

Flexible Internship Programs: Employability Skills Study

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Abstract

This study assessed the extent of industry partnership implementation, evaluated students' workplace and industry-wide competencies in flexible internship programs and identified the facilitating and hindering factors affecting internship effectiveness. An intervention program was proposed to strengthen industry-academe collaboration and improve internship outcomes. Descriptive quantitative with purposive sampling was utilized in the study. A total of 108 respondents participated, including school administrators, on-the-job training (OJT) coordinators and industry partners for HEIs offering business administration programs in Metro Manila. The data were collected using a validated researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed using mean and percentage, ANOVA and correlation coefficient. The implementation of industry partnerships for employability skills development was rated with very high extent [4.41]. Collaboration and teamwork ranked highest, followed by work ethics, communication, human resource competence and decision-making and empowerment. Supervised internship performance was rated as excellent with high markings for both workplace and industry-wide competencies. Administrative competence obtained the highest mean, followed by leadership, interpersonal, technical and conceptual competencies. The ANOVA indicated a significant difference only in collaboration and teamwork. In addition, correlation demonstrated strong positive relationships between industry partnership implementation and students' competencies. Furthermore, facilitating variables in the study were highly encountered, while hindering variables were moderately experienced by the students. Finally, based on the assessment, the proposed intervention program was highly suitable for acceptable and feasible. This illustrates the important collaborative role of industry-academe in improving internship programs, ensuring graduate employability.

Keywords: Employability Skill Development, Flexible Internship Program, Industry-academe Partnership, Workplace Competencies.

Introduction

The rapid globalization of economies has significantly reshaped labor market expectations, requiring graduates must acquire the academic knowledge, also adaptability, practical skills and the capacity to function effectively in complex and dynamic workplace environments (1). In response to these evolving demands, higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world are obligated to produce graduates who are equipped with competencies aligned with industry requirements. Strengthening collaboration between academia and industry has therefore become an essential strategy for ensuring programs follow continuous quality instructions to make it more relevant and responsive to global demands (2, 3). One of the most widely adopted approaches for achieving this goal is the integration of internship programs that provide students with opportunities to integrate the soft and hard skills they obtained from the academy into the industry. The foundation of an

internship is based on experiential learning theory (4). This theory, students' progress through experience, reflective observation, conceptualization of abstract theory that they have learned in the classroom and be applied in the actual workplace setting. In addition, the situated learning theory emphasizes that learning occurs through social and professional interactions. In internships, students become part of a community in which they practice and perform as employees, developing their skills and work attitudes (5). The Revised Guidelines for Student Internship Program in the Philippines (SIPP) by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) through CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 104, series of 2017 stated that the internship is required for all programs for the learners to professionally ready (6). They are supervised jointly by the on-the-job training coordinator from their respective Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and industry

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supervisors from recognized Higher Training Establishments (HTEs) partners. In this context, learners will develop work readiness, professional values and competencies aligned with industry standards. The coordinators and supervisors serve as assessors of students' performance which are based on learning outcomes and competencies of the program. With these, internships are not only training experiences rather than structured environments for developing employability skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration and teamwork, technical and work-attitude.

Internships serve as structured work-based learning experiences that help connect the gap between classroom to workplace settings. Through internships, students develop essential employability skills such as communication, collaboration, decision-making, leadership and professional work ethics while they gain exposure to actual industry practices (7). Despite these benefits, many university graduates still encounter difficulties in entering the labor market because of insufficient practical experience and limited opportunities to engage in industry-relevant tasks during their academic training (8).

Due to the pandemic, many organizations suspended internship programs, while others transitioned to virtual or remote internship arrangements. Studies reported that nearly half of internship opportunities were either canceled or shifted to online formats in 2020 (9). This sudden transformation compelled both educational institutions and industry partners to adopt flexible and technology-driven internship models, emphasizing the growing importance of virtual and remote experiential learning opportunities (10). While these alternative arrangements enabled the continuity of internship programs, they also introduced new challenges related to supervision, coordination and student engagement.

Flexible internship program is the response to new normal education. This is primarily associated with the modality of students in taking internships, a blend of online and face-to-face practicing the knowledge and skills in the workplace. Flexible internship programs require students to demonstrate greater levels of self-regulation, technological competence and independent learning, while institutions and industry partners must ensure effective coordination to maintain the quality of experiential learning outcomes (4, 11).

However, several factors may hinder the effectiveness of internship implementation, including limited resources, lack of technical skills, insufficient supervision, financial constraints and distance from cooperating organizations (9, 12). These challenges highlight the need to examine the impact of industry partnerships on the development of employability skills and how internship programs help students prepare for professional practice.

In the context of the Philippines, these concerns are particularly relevant for students enrolled in business administration programs, whose employability largely depends on their exposure to practical and industry-aligned learning experiences. Effective partnerships between HEIs and industry partners play a critical role in facilitating meaningful internship opportunities that support the development of essential workplace competencies (6). In this context, the present study investigates how industry partnerships contribute to employability skills development within Business Administration programs and how such partnerships influence student performance in flexible internship programs.

Specifically, the study examines how school administrators, on-the-job training (OJT) coordinators and industry partners assess the implementation of industry partnerships in terms of collaboration and teamwork, communication, human resource management, decision-making and empowerment and work ethics. It also evaluates the performance of business students who participates in flexible internship programs in relation to workplace competencies namely administrative, conceptual, interpersonal, technical and leadership competencies, as well as broader industry-wide competencies. Furthermore, the study explores if significant differences exist among the assessments of the three groups of respondents and whether a significant relationship exists between the implementation of industry partnerships and the performance of business students in internship programs. In addition, the study identifies the hindering and facilitating factors encountered during internship implementation and proposes intervention measures to improve the effectiveness of industry partnerships and internship experiences. The proposed intervention is also evaluated in terms of its suitability, acceptability and feasibility.

The study is limited to the assessment of industry partnership implementation and student internship performance within ten selected higher education institutions (HEIs) offering business administration programs within Metro Manila. The respondents consisted of three groups involved in the internship program implementation, including ten deans of the College of Business Administration, fourteen OJT coordinators and eighty-four industry partners, for a total of 108 participants. Data were collected through survey questionnaires administered both personally and through online platforms between December 2021 and June 2022. The findings of this study are therefore limited to the perceptions and experiences of these respondents and may not necessarily represent all higher education institutions or internship programs in the Philippines.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized descriptive research design using a quantitative approach. Research design serves as a systematic plan or strategy for data collection, measurement and analysis that enables researchers to address research questions and test hypotheses effectively (13). The descriptive design was deemed appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to systematically describe and analyze the existing conditions of the industry partnership for employability skills development within the business administration program. The quantitative approach facilitated the use of a structured questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. This approach enabled the researcher to measure the variables under investigation, examine variations in the responses of the participants and apply appropriate statistical procedures for analyzing the numerical data. Through statistical analysis, the study was able to determine patterns, relationships and differences among the variables related to industry partnership implementation and student internship performance.

Population and Sampling

The study used purposive sampling to select the respondents. This technique was employed because the participants needed to meet specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. This allows the researcher to deliberately select individuals who possess the necessary knowledge,

experience and involvement in internship program implementation. The respondents include administrators, particularly from the academic sector, on-the-job Training (OJT) coordinators and industry partners who directly supervise or collaborate with interns from the participating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These individuals were selected as they are directly involved in planning, implementation and evaluation of internship programs. The selection of Higher Education Institutions was based on their availability and accessibility to the researcher. A total of ten HEIs offering business administration programs in Metro Manila were included in the study.

Among the respondents, eighty-four industry partners participated in the survey. These respondents consisted of industry owners, human resource managers and supervisors who were responsible for overseeing student interns in their respective organizations. The participating industry partners represented various sectors, including financing, food services, manufacturing, customer service and real estate, providing diverse perspectives regarding the employability skills and workplace competencies of business students. The distribution of respondents included in the study is presented in Table 1. Among the 108 respondents, the participants were categorized into three groups: industry partners, OJT coordinators and school administrators. Most of the respondents were industry partners, comprising 84 respondents or 77.78% of the total sample. This was followed by 14 OJT coordinators, representing 12.96% and 10 school administrators, accounting for 9.26% of the respondents.

The study involved respondents from ten selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) situated in Metro Manila. The spatial distribution of these institutions is presented in Figure 1. Among these institutions, the Navotas Polytechnic College recorded the greatest number of respondents with 29 participants (26.85%). This was followed by Eulogio Amang Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology (EARIST), which contributed 11 respondents (10.19%). Both Arellano University Pasay Campus and De La Salle University had 10 respondents each (9.26%). Furthermore, the rest of the institutions had respondents of 7 and 9. Overall, the distribution of respondents across the participating institutions ensured representation

from various HEIs involved in the implementation of internship programs within the business administration program.

The responses of the respondents serve as a basis for assessing student's employability. Since OJT Coordinators and Workplace Supervisors are responsible for students during their internships, they are considered the most reliable sources of information regarding students' performance in the workplace. In addition, they may provide external and professional perspectives that

minimize personal bias and enhance reliability and validity of the findings.

The demographic profile of the respondents was collected at the initial stage of data gathering to provide a descriptive overview of the sample characteristics. However, these variables were not included in the inferential analysis because the primary objective of the study focused on examining the relationships and differences among the key constructs related to internship implementation and employability skills, rather than analyzing demographic influences.



Figure 1: Geographic Location of the Selected HEIs in the Study.
Map of Metro Manila using Google Earth

Table 1: Respondents of the Study

School	GPS Coordinates	School Administration		OJT Coordinators		Industry Partner		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adamson University (ADU)	14.586 N, 120.986 E	1	10	1	7.14	5	5.95	7	6.48
Arellano University (AU-Pasay)	14.554 N, 120.998 E	1	10	1	7.14	8	9.52	10	9.26
De La Salle University (DLSU)	14.564 N, 120.993 E	1	10	2	14.29	7	8.33	10	9.26
Global Reciprocal College	14.657 N, 120.983 E	1	10	1	7.14	5	5.95	7	6.48
Jose Rizal University (JRU)	14.592 N, 121.028 E	1	10	1	7.14	7	8.33	9	8.33

City of Malabon University (CMU)	14.6684 N, 120.956 E	1	10	1	7.14	5	5.95	7	6.48
EARIST	14.599 N, 120.994 E	1	10	4	28.57	6	7.14	11	10.19
Navotas Polytechnic College (NPC)	14.666 N, 120.947 E	1	10	1	7.14	27	32.14	29	26.85
Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Muntinlupa (PLMUN)	14.383 N, 121.044 E	1	10	1	7.14	7	8.33	9	8.33
University of Caloocan City (UCC)	14.756 N, 121.044 E	1	10	1	7.14	7	8.33	9	8.33
Total		10	100	14	100	84	100	108	100

Note: f: frequency, %: percentage.

The educational attainment of the respondents was categorized as school administrators, OJT coordinators and industry partners. Among the 108 total respondents, 73 (67.59%) held a bachelor's degree, followed by 11 (10.19%) with a master's degree. Meanwhile, 10 (9.26%) possess a doctorate degree, another 10 (9.26%) had doctoral units and 4 respondents (3.70%) had master's units.

Among the school administrators, the majority possess advanced academic qualifications. Specifically, 7 out of 10 administrators (70%) have completed a Doctorate degree, 2 administrators (20.00%) have doctoral units and 1 administrator [10] holds a master's degree. This distribution indicates the strong academic preparation expected for leadership roles in higher education institutions.

Most of the OJT coordinators have pursued graduate studies. The largest proportion, 6 respondents (42.86%), have doctoral units, followed by 4 respondents (28.57%) with a master's degree, while 2 respondents (14.29%) hold a doctorate degree and another 2 respondents (14.29%) possess a bachelor's degree. These findings suggested that many OJT coordinators have advanced academic training that may support effective management of internship programs. In contrast, industry partners display different educational profiles. The majority of the 71 respondents (84.52%) held a bachelor's degree, while 6 respondents (7.14%) had completed a master's degree, 4 respondents (4.76%) had a master's units, 2 respondents (2.38%) had a doctoral unit and 1 respondent (1.19%) had a doctorate degree. This reflects the varied

educational backgrounds of professionals representing different industry sectors.

In terms of years of service, the largest group of respondents reported having less than 1 year of service. This was followed by respondents who had 11 years or more in service. A total of 15.74% or 17 respondents had 5-6 years of service, whereas 12 respondents had 3-4 years of service. The group with 7-8 years of service included 11 respondents (10.19%) and the group with 1-2 years of service included 10 (9.26%). Finally, the smallest group consisted of 7 respondents (6.48%) who had 9-10 years of service.

Overall, the findings show that school administrators and OJT coordinators generally hold higher academic qualifications, while industry partners are predominantly bachelor's degree holders consistent with typical educational requirements for professional and managerial roles. In addition, the respondents exhibit a diverse range of experience levels, with a significant proportion having either relatively short service (below one year) or long-term service (11 years and above), indicating the presence of both new and seasoned participants in the internship programs. This indicated that respondents are credible and reliable in assessing the performance of students under their internship programs.

Research Instrument

The study employed a self-constructed survey questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by the sets of experts from the academe, research and industry. Items that were unclear, irrelevant, or misaligned

with the study objectives were revised or removed, ensuring that the instrument was appropriate, comprehensive and reliable for the target respondents. The questionnaire was administered to school administrators, OJT coordinators and industry partners involved in the Supervised Internship Program of the selected HEIs. The questionnaire was divided into five parts. To ensure that all the participants met the criteria for inclusion in the study, the demographic profile of the respondents, including educational attainment, years of service and professional role. The second section focuses on industry partnerships for employability skills development and evaluates key areas such as collaboration and teamwork, communication, human resource management, decision-making and empowerment and work ethics. The third section assessed the performance of business students in the flexible internship program, including administrative, conceptual, interpersonal, technical and leadership, workplace competencies and industry-wide competencies. The fourth section explored the hindering and facilitating factors encountered by the respondents in the implementation of the internship program. Finally, the fifth section evaluated the suitability, acceptability and feasibility of the proposed intervention measures to enhance the effectiveness of the internship program. The questionnaire was validated by the field experts. Items that were unclear, irrelevant, or misaligned with the study objectives were revised or removed, ensuring that the instrument was appropriate, comprehensive and reliable for the target respondents.

Data Gathering Procedures

The data were collected in several phases. Initially, permission was sent to the school administrators and industry partners of the selected HEIs. The letter contained the purpose of the study, including the requesting approval to conduct the research. Upon receiving permission, the cooperation of the respondents was secured and they were oriented regarding the objectives and significance of the study. Due to restriction and time constraints during the period of data gathering, questionnaires were administered to the respondents both personally and through Google Forms. After completed questionnaires were retrieved, the researcher systematically tabulated, organized, computed, analyzed and interpreted the data to address the research questions and objectives of the study.

Statistical Treatment of the Data

In this study, descriptive statistics such as the mean and percentage were used to interpret the demographic profiles of the respondents and their responses to the survey. A 5-point Likert scale of different interpretations was used to represent the responses of the respondents in the survey as shown in Table 2. Inferential statistics such as analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to investigate significant differences and significant relationships between the assessment of the respondents in the implementation of industry partnership for employability skills development and the performance of business students in the internship program, respectively. Microsoft Excel was utilized in computing statistics such as ANOVA, Correlation and Mean.

Table 2: 5-point Likert Scales and Corresponding Interpretation used in the Study

Scale	Range	Interpretation and Symbol											
5	4.20-5.00	Very Highly Extent	VHE	Excellent	E	Highly Encountered	HE	Highly Suitable	HS	Highly Acceptable	HA	Highly Feasible	HF
4	3.40-4.19	Highly Extent	HE	Above Average	AA	Encountered	E	Suitable	S	Acceptable	A	Feasible	F
3	2.60-3.39	Moderate Extent	ME	Average	A	Moderately Encountered	ME	Moderate Suitable	MS	Moderately Acceptable	MA	Moderately Feasible	MF
2	1.80-2.59	Least Extent	LE	Below Average	BA	Least Encountered	LE	Least Suitable	LS	Least Acceptable	LA	Least Feasible	LF
1	1.00-1.79	No Extent	NE	Poor	P	Not Encountered	NE	Not Suitable	NS	Not Acceptable	NA	Not Feasible	NF

Results and Discussion

The results of the assessment of different groups who evaluated the industry partnership for employability skills development of business administration programs of the selected higher educational institutions (HEIs) used in the study from the different criteria specifically identified in the study are discussed in this section.

The assessment of Industry Partnership for Employability Skills Development is illustrated in Table 3. The criteria of collaboration and teamwork were rated to a Very High Extent [4.46]. Its indicators were the alignment of the mission statement and partnership goals with the needs of both the school and industry partner obtained the highest mean of 4.52. This was followed by the development of a shared team mindset with a mean score of 4.48. Other indicators included clear objectives, self-assessment opportunities, individual evaluation, needs assessment and awareness planning are ranging from 4.40–4.46. This shows strong collaboration, although respondents noted that teams focus more on tasks than informal bonding. These findings align with literature emphasizing that collaboration, inclusivity and engagement improve productivity and support employability and professional development.

Table 3 also illustrates results in communication criterion, with a mean value interpreted as Very High Extent [4.41]. The highest-rated item was the clear communication of the partnership's goals and objectives to faculty, partners, students and the community. This was followed by the communication of volunteer involvement procedures and the sharing of evaluation results with stakeholders. Other indicators included assessing stakeholder needs, including volunteer procedures in the partnership plan and making the mission statement visible in printed materials. These results indicate that partnership goals were clearly communicated among stakeholders. Effective participation in a community of practice requires strong oral and written communication skills. Clear communication improves coordination, stakeholder engagement and the success of work-based learning programs (14).

Human resources criterion was rated to a Very High Extent [4.37]. The highest-rated indicator was the involvement of stakeholders (respondents) in developing the mission statement. This was followed by the assigning staff

to implement awareness activities. The presence of an OJT coordinator who manages and monitors training ranked third. Other indicators included the identification and allocation of resources and ensuring fair access for students, while the integration of the partnership into the school structure ranked last. These results show strong involvement of industry partners in supporting student training through mentoring and supervision. The OECD Report of 2020 stated that the strong collaboration between schools and employers improves workforce readiness and strengthens training and employment systems (15).

For decision-making and empowerment, the results were rated to a Very High Extent [4.36]. The highest-rated indicator was the analysis of evaluation results and implementation of improvements to strengthen the partnership, followed by regular reviews and flexible adjustment of goals. Other indicators included continuous awareness strategies, role definition and clear assignment of responsibilities. Lower but still high ratings were observed in collaborative decision-making, procedure review, information use and shared agreement in decisions. Overall, the results show strong collaborative decision-making and empowerment within the partnership. These practices help interns develop problem-solving, leadership and decision-making skills. These results support the finding that internships strengthen workplace competencies, especially decision-making and critical thinking. Employers highly value decision-making skills because employees regularly face workplace decisions. Likewise, internships provide real-world experiences that develop interns' analytical and problem-solving abilities (16). Overall, strong industry-academe partnerships help create learning environments that enhance interns' employability skills.

Work ethics was rated to a Very High Extent [4.44]. The indicator such as the alignment of the mission statement with the values and goals of both the school and industry partners and the orientation for participants, recognition of stakeholders and evaluation of activities aligned with the mission ranked high among the criteria. Monitoring the partnership budget and documentation of expenditures ranked lowest. Overall, the results

show strong commitment to work ethics in partnership. Industry partners demonstrate professionalism and responsibility, which positively influence interns' behavior. Industry partners help develop interns' work ethics by modeling ethical and responsible workplace practices (17).

The overall assessment of the industry partnership for employability skills development in the business administration program was rated to a Very High Extent [4.41]. Among the indicators, collaboration and teamwork obtained the highest composite weighted mean of 4.46, ranking first. This was followed by work ethics with a weighted mean of 4.44, communication with 4.41, human resources with 4.37 and decision-making and empowerment with 4.36. These results indicate

that industry partners strongly support interns in developing employability skills, particularly in collaboration, teamwork, communication and work ethics. However, decision-making and empowerment received slightly lower ratings, suggesting that industry partners may be cautious in allowing interns to make important workplace decisions independently. Interns often experience limited involvement in decision-making processes during internships because organizations tend to assign them supportive roles while they are still developing professional competencies (18). Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the objectives of the internship program are highly achieved by the time students complete their training.

Table 3: Summary of Assessment on the Industry Partnership for Employability Skills Development of Business Administration Program

Criteria	School		OJT		Industry		Composite		Rank
	Administrators		Coordinators		Partners				
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	
Collaboration and Teamwork	4.66	VHE	4.64	VHE	4.41	VHE	4.46	VHE	1
Communication	4.58	VHE	4.45	VHE	4.38	VHE	4.41	VHE	3
Human Resource	4.43	VHE	4.43	VHE	4.35	VHE	4.37	VHE	4
Decision-Making and Empowerment	4.44	VHE	4.35	VHE	4.36	VHE	4.36	VHE	5
Work Ethics	4.44	VHE	4.34	VHE	4.46	VHE	4.44	VHE	2
Grand Mean	4.51	VHE	4.44	VHE	4.39	VHE	4.41	VHE	

Note: VHE: Very High Extent, WM: Weighted Mean, VI: Verbal Interpretation.

Table 4 presents the results of an analysis of variance comparing assessments of industry partnerships for employability skills development in the Business Administration program across three groups: school administrators, OJT coordinators and industry partners. The results show that collaboration and teamwork obtained a computed F-value of 4.561, which is greater than the critical value of 3.47 with 21 degrees of freedom at the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates a significant difference in the respondents' assessments regarding collaboration and teamwork. In contrast, the computed F-values for communication, human resources, decision-making and empowerment and work ethics ranged from 0.152 to 1.015, all lower than their respective critical values at the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there are no significant differences in the assessments of school administrators, OJT coordinators and industry partners in these areas. Overall, the findings suggest that the different

groups of stakeholders generally share similar perceptions regarding most aspects of the industry partnership in developing the employability skills of Business Administration interns. The only area where their perceptions significantly differ is collaboration and teamwork. This implies that while stakeholders largely agree on the effectiveness of the partnership, their experiences or expectations regarding teamwork and collaborative practices may vary. Collaboration and teamwork are widely recognized as essential employability skills that influence how individuals work together to solve problems and accomplish organizational goals. Effective teamwork promotes better communication, efficient work processes and innovation within organizations. In addition, positive teamwork dynamics significantly enhance employability by improving individuals' ability to cooperate, communicate and adapt within professional environments (19).

Table 4: ANOVA of Different Criteria in the Assessment on Flexible Internship for Employability Skills Development of Business Administration Program

Criteria	df	F-Value	Critical Value	Interpretation
Collaboration and Teamwork	21	4.56122	3.47	Significant
Communication	15	1.0148	3.68	Not Significant
Human Resources	15	0.15198	3.68	Not Significant
Decision-making and Empowerment	24	0.4592	3.4	Not Significant
Work Ethics	12	0.20381	3.89	Not Significant

Note: p = .05 level of significance, df = degrees of freedom.

The assessment of the flexible internship program in terms of workplace competencies in the administrative domain was rated as Excellent, with an overall weighted mean of 4.49 shown in Table 5. The highest-rated indicators were maintaining regulations, policies and procedures and understanding plans and agreements relevant to assigned tasks [4.54]. These were followed by developing objectives and setting priorities consistent with organizational goals [4.53] and articulating and actively supporting the agency's vision [4.51]. Other indicators included analyzing best practices from other organizations [4.49], applying principles of resource allocation and management [4.48], determining strategies to sustain competitive advantage [4.47], understanding functional roles and responsibilities [4.45] and aligning personal vision with programmatic goals and understanding resource acquisition processes [4.44].

Table 5 further indicates that business students performed highly in administrative functions within the flexible internship program. Successful internships require clearly articulated learning goals and outcomes, particularly in remote settings where clarity of tasks, expectations, stakeholders and success indicators is essential for effective learning experiences.

In terms of conceptual competencies, the results were rated as Excellent [4.42]. The highest-rated indicator was the development of insights, innovative solutions and non-traditional approaches (mean = 4.46, Rank 1), followed by the integration of knowledge and skills (mean = 4.45, Rank 2). Other indicators included designing and implementing innovative programs and processes, investing in self-development and creating systems that facilitate knowledge communication (all mean = 4.44, Rank 3–5). Additional indicators included recognizing and analyzing workplace problems (mean = 4.43, Rank 6), promoting creativity and innovation and seeking feedback

(mean = 4.41, Rank 7 and 8), initiating risk-based actions for benefits (mean = 4.37, Rank 9) and making difficult or controversial decisions when necessary (mean = 4.33, Rank 10). Virtual internships enable interns to contribute meaningfully to organizational development, including digital content creation and system improvement, while simultaneously enhancing their professional portfolios (20).

The interpersonal competencies were also rated as Excellent [4.44]. The highest-rated item was treating individuals with sensitivity and respect (mean = 4.48, Rank 1), followed by listening and demonstrating understanding of others' needs (mean = 4.46, Rank 2 and 3). Other indicators included facilitating open exchange of ideas and respectful interaction (mean = 4.45, Rank 4 and 5), developing professional networks (mean = 4.44, Rank 6), understanding co-workers' needs and communicating ideas clearly and convincingly (mean = 4.43, Rank 7 and 8 respectively), responding appropriately to others' emotions (mean = 4.39, Rank 9) and providing constructive critique of written outputs (mean = 4.37, Rank 10). Flexible internship programs promote experiential learning where students develop teamwork skills through service-oriented and collaborative activities, distinguishing them from traditional classroom-based learning approaches (21).

For technical competencies, the results were rated as Excellent [4.43]. The highest-rated item was understanding business approaches and technology utilization, followed by leading virtual work for organizational effectiveness and integrating information technologies into the workplace. The results suggested that interns were able to apply technical knowledge and workplace procedures effectively while participating actively in organizational operations. In addition, indicators such as keeping updated with disciplinary developments, applying safety procedures and workplace policies were next to the lists. The

responses to these routinary activities demonstrated that interns are committed to continuous learning and professional development. Demonstrating functionality and participation in organizational activities and providing technical consultation for problem-solving are added competencies. Interns showcasing confidence and a sense of belongingness in addressing workplace challenges. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, business students demonstrated increased competence in digital technologies and virtual work environments. The technical skills must continuously evolve and proactive adaptation is necessary to avoid skill obsolescence in a rapidly changing business environment (22).

Finally, leadership competencies were rated as Excellent [4.46]. The highest-rated indicator was demonstrating positive leadership qualities, followed by accepting responsibility for actions and applying leadership skills in various contexts. Other indicators included accepting feedback for improvement, motivation and commitment to tasks and continuous learning, adapting to

different situations, designing practical programs and demonstrating risk awareness and planning and presenting programs ranked from 4 to 10. These findings suggested that internship behaviors show openness to constructive criticism and commitment to professional growth. Furthermore, their ability to adapt from different workplace scenarios reflects flexibility and resilience, the important qualities in organizational environments. Industry partners further highlighted diverse leadership practices in workplace settings, showing that leadership perceptions vary between mentors and interns depending on organizational roles and workplace expectations. This implied that leadership skills development influenced not only by technical skills but also communication skills, experiential learning and workplace culture. Career readiness should be assessed beyond personality traits and leadership styles, focusing instead on broader leadership competencies such as accountability, adaptability, collaboration and teamwork and decision-making skills (23).

Table 5: Summary of Assessment on the Performance of Business Students in the Flexible Internship Program as to Workplace Competencies

Criteria	School		OJT Coordinators		Industry Partners		Composite		Rank
	Administrators								
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	VM	VI	
Administrative	4.47	E	4.56	E	4.48	E	4.49	E	1
Conceptual	4.5	E	4.47	E	4.4	E	4.42	E	5
Interpersonal	4.51	E	4.57	E	4.41	E	4.44	E	3
Technical	4.48	E	4.46	E	4.41	E	4.43	E	4
Leadership	4.47	E	4.69	E	4.42	E	4.46	E	2
Grand Mean	4.49	E	4.55	E	4.42	E	4.45	E	

Note: E: Excellent, WM: Weighted Mean, VI: Verbal Interpretation.

Table 6 summarizes the assessment on the flexible internship program rated as Excellent [4.38]. Regardless of the group of respondents, all items obtained excellent remarks. The administrative and leaderships skills of intern rank among the criteria of workplace competencies. The variation of the means only ranges from 4.46 to 4.69. It shows that business students have performed excellent in both workplace and industry-wide competencies on flexible internship programs. This implies that student-interns from the selected HEIs are highly competitive and equipped to face possible employers.

The assessment on the flexible internship program as to industry wide competencies rated as Excellent with overall weighted mean of 4.31. Nine

items rated as Excellent, namely: explain accurate calculations and symbolic operations needed in work task with composite weighted mean of 4.42 as rank 1; demonstrate how to account for financial decision making; and apply technology to support decision making in business and leadership with both composite weighted mean of 4.36 as rank 2 and 3; develop a program for a business application; and interpret and implement business functions and processes with both composite weighted mean of 4.35 as rank 4 and 5; design a project or other appropriate task linking knowledge skills from work with composite weighted mean of 4.34 as rank 6; identify and evaluate ethical issues and formulate a defensible business resolution with composite weighted

mean of 4.32 as rank 7; construct a novel or unique ideas, original ideas, innovation and new product development with composite weighted mean of 4.30 as rank 8; and describe insights gained from engaging in activities beneficial to the community with composite weighted mean of 4.29 as rank 9. One item rated as Above Average which demonstrates effective oral and written communication skills with a composite weighted mean of 4.04 as rank 10. These findings implied that the flexible internship program effectively developed industry-wide competencies essential for workplace readiness, particularly in decision making, ethical reasoning, innovation for

improvement and utilization of available technology. However, enhancement in both oral and written communication skills is deemed necessary.

It recognizes that the performance of business students in the flexible internship program on industry-wide competencies was found to be fully competent, which is consistent with Mah and Thomlinson's finding that mastering industry-wide competencies allows workers to move between different roles and positions within an industry while maintaining the basic skills needed for success (24).

Table 6: Summary of Assessment on the Performance of Business Students in the Flexible Internship Program

Criteria	School Administrators		OJT Coordinators		Industry Partners		Composite		Rank
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	
Workplace Competencies	4.49	E	4.55	E	4.42	E	4.45	E	1
Industry-wide Competencies	4.42	E	4.45	E	4.28	E	4.31	E	2
Grand Mean	4.46	E	4.5	E	4.35	E	4.38	E	

Note: E: Excellent, WM: Weighted Mean, VI: Verbal Interpretation.

Table 7: Correlation between Implementation of Industry Partnership for Employability Skills Development and the Performance of Business Students in the Flexible Internship Program as to Workplace Competencies

Criteria	r-value	Interpret	Decision
Collaboration and Teamwork	0.74	Significant	Reject H_0
Communication	0.76	Significant	Reject H_0
Human Resource	0.68	Significant	Reject H_0
Decision-Making and Empowerment	0.76	Significant	Reject H_0
Work Ethics	0.79	Significant	Reject H_0

Note: $p = .05$ level of significance.

As displayed in Table 7, the computed r-values are as follows: collaboration and teamwork with 0.74; communication with 0.76; human resource with 0.68; decision-making and empowerment with 0.76; and work ethics with 0.79 were all strong correlation respectively. Hence, there is a significant relationship between implementation of industry partnership for employability skills development and the performance of business students in the internship program as to workplace competencies. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected. The findings revealed that strong academe-industry partnerships significantly contributed to the development of workplace competencies among business students (interns) during the internship program. An effective collaboration enhances employability skills by providing meaningful workplace experiences,

guidance and professional exposure for interns. The implementation of industry partnership for employability skills development has fully supported the outstanding performance of business students in the internship program on workplace competencies. The success of internship, bridging theory, applied learning and practices reflected the ability of students to use skills and knowledge from the classroom in the work environment. However, areas for improvement include strengthening communication between employers, students and supervisors, as well as expanding internship opportunities (24). As presented in Table 8, the computed R-values are as follows: collaboration and teamwork with 0.63; communication with 0.66; human resource with 0.61; decision-making and empowerment and work ethics with both 0.64 were all Strong

Correlation respectively. Hence, there is a significant relationship between implementation of industry partnership for employability skills development and the performance of business students in the internship program as to industry-wide competencies. The academic performance and technical skills found significant for

employability while communication and teamwork were insignificant (25). Likewise, the implementation of industry partnership for employability skills development has fully extended the outstanding performance of business students in the internship program on industry-wide competencies.

Table 8: Correlation between Implementation of Industry Partnership for Employability Skills Development and the Performance of Business Students in the Flexible Internship Program as to Industry-wide Competencies

Criteria	r-value	Interpret	Decision
Collaboration and Teamwork	0.63	Significant	Reject H_0
Communication	0.66	Significant	Reject H_0
Human Resource	0.61	Significant	Reject H_0
Decision-Making and Empowerment	0.64	Significant	Reject H_0
Work Ethics	0.64	Significant	Reject H_0

Note: $p = .05$ level of significance.

Table 9 illustrates the assessment of the respondents in the facilitating factors encountered in employability programs. Collaboration and teamwork were rated as Highly Encountered [4.47]. The highest-rated item was openness to others' ideas followed by the establishment of networks and strong connections. This indicated a positive collaborative environment that supports effective interaction and relationship-building in the workplace. Other indicators included sharing credit among members, openly sharing information and providing extra time and effort to assist team members, all of which further reinforce strong teamwork and cooperative working culture. These findings suggest that collaboration and teamwork were strongly facilitated during the flexible internship program, reflecting the importance of cooperative learning environments in developing workplace competencies (21).

For the communication criterion, the results were rated as Highly Encountered [4.44]. The provision of clear and understandable instructions ranked first followed by valuing reliable sources of information and sharing concise messages. Other indicators included proficiency in oral and written communication, active listening skills and the ability to prepare meeting minutes. These results indicate that communication processes were effectively facilitated in the flexible internship program, supporting efficient coordination and information sharing among stakeholders. A study revealed how oral and written communication skills are among the most critical competencies expected by employers from graduates (26).

In terms of the human resource criterion, the results were rated as Highly Encountered [4.51]. The highest-rated item was knowledge of administrative functions and human relations, followed by effective task performance. Other indicators included leadership in various situations, positive response to criticism and being self-driven and goal-oriented. These findings indicate that human resource-related competencies were strongly facilitated in the flexible internship program, enabling interns to acquire essential workplace skills in a structured learning environment consistent with experiential learning principles (21).

Regarding decision-making and empowerment, the results were rated as Highly Encountered [4.42]. The highest-rated item was reliability in actions, followed by integrating opinions in decision-making. Other indicators included quick decision-making in critical situations, systematic problem-solving approaches and consideration of alternative options to minimize negative outcomes. These results indicate that decision-making and empowerment were effectively facilitated during the internship program, supporting the development of critical workplace competencies such as problem-solving, negotiation and accountability (27).

Finally, in terms of work ethics, the results were rated as Highly Encountered [4.44]. The highest-rated item was punctuality with minimal absences, followed by productivity. Other indicators included maintaining quality and quantity of work, performing tasks with minimal supervision and

prioritizing the welfare of others over self-interest. These findings indicate that strong work ethics were consistently demonstrated throughout the

flexible internship program, supporting the view that structured internships help develop professional values and workplace discipline (28).

Table 9: Summary of Assessment on the Facilitating Factors Encountered in the Flexible Internship Program

Criteria	School		OJT		Industry		Composite		Rank
	Administrators		Coordinators		Partners				
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	WM	VI	WM	
Collaboration and Teamwork	4.66	HE	4.49	HE	4.44	HE	4.47	HE	2
Communication	4.50	HE	4.39	HE	4.44	HE	4.44	HE	3.5
Human Resource	4.50	HE	4.54	HE	4.50	HE	4.51	HE	1
Decision-Making and Empowerment	4.46	HE	4.40	HE	4.42	HE	4.42	HE	5
Work Ethics	4.50	HE	4.53	HE	4.41	HE	4.44	HE	3.5
Grand Mean	4.52	HE	4.47	HE	4.44	HE	4.46	HE	

Note: HE: Highly Encountered, WM: Weighted Mean, VI: Verbal Interpretation.

Table 10 summarizes the assessment on the hindering factors encountered, rated as Moderately Encountered with a grand mean of 3.01. All items rated as Moderately Encountered, namely: collaboration and teamwork [3.18, rank 1], communication with [3.04, rank 2] decision-making and empowerment [2.98, rank 3], human resource [2.95, rank 4] and work ethics with composite weighted mean of [2.90 as rank 5]. The assessment of the hindering factors encountered in terms of collaboration and teamwork was rated as Moderately Encountered [3.18]. The highest-rated item was considering team members as competitors [3.25], followed by lack of confidence in working in a team [3.24]. Indicators included lack of time in extending assistance or support [3.20], discomfort in working with others [3.11] and concerns regarding credibility in handling confidential information [3.08] were all evaluated as Moderately Encountered. These findings suggest that only limited barriers were encountered, indicating generally effective collaboration in the flexible internship program, consistent with the importance of teamwork in employability development (25). The need for strengthened team-building activities and mentoring strategies to further enhance cooperation and reduce conflicts and hesitations among interns in the workplace.

For communication, the results were rated as Moderately Encountered [3.04]. The highest-rated item was lack of interest in company expectations, followed by lack of initiative in acquiring information. Other indicators included insufficient communication skills such as poor listening, difficulty following instructions and weak reading

comprehension, as well as engaging in gossip and showing disregard for others' ideas. These findings indicate communication-related barriers were only minimally encountered in the flexible internship program. However, the results also highlighted the continuing importance of communication skills to further enhance employability outcomes (26).

The human resource factors were evaluated as Moderately Encountered [2.95]. The challenges related to managing work resources, responding effectively to the needs of others, demonstrating empathy and correcting mistakes in a professional manner are commonly encountered. These suggested that these influence the effectiveness of interns in workplace settings, particularly in tasks that require coordination, interpersonal sensitivity and supervisory skills. Hence, interventions and capability enhancement programs are necessary to strengthen interns' resource management and interpersonal competencies (26).

Regarding decision-making and empowerment, the results were rated as Moderately Encountered [2.98]. The findings indicated challenges related to accepting constructive feedback, limited engagement in decision making processes, difficulty in responding to unexpected situations, hesitation in communicating with superiors and tendency to disregard alternative solutions in problem. While issues are not highly prevalent, they may still affect interns' confidence and participation in the workplace. Hence, an enhanced internship experience by giving opportunities to be part of the decision-making

strengthens interns' empowerment and problem-solving competencies (27).

Finally, in terms of work ethics, the results were rated as Moderately Encountered, with an overall weighted mean of 2.90. The highest-rated item was lack of self-discipline followed by lack of respect for others' ideas and opinions. Other indicators included a lack of concern for others' struggles, which suggested limited empathy and reduced sensitivity towards challenges in the workplace. Absenteeism and tardiness reflected issues in time management, discipline and commitment, which may negatively affect productivity and team coordination during the internship activities. Meanwhile, social withdrawal or isolation indicated a reduced engagement and reluctance to participate in workplace interactions, which can hinder collaboration and teamwork. Taken

together, the presence of some undesirable work behaviors that require attention and intervention. This emphasizes the importance of developing strong work ethics in internship programs (17, 28). There are some identified barriers in the implementation of collaboration and teamwork, communication, decision-making and empowerment, human resources and work ethics. The interns' preparedness for the workplace may have influenced the results of the study. The lack of formal training, absence of advance planning or clear goals and insufficient support from the HEI or host training establishment (HTE) may lead to poor internship performance. The intervention program may be helpful to improve the performance of the stakeholders specifically enhance the experience of students in the workplace (25).

Table 10: Summary of Assessment on the Hindering Factors Encountered in the Flexible Internship Program

Criteria	School		OJT		Industry		Composite		Rank
	Administrators		Coordinators		Partners				
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	WM	VI	WM	
Collaboration and Teamwork	2.7	ME	2.74	ME	3.3	ME	3.18	ME	1
Communication	2.64	ME	2.58	ME	3.16	ME	3.04	ME	2
Human Resource	2.6	ME	2.43	LE	3.08	ME	2.95	ME	4
Decision-Making and Empowerment	2.54	LE	2.76	ME	3.07	ME	2.98	ME	3
Work Ethics	2.56	LE	2.42	LE	3.03	ME	2.9	ME	5
Grand Mean	2.61	ME	2.59	LE	3.13	ME	3.01	ME	

Note: ME: Moderately Evident, LE: Least Evident, WM: Weighted Mean, VI: Verbal Interpretation.

Proposed Intervention

The proposed intervention measure is composed of activities that will enhance the implementation of industry partnership for employability skills development of business administration program and improve the performance of business students in the flexible internship program.

The suitability of the proposed intervention measures rated as Highly Suitable with an overall weighted mean of 4.35. All items rated as Highly Suitable, such as: The inputs for intervention measures are in consonance with the vision and mission of Institution with weighted mean of 4.44 as rank 1; The inputs for intervention measures are suitable from implementation in the institution with weighted mean of 4.32 as rank 2; The inputs for intervention measures are doable, reasonable and time-bound for the implementation of corrective actions with weighted mean of 4.34 as rank 3; The inputs for intervention measures are clear and explicit template for program

implementation with weighted mean of 4.33 as rank 4; The inputs for intervention measure is considered a policy to the implementation of corrective actions with weighted mean of 4.32 as rank 5; and The objectives of the inputs for intervention measures are suitable since they can be achieved at a reasonable time with weighted mean of 4.27 as rank 6.

The first exposure of interns into the workplace is very challenging. The impression of intern as well as the work environment may affect its performance towards work. When interns are sent into designated host training establishments (HTE), constant communication must be done. In addition, having a direct line with the students is one of the best ways to do. This is by connecting and leveraging stakeholders. Intern must be aware of his/her job description to have better ideas on daily tasks or activities for self-monitoring and assessment. Stakeholders are always involved interns into any task, so they feel their value and

worth. Moreover, interns must have a chance to connect with other interns and professionals. They must give a chance to collaborate and build networks (29).

The acceptability of the proposed intervention measures rated as Highly Acceptable with an overall weighted mean of 4.43. All items rated as Highly Acceptable, such as: The inputs for intervention measures will benefit the institution in terms of identifying shortcomings in delivering quality management with weighted mean of 4.53 as rank 1; The inputs for intervention measures will guide and assist the implementer to develop and enhance policy guidelines with weighted mean of 4.51 as rank 2; The inputs for intervention measures provide completeness of facts presented with weighted mean of 4.41 as rank 3; It is practical enough to warrant adaptation and implementation with weighted mean of 4.40 as rank 4; The inputs for intervention measures have adequate provision for flexibility and cost effectiveness with weighted mean of 4.39 as rank 5; and The inputs for intervention measures provide comprehensive knowledge in the implementation of corrective actions with weighted mean of 4.36 as rank 6.

The feasibility of the proposed intervention measures rated as Highly Feasible with an overall weighted mean of 4.32. All items rated as Highly Feasible, such as: The inputs for intervention measure are feasible on features to be

implemented in the institution with weighted mean of 4.35 as rank 1; Resources and other materials are currently available and obtainable with weighted mean of 4.33 as rank 2; It is practical and fitting given the activities in the inputs for intervention measure and Right human resources and manpower can be allotted in place with both weighted mean of 4.32 as rank 3 and 4; and Facilities and other equipment are available for utilization in order to carry out the inputs with weighted mean of 4.29 as rank 5.

As presented in Table 11, the computed F-values for the three criteria were lower than their corresponding critical values at the 0.05 level of significance. Specifically, the F-values obtained were 1.72 for suitability, 1.05 for acceptability and 0.30 for feasibility. These values are all lower than the critical F-values of 3.68, 3.68 and 3.89 with degrees of freedom of 15, 15 and 12, respectively. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the assessments of suitability, acceptability and feasibility of the proposed intervention measures among the three groups of respondents, namely school administrators, OJT coordinators and industry partners. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the respondents' assessments of the proposed intervention measures is accepted.

Table 11: Comparative of Assessment on the Suitability, Acceptability and Feasibility of the Proposed Intervention Measure

Criteria	df	F-value	Critical Value	Interpretation
Suitability	15	1.7235	3.68	Not Significant
Acceptability	15	1.0475	3.68	Not Significant
Feasibility	15	0.30112	3.89	Not Significant

Note: df= degree of freedom, p = 0.05 level of significance.

The primary focus of internship is to equip students' readiness in the workforce environment. The CMO No. 104 s. 2017 of CHED does not stipulate the respond to the need of Southeast Asian Nation or Cross Boundary labor force. This is parallel to the study conducted in Vietnam that the transition from student mobility to coordinated workforce deployment remains largely informal in the absence of coordinated institutional mechanism (30).

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that the implementation of industry partnership for employability skills development in the Business Administration program is strongly evident and effectively practiced. The assessments of school administrators, OJT coordinators and industry partners indicated that the level of industry partnership was observed to a high extent, with collaboration and teamwork emerging as the most prominent criteria, followed by work ethics, communication, human resources and decision-making and empowerment. This suggests that the

collaborative relationship between academic institutions and industry partners plays a significant role in enhancing the employability competencies of business administration students. The results further indicate that there is a significant difference in the assessment of collaboration and teamwork among the three groups of respondents, implying that stakeholders may have varying perceptions regarding collaborative practices within the partnership. However, no significant differences were found in the areas of communication, human resources, decision-making and empowerment and work ethics, which reflects a consensus among stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of these aspects of the industry partnership. Moreover, the performance of business students in the flexible internship program was rated excellent in terms of both workplace competencies and industry-wide competencies. Among workplace competencies, administrative skills ranked the highest, followed by leadership, interpersonal, technical and conceptual skills. Similarly, the students demonstrated strong performance in industry-wide competencies, particularly in performing accurate calculations, supporting financial decision-making and applying technology in business operations. These findings indicate that the internship program provides valuable practical experiences that enhance students' professional knowledge and skills.

The study also established a significant relationship between the implementation of industry partnership for employability skills development and the performance of business students in the flexible internship program. Strong correlations were observed across all criteria, indicating that effective collaboration between schools and industry partners contributes significantly to the development of both workplace and industry-wide competencies among interns. In terms of contextual factors, the facilitating factors related to the implementation of industry partnership were highly encountered, particularly in human resources, collaboration and teamwork, communication and work ethics. Meanwhile, hindering factors were only moderately encountered, suggesting that while certain challenges exist, they do not significantly hinder the successful implementation of the internship partnership.

Finally, the proposed intervention measures designed to strengthen industry partnership and improve the flexible internship program were evaluated as highly suitable, highly acceptable and highly feasible by the respondents. Moreover, no significant differences were observed in the stakeholders' assessments of the intervention plan, indicating a shared agreement among school administrators, OJT coordinators and industry partners regarding its potential effectiveness. The study concludes that a strong and well-implemented industry-academe partnership significantly enhances the employability skills and professional competencies of Business Administration students, thereby supporting the successful implementation of the flexible internship program and preparing students for future workplace demands.

Abbreviations

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance, COVID-19: Corona Virus 2019, HEI: Higher Education Institute, HTE: Host Training Establishment, OJT: On the Job Training.

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Author Contributions

The work and article are solely done by the author.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding this article

Data Availability

The availability of the data upon the be request from the author.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The author uses AI only for clarifying and correcting grammar; no statements in the article were generated by the AI application. The author holds full accountability in the originality of the content and accuracy of the results.

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