cycle, namely *Concrete Experience*, *Reflective Observation*, *Abstract Conceptualization*, and *Active Experimentation*, occurred in the participants' overall experience. Data (15) shows the first stage of the theory developed by Kolb.

*"For example, for culture. Because there is a bus hour, so I have to follow it. Then there was a warning from the lecturer that German people don't like it when they don't look at each other. So from there I try to change my habits, I have to care about it because German people consider it polite."* (C01)

Data (15) shows that the student had direct experience meeting German people and concluded that the culture in Indonesia and in Germany is different. seen from punctuality, Germans really appreciate being on time so that it becomes a factor that triggers students to adapt to the cultural environment there. Looking into the eyes when talking is also important because it is part of good manners in Germany. The experience of mingling with local residents in Germany can increase cultural awareness in certain areas. Differences in social norms are also one of the factors that increase students' cultural awareness when visiting. Data (16) shows the difference in norms.

(15) *"Of course, there is culture shock because German people are not friendly and individualistic, so many German people have an indifferent impression."* (J02)

Data (16) shows that different norms can be something that triggers *culture shock*. Social norms reflect the traits that live in a society and are implemented as a supervisory tool consciously and unconsciously by the community on the behavior and words of its members (Soelhi, 2015). Indifferent and individualistic behavior is common for native Germans, but not for friendly Indonesians. Therefore, students felt *shocked* by the cultural differences. However, this experience can be used as a foundation in increasing awareness of German



culture for German Literature students who conduct *study visits* and increase knowledge about culture and how to respond to it.

The experience of interacting directly with the native German cultural context has given students the opportunity to develop their intercultural sensitivity and increase their courage in using German in real communication situations. The process of adapting to cultural habits in Germany indirectly improves students' language skills and confidence in interacting with the local community. This is in accordance with data (17)

(16) *"Yes, I feel more confident, especially when interacting directly with the supermarket guard or cashier. I am more confident because I can speak directly unlike on campus because the lecturers are Indonesian. Over there, we talk directly to natives, so we rarely chat with native speakers. When I was there, I chatted with local people, so I was braver and more confident."* (J02)

From the statement by data (17), it can be concluded that different social norms are not a barrier for students to speak German directly with local residents. Students stated that in class students rarely speak German because the lecturer is Indonesian so students are not too confident to speak German. If they are in Germany, students directly speak with *native speakers* or local residents so that students feel more challenged and try to be more confident to speak. However, there is a slight difference in data (18)

*"So because I use 80% English, there is only basic German. So for now I'm still not confident to use German. It needs to be honed at the moment. Because there is still a lack of Wortschatz, to be able to speak with long sentences is still confused. I know what they're talking about, but I can't answer them."* (C01)

Data (18) shows that concerns about *Wortschatz* or vocabulary make students not confident to speak. Many concerns experienced by students when speaking with foreigners, especially German locals, one of which is the fear of speaking long sentences, as expressed by data (19).

(19) *"I already use German when shopping at the supermarket. Sometimes I answer conversations with international friends there, but because my German skills are also lacking, I use English too, not just German. My friends there also mostly use English rather than German"* (J02).

Respondents in data (19) mentioned that their German language skills were not up to scratch, which was an obstacle to speaking German during a *study visit*. However, the influence of the environment that was present at the time was also a big factor in the choice of language used by respondents. As stated by respondents that most interactions are not with native German students but with international students, so the majority use English rather than German. This is also expressed by data (20)

(20) *"My German language skills are still low. Why can I go to Germany? Because there is no language test for this program, so there is no language selection to go there. We have personal data to write down our abilities, we write as it is at level A2. Then why not use German because of the ability and the absence of that selection. It's not that I*

*can't speak it at all but I know what they're talking about and what they mean, I can follow the lectures and I can watch the movies and know what the movies are like. What I lacked was the speaking skills, plus we didn't meet real German students, but the ones we met and the events there were like international students."* (C01)

Respondent C01 also revealed in data (20) that the respondent generally understood what was said by the native people there, including when attending lectures and when seeing movies, but the respondent stated that speaking a foreign language, namely German, was still lacking because it was hampered by the lack of foreign language skills in this context is German. Learning a foreign language needs to go hand in hand between language and self-confidence. The improvement of students' self-confidence language skills during the *study visit* is strongly influenced by the quality of social support and adaptability that appears in the new environment. this is supported by data statement (21).

(21) *"I didn't have any difficulties with that, because when we first arrived on campus we were picked up by lecturers and students from PH Schwabisch Gmünd, and they were very friendly. From the beginning, I was able to interact well. Then what I initially thought was that European people seemed ignorant, after I came there it turned out that the picture was gone."* (C01)

From data (21) it can be concluded that student adaptation is not so difficult because outsiders are friendly to study visit students, so students are more comfortable and adapt quickly. The images and expectations that have been imagined at the beginning about the stereotype that European people are indifferent are not experienced when they come to campus to conduct a *study visit*. This shows that social support from outside parties also affects how students adapt. As mentioned in the data, students who have received the right social support from employees are more likely to adapt to their new environment, local universities will dare to adapt quickly to the new cultural context. This social support gives students a "safe zone" to experiment with the target language without fear of mistakes.

Cultural differences in terms of learning are the main highlights in the implementation of study visits in Germany. During the study visit in Germany, students had the opportunity to gain learning experience at *Pädagogische Hochschule Schwäbisch Gmünd* in a class. In the class, students witnessed how the class runs from the beginning to the end of the course and found differences in learning culture in *Schwäbisch Gmünd* on the time factor and active participation. In the next data, students have entered the second phase, namely *Reflective observation*, where students begin to review what they experience. This can be seen in the following data (22) and (23):

(22) *"The second thing is that they come on time, they come far from the schedule, so There is no one who is late to class. "* (C01)

(23) *"Definitely come on time, so no one is late, not like in Indonesia. The students are active in answering questions, not like here, they are less active. There is often interaction between lecturers and students. "* (J02)

In data (22) and (23), it is mentioned that punctuality is important for students in Germany. Students there always come on time according to the specified time, even long before the class starts. Students there tend to be more active in participating in class

learning and the interaction is more effective between lecturers and students. In contrast to Indonesia, respondents felt that they were not on time and were less active in participating in class. Until the 17th data shows that students experience concrete experience or direct experience while in Germany to conduct a *study visit*. Respondents conveyed what they saw during the study visit in Germany. In the data, students have begun to compare what happened during the visit to *Pädagogische Hochschule Schwäbisch Gmünd* and follow the learning. This phase is also found in the following data regarding the form of appreciation given by students in Germany to the lecturer who finished teaching in the following data:

(24) *"If the different culture is at that time, at the end of the class, we appreciate the lecturer by knocking on the table."* (J02)

(25) *"There is also appreciation through table tapping"* (C01)

Data (24) and (25) show a form of appreciation in lectures in Europe, especially in Germany. This shows that students have begun to recognize a new culture that has never been experienced before. With these cultural differences, respondents have a comparison with the implementation of learning in Indonesia obtained from the following data (26)

(26) *"I think the difference there is that when the lecturer explains to students it is more organized, the lecturer gives responses and opportunities for students to speak. So the lecturer said that we don't have to be afraid to answer."* (J02)

Based on data (26) the respondent began to enter the (*Abstract Conceptualization*) phase. In this phase respondents try to link experiences with previously learned concepts. They begin to build a deeper understanding by analyzing and synthesizing information. This form of analysis can be seen when giving answers to comparisons of different forms of learning. In learning there, students are more courageous to express their opinions compared to lectures in Indonesia. This encourages students to actively participate in class when they return to Indonesia. Supported by the following data (27): *"I really do, but I feel insecure, because now the classes are combined, I feel a lot of lack but I try to be more active"* (C01).

In data (27) respondent C01 revealed that his experience in participating in learning in Germany during the study visit encouraged him to participate and be more active in attending lectures when he returned to Indonesia. It is also supported by publications by (Kent et al., 1997; Healy and Jenkins, 2000; Hope, 2009) that field study visits are ideal for illustrating successful practices in experiential and active learning. Field experiences can contribute to more positive attitudes and feelings towards a topic; they energize students and produce lasting learning benefits (Falk & Dierking, 1997; Rishbeth, op.cit, Nadelson & Jordan, 2012; Myers & Jones, 2015).

There is a little fear and unusual when participating actively due to external pressure when respondent C01 mentioned *"but I feel insecure, because now the classes are merged, I feel a lot of lack"* but respondents still try to be more active in answering during class. The experience of attending lectures in Germany and observing participation there is not enough to fully encourage more active learning, as can be seen in data (28).

(27) *"Sometimes I try to be more active because I am inspired by studying in Germany. But also sometimes I am afraid to answer questions from the lecturer or answer questions from the lecturer. So I get scared first."* (J02)

In data (28) respondent J02 has tried to be more active but there is still fear in participating in learning in Indonesia because he is afraid to answer questions from the lecturer. The experience of direct observation can be used as an encouragement for students to be more active during learning but the culture and habits that are already inherent in the respondent can be more dominant than directly practicing the experience gained.

From the interviews, it was found that the *study visit* program also has a significant long-term impact on students' future planning. Participants who have participated in the *study visit* expressed an increased motivation to develop German language skills, such as by targeting language certification (Goethe Zertifikat), as well as the desire to return to Germany both in the context of further studies and the world of work. This is in accordance with data (29)

(28) *"So I want to have a B1 certificate, and then I also want to experience either working in Germany or basically I want to go to Germany again."* (J02)

Data (29) shows that the direct experience in Germany succeeded in forming more concrete and purposeful long-term goals. This is also reinforced by data (31)

(29) *"Now I have to maximize my language learning and gain experience for my time there."* (C01)

Data (29) and (30) show the last phase, *Active Experimentation*, which is the application in real life. The experience gained during the *study visit*, such as attending lectures in Germany, can be used as a basis for Study Visit participants to apply the positive things they have learned in lectures in Indonesia. This can be a motivation for participants to have more language skills than before attending the *study visit*. It is evident in the statements in data (29) and (30) where participants want to maximize their learning and seek more experience to be a provision for further study or work in Germany. It can be seen from the results that the *study visit* program not only serves as a means of cultural exchange for a moment, but also plays a role in building students' vision and career orientation in a more realistic and planned manner.

### **The Role of Study Visit in the Development of Intercultural Understanding**

Intercultural understanding for German Language Education students undertaking study programs in Germany is essential, especially given the range and diversity of cultures they will encounter. Intercultural competence includes the ability to interact effectively with individuals from different cultures. It is not only important in an academic context, but also in the development of professional and personal learners. Intercultural competence enables students to understand and appreciate cultural differences and develop the communication skills necessary to adapt in complex international contexts (Dimitrova-Gyuzeleva, 2020).

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with two participants, data were obtained indicating that the four stages in Kolb's learning cycle namely *Concrete Experience*, *Reflective Observation*, *Abstract Conceptualization*, and *Active Experimentation* occurred thoroughly in their experience during the visit study program.

(30) *"I was really amazed because the people there are disciplined. After the airport, you enter the train, and the train is very clean, there is no graffiti, no garbage"*

*and the people sit in an organized manner. There are more people who walk than those who take private vehicles. So the majority are pedestrians. I was also surprised when I was in Germany that all the shops were literally closed."* (C01)

From the data (31) above, it shows that the first stage in Kolb's model (*Concrete Experience*) is realized in the form of direct experience of students when they first arrive and interact with the social and cultural environment in Germany. Students experience various forms of amazement (*Culture Surprise*) towards the culture of discipline of the German people, the cleanliness of public facilities such as trains, and the regularity of public behavior, including in terms of queuing and using public transportation. These reactions of surprise reflect how students actively deal with new cultural situations that differ significantly from their home cultural context.

As explained by Kolb (1984), the *Concrete Experience* stage requires individuals to fully engage in new experiences, without first cognitively analyzing or assessing the situation. In this case, students see authentic situations that not only question their perceptions of foreign cultures, but also trigger emotional responses such as shock, awe, and cultural confusion. This response is an early manifestation of the learning process for cultural immersion, which is important because it triggers the recognition of different values and norms that were previously unrealized in their country.

This *culture surprise* phenomenon is consistent with research by Jackson (2008) which states that *short-term study abroad* programs often bring students together with contrasting cultural conditions, which can trigger deep reflection and ultimately expand intercultural awareness. Experiences such as seeing German people prefer to walk, orderly in queues, to facing the fact that shops are completely closed on certain days, create new situations that enrich students' understanding of social values outside the framework of their native culture. These concrete experiences not only form the basis of cultural understanding, but also serve as a helpful level at later stages in the learning cycle. In line with what Kolb (2005) explains, meaningful learning can only occur if individuals actively interact with new experiences in a context that challenges and encourages critical reflection. On the other hand, students showed contradictory expressions in relation to

*culture surprise* experienced by first-time responders in Germany.

(31) *"But there are also trains that are clean, but there are also trains that are full of graffiti, vandalism, and I've encountered the smell on the train and on the road from Stuttgart to Schwabisch Gmund, it's really different. Schwabisch Gmünd is still a village while Stuttgart is like a big city. It's crowded and the streets are full of beggars and smelly."* (J02)

(32) *"I had too high expectations. I imagined Europe to be really sophisticated, so people have a broader mindset. But it's still the same with a lot of people peeing in the street, a lot of homeless beggars in the tunnel at the station."* (J02)

The interpretation of data (33) shows that respondents have specific expectations of cleanliness and order in developed countries in Europe, but they still face complex social realities that do not always match the idealized image. Respondents expressed surprise at the state of vandalism, the smell of urine, and the presence of beggars in big cities like Stuttgart. This shows that cross-cultural experiences not only introduce positive values such as discipline and order, but also open students' minds to other sides of the social reality of

foreign societies that they may not have previously imagined. In the context of *Concrete Experience*, this experience is particularly important as it broadens students' understanding of cultural diversity, including the differences in urban environments and rural areas such as Schwabisch Gmünd.

Theoretically, this overview also emphasizes the importance of experiential learning approaches for the formation of real cross-cultural understanding and not getting stuck in cultural generalizations. By witnessing irregularities and social problems in Germany, students are invited to understand that every culture has its own complexities. This direct experience of social reality in Germany that is not always ideal then encourages students to reflect on cultural values, including in terms of discipline and perspective on time. This reflection opens up space for a deeper understanding of the differences in social norms between German and Indonesian society.

(33) *"I honestly don't understand the reason why they are not like in Indonesia. Because I myself am also not like in Indonesia, I still like to queue. So maybe it just depends on the human resources."* (C01)

(34) *"Maybe it's because I'm not used to it. So we often underestimate the time or appointments. It's different like in Germany where time is really precious."* (J02)

Responses from data (34) and (35) show the beginning of Reflective Observation on the differences in social values between German and Indonesian society, especially in the form of discipline towards time appreciation. Both indicate that the experience of being in Germany made respondents realize how time is regarded as something of great value, where being late or not punctual is considered a form of impoliteness. Respondent (J02) specifically emphasized that in Germany, "time is precious," indicating a deepening of the value of efficiency and punctuality as part of the dominant social norm. This contrasts with the Indonesian tendency to be more flexible with time and have a higher tolerance for delays. Followed by respondents (C01) who recognized that not all Indonesians are undisciplined, suggesting that this difference may have more to do with the quality and consistency of character development of human resources. Thus, students' experience in observing and reflecting on the discipline of German society is not only a form of reflection in intercultural understanding, but also a form of critique of the social values they have adopted so far. This process enriches the *Reflective Observation* stage in Kolb's theory.

The next stage is the *Abstract Conceptualization* stage. The *Abstract Conceptualization* stage in Kolb's *Experiential Learning* model (1984) is characterized by an individual's ability to form new understandings or principles from the experiences they have undergone. In this context, students begin to draw conclusions and formulate values that are considered important to apply, both in personal life and in broader social interactions. This is evidenced by data (35) which discusses the nature or character of the people in Germany which makes students admire these traits.

(35) *"The attitude is very ignorant. People there are like ignorant and individualistic. So people there don't think about what other people say. But people there are also not judgmental so it's like they have their own lives. Being too individualistic is not good because we are social creatures but if it's like a problem of not wanting to interfere and not judging other people, that's good."* (J02)

Respondents expressed their thoughts that German society seems indifferent and has no interest in interfering in other people's affairs, but still respects personal freedom and is non-judgmental. This attitude is seen as positive in terms of respecting individual privacy and freedom. At the same time, respondents also realize that if individualism is not controlled, it is considered contrary to human nature as a social being. This statement shows that students not only experience value differences, but are also able to analyze and weigh the implications for relationships between individuals. This process marks the success of the abstract conceptualization stage, where they internalize the basic principle of intercultural: respecting differences, without losing the normative values that characterize Indonesian society.

This finding is in line with research by Tarchi, Surian, & Pinto (2021), which shows that the reflective process during cross-cultural experiences allows students to develop intercultural competence, including the ability to recognize and adopt positive values from other cultures. Respect for privacy between individuals is an example of a global value that can be applied across cultural contexts without losing local identity. Thus, students' experiences not only broaden their horizons, but also strengthen their critical thinking skills and build more inclusive and adaptive life principles in a global context.

The last stage is the *Active Experimentation* stage. Kolb's learning cycle is characterized by the application of acquired concepts and understandings to real-life situations. In this context, students not only reflect on their experiences, but also test and apply these understandings in new social interactions. In the interview data, both respondents recounted their experiences when attending a dinner with international students who participated in a study visit program.

(36) *"Personally, I'm excited because I want to meet new friends. Because while studying there, we have never had a real German friend because the people in the class are really individualistic and we have to reach out first."* (J02)

In the data excerpt, the respondent expressed her enthusiasm to meet new friends, despite previously finding it difficult to establish relationships with local students who tend to be individualistic.

*"At that time we from Indonesia wore kebaya clothes and then they asked what clothes it was so we introduced Indonesian culture even though it was not specific."* (C01)

Respondent C01 added that the session facilitated cultural exchange, such as introducing foreign students to kebaya. This experience reflects the *Active Experimentation* stage, where students test their understanding of social and cultural dynamics in a real context. According to research by Levine and Garland (2015), direct experience in an intercultural environment enables students to develop higher communication skills and cultural sensitivity. The research supports the data citation that students' involvement in real intercultural situations, such as having dinner with students from different countries, allows them to practice cross-cultural communication skills directly. Through this kind of interaction, students not only learn to understand cultural differences, but also practice empathy, openness, and the ability to adjust how to communicate according to diverse social contexts.

## **Conclusion**

Students' motivation to join the study visit program to Germany is formed from a combination of internal and external factors, such as personal desire to broaden their horizons, social support from parents, and relevance of the program to academic and career goals. Internal motivation encourages participants to use the program as a bridge to their dreams of working or studying in Germany, while social support, such as permission, moral encouragement and financial support strengthens the determination of program participants. Hands-on experience in Germany enriches language and cultural learning, allowing participants to put theory into practice, such as attending lectures and understanding daily life there. In addition to deepening linguistic skills, such as listening and speaking, the program also shapes more purposeful learning strategies and generates instrumental motivation to achieve better life opportunities. However, challenges such as limited language skills are a reminder of the importance of continuous reflection and self-development.

The Study Visit program encourages contextualized and applied German language learning. Students have the opportunity to apply their linguistic skills in real communication contexts. Interacting directly with native speakers and seeing how everyday communication is done in Germany develops listening and speaking skills even with limited vocabulary. Attending lectures at PH Schwabisch Gmünd also brings a different learning culture, such as keeping time and actively participating in class discussions. This encourages them to be more active and more confident. This process demonstrates the experiential learning cycle (Kolb), which includes concrete experiences and active experimentation in new learning patterns.

The findings in this study confirm that the study visit program not only acts as a geographical bridge that brings students across national borders, but also as a transformative space that activates all stages in Kolb's learning cycle in a complete and meaningful way. Through direct experience of German cultural reality, both in harmony with and contrary to initial expectations, students experience productive culture shock, which encourages them to reflect on values that have been considered universal. This process gave birth to new meanings, where students not only admired the discipline and efficiency of the German workforce, but also the quality of their work.

German society, but also began to adopt these values critically in the context of their own lives. More than just enhancing knowledge, this experience transforms into a driving force in the formation of an intercultural identity that is inclusive, adaptive and contextually aware. Thus, the study visit proved to not only broaden cross-cultural horizons, but also triggered a mutually reinforcing integration between academic learning, personal development, and global awareness. Please use 11-point font size. Please margin the text to be justified. Manuscripts should be 1.5 times spaced. A paragraph should have at least 3 sentences. Footnotes and endnotes are not accepted. All relevant information should be included in the main text. Please indent paragraphs; leave a space of one line between consecutive paragraphs. Do not underline words for emphasis. Use italics instead. Both numbered lists and bulleted lists can be used if necessary. Before submitting your manuscript, please ensure that every in-text citation has a corresponding reference in the reference list. Conversely, ensure that every entry in the reference list has a corresponding in-text citation.



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