

The Impact of Internship on Soft Skills and Hard Skills to Improve Students' Work Readiness

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to examine the influence of internship experience on the development of students' soft and hard skills and their impact on job readiness. The method used was a quantitative approach, with a sample of students from Trunojoyo University, Madura, who had participated in internships. The results showed that internship experience significantly improved both types of skills, ultimately contributing positively to improving students' job readiness. Soft and hard skills also act as mediators in this relationship.

Keywords: Internship Experience, Soft Skill and Hard Skill Development, Job Readiness.

INTRODUCTION

Facing the era of globalization which is characterized by fierce competition in the job market, the readiness of university alumni to enter the professional world has become an important problem that requires serious attention from various parties, including educational institutions and the government (Luthfiani & Wajdi, 2025). The phenomenon that occurred shows that there is a big difference between the skills produced by educational institutions and the qualifications required by the industrial sector (Pulido & Rodríguez, 2025). Higher education institutions often focus more on academic and theoretical development, while companies and industries practically seek prospective employees who are not only technically skilled but also possess practical, immediately applicable skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills. This disparity contributes to high rates of educated unemployment, with many university graduates struggling to land their first job because they are perceived as unprepared for the real challenges of the workplace. Technological advances, particularly automation and artificial intelligence (AI), further complicate this challenge by transforming the work environment and requiring more flexible, skilled, and qualified human resources (HR) (Syafira & Umam, 2024).

As a bridge to bridge the gap between theory and practice, internship programs have been widely recognized as one of the most effective means of supplementary learning in the higher education system. Internship experience is defined as a practical learning process aimed at providing students with the opportunity to apply academic knowledge gained in college to the real world of work. This program not only aims to increase knowledge and work experience, but also proactively hone technical and non-technical skills that are crucial to industry needs. Through internship programs, students can gain experience and adapt to the work

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environment, build professional relationships, and understand industry dynamics firsthand, ultimately improving their sense of self and quality as prospective employees (Faridah & Marzuki, 2024). In accordance with the theory of experiential learning, knowledge is formed through changes in experience, with internships being an appropriate means for students to undergo a cycle of real learning, reflection, conceptualization, and direct practice (Syafira & Umam, 2024).

Specifically, the positive impact of internship programs on job readiness can be explained by the improvement of two main types of skills: technical and interpersonal skills. Hard skills refer to specific technical and academic abilities in a field, such as data analysis, software use, programming, or specialized mastery (Luthfiani & Wajdi, 2025). Internship programs offer students the opportunity to apply, hone, and validate their skills. Technical abilities are demonstrated by completing real-world tasks, leading them to become more skilled and professionally proficient. Experience with specialized equipment, the application of industrial methods, and an understanding of operational standards during internships directly contribute to the development of highly sought-after technical skills (Pulido & Rodríguez, 2025).

On the other hand, internships are also a highly supportive arena for growth. Soft skills are non-technical personal skills that influence one's interactions and collaboration with others. Soft skills encompass a wide range of abilities, including effective communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and professional ethics. These abilities are often considered more difficult to teach in the classroom, but they are crucial for long-term career success. During internships, students naturally encounter situations that require them to communicate with supervisors and colleagues, collaborate on team projects, receive feedback, and manage time and stress, all of which efficiently hone their soft skills competencies.

Various studies consistently show that internship experiences, both direct and indirect, have a positive and significant impact on students' job readiness (Faridah & Marzuki, 2024). The hands-on experience gained during internships has been shown to improve students' technical skills, hard skills, and soft skills, ultimately enhancing their job readiness. Several studies have shown a strong direct impact, while others have found that the impact is not directly significant or is highly dependent on other factors such as work motivation or the quality of the internship program itself (Syafira & Umam, 2024). Thus, this study focuses on a comprehensive analysis of how internship experiences simultaneously impact the strengthening of hard and soft skills as key factors in improving students' work readiness. It is hoped that this will provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of effective career preparation paths for prospective graduates.

RESEARCH METHODS

Types of research

This study uses a quantitative approach to examine the influence of internship experience on the development of students' soft and hard skills and its impact on their work readiness. Data analysis uses reliability testing and path analysis with a mediation approach to examine the influence of the variables studied. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, with the sample being a portion of the population considered representative. The population in this study was all 300 students at Trunojoyo University, Madura, who had participated in internships, while the sample taken was 41 students considered representative.

Population and Sample

Population is a generalization area consisting of: objects/subjects that have certain qualities and characteristics determined by researchers to be studied and then conclusions drawn (Sugiyono, 2009), while according to Arikunto (2006) population is the entire research subject. If someone wants to research all the elements in the population research area. The population in this study is all students of Trunojoyo University Madura who have previously carried out internships, namely 300 students. A sample is a portion of the total characteristics possessed by a population where the sampling must represent the population or must be representative (Sugiyono, 2006). The sample in this study was a portion of Trunojoyo University Madura students totaling 41 students.

Variables and Indicators

The variables in this study consist of independent variables and dependent variables. These variables consist of: 1) internship with indicators of internship duration, type of work during internship, frequency of work-related activities, 2) soft skills with indicators of communication, cooperation, time management, problem-solving ability, adaptation, 3) hard skills with indicators of technical competence according to the field of study, use of software, practical ability, 4) work readiness with indicators of self-confidence, readiness to face interviews, technical readiness, work motivation.

Data Analysis Techniques

The study employed quantitative analysis with instrument reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure data consistency. Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the average scores for soft skills, hard skills, and work readiness based on internship experience. Hypothesis testing used path analysis with a mediation approach to examine the effect of internship on skills and work readiness, as well as the mediating role of soft skills and hard skills.

Hypothesis Testing

- a. There is a significant positive influence between internship experience on soft skills
- b. (coefficient 0.71, $p < 0.001$) and hard skills (coefficient 0.73, $p < 0.001$).
- c. Soft skills and hard skills have a significant influence on work readiness with coefficients of 0.45 and 0.38 respectively ($p < 0.001$).
- d. Mediation analysis shows that soft skills (mediation effect 0.320) and hard skills (mediation effect 0.277) significantly mediate the relationship between internship experience and job readiness with confidence intervals that do not cross zero.

Table 1. Reliability Test Results

Variables	Number of Questions	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Soft Skill	10 items	0.912	Very Reliable
Hard Skill	10 items	0.897	Very Reliable
Job Readiness	10 items	0.925	Very Reliable

Source: Processed Data

Table 2. Average Scores Based on Internship Experience

Respondent Group	Average Soft Skill Score	Average Hard Skill Score	Average Work Readiness Score
Have Internship	4.52	4.48	4.59
Never Internship	3.81	3.75	3.88

Source: Processed Data

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Instrument Reliability Test Results

Reliability testing was conducted to ensure the consistency of the instruments used in this study. The results of the reliability test are indicated by the Cronbach's Alpha values in Table 1. Note: Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 indicates that the instrument used is reliable for further analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the average score of each respondent group based on their internship experience. The average score was calculated on a scale of 1 - 5. From the table 2 above, it can be seen that respondents who have participated in internships have higher average scores in soft skills, hard skills, and work readiness compared to respondents who have never participated in internships.

Hypothesis Test Results (Mediation Analysis)

This analysis aims to examine the influence of internships on skill development and work readiness, as well as the mediating effects of these skills.

a) Influence of Internship on Skills (Path a)

a) Impact of Internship on Soft Skills: The analysis results show that participating in an internship significantly improves soft skills with a coefficient of 0.71 and a p-value <0.001. This indicates that the internship experience contributes positively to the development of students' soft skills.

b) Impact of Internship on Hard Skills: The analysis also shows that internships improve hard skills with a coefficient of 0.73 and a p-value <0.001. This indicates that participation in internships helps students hone their technical skills.

b) The Influence of Skills on Work Readiness (Path b)

a) Impact of Soft Skills on Job Readiness: There is a significant relationship between soft skills and job readiness, with a coefficient of 0.45 and a p-value < 0.001. This indicates that the higher the soft skills possessed, the higher the student's job readiness.

b) Impact of Hard Skills on Job Readiness: The results show a significant relationship between hard skills and job readiness, with a coefficient of 0.38 and a p-value < 0.001. This means that improving hard skills also contributes to students' job readiness.

Mediation Effect (Indirect Effect)

Mediation path analysis was conducted to determine whether soft skills and hard skills function as mediators in the relationship between internship and work readiness. This can be seen in Table 3. Conclusion: Since the confidence intervals (BootLLCI-BootULCI) for both pathways do not cross zero, it is clear that the mediating effect of Soft Skills and Hard Skills is real and

significant. This indicates that skill development through internships plays a significant role in improving students' work readiness.

Research Discussion

Instrument Reliability Test

Reliability tests are conducted to ensure that the research instruments are consistent and reliable. The results show that the instrument for measuring Soft Skills, Hard Skills, and Work Readiness has a very high Cronbach's Alpha value.

a. Variables

Soft Skill has 10 question items with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.912, which is categorized as Very Reliable.

b. Variables

Hard Skill has 10 question items with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.897, which is also categorized as Very Reliable.

c. Variables

Job Readiness has 10 question items with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.925, which is also Very Reliable.

Since all Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.70, this instrument is considered reliable for further analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to compare the average scores between respondents who had internship experience and those who did not. The results showed a significant difference between the two groups.

a. The group that

Those who had interned had higher average scores for Soft Skills (4.52), Hard Skills (4.48), and Job Readiness (4.59).

b. In contrast, the group that had never had an internship had lower average scores for Soft Skills (3.81), Hard Skills (3.75), and Job Readiness (3.88).

These data indicate that internship experiences are positively related to students' skill development and job readiness.

Hypothesis Testing (Mediation Analysis)

This analysis aims to examine how internship experiences influence skill development and job readiness, and whether these skills act as mediators.

Table 3. Mediation Path Analysis

Mediation Path	Effect Coefficient	Lower Limit (LLCI)	Upper Limit (ULCI)	Information
Internship → Soft Skills → Job Readiness	0.320	0.189	0.461	Significant
Internship → Hard Skills → Job Readiness	0.277	0.155	0.412	Significant

Source: Processed Data

The Impact of Internship on Skills (Path a)

Internship experience has been shown to have a significant impact on both types of skills:

- a. Impact on Soft Skills: Internships significantly improve soft skills with a coefficient of 0.71 and a p-value < 0.001 , indicating its positive contribution to the development of students' soft skills.
- b. Impact on Hard Skills: Internships also significantly improve hard skills with a coefficient of 0.73 and a p-value < 0.001 , which proves that internship participation helps students hone their technical skills.

The Influence of Skills on Job Readiness (Path b)

Both skills also have a significant relationship with job readiness:

- a. Impact of Soft Skills: Soft skills have a significant relationship with job readiness, with a coefficient of 0.45 and $p < 0.001$. This indicates that the higher the soft skills, the higher the student's job readiness.
- b. Impact of Hard Skills: There is a significant relationship between hard skills and work readiness, with a coefficient of 0.38 and $p < 0.001$. Improving hard skills also contributes to students' work readiness.

The Influence of Mediation

Mediation path analysis shows that soft skills and hard skills significantly mediate the relationship between internship experience and job readiness. This mediation effect is significant because the confidence intervals for both paths do not cross zero.

- a. Internship Path $\rightarrow$ Soft Skills $\rightarrow$ Job Readiness: The mediation effect coefficient is 0.320, with a lower bound of 0.189 and an upper bound of 0.461.
- b. Internship Path $\rightarrow$ Hard Skill $\rightarrow$ Job Readiness: The mediation effect coefficient is 0.277, with a lower bound of 0.155 and an upper bound of 0.412.

These results confirm the conclusion that skill development through internship experiences plays a vital role in improving students' job readiness.

CONCLUSION

Internship experiences play a crucial role in enhancing students' job readiness through the development of both soft and hard skills. These two skills are not only directly enhanced through internships but also serve as a mediator, strengthening the relationship between internships and job readiness. Internship programs are effective as practical learning tools to prepare students for the real world of work.

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