BUILDING INDONESIAN HUMAN CAPABILITY: REDUCING DEPENDENCY ON FOREIGN EXPERTISE IN THE FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR

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Abstract

Foreign expertise holds a revered status in the Indonesian Further Education and Training sector, with the notion of 'Bule' playing a pivotal role in how international interventions are resourced. Foreign expertise often brings with it many local assumptions, particularly around the sharing of contemporary and start-of-the-art western knowledge, but often in reality this is not practically manifested. It is for these reasons that Maconick (1999) contends that greater emphasis needs to be placed on defining the operational role of local capacity building. The authors believe that greater emphasis should be placed on building local human capital, and this paper describes the engagement process in the design of occupational standards challenging the conception that foreign expertise and influence should be unfettered. While foreign skills and talent can play a pivotal role in developing local human capability, it must be recognised that these interventions must be cultural appropriate and look towards creating a sustainable future where indigenous

human resources are given equal standing. The methodology applied reflected a 'most significant change approach' (Dart & Davies, 2003) to the evaluation of training methods with an emphasis on workplace engagement.

Keywords

Capability Development, Cultural, Foreign Expertise, Bule

1. Introduction

The respect assigned to the 'Foreigner in our midst' (Fairman, 2017, p. 89), or in the Indonesian vernacular, a 'Bule', which is the Indonesian word used to describe a 'foreigner' and comes with specific Indonesian cultural connotations, cannot be undervalued nor underestimated in the education and training area. Indonesians, as a (general) rule, favour having foreign involvement in training interventions, because it is considered 'modern', it implies international quality and, as a consequence, is thought to be more efficient, effective and respected (Fairman, 2017). As a result, having a 'Bule' involved in a training activity is regarded as a universal sign of status and this position is rarely questioned (Fairman, 2017). Unfortunately, this level of trust and the subsequent strength of belief in this system have many unplanned consequences.

This paper suggests, therefore, that there is a real requirement to better balance the 'Bule' role, status and cultural representation in Indonesia. This often skewed perspective tends to promote an unwarranted admiration toward 'foreigners' (Fairman, Voak, Abdullah, & Indarjo, 2020), and impacts negatively on the task of capacity-building strategies (A. T. Abbott, 2014). Unfortunately, this heightened status of the 'Bule' within TVET interventions has inadvertently reduced local indigenous learning opportunities (Fairman et al., 2020). The authors have observed, anecdotally, that any local development opportunities are unfortunately foregone if 'foreigners' remain as central figures in human resource development in Indonesia. If the Further Education and Training sector continues embrace the notion of Bule (Fairman, 2017), there is a danger that a self-fulfilling cycle of Bule dependence (Figure 1) will result. It is anticipated that this discussion may assist in helping the currently muted local voices in becoming more audible (Oktadiana & Pearce, 2017).

Furthermore, we examine a suggested framework (Fairman, 2017) which has been purposely developed to guide the creation of industry-led vocational training systems suitable for use in off-shore locations such as Indonesia. It allows a transparent exploration of the importance of engaging Indonesian industry managers and local commercial stakeholders when designing occupational standards for a particular local context. It is offered as a contribution to the

development of 'reflective practice' in the vocational training area, which may also have wider advantages for the up-skilling of local trainers.

This discussion finally proposes a scheme of meaningful practice interventions which may improve external 'engagement' in Indonesia, in which we openly, and respectfully, recognize and acknowledge local ownership and contributions. We are cognizant that in an Indonesian cultural milieu of many varied and divergent sub-cultures, that there is no one approach that meets all the needs of the society. Thus we argue that imported interventions need to correlate and harmonize with the specific requirements of the intervention.
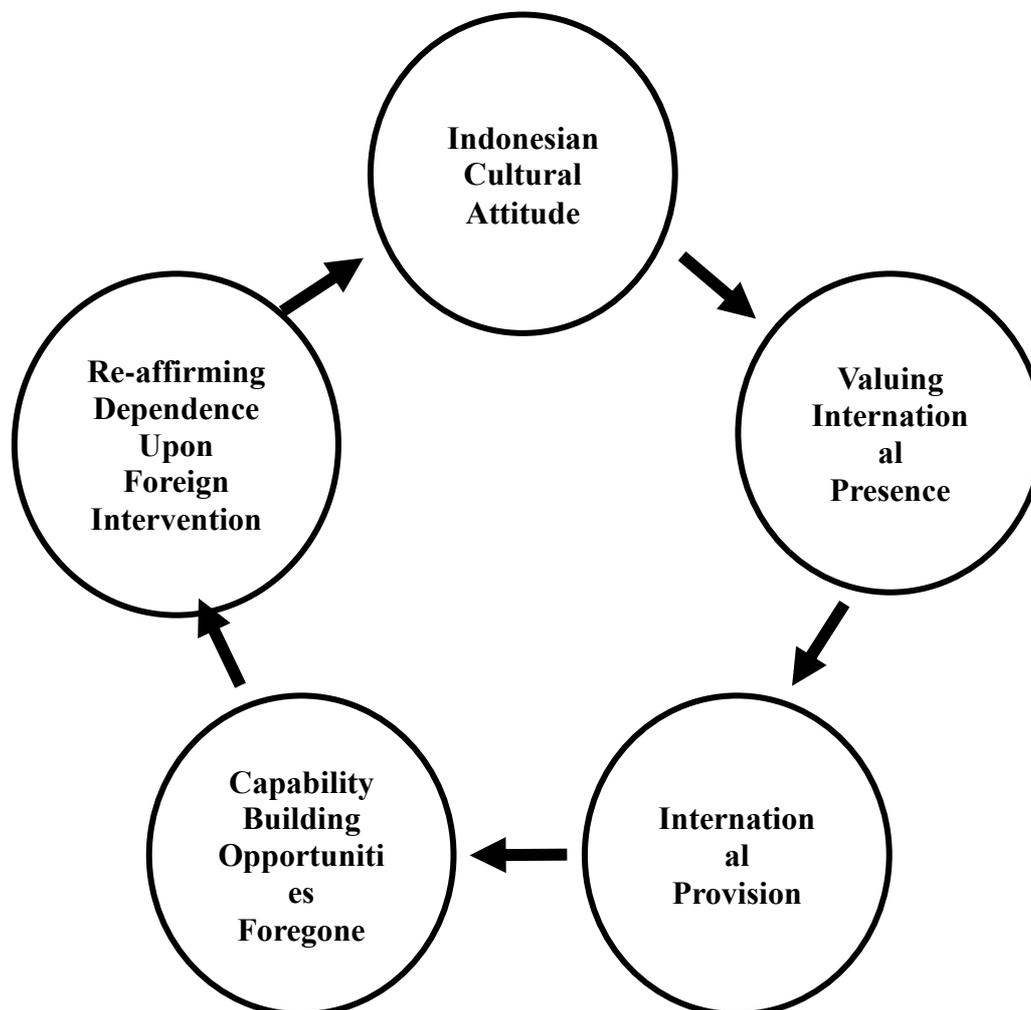
Figure 1: *Self-Fulfilling Prophesy of 'Bule' Dependence (Fairman, 2017, p. 225)*

2. Current International Practice Perpetuating Dominant Cultural Values

When observing the current situation, it appears that international training practices and interventions act to reinforce, and moreover strengthen, cultural perceptions by limiting the scope of local talent engagement (King, 2019; Rizvi & Walsh, 1998). "It is not uncommon that Indonesians

place a high priority on having a Bule in the training room, often at the expense of skilled and qualified locals. Indeed, the issue of 'nominating 'international trainers' in tenders was seldom challenged or questioned during the period of IASTP Phases II and III in Indonesia" (Fairman, 2017, p. 226). Notwithstanding this high level of respect, we suggest that it needs to be regarded with some degree of ambivalence. In order to confront what is an almost institutionalized 'Cycle of Bule Dependence' (Figure 1), it is necessary that internationally, and for that matter locally, administrators of funded human resource development programs need to challenge each and every stage of this cycle by actively seeking contributions from local participants through encouraging more inclusive implementation discussions (A. Abbott, 2017). The following case studies aim to reflect on the positive outcomes achieved when culturally respectful engagement practices have been deployed by the Bule.

It is our view that a culture of reflective practice would meaningfully engage the needs of local participants and clearly articulate appropriate objectives and outcomes, giving consideration to recipient country requirements and adopting an 'ethical approach' to intervention. We assert that these precursor elements are fundamental to meaningful interventions as illustrated in Figure 2. This model provisions the structural components needed to design and build responsive and culturally pertinent TVET interventions including the examination of their impacts.

This model leans heavily on the 'Meaningful Practice Intervention Model' developed by Fairman (2017). Notwithstanding that this model was developed for, and is relevant to, the Aid and Development community, we see that with some minor adjustments, this model has direct applicability to the 'reverse engineering' approach used in the industry-led vocational training system intervention in Indonesia which is under examination in this paper.
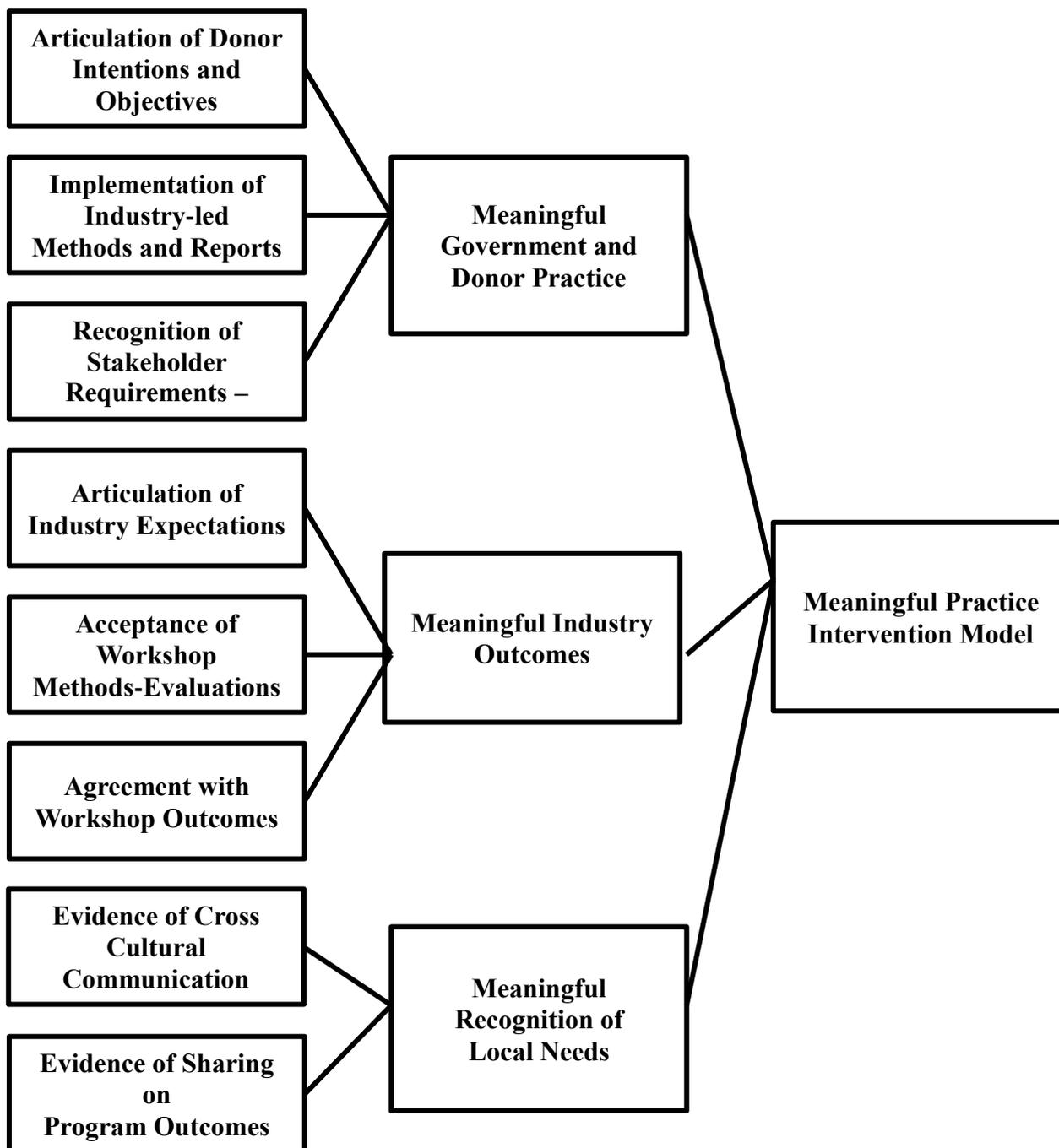
Figure 2: *Meaningful Practice Intervention Model (Fairman, 2017, p. 236)*

We suggest that application of this 'Meaningful Practice Intervention Model' requires a detailed examination of the motivations, choices and options for training implementations, and an explicit statement of the decision-making benchmarks, which enunciate rationale clarity around intervention strategy selection. The model aims to highlight the strategic considerations which could impact on the design and development of TVET interventions. Ultimately, the model provisions key stakeholders with a common or shared approach in designing, implementing and evaluating these engagements. It is based on six key principles, which are; ethical behavior,

intentions and objectives, recipient country consideration, consideration of local input, acceptance of training interventions, and sharing of outcomes. It is in this context that respectful practice and positive outcomes are examined.

3. Respectful Practice and Positive Outcomes

In order to develop a culture of reflective practice (Lawler & Sillitoe, 2013), it is necessary not only to honestly assess the appropriateness of applied procedures and the suitability of observed outcomes, but also challenge innate perceptions, by asking difficult preliminary questions and responses from industry representatives, donors, and recipient agencies. In the first instance, a 'double-loop' culture of learning can be an important developmental experience for program presenters, and to help expose any hidden elements which may have longer-term implications such as cultural tensions. Secondly, developing a culture of reflective practice, again by openly inviting comment regarding comments and perspectives about program outcomes, assists stakeholders in structuring a culturally informed process of decision-making inevitable involved in developing an 'industry-led' vocational training system in an unfamiliar setting.

The approach used by the facilitators of this program ensured that the key stakeholders in the training area provided local input into the developed occupational standards. The inclusion of the 'industry associations' on the project team, who then developed an Indonesian-specific occupational standard for a 'Logistics Data Entry Operator' together with the development of an 'Industry Reference Council', illustrate how this local input was achieved. Of particular note was that the consideration of local input requires the facilitators to bring competitors across the transport and logistics sector in Indonesia together to share their intellectual property. This was a critical requirement for developing uniform agreement around local occupational standards. The language used in these collaborative meetings was specifically couched to emphasize the importance of joint ownership of the standards, and was achieved by seeking agreement and harmony to ensure the standards developed would be relevant to the Indonesian transport and logistics sector.

Courteous and respectful engagement with local partners is an essential factor in ensuring that a foreign-funded developmental interventions are only perceived through a funder's lens (Adinda, 2015), but also is seen as provisioning beneficial outcomes, both individually and collectively, for the local partners (Tikly, 2013). In this section, the authors reflect on a brainstorming session that endeavored to facilitate maximum input from Indonesian stakeholders in a foreign-funded training activity.

The authors were working with industry partners on developing a suite of new national occupational standards, but it soon became clear that a locally suggested occupational standard, that of 'Logistics Data Entry Operator', was not able to be readily defined for comparison within existing Australian, New Zealand or other foreign jurisdictions. Essentially, this meant that there was no real benchmark from which to map local job requirements and specifications with an existing recognized standard, which deployed a national qualification framework.

In an effort to resolve this issue, participants from industry in the workshop began the process of 'brainstorming' in order to flesh out the job specifications and requirements from the many perspectives represented in the room. When the industry delegates began to articulate the emerging job requirements needed to perform this job role, every comment was recorded. All the issues placed before the participants were discussed, questioned and clarified, noting each aspect of the industry requirements for this job role. This discussion included the exact circumstances and work environment that would characterize a Logistics Data Entry Operator's daily work output. This included a listing of the specific knowledge and skills required for the position, and a description of the expected levels of engagement with peers and supervisors. An outcome of this activity was the identification of the relevant operational levels involved in this occupation which could be mapped onto the Indonesian Qualifications Framework (KNNI) (Sayuti, 2016).

It was noted, after detailed and constructive discussions with those present, that an agreed collective decision was made to 'identify' a lower level of operation for this occupation on the Indonesian Qualifications Framework. It was the participants' view that in doing so, this occupational standard would impact upon a larger number of people within the Indonesian transport and logistics sector. On reflection, it appeared that this recognition and acceptance of the importance of impacting upon greater numbers in the 'workforce', was an altruistic decision. The participants could have just as easily argued from a position of 'self-interest' and thus achieved their own high-level industry specialization requirements. That this was not the case suggested that the participants (at least tacitly) all agreed to view the requirements through a universal lens, so the occupational standard would have wide-reaching impact for the sector. This revealed, and ultimately reflected, a collective approach which was previously unseen in the sector when solving these broad challenges (Abdullah, 2014a). It was particularly telling that many participants commented anecdotally that this was the first time the major industry associations, industry and broader representative bodies had found their way to agreement on any issue, let alone for an issue as important as an occupational standard.

This activity provided us with particular insight in relation to the articulation of industry expectations. It specifically showed us that the industry representatives were:

- Abreast of their constituent requirements;

- Sensitive to the broader impact on role definition and the resultant economic impacts for employers, particularly through the classification elements impacting on remuneration;

- Attentive and listened to each other's suggestions, responding in a considered and respectful manner;

- Willing to disregard self-interest in order to find an industry-wide solution; and

- Cognizant of the importance of role definition, and worked to clarify and support better understand of the job role amongst the many stakeholders and industry experts within the room.

Whilst this particular activity may have taken a longer time to develop the occupational standards than with previous occupations, it illustrated the importance of collaboration and sharing of knowledge between stakeholders. It also shows that if the Bule is prepared to show respect for local industry representatives, which can be shown by minimizing intervention and by listening, those normally muted local voices become audible (Voak & Fairman, 2020).

It is interesting to recall that reaching agreement within this workshop was found to be, at first, challenging. It was clearly apparent that the group of industry representatives was initially skeptical and defensive regarding the sharing of their own intellectual property with other competitors. However, it was noted that this skepticism evaporated as the group worked through this collective approach, which involved fleshing out the parameters of this particular occupational standard. Upon reaching a consensus, the group was observed to coalesce into a more coherent body. We particularly noted that, after this change, the way the group responded to and supported each other, meant that the last phase of sharing the process and reaching agreement, had become manifest.

All participants were given the agreed occupational standards in writing approximately one week after the workshop. They were then given another week to comment upon whether the write-up matched their personal understanding of the workshop conversations and discussions. Each participant was encouraged to contribute further, but only minor corrections in structure were forthcoming, which reinforced the overall collegiately of the process. We contend that this experience and its outcomes illustrated that the importance of sharing knowledge and articulating industry expectations in a climate of respectfully collaboration, led to a broad acceptance that local agreement would manifest the best economic outcomes for Indonesia. Additionally, the workshop,

through deploying a 'learning by doing' approach to interpreting and developing standards, meant that the stakeholders were not only engaged but were also given a sense of purpose and a duty to ensure that the best outcomes were reflected in their collective outputs. Rather than present a set of occupational standards from other jurisdictions and simply expect these to be adopted in their entirety, the Bule facilitators provided an environment from which respectful discussion resulted in local ownership of the outputs. No longer were these standards seen to be a foreigner's view of Indonesian industry requirements which locals were obliged to adopt, but represented a true reflection of the current needs articulated by the local industry.

4. Building Local Workplace Assessor Capability

As part of the project, the facilitators conducted a workplace assessor capability development workshop. The workshop participants were purposively chosen to not only reflect government, sector-wide agencies [Lembaga Sertifikasi Profesi] (Sayuti, 2016) and industry associations, but also to integrate a representative sample of views from the vocational education sector. The premise for integrating Assessor development in parallel with Occupational Standards development was to ensure that deployment of the standards was universally consistent across the many stakeholders undertaking the certification. To achieve this end, the Assessor workshop participants were required to develop a skills breakdown for a sample manual handling task. This appeared simple at first glance, but in practice it revealed that more complex issues were involved. The central aim of this exercise was to encourage assessors to deploy real-life assessment tasks, whose authenticity mirrored the requirements of industry, and the activity highlighted, for the participants, the importance of:

- Breaking down not only the specific elements of the required learning, but also defining the precision needed around the design and development of the assessment task;

- Developing a better understanding what it means to be competent at a particular task;

- Provisioning authentic assessment environments which either simulated work conditions or, when physically possible, being actually assessed in the workplace; and

- Finally, recording the assessment process in a manner that ensured the opportunity to engage in double-loop learning within the process.

The facilitators were also cognizant of the importance of providing opportunities for our assessor workshop participants to practice assessor skills in real-life situations (Abdullah, 2014b). Our program was thus designed to allow for this eventuality, allowing initially for one week of intensive training, this was followed by a visit to the workshop participants by the facilitators, and

observing the conduct of practical industrial assessments in their respective workplaces. In addition to the work-place visits, the training participants were invited back to a follow-up reflective session designed to examine the impact of their workplace learning. After this session, many participants commented that:

- They were more comfortable with the practical aspects of this form of assessment, which they saw as requiring a demonstration of their competence;

- They were more confident with the training because they understood the nature and details of the assessment process;

- The nature of the assessment model was simple to understand, and they felt that they began to see resultant change in their own competencies;

- There is a definite need to develop case studies during the training activities which are more culturally relevant to the Indonesian context; and

- It is recognized that it is a significant challenge for trainers to develop Indonesian-specific case studies, and to consequently deal with the constraints of competing interests.

The authors feel that these comments show that, in order to break the cycle of Bule Dependence, it is required that international facilitators need to be ready and willing to be involved in this process and challenge the uncritical transfer of western knowledge (Hickling-Hudson, 2003). It will require them to provide ample opportunities for Indonesian facilitators to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to design and implement real-life industry-relevant learning and assessment practices. Moreover, the comments reinforce the premise that the 'Bule' must provide culturally respectful and trustworthy environments to build the confidence necessary for Indonesian participants to engage meaningfully in the training exercises (Abdullah, 2014b). These case studies also illustrate that when given the opportunity to come together and work collaboratively, Indonesian participants can be made more comfortable and begin to feel empowered to share their views and perspectives. We believe that by valuing 'local input' it is possible to challenge the 'Self-Fulfilling Bule Dependency Cycle' and thus produce much more desirable and long-term sustainable results for Indonesian training interventions (Bayu Adi, Supriyono, & Sri, 2018).

5. Conclusion

In the Indonesian cultural context (and, in our experience, to a similar extent in the Timor-Leste cultural context), the Bule is still a respected, honoured and highly-valued cultural person. However, will this trend continue? For example, whilst communities are becoming highly critical of 'foreigners' displacing 'competent locals' in important roles simply because of their 'language

skills', at the same time Indonesians still generally reflect the view that 'incompetent' foreigners are more highly valued than competent locals. The degree to which this honoured and highly-valued cultural status of Bule continues, particularly with younger demographics, reveals that further research is needed around the intergenerational cultural transference of the phenomenon. The paradox is heightened when Indonesians question the value and meaning of 'international' training; if it is not led by a foreigner, can it be truly international? This paper found that the best way of interpreting these issues was to apply a 'de-constructionist' view of training, occupational standards development and assessment. This uses the concept that it is not 'what is presented', but 'what is not presented', and it is not 'who is presenting', but 'who is not presenting' (Hall, Davies, & Robertson, 1983). By deconstructing the various methodologies in this way, we can see that these questions begin to open up the debate around the real impact of 'Bule'. The authors are however cognizant of the small sample size and specificity around the industrial sectors examined within this study and would encourage further investigation in other industries and regional Indonesia.

It is important that Indonesia be mindful that an 'over-reliance' upon 'foreign' trainers could be at the detriment of developing a skilled, knowledgeable and sustainable Indonesian workforce (King, 2019). Furthermore, Indonesians are beginning to make distinctions between those foreigners that want to help in a developmental sense (that is, working toward capacity building in order to support the locals in the management process), with those foreigners that treat their work purely as a 'job' (working toward their remaining in constant employment). The authors contend that a good first step to achieving the former situation would be to remove strict tender requirements to use only international trainers, and look towards a more sustainable approach where local talent must be engaged and play an important role in the intervention. We contend, that further research into 'local engagement' would prove to be a desirable and valuable outcome for improving sustainable practice. Additionally, models of shared ownership could also prove to be a more desirable model for local engagement, and could potentially ensure greater cultural appropriateness of international donor human capability development initiatives in Indonesia moving forward.

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