

# Generation Z competencies: A case study of a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP)

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**Abstract:** Generation Z enters the labour market with its specific needs and requirements. Most members of Generation Z are now studying and gaining their first work and international experience. The Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) is an example of the new trend of cooperation between business and university. A case study of the BIP related to modern HR trends can answer the research question of which competence development is most preferred by Generation Z. A CAWI and descriptive data analysis methods explore the attitudes of Generation Z towards the current labour market. This case study can inspire corporate training and corporate management. It can promote collaboration between businesses and universities. Moreover, knowledge of Generation Z's competencies can support selecting an appropriate management direction for the company to remain competitive in the long term.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, competency, enterprise, BIP

**JEL Classification:** M12; M53; 015

## 1 Introduction

The group of people who are linked to a same significant events with a similar year of birth are identified as generation (Brindha & Priyadarshini, 2020). The people born between 1997 and 2013 are called Generation Z or Gen Z (Schroth, 2019). Generation Z has a very close relationship with technology and online communication. This group is strongly connected through social networks and is very good with computers and the internet (Marshall & Wolanskyj, 2020). Connected with technological background they incline towards a visual and image-oriented style (Akpınar et al., 2022; Brindha & Priyadarshini, 2020). This approach can be used in training and development methods through Blended Learning approaches that merge online and face-to-face learning methods (Tolstikova et al., 2023).

The Gen Z also values learning by doing and experiential learning methods (Pueschel et al., 2020). They prefer forms of training and development that integrate the training of practical skills that will prepare them for professional life. Moreover, Gen Z is aware of globalization trends and global workforce need for future years (de Boer & Bordoloi, 2022). Therefore, BIP with international participants and cooperation with particular companies can attract Gen Z.

The Blended Intensive Program (BIP) is a learning approach that combines both university and company practices and can conclude a strategic and systematic approach (Rahman et al., 2020). This method is especially beneficial for group of participants who are technologically savvy yet value experiential learning. These include problem-based, blended learning methods connected with learning experiences. The advantages of blended learning at an university and workplace have been acknowledged by both academic and company tutors (Amenduni et al., 2021).

Blended learning integrates face-to-face and online interactions using appropriate communication technology (Amenduni et al., 2021). Companies must considered a holistic approach to their corporate training (Loumpourdi, 2021). The development of competencies is necessary during the studies before entering regular employment (Coelho & Martins, 2022). The competence gap are mostly in communication skills, technical knowledge and digital competencies (Machová et al., 2021). There are different approach to competency needs. A practical summary of needed business competencies bring Continual Vocational Training Survey (CVTS, 2023).

## 2 Methods

There still needs to be more literature and global research on labour market-related competencies of Gen Z. To investigate this further, a case study was conducted on the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), which focused on modern trends in HR. The aim was to understand the approach of Gen Z and the competencies they wanted to develop related to labour market. For this purpose, the CAWI and descriptive analysis method was chosen.

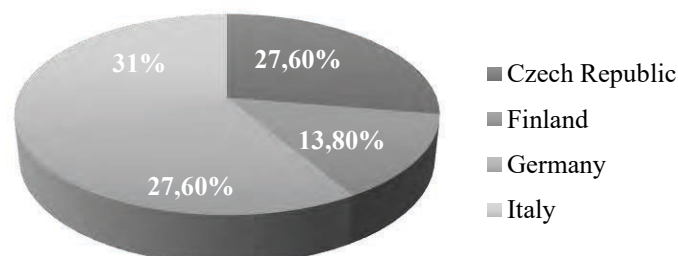
The BIP focused on the field of HR and the current needs of companies in terms of the labour market and digitalisation. The BIP took place in the form of 3 online meetings and a 5-day face-to-face meeting at the Technical University of Liberec in the Czech Republic in May 2023. Together, 53 university students from four European countries - Germany,

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Italy, Finland and the Czech Republic - participated in the programme. Figure 1 shows the distribution of participants in this BIP who reflected this BIP and share their feedback. The most participants came from Italy (31%), same distribution (27.6%) belongs to Czech and German participants and 13.8% from Finland.

**Figure 1** Distribution of BIP reflection by country



Source: Own processing

Feedback on this BIP was conducted using the CAWI method. An electronic questionnaire was sent after the program with a return rate of 51.72%. The age composition of the respondents was mainly between the ages of 20 to 25 years. The majority of the respondents already had work experience (89.7%) and had participated in another BIP program (86.2%).

The link to corporate training was also made using the results of an international survey conducted by Deloitte among 1,531 respondents globally in 2020 (Deloitte, 2020). In addition, the results of the 2022 GWI global survey conducted in the third quarter of 2022 in 50 countries were also used. A total of 246,761 respondents participated in GWI global survey related to Gen Z (GWI, 2022). According to the GWI survey, 48% of the Generation Z population in 2022 is already employed or in business. 42% of the Generation Z population is studying.

The BIP responses on competencies were compared with the results of the Continuous Vocational Training Survey (CVTS), which is a long-running European-wide survey on corporate training from a company perspective. Eurostat coordinates the survey which is mandatory for EU countries and other contracting countries in Europe. The data is collected on the basis of an EU regulation and is carried out in each country every five years. Eurostat is responsible for the overall evaluation and for the statistically relevant data, latest data was published in 2023. The questionnaire is relevant for enterprises with more than 9 employees across almost all business sectors and is conducted every five years. Aggregated data from the reference year 2020 from 29 European countries were published in January 2023, with 113,000 business units responding (CTVS, 2023).

To determine the usefulness of the BIP method for Gen Z education, the Net Promoter Score (NPS) metric was chosen, which is used in various industries to measure customer loyalty and satisfaction. It is calculated based on responses to a single question: "On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend our company/product/service to a friend or colleague?" (Sugant, 2020). In the case of BIP, the question was "How likely is it that I would recommend the BIP to a friend or colleague?"

The main research questions asked by the author in relationship to the case study of selected BIP (Blended Intensive Program) are following:

1. What competencies can Gen Z develop through a BIP?
2. Is the BIP method suitable for Gen Z?

### 3 Research results

The literature research in the introduction revealed that Gen Z has specific skills. According to current worldwide surveys, it is essential to understand Generation Z, one of the most diversified generational groups (Deloitte, 2020). According to GWI research, 48% of the Gen Z population is already employed or in business in 2022. 42% of the Generation Z population is studying. Regarding social relationships, 10% of the Gen Z population is married, 14% have one or more children, and 73% of Gen Z respondents are without a permanent partner.

However, the impact of various global events, such as recession, rising prices, wars, and the abundance of information, has greatly influenced their competencies and development (Deloitte, 2020). This complex issue requires deeper exploration to understand which competencies Gen Z need to develop. Therefore, a case study was selected to explore the need of competence development using the example of an international Blended Intensive Program (BIP) attended by 54 university students from four different countries.

### 3.1 Competencies of Gen Z

As shown in Table 1, the BIP improved the competence of teamwork most (26.9%). The second most represented improved competence area was communication skills (19.2%). 7.7% of the respondents also mentioned intercultural competencies, which may also include intercultural communication. Related to this, 11.7% of respondents also improved their English language skills due to the international feature of the BIP where English was an official language. Presentation skills were developed during the BIP for 9.6% of the respondents. Content-wise, the BIP can also provide professional knowledge and skills, with 17.3% of responses indicating this as a benefit.

The table also compares which competencies 27 European organizations in average consider essential within the next three years. The table shows some common tendencies but also differences. The importance of developing competencies through teamwork is visible in the table; 26.9% Gen Z and 41.9 % of companies recognize the importance of developing this competency. However, communication skills, which are developed by Gen Z (19.2%), are less important to companies (6.3%). Almost half of the companies (43.2%) see it as crucial to developing employees' hard skills, such as specific or technical skills, compared to 17.3% of Gen Z. In the case of foreign language, 11.5% of Gen Z respondents and 8.5% from the perspective of companies feel the need for development. A more significant difference is in the case of presentation skills, which are also an essential part of business and customer-related skills, which are important for 26.9% businesses. There is also a discrepancy in problem-solving skills, which 25.2% EU companies plan to develop in next three years. In contrast, Gen Z (7.7%) considers this competency as an area to be developed. Intercultural skills were also developed through the participation from different EU countries, as reported by 7.7% of the BIP respondents. This could also be included under other skills companies will develop due to advancing globalization.

**Table 1** Comparison of the competences developed through the BIP from the participants' point of view with the EU companies' view of the direction in which they will develop competences in the next three years

Competence	BIP participants	EU Companies (average 27 countries)	The difference
Teamwork	26.9%	41.9%	15
Communications skills	19.2%	6.3%	12,9
Hard skills/ Technical skills	17.3%	43.2%	25,9
Language skills/ English	11.5%	8.5%	3
Presentation skills/ Customer handling skills	9.6%	36,5%	26,9
Problem solving	7.7%	25.2%	17,5
Intercultural communication/ Other	7.7%	8.8%	1,1

Source: Own processing, based on CVTS 6

This comparison shows that the development goals of companies and Generation Z sometimes differ. The most significant difference is between Presentation Skills, which is also related to Customer Handling Skills, where the difference is 26.9 percentage points. It should be a guideline for companies and educators preparing Generation Z for the job market to add more opportunities to develop customer-oriented or listener-oriented presentation skills to their training methods. Similarly, the hard skills required by companies also need to be addressed, which is what BIP can bring as one possible form of linking companies and the university environment.

Table 1 also shows the current priorities of companies in the area of teamwork, which is one of the competencies identified by BIP participants as having been developed through this method. Therefore, from this perspective, it is also possible to recommend the BIP method as one of the methods of developing competencies that are also demanded by the current business environment (CVTS, 2023).

However, given the output of the literature that identifies Generation Z as tech-savvy, image-oriented and using social networking styles (Akpınar et al., 2022; Brindha & Priyadarshini, 2020; Marshall & Wolanskyj, 2020), this generation will also need to focus more on communication skills themselves, which are not seen as a priority by companies at the moment.

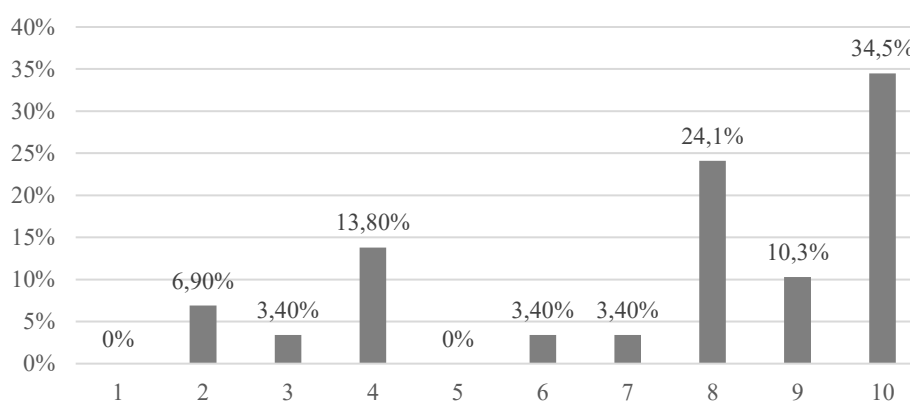
On the contrary, as the results of this case study show, Generation Z can help firms solve problems, which, for example, is also developed through the BIP method. Only 7.7% participants appreciated this advantage of BIP but 25.2% companies see the problem-solving as a priority in next three years.

### 3.2 Recommendations of the BIP method

One possible guide to satisfaction is the Net Promoter Score (NPS), used in various fields and industries to measure satisfaction. It is calculated based on the responses to a single question: "On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend our company/product/service to a friend or colleague?" (Sugant, 2020). This also inspired asking whether participants would recommend BIP to their friends on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means completely recommended.

As shown in Graphic 2 below, almost half of the participants in this case study chose 10 or 9, which means that they would recommend BIP to their friends (34.5% and 10.3%). Ratings such as 7 and 8 are considered neutral. On the other hand, dissatisfaction is expressed by ratings of 6 or less. It always depends on the content and the organization of the program. The BIP included, for example, lectures by experts from practice or a visit to a renowned Czech manufacturing company or a business incubator. Not all activities during the three online days and five days present meetings satisfied all participants. The Figure 1 shows a relatively large diversification, which also corresponds to the conclusions of Deloitte survey. This is where companies and BIP organizers should prepare for a greater diversity of satisfaction with this development method. The participants of this selected BIP mostly had already experienced another BIP (86.2%), so they can be stricter with their evaluation. As shown in Figure 1, Generation Z is also not afraid to express that they would not recommend the program to their friends. Companies who may not be as used to this approach need to be prepared for some critical attitude of Gen Z.

**Figure 1** Recommendation of BIP to their friends on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means completely recommended



Source: Own processing

Nevertheless, Figure 1 shows the higher level of satisfaction with the BIP. Therefore suggests that this is a suitable method for Gen Z. Despite a few dissatisfied responses, it can be seen that almost a majority would recommend this BIP to their friends to attend this BIP (44.8%), some participants are neutral (27.5%) and more than a quarter of participants would rather not recommend this particular BIP to their friends to varying degrees (27.7%). However, no one refused to recommend this BIP to their friends entirely. However, it depends on the specific content of the BIP. However, it is also necessary for companies and pedagogues to be aware of the sensitivity of this generation, as shown by the different level of dissatisfaction of some participants.

Despite the research and case study limitations, there is a research gap for further exploration in this area. There is a need to consider a larger sample size, to include more countries and to extend the literature search and analysis of secondary sources to explore Gen Z competencies more, which will also be the subject of further investigation by the author.

#### 4 Conclusions

Gen Z competencies are influenced by the time when this generation is growing up and starting to enter the labour market. As a result, there is a need for competence development to keep up with the changing times. In line with the literature search results, Gen Z is powerful in competencies related to technology and digitalization. On the other hand, however, they also need to develop their other competencies related to business needs. This generation can develop competencies through different methods. One of the possible ways is the Blended intensive programme (BIP). BIP combines online and face-to-face development methods, both in the form of lectures or practical workshops. This method benefits both workers and students. It can also provide important insights for companies on how to develop Generation Z, as well as for educators preparing Generation Z for the labour market. Due to the complexity of the topic, a case study was selected to field two critical research questions, namely, what competencies are currently being developed by Gen Z and whether a BIP form is appropriate method to develop Generation Z competencies related to labour market.

Despite the limitations of this paper, which needs to be extended in terms of the literature review and the sources of primary and secondary data in the future, it is clear that BIP has a positive impact on the development of Generation Z competencies. In this BIP case, participants developed the most teamwork competencies, communication skills and HR expertise (hard skills). Teamwork and professional skills are one of the most in-demand skills by companies today (CVTS, 2023). By including BIP in university studies, it can prepare Generation Z for the demands of the labour market. The BIP method is based on a combination of online and face-to-face methods that reinforces problem-solving skills, which is also in demand by businesses today. This case study, however, also highlights the sensitivity of Generation Z and the need to develop communication skills as well, which companies should also prepare for. Generation Z therefore requires a new approach from companies and teachers, as evidenced by the findings of international research by GWI and Deloitte. According to a questionnaire based on the NPS principle, a satisfaction survey metric, it is likely that BIP would recommend Gen Z as a method of competency development to most of its friends as well. Thus, BIP could be a suitable training method for developing employees and current students at the university who fall into Gen Z. However, this requires further scientific research and investigation.

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