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Asset-Based Community Development in Vocational Schools Through Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the BAGJA Model

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Abstract: This study examines the implementation of asset-based community development at SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya using qualitative methods through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal a significant gap between the availability of assets, including physical assets (workshops, laboratories), movable assets, and human assets (educators and students), and their collective mobilisation, attributed to the absence of a collaborative framework or "social contract" institutionalised within the school environment. To address this, the study integrated modern community development models such as Appreciative Inquiry and the BAGJA framework with local wisdom through the educational philosophy "Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madyo Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani," resulting in culturally relevant and acceptable adaptations for the local community. The limitations of this study lie in its focus on a single case study and the use of qualitative methods alone, making it difficult to generalise the findings broadly. Therefore, further research with a more diverse scope and a mixed-methods approach is recommended to provide a more effective policy foundation for asset-based community development in vocational high schools.

Keywords: Asset-based community development; Appreciative Inquiry; BAGJA; vocational high school.

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi pengembangan komunitas berbasis aset di SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya dengan metode kualitatif melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan signifikan antara ketersediaan aset - meliputi aset fisik (bengkel, laboratorium), aset bergerak, dan aset manusia (pendidik serta peserta didik) - dengan mobilisasi kolektifnya, yang disebabkan belum adanya kerangka kerja kolaboratif atau "kontrak sosial" yang terlembagakan di lingkungan sekolah. Untuk mengatasi hal tersebut, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan model pengembangan komunitas modern seperti Appreciative Inquiry dan kerangka kerja BAGJA dengan kearifan lokal melalui filosofi pendidikan "Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madyo Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani" sehingga menghasilkan adaptasi kultural yang relevan dan dapat diterima oleh komunitas lokal. Keterbatasan penelitian terletak pada fokus satu studi kasus dan penggunaan metode kualitatif semata, sehingga temuan sulit digeneralisasi secara luas. Oleh karena itu, penelitian lanjutan dengan cakupan lebih beragam dan pendekatan mixed-methods*

direkomendasikan untuk menghasilkan dasar kebijakan yang lebih efektif bagi pengembangan komunitas berbasis aset di sekolah mengengah Kejuruan.
Kata kunci: pengembangan komunitas berbasis aset; Appreciative Inquiry; BAGJA; Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan.

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Introduction

The year 2024 marks a strengthening trend in vocational education empowerment that not only relies on a *link-and-match* strategy with the industry but also encourages the formation of a positive school culture through an approach that leverages the internal potential of the school community. An increasingly relevant approach is Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a strength-based framework from Cooperrider (2005) that focuses on continuous dialogue, collaboration, and community commitment. AI operates through the BAGJA stages, an acronym for *Buat pertanyaan utama (Make the main question), Ambil pelajaran (Take lessons), Gali mimpi (Dig for dreams), Jabarkan rencana (Detail the plan), and Atur eksekusi (Arrange the execution)*. Each stage is designed to shift the focus from problem identification to the discovery and development of existing assets (strengths) within the school community. AI emphasizes the importance of transformative leadership that involves all stakeholders, from principals, teachers, and students to industry and community representatives, in the planning and implementation of educational programs (Disas, 2018).

This AI approach is highly aligned with the principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), a development model that views the school as a center for developing the capacity of the local community. Unlike traditional approaches that tend to focus on deficits and problems, ABCD identifies and mobilizes the internal assets owned by the community, such as teacher talent, student enthusiasm, alumni support, and local resources, to create sustainable change. Recent literature from Cooperrider (2005) and Wellman (2012) confirms that the recognition of local strengths and assets can build a sustainable learning ecosystem focused on potential rather than deficiencies, thereby creating a strong sense of ownership and empowerment.

This trend is consistent with the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) policy, which provides substantial flexibility in learning, encourages innovation, and prepares students to face the dynamic challenges of the professional world. Through Merdeka Belajar, schools are encouraged to adopt educational technology, project-based learning, and community engagement programs such as a *Teaching Factory*

(Simatupang and Yuhertiana 2021; Suryati et al. 2023). These initiatives significantly strengthen graduate competencies, enabling them to compete in the global market by developing not only technical skills (*hard skills*) but also adaptive skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and entrepreneurial potential (*soft skills*) (Suparyati and Habsya 2024). Collaboration between schools, industry, and the local community, as advocated by AI and ABCD, has been proven to increase the effectiveness of vocational education by producing graduates who are not only ready to work but also possess strong values and work ethic (Mustabsyiroh et al. 2023; safaruddin 2021). Therefore, the integration of IA, ABCD principles, and the Merdeka Belajar policy serves as a strategic foundation for creating vocational education that is responsive, sustainable, and adaptive to global dynamics.

Although Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the BAGJA model have been well-received conceptually, the gap between theory and practice is an important barrier to their implementation at Vocational High Schools (SMK). Implementation often stops at the socialization or training stage without leading to real reconstruction that affects the learning system, school culture, or curriculum. Preliminary data from SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya indicates that the execution of BAGJA is not yet optimally structured, especially in the detail of the plan and the arrangement of the execution stages. This is marked by the absence of a strategic plan that systematically integrates AI-BAGJA with school development programs. Interviews with teachers and the principal indicate a satisfactory understanding of AI principles, but a systematic and practical operational guide is not yet available to translate these principles into a tangible context (Yuan and Han 2023). As a result, teachers feel less confident in implementing AI, students are less actively involved in planning, and school programs do not fully utilize the existing internal potential.

This condition underscores the urgency of a model-based intervention that combines the strengths of school assets with a sustainable development strategy, as previous research has shown that the success of vocational education is highly influenced by close collaboration between stakeholders, including teachers, students, the community, and local industry (Astuti and Setyonaluri 2022; Ogbuanya and Shodipe 2021; Zhao et al. 2022). Without this synergy, the implementation of AI and BAGJA is at risk of being ineffective because it lacks relevance to the real needs of the educational community and the professional world (Yasdin et al. 2023). Furthermore, a systematic operational guide is crucial for translating theoretical principles into applicable practice, in line with findings that improving the quality of vocational education requires not only theoretical mastery but also contextual skills in its application (Kilag et al. 2023). Therefore, a

system development model is needed that involves all elements of vocational education, from policy and curriculum to school culture (Handayani et al. 2020; Kibrit et al. 2022), with a collaborative and sustainable approach that emphasizes relevance to the needs of local industry and the community. The implementation of IA and BAGJA should be directed at developing skills that are applicable in the workplace and strengthening the connection between education and industry through integrated and strategic practices, thereby creating a harmonious structure between theory and practice that ultimately improves the quality of vocational education at the SMK level (Li et al. 2024; Zhuang 2023).

The theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) initiated by Cooperrider (2005) has provided a solid foundation for a strengths-focused organizational change approach, which is then adapted into a more operational BAGJA model. The relevance of this approach in the context of Indonesian education is beginning to be seen, for example in the research of Satriawan, Santika, and Naim (2021) which proves the role of AI in supporting Driving Teachers to transform school culture in a more participatory direction. However, the application of AI and BAGJA is still limited to the general education environment, leaving significant gaps in the context of vocational education (SMK) whose characteristics are unique due to their direct linkage to industrial dynamics. The question is, how can the generic stages of BAGJA be operationalized to overcome specific challenges of vocational schools, such as aligning the curriculum with the needs of the rapidly changing world of work and building students' soft skills? There is no contextual guide that bridges AI theory with reality in vocational workshops and teaching factories.

In parallel, the concept of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) emphasizes the use of the community's internal assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Wellman, 2012) offers a very relevant lens to see the potential that is often overlooked in a vocational school. Unfortunately, this ABCD lens is rarely directed to analyze formal educational institutions such as vocational schools. In fact, assets such as a strong alumni network, special skills of teachers, or students' entrepreneurial spirit are very valuable social capital. Meanwhile, the main discourse on vocational development in Indonesia as discussed by Simatupang and Yuhertiana (2021) and Suryati et al. (2023) is still dominated by link and match strategies and teaching factories that are instrumental and externally oriented. There is a clear distance between the instrumental approach and the cultural approach that builds from the inside (inside-out) based on community assets.

In other words, previous studies have built solid foundations for each of the areas: AI for power-based change, ABCD for community empowerment, and

vocational studies for link and match strategies. However, these three lines of thought are still running individually. There has been no research that brings the three together to create an integrated framework specifically designed for the SMK context. This research departs from this strategic gap. This study not only examines the application of AI-BAGJA in vocational schools, but also integrates it with the ABCD principles to systematically identify and mobilize school assets, as well as align them with the strategic goals of Indonesian vocational education. This integration is expected to address the need for a model that not only enhances hard skills but also builds a culture of continuous collaboration and innovation from within the school community itself, an aspect that is often overlooked in an overly industry-focused approach.

This study argues that the application of Appreciative Inquiry through the BAGJA model is a strategic approach to bridge the gap between theory and practice in vocational education. By mobilizing school assets teachers, students, alumni, and local resources through a collaborative and co-creative process, schools can foster a positive culture that enhances both academic and vocational outcomes. Unlike previous studies that focus mainly on general education or organizational change, this research integrates Appreciative Inquiry (AI) with Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) specifically in the vocational school (SMK) context. This integration not only emphasizes positive dialogue but also systematically identifies and utilizes community assets, positioning the school as a center for both educational excellence and community development.

The contributions of this research are threefold. First, it enriches the AI literature by offering a contextual model of BAGJA implementation tailored for Indonesian vocational schools. Second, it provides a practical framework complete with step-by-step guides and evaluation instruments that can be adapted and adopted by other SMKs to accelerate asset-based innovations. Third, it strengthens the linkage between schools, industry, and the community by leveraging local assets to create sustainable, practice-oriented learning ecosystems.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are: (1) to describe the initial conditions of AI-BAGJA implementation at SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya, including teachers' and students' understanding and stakeholder involvement; (2) to develop a contextual BAGJA implementation model integrated with school assets and internal potential, covering curriculum, teacher competence, facilities, and school culture; and (3) to test the effectiveness of the model in fostering positive school culture, strengthening collaboration, and increasing graduate absorption in the professional world.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research method with a case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Appreciative Inquiry in the school context (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014; Whitney 2010). The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows the exploration of complex social phenomena, such as school culture and stakeholder perceptions, within their natural settings. The case study is centered on SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya to provide a comprehensive and holistic analysis of the research problem.

The research subjects consist of twenty-one participants, purposively selected to ensure diverse perspectives from the school's ecosystem (Patton 2015). They include the school principal, two vice principals, two educational staff, five teachers, eight students from different grades and programs, and three representatives from the local community or industry partners. The purposive sampling technique is used to select participants who possess direct experience and knowledge about the school's culture and asset-based development, so that the data obtained are rich and relevant.

Data are collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to ensure triangulation and validity (Denzin 2012). In total, twenty-one semi-structured interviews are conducted, each lasting between forty-five and ninety minutes. The interviews explore themes such as the school culture, the application of the BAGJA framework, and stakeholder perceptions of asset-based development. All interviews are audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Alongside this, the researcher carries out participatory observations in at least fifteen school activities, including classroom learning, assemblies, extracurricular events, and meetings involving stakeholders. Observations average six hours per week across the three-month period, and field notes consist of both descriptive accounts and reflective comments. In addition, documents such as the school's curriculum, strategic plans, lesson plans, student achievement portfolios, and records of collaboration with external partners are examined. The criteria for selecting documents are that they must be produced within the last three years, directly related to school development, and formally accessible through permission granted by the school administration.

The process of triangulation is carried out concretely by comparing interview statements from teachers and students with actual practices observed in the classroom, cross-checking policy documents and strategic plans with information from principals and vice principals, and aligning the perspectives of community or industry partners with the school's collaboration records. To further strengthen

credibility, member checking is conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants for verification.

Data analysis follows an inductive thematic approach, beginning with the transcription of interviews and a systematic review of observation notes and documents. The coding process reduces raw data into key categories, which are then organized into thematic matrices for comparison across sources. Themes and patterns that emerge are interpreted to construct a coherent narrative, and conclusions are refined through constant verification against multiple data sources. This iterative process ensures that the "Pengetahuan Terbangun" emerges authentically from the data rather than being imposed by existing theoretical frameworks.

Result And Discussion

Result

The findings of this study are presented based on the data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation, as outlined in the methodology section. The results highlight the discovery, learning, expectations, and transformative strategies related to asset-based community development in the SMK educational environment, particularly through the IA-BAGJA framework.

Observations at SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya revealed that the educational environment possesses three categories of assets: fixed, movable, and human resources. Fixed assets consist of classrooms, workshops, computer laboratories, and the school library. Movable assets include machinery in the automotive workshop, computers in IT labs, and other equipment. However, the most crucial resources are human assets. The school principal emphasized, "The real strength of this school is not only in its physical facilities, but in the teachers, students, and alumni who continuously contribute to the school's growth" (Principal, Interview 03/04/2025).

Field notes from classroom observations also suggest that educators tend to work within their own subject boundaries. During an automotive class, students were observed conducting technical practices without collaboration with IT or graphic design students. This aligns with the vice principal's statement: "We work according to our job descriptions. Collaboration across departments is still limited because there is no structured platform" (Vice Principal, Interview 05/04/2025). Students confirmed this limitation, with one explaining, "We want to combine automotive with IT to create a monitoring app, but we don't have any official program to support it" (Student B, Interview 10/04/2025). Documentation of extracurricular programs further reveals that activities are still managed by departments individually, not in an integrated manner.

Each study program currently uses its assets only for curriculum fulfillment. For example, the automotive workshop is reserved exclusively for automotive students, while the IT lab is limited to IT students. An educational staff member explained, "The development of assets is still partial. We use them for learning basics, not for innovation projects" (Educational Staff, Interview 07/04/2025). Observation notes confirm this, as most lab sessions focused on routine tasks rather than collaborative or creative projects.

Teachers also highlighted that the current system focuses more on asset maintenance than innovation. As one teacher stated, "Students are disciplined in cleaning and maintaining tools, but there is no initiative to use these assets to create new products or cross-department projects" (Teacher A, Interview 09/04/2025). This indicates that while assets are available, they are not yet utilized as catalysts for creativity and collaboration.

Educators and students expressed hopes for more integrative use of school assets. Teachers envisioned cross-disciplinary projects, such as IT students collaborating with culinary students to develop marketing apps or automotive students working with graphic design students to design vehicle prototypes. A teacher remarked, "If there were a clear policy, we could guide students from different majors to work together on one project" (Teacher B, Interview 11/04/2025).

Students also expressed a similar aspiration. One student noted, "We know the tools and facilities can help us be more creative, but there's no clear communication channel to bring our ideas to teachers or principals" (Student C, Interview 10/04/2025). Documentation of school policy guidelines shows that while innovation is listed as a value, there are no specific regulations or programs that facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration.

The findings indicate that the school has started to adopt Appreciative Inquiry (IA) as a philosophical basis for building a positive culture, though its application remains partial. Policymakers reflected, "We have tried IA before, and now we are rethinking it to align with the vision of Golden Generation 2045" (Policy Maker, Interview 12/04/2025). Observational notes from a teacher coordination meeting showed discussions about how to integrate asset mapping into the school's planning documents, though these were still in preliminary stages.

A portfolio-based information system was also discussed as a potential transformative tool. This system would not only serve as a database but also as a communication platform connecting educators and students based on their skills and interests. Document analysis of the draft strategic plan confirms that such a

system is currently being considered as part of the school's digital transformation program.

The BAGJA framework is beginning to be implemented in structured ways. Documentation shows that surveys and interviews have been conducted as part of the Buat Pertanyaan and Ambil Pelajaran stages, aimed at identifying assets and positive experiences. During observations, educators were seen inventorying student portfolios, which included academic achievements, extracurricular skills, and prior work experience. One educator explained, "This portfolio system is our way to ensure every student's potential is visible and can be connected to school projects" (Teacher C, Interview 14/04/2025).

The development of this portfolio system is embedded into the school's planned communication information system. This system aims to make it easier for teachers and management to mobilize students for cross-disciplinary projects. Furthermore, integration with local cultural values inspired by Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy is beginning to emerge in discussions about how to ensure collaboration also reflects the spirit of togetherness and mutual support observed in community life.

Discussion

The findings that asset-based communities at SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya have not been optimally developed indicate a gap between asset identification and asset mobilization. While Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) in their Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model highlight that communities must not only identify but also synergize assets to achieve sustainable transformation, the case of this school shows that synergy is limited. Educators remain confined to their job descriptions, and students lack platforms for cross-departmental collaboration. This condition resonates with the argument of Mathie and Cunningham (2003) that communities often fail when there is no "social contract" or collective agreement to transform individual assets into shared capital. Compared with previous studies that mostly emphasize asset mapping in broader community settings (e.g., Wellman & Lipton, 2004; Sanusi, 2018), this research confirms the persistence of a gap in the vocational education context, where asset mobilization remains weak.

The limited implementation of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the BAGJA framework reflects a gap between theory and practice. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) designed AI to shift organizations toward strength-based transformation, while Zuber-Skerritt (2016) emphasizes that AI must be followed by concrete action steps to create innovation in learning. At SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya, however, the application remains at early stages (*Buat Pertanyaan* and *Ambil*

Pelajaran), while *Jabarkan Rencana* and *Atur Eksekusi* are underdeveloped. This condition mirrors the concerns of Hammond (2013), who notes that without operational policies and structured facilitation, AI risks remaining a rhetorical tool rather than a transformative practice. Thus, this study expands on earlier research by showing how the absence of interdisciplinary policies in vocational education specifically hampers the systematic execution of BAGJA.

The aspirations of educators and students for asset optimization highlight the importance of transformative pedagogy. Freire (1970) emphasized dialogical pedagogy as a means of fostering critical consciousness and collaboration, while Bruner (1996) stressed that the curriculum must promote interdisciplinary and problem-based learning. Findings from this study show that pedagogy and curriculum in SMK still emphasize discipline and maintenance rather than innovation. This supports the view of Fullan (2014), who argues that without cultural change in pedagogy, schools cannot achieve systemic improvement. By contextualizing this with vocational education, the study suggests that interdisciplinary curricula equipping students with digital, social, and humanistic literacy are crucial to fostering social-emotional competence and workplace readiness, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice.

The planning of a portfolio-based information system aligns with IA principles, where each individual is viewed as an asset with unique potential (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). By documenting strengths, the school moves toward creating a social infrastructure that supports collaboration. This echoes Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, which highlights the role of shared platforms in knowledge exchange and collective learning. Previous studies in general organizational contexts (e.g., Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) emphasized the transformative capacity of AI, but this study situates it in the vocational school environment, offering empirical evidence that portfolio systems can bridge the gap between identification and mobilization of assets.

The integration of BAGJA with Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, *Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madyo Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani,* underscores the importance of cultural relevance in educational change. This resonates with Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension theory, which stresses that local values shape how global frameworks are implemented. While IA-BAGJA offers a universal structure for appreciative transformation, its integration with local wisdom ensures contextual acceptance. Previous studies have rarely highlighted this synthesis, making the current study a novel contribution. The emphasis on character, empowerment, and collaboration reflects not only AI principles but also

Indonesian pedagogical heritage, creating a more sustainable and culturally embedded model of asset-based school development.

Conclusion

This research underscores a critical gap between asset identification and collective mobilization within SMK 2 LPPM RI Majalaya. Despite the presence of adequate fixed, movable, and human resources, these assets remain siloed. Educators prioritize individual responsibilities, while students lack platforms for cross-disciplinary collaboration. The core challenge, therefore, lies not in asset availability but in the absence of an institutionalized "social contract" encompassing shared norms, commitments, and communication mechanisms necessary to transform assets into productive capital.

Conceptually, this study advances the literature by integrating Appreciative Inquiry and the BAGJA model with the educational philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara (*Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madyo Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani*). This synthesis illustrates how global frameworks can be culturally situated: *Ing Madyo Mangun Karsa* aligns with collaborative stages such as "Explore dreams" and "Detail the plan," while *Tut Wuri Handayani* supports empowerment in "Arrange the execution." By embedding IA-BAGJA within local philosophical traditions, this research demonstrates the value of cultural adaptation in strengthening asset-based community development for vocational education.

The study's scope is limited by its reliance on a single case study and a qualitative design, which constrains generalizability and precludes statistical analysis. Future inquiries should employ comparative multi-case studies and mixed-method designs to capture broader patterns of implementation and outcomes. Such methodological expansion would yield a more rigorous empirical foundation for policy formulation and the sustainable integration of IA-BAGJA in vocational education.

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