



# Fostering Personal and Professional Growth and Development in University Students through Internship Program

Mark Anthony R. Aribon III<sup>1\*</sup>, Jessel P. Juniosa<sup>1</sup>, Zandro T. Estella<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Business Teacher Education, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Manila 1016, Philippines

<sup>2</sup>Department of Social Science and Development, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Manila 1016, Philippines

\*Corresponding author: mararibon@pup.edu.ph

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Submitted 03 August 2025

Revised 20 November 2025

Accepted 23 December 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54250/view/11/version/11>

### KEYWORDS:

*Experiential learning, Internship program, Personal growth, Professional development*

### HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Internship programs significantly enhance students' professional development, including career clarity and application of academic knowledge
- ❖ Participation in internships improves key professional skills such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving
- ❖ Internship experiences contribute to students' personal growth, fostering maturity, responsibility, and effective time management



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## ABSTRACT

Internship program serves as an experiential learning for students to integrate theoretical and conceptual understandings into actual industry-based practice. In addition, this program allows the students to be exposed to real-life experiences, experts in the field, and day-to-day transactions of an employee. This study determined the potential influence of the internship program on personal and professional development of 250 graduating students from five (5) different undergraduate degree programs who experienced the internship as a course requirement, and who were deployed to academic institutions, government agencies, business industries, and other industry partners. Using descriptive research, the findings revealed that most of the students are interested in working at their chosen company/school before internship. Most of the students seek direction for better preparation for independent life and have agreed that taking their internship experience will help them land their future job and future job promotion. In conclusion, this study recommends exploring the long-term impact of internship programs on personal and professional development, the factors that contribute to high-quality internship experiences, and the student's satisfaction with internship programs and identify factors that contribute to positive experiences.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mendoza & Bautista, 2022 states that training is a planned initiative designed to help employees gain job-related knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for their roles. On the other hand, development is about gaining new knowledge and skills to handle the challenges of different jobs. In line with this, it becomes clear that both training and development play a significant role in the lives of learner-students being exposed to the internship programs to capacitate them in the market driven industries.

In the Philippines, employers of both government and private sector believe that investing in training is important for boosting workplace productivity and increasing labor income over the long term (Edralin, 2011). To achieve this, employers offer training programs tailored to their specific needs, and they often work with business industries or partnering with academic institutions.

Training and development programs within organizations aim to enhance knowledge and skills while changing attitudes and behaviors. These programs serve as significant motivators, which offers numerous potential benefits for both individuals and the organization (Mendoza & Bautista, 2022).

According to Serli et al. (2023) knowledge, attitude, and skills influence performance. It postulates that each of these factors contributes significantly to improving performance. Among the factors mentioned here, knowledge occupies a basic position. It starts with simple information and extends into complex forms like expertise. In knowledge-based societies, more knowledge translates into increased awareness and, consequently, deeper understanding of issues (Sail & Abu-Samah, 2010). This in turn influences employee performance positively, considering that Mendoza & Bautista (2022) established that the more knowledgeable an employee is, the better the work outcomes.

Meanwhile, attitudes are dictated by knowledge-driven beliefs. A more informed person is likely to hold positive attitudes, which are manifested in forms of proactive behavior, such as paying interest and assuming responsibility over one's work (Sail & Abu-Samah, 2010). Attitudes, too, according to Mendoza & Bautista (2022), are significant in influencing employee performance positively. Knowledge and attitude together inspire participation in community activities, which again improves skill development. According to the observation of Mendoza & Bautista (2022), the better the skills, the better the performance. Thus, training turns out to be an essential process in enhancing skills, knowledge, and attitudes, which eventually increases the effectiveness of employee and organizational performance (Engetou, 2017). Yet, when student-learners are empowered with training, they enhance not only their personal growth but also quality of life.

Similar studies published online likewise include the effectiveness of internship programs of undergraduate students from business programs (Satulan, 2025), hospitality programs (Seyitoğlu & Yirik, 2014), health and allied health programs (Banker & Borchardt, 2025; Ghazy, et al., 2021), and education program (Cale et al., 2025; Sartika et al., 2024). These studies are siloed within specific departments or programs within a university and focused on internships within a single sector. To address these identified gaps, the present study involved multi-sectoral experiences of students from five (5) different undergraduate degree programs providing a broader, comparative perspective that a single-program study lacks. Moreover, the present study understands how students develop when deployed across diverse industry partners, including academic institutions, government agencies, and private business industries.

Therefore, this study aims to determine the beneficial influence of internship program experiences on the professional development and personal growth of student-interns. Moreover, this study also serves as an evaluation of the internship program of the university and its influence on personal development and improvement. This personal-professional gap is being treated by the present study as interconnected which prepares a student for independent life while simultaneously preparing them for future job promotion. Finally, the study also determines where internship programs have the greatest impact on degree programs.

This means that: There is no significant difference between the personal and professional development of respondents when grouped according to their program of study.

The primary theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) which is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". This theory is particularly relevant to the internship experience of the students as it posits that learning is not merely the acquisition of abstract concepts but a cyclical process involving four (4) distinct stages of the theory namely: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. This study explains the statistically non-significant difference found across degree programs although the technical content of the internships varied, thus, the cognitive process of transforming experience into maturity and professional quality remained a universal human endeavor.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used a quantitative research design employing descriptive-correlational study to measure the influence of the internship program on personal and professional development of 250 university students who underwent internship and were deployed in the public and private schools, business industries, and government agencies and spent about 300-400 hours through an endorsement letter from the university.

The respondents are currently enrolled in the programs Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (n=66; 26.4%), Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (n=61; 24.4%), Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (n=57; 22.8%), Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurship (n=44; 17.4%), and Diploma in Office Management and Technology (8.8%). Additionally, a massive portion of the respondents are aged 22-23 (n=185; 74%), while others are aged 20-21 (n=35; 14%), 24-25 (n=28; 11.2%), and 26 and above (n=2; 0.8%) respectively. Finally, a sizable percentage of the respondents are female (n=157; 62.8%) while others are male (n=75; 30%) and part of the LGBTQIA++ community (n=18; 7.2%).

This study utilized an adopted questionnaire from Anjum (2020) composed of five (5) sections: the first section solicits for background of the respondents (e.g. program of study, age, gender); Part II – Part V is the assessment of student-interns on the influence of internship program on their personal and professional growth and development using five-point Likert scale with verbal interpretation ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The researchers used statistical data treatment such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Furthermore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test and compare diverse groups of respondents (i.e., program of study) and determine if there is a significant difference among them was also utilized.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part presents the results and discussion of the present study particularly the influence of internship programs on professional development, professional skills, personal growth, personal capabilities, and the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA).

### Professional Development

**Table 1.** Influence of internship program on professional development

Statement	M	SD
My internship program changed me professionally	3.97	1.12
Internship program made clear my career goals	3.77	1.23
I have applied my classroom knowledge during my internship	3.78	1.19

Statement	M	SD
Internship helped me to gain practical work experience in my field of interest	3.96	1.21
Internship helped me to identify the skills needed to get a job in my field of interest	3.97	1.23
I faced some problems to seek and accept work assignments during internship	3.50	1.33
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>1.22</b>

\*Legend: 4.21-5.00 – Strongly Agree; 3.41-4.20 – Agree; 2.61-3.40 – Neither; 1.81-2.60 – Disagree; 1.00-1.80 – Strongly Disagree

Correspondingly, respondents agreed that the internship program changed them professionally (M=3.97; SD=1.12). This means that the internship helped students develop professionally by allowing them to experience what it is like to work in their chosen field. It shows that internships are important in helping students build their career goals and understand their professional role. According to Bhandari et al. (2022), an internship is an opportunity for professional development that offers students practical knowledge in their chosen field of study or career of interest. Likewise, the internship helped them determine the abilities they must possess related to their area of specialization (M=3.97; SD=1.12). This suggests that being exposed to actual work situations helps students understand what skills they need to meet job requirements and perform effectively in the workplace.

In line with this, Jianning & Lee (2019) emphasize that when internees experience the criteria of an organization, they obtain the professional training associated with that career. In addition, respondents agreed that doing an internship program allowed them to acquire real-world experiences respective to their area of expertise (M=3.96; SD=1.21). This highlights the important role internships play in letting students experience real job tasks and responsibilities. These experiences help them connect their school learning with practical applications in the workplace. Supporting this view, To & Lung (2020) argue that internships offer students a valuable opportunity to apply academic knowledge to real-world problems through engagement in job-relevant activities. Moreover, respondents have agreed that the internship program they took has potentially contributed to the advancement of their professional development (M=3.80; SD=1.22). This reflects that the internship gave them more confidence and helped them prepare for their future careers through real exposure to industry settings. Studies reinforce this by showing that experiential education is foundational to building a strong career trajectory (Jackson, 2018).

Overall, the respondents overwhelmingly “agreed” that the internship program has potentially influenced professional development of the respondents with a general weighted mean of 3.8267 (SD=1.22). These findings support the idea that internships not only enhance professional growth and industry experience but also foster soft skills important for workplace success. As Anjum et al. (2020) affirm, internship programs play a vital role in improving both the professional development and personal skills of students.

### Professional Skills

**Table 2.** Influence of internship program on professional skills

Statement	M	SD
Internship improved my communication and interpersonal team skills	3.92	1.31

Statement	M	SD
Internship enhanced my decision making and problem solving skills	3.90	1.23
Internship improved my skills to work as a team	3.96	1.28
Internship enhanced my critical thinking	3.94	1.27
Internship improved my computer skills	3.90	1.32
Internship improved my skills in technical field of accounting and finance business	3.61	1.29
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.87</b>	<b>1.29</b>

\*Legend: 4.21-5.00 – Strongly Agree; 3.41-4.20 – Agree; 2.61-3.40 – Neither; 1.81-2.60 – Disagree; 1.00-1.80 – Strongly Disagree

The respondents agreed that undergoing an internship program improved their skills to work in a team (M=3.96; SD=1.28). This means that by being part of a real work environment, they were able to build better teamwork habits and connect more naturally with others in group settings. Tuccillo (2021) supports this idea by explaining that internships give young people a chance to form social bonds that are essential for successful collaboration. The internship program also enhanced their critical thinking (M=3.90; SD=1.27) considering that they were exposed to industry-based experiences.

Gomez-Estern et al. (2021) explained that service learning can develop students' ability to handle complex problems by encouraging them to consider different perspectives and act thoughtfully. Heinrich et al. (2015) also emphasized that learning through experience can push students to think more deeply and grow intellectually, especially in university settings. Additionally, they expressed that the internship program improved their communication and interpersonal team skills (M=3.92; SD=1.31), which suggests that direct exposure to workplace tasks allowed them to become more confident and effective when interacting with others. This is supported by Shan (2018), who found that most students improve in communication, teamwork, time management, and multitasking during internships. Galloway et al. (2014) also found that internships benefit IT students by helping them improve in communication, teamwork, customer service, and creative thinking.

Overall, the respondents agreed that the internship program has improved their professional skills (M=3.87; SD=1.29). This shows that hands-on learning experiences, like internships, play a major role in preparing students for employment by giving them practical skills and real-world exposure. Sitti et al (2023) demonstrates that internships positively influence students' professional growth and career readiness, helping them better understand the workplace and prepare for future opportunities.

### Personal Growth

**Table 3.** Influence of internship program on personal growth

Statement	M	SD
The internship program made me mature professionally and personally	3.98	1.24
Internship changed my personal career goals	3.72	1.24
Internship positively changed my interest in accounting and finance related business	3.52	1.18

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I developed a habit to accomplish my task before the set target after internship	3.88	1.20
My internship practically improved my classroom concepts	3.82	1.20
Internship changed my personal aspirations in some ways	3.87	1.20
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>1.21</b>

\*Legend: 4.21-5.00 – Strongly Agree; 3.41-4.20 – Agree; 2.61-3.40 – Neither; 1.81-2.60 – Disagree; 1.00-1.80 – Strongly Disagree

The field work experiences of the respondents were their venue to gain maturity professionally and personally ( $M=3.98$ ;  $SD=1.24$ ). This indicates that exposure to actual work environments fosters not only career-related skills but also personal transformation. Supporting this, Kilgore (2023) affirms that internships help students grow not just professionally, but also in terms of character, confidence, and life perspective. In addition to this, respondents have learned effective time management (i.e., submitting tasks before deadlines) ( $M=3.88$ ;  $SD=1.20$ ). This suggests that being accountable for real-world deliverables helps students manage their time more efficiently. The experience of having to prioritize tasks, meet project deadlines, balance multiple responsibilities, and coordinate with team members in a professional setting serves as practical training for developing self-organization, planning, and prioritization skills (Starks & Bower, 2025). Moreover, respondents indicated they have practically improved their industry concepts and personal aspirations in some ways even after they finish their internship program ( $M=3.82$ ;  $SD=1.20$ ). This underscores the significance of experiential learning in shaping future goals and deepening conceptual understanding. In support of this, Galbraith (2020) argues that in an ever-changing professional landscape, internships offer an ideal space for students to build future-relevant skills and reflect meaningfully on their ambitions.

Therefore, respondents have agreed that the internship program helped shape their personal growth resulting in an overall weighted mean of 3.80 ( $SD=1.21$ ). This means that the program contributed to their maturity, improved their time management, and allowed them to apply their knowledge in real work settings. Although internships are generally short-term, their long-term benefits are well-documented. Experiences of this kind have also been linked to longer-lasting learning (Gomez-Estern et al., 2021).

### Personal Capabilities

**Table 4.** Influence of internship program on personal capabilities

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Internship improved my conscientiousness and ethics	3.96	1.24
Internship polished my habit to have a respect for people different from myself	3.99	1.30
Internship taught me how to learn	4.00	1.29
Internship improved my skills to manage my time and money	3.94	1.27
Internship improved my social relationships	3.96	1.28

Statement	M	SD
Internship enhanced my initiative	3.93	1.28
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.96</b>	<b>1.27</b>

\*Legend: 4.21-5.00 – Strongly Agree; 3.41-4.20 – Agree; 2.61-3.40 – Neither; 1.81-2.60 – Disagree; 1.00-1.80 – Strongly Disagree

Based on the self-assessed report, respondents agreed that the internship program taught them how to learn (M=4.00; SD=1.29). This shows that through hands-on experience, students became more aware of how they take in and use knowledge in real situations. Applied learning experiences allow students to apply what they learned in the classroom to actual work environments (Trolan & Jach, 2020). Respondents also agreed that the program polished their habit of respecting people different from themselves (M=3.99; SD=1.30), suggesting growth in interpersonal and intercultural sensitivity. This is consistent with Baird & Mullen (2023), who note that internships expose students to real-world workplace dynamics and professional relationships, enabling them to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. In addition, respondents reported that the internship experience enhanced their conscience and ethics (M=3.96; SD=1.24). This means they developed a stronger sense of responsibility, honesty, and professionalism. Supporting this, Vocal et al. (2023) argue that internships promote moral values, a stronger work ethic, independence, and effective communication with supervisors, all of which contribute to ethical development. Respondents likewise agreed that their social relationships improved as a result of the internship program (M=3.96; SD=1.28). Being in a professional setting helped them grow in terms of social skills and teamwork. The internships can expose the student to a community of practice, that is a group of individuals with whom they will work in the future, who “share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Overall, respondents agreed that personal capabilities were significantly influenced by the internship program, with an overall weighted mean of 3.96 (SD=1.27). This supports the idea that internships are more than just skill-building, they also help shape values, habits, and workplace behavior. As Zehr & Korte (2020) point out, internships facilitate valuable skill acquisition through situational learning, where students adapt to real-world contexts that foster personal and professional growth.

#### Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) vis-à-vis Tukey Cramer

**Table 5.** Findings of Analysis of Variance vis-à-vis Tukey Cramer

Source	DF	Sum of Square	Mean Square	F Statistic	P-value
Groups (within groups)	4	5.1222	1.2805		
Error (between groups)	245	314.0084	1.2817	0.9991	0.4087
Total	249	319.1305	1.2816		

\*p>0.05

**Table 5** provides the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). It showed statistically insignificant differences in the personal and professional development of respondents coming from different degree programs,  $\chi^2(4) = 1.00$ ,  $p = .41$ . This result is consistent with the results of the pairwise comparison using the Tukey Kramer post hoc analysis. The computed p-values range from .57 to 1.00.

Regardless of their specific degree program, participants in the internship program experienced significant growth in both personal and professional aspects. This suggests that the internship program's design and implementation were effective in fostering development, regardless of the participants' academic backgrounds.

The findings of this study are aligned with previous studies of Seyitoğlu & Yirik (2014), Abrudan et al (2012), and Amin et al., (2023) where they found that internship program is an opportunity for students to be exposed in an actual work environment to help shape professional skills and receive valuable guidance and mentoring from their supervisors. While this study aligned with existing foundational findings regarding skill acquisition, its novelty lies in its multidisciplinary approach, offering a more comprehensive understanding of experiential learning in the Philippine higher education context. The present study established that the transformative power of internship is a universal developmental milestone that transcends specific technical curricula across degrees which is demonstrated by a non-significant difference in growth across five (5) diverse degree programs. Furthermore, it expands the discourse by integrating independent life readiness as a key metric of success, moving beyond traditional employability-focused metrics.

Contextually, Hussain & Marmood (2010) have concluded that providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to use conceptual knowledge into practice develops confidence to grow professionally thereby mastering classroom practices. Likewise, business students from Pakistan reported that the program is impactful on their personal and professional development (Anjum, 2020). Additionally, employability, technical, problem-solving, and critical thinking abilities are all enhanced by internship programs (Mabeba, 2019; Bawica, 2021; Ebiye et al., 2015; Irani et al., 2007). However, as Duncan et al. (2017) point out, even while internships might offer worthwhile chances for skill development, more instruction and assistance could be required to further improve some abilities (like collaboration). Furthermore, the internship program has demonstrated noteworthy results in terms of personal development and maturation, introspection, and a shift in perspective (Rutman, 2022). Character, values, and personality are shaped by supportive connections and reflection (Levine et al., 2006; Moghaddam, 2014).

Student-interns have improved their maturity, employment skills, team-playing abilities, flexibility, and social skills, which has helped them prepare for future work prospects (Khalil, 2015; Shaheen et al., 2022; Imjai et al., 2024). Meanwhile, prior research also showed that supportive connections and reflection (Levine et al., 2006) shape personality, values, and character (Moghaddam, 2014), leading to major results in personal maturity and growth, reflection, and change of mentality (Rutman, 2022).

These results imply that internship programs offer worthwhile chances for students to cultivate critical life skills and character traits. Student-interns can build a sense of professional maturity, learn effective time management techniques, and obtain a deeper awareness of their strengths and shortcomings through workplace immersion. These also have significant ramifications for companies and higher education institutions. Institutions may give students the experiences and abilities they need to be successful in the workplace by offering top-notch internship programs. Since internship programs give student-interns important chances to enhance their interpersonal and personal abilities, employers can get access to a pool of prepared interns who can support organizational objectives. During internship programs, student-interns can learn how to establish a growth mindset, learn how to adjust to new situations, form solid relationships, and develop a strong ethical compass.

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study is to determine how the internship program affects the interns' personal and professional growth. These student-interns, who are majoring in information technology, education,

business management, and entrepreneurship, have completed 300–400 internship hours from various government agencies, educational institutions, and corporate sectors. The study's findings showed that internship programs may have had an impact on the student-interns' professional development, professional skills, personal development, and personal capacities. They have stated that the program was beneficial and significant in their overall personal and professional development, provided they were given adequate exposure to a genuine work environment and were supervised by mentors from their various training schools.

Crucially, the statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in the level of development across different degree programs. This suggests that the benefits of experiential learning theory, as posited by Kolb (1984) are universal, regardless of the field of specialization, hence, the internship serves as an equally powerful catalyst for maturity by guiding students through the cycle of concrete experience and reflective observation. Furthermore, the high level of agreement regarding personal capabilities, specifically in the areas of ethics, diversity, and learning how to learn, indicated that internships provide a form of meta-learning that traditional classroom settings cannot easily replicate (Lee, 2025). This also underscores that the success of the internship program is not merely a product of the hours spent on-site, but is contingent upon adequate exposure to genuine work challenges and the quality of mentorship provided by industry supervisors (Galbraith & Mondaol, 2020).

In addition, these results may implicate how the university plans and implements activities and programs to develop their student-interns as well as to forge more partnerships that will greatly benefit the students from across programs. This also highlights the role of partner industries as co-educators in fostering personal and professional growth of student-interns, whom they can absorb for employment. These industry partners may view internships not just as extra help, but as a low-risk, high-return recruitment strategy.

However, the present study also acknowledges some limitations such as its research design (i.e., descriptive research), the single-institution context, and self-reported data by undergraduate students. This study further recommends exploring the long-term impact of internship programs on personal and professional development, the factors that contribute to high-quality internship experiences, and the student's satisfaction with internship programs and identify factors that contribute to positive experiences, hence, longitudinal studies and also qualitative studies are recommended to explain the nuances of how internship program led to a transformation of personal and professional skills.

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