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Aligning Theory and Practice: Experiences of College of Business Administration Stakeholders on Academic Preparation and Internship Practice

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Abstract

Internship programs serve as a vital bridge between academic preparation and actual industry practice, yet discrepancies often emerge between what is taught in schools and what is expected in the workplace. This study explores the experiences of student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors on academic preparation and actual industry practice during internship, College of Business and Accountancy, University of Cebu Lapu-Lapu and Mandaue (UCLM), Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines. A qualitative-phenomenological research design was employed, utilizing individual interviews with a total of 25 informants, 10 student interns, 5 internship coordinators, and 10 industry supervisors selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was applied to examine and interpret the data collected from these stakeholders.The findings revealed both congruencies and misalignments between academic training and actual workplace tasks. For student interns, positive experiences included Real-World Application of Academic Knowledge, Professional and Personal Growth, Skill Development and Exposure to Industry Tools, Positive Work Environment and Supportive Mentors, *and* Increased Industry Awareness and Exposure, *while challenges involved* Gaps Between Theory and Practice, Adjustment and Adaptation Challenges, Lack of Familiarity with Tools and Office Systems, Limited or Repetitive Task Assignments, *and* Personality and Communication Barriers. *Their aspirations centered on* Strengthening Practical Exposure through Simulation-Based Training, Alignment of School Curriculum with Industry Needs, Strengthening Communication and Feedback Mechanisms, Personality, Soft Skills, and Workplace Readiness, Selection of Supportive Host Training Establishments (HTEs), *and* Joint Orientation and Mentor Engagement. *Internship coordinators shared positive experiences such as* Active Monitoring and

Collaboration with Host Training Establishments (HTEs), Internship as a Confidence-Boosting and Experiential Learning Process, *and* Structured Academic Requirements for Internship Eligibility. *Their challenges included* Absence of Formal Industry Partnerships and Limited Feedback Mechanisms, Technical Competency Deficit, *and* Task-Internship Mismatch and Industry Expectations. *Their aspirations included* Strengthening Institutional Linkages through Regular Consultations and Forums, Formalizing Partnerships through Clear MOUs and Defined Expectations, Integrating Applied Learning and Modern Tools in the Curriculum, Emphasizing Soft Skills and Professional Readiness, *and* Encouraging Structured Industry Engagement in Curriculum Review. *Industry supervisors positively noted* Productive Contribution and Work Support, Fast Learners and Adaptability to Real Tasks, Demonstration of Professionalism and Work Ethics, *and* Foundational Technical and Business Knowledge. *Their concerns focused on* Limited Readiness and Task Alignment, Difficulty Applying Theory to Practice, Lack of Confidence and Communication Skills, *and* Weak Presentation and Reporting Abilities. *Their aspirations were aligned toward* Active Industry Participation in Curriculum Development, Establishing Structured and Two-Way Feedback Mechanisms, Co-Designing Internship Activities with Industry Input, Strengthening Communication and Collaboration Through Institutional Partnerships, *and* Emphasis on Soft Skills and Workplace Etiquette Development. *The study concluded that bridging the gap between academic preparation and industry practice requires more than just curriculum adjustments, it demands a collaborative, systemic approach involving schools, students, and industry partners. A key insight uncovered is that meaningful internship experiences are shaped not only by what is taught but also by how academic institutions and host training establishments (HTEs) align expectations, tasks, and feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, this study affirms and extends experiential learning theory by emphasizing that real transformation occurs when learning becomes a shared responsibility across institutional boundaries.*

***Keywords*— Business Administration Education, Internship Experience, Experiential Learning, Qualitative Research, Mandaue City, Philippines**

I. INTRODUCTION

Internship programs are essential in bridging academic learning and professional practice, particularly in the field of Business Administration education. Globally, the importance of aligning academic curricula with industry expectations has been emphasized to improve graduate employability and ensure smoother transitions into the workforce (Institute of International Education, 2023). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – Quality Education – reinforces the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, specifically through the development of relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship (United Nations, 2015).

The global internship landscape continues to evolve with the advent of technology and changing work environments. Virtual internships, for example, are increasingly adopted to provide access across borders and address mobility limitations. However, while digital internships foster inclusivity and exposure, they present challenges in replicating authentic, hands-on industry experiences and mentoring dynamics (Bilsland, Nagy, &

Smith, 2014). The growing need for digital competency, adaptability, and collaboration has pushed educational institutions to reconsider how internship programs can remain relevant and rigorous.

Within the ASEAN region, nations have increasingly recognized the strategic role of internships in cultivating a regionally competitive workforce. According to Khoo and Lim (2020), countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines are integrating work-based learning frameworks in higher education to meet the growing demand for industry-ready graduates. These models emphasize co-designed internship programs between universities and industry stakeholders to ensure relevance and adaptability.

In contrast, the Philippines, while making strides in promoting internship opportunities through the CHED-mandated practicum programs, continues to struggle with the alignment between academic preparation and industry requirements. Catacutan and Tuliao (2020) highlight that business students often face challenges in translating classroom-based theoretical knowledge into actual work functions, revealing a critical gap in instructional integration. Batas et al. (2024) note that business administration students, in particular, express concern over the lack of exposure to real-world accounting software and updated regulatory practices, suggesting that many programs lag in industry calibration. Guanlao et al. (2023) emphasize that although students may exhibit academic excellence, employers still identify deficiencies in soft skills,

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adaptability, and professional communication, which are increasingly vital in today's workplace.

Furthermore, regional challenges include variability in industry participation, limited faculty coordination with host companies, and insufficient monitoring of internship progress. A regional policy review by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED Region VII, 2023) pointed out that while internship manuals exist, they often lack comprehensive frameworks that support continuous collaboration between academia and industry, particularly in aligning expectations and providing timely feedback mechanisms.

Within the context of higher education institutions in Central Visayas particularly those situated in economically active areas such as Mandaue and Lapu-Lapu City, there is value in further examining how internship frameworks are experienced by stakeholders. Rather than assuming specific gaps, this study seeks to understand these frameworks through the perspectives of students, coordinators, and industry supervisors. Insights drawn from localized accounts, employer input, and student reflections are used to inform recommendations that align with both educational objectives and the regional industry landscape, allowing practice improvements to emerge from the participants' own narratives.

While internship evaluation has been widely discussed in existing literature, fewer studies have examined the experiences of Business Administration students in the Philippines from a qualitative, phenomenological perspective. Previous works (e.g., Catacutan & Tuliao, 2020) have provided valuable insights, often through quantitative measures such as performance ratings or satisfaction levels. However, less attention has been given to how students themselves describe and make sense of the transition from academic preparation to industry practice. This study seeks to explore these experiences without presupposing their nature or direction, allowing the meanings to emerge from the participants' own accounts. By employing a phenomenological approach, the study aims to understand how student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors articulate and interpret their internship experiences within the context of business administration education.

As a full-time faculty member in the College of Business and Accountancy at the University of Cebu, Lapu-Lapu and Mandaue, the proponent became aware of recurring conversations among students, coordinators, and industry partners regarding the relationship between classroom learning and workplace expectations. Guided by the principles of transcendental phenomenology, the proponent undertook this study while consciously setting aside personal assumptions and interpretations to understand the phenomenon as experienced by the participants themselves.

Through this process, the study sought to capture the stakeholders' authentic narratives and generate insights that may inform future improvements in academic preparation and industry collaboration.

OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to examine the experiences of student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors regarding academic preparation and actual industry practice during the Internship Program at the College of Business and Accountancy, University of Cebu Lapu-Lapu and Mandaue (UCLM), Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines. It specifically sought to explore how each group of informants perceived the effectiveness of academic preparation in relation to real-world industry practice and to identify their aspirations for enhancing school-industry collaboration to improve the overall internship experience.

Theoretical Background

This study is anchored on Experiential Learning Theory of David A. Kolb (1984), and is supported by Constructivist Learning Theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Stakeholders Theory of Edward R. Freeman (1984).

Experiential Learning Theory by David A. Kolb (1984) suggests that learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. The theory identifies four key stages of the learning cycle: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Learners engage with new experiences (Concrete Experience), reflect on those experiences (Reflective Observation), formulate concepts based on their reflections (Abstract Conceptualization), and then test these concepts in new situations (Active Experimentation). Kolb's model illustrates that effective learning is not a linear process but a continuous, cyclical progression that integrates both action and reflection (Kolb, 1984)

Kolb's theory offers a vital lens to examine how students integrate classroom knowledge with workplace realities. Internships provide the Concrete Experience, allowing students to immerse themselves in authentic internship environments. It aligns with the first stage of Kolb's cycle, where learners gain hands-on exposure to tasks, responsibilities, and workplace

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culture. The Reflective Observation phase follows, as students consider the effectiveness of their actions, assess their preparedness, and examine gaps between academic preparation and real-world expectations. According to Di Pietro (2022), these reflections are key to revealing the underlying "dynamics" between institutional instruction and industry practice, one of the core aims of the study.

Moreover, as students engage in Abstract Conceptualization, they begin to make sense of their experiences by applying theoretical frameworks learned in school to practical scenarios encountered during the Internship. This bridging of theory and practice helps them develop a more complex understanding of business operations, ethical standards, and workplace behavior, areas emphasized in the curricula. Finally, during Active Experimentation, students apply newly acquired insights to improve performance, solve problems, and adapt to professional expectations. This stage demonstrates the transformation of experiential learning into actionable competence, and it also highlights whether current internship frameworks adequately prepare students to contribute meaningfully to their assigned roles.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is highly relevant because it reinforces the importance of structured and reflective internship design. The theory underscores that learning does not stop at exposure but must involve intentional reflection and application for development to occur. This theoretical foundation not only legitimizes the research inquiry but also provides a framework to assess the effectiveness of current internship models and to propose improvements grounded in experiential learning principles (Franks & Oliver, 2012).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory allows for a comprehensive examination of the internship experience as a formative educational process. It emphasizes the need for academic institutions to go beyond merely deploying students and instead create integrative experiences that promote reflection, conceptual understanding, and continuous improvement (Di Pietro, 2022).

Constructivist Learning Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978) further supports the anchored theory, which emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process in which individuals construct knowledge through interactions with more knowledgeable others within a cultural and historical context. Central to this theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the gap between what learners can achieve independently and what they can achieve with guidance or collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky argued that learning occurs most effectively when students are scaffolded by teachers, mentors, or peers who help them move beyond their current level of understanding. This social constructivist view supports the idea that learning is not isolated but embedded in meaningful cultural and interpersonal contexts.

Students are placed where they are capable of performing tasks under the supervision of industry and academic mentors. The constructive mentoring process, whether through coaching, demonstrations, or collaborative problem-solving, enables them to acquire professional competencies that they could not achieve alone. In effect, both the academic supervisors and industry partners serve as "more knowledgeable others" who facilitate the student's cognitive and professional development. It mirrors the apprenticeship model and reflects the essence of Vygotsky's theory in contemporary workplace learning.

Furthermore, Vygotsky’s constructivist framework aligns with the anchored theory as both emphasize the importance of social interaction in learning. While it focuses on the role of observation, imitation, and self-efficacy, Vygotsky reinforces the importance of guided participation and scaffolding. Additionally, Vygotsky's theory provides a conceptual basis for designing responsive and developmentally appropriate frameworks. A practical program should be structured to progressively challenge students within their scope, providing appropriate support mechanisms such as mentoring, coaching, and feedback systems. It aligns to develop an Industry–Academe alignment framework that fosters meaningful learning experiences.

By incorporating the principles of social constructivism, this study promotes a deeper, more participatory model of internship learning, one that supports student agency while emphasizing the collaborative nature of professional growth.

The inclusion of Stakeholder Theory by Edward Freeman (1984) further reinforces the theoretical foundation of this study by emphasizing the interdependent roles and shared responsibilities of various actors involved in internship programs. Stakeholder Theory suggests that organizations must consider the interests, contributions, and well being of all stakeholders, including students, academic institutions, industry partners, and regulatory bodies, to achieve sustainable success. Freeman's theory underscores the critical need for collaborative

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engagement between higher education institutions and industry partners to design, implement, and continuously improve frameworks that are responsive to both educational goals and workforce expectations.

Freeman's Stakeholder Theory complements Kolb's and Vygotsky's learning models by recognizing that the relationships, expectations, and inputs of multiple stakeholders significantly shape experiential and socially constructed learning processes. Student learning does not occur in a vacuum but within a complex ecosystem where academic preparation, industry standards, organizational culture, and stakeholder interests converge. Thus, for internship programs to be effective and meaningful, deliberate collaboration among stakeholders is essential to ensure alignment between curriculum content, student preparedness, and the practical demands of the industry.

Furthermore, Stakeholder Theory also brings to light the ethical and strategic importance of recognizing diverse stakeholder voices in shaping internship programs. Within the higher education landscape, particularly in Business Administration students, faculty, industry supervisors, and institutional leaders all possess legitimate stakes in ensuring that internship experiences are relevant, equitable, and impactful. Freeman's perspective encourages institutions to move beyond a transactional view of internships as mere academic requirements and towards a more relational and inclusive approach that fosters long-term partnerships with industry. By acknowledging and integrating stakeholder perspectives, internship programs can be designed to balance academic rigor, professional growth, and organizational needs, ultimately enhancing the employability of graduates and the sustainability of school-industry collaborations.

The theories provide a robust conceptual framework guiding the exploration of the experiences of academic preparation and actual industry practice. By integrating Experiential Learning Theory, Constructivist Learning Theory, and Stakeholder Theory, this study acknowledges the experiential, social, and multi-stakeholder dimensions of learning.

The theoretical grounding of this study is further reinforced by key legal frameworks in the Philippine educational landscape, which underscore the state's commitment to quality and relevant higher education. Republic Act No. 7722, also known as the Higher Education Act of 1994, mandates the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to formulate and enforce policies that promote academic excellence and responsiveness to national development goals (Republic of the Philippines, 1994).

This law establishes CHED's authority over higher education institutions, including its role in regulating internship programs that connect academic learning to real-world applications. Complementing this is CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 104, Series of 2017, which provides specific guidelines for the Student Internship Program in the Philippines (SIPP). The CMO outlines the roles and responsibilities of both academic institutions and partner industries, ensuring structured, outcome-based internship experiences that mirror workplace expectations and professional standards (CHED, 2017).

Moreover, Republic Act No. 10968, or the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) Act of 2018, institutionalizes a competency-based approach to education and training. This framework aligns qualifications with industry needs, promotes lifelong learning, and facilitates smoother school-to-work transitions (Republic of the Philippines, 2018). Lastly, the CMO 39, s. 2006 and CMO 17, s. 2017, standardizing curriculum, specializations (Marketing, Finance, HR, Ops, Econ), and outcomes for business graduates.

In the CMO of Business Administration education, these legal foundations collectively advocate for strong school-industry collaboration, standardized learning outcomes, and the integration of theoretical and experiential learning. Thus, they provide not only regulatory support but also conceptual direction for investigating how academic preparation and industry practice dynamically interact during internships and how these processes can be enhanced better to serve student, institutional, and industry needs.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using transcendental phenomenology by Moustakas (1994), to explore the lived experiences of Business Administration student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors. The approach was selected to allow the researcher to describe how stakeholders encounter and make sense of academic preparation and industry practice during internship programs. Consistent with phenomenological bracketing, the researcher set aside prior assumptions to focus on the meanings conveyed by the participants themselves.

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Research Environment

This study was conducted at the University of Cebu Lapu-Lapu and Mandaue (UCLM) Campus, a prominent private higher education institution located in Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines. The research included selected business and industry partners situated within Mandaue and Lapu-Lapu City, which are near the university and serve as common venues for student internship placements.

Research Informants

This study involved three main groups of informants: Ten (10) student interns, five (5) internship coordinators, and ten (10) industry supervisors. These informants were carefully selected to ensure the richness and relevance of the data, as aligned with the phenomenological qualitative research design of this inquiry.

Student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors were invited as informants because each group holds direct and meaningful experience of the internship process. Student interns offer perspectives based on their participation in industry-based training. Internship coordinators contribute insights from their involvement in implementing and overseeing internship requirements within the academic setting. Industry supervisors provide viewpoints grounded in workplace interactions and observations of interns' engagement in actual tasks.

A purposive sampling technique was used to identify individuals who have first-hand experience with the internship process. This approach is suitable for phenomenological research, as it allows the selection of informants who can describe the phenomenon in depth. Data were gathered through individual interviews to allow each informant to share their experiences openly, without imposing assumptions about what those experiences should be.

This study applied a set of inclusion parameters for each group of informants to ensure that participants had direct experience with the Business Administration internship process. These criteria were established to identify individuals who had encountered the phenomenon being examined, without presuming the nature or quality of their experiences.

For student interns, only those currently enrolled in a higher education institution offering Business or Accountancy programs were included. They must have completed their industry-based internship within the last six to twelve months so that their recollections remain recent and grounded in actual engagement with the internship program.

For internship coordinators, participation was limited to those currently employed under the College of Business and Accountancy. They were required to have served as coordinators or supervisors within the last two academic years and to have been involved in the design, implementation, supervision, or evaluation of the internship program. This ensured that the coordinators selected had direct exposure to internship-related academic processes.

For industry supervisors, the study included individuals who had supervised Business Administration student interns within the last one to two years. These supervisors were selected from companies holding a formal Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the academic institution, ensuring that their insights arise from formally recognized internship arrangements.

A total of 25 informants participated in the study: 10 student interns, five internship coordinators, and 10 industry supervisors. Data were gathered through individual interviews, providing each informant the opportunity to describe their experiences, perspectives, and reflections in their own terms. This approach supported a phenomenological stance by allowing meanings to emerge from the participants themselves rather than from researcher assumptions.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument employed in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. This instrument aligns with a phenomenological qualitative design, as it allows the researcher to explore the lived experiences, meanings, and subjective insights of the informants regarding their internship experiences within the Business Administration program. Consistent with the bracketing process, the researcher approached the interviews by consciously setting aside personal assumptions and prior knowledge to capture the participants' perspectives authentically.

Analysis of Data

Thematic analysis was employed as the core method for analyzing the qualitative data. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the researcher first immersed herself in the data to achieve familiarity, then generated initial codes across the dataset. Themes were subsequently identified, reviewed, defined, and named to represent patterns of meaning related to the study's objectives. Analysis was conducted manually or supported by qualitative data

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analysis software (e.g., NVivo), depending on resource availability.

During the thematic analysis, recurring responses and meaningful patterns were reorganized into core themes and subthemes that capture the shared lived experiences of the informants. These themes reflected key insights regarding internship preparation, practice, and the alignment between academic training and industry expectations. The final themes were synthesized into a narrative that addresses the research questions and informs context-specific implications for the Business Administration program.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets data on the experiences of the informants on the academic preparation and actual industry practice during internship. The sources of data were the responses from student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors who provided vital information based on their respective experiences on the course of the internship in the Business Administration program.

There are three (3) sections presented in this chapter. The first (1st) part presents the positive and negative experiences of each group of informants on academic preparation and actual industry practice during internship. The second (2nd) part reveals the aspirations of each informant to improve school-industry collaboration during internship, and the third (3rd) part presents the common themes emanating from the experiences of the key informants.

I. Experiences of Each Group of Informants

1. Positive Experiences

A. Student Interns

The first question asked of the student intern-informants relates to their experiences on academic preparation and actual industry practice during the intership. Their experiences were identified as positive and negative. On the positive side, five themes emerged from the responses during the personal interview.

1. Real World Application of Academic Knowledge. The informants reflect how they were able to connect and apply their classroom learning in actual workplace settings. Many interns expressed that their academic foundations served as a crucial starting point when performing real tasks. Interns were able to recognize the relevance of their theoretical knowledge as they encountered practical challenges. This hands-on application not only reinforced their prior learning but also helped deepen their understanding of industry expectations. The experience highlighted the value of academic preparation while also exposing areas where practical training could be further enhanced. The following informants expresses that:

Informant 9 said that:

The theories, concepts, and technical skills I learned in class proved particularly valuable when I was assigned real-world tasks. Helps me build my character and personality (Informant 9).

Informant 10 added:

My academic training helped me perform the tasks, especially with fundamental accounting principles and other business-related functions (Informant 10).

As per Informant 1:

My academic training provided me with a solid foundation in marketing concepts and how marketing should be done in a business environment. Additionally, boosted my work ethics and professionalism when dealing with other people, especially in an office setting (Informant 1).

Informant 3 narrated that:

Based on my experience, having theoretical knowledge of the tasks and concepts is much better, and knowing the concepts would make work easier (Informant 3).

As to Informant 7:

In my experience, it provides me the basic knowledge and foundational understanding needed to perform my tasks (Informant 7).

Based on the narratives of the informants, the essential role of experiential learning is in bridging the gap between classroom instruction and industry practice. This alignment allows students to contextualize theoretical concepts by engaging in practical, hands-on activities during internships, thereby improving their adaptability and professional competence. When academic knowledge is integrated with authentic workplace experiences, students not only develop discipline-specific skills but also enhance their problem-solving, communication, and decision-making abilities. According to Rausch and Goller (2024), interns reported significantly greater self-perceived learning when given opportunities to apply classroom-based knowledge in real-world settings, mainly when supported through feedback and autonomy. Similarly, Ponce-Ceballos et al. (2024) emphasize that industry-aligned training and structured internship programs

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improve the relevance of higher education and better equip students for future employment.

Moreover, It underlines the importance of translating academic theories into practical skills in real-world settings. Student interns gain firsthand experience in navigating real business operations, which allows them to validate, refine, and even question their classroom knowledge. This dynamic fosters deeper learning and prepares students for the complexity and unpredictability of the modern workplace. The implication for higher education institutions is the need to strengthen experiential learning approaches further. Simply teaching theories in isolation is no longer sufficient. Embedding real-world tasks into coursework, such as industry-based projects and simulations, cultivates a more robust and job-ready skill set. Additionally, it nurtures adaptability, initiative, and problem-solving traits valued in evolving work environments.

A study by Rowe et al (2012) stresses that structured work placements help students apply abstract academic knowledge in meaningful and situationally relevant ways. Similarly, McRae and Johnston (2016) highlight that students exposed to authentic work settings during internships often experience a transformation in how they perceive and internalize academic concepts, ultimately becoming more competent and confident professionals.

2. Professional and Personal Growth. The informants reflect how internships serve as a transformative experience for students, fostering the development of essential workplace competencies alongside self-confidence, independence, and a clearer sense of career identity.

Informant 8 discussed that:

To conceptualize everything based on my experience, I became more patient and very eager to learn because I can now validate my skills and capability as a student, turning into an employee in the future (Informant 8).

Informant 9 added:

It helped me grow both personally and professionally because of my experience and the guidance given by my immediate supervisor (Informant 9).

As per Informant 10:

Eventually, I became more confident as I became more accustomed to the tasks. It boosted my attitude and behaviour since I am a shy type of person (Informant 10).

Additionlly, Informant 1 detailed:

I am grateful for my internship experience, for it developed my confidence in a real work environment. (Informant 1).

Informant 7:

It made me more confident and less overwhelmed in a real work setting (Informant 7).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies that through navigating and exposure to real-world scenarios and challenges, interns often gain a deeper understanding of professional conduct, time management, communication skills, and self-awareness. This growth not only enhances their employability but also contributes to shaping their long-term personal and professional trajectories. As noted by Kwon and Lee (2023), internships play a critical role in promoting students' self-efficacy and career readiness, mainly when supported by effective mentorship and reflective practices. In a similar vein, Amparo and Tanguilig (2024) emphasized that structured internship experiences allow students to develop soft skills and professional values that are often difficult to teach in traditional academic settings, thereby supporting a more holistic education-to-employment transition.

Additionally, the internship experience plays a pivotal role in fostering both professional and personal development among student interns. Through their immersion in actual work environments, students encounter real-life challenges that demand initiative, accountability, and self-reflection. These experiences encourage them to develop workplace professionalism, such as punctuality, ethics, and reliability, while also enhancing their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Internships should be intentionally designed not only to build technical skills but also to cultivate personal maturity and workplace behavior. Higher education institutions must therefore integrate reflective practices, mentoring opportunities, and structured self-evaluation into internship programs. These strategies enable students to develop resilience, a growth mindset, and a clearer sense of career direction, thereby enhancing their long-term employability and well being.

Jackson (2015) emphasizes that professional identity formation and personal development are essential components of work-integrated learning, which empower students to transition more confidently into the workforce. Similarly, Clarke (2018) underscores the value of workplace learning environments in fostering self-efficacy and career readiness, arguing that such growth is foundational to success in competitive labor markets.

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3. Skill Development and Exposure to Industry Tools. The internship program provides students with opportunities to build practical, job-relevant skills and gain exposure to actual tools, systems, and processes used in the industry. Interns move beyond textbook knowledge and become familiar with software, office equipment, workflows, and technical practices that reflect current industry standards. This hands-on experience enables them to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-world application, enhancing both their confidence and work readiness. In the context of business administration programs, such exposure is especially crucial as it allows students to understand the expectations of the workplace better and develop competencies aligned with their future careers. As the informants narrated:

Informant 4 stated that:

I improved how I talk to guests and assist them politely. I was able to engage with high-ranking people, which motivates me to explore more of myself, especially my personality and my character as a professional in the workplace (Informant 4).

Informant 3 added:

I developed skills in computing the amount to process as I was exposed to the latest tools in the company where I am (Informant 3).

Informant 10 contributed:

My computer skills from school, like Excel functions, were beneficial. And most of the time I was exposed to tools and software applications that are significant in today's business operations, such as the usage of artificial intelligence in the office setting (Informant 10).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies that effective internship programs must be designed not only to provide students with tasks but also to immerse them in real-world technologies, systems, and professional tools relevant to their field. When interns are trained using actual industry tools such as accounting software or business analytics platforms, they are more likely to transition smoothly into the workforce. This alignment enhances employability and reduces the skill gap between academic preparation and workplace demands. As underscored by Narayanan et al. (2022), exposure to real workplace environments during internships significantly improves students' technical proficiency and job readiness. Similarly, Lim and Lee (2021) emphasize that structured industry immersion enables students to acquire not just functional skills but also adaptability to evolving technologies in their profession.

Furthermore, one of the most transformative aspects of the internship experience lies in the direct exposure to industry-relevant tools, technologies, and practices. Student interns who gain hands-on experience with actual software, equipment, and workflow systems develop functional competencies that go beyond what can be taught in traditional classrooms. This theme highlights the essential role of internships in closing the gap between theoretical instruction and practical skillsets.

Academic institutions must strengthen partnerships with industry to ensure that students are trained using the tools and systems they are likely to encounter in professional settings. Internship programs should emphasize applied training through the use of simulations, case-based learning, and actual task assignments that mirror real-world demands. By aligning curriculum design with emerging technologies and industry expectations, higher education can enhance students' readiness and confidence for future employment.

According to Finch et al. (2013), graduates' success is increasingly tied to their ability to demonstrate practical competence and familiarity with industry-standard tools, not just academic knowledge. Furthermore, McArthur et al. (2021) argue that embedding authentic learning experiences, such as exposure to current technologies and software, significantly improves students' skill acquisition and long-term employability outcomes.

4. Positive Work Environment and Supportive Mentors. The informants reflect how a nurturing and respectful workplace atmosphere, combined with approachable and encouraging mentors, significantly shapes the overall internship experience of students. The informants associated their learning success and confidence building with the presence of mentors who guided them patiently, allowed space for learning, and created a non-threatening environment. This supportive dynamic fosters a sense of belonging, reduces anxiety, and promotes deeper engagement in tasks. It also encourages interns to ask questions, seek feedback, and develop professional habits that are vital for long-term growth in their chosen fields. The following informants narrated that:

Informant 3 detailed that:

As far as I can remember, I had a smooth internship, a non-toxic workplace, and a great team to

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work with. I hope to have this kind of environment later on when I apply for a job (Informant 3).

Informant 4 also contributed:

The team was friendly and helpful. The company provided me with valuable experience and information on how to do my tasks properly (Informant 4).

Informant 7 said:

I developed my skills and gained the needed skills as well through the guidance of the people who surround me and (Informant 7).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies that the presence of a positive work environment and supportive mentors during internship programs plays a vital role in enhancing the personal and professional growth of student interns. When students are placed in workplaces where they feel respected, encouraged, and supported, they are more likely to engage actively, take initiative, and demonstrate adaptability. This theme further suggests that organizations and academic institutions should prioritize mentor selection and training to ensure interns receive meaningful guidance and constructive feedback. Moreover, fostering an inclusive and collaborative environment contributes to better learning outcomes, reduced performance anxiety, and a smoother transition from the classroom to the workplace.

Research underscores the importance of a supportive mentoring relationship and a healthy workplace culture in shaping positive internship experiences. According to Hughes, Ginns, and McDonald (2021), effective mentorship not only boosts interns' confidence and satisfaction but also enhances their skill acquisition and long-term career readiness. Similarly, Billett (2015) emphasized that guided learning in authentic workplace environments encourages active participation and helps interns bridge the gap between theory and practice, especially when mentors model and explain tasks within a psychologically safe space.

Moreover, a nurturing and inclusive internship environment plays a crucial role in shaping students' overall experience, confidence, and professional identity. When student interns are welcomed into a positive workplace culture with clear guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback from mentors, they are more likely to engage fully, ask questions, and take initiative. The presence of supportive mentors helps interns transition from classroom learners to contributing team members, reinforcing both technical and interpersonal growth.

The implication of this theme underscores the need for both academic institutions and host training establishments (HTEs) to carefully select internship sites that are not only aligned with the students' academic backgrounds but also exhibit healthy mentorship cultures. Training for mentors, structured check-ins, and clear performance expectations can significantly improve the quality of guidance interns receive. Establishing these support systems helps students build resilience, enhance self-efficacy, and develop workplace adaptability.

Recent findings by Ching et al. (2022) emphasize that mentor involvement is a key determinant in students' perception of internship success and learning effectiveness. Similarly, Li, Yu, and Liu (2023) found that students who reported having positive relationships with their workplace mentors were more likely to develop strong career aspirations and greater confidence in handling professional tasks.

5. Increased Industry Awareness and Exposure. As perceived by the informants, the internship allowed them to go beyond textbook learning and directly witness the pace, standards, culture, and dynamics of real-world business operations. From understanding organizational structures to observing how different departments collaborate, the internship served as a window into the actual workings of the corporate environment. Many interns expressed that this firsthand exposure helped demystify industry processes and clarified their expectations about future careers. It also helped them better appreciate the relevance of their academic training about practical demands.

Moreover, this is an affirmation of the internship's vital role in bridging the gap between theoretical instruction and the complexities of professional practice. It underscores the value of immersive learning environments where students gain not only technical insights but also an understanding of workplace realities, etiquette, and culture. As the informant's narrative:

As per Informant 2:

The internship program helped me understand how documentation flows and workflow expectations inside the office (Informant 2).

Informant 4 stated that:

Based on my experience, seeing how everyone worked together showed me how important cooperation and commitment are (Informant 4).

As well as Informant 7 added that:

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The internship helped me understand how the company works. And how should I position myself as an employee in the future (Informant 7).

Based on the narratives of the informants, the emergence of increased industry awareness and exposure as a core theme implies that internship programs serve as a crucial transitional space for students, allowing them to immerse themselves in the realities of the professional world. This exposure helps learners refine their career goals, adjust expectations, and build a clearer understanding of the competencies required in their chosen fields. As such, schools and partner industries must collaborate more effectively to design internships that offer rich, varied, and contextually relevant learning experiences. Intentional placement, mentorship, and real-time involvement in business operations can foster deeper learning and smoother integration into the workforce after graduation.

According to Gault et al (2010), students who participate in internships are more likely to understand organizational expectations, workplace culture, and industry-specific practices, making them more job-ready than their non-intern peers. Similarly, Kocakulah et al. (2022) emphasized that industry exposure during internships significantly contributes to students' adaptability and alignment with labor market needs, particularly when the programs are structured and supported by both academic and industry mentors.

In like manner, the increased exposure to actual industry environments allows student interns to contextualize their academic learning within real-world business operations. This theme reflects how immersion in diverse work settings helps students grasp industry trends, organizational structures, and workplace dynamics, fostering a deeper understanding of how their roles contribute to broader business goals. It also equips them with insights into specific career paths, professional standards, and employer expectations, which are often difficult to convey in classroom settings alone.

Internship programs should not merely be task-oriented but must also intentionally include opportunities for students to observe and engage with the broader functions of the industry. Activities such as interdepartmental rotations, company briefings, and exposure to industry events can significantly enhance students' career clarity and professional maturity. Academic institutions, therefore, have a responsibility to design internship frameworks that prioritize this kind of holistic exposure.

A study by Jackson and Wilton (2023) highlights that structured exposure to professional settings enhances students' career readiness and their ability to transfer academic knowledge to workplace demands. Similarly, Rowe and Zegwaard (2022) stress that when students understand industry contexts early on, they are better able to align their skills with employer needs and demonstrate greater workplace adaptability.

B. Internship Coordinators

The first question was also asked to the Internship Coordinators, which relates to their experiences on academic preparation and actual industry practice during the internship. Their experiences were identified as positive and negative. On the positive side, three themes emerged from the responses during the personal interview.

1. Active Monitoring and Collaboration with Host Training Establishments (HTEs). The informants actively engage with Host Training Establishments (HTEs) to ensure a successful internship experience for students. This involvement includes conducting regular site visits, coordinating with industry mentors, and assessing student performance through consultations and feedback collection. Their active participation fosters a collaborative environment that helps align internship experiences with academic objectives. Such monitoring ensures that interns are provided with relevant learning opportunities and proper guidance, enhancing both student development and institutional reputation. As for the informant's narrative:

Informant 1 said that:

Engagement happens through email, forum, phone call, and company visit. But most of the time, given the number of years I've been a coordinator, we visited the company only once and brought a token of appreciation for them (Informant 1).

Informant 3 added:

As an internship coordinator, I go with the adviser or teacher to conduct actual site visits of our interns. Once there, I meet with their immediate heads and confirm or discuss their performance evaluation submitted to me (Informant 3).

As per Informant 5:

During industry forums, HTE representatives join the department's faculty and administrators in a dialogue. Alumni students are also invited (Informant 5).

Informant 2:

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We make sure that the HTE is aligned with their course and profession through our on-site visit once every semester (Informant 2).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it underscores the importance of continuous engagement between academic institutions and industry partners in ensuring the quality and relevance of internships. Active monitoring allows internship coordinators to identify issues quickly, offer timely interventions, and adjust internship placements as needed. Moreover, it builds a foundation for long-term partnerships between schools and HTEs, resulting in better internship programs that are responsive to both educational goals and industry needs.

It was further supported by Narayanan et al. (2021), stating that effective monitoring mechanisms contribute to better learning outcomes and higher satisfaction among student interns. Similarly, Rahman and Mohamed (2022) emphasize that institutional oversight and feedback loops are vital for aligning internship programs with industry standards and competencies.

In addition, active monitoring and collaboration with Host Training Establishments (HTEs) ensure that the internship experience remains meaningful, structured, and aligned with academic and industry expectations. It allows internship coordinators to directly observe intern progress, clarify concerns, and foster a supportive learning environment. This practice also strengthens institutional relationships with industry partners, building trust and long-term cooperation.

The presence of regular site visits and open communication between schools and HTEs implies a shared commitment to student development. It allows for real-time feedback and intervention when challenges arise, leading to better support systems for interns. Moreover, this collaborative approach enhances the adaptability of internship programs, enabling institutions to tailor future partnerships and curriculum adjustments based on observed industry needs and student performance.

McHugh (2017) emphasized that strong partnerships between schools and industry foster improved student outcomes during internships. Likewise, Zegwaard and McCurdy (2014) found that ongoing collaboration enhances the relevance of work-integrated learning, promoting mutual understanding between educators and industry supervisors.

2. Internship as a Confidence-Boosting and Experiential Learning Process. The informants view the internship experience not only as a requirement for academic completion but also as a vital confidence-building and experiential learning process for students. Coordinators observed that as students engage in real-world tasks, interact with professionals, and receive feedback, they gradually build self-assurance and develop workplace competencies. These experiences allow students to transition from theoretical learners to emerging professionals, reinforcing both personal and professional growth. As their narratives:

As per Informant 2:

Most of them find the internship valuable and say it helps build their confidence (Informant 2).

Informant 4 also said that:

They usually mention that they become more familiar with workplace dynamics, teamwork, and handling deadlines (Informant 4).

Informant 5 added that:

They often share that the internship helped improve their confidence and exposed them to real business operations (Informant 5).

The statements of the informants highlight the dual role of internships in developing both technical know-how and personal confidence. By participating in meaningful workplace tasks and gradually being entrusted with responsibilities, students gain not only practical insights but also a sense of competence and identity as future professionals. Institutions can enhance this effect by designing internship structures that allow for reflection, mentorship, and feedback throughout the process, making the internship a transformative rather than transactional experience.

Internships that include active mentorship, structured tasks, and constructive feedback have been shown to improve students' confidence and readiness for the workforce significantly. According to Jackson and Collings (2022), experiential learning through internships enhances students' professional identity and promotes a smoother school-to-work transition. Furthermore, Gault et al. (2021) found that internships play a critical role in building students' confidence, particularly when there is consistent support and encouragement from academic and industry supervisors.

Moreover, Internships serve not only as platforms for academic application but also as significant confidence-building experiences. Through real-world exposure, student interns develop a stronger

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sense of self-efficacy as they engage in professional tasks, interact with colleagues, and make meaningful contributions to workplace goals. These experiences cultivate both technical competence and a positive self-concept, which are vital for long-term career success.

It implies that a well-structured internship program can serve as a transformative stage in a student's academic and personal development. When internship coordinators and host institutions foster supportive environments, students are more likely to take initiative, perform confidently, and transition more smoothly into professional roles. This insight urges academic institutions to integrate experiential learning opportunities throughout the curriculum, not just during internship periods.

Jackson (2015) highlighted that internships enhance students' confidence and self-efficacy by placing them in authentic work situations. Similarly, Papadopoulos (2020) emphasized that experiential learning through internships leads to stronger professional identity and motivation among students.

3. Structured Academic Requirements for Internship Eligibility. The internship coordinators' informants emphasized the value of having structured academic requirements before allowing students to engage in internships. These include prerequisites such as completion of foundational courses, submission of medical and legal documents, and attendance in preparatory seminars on work ethics and professional behavior. Such prerequisites ensure that students are academically prepared and mentally ready to engage with real-world industry settings. This structure reflects a commitment to maintaining the quality and integrity of the internship process. As for their narratives:

Informant 1 said that:

In our department, we are constantly highlighting our internship process through the following: enrollment in internship subjects, medical certificates, MOA, and internship contract, as well as evaluation of the HTE prior to deployment (Informant 1).

Informant 2 also added:

This criterion is based on the SIPP program and it follows a rightful process that is accepted by the University (Informant 2).

Informant 3:

As I have observed and based on the actual process, their curriculum requires them to have finished 1st to 4th year first semester subjects before they can have their internship (Informant 3).

Based on the informants' comments, it implies that the presence of structured academic requirements prior to internship deployment serves as a quality assurance mechanism. It ensures that students meet minimum competencies and are equipped with the essential knowledge and behavioral expectations needed in a professional environment. This system supports smoother transitions, minimizes workplace issues, and aligns the internship with institutional learning outcomes. Academic institutions can continue to strengthen these structures by including input from industry partners to ensure relevance and responsiveness to current workplace standards.

Structured internship programs that include precise academic prerequisites have been found to enhance student readiness and performance in professional environments. According to Narayanan et al. (2019), rigorous pre-internship academic preparation leads to better student adaptation and contribution during fieldwork. Similarly, Taylor (2021) stresses the importance of aligning academic and internship requirements to ensure meaningful learning and industry engagement.

Furthermore, establishing clear and structured academic requirements for internship eligibility ensures that students are adequately prepared cognitively and technically before they are deployed to host training establishments (HTEs). These requirements, such as the completion of key foundational courses, submission of medical clearances, and orientation attendance, create a baseline that promotes readiness, accountability, and safety for all internship stakeholders.

Internships must not be treated as stand-alone experiences but as a culmination of academic preparation and institutional coordination. By enforcing structured prerequisites, academic institutions safeguard both the quality of internship experiences and the professional image of their students. It also fosters a standardized approach across departments, allowing coordinators to monitor progress and ensure that students meet minimum qualifications before being endorsed to partner organizations.

According to Rowe et al. (2012), clearly defined prerequisites and pre-placement preparation activities are essential to ensuring successful work-integrated learning outcomes. Similarly, Groenewald (2020) *emphasized* the importance of formal academic preparation before internship deployment, noting that unprepared students often struggle with integration and productivity in the workplace.

C. Industry Supervisors

The first question was also asked of the

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Industry Supervisors, which relates to their experiences on academic preparation and actual industry practice during the intership. Their experiences were identified as positive and negative. On the positive side, four themes emerged from the responses during the personal interview.

1. Productive Contribution and Work Support. The informants consistently observed that student interns provided meaningful contributions to the workplace by assisting in routine tasks, supporting daily operations, and helping the staff focus on more complex assignments. These contributions were not only beneficial in improving workflow efficiency but also gave interns a practical avenue to apply their academic knowledge in a real-world setting. From encoding data to assisting in audits, the interns' presence helped reduce workload while also enabling the interns to build hands-on experience in professional environments. As for the informant's narrative:

Informant 1 shared that:

Student interns contribute to the organization because they help accelerate the completion of daily tasks, contributing to more efficient work processes. At the same time, they can apply and develop their knowledge in an actual work setting (*Informant 1).*

Informant 3 detailed that:

Interns helped us in many ways. They already have technical knowledge, such as preparing working papers and account analysis. We were able to delegate some tasks to them without needing close supervision (Informant 3).

As well as Informant 5 narrated that:

Student interns help us by making our tasks more manageable. They bring fresh energy and ideas to the team, which can be refreshing and even motivating for our staff (Informant 5).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it underscores the mutually beneficial nature of internship programs. Interns not only gain exposure and training but also help host companies function more smoothly. When interns are trusted with relevant tasks, it builds their competence and confidence while relieving regular employees from routine duties. It highlights the importance of structured onboarding and task allocation aligned with interns' capabilities. According to Narayanan et al (2010), internships serve as a "bridge" that allows students to apply theoretical knowledge while simultaneously providing value to organizations. Additionally, Crawford and Wang (2019) emphasized that when interns are given meaningful responsibilities, both organizational productivity and intern engagement improve significantly.

In like manner, It highlights how student interns, despite being in training, play a valuable role in the day-to-day operations of host companies. Industry supervisors observed that interns effectively assisted with routine and administrative tasks, allowing regular staff to focus on high-priority responsibilities. Their involvement not only enhances productivity but also provides companies with fresh perspectives and enthusiasm in the workplace. Furthermore, it demonstrates that internship programs are not merely academic exercises but can lead to meaningful workforce contributions when interns are well-prepared and appropriately deployed.

The implication of this theme is two-fold: for academic institutions, it emphasizes the need to equip students with foundational skills before deployment adequately; for companies, it encourages structured task assignments that enable interns to contribute without excessive supervision. The more interns are aligned with the needs of the workplace, the more productive and mutually beneficial the internship becomes. It supports the idea that internships should be viewed as a two-way engagement, both developmental and contributive.

Research affirms that interns can meaningfully contribute to organizational productivity when they are placed in roles that match their academic background and are given appropriate supervision. According to Gault et al. (2018), internships provide an opportunity for students to apply their knowledge while simultaneously benefiting employers through valuable task support and fresh insights. Similarly, Jackson and Wilton (2017) argue that internships enhance organizational capacity and offer employers a pipeline for talent development, provided there is proper alignment and structure in task assignment.

2. Fast Learners and Adaptability to Real Tasks. The informants view many student interns, despite initial challenges, as quickly adapting to their assigned tasks and the fast-paced demands of the workplace. Their ability to observe, ask questions, and apply feedback allowed them to transition from learners to contributors in a relatively short time. This adaptability was evident in tasks such as data handling, audit procedures, and office operations, where interns not only learned the processes but demonstrated initiative and independent work habits as the internship progressed. According to the informants' narratives:

Informant 2 said that :

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Applying the knowledge they have learned is one of the obstacles I have seen, but I also applaud how quickly and nimbly they pick things up (*Informant 2*).

Informant 4 also added:

I encouraged them to ask questions and try things step by step. It made them more comfortable and eager to learn (Informant 4).

As for Informant 10:

Once they adjust to the office environment, they can contribute. We have had interns who assisted in financial reports and suggested process improvements (*Informant 10).*

Based on the narratives of the informants, the value of experiential learning, particularly how structured exposure to real tasks can cultivate adaptability in student interns, is highlighted. It implies that with the right balance of guidance and autonomy, interns are capable of rapid skill acquisition and behavioral adjustment. Academic institutions can support this by incorporating more simulation-based and practical experiences within the curriculum, thus shortening the adjustment curve when students enter industry settings.

Beenen and Mrousseau (2010) found that interns who receive task-relevant feedback and opportunities to engage in actual work tend to exhibit accelerated learning and greater role clarity. Maertz et al. (2014) also concluded that early-stage autonomy and constructive feedback are key predictors of successful internship performance and student growth.

In addition, this theme reflects how student interns quickly adapt to real-world demands once they are immersed in the workplace environment. Industry supervisors observed that although interns initially encountered challenges, many demonstrated strong learning curves, absorbing new information, adjusting to professional routines, and independently completing tasks over time. Their adaptability is especially appreciated in fast-paced work settings where quick onboarding is essential. Such observations reveal that today's students possess a baseline capacity to translate academic knowledge into practical outputs, particularly when given appropriate guidance and encouragement.

It implies that academic preparation should go beyond theoretical instruction by integrating adaptive learning strategies and opportunities for independent problem-solving. The ability to learn quickly and adapt is a critical workplace competency, and institutions should focus on building these traits through case studies, simulations, and field-based exposures. Furthermore, organizations benefit when they establish an onboarding culture that nurtures early learning and provides clear expectations.

Adaptability and rapid learning are consistently cited as key traits for employability and workplace effectiveness. According to Finch, Peacock, Levallet, and Foster (2016), employers increasingly prioritize soft skills such as adaptability and initiative, as they directly impact an intern's ability to function in dynamic work settings. Likewise, Succi and Canovi (2020) emphasize that fast learners who can quickly integrate into real tasks are perceived as more competent and are more likely to be retained by the organization.

3. Demonstration of Professionalism and Work Ethics. The informants consistently noted that many student interns exhibited commendable levels of professionalism and work ethic during their practicum. These were demonstrated through punctuality, respect for organizational protocols, willingness to learn, accountability for assigned tasks, and overall responsible behavior in the workplace. Such attributes contributed positively not only to the interns' personal growth but also to the efficiency and morale of their host teams. These behaviors suggest that the values emphasized during academic instruction are being internalized and effectively applied in real-world settings. According to their narratives:

Informant 2 said that:

Interns exhibit professionalism, being responsible, punctual, and committed to their roles (*Informant 2*).

While Informant 6 mentioned:

I am expecting that they are more professional, and they possess a strong work ethic (Informant 6).

Informant 8 added:

They follow the proper dress code, show up on time, and interact respectfully with coworkers. These are behaviors we highly value (Informant 8).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies that the integration of professional values within the academic curriculum, such as punctuality, integrity, and respect for workplace standards, is being effectively applied. It reinforces the need for academic institutions to continue embedding soft skills and ethical frameworks into their instructional design, ensuring students are not only technically competent but also prepared to conduct themselves appropriately in professional environments.

According to Jackson and Wilton (2017), professionalism and work ethics are highly valued by employers and are among the most critical attributes for graduate employability. Similarly, Andrews and Higson

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(2008) emphasize that developing employability skills, including work ethics and personal conduct, should be a central goal of higher education programs to align graduates with workplace expectations.

Moreover, student interns exhibit punctuality, accountability, respectfulness, and dedication to their assigned responsibilities, core indicators of professionalism and a strong work ethic. Industry supervisors observed that interns who conduct themselves professionally contribute positively to the organization's culture and efficiency, even when performing basic or routine tasks. Such behaviors are not only essential for smooth workplace integration but also serve as early indicators of future employability. Supervisors emphasized that students who consistently act responsibly and show initiative tend to stand out and are often trusted with more complex tasks over time.

The presence of professionalism and a strong work ethic among interns implies the effectiveness of values-based education and pre-internship preparation provided by academic institutions. This theme underscores the need for schools to reinforce professional conduct through orientation programs, codes of ethics, and workplace immersion activities. Cultivating these attributes early can improve students' transition into the workforce and increase employer confidence in academic-industry partnerships.

Professionalism is a foundational trait that employers consistently rank as essential for workplace success. According to Jackson (2016), graduates who demonstrate punctuality, reliability, and a strong work ethic are more likely to be viewed as ready for employment. Similarly, Robles (2012) identified professionalism and work ethic as among the top ten soft skills valued by employers, reinforcing the importance of embedding these in academic training.

4. Foundational Technical and Business Knowledge. The informants recognize that student interns arrived with a solid grounding in technical and business fundamentals, particularly in areas such as basic accounting principles, data encoding, financial analysis, and familiarity with tools like Microsoft Excel, Word, and PowerPoint presentations. This foundational knowledge allowed interns to integrate more quickly into their roles and execute routine tasks with minimal supervision. Such readiness suggests that academic institutions are successfully delivering core content necessary for entry-level professional work, bridging classroom theory with operational basics. As the informant's narrative:

Informant 3 disccused that:

*Interns are already familiar with accounting and auditing terminology and can understand and execute audit programs. Moreover, other business-related transactions can also be identif*ied *(Informant 3)*.

Informant 4 also contributed that:

They already know basic tools like Microsoft Excel, Word, and PowerPoint presentations, which help in our daily routines (Informant 4).

Informant 5 shared:

They bring with them foundational knowledge in business management that makes adapting easier (Informant 5).

Based on the narratives of the informants, the presence of foundational business and technical skills among interns highlights the effectiveness of current academic curricula in preparing students for initial workplace tasks. However, it also signals the importance of continually updating curriculum content to maintain relevance to industry tools and standards. Institutions should ensure that foundational learning remains responsive to the evolving demands of the workplace, especially with the increasing integration of digital tools in business processes.

Tymon (2013) emphasized that while employers value soft skills, they also expect graduates to possess a solid technical foundation that enables immediate contribution to the organization. Yorke (2006) similarly argued that employability is underpinned by a blend of subject-specific knowledge and practical abilities that must be continuously adapted to meet the needs of modern industry.

Furthermore, this theme reflects the recognition from industry supervisors that many student interns arrive with adequate knowledge of business concepts, accounting principles, and basic software applications (e.g., Excel, bookkeeping tools). These foundational skills enable interns to understand assigned tasks quickly, contribute meaningfully to team efforts, and adapt to real work situations. Their prior classroom exposure to core business topics equips them to engage in basic auditing, data encoding, and financial documentation tasks with minimal instruction. Having this academic groundwork bridges the gap between entry-level internship roles and more advanced workplace demands. It allows supervisors to delegate essential yet manageable duties to interns, optimizing both learning and productivity.

The presence of solid foundational knowledge suggests that higher education institutions are generally successful in equipping students with relevant core competencies. However, it also points to the need for

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continuous curriculum evaluation to ensure these technical skills remain aligned with evolving industry practices. Internships serve as an ideal testing ground for assessing the practical value of what is taught in school, prompting academic institutions to strengthen the connection between theoretical instruction and practical workplace application.

Research shows that technical and domain-specific knowledge forms the backbone of job readiness. According to Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin, and Zehner (2013), employers value graduates with strong foundational knowledge in their fields, as it allows for smoother transitions and faster productivity in professional settings. Meanwhile, Teijeiro et al. (2013) emphasize the necessity of aligning curriculum content with real-world job requirements to enhance graduate employability and workplace integration.

To summarized, the internship experience was marked by mutually reinforcing benefits across students, coordinators, and industry supervisors. Student interns described a deepened professional and personal growth as they gained skill development and exposure to industry tools, built confidence through experiential learning, and experienced a supportive work environment with encouraging mentors, which collectively expanded their industry awareness and readiness. Internship coordinators highlighted active monitoring and collaboration with host training establishments, the value of structured academic requirements for internship eligibility, and the chance to witness how internships serve as a confidence-boosting, experiential learning process for students. Meanwhile, industry supervisors emphasized interns' productive contributions and work support, their fast learning and adaptability to real tasks, the interns' professionalism and sound work ethics, and the application of foundational technical and business knowledge in actual workplace contexts.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal a shared recognition that well-planned internships foster not only technical proficiency but also holistic growth, demonstrating the importance of sustained school–industry partnerships and responsive mentoring to prepare graduates for dynamic professional environments.

2. Negative Experiences

A. Student Interns

The first question asked of the student intern-informants relates to their experiences on academic preparation and actual industry practice during the intership. Their experiences were identified as positive and negative. On the negative side, five themes emerged from the responses during the personal interview.

1. Gaps Between Theory and Actual Practice. One of the recurring concerns voiced by student interns centers on the evident disparity between classroom instruction and workplace realities. While academic preparation provides a theoretical foundation, many interns reported feeling unprepared when faced with practical tasks that required real-time decision-making, technical competencies, or the use of specific industry tools. This disconnect highlights a gap in curriculum alignment, where the knowledge gained in academic settings does not always translate seamlessly into the competencies required in actual job functions. As a researcher, this theme underscores the need to reevaluate the practical integration of theory in higher education, particularly within programs designed to bridge students to professional roles. As the informant's narrative:

As per Informant 1:

In school, we focused more on theories, while in the workplace, tasks required practical knowledge (Informant 1).

Informant 6 said:

As I have observed, it would be more relevant if the school had simulations (Informant 6).

While Informant 8 added:

Lessons are only being taught, but mainly not demonstrated (Informant 8).

Lastly, Informant 9 narrated that:

In school, it is about memorizing theory, which does not always translate into real-world skills (Informant 9).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies a critical need for curriculum enhancement that integrates more experiential learning strategies. Academic institutions must collaborate more closely with industry partners to ensure that the skills taught in classrooms are directly relevant to the expectations of the field. Internship programs, in particular, should be structured to serve as a bridge where theoretical knowledge is consistently reinforced through real-world application. Failing to address this gap may result in graduates who are academically competent yet underprepared for actual job performance, thereby affecting both employability and workplace productivity.

According to Jackson (2016), the disconnect between university education and industry expectations continues to be a pressing challenge, often leading to a lack of workplace readiness among

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graduates. Similarly, Billett (2019) suggests that authentic learning opportunities and close engagement with industry contexts are essential for bridging the theory-practice divide and enhancing graduate employability.

Similarly, understanding the gap between theoretical learning and actual workplace practices is vital in evaluating the effectiveness of academic programs in preparing students for the demands of professional life. When this gap is not addressed, students may experience difficulty applying learned concepts, reducing their confidence and effectiveness during internships. Recognizing this issue allows academic institutions to realign their teaching methodologies and curriculum with real-world industry expectations.

The theme underscores the necessity for stronger integration of practical learning strategies within academic programs. Institutions must adopt experiential learning methods such as case studies, industry simulations, and the use of actual tools and software to reduce the learning curve when students enter the workforce. Collaborating with industry stakeholders during curriculum development can also help ensure that students are not only knowledgeable in theory but also prepared to perform effectively in practice. Bridging this gap improves employability and better aligns graduate output with labor market needs.

The discrepancy between academic preparation and industry expectations has been a longstanding concern in higher education. According to Nambiar et al. (2022), internships often reveal inadequacies in curriculum design, particularly in preparing students for the demands of dynamic professional environments. Similarly, Kumar and Singh (2021) emphasize that to enhance employability, institutions must ensure curriculum content is consistently updated with industry-aligned competencies and practices.

2. Adjustment and Adaptation Challenges. The informants highlighted the transitional stress that students experience when shifting from a structured academic setting to a dynamic industry environment. The struggle to quickly assimilate workplace protocols, expectations, and communication styles often leads to hesitation and reduced confidence during the early stages of the internship. It suggests that while students may be academically prepared, the social and psychological adjustment to workplace realities remains a critical area for development in internship design and preparation programs. As the informant's narrative:

Informant 1 shared that:

Adjusting to real workplace processes, which were more fast-paced, I find it hard to cope with the reality since in school, it was purely theoretical (Informant 1).

Informant 8 added:

All the things I learned in school were only 30% of the actual thing (Informant 8).

As per Informant 10:

It was challenging at first because I could not adapt to the scenario; it was my first time being in an actual office setting, and since I came from the province, I appreciated the opportunity (Informant 10).

Based on the narratives of the informants, the recurring adjustment difficulties reported by student interns point to a need for enhanced pre-internship preparation that goes beyond technical knowledge. Academic institutions should consider incorporating adaptive skill training, such as situational simulations, workplace immersion activities, and mentoring programs that build resilience and interpersonal confidence. It could ease the psychological and professional transition of students into the workplace. Strengthening the support system for interns during the early stages of deployment may also enhance their ability to adapt more efficiently, ensuring a more productive and meaningful internship experience.

Scholars have emphasized that transitioning from academic to professional environments often brings challenges that require not only cognitive skills but also emotional and social adaptability. According to Jackson and Collings (2022), students frequently encounter “transition shock” when entering the workforce, necessitating institution-led initiatives to bridge the gap between academic expectations and workplace realities. Similarly, Rowe and Zegwaard (2023) highlight that structured onboarding and reflective practices during internships significantly improve students’ adjustment and performance.

In addtition, Internship programs often present a steep learning curve for students transitioning from academic environments to professional settings. The need to adapt to new routines, organizational culture, and work expectations can result in stress and confusion. Many student interns initially struggle with workplace norms, such as time management, reporting structures, interpersonal dynamics, and unfamiliar workflows. These adjustment challenges can

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significantly affect their learning outcomes and overall internship performance.

To support smoother transitions, academic institutions must integrate preparatory programs that simulate real workplace conditions. Workshops focusing on workplace adaptability, time management, and professional communication can equip students with the soft skills necessary to cope with unfamiliar environments. Furthermore, mentorship and orientation initiatives, both from schools and host companies, can foster a more supportive onboarding experience for student interns, helping them adapt more confidently and efficiently.

The transition from academic to professional life often brings psychological and practical difficulties. According to Torres and Milner (2021), students undergoing internships commonly face emotional and cognitive adjustments that affect their performance, requiring structured support systems from both educational and industry partners. Similarly, Huang et al. (2022) underscore the importance of pre-internship training and mentoring to ease student anxiety and enhance adaptive capacity in fast-paced work environments.

3. Lack of Familiarity with Tools and Office Systems. The narratives from student interns revealed that many of them encountered difficulties in using essential tools and systems commonly found in the workplace. Despite their academic preparation, some interns were unfamiliar with standard office software, filing systems, and task management platforms used in real-world operations. This disconnect underscores a misalignment between academic training and industry expectations. The findings suggest that although students may grasp theoretical concepts, they struggle to apply them using actual industry technologies, thus limiting their confidence and productivity during the internship. As the informant's narrative:

As per Informant 6:

I had challenges, particularly with the office equipment such as the photocopier, cheque writer, printer, paper cutter, etc. (Informant 6).

Informant 10 explained that:

In the company, everything was automated. I had to learn on the spot, and I found it difficult since we did not do it at school, or it was not part of our curriculum (Informant 10).

Informant 2 added that:

Because they are using digital equipment, it took me an effort to learn the documentation flow and workflow expectations, and it is pretty unique to a business environment (Informant 2).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies that the lack of familiarity with workplace tools indicates a pressing need for curriculum modernization that includes early exposure to industry-relevant software and digital systems. Higher education institutions must prioritize the integration of practical technology training through simulation labs, case-based learning, and partnerships with industry experts. Doing so can bridge the operational readiness gap and ensure that students are not only conceptually competent but also practically skilled in using tools they will encounter in their professional settings. Failing to address this gap may result in reduced internship efficiency and missed learning opportunities.

Multiple studies affirm that experiential training with digital tools prior to deployment enhances students' workplace readiness. According to Prihantoro and Yuliana (2022), digital literacy and familiarity with office systems are now baseline competencies for business students entering the workforce. Likewise, Billett (2023) emphasizes that simulated workplace experiences and the use of authentic tools during coursework significantly improve learners' transition to practice and ability to contribute meaningfully during internships.

Moreover, student interns frequently encounter challenges when using industry-standard tools, software, and office systems that were not introduced in their academic training. This lack of familiarity can hinder their efficiency, reduce their confidence, and delay their ability to contribute meaningfully to workplace tasks. The gap between school-based simulations and actual business operations can create a steep learning curve, especially in technology-driven environments.

There is a pressing need for academic programs to integrate real-world business tools and platforms into coursework. Curricula should include hands-on practice with widely-used software such as accounting systems, office productivity suites, and project management tools. Collaborating with industry partners to identify relevant technologies and training resources can better equip students prior to deployment, reducing adjustment time and increasing productivity during internships.

Industry expectations often outpace the digital readiness of students. As observed by Al-Harthi and Spichkova (2022), a significant number of interns report

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difficulties when faced with unfamiliar digital systems, revealing a disconnect between academic instruction and workplace practice. Meanwhile, Kumi-Yeboah et al. (2021) emphasize that experiential learning environments that integrate authentic digital tools can significantly enhance student preparedness and bridge the digital competence gap.

4. Limited or Repetitive Task Assignments. There is a recurring concern regarding the nature of tasks assigned during their internships. Many described their work as limited to basic, repetitive tasks such as data encoding, photocopying, or document filing, which did not fully reflect their academic training or potential. While some repetition is expected in entry-level roles, excessive monotony hindered their engagement, learning, and ability to explore the organization's diverse functions. This experience left interns feeling underutilized and disconnected from the broader goals of professional development. As the informant's narrative:

Informant 5 discussed that:

We were only exposed to aspects related to one area of the company's day-to-day operations, specifically in the area where I am assigned. (Informant 5).

Informant 6 added:

They are not allowing us to do tasks that they consider highly confidential, and we are not exposed to some areas that are vital to my course. I am not expecting more, but at least give us the idea about the process and how it affects the actual business operation (Informant 6).

Informant 10:

My tasks mainly were document filing, encoding, and basic bookkeeping. And sometimes we just did filing and photocopying of different papers, particularly the ones in thermal paper. They need us to photocopy it according to their protocol (Informant 10).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies that repetitive assignments indicate a need for internship programs to be more thoughtfully designed to include diverse and progressively challenging tasks. Internship hosts and academic institutions should collaborate to set clear, competency-based learning objectives that ensure interns are exposed to a broader array of work experiences. Incorporating task rotation or mentorship-guided learning projects can offer students a richer, more meaningful engagement with their roles, ultimately preparing them for full-time employment. Without such interventions, internships risk becoming procedural rather than developmental.

Research emphasizes that internships should provide varied and meaningful tasks aligned with students' educational background and career aspirations. According to Jackson (2021), a lack of task variety diminishes student motivation and fails to support the development of transferable skills. Similarly, Silva et al. (2022) argue that structured and goal-oriented internships, with access to hands-on learning, lead to greater satisfaction and perceived competence among interns.

Furthermore, when student interns are consistently given limited or repetitive tasks such as clerical work, data encoding, or basic errands, they are deprived of opportunities for growth and meaningful learning. It restricts their ability to apply academic concepts, develop critical thinking, and gain a comprehensive understanding of workplace operations. Such experiences can diminish motivation and lead to a sense of underutilization and disengagement.

Academic institutions and industry partners must collaboratively design internship programs that offer balanced exposure. While routine tasks are part of workplace learning, interns should also be gradually introduced to more complex, relevant responsibilities aligned with their field of study. Structured internship plans, including learning goals and skill progression pathways, can help ensure interns gain valuable experiences that contribute to their professional development.

According to Rowe and Zegwaard (2017), internships that fail to challenge students or align with their academic background risk reducing the Internship to a formality rather than a transformative experience. Similarly, Devasagayam et al. (2020) argue that meaningful task assignments are essential in developing employability skills and increasing student engagement during work-integrated learning.

5. Personality and Communication Barriers. Challenges emerged in the form of personality and communication barriers. Several informants admitted struggling with shyness, low self-esteem, or hesitation when interacting with colleagues, supervisors, or clients. These barriers often limited their ability to ask questions, seek help, or actively participate in collaborative tasks. While they possessed the technical knowledge required, their lack of confidence in professional conversations hindered their full integration into the workplace environment. This disconnect revealed that communication is not just a soft skill but a core competency necessary for a successful internship. As the informant's narrative:

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Informant 6 relayed that:

Since I am shy, my lack of confidence hampers my communication with other people, especially during my OJT, since that was my first time attending a company, and I find everything very formal and professional (Informant 6).

Informant 5 replied that:

I was never really smart academically, but I made up for it with practicality (Informant 5).

While Informant 10 inferred that:

I was not fully prepared for communicating with the supervisor and with the other employees since I am not used to talking with other people professionally (Informant 10).

Informant 8:

It was making me anxious and thrilled at the same time to converse with them, since I am only an intern, but I just did my best during my tour of duty in the company (Informant 8).

Based on the narratives of the informants, the presence of communication and personality-related barriers implies a critical gap in the pre-internship preparation offered by academic institutions. Schools must integrate confidence-building strategies such as group presentations, professional communication workshops, mock interviews, and role-playing activities into the curriculum. These tools can help students build interpersonal skills and reduce anxiety in real-world scenarios. Moreover, fostering emotional intelligence and self-awareness through reflective exercises can empower students to navigate workplace dynamics more effectively. Addressing these personal development needs is essential for maximizing both learning outcomes and organizational contributions during the internship.

Studies highlight that strong communication and interpersonal skills are vital for internship success and future employability. According to Finch et al. (2023), employers increasingly prioritize emotional intelligence and communication over technical expertise alone. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2021) stress that structured interventions in academic programs can significantly enhance students' self-confidence and communicative competence, particularly in high-stakes professional environments.

In like manner, personality traits such as shyness, low self-confidence, and reluctance to communicate pose significant challenges during internships. These barriers can hinder student interns from engaging effectively with colleagues, asking questions, or asserting themselves in a professional setting. As communication is a cornerstone of workplace success, such limitations may affect not only individual learning but also team productivity and intern evaluation.

To mitigate these issues, academic institutions must integrate communication-focused training and confidence-building initiatives into the curriculum. Pre-internship programs such as mock interviews, role-playing exercises, public speaking workshops, and workplace etiquette seminars can better prepare students. Industry partners, on the other hand, can help by fostering inclusive and supportive environments that encourage participation and gradual exposure to real interactions.

Poor communication skills and lack of confidence are among the most cited shortcomings of fresh graduates during internships. As noted by Jackson and Wilton (2017), workplace readiness must include interpersonal skills development, as soft skills are highly valued by employers across industries. Additionally, Finch et al. (2020) emphasize that targeted pre-internship interventions significantly improve students' self-efficacy and ability to communicate in diverse workplace settings.

B. Internship Coordinators

The first question was also asked to the Internship Coordinators, which relates to their experiences on academic preparation and actual industry practice during the internship. Their experiences were identified as positive and negative. On the negative side, three themes emerged from the responses during the personal interview.

1. Absence of Formal Industry Partnerships and Limited Feedback Mechanisms. It becomes evident that a lack of formalized industry partnerships and inadequate feedback systems creates significant challenges in managing and improving internship programs. Without Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs) or structured communication channels, coordinators face difficulties in aligning academic expectations with industry practices. The absence of regular feedback also limits the capacity of schools to assess student performance comprehensively or to implement timely improvements. This disconnection leads to missed opportunities for collaborative planning and weakens the overall effectiveness of internship placements. As the informant's narrative:

Informant 2 said that:

Technically, there was no literal communication with the companies. There was no MOA or MOU to be called the basis for partnership (Informant 2).

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As per Informant 3:

Technically, there was no feedback at all. The coordinators are limited only in terms of their actions on the given budget. At the same time, we can visit the company only once. Sometimes we visited companies only, but the students had already done their duty hours (Informant 3).

While Informant 5 shared:

One common challenge I face when coordinating with industry partners here in Lapu-Lapu City is ensuring consistent communication (*Informant 5).*

Based on the narratives of the informants, the lack of formal partnerships and consistent feedback loops compromises the quality and relevance of internship programs. Strong, structured partnerships between academic institutions and industry are crucial in ensuring that interns receive meaningful, guided experiences. When communication is only transactional, limited to documents like internship contracts, and there is little room for continuous improvement or shared accountability. Establishing formal channels for feedback and collaboration is essential to fostering dynamic school-industry relationships that benefit both students and host organizations.

According to Jackson (2022), strong collaboration between universities and industry, primarily through formal agreements and feedback systems, helps ensure that academic preparation aligns with real-world expectations. Moreover, Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) emphasize that sustained communication between educational providers and employers enhances student learning by enabling responsive and adaptive internship structures.

In like manner, the lack of formalized partnerships and precise feedback mechanisms between academic institutions and industry partners highlights a significant gap in ensuring effective and collaborative internship programs. Without Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), structured feedback, or clear communication channels, coordination becomes reactive rather than proactive, which can negatively affect student learning, performance assessment, and program improvement. Formal partnerships foster accountability, set expectations, and support mutual growth between academia and industry.

The absence of these structured linkages limits the internship program's potential to evolve into a fully integrated experiential learning platform. Internship coordinators may struggle to monitor student progress, ensure relevant placement tasks, or address concerns raised by either party. Moreover, the absence of direct industry feedback prevents curriculum improvements that could align academic instruction with workplace demands. Establishing formal agreements and regular feedback sessions will help close this gap and build long-term partnerships essential for student readiness and organizational collaboration.

The lack of formal linkages between universities and industry limits the effectiveness of internship programs. According to Salamon and Smith (2023), formal agreements like MOUs and structured feedback systems are critical in maintaining consistent expectations and ensuring productive academic–industry collaborations. Likewise, Arora and Pandey (2021) stress the importance of communication loops between host companies and educational institutions, as these create the foundation for feedback-informed curriculum development and improved internship oversight.

2. Technical Competency Deficit. The informants identified a noticeable gap in students' technical competencies. While many interns enter the workplace with theoretical knowledge, they often struggle when expected to use industry-specific software, tools, or perform office-based tasks that require digital literacy. Internship coordinators observed that students frequently need significant orientation and guidance to perform even basic tasks involving spreadsheet applications, document formatting, or enterprise systems. This disconnect between classroom instruction and real-world technological demands highlights a significant shortfall in curriculum alignment. As for the informant's narrative:

Informant 5 said that:

There are still noticeable gaps, especially when it comes to the use of industry-specific software and actual office workflows (Informant 5).

Informant 2 shared:

Our students are academically prepared, but many are still adjusting to the real-world pace and operational systems (Informant 2).

Informant 4 added that:

It shows there is still room to better align classroom learning with industry expectations (Informant 4).

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies that the deficiency in technical competencies among student interns hinders their ability to

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contribute effectively during their internship period and reflects a broader issue in academic preparation. Without exposure to industry-standard tools, such as accounting software, productivity platforms, or data systems, students remain underprepared for workplace tasks. It suggests a need for academic programs to strengthen practical technology training by integrating hands-on digital skill development into coursework, supported by regular industry consultations to ensure alignment with current trends and expectations.

Literature underscores the importance of embedding digital competence into higher education programs. According to Tang and Chaw (2019), integrating digital literacy into the curriculum is essential to prepare students for future employability and workplace readiness. Similarly, a study by Vial (2019) on digital transformation in organizations emphasizes that educational institutions must respond to evolving technological demands by fostering student capabilities in key software and digital systems that are commonly used in professional environments.

Likewise, technical competency is fundamental to the success of student interns, especially in business and accountancy programs where software proficiency, data management, and process execution are critical. A deficit in these areas undermines the student's ability to meet internship expectations and limits their contribution to the host organization. Internship coordinators view this gap as a consequence of either inadequate practical exposure in the curriculum or misalignment between classroom instruction and current industry tools and practices.

When students enter internships lacking core technical competencies such as software literacy, documentation practices, or office equipment handling, this can burden the host company and affect the credibility of the academic program. Internship coordinators are then limited in their ability to ensure that interns can seamlessly integrate into the workplace. To address this, academic institutions must update course content to include hands-on training and simulation using industry-relevant tools. Strengthening these competencies will not only boost students' workplace readiness but also improve their confidence and independence during the Internship.

Technical competency gaps among students often stem from traditional teaching methods that neglect real-world application. As observed by Chugh and Ruhi (2022), integrating enterprise systems and technology applications into curricula significantly improves students' job readiness. Furthermore, Dabbagh and Menascé (2023) argue that experiential learning environments equipped with modern tools foster better retention of skills and ensure alignment with industry expectations, especially in fields like business and accounting.

3. Task-Internship Mismatch and Industry Expectations. The informants identified a significant issue encountered during student internships, namely the misalignment between the assigned tasks and the academic background or field of study of the interns. In several cases, students were tasked with work that bore little relevance to their specialization, limiting the educational value of the internship. Moreover, industry partners often held unrealistic expectations, assuming interns possessed professional-level skills or could perform without supervision. This lack of alignment leads to missed learning opportunities and can diminish the interns' motivation and confidence. It also signals the need for more transparent communication and role definition between schools and host companies. As for the informant's narrative:

As per Informant 4:

Some companies expect interns to be immediately capable of doing things or office work, forgetting that they are still students (*Informant 4)*.

While Informant 3 also shared:

There are also times when the tasks given to interns do not fully match their course specialization, which affects their learning experience (*Informant 3)*.

Informant 5 said that:

Another challenge is when students are assigned to tasks that do not match their field of study, which limits their learning (*Informant 5).*

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies that the mismatch between internship roles and student preparation underscores the need for stronger pre-deployment planning and structured internship agreements. Educational institutions must work closely with host training establishments (HTEs) to set realistic expectations and ensure that task assignments reflect the students' level of competence and academic focus. Without this alignment, the internship fails to serve as a bridge between theory and practice. Structured orientation sessions, joint task planning, and feedback loops between coordinators and supervisors are critical to improving task relevance and ensuring a developmental experience for the intern.

As stated by Jackson (2015), internships are most beneficial when the tasks assigned are challenging yet aligned with the intern's field of study, as this allows for the practical application of academic learning.

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Additionally, Gault, Leach, and Duey (2010) emphasize that clear role expectations and communication between academia and industry partners are essential to prevent misalignment and ensure productive internship experiences.

Similarly, a critical component of a successful internship lies in the alignment between the intern's academic preparation and the tasks assigned by host training establishments (HTEs). However, internship coordinators often observe a mismatch wherein students are assigned duties either irrelevant to their field of study or disproportionately complex for their level of preparation. In some cases, companies expect interns to function as regular employees, which fails to recognize the developmental nature of internships.

This misalignment not only hampers the learning experience of student interns but also leads to dissatisfaction among host companies and academic institutions. When expectations are unclear or miscommunicated, interns may be underutilized or overwhelmed. Internship coordinators must serve as active mediators, clearly defining the learning outcomes of internships and ensuring that HTEs understand the developmental stage of the students. Institutions should conduct pre-deployment consultations with companies to clarify roles and ensure alignment with program objectives.

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of aligning internship roles with academic goals. According to Jackson and Wilton (2017), a mismatch between educational outcomes and workplace tasks diminishes the effectiveness of internships in building employability skills. Likewise, Tran and Soejatminah (2022) highlight that setting realistic expectations and ensuring task relevance are essential for a meaningful internship experience, especially in structured academic-industry collaborations.

C. Industry Supervisors

The first question was also asked of the Industry supervisors, which relates to their experiences on academic preparation and actual industry practice during the internship. Their experiences were identified as positive and negative. On the negative side, four themes emerged from the responses during the personal interview.

1. Limited Readiness and Task Alignment. It was evident from the informants that many student interns enter the workplace lacking full readiness for industry tasks. While some possess theoretical knowledge, there appears to be a gap in their ability to apply it in real-world scenarios immediately. Supervisors noted challenges such as mismatched assignments and inadequate familiarity with industry standards or expectations. Misalignment not only affects interns' learning but can also limit their productivity in the workplace. These findings highlight the critical need for improved coordination between academic institutions and industry hosts to ensure that student placement and training expectations are well-aligned. As for the informants' narratives:

As per Informant 6:

Technically, they are not yet ready since they need more guidance on how to navigate the workplace setting. If I may highlight their personality, they are shy most of the time, but as they go along, they can recover somehow. For me, personality matters above all, such as the intern's attitude and behaviour (Informant 6).

While Informant 8 narrated:

Some interns struggle to keep up with tasks that require workplace experience or that do not align with their course, or maybe they are not just exposed to the latest trends and equipment in the industry (Informant 7).

Informant 10 added that:

They were almost ready. There was still room for improvement. Some skills can be learned only in actual working environments, or maybe the school itself must have simulation-based solutions for this particular scenario *(Informant 10).*

Based on the narratives of the informants, it implies a need for academic institutions to enhance the alignment between curriculum content and the real demands of the workplace. Proper coordination, task analysis, and pre-internship orientations involving both schools and host companies could help address misaligned tasks. When roles are clearly defined and matched to students' competencies, it improves both learning outcomes and the company's operational efficiency. Strengthening the partnership between academia and industry is essential to bridge this readiness gap.

Recent studies echo the same concern regarding the disconnect between student preparedness and industry expectations. According to Caballero & Walker (2021), interns often struggle to perform tasks effectively due to insufficient training or a lack of exposure to workplace realities during their academic preparation. Similarly, Sutarto et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of curriculum reform and early industry immersion to better prepare students for task-related expectations in professional settings.

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In addtition, Industry supervisors commonly observed that student interns often arrive with insufficient preparedness, especially in aligning their academic training with actual job responsibilities. This misalignment leads to inefficiencies in task execution, as students struggle to meet expectations or require additional supervision. The gap highlights the need for improved preparatory programs that address both technical and soft skills required in the workplace.

This theme implies a pressing need for academic institutions to reevaluate the structure and content of their internship programs. Coordinated pre-internship assessments, simulation-based training, and better communication between schools and host training establishments (HTEs) could enhance readiness. Tailoring internship placements based on the student's academic competencies and career trajectory will also improve task alignment and foster a more meaningful internship experience for both the intern and the host company.

Limited readiness among student interns remains a widespread concern in experiential learning. According to Manickam and Abdul Rahman (2022), many students lack the necessary workplace readiness due to insufficient alignment between institutional training and real-world job functions. Likewise, Nguyen and Doan (2023) found that misaligned internship roles often result in decreased intern confidence, reduced productivity, and missed learning opportunities.

2. Difficulty Applying Theory to Practice. As for the informants, many student interns experience a noticeable struggle in translating classroom knowledge into practical tasks. Despite having foundational academic preparation, interns often find themselves unprepared when confronted with actual work scenarios, especially when these involve complex processes, unfamiliar software, or the fast-paced nature of the workplace. This gap reflects a recurring challenge in higher education where theoretical instruction is not adequately supplemented by experiential or contextual learning. This finding emphasizes the need to revisit teaching methodologies to incorporate more applied and competency-based approaches. According to their narratives:

Informant 2 said that:

Students struggle when asked to apply classroom knowledge to real work tasks, since according to them, there is only limited equipment and apparatuses for them to simulate in doing office work (Informant 2).

Informant 5 replied:

Interns often feel stressed when balancing job responsibilities with report writing and other academic tasks. During their internship, some subjects require the most attention, like a feasibility study (Informant 5).

Informant 7 share that:

Many interns are overwhelmed by the real business timelines and fast-paced operations (Informant 7).

Based on these narratives, the inability to effectively apply theoretical knowledge in the workplace can hinder an intern's performance and limit their contribution to the organization. It highlights a pressing need for educational institutions to strengthen practice-oriented learning strategies such as simulations, case-based instruction, and problem-solving workshops before deploying students to internships. Better integration of practical learning in the curriculum will improve students' confidence and their ability to engage with real-world professional expectations.

This concern is supported by the findings of Jackson and Wilton (2017), who point out that while students may be academically equipped, their capacity to transfer knowledge into practice is often underdeveloped. Likewise, Tran (2021) emphasizes that closing the gap between theoretical instruction and real-life practice requires closer collaboration between universities and industry in shaping curriculum content and delivery.

Moreover, Industry supervisors frequently noted that while interns possess theoretical knowledge from their academic training, they often struggle to apply this knowledge in real-world settings. The disconnect between classroom learning and professional expectations can hinder the intern's performance and limit their contribution to the organization. It highlights a critical gap in experiential readiness, emphasizing the need for practical integration within the academic setting.

This theme implies that educational institutions must adopt more experiential learning strategies, such as case studies, simulations, and capstone projects that mirror real industry scenarios. Strengthening the link between academic content and applied tasks will improve students' ability to transition from theory to practice. Moreover, incorporating problem-based learning and early exposure to industry-standard tools can significantly enhance student preparedness for internships.

The theory-practice gap is a longstanding issue in internship programs. Chin and Teoh (2021) assert

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that without adequate opportunities to apply theoretical frameworks in practical settings, students often fail to develop essential problem-solving skills. Similarly, Rahmat and Yusof (2023) emphasize the importance of integrating experiential learning approaches into business curricula to ensure that students are better equipped to adapt their knowledge to real-world job functions.

3. Lack of Confidence and Communication Skills. The informants determined a noticeable lack of confidence and underdeveloped communication skills. Interns often hesitate to ask questions, struggle to express ideas clearly, or show discomfort when interacting with supervisors, colleagues, or clients. This challenge hinders effective collaboration and slows down integration into the organizational culture. As the researcher, I interpret this as a developmental gap that extends beyond technical preparation, highlighting the importance of soft skills as essential competencies in professional settings. As for the informants' narratives:
As per Informant 1:

One of the challenges I had observed with student interns is building rapport with employees in the organization (Informant 1).

While Informant 4 shared:

They are being shy sometimes, which is normal, but it hinders their ability to ask questions or communicate freely (Informant 4).

Additionally, Informant 8:

Many interns lack confidence when speaking with senior staff or clients, making communication a struggle (Informant 8).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies that academic institutions should place greater emphasis on cultivating interpersonal and communication skills alongside technical knowledge. Activities such as role-playing, public speaking workshops, team-based projects, and simulated workplace interactions can prepare students to navigate real-world professional environments with greater confidence. Ensuring that students can communicate effectively and assertively is vital not only for internship success but also for long-term employability and leadership readiness.

Robles (2012) stresses the importance of soft skills, especially communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence, as critical determinants of workplace success. Similarly, Tymon (2013) found that employers often rate communication and self-confidence as top competencies lacking in graduates, suggesting that institutions should integrate soft skill training into the curriculum to bridge this expectation gap.

Furthermore, this theme emphasizes a critical soft skills gap observed by industry supervisors during the internship period. While student interns may exhibit technical competence, many struggle with expressing ideas, asking questions, or confidently engaging in workplace discussions. This lack of self-assurance and communication fluency can limit their ability to adapt, collaborate, and contribute effectively within the organization.

Academic institutions must give equal priority to developing soft skills alongside technical instruction. Programs such as public speaking workshops, mock interviews, collaborative projects, and reflective journaling can nurture students' self-esteem and communication abilities. By embedding soft skills training early and consistently in the curriculum, institutions can enhance students' workplace readiness and enable them to thrive in diverse professional settings.

Deficiencies in communication and interpersonal skills are a growing concern among employers. According to Suleman and Nelson (2021), graduates frequently lack the confidence and verbal communication skills necessary for team-based and client-facing roles. Additionally, Tran and Pham (2022) highlight that soft skills development must be an intentional and integrated part of higher education to address the demands of an evolving workplace.

4. Weak Presentation and Reporting Abilities. The informants have observed that while some interns can complete their technical tasks, many struggle when it comes to presenting their work clearly and professionally. It includes challenges in preparing reports, articulating findings to stakeholders, and adjusting their communication style to suit different audiences. As a researcher, I interpret this as a critical area for improvement in higher education, indicating that students may not be receiving sufficient practice or feedback on how to convey their ideas and outputs effectively in a business context. As for their narratives:
Informant 3 shared that:

Although they have technical knowledge, they need improvement in presenting outputs clearly to target audiences, or, in other words, the employees in our company (Informant 3).

Informant 6 also added:

They need to enhance their ability to communicate their work professionally, not just do the task but explain it as well (Informant 6).

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Informant 10:

Some interns are hesitant and lack confidence during reporting sessions. They need better training in presentation skills (Informant 10).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies that there is a need for academic institutions to enhance their curriculum by embedding structured opportunities for students to develop and practice their reporting and presentation skills. It can be addressed by incorporating regular oral presentations, business writing exercises, peer reviews, and simulated workplace reporting tasks. Doing so will prepare students not only to complete tasks competently but also to communicate their value and insights clearly as an essential component of professional success.

According to Jackson (2016), employers consistently rate communication and presentation skills as core competencies that many graduates lack, highlighting a misalignment between academic preparation and industry expectations. Furthermore, Clokie and Fourie (2016) emphasize that integrating oral presentation training within university programs significantly enhances students' ability to communicate in professional settings, increasing their workplace readiness.

In like manner, presentation and reporting skills are essential in translating technical work into comprehensible outputs for decision-making and collaboration. Industry supervisors observed that many student interns struggle to organize and communicate their findings, whether through written reports or verbal presentations. These limitations hinder the interns' ability to contribute meaningfully to team discussions and to showcase the value of their work to stakeholders.

Higher education institutions should integrate structured communication training into academic programs, with a focus on business report writing, data presentation, and public speaking. Embedding activities such as report simulations, oral defenses, and presentation-based assessments can help students gain confidence and proficiency. Enhancing these skills equips future professionals to articulate their work, support organizational goals, and interact effectively in diverse workplace contexts.

According to Jackling and De Lange (2021), graduates often fall short in professional communication, particularly in synthesizing and conveying complex information. Meanwhile, Velasco (2022) emphasizes the need for universities to provide intentional learning experiences that foster both written and oral communication, especially in disciplines like business and accounting, where clarity and accuracy are crucial.

To summarized, across all three groups of informants; student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors showed a common set of challenges emerged that highlighted the gaps between academic preparation and the realities of workplace practice.

Student interns described difficulties in bridging classroom knowledge with real-world tasks, revealing gaps between theory and actual practice. They also encountered adjustment and adaptation challenges, including anxiety when entering unfamiliar professional settings. Several reported a lack of familiarity with tools and office systems, which limited their efficiency, and some were assigned limited or repetitive tasks that did not fully develop their skills. Interpersonal issues such as personality and communication barriers further hindered confidence and integration into workplace teams.

Internship coordinators likewise experienced structural and procedural obstacles. They cited an absence of formal industry partnerships and limited feedback mechanisms, which weakened the continuity of school–industry collaboration. They also observed a technical competency deficit among some interns, reflecting gaps in curriculum alignment, and reported a task–internship mismatch where company expectations occasionally exceeded what students were trained to perform.

Industry supervisors reinforced these concerns from the employer perspective. They noted limited readiness and task alignment, where interns sometimes lacked the skills needed for assigned responsibilities. Supervisors also observed difficulty applying theory to practice, lack of confidence and communication skills, and weak presentation and reporting abilities, all of which affected the interns' overall workplace performance.

Collectively, these negative experiences underscore the persistent divide between academic preparation and professional demands. They point to the need for stronger curriculum–industry alignment, early exposure to industry-standard tools, and more structured feedback systems to support students, educators, and host companies in creating a more cohesive and mutually beneficial internship experience.

II. The Aspirations of Each Group of Informants

A. Student Interns

The second question that was asked of the

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student interns was about their aspirations to improve school-industry collaboration during the Internship. According to their responses, six themes emerged during the personal interview.

1. Strengthening Practical Exposure through Simulation-Based Training. The informants suggested that academic institutions should incorporate more simulation-based training and real-world tools into the curriculum to better prepare students for industry expectations. It reflects a critical gap between theoretical instruction and the technical realities of the workplace. Supervisors believe that exposure to software, case-based learning, and workplace simulations will enable interns to navigate their tasks and contribute more effectively confidently. As for their narratives:

Informant 1 shared:

Schools can provide more practical training, like simulations or case studies, and expose students to fundamental industry tools and processes (Informant 1).

Informant 3 also contributed that:

Schools should incorporate more hands-on, project-based learning that mirrors industry demands (Informant 3).

As per Informant 6:

More exposure prior to tour of duty during the internship program (Informant 6).

While Informant 8:

Maybe let them take a test with situational questions before the practicum, and then another after the Internship. (Informant 8)

Informant 10 also suggests that:

We need more hands-on experience, like using actual accounting software (Informant 10).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies a pressing need for curriculum reform that prioritizes experiential learning. Integrating simulation-based training aligned with industry standards not only bridges the gap between theory and practice but also fosters job-readiness and self-efficacy among interns. Such reforms can significantly improve the interns' transition into professional environments and reduce the learning curve upon deployment.

According to Hodge et al. (2022), simulation-based learning enhances problem-solving abilities and professional preparedness by offering authentic workplace scenarios within academic settings. Additionally, Mansour et al. (2021) noted that simulations improve student confidence and performance by mirroring the complexities of industry tasks.

Likewise, student interns expressed a clear desire for more simulation-based, industry-aligned training as part of their academic preparation. They believe that prior exposure to real-world business scenarios such as mock audits, accounting software practice, or simulated client interactions would ease their transition into actual workplace settings. Many of them felt that while theoretical instruction provided foundational knowledge, it was not enough to fully prepare them for the complexities and expectations of professional environments. By practicing industry-relevant tasks in a simulated environment, they expect to become more confident and capable during their internships.

This theme implies that schools must integrate more experiential and simulation-driven learning into the curriculum to help students bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace demands. Embedding practical exercises into instruction not only improves technical competence but also enhances students' confidence and adaptability. For internship programs to yield better outcomes, academic institutions must equip students with the tools and practical skills commonly used in the industry before deployment, ensuring that learning continues in a structured and purposeful way once interns are on-site.

Simulation-based training serves as a practical pedagogical approach for developing workplace readiness. According to De Gagne et al. (2021), simulated environments allow students to experience authentic tasks, fostering critical thinking and decision-making. Likewise, Kolb and Kolb (2023) emphasize the value of experiential learning as a means to apply theory in action, preparing students to respond to real-time challenges with competence and confidence.

2. Alignment of School Curriculum with Industry Needs. Student interns expressed a strong aspiration for their academic preparation to reflect the realities of the workplace better. They noted that while theoretical knowledge is important, it often falls short when faced with actual tasks and tools used in industry settings. Interns wished for a more responsive and updated curriculum, one that includes relevant technologies, software, and competencies expected by host training establishments (HTEs). They viewed alignment as key to smoother adaptation and increased confidence during their practicum. As for the informants' narratives:

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Informant 1 relayed that:

Industry mentors and schools can work together by aligning internship programs with the actual skills needed in the workplace (Informant 1).

Informant 6 expressed that:

Alignment through partnership and constant sharing of information during industry forums shall be used during curriculum development (Informant 6).

While Informant 9 added that:

Educational institutions should shift toward fostering practical skills and building confidence (Informant 9).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies that students value an education that is not only conceptually sound but also practically applicable. A curriculum informed by industry needs can reduce the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, thereby enhancing internship success and graduate employability. According to Finch et al. (2016), students perceive employability as closely tied to how well academic programs integrate industry-relevant skills and experiences. Similarly, Jackson and Wilton (2017) emphasize that students expect higher education institutions to play an active role in ensuring career readiness by aligning their offerings with current labor market trends.

Similarly, It emphasized the need for a better academic curriculum to reflect the demands of actual industry settings. Many noted that the theoretical foundation acquired in school was helpful, but did not fully prepare them for the tasks and expectations encountered during their Internship. They observed gaps between classroom instruction and workplace operations, particularly in the use of industry-standard tools, updated business processes, and soft skills integration. As a result, they advocated for continuous collaboration between schools and companies to ensure the curriculum is updated based on evolving industry requirements.

The call for aligning curriculum with industry needs indicates a growing recognition among students of the disconnect between academic training and workplace realities. To enhance employability and performance during internships, higher education institutions must forge stronger industry linkages in curriculum development. It includes involving industry partners in program design, hosting regular forums to gather feedback, and ensuring coursework reflects current technologies, workflows, and market expectations.

The alignment between curriculum and industry standards has become a key factor in workforce preparedness. According to Sin et al. (2022), regular collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders leads to more relevant, skills-based learning that enhances graduate readiness. Similarly, Bui and Porter (2021) stress that aligning academic content with professional requirements improves not only technical competencies but also graduates' ability to adapt to rapidly changing work environments.

3. Strengthening Communication and Feedback Mechanisms. Student interns emphasized the need for stronger communication and structured feedback systems between academic institutions and host training establishments (HTEs). Many expressed that during their Internship, they often felt uncertain about their performance and desired more explicit guidance from both school coordinators and industry mentors. They aspired to receive timely, constructive feedback to understand their strengths better, address areas for improvement, and feel more supported throughout their practicum journey. Students also recommended more frequent coordination meetings between schools and companies to align expectations and ensure a meaningful internship experience. As for the informants' narratives:

Informant 4 inputs:

Regular feedback from both sides would help students learn and improve during the Internship (Informant 4).

As per Informant 2:

They can coordinate regularly on aligning academic content with real-world needs and offer joint feedback systems (Informant 2).

While Informant 9:

Clear communication, align curricula with real-world industry needs, and ensure structured mentorship (Informant 9).

Based on the informant narratives, it suggests that student interns see communication and feedback as essential components of a productive internship experience. Without regular dialogue between institutions and industry partners, students may feel disconnected and under-supported, which can hinder their learning and performance. According to Conway and Sheridan (2020), effective communication between educational institutions and industry supervisors is critical in shaping a responsive learning environment during internships. Similarly, Widiastuti et al. (2022) argue that feedback loops involving all stakeholders

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significantly improve internship outcomes by facilitating reflective learning and adaptive instruction.

In addtition, student interns expressed the importance of having clear and consistent communication between academic institutions and host training establishments (HTEs) throughout the internship period. They felt that timely feedback and open dialogue between industry mentors, school coordinators, and the interns themselves could help resolve issues more effectively, reinforce learning, and adjust expectations in real time. The absence of structured communication channels sometimes led to confusion or missed opportunities for growth and reflection.

The emphasis on improved communication and feedback mechanisms highlights a critical area for internship program enhancement. Establishing formal systems for regular check-ins, mentor-student debriefings, and school-to-company reporting can foster a more supportive and responsive learning environment. It would help ensure that internships are not only experiential but also reflective, allowing students to understand their progress and address areas needing improvement promptly.

Structured feedback systems are crucial in maximizing learning during internships. As highlighted by Rowe et al. (2021), the inclusion of reflective practice and continuous dialogue between academic and industry stakeholders strengthens student development and program outcomes. Moreover, according to Jackson et al. (2022), feedback-rich environments during work-integrated learning lead to greater student confidence, skill acquisition, and overall internship satisfaction.

4. Personality, Soft Skills, and Workplace Readiness. Student interns expressed a strong desire for academic institutions to place more emphasis on developing soft skills such as communication, adaptability, confidence, and emotional intelligence. While technical knowledge is crucial, many interns recognized that success in the workplace heavily depends on how they conduct themselves, interact with others, and respond to professional challenges. They shared that they often felt unprepared for real-world demands in terms of interpersonal dynamics, professional etiquette, and managing pressure. It points to a growing awareness among interns of the importance of being "workplace ready," beyond academic competencies. As per their narratives:

Informant 4 said that:

Schools should have more activities to boost our communication skills and self-confidence. It is needed since not all of us are coming from a family where computers or office exposure is evident. (Informant 4).

As per Informant 10:

Interns need more preparation workshops, especially on soft skills like communication, handling pressure, and adapting to professional environments. Even though we have seminars prior to our deployment, this is not enough, I think (Informant 10).

Informant 9 expresses that:

Attitude plays the most significant role in the workplace; it is the most important factor, and this is most highlighted by one of my teachers here in the College of Business and Accountancy. Moreover, we should need this in our workplace (Informant 9).

Based on the informant narratives, it suggests that the emphasis on soft skills and workplace readiness has significant implications for internship program design. Academic institutions must expand their internship preparation frameworks to include activities that strengthen personal presentation, collaboration, and emotional resilience. According to Robles (2012), soft skills such as integrity, communication, and courtesy are considered just as important as hard skills by employers. More recently, Sultana and Khan (2021) highlighted that higher education must integrate soft skills training into the curriculum to enhance graduates' employability and transition into professional roles more effectively.

Moreover, student interns emphasized the value of enhancing their interpersonal and behavioral skills to function effectively in professional settings. Many recognized that while technical knowledge is essential, soft skills such as communication, adaptability, self-confidence, and work ethic are equally critical. Interns expressed the need for preparatory programs like workshops, seminars, and simulated workplace interactions that can help them transition more confidently into real-world environments. They believe that early and consistent soft skills training will better equip them to navigate workplace dynamics and professional expectations.

This theme underscores the need for academic institutions to integrate soft skills development into their internship preparation programs. Without adequate exposure to communication strategies, time management, collaboration, and emotional intelligence, students may struggle to meet professional standards. Institutions can enhance workplace readiness by

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embedding soft skills modules into the curriculum and offering personality development interventions even before internship deployment. Such efforts are likely to result in smoother adaptation, improved performance, and greater long-term employability.

Soft skills are increasingly recognized as fundamental for internship success and career readiness. According to Succi and Canovi (2020), employers across industries consistently rank soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and self-management as critical to effective workplace integration. Similarly, Jackson and Tomlinson (2021) highlight that higher education must embed employability-focused soft skill development to bridge the gap between academic instruction and professional requirements, especially during work-integrated learning experiences.

5. Selection of Supportive Host Training Establishments (HTEs). The informants articulated the need for more careful selection of host training establishments, emphasizing that placement should not be random or solely based on availability. Many believed that being assigned to a supportive, reputable company where mentorship, relevant tasks, and active supervision are present would significantly enhance their internship experience. Interns hoped that academic institutions would implement a more rigorous selection process, prioritize student interests and specialization, and ensure that companies are committed to providing meaningful learning opportunities. As for their narratives:

Informant 3 expressed that:

Deploy interns to companies that are trusted, active, and willing to mentor, and possibly who will provide allowances, since this is most likely one of their motivations for applying to that company (Informant 3).

While Informant 10 narrates:

Internship placements should match the student's strengths or specialization so that they can contribute better. Additionally, as much as possible, they must have a partnership agreement so that the exposure, training, and practices among the students would always be highlighted in their respective host training establishments (Informant 10).

Additionally, Informant 8:

HTE visitation was effective and should be continued. Hopefully, we will come up with a meaningful list of companies that are significantly considered to be one of the host training establishments that we OJTs would apply to (Informant 8).

Based on the informant's narrative, they highlighted the importance of ensuring quality over quantity in internship placements. Schools must establish partnerships with host establishments that demonstrate a clear commitment to mentoring and training interns. A well-matched internship site can elevate student motivation, skill application, and future employability. According to Jackson (2015), the quality of host organizations plays a crucial role in shaping student experiences and learning outcomes. Furthermore, Ferns et al. (2019) emphasize that purposeful matching between interns and host organizations leads to better engagement, deeper learning, and increased professional growth.

Furthermore, It emphasized the importance of being assigned to host training establishments that are not only relevant to their field of study but are also committed to providing meaningful learning opportunities. They expressed a desire for internship placements where supervisors are actively involved, tasks are aligned with their specialization, and companies have a genuine mentoring culture. Many interns shared concerns about being placed in organizations where they felt underutilized or disconnected from actual industry practices. It reflects their aspiration for a more strategic and intentional matching process between interns and HTEs.

This theme highlights the critical role of careful HTE selection in shaping the quality of student internships. Schools must establish a vetting system that ensures partner companies are capable, willing, and adequately equipped to train student interns. Collaborating only with HTEs that demonstrate a strong mentoring environment, task alignment, and feedback mechanisms can significantly enhance the interns' experiential learning. Moreover, maintaining a database of trusted and performance-evaluated HTEs can contribute to more effective internship deployment and learning outcomes.

The quality and engagement of host organizations strongly influences the effectiveness of internship experiences. According to McHugh (2017), supportive host companies play a vital role in facilitating student learning, especially when they provide structured tasks, regular feedback, and meaningful mentorship. Moreover, Narayanan et al. (2019) emphasize that internships situated in well-organized and relevant workplaces lead to higher intern satisfaction, skills acquisition, and career clarity.

6. Joint Orientation and Mentor Engagement. The informants expressed a strong desire for a more

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coordinated approach between schools and host training establishments (HTEs), particularly at the start of the internship period. They believed that a joint orientation involving students, school representatives, and industry mentors would help set clear expectations, clarify roles, and ensure that both academic and industry goals are aligned. Interns noted that better engagement with mentors early on in the Internship fosters trust, improves communication, and enables a smoother transition into the workplace setting. According to their narratives:

As per Informant 10:

I suggest that companies and schools conduct orientation sessions together before the Internship starts (Informant 10).

This was supported by Informant 4 stating that:

Our adviser visits the company to talk to our mentor, which helps solve issues and guide us better (Informant 4).

Moreover, Informant 9 expresses that:

To improve internship outcomes, schools and industry mentors should foster clear communication and align expectations (Informant 9).

Based on the informant narratives, it underscores the value of proactive collaboration and structured onboarding in internship programs. A joint orientation session not only promotes shared understanding between stakeholders but also improves the interns' sense of preparedness and inclusion. As noted by Smith et al. (2014), early engagement and clear communication between academia and industry mentors create a more supportive learning environment, enhancing both supervision and student outcomes. Moreover, according to Patrick et al. (2018), well-structured internship programs with mentor involvement are linked to higher levels of student satisfaction and competence development.

In like manner, student interns articulated the need for structured, joint orientations involving both academic institutions and host training establishments (HTEs) before the Internship begins. They recognized that clear expectations, shared objectives, and a mutual understanding of roles between mentors, schools, and interns help prevent confusion and increase confidence. They further expressed the value of active mentor involvement in their development through regular engagement, progress monitoring, and constructive guidance throughout the internship period. This aspiration reflects their desire for a well-supported and communicated internship environment.

Establishing a collaborative orientation and mentoring framework is critical in ensuring all stakeholders are aligned on the purpose, expectations, and learning goals of the Internship. Schools and HTEs should co-design pre-deployment briefings and assign mentors who are not only knowledgeable but also committed to coaching interns effectively. Such practices can help reduce student anxiety, enhance accountability, and foster a more cohesive internship experience that bridges institutional goals with workplace realities.

Joint orientations and active mentor involvement have been shown to enhance the quality of internship experiences. According to Gault et al. (2010), the presence of structured orientation and mentor-student alignment contributes significantly to the success of internship programs by ensuring mutual understanding and support. Similarly, Sweitzer and King (2014) emphasize the importance of mentorship in internships, noting that when mentors are actively engaged, interns demonstrate better skill application, professional behavior, and confidence.

B. Internship Coordinators

The second question that was asked of the internship coordinators was about their aspirations to improve school-industry collaboration during the Internship. According to their responses, five themes emerged during the personal interview.

1. Strengthening Institutional Linkages through Regular Consultations and Forums. Internship coordinators collectively advocate for stronger partnerships between academic institutions and industry through regular dialogues, forums, and collaborative meetings. These platforms are viewed as vital for establishing shared expectations, refining internship frameworks, and responding to the evolving needs of employers. Coordinators believe that without consistent engagement, gaps in training and misalignments between academic preparation and actual industry practice may persist, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of internship programs. As for the informants' narratives:

Informant 1 expresses that:

On my end as an internship coordinator, there must be a Regular consultation/industry forum, to build up communication which serves as the basis for the reform, enhancement, and development of the business administration internship program (Informant 1).

While Informant 4 narrates:

Regular meetings or consultations with industry partners help maintain strong collaboration. We also

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conduct orientations for both students and companies to explain the objectives of the internship program (Informant 4).

Informant 5 also added:

Although we are doing it already, but not on a semestral basis, both parties should engage in regular consultations, joint workshops, and feedback sessions. It must be carried over during the Industry forum that should be conducted on a school-year basis, or shall I say on an annual basis. It is to be updated about the latest developments in the industry and to confirm whether the teaching and learning are still applicable and aligned with the industry (Informant 5).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies that institutionalizing regular communication channels between schools and industry stakeholders can significantly enhance the design and implementation of internship programs. Through structured forums and consultations, academic curricula can be updated based on industry feedback, internship expectations can be standardized, and challenges encountered during deployment can be promptly addressed. Such initiatives foster mutual accountability and pave the way for sustainable and meaningful collaborations that benefit students, educators, and host companies alike.

Effective school-industry collaboration has been shown to improve curriculum relevance and student employability. According to Jackson and Collings (2022), industry-academic partnerships built on continuous dialogue enable the co-creation of educational experiences that are closely aligned with current labor market needs. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2021) emphasized that regular stakeholder engagement promotes curriculum agility, enabling schools to adapt to emerging industry trends and requirements.

Likewise, Internship coordinators emphasized the importance of fostering continuous dialogue between academic institutions and industry partners. Regular consultations and forums serve as platforms to exchange feedback, align internship goals, and strengthen institutional partnerships. These engagements are seen not only as communication avenues but also as strategic mechanisms for curriculum improvement, internship planning, and partnership development. By doing so, both parties can ensure a shared understanding of expectations, roles, and the evolving needs of the labor market.

Regular consultations and institutional forums create a collaborative environment where both academia and industry actively contribute to the shaping of internship experiences. It fosters alignment between educational outcomes and industry requirements, helping to close gaps in competency and expectations. Moreover, it builds trust and continuity in partnerships, making it easier to plan long-term engagements and sustainable internship programs. For institutions, these efforts can lead to improved student preparation, smoother internship placements, and more targeted curricular enhancements based on industry feedback.

The value of institutional collaboration through consultations and forums has been widely acknowledged. According to Jackson and Collings (2022), structured engagements between higher education institutions and industry stakeholders are essential in enhancing work-integrated learning outcomes and ensuring that academic curricula remain relevant to professional practice. Similarly, Zegwaard and McCurdy (2021) emphasize that ongoing dialogue between academia and industry leads to improved internship planning and strengthens the feedback loop necessary for continual program improvement.

2. Formalizing Partnerships through Clear MOUs and Defined Expectations. The informant's point of view is evident that there is a strong aspiration to formalize school-industry relationships through the establishment of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or similar binding agreements. These documents are seen as essential for clarifying the responsibilities of both parties, standardizing internship expectations, and ensuring the delivery of meaningful workplace training. Coordinators recognize that informal arrangements often lead to misunderstandings or inconsistencies in how students are deployed and supervised during their internships. According to their narratives:

Informant 2 said that:

Initiate an industry partnership. This study should somehow be the benchmark of the industry partnership, wherein the criteria generated will serve as the basis to fill in the gaps between student and partners' competency alignment (Informant 2).

Informant 3 expresses:

I suggest that academic institutions and industry partners come up with a memorandum of understanding as to what tasks, training, and interventions are necessary to augment the classroom training of the students further to address the gaps in instruction (Informant 3).

While Informant 4 added:

Having a clear Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with defined roles and expectations has also been effective in avoiding misunderstandings (Informant 4).

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Based on the informant narratives, it implies the need for structured, formal agreements that define the roles, deliverables, and shared responsibilities between academic institutions and host training establishments (HTEs). By having clear MOUs in place, both parties can avoid ambiguity, promote accountability, and align their efforts to provide consistent and productive internship experiences. These formal arrangements also serve as frameworks for conflict resolution, performance assessment, and long-term collaboration strategies.

The importance of formalized partnerships in work-integrated learning is well-documented. According to Ferns and Zegwaard (2020), clearly defined agreements such as MOUs help bridge gaps between academic theory and workplace practice by setting transparent expectations. Similarly, Coll and Eames (2021) emphasize that formalized collaboration provides a foundation for building trust and ensuring that learning outcomes are mutually beneficial for institutions, employers, and students.

Similarly, it expresses the need to establish formal agreements between academic institutions and industry partners through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). These agreements are not merely bureaucratic documents but serve as frameworks that clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and mutual expectations of both parties. Coordinators observed that in the absence of such formal structures, inconsistencies in internship implementation arise, such as misaligned expectations, unclear mentorship roles, and insufficient student supervision.

Establishing clear MOUs is critical to ensuring accountability, clarity, and mutual understanding between schools and Host Training Establishments (HTEs). When roles and deliverables are outlined explicitly, student interns benefit from more structured learning experiences, and companies are more likely to be engaged, knowing their expectations are supported institutionally. Additionally, formal partnerships foster long-term collaboration and trust, making internship programs more sustainable and impactful.

Formal agreements between academia and industry are essential for ensuring consistency in internship implementation and enhancing program credibility. Bilsland et al. (2020) assert that formal partnerships contribute significantly to the design of structured and accountable work-integrated learning experiences. Likewise, Jackson et al. (2021) highlight that MOUs serve as a governance mechanism that aligns expectations and promotes clarity among stakeholders, leading to more effective internship delivery.

3. Integrating Applied Learning and Modern Tools in the Curriculum. The informants identified a strong emphasis on updating and redesigning the academic curriculum to include more applied learning strategies and the use of modern industry tools. Coordinators noted the gap between theoretical instruction and the operational realities encountered in the workplace. They envision a curriculum that not only teaches concepts but also immerses students in real-world scenarios using simulations, business software, and task-based activities that mirror actual industry functions. According to their narratives:

As per Informant 4:

One of the best ways to bridge the gap between theory and practice is to integrate more applied learning opportunities. For example, courses should include case studies, simulations, and the use of actual business software (Informant 4).

However, Informant 5 also said that:

As I have observed as a coordinator for just a few years, it's important to integrate more hands-on training, simulations, and software familiarization (Informant 5).

Informant 2 shared:

Based on my observation and personal experience going through the internship program in our department, the students should have more exposure to the types of tools and systems commonly used by companies (Informant 2).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies that to prepare students for professional success effectively, academic institutions must proactively revise their curricula to incorporate practical, skill-based learning. Doing so will better equip students to meet workplace expectations and adapt to evolving technologies used in the business and accounting fields. Such integration also strengthens the relevance of classroom instruction and enhances students' confidence and performance during internships. Furthermore, partnerships with industry experts can be instrumental in identifying tools and practices that should be embedded in course content.

The call to embed applied learning in higher education is supported by recent literature. Jackson and Wilton (2017) argue that experiential and skills-based approaches in curriculum design significantly enhance graduate employability and workplace adaptability. Likewise, Bond et al. (2021) highlight the importance of

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integrating digital tools and industry-relevant technologies into academic programs to reflect the demands of contemporary workplaces and foster digital competence.

In addition, Internship coordinators emphasized the importance of embedding applied learning methods and current industry tools into the academic curriculum. They observed that while students often possess theoretical knowledge, they face difficulties when exposed to actual business systems, software, and operational procedures during their internships. This gap highlights the urgency to redesign instructional strategies so that students can practice using tools and scenarios that mirror workplace environments before deployment.

Integrating applied learning, such as simulations, case-based teaching, and exposure to software like accounting or enterprise resource planning systems, enhances student preparedness and confidence. It bridges the disconnect between classroom learning and workplace requirements. Doing so not only improves the effectiveness of internships but also boosts student employability, as they become more capable of meeting the demands of fast-evolving business environments.

Applied learning approaches, particularly when infused with current technologies, significantly increase the relevance and impact of education in professional settings. According to Zegwaard and Coll (2021), a curriculum that incorporates real-world tools and experiential activities fosters deeper learning and facilitates a smoother transition to employment. Similarly, Tran and Nguyen (2022) highlight the value of industry-specific simulations and digital literacy integration in reducing the skills gap and preparing students for dynamic workplace conditions.

4. Emphasizing Soft Skills and Professional Readiness. The informants expressed a strong desire for academic programs to place greater focus on soft skills and workplace readiness. These include communication, teamwork, adaptability, self-confidence, and professionalism, qualities they often find lacking in interns despite their technical competence. Coordinators observed that while students may perform well academically, many struggle with interpersonal interactions, time management, and adjusting to workplace norms. Their aspiration is for educational institutions to embed soft skills training across the curriculum, preparing students not only intellectually but also emotionally and socially for the demands of industry. As the informant's narrative:

Informant 4 expresses that:

To have a total integration of quality student interns, we should also emphasize soft skills development, like communication, workplace ethics, and adaptability, as these are critical based on both student and employer feedback (Informant 4).

While Informant 1 added:

It is just based on my own opinion as a coordinator; we also need to give more focus to soft skills like communication, adaptability, and workplace etiquette, so they are better prepared for professional environments (Informant 1).

Informant 5:

As I have experienced, the department must also encourage students to set clear expectations with their assigned companies and emphasize professionalism early on (Informant 5).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies that soft skills are no longer optional in the modern workplace. As industries increasingly value emotional intelligence, communication, and collaborative ability, higher education institutions must respond by integrating soft skills development into their pedagogy. Workshops, seminars, mock interviews, and simulation exercises can play a critical role in preparing students for the social and cultural dynamics of professional environments. Prioritizing soft skills equips students with the confidence and competence needed to navigate workplace challenges and contribute meaningfully from the start of their careers.

Several studies emphasize the importance of soft skills in enhancing employability. Robles (2012) identified communication, integrity, and interpersonal skills as the top essential soft skills valued by employers. More recently, Succi and Canovi (2020) highlight that soft skills often differentiate successful graduates in competitive job markets, stressing that higher education must intentionally cultivate these competencies alongside technical knowledge.

Moreover, it expresses a shared aspiration to enhance students' soft skills such as communication, adaptability, time management, and professionalism prior to deployment. They observed that even when students are technically competent, a lack of interpersonal skills or workplace etiquette often hinders their performance. These gaps underline the need for pre-internship training modules or seminars specifically targeting professional behavior, workplace ethics, and confidence-building.

It implies that prioritizing soft skills and professional readiness as part of internship preparation

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ensures students can navigate workplace environments more effectively. These skills are crucial not only for collaboration and communication but also for building relationships with mentors and adapting to organizational culture. Developing these attributes enhances student performance during internships and increases their chances of long-term career success.

Soft skills have become essential components of employability in the 21st-century workforce. Succi and Canovi (2020) stress that employers value interpersonal abilities, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence as much as, if not more than, technical knowledge. Furthermore, Andrews and Russell (2021) note that students who are trained in soft skills demonstrate better workplace integration and adaptability, which in turn benefits both the intern and the host organization.

5. Encouraging Structured Industry Engagement in Curriculum Review. Internship coordinators advocate for the formal involvement of industry partners in curriculum development and review. They believe that collaboration with professionals and stakeholders in the business sector will help academic institutions align their programs with the evolving demands of the workforce. Coordinators noted that much of the curriculum content remains theoretical and disconnected from current industry practices. They recommend that schools regularly solicit feedback from host training establishments (HTEs), conduct industry consultations, and invite practitioners to participate in curriculum review panels. It would ensure that the educational content remains relevant and responsive to industry trends. As for the informant's narrative:

Informant 4 suggested:

Again, this is what I have observed. We need more structured engagements, such as job fairs, industry dialogues, and inviting practitioners to serve as resource speakers in our classes or even departmental hold engagement talks with the respective industries where our OJTs are doing their internships (Informant 4).

Informant 3 added:

On my end, on a departmental basis, they should also conduct site visits to understand the current needs of companies better and adjust the curriculum accordingly. Although they are doing site visits, there was no integration in the curriculum as to the various informants gathered, which is considered significant and relevant in the internship program development (Informant 3).

Furthermore, Informant 5 share that:

As a coordinator, the department should also update its curriculum based on industry trends, especially in Lapu-Lapu City, where many companies require modern technical skills (Informant 5).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies that industry-academic collaboration should not be limited to internship placements but must extend to shaping what is taught in classrooms. A dynamic curriculum, co-designed with input from industry, equips students with job-ready skills and reduces the gap between academic preparation and real-world expectations. Institutions can benefit from structured feedback mechanisms such as annual stakeholder meetings, joint curriculum workshops, and tracer studies to inform revisions. Ultimately, industry-engaged curriculum review enhances graduate employability and fosters more meaningful partnerships between schools and employers.

Literature underscores the value of industry participation in curriculum development. Jackson (2015) stresses that continuous employer engagement ensures that academic programs remain responsive to labor market needs. Similarly, Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2016) emphasize that structured collaboration between academia and industry improves curriculum relevance and strengthens student preparation for work-based environments.

Moreover, Internship coordinators emphasized the importance of establishing structured and continuous engagement between academic institutions and industry partners during curriculum development and review. Their aspiration reflects a recognition that curriculum content must reflect the evolving demands of the workplace. By systematically involving industry representatives through consultations, dialogues, and feedback mechanisms, schools can ensure the integration of current tools, competencies, and expectations into academic programs.

Regular engagement with industry during curriculum development promotes relevance, responsiveness, and alignment with real-world standards. This collaboration ensures that the curriculum is not only theoretically sound but also practically useful, equipping students with skills that are in demand. When academic programs are shaped with input from practitioners, the transition from classroom learning to Internship and employment becomes smoother and more effective.

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Curriculum development that includes active industry involvement results in more substantial alignment between academic outcomes and labor market needs. According to Suleman (2020), industry engagement ensures that higher education remains responsive to the skills employers require, particularly in dynamic sectors like business and technology. Likewise, Jackson (2019) highlights that structured partnerships with employers in the curriculum planning process significantly improve students' work readiness and industry relevance.

C. Industry Supervisors

The second question that was asked to the Industry supervisors was on their aspirations to improve school-industry collaboration during the Internship. According to their responses, five themes emerged during the personal interview.

1. Active Industry Participation in Curriculum Development. Industry supervisors emphasized the importance of integrating real-world business practices and technological tools into the academic curriculum. They expressed that when curriculum planning involves active collaboration with industry partners, it ensures that the competencies developed among students are more aligned with the current demands of the workplace. Their aspiration is not merely consultative but participatory, where practitioners contribute insights into designing syllabi, identifying relevant skills, and updating instructional methods to keep pace with industry changes. As for the informants' narratives: Informant 1 said that:

To make sure students learn what they need for jobs in accounting and businesses, I think schools should work with people who have those jobs (Informant 1).

Informant 6 expresses:

I recommend including the industry in the curriculum development on an annual basis, identifying the latest trends that can be embedded (Informant 6).

Informant 7 informed that:

I suggest that the department or school should sit down with companies, especially those here in Mandaue and Lapu-Lapu, to update their curriculum based on what's happening in real businesses (Informant 7).

As per Informant 8:

The schools should directly ask companies in Mandaue what skills they expect and update their programs accordingly (Informant 8).

Informant 9 also added:

Based on my experience, academic institutions may invite stakeholders (industry partners) to identify the necessary skills that students should possess when they begin internships or work (Informant 9).

Based on the informant narratives, their aspiration highlights the need for academic institutions to shift from isolated curriculum planning toward a more dynamic, collaborative model with industry stakeholders. Such involvement bridges the often-cited gap between theoretical instruction and practical application. By embedding current tools, technologies, and business practices directly into academic programs, institutions can ensure that students graduate with skills that are immediately valuable to employers, improving both employability and job readiness.

Empirical evidence supports this call for collaboration. According to Jackson (2016), ongoing engagement between industry and academia plays a pivotal role in aligning graduate attributes with labor market requirements. Similarly, a study by de Villiers (2020) found that including employers in curriculum design leads to stronger outcomes in graduate employability, especially in business-related fields.

Furthermore, Industry supervisors emphasized the importance of involving practitioners in the design and revision of academic curricula. They observed that many of the gaps between student competencies and workplace requirements stem from outdated or overly theoretical course content. By engaging industry professionals in curriculum planning, academic institutions can ensure the relevance of lessons, tools, and practices taught to students. This collaborative approach allows for the timely integration of current technologies, workflows, and soft skill demands aligned with real business operations.

This theme highlights a strong need for sustained dialogue between the industry and the academe. Including industry perspectives in academic planning bridges the disconnect between theoretical instruction and actual field requirements. Such collaboration could take the form of curriculum advisory boards, annual stakeholder consultations, or joint planning sessions. The result is a more agile educational program that better prepares students for real-world challenges, while companies benefit from more capable interns and future hires.

Involving industry stakeholders in curriculum development is a key strategy to enhance graduate employability and curriculum relevance. According to Tang et al. (2022), active engagement between academia and industry helps ensure that academic institutions keep pace with rapidly evolving professional standards and workplace demands.

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Likewise, Tyszkiewicz et al. (2021) argue that cross-sector collaboration in higher education planning strengthens graduate outcomes by embedding practical, industry-relevant skills into traditional academic frameworks.

2. Establishing Structured and Two-Way Feedback Mechanisms**.** The informants expressed a strong desire for more structured and reciprocal feedback processes between academic institutions and host training establishments. While some feedback mechanisms currently exist, often in the form of rating sheets or evaluation forms, supervisors noted that these are frequently one-sided and lack meaningful dialogue. They aspire for feedback systems that are regular, dialogic, and capable of addressing issues in real time. It includes face-to-face discussions, post-internship debriefs, and performance reviews that allow both schools and companies to align expectations, identify gaps, and recognize student progress. As for their narratives:

Informant 3 said that:

There was no discussion between the rater and the school representative regarding issues or suggestions. That should be improved (Informant 3).

Informant 7 inputs:

Structured feedback from employers after every internship cycle will go a long way (Informant 7).

While Informant 8:

Regular consultations and feedback-sharing sessions are needed (Informant 8).

Informant 10 added:

By collecting necessary information and feedback, they may improve or modify courses and syllabi (Informant 10).

The informant narratives underscore the importance of building a culture of continuous improvement in internship programs. A two-way feedback system enables academic institutions to revise training approaches, fine-tune internship placements, and deliver timely interventions when needed. Likewise, it empowers industry partners to shape the caliber of interns they receive. A feedback-rich environment supports reflective learning, ensures student accountability, and strengthens collaboration between academe and industry, all of which are essential in preparing students for professional success.

The value of feedback in experiential learning environments has been well-documented. According to Rowe (2017), timely and constructive feedback is a critical factor in maximizing student learning and development during internships. Moreover, Tran and Soejatminah (2017) emphasized the importance of reciprocal communication between universities and employers in enhancing the overall internship experience and bridging skill gaps.

In like manner, Industry supervisors emphasized the importance of establishing formal, structured, and reciprocal feedback systems between academic institutions and host training establishments. They noted that most internship programs rely solely on performance ratings without proper dialogues or debriefings with school representatives. As a result, valuable insights from the workplace, including interns' strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas of improvement, are not effectively communicated to the academe. Structured feedback mechanisms would enable both institutions to align expectations, improve internship design, and provide meaningful interventions for student development.

The absence of two-way feedback limits continuous improvement in internship programs. Structured feedback systems, including post-internship evaluations, reflection sessions, and collaborative reviews, can promote shared accountability between academia and industry. Schools gain critical insight into how students perform in real settings, while companies can influence educational priorities and skill formation. More importantly, such mechanisms help identify gaps early and support timely interventions to ensure better preparedness among interns.

Feedback mechanisms between academic institutions and industry partners are essential for effective internship management and continuous improvement. According to Jackson (2022), two-way feedback not only strengthens collaboration but also ensures that the lessons learned from real-world settings inform curriculum and student development. Similarly, Hassan and Hoque (2021) highlight that structured communication and feedback loops contribute to enhanced student outcomes and more substantial school-industry alignment.

3. Co-Designing Internship Activities with Industry Input. The informants emphasized the importance of involving companies in shaping internship programs to ensure alignment with actual workplace demands. They expressed that while students bring theoretical knowledge, the tasks assigned during internships should also reflect the functional realities and strategic needs of the company. Supervisors noted that when internship activities are designed without industry input, students may end up with generic or repetitive tasks that do not add value to

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their training nor the company. They advocate for collaborative planning between schools and industry to co-create internship activities that offer real-world relevance, productivity, and meaningful exposure to actual roles within business operations. As per stated by the informants;

As per Informant 1:

To make sure students learn what they need for jobs in accounting and businesses, I think schools should work with people who have those jobs (Informant 1).

Informant 6 shared that:

I recommend including the industry in the curriculum development on an annual basis, identifying the latest trends that can be embedded (Informant 6).

Informant 7:

I suggest that the department or school should sit down with companies, especially those here in Mandaue and Lapu-Lapu, to update their curriculum based on what's happening in real businesses (Informant 7).

While Informant 8 also shared that:

The schools should directly ask companies in Mandaue what skills they expect and update their programs accordingly (Informant 8).

Informant 9 shared that:

Based on my experience, academic institutions may invite stakeholders (industry partners) to identify the necessary skills that students should possess when they begin internships or work (Informant 9).

Based on the informant narratives, this highlights the need for deeper and more intentional school-industry collaboration in structuring internship programs. Co-designed internship activities increase the likelihood that students will engage in relevant, skill-building tasks while simultaneously supporting business operations. This approach helps avoid mismatches between academic preparation and practical needs. It also ensures that students are trained using tools, workflows, and processes reflective of current industry practice, thereby narrowing the employability gap and fostering work readiness.

Coll and Zegwaard (2011) argue that work-integrated learning (WIL) programs are most effective when employers are actively involved in determining learning outcomes and task assignments, resulting in more authentic and valuable student experiences. Similarly, Jackson (2015) stresses the significance of aligning internship design with industry expectations to enhance students' career preparedness and professional identity formation.

Likewise, there is a need for schools and companies to collaboratively design internship activities that are aligned with actual workplace roles and operations. They noted that many current internship programs lack relevance or practical depth, resulting in interns performing tasks that do not reflect the realities of the business environment. By involving industry practitioners in designing tasks, setting expectations, and defining learning outcomes, the internship experience becomes more meaningful, purposeful, and aligned with the competencies needed in the field.

Internship programs benefit significantly when companies contribute directly to the planning and structuring of intern responsibilities. Co-designed activities ensure that interns are not relegated to menial or repetitive work, but are instead engaged in tasks that build job-relevant skills. This approach fosters a stronger bridge between academic instruction and actual industry practices, better prepares students for post-graduate employment, and enables companies to gain interns who are more productive and aligned with their operational goals.

Collaborative internship design has been recognized as a strategic means to bridge the gap between academic training and industry practice. According to Smith and Betts (2022), engaging employers in internship planning helps ensure that students' on-the-job experiences directly develop industry-valued competencies. In the same vein, Zegwaard and Coll (2021) emphasize that a co-design approach in work-integrated learning increases the relevance, impact, and sustainability of internship programs across business sectors.

4. Strengthening Communication and Collaboration Through Institutional Partnerships**.** The informants underscored the importance of consistent communication and mutual understanding between academic institutions and host companies. They observed that while many internship arrangements exist, the lack of structured institutional partnerships, such as formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or regular consultations, limits the effectiveness of the program. They advocate for mechanisms that allow both parties to co-create internship goals, address feedback, and clarify expectations. Activities such as stakeholder forums, site visits, and industry-academe dialogues are seen as vital tools to establish stronger trust and long-term alignment in internship outcomes. As per the informant's narrative:

Informant 3 relayed that:

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As I have observed, there should be discussions between intern supervisors and the school to offer suggestions and address internship issues (Informant 3).

Informant 6 added:

In my opinion, partnerships or memorandum agreements with schools will help align internship contributions and industry needs (Informant 6).

Informant 7 also expresses:

It is also essential to have regular consultations, site visits, guest lectures, and feedback, which can bridge gaps (Informant 7).

Additionally, Informant 8:

May I suggest that the school must invite company representatives to schools as speakers to bridge the gap between academic training and real industry needs (Informant 8).

The informant narratives highlight the necessity of institutionalizing collaboration between schools and industry. A formal partnership framework ensures more transparent communication, consistent feedback, and better coordination throughout the internship cycle. When trust and shared accountability are embedded in institutional agreements, both students and companies benefit from more structured, predictable, and mutually beneficial internship engagements. It ultimately supports higher-quality internships that are responsive to both educational goals and labor market demands.

According to Rowe and Zegwaard (2017), effective work-integrated learning partnerships require open communication channels and shared responsibilities through formal agreements and ongoing dialogue. Additionally, Ferns, Campbell, and Zegwaard (2014) emphasize that collaborative stakeholder engagement contributes significantly to improved student learning outcomes and better alignment with industry needs.

Similarly, the importance of establishing formal, ongoing communication channels between academic institutions and companies. They aspire to create a culture of open dialogue through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), regular consultations, and joint activities such as orientations and stakeholder meetings. This collaboration is envisioned not just as a formal requirement but as a strategic mechanism for aligning expectations, addressing issues promptly, and maintaining shared accountability in shaping future-ready graduates.

Effective communication and institutional collaboration are key to the success of internship programs. When schools and industry partners engage in structured partnerships, they can co-create better internship policies, ensure role clarity, and adapt training programs based on evolving industry demands. This alignment enhances the quality of student preparation and maximizes the value companies gain from hosting interns. Furthermore, it builds long-term trust, encourages mutual feedback, and results in more sustainable and impactful internship engagements.

Institutional collaboration through formal partnerships and regular communication is a foundational element of successful internship programs. As noted by Jackson and Ferns (2023), strong industry-academe relationships foster transparency, feedback, and continuous improvement in student employability outcomes. Similarly, Walo and Ritchie (2022) highlight that institutional partnerships supported by regular stakeholder engagement create more responsive and industry-aligned curricula.

5. Emphasis on Soft Skills and Workplace Etiquette Development. The informants strongly emphasized that, beyond technical knowledge, student interns must be equipped with essential soft skills to thrive in real-world work environments. These include effective communication, adaptability, time management, respect for workplace norms, and professionalism. Several supervisors noted that while interns often possess theoretical knowledge, they struggle with confidence, interpersonal dynamics, and appropriate workplace behavior. They believe that embedding soft skills training into academic curricula through workshops, simulations, and mentorship will help bridge this gap and ensure students are truly work-ready. As per the informant's narrative:

Informant 6 said that:

Students should focus more on soft skills like communication, adaptability, and workplace etiquette (Informant 6).

Informant 7 also added:

Interns need more than theories; they need to practice how to behave and function in a corporate setting (Informant 7).

While Informant 8:

Expose students to workplace settings, simulations, workshops, or invite industry practitioners (Informant 8).

Informant 9 shared that:

Prioritize weakest points like communication and confidence through outcomes-based activities integrated in courses (Informant 9).

Based on the informant narratives, it implies that the integration of soft skills into the academic

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curriculum is vital for enhancing students' employability and overall internship performance. As companies increasingly prioritize emotional intelligence, collaboration, and workplace etiquette, schools must proactively incorporate these elements into learning outcomes. Doing so will not only improve the individual intern's adaptability and productivity but also strengthen the reputation of academic institutions in producing well-rounded graduates suited for modern work environments.

According to Jackson (2016), employers often identify soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence as equally or more important than technical capabilities. Likewise, Robles (2012) asserts that professionalism, responsibility, and strong interpersonal skills are key predictors of career success in business and industry sectors.

In addition, Industry supervisors voiced a strong desire for student interns to enter the workplace not only with technical knowledge but also with well-developed soft skills. These include communication, confidence, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and a sound understanding of workplace norms. The lack of these competencies has been consistently observed to hinder students' ability to integrate seamlessly into professional settings. Thus, they recommend that academic institutions prioritize the development of workplace etiquette and interpersonal skills early in the academic journey to better prepare students for real-world engagements.

The inclusion of soft skills training in academic curricula is critical to bridging the transition from classroom to workplace. While technical abilities remain essential, soft skills often determine how well a student can contribute in collaborative environments and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics at work. By embedding these competencies through workshops, simulations, and co-curricular activities, academic institutions can foster professionalism, boost students' confidence, and enhance their adaptability in diverse work environments.

Soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability have become key differentiators in employability. According to Succi and Canovi (2020), employers across industries increasingly value soft skills as essential attributes in potential hires, sometimes more than technical knowledge. Additionally, Robles (2022) affirms that workplace etiquette, ethical behavior, and interpersonal competencies significantly influence an intern's long-term success in professional environments.

To summarized, despite the challenges they encountered, all three groups; student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors shared a forward-looking vision aimed at strengthening the internship experience and preparing students for meaningful careers.

Student interns expressed a strong desire for holistic professional growth. They aspired to gain deeper, hands-on exposure to real business operations, including opportunities to handle more complex tasks that develop decision-making and problem-solving skills. Many emphasized hopes for personal development improving confidence, communication, and adaptability along with expanded networking opportunities that could translate into future employment.

Internship coordinators envisioned a more structured and sustainable partnership between the university and industry. Their aspirations centered on curriculum enhancement to match current market needs, continuous industry collaboration for consistent placement opportunities, and integrated feedback systems to monitor and improve student performance. They also hoped for greater administrative and institutional support to strengthen coordination and mentoring processes.

Industry supervisors articulated aspirations focused on mutual growth for companies and interns. They sought to cultivate future-ready professionals who can seamlessly transition from classroom learning to workplace practice. Supervisors aspired to provide meaningful mentorship and progressive training opportunities, while also encouraging the university to align academic competencies with evolving business trends.

Taken together, these aspirations highlight a shared commitment to transforming internships into strategic, career-shaping experiences. They call for stronger university–industry linkages, proactive skills development, and mentoring structures that empower students while supporting the professional goals of educators and employers alike.

Based on this investigation, the voices of student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors revealed a complex understanding of the internship process as a space where academic ideals and industry realities intersect. While challenges were evident, ranging from mismatches in expectations to gaps in technical readiness, there was also a shared aspiration for stronger school-industry collaboration. These perspectives offered deeper insights that extend

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beyond existing literature, illuminating real-time complexities in internship implementation.

The findings showed that bridging the gap between academic preparation and industry practice requires more than just curriculum adjustments; it demands a collaborative, systemic approach involving schools, students, and industry partners. A key insight uncovered is that meaningful internship experiences are shaped not only by what is taught but also by how academic institutions and host training establishments (HTEs) align expectations, tasks, and feedback mechanisms. This conclusion affirms and extends experiential learning theory by emphasizing that fundamental transformation occurs when learning becomes a shared responsibility across institutional boundaries.**Implications for Practice**

In the context of Educational Management, the implications of this study are grounded in Total Quality Management (TQM) principles applied to education, which emphasize continuous improvement, stakeholder involvement, and systematic evaluation of educational processes. TQM suggests that academic institutions can enhance the quality of teaching, learning, and experiential programs by regularly assessing outcomes, incorporating feedback from students and industry partners, and refining curricula and internship structures. Applying this perspective, the study highlights the need for structured collaboration and practical learning opportunities to ensure that graduates are competent, job-ready, and aligned with industry expectations.

Additionally, Transformational Leadership Theory in educational management supplements the implication of this study, which underscores the role of academic leaders in inspiring, motivating, and strategically guiding faculty and students toward shared goals. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, stakeholder engagement, and fostering innovation in institutional practices. From this perspective, the study suggests that academic leaders can enhance internship programs, curriculum relevance, and soft skills development by actively coordinating with industry partners, promoting faculty development, and implementing evidence-based strategies that respond to evolving workplace demands

Lastly, the implications of this study are framed within Systems Theory in educational management, which views academic institutions as interconnected systems where curriculum, faculty, students, and external stakeholders operate collaboratively to achieve educational objectives. Systems theory emphasizes coordination, communication, and continuous feedback to optimize institutional performance. Applying this perspective, the study underscores the importance of structured school-industry partnerships, integrated curricula, and reflective learning processes to ensure that internship programs are coherent, responsive, and aligned with both educational goals and labor market needs

The following implications for practice are advanced:

A. Student Interns

1. *Enhancing Preparedness through Pre-Internship Training.* Students must undergo comprehensive preparatory programs that simulate real-world work environments, particularly through simulation-based tasks and exposure to actual industry tools. These experiences will help narrow the gap between academic theory and practice, improve adaptability, and develop their confidence before entering the Internship proper.
2. *Developing Communication and Soft Skills.* Internship programs should embed targeted training modules focusing on interpersonal communication, teamwork, adaptability, and professional etiquette. Industry supervisors often cite these competencies as lacking and are critical for success in real work settings.

B. Internship Coordinators

1. *Curriculum-Industry Alignment and Curriculum Review Participation.* Internship coordinators should work closely with industry partners to ensure that academic content stays relevant to current business and technical trends. Engaging industry representatives in regular curriculum reviews will allow better alignment between institutional goals and workplace needs.
2. *Formalizing Institutional Partnerships and Feedback Loops.* Establishing formal agreements, such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), between academic institutions and Host Training Establishments (HTEs) is crucial. These should outline clear expectations, responsibilities, and communication channels to ensure a mutual understanding of objectives. Additionally, a regularized feedback mechanism must be maintained to evaluate both student performance and internship site suitability.

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3. *Centralized Institutional Oversight for Internship Program Quality.* While departmental monitoring of interns is already in place, there is a need to establish a centralized and standardized institutional oversight mechanism. This can be achieved by creating an internship quality assurance unit or committee at the institutional level to consolidate internship practices, ensure consistency across departments, and provide strategic direction based on aggregated feedback. This structure enables the institution to evaluate and enhance internship outcomes holistically, fostering long-term improvements that go beyond individual departmental efforts.
4. While departmental monitoring of interns is already in place, there is a need to establish a centralized and standardized institutional oversight mechanism. It can be achieved by creating an internship quality assurance unit or committee at the institutional level to consolidate internship practices, ensure consistency across departments, and provide strategic direction based on aggregated feedback. This structure enables the institution to evaluate and enhance internship outcomes holistically, fostering long-term improvements that go beyond individual departmental efforts.

5. *Strategic Selection and Preparation of Host Training Establishments (HTEs).* The College of Business Administration must collaborate with HTEs that are capable of providing structured, meaningful tasks aligned with the students' course and learning objectives. These establishments must be screened not only for their willingness to host but also for their capacity to mentor, provide feedback, and expose students to real work environments.

2. **Industry Supervisors**

1. *Collaborative Co-Design of Internship Activities.* Industry supervisors should be involved in co-designing internship tasks and learning outcomes. It helps ensure that interns are engaged in meaningful work that contributes to the organization while also supporting their academic development.
2. *Establishing Two-Way Feedback Mechanisms.* There must be an implementation of structured feedback systems that facilitate regular evaluation and open communication between students, coordinators, and industry mentors. These feedback mechanisms help identify learning gaps early, reinforce strong performance, and allow for timely interventions, ultimately enhancing the overall internship experience.
3. *Ongoing Industry Participation in Educational Development.* Beyond internships, companies should be invited to participate in career talks, seminars, job shadowing activities, and mentorship programs. It fosters stronger ties between academia and industry and ensures that students are consistently exposed to current workplace expectations.

3. **Development of a Field Internship Manual**

One key implication emerging from this investigation is the need to develop a comprehensive Field Internship Manual that clearly outlines the standards, responsibilities, processes, and expectations governing the internship experience. The findings of the study revealed recurring issues across all groups of informants; student interns, internship coordinators, and industry supervisors. The identified tasks, unclear expectations, inconsistent feedback mechanisms, uneven orientation practices, and variability in student readiness. These concerns collectively highlight the absence of a unified institutional reference that can guide all stakeholders throughout the internship cycle.

A well-structured Field Internship Manual would serve as an operational blueprint that promotes consistency, transparency, and accountability across all phases of the field internship program. For student interns, the manual can provide explicit guidelines on pre-deployment requirements, expected workplace behavior, soft-skill standards, reporting protocols, grievance procedures, and performance evaluation criteria. This clarity reduces anxiety, strengthens preparedness, and minimizes ambiguity issues that were frequently identified as challenges in this study.

For internship coordinators, the manual can establish standardized procedures for screening and matching students with Host Training Establishments (HTEs), conducting site visits, validating learning outcomes, and ensuring regular communication with industry partners. It may also include protocols for

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addressing common problems such as task-internship mismatch, technical competency deficits, and inconsistent feedback loops.

For industry supervisors, the manual can clarify their roles as mentors, evaluators, and collaborators in student learning. Sections may include guidelines on assigning tasks aligned with academic specialization, setting realistic expectations, providing structured feedback, and participating in joint school-industry orientation sessions. Such clarity reduces miscommunication and enhances the quality of the internship experience, as suggested by both coordinators and supervisors in the study.

Moreover, the manual can departmentalized key practices such as simulation-based training, regular curriculum-industry consultations, two-way feedback mechanisms, and competency-based evaluation tools, ensuring that these improvements are sustained beyond individual partnerships or personnel changes. By codifying these processes, the manual strengthens institutional memory and supports continuous program improvement.

The development of a Field Internship Manual provides a strategic and practical response to the systemic issues identified in this study. It ensures that the internship program is not only compliant with academic standards but also responsive to evolving industry needs ultimately promoting a more coherent, equitable, and meaningful learning experience for all stakeholders involved.

4. Pre – Deployment Practices

An important implication arising from the study is the need to departmentalized pre-deployment practices to ensure that student interns enter the workplace with adequate preparation, proper documentation, and a clear understanding of expectations.

Before deployment, students should be officially enrolled in BA 9: On-the-Job Training Program and be required to secure a pre-internship orientation and seminar certificate, which serves as proof that they have been briefed on internship policies, workplace ethics, and safety protocols. To safeguard student welfare, they must also submit a medical certificate confirming that they are fit for field training. Moreover, a notarized Internship Contract signed by the parent or legal guardian strictly without waivers must be accomplished to formalize consent. In line with institutional requirements, an updated Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the school and the Host Training Establishment (HTE) must be submitted before or during the start of the tour-of-duty, together with an actual sketch or photograph of the HTE for verification and monitoring purposes. These pre-deployment processes help ensure that students are adequately prepared, protected, and deployed to legitimate and appropriate workplaces.

During the tour-of-duty, students should consistently maintain and submit a journal daily, weekly, and monthly following the prescribed format of the Practicum Adviser. This documentation allows students to reflect on their activities, challenges, learning progress, and workplace issues. The internship program must also provide a clear system for handling student concerns on work ethics violations or sexual harassment, ensuring that mechanisms for reporting and intervention are in place. Likewise, HTEs should submit an official Job Evaluation Report and Performance Rating, sealed and returned directly to the Practicum Adviser or SIPP Coordinator to preserve the integrity of the assessment. At the end of the internship, students must secure a Certificate of Completion and undergo final evaluation and reflection on their SIPP and tour-of-duty experiences using the standard forms issued by the Dean's Office.

Embedded across these processes should be explicit alignment with essential program competencies, including communication proficiency (7.1–7.5), work quality and interpersonal relations (7.6–7.8), professional and civic engagement (7.9–7.10), analytical and research skills (7.11–7.12), environmental responsibility (7.13), and understanding of national development concerns (7.14). Ensuring that internship activities and assessments reinforce these outcomes strengthens the coherence between academic preparation and field-based learning. By formalizing these expanded pre-deployment and tour-of-duty practices, the internship program can better safeguard students, enhance workplace readiness, and support the development of the knowledge, skills, and values expected from future business professionals.

5. Alignment of Internship Practices with the CMO Program Outcomes

Another important implication for practice is the need to ensure that internship activities are systematically aligned with the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) CMO-mandated program outcomes

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for Business Administration and Accountancy. Internship tasks, expectations, and assessments should clearly reflect the competencies outlined in the relevant CMO such as analytical thinking, ethical behavior, problem-solving, communication skills, and the application of business tools and technologies.

By aligning internship guidelines, performance evaluation tools, and Host Training Establishment (HTE) task assignments with CMO outcomes, the internship program becomes more coherent, competency-based, and quality-driven. It also provides a consistent framework for coordinators and industry mentors to assess whether students demonstrate the skills, values, and knowledge required of future business professionals. Strengthening CMO-outcome alignment will therefore enhance the credibility of the internship program and ensure that graduates meet both academic and industry expectations.

In general, these implications advocate for a more integrated, collaborative, and developmental approach to school-industry engagement, resulting in internship programs that not only fulfill academic requirements but also contribute to meaningful, work-ready student interns.

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