

Original Article

Perceived Effectiveness of the Externship Program in the College of Arts and Sciences: Inputs for Program Enhancement

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Abstract. Externship programs are integral to work-integrated learning in higher education, providing students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic professional contexts. Despite the growing prominence of work-integrated learning, there is limited empirical evidence on how students perceive the effectiveness of externships in liberal arts and sciences contexts. This study addressed that gap by assessing the perceived effectiveness of the College of Arts and Sciences externship program across five domains: learning outcomes and professional exposure, alignment with academic discipline, communication and interpersonal skills, career awareness and readiness, and adherence to institutional policies and professional standards. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, 86 student participants completed a researcher-developed questionnaire and provided qualitative accounts of their externship experiences. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis examined qualitative responses; the findings were subsequently integrated to ensure convergence and complementarity. Results revealed that the externship program was perceived as highly effective across key domains, including learning outcomes and professional exposure ($M = 3.49$), alignment with academic discipline ($M = 3.47$), communication and interpersonal skills ($M = 3.49$), career awareness and readiness ($M = 3.48$), adherence to professional standards ($M = 3.61$), and overall effectiveness ($M = 3.53$). Inferential analysis indicated no significant differences in perceived effectiveness when respondents were grouped by program/discipline and year level, suggesting consistency in student experiences across academic contexts. Qualitative findings corroborated these results, emphasizing the externship as an authentic and transformative learning experience that enhanced professional competence, confidence, and career clarity, despite challenges related to limited duration and supervision.

Keywords: Externship program; Mixed-methods research; Program effectiveness; Student experiences; Work-integrated learning

Externships and other forms of work-integrated learning (WIL) have become integral components of higher education, serving as practical avenues for linking academic preparation with the evolving demands of the labor market. Globally, universities are under pressure to produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also work-ready, adaptable, and capable of functioning effectively in complex professional environments (Dempsey et

al., 2024; Ferns et al., 2025). As a result, experiential learning approaches—such as externships, internships, and practicum—have been widely institutionalized to enhance students' employability, professional identity formation, and career readiness. Empirical studies consistently show that participation in structured workplace learning opportunities improves students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge, develop interpersonal competencies, and gain realistic insights into professional roles (Ng et al., 2023; Curto-Reverte et al., 2025).

Despite these benefits, contemporary literature also highlights persistent issues that affect the quality and effectiveness of externship programs. Among the most frequently cited challenges are limited exposure duration, inconsistent supervision, lack of meaningful task engagement, and variability in placement quality (Ferns et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2023). In many cases, students are confined to observational roles rather than actively involved in workplace tasks, thereby reducing the depth of experiential learning. Furthermore, differences in host institutions' capacity to mentor students and provide structured learning experiences contribute to uneven outcomes across placements. These issues suggest that while externship programs are conceptually valuable, their effectiveness is highly dependent on program design, implementation, and contextual factors.

In the Philippine context, externship and internship programs are guided by policies such as the Student Internship Program in the Philippines (SIPP), which aims to ensure that students acquire relevant practical experience aligned with their academic programs (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2017; CHED, 2023). However, local studies and institutional observations indicate that challenges similar to those reported internationally persist, including limited training hours, a mismatch between academic preparation and workplace expectations, and variability in supervision and learning opportunities. These concerns underscore the need for context-specific empirical investigations that assess not only the effectiveness of externship programs but also the factors that facilitate or hinder their success within Philippine higher education institutions.

Anchored in these global and local issues, this study aims to determine the perceived effectiveness of the externship program of the College of Arts and Sciences. Specifically, it examines effectiveness in terms of: (1) learning outcomes and professional exposure; (2) alignment of the externship experience with the students' academic discipline; (3) development of communication and interpersonal skills; (4) enhancement of career awareness and readiness; and (5) adherence to institutional policies and professional standards. It also determines the overall level of perceived effectiveness and tests for significant differences when respondents are grouped according to program/discipline, year level, and number of externship hours completed. Complementing the quantitative strand, the qualitative component explores students' lived experiences, the challenges they face, and the factors that facilitate or hinder the externship program's effectiveness. Finally, the study integrates both strands to explain how qualitative findings support or expand quantitative results and to propose evidence-based program enhancement strategies.

This study is guided by a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, which allows for the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of externship effectiveness. By integrating numerical trends with lived experiences, the study contributes to a more nuanced and holistic evaluation of experiential learning programs. Moreover, the findings of this study align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), particularly by promoting inclusive, equitable, and relevant learning opportunities that prepare students for productive employment and lifelong learning.

The contribution of this paper lies in providing empirical, context-specific evidence on the effectiveness of externship programs in a Philippine higher education setting, while also advancing the discourse on WIL by integrating student perceptions, experiential insights, and program-level considerations. The results are expected to inform institutional policy, curriculum design, and program enhancement initiatives aimed at strengthening externship implementation and maximizing its impact on student development and professional readiness.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design, wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation. This design was selected to provide a comprehensive assessment of the perceived effectiveness of the externship program by combining measurable indicators with students' lived experiences. The approach is appropriate for studies that seek both generalizable trends and in-depth insights, allowing for triangulation and validation of findings across data sources.

Research Participants

The participants of the study consisted of eighty-six (86) students from the College of Arts and Sciences who had completed the externship program. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that only students with direct externship experience were included. The inclusion criteria were: (1) currently enrolled CAS students, (2) completion of the externship program, and (3) willingness to participate voluntarily. Excluded were students who had not yet completed the externship or those who submitted incomplete responses. This sampling approach ensured that the data gathered were relevant and reflective of actual program experience.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made instrument consisting of two components. The quantitative component was a 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire designed to measure the perceived effectiveness of the externship program across five domains: (1) learning outcomes and professional exposure, (2) alignment with academic discipline, (3) communication and interpersonal skills development, (4) career awareness and readiness, and (5) adherence to institutional policies and professional standards. The qualitative component included six (6) open-ended questions to capture students' lived experiences, challenges, and perceived facilitating and hindering factors.

To establish validity, the instrument underwent face and content validation by a panel of five (5) experts in education, research, and program evaluation. Using a validation checklist, the instrument obtained a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.93, indicating high validity. Revisions were made based on expert feedback. A pilot test was conducted among thirty (30) students from a similar academic context who were not part of the actual respondents. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded an overall coefficient of $\alpha = 0.95$, indicating excellent internal consistency. Domain-specific reliability coefficients ranged from $\alpha = 0.91$ to $\alpha = 0.94$, confirming that the instrument measures the intended constructs reliably.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted after securing permission from the appropriate institutional authorities. The researcher administered the instrument via an online survey platform, enabling efficient, accessible participation. Prior to answering, respondents were provided with a brief explanation of the study and an informed consent statement. The data gathering process was conducted within a specified period, during which responses were collected, monitored, and screened for completeness. The use of a single instrument integrating both quantitative and qualitative components ensured consistency in data collection.

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly the mean and standard deviation, to assess the perceived effectiveness across the identified domains. Inferential statistics were also employed to determine significant differences across selected variables, such as program, year level, and externship hours. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding, categorizing, and identifying recurring patterns and themes. To ensure trustworthiness, strategies such as data triangulation and careful coding procedures were applied. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was conducted during the interpretation phase, allowing identification of convergence, explanation, and expansion of results.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were ensured by not collecting personally identifiable information and by securely storing all data. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes, and all procedures adhered to institutional research ethics guidelines to ensure the

protection and welfare of the respondents.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the perceived level of effectiveness of the externship program in terms of learning outcomes and professional exposure. The findings revealed a composite mean of 3.49 (SD = 0.52), interpreted as Highly Effective. This result indicates that the externship program substantially achieved its intended objective of integrating theoretical knowledge with authentic workplace experiences. The high overall rating suggests that students engaged meaningfully in experiential learning, thereby enhancing their applied knowledge, professional awareness, and readiness for future employment. This finding is supported by recent empirical evidence indicating that internship and externship experiences significantly contribute to employability confidence and vocational identity development when learning engagements are structured and aligned with professional practice (Shen et al., 2024). Similarly, participation in work-integrated learning has been shown to facilitate the development of higher-order competencies such as problem-solving, contextual understanding, and professional adaptability (Álvarez-Huerta et al., 2024).

Table 1. *Perceived Level of Effectiveness of the Externship Program in Terms of Learning Outcomes and Professional Exposure*

Indicators	M	SD	VD/VI
As a student, I perceive that the externship program...			
1. provided me with meaningful insights into real-world professional practices.	3.50	0.50	SA
2. enabled me to observe workplace procedures relevant to my field of study.	3.50	0.53	SA
3. helped me understand the roles and responsibilities of professionals in the industry.	3.51	0.50	SA
4. exposed me to current workplace trends and practices.	3.42	0.54	SA
5. enriched my academic learning through practical experience.	3.50	0.53	SA
Composite mean	3.49	0.52	HE

Note. 4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Highly Effective (HE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Effective (E); 2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Less Effective (LE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Effective (NE)

Among the indicators, the highest mean ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.50$) was obtained for the statement that the externship program helped students understand the roles and responsibilities of professionals in the industry. This suggests that the externship was particularly effective in fostering professional role clarity and occupational awareness among the participants. Such exposure is critical to the process of professional socialization, in which students begin to internalize workplace norms, expectations, and standards of practice. As Dempsey et al. (2024) argue, placement experiences serve as a form of identity work, enabling students to construct and negotiate their emerging professional identities through real-world engagement. In the same vein, Shen et al. (2024) emphasized that internship effectiveness significantly strengthens vocational identity clarity, which in turn enhances students' confidence in transitioning to the workforce. Industry-responsive perspectives frame employability as adaptive readiness for evolving professional contexts, highlighting the need to strengthen practicum, integrate simulation-based training, and reinforce industry-aligned assessment competencies (Alvero et al., 2026). These findings affirm that externship programs play a crucial role not only in skill acquisition but also in shaping students' understanding of professional roles and career trajectories.

Conversely, the lowest mean ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.54$) was recorded for the indicator, stating that the externship program exposed students to current trends and practices in the workplace, although it remained within the Strongly Agree range. This relatively lower rating suggests that while students were adequately introduced to workplace environments, their exposure to emerging trends, innovations, and advanced industry practices may have been somewhat limited. This observation is consistent with the findings of Álvarez-Huerta et al. (2024), who noted that the developmental impact of internships varies depending on the depth and quality of engagement within the placement setting. Moreover, Fakhry et al. (2024) highlighted that not all internship or externship environments provide equal opportunities for exposure to contemporary tools, digital systems, and evolving professional practices, as these are often contingent upon the host organization's capacity and level of student involvement. Hence, while the externship program effectively facilitates foundational professional exposure, there remains an opportunity to enhance students' engagement with current and emerging industry practices.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the externship program is highly effective in achieving its intended learning outcomes, particularly in strengthening students' understanding of professional roles and providing meaningful real-world learning experiences. However, the comparatively lower rating on exposure to current trends underscores the need for continuous program enhancement through stronger collaboration with industry partners, improved placement matching, and the integration of innovation-oriented learning opportunities. As

emphasized in recent literature, the effectiveness of work-integrated learning programs is maximized when students are not only exposed to routine workplace functions but are also actively engaged in dynamic, innovation-driven environments that reflect current industry standards (Shen et al., 2024; Álvarez-Huerta et al., 2024).

Table 2 presents the perceived effectiveness of the externship program in terms of its alignment with students' academic disciplines. The findings revealed a composite mean of 3.47 (SD = 0.54), interpreted as Highly Effective, indicating that the externship program successfully facilitated alignment between academic preparation and workplace experience. This suggests that students were able to situate their disciplinary knowledge within authentic professional contexts, reflecting the core principle of work-integrated learning (WIL) that emphasizes coherence between curricular intent and experiential engagement. Contemporary studies affirm that effective WIL programs intentionally align academic learning outcomes with workplace tasks, thereby enhancing knowledge transfer, contextual understanding, and graduate readiness (Jackson et al., 2022; Rowe et al., 2021). Moreover, Leow et al. (2022) emphasized that workplace learning becomes educationally meaningful when students can recognize how disciplinary knowledge is enacted in practice, reinforcing the importance of alignment between formal instruction and experiential exposure.

Table 2. *Perceived Level of Effectiveness of the Externship Program in Terms of Alignment with Academic Discipline*

Indicators	M	SD	VD/VI
As a student, I perceive that the externship program...			
1. allowed me to observe tasks and activities closely related to my academic program.	3.50	0.59	SA
2. helped me recognize clear connections between externship experiences and my coursework.	3.51	0.53	SA
3. enabled me to apply theoretical knowledge from my classes during the externship.	3.36	0.51	SA
4. provided placement opportunities relevant to my field of specialization.	3.48	0.55	SA
5. aligned well with my academic and professional goals.	3.50	0.55	SA
Composite mean	3.47	0.54	HE

Note. 4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Highly Effective (HE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Effective (E); 2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Less Effective (LE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Effective (NE)

The highest mean ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.53$) was obtained for the indicator stating that the externship program helped students recognize clear connections between externship experiences and their coursework. This finding underscores the program's strength in promoting integrative learning, where students can bridge theoretical constructs and practical realities. Such integration is a critical dimension of higher education learning, as it supports deeper cognitive processing and facilitates the internalization of disciplinary knowledge. Empirical evidence suggests that when students can explicitly link classroom learning with workplace experiences, they demonstrate stronger engagement, improved reflective capacity, and enhanced professional competence (Luk & Chan, 2024). Similarly, Thapa (2024) argued that alignment between academic content and work-based experiences is a key predictor of career readiness, as it helps students understand the relevance of their studies in real-world contexts. Hence, the high rating of this indicator reflects the externship program's effectiveness in operationalizing theory-to-practice connections.

In contrast, the lowest mean ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.51$) was recorded for the indicator, indicating that the externship program enabled students to apply theoretical knowledge from their classes during the externship, although it remained within the Strongly Agree range. This suggests that while students recognized the relevance of their academic learning, the practical application of theoretical knowledge in workplace settings was comparatively less pronounced. This gap between recognition and application is well-documented in the literature. Philip, Mathew, and Sebastian (2025) noted that students in WIL programs often have limited opportunities to actively apply theoretical concepts due to the nature of the assigned tasks, which may prioritize observation over participation. In addition, Katsamba (2024) emphasized that the extent of knowledge application depends on the level of student engagement, task complexity, and the degree of autonomy granted within the placement environment. Thus, while alignment exists at the conceptual level, translating theory into practice may require more structured, intentional experiential design.

Overall, the findings indicate that the externship program is highly effective in aligning with students' academic discipline, particularly in fostering connections between coursework and workplace experiences. However, the relatively low rating in the application of theoretical knowledge highlights the need for greater experiential depth. Strengthening task design, increasing opportunities for active participation, and ensuring guided mentorship within placement sites may help bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. As

emphasized in recent studies, the full educational value of work-integrated learning is realized when students not only recognize disciplinary relevance but also actively apply knowledge in authentic, supervised professional contexts (Billett, 2022; Leow et al., 2022).

Table 3 presents the perceived effectiveness of the externship program in developing communication and interpersonal skills. The findings yielded a composite mean of 3.49 (SD = 0.52), interpreted as Highly Effective, indicating that the externship program significantly contributed to students' development of communication competence and interpersonal effectiveness in professional settings. This suggests that students were able to engage in authentic social interactions that enhanced their ability to communicate, collaborate, and function within workplace environments. The result aligns with existing literature emphasizing that work-integrated learning experiences are instrumental in developing soft skills, particularly communication and interpersonal competencies, which are critical for employability and workplace success (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Moreover, interpersonal skill development is often cited as one of the most salient outcomes of experiential learning, as students are exposed to real-world interactions that require adaptability, clarity, and professionalism (Clarke, 2018).

Table 3. *Perceived Level of Effectiveness of the Externship Program in Terms of Communication and Interpersonal Skills Development*

Indicators	M	SD	VD/VI
As a student, I perceive that the externship program...			
1. improved my ability to communicate effectively with professionals.	3.45	0.52	SA
2. developed my confidence in interacting within a professional environment.	3.42	0.54	SA
3. provided opportunities to practice appropriate workplace communication etiquette.	3.53	0.50	SA
4. enhanced my ability to collaborate and engage with others.	3.49	0.53	SA
5. promoted professionalism in my interactions during the externship.	3.55	0.52	SA
Composite mean	3.49	0.52	HE

Note. 4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Highly Effective (HE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Effective (E); 2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Less Effective (LE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Effective (NE)

The highest mean (M = 3.55, SD = 0.52) was obtained for the indicator, indicating that the externship program promoted professionalism in students' interactions during the externship, followed closely by the indicator on opportunities to practice workplace communication etiquette. This finding suggests that the externship was particularly effective in cultivating professional communication behaviors, including appropriate language use, workplace decorum, and respectful engagement with colleagues. Professionalism in communication is a key dimension of career readiness, as it reflects not only technical communication skills but also the ability to navigate social norms and expectations in organizational contexts. Recent studies have shown that experiential learning environments provide students with opportunities to observe and model professional communication practices, thereby strengthening their workplace identity and behavioral competence (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). In addition, Succi and Canovi (2020) emphasized that communication etiquette and professionalism are among the most valued competencies by employers, reinforcing the importance of embedding such skills in experiential learning programs.

Conversely, the lowest mean (M = 3.42, SD = 0.54) was recorded for the indicator, stating that the externship program developed students' confidence in interacting within a professional environment, although it remains within the Strongly Agree range. This suggests that while students were able to demonstrate communication behaviors and engage in professional interactions, their level of confidence may not have developed to the same extent as their observable skills. This distinction between skill acquisition and confidence development is supported in the literature. Clarke (2018) noted that while internships and externships enhance students' communication abilities, confidence-building often requires sustained engagement, repeated exposure, and supportive mentoring. Similarly, Jackson and Bridgstock (2021) argued that self-efficacy in professional communication develops gradually and is influenced by the level of autonomy and feedback students receive during workplace experiences. Hence, although the externship program effectively facilitated the development of communication skills, additional support mechanisms may be needed to strengthen students' confidence in professional interactions.

Overall, the findings indicate that the externship program is highly effective in developing students' communication and interpersonal skills, particularly in fostering professionalism and appropriate workplace communication practices. However, the relatively lower rating in confidence development highlights the need for

enhanced scaffolding within the externship experience. Structured mentoring, guided feedback, and increased opportunities for active participation may help students build greater confidence in navigating professional environments. As emphasized in recent studies, the development of communication competence in work-integrated learning is maximized when students are not only exposed to real-world interactions but are also supported through reflective practice and continuous feedback mechanisms (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Clarke, 2018).

Table 4 presents the perceived level of effectiveness of the externship program in terms of career awareness and readiness. The results revealed a composite mean of 3.48 (SD = 0.55), interpreted as Highly Effective, indicating that the externship program substantially contributed to the development of students' career-related competencies. This finding suggests that the program effectively supported students in clarifying career pathways, understanding workplace expectations, and strengthening their perceived readiness for employment. From a work-integrated learning (WIL) perspective, such outcomes reflect successful alignment between academic preparation and labor market demands, where experiential learning serves as a mechanism for enhancing employability capital (Jackson, 2018; Vlachopoulos & Tsitiridou, 2026). Empirical evidence further indicates that structured workplace exposure enables students to develop realistic career expectations and a more informed understanding of professional roles, thereby facilitating smoother school-to-work transitions (Clarke, 2018).

Table 4. *Perceived Level of Effectiveness of the Externship Program in Terms of Career Awareness and Readiness*

Indicators		M	SD	VD/VI
As a student, I perceive that the externship program...				
1.	provided clearer insights into potential career paths in my field.	3.47	0.52	SA
2.	enhanced my understanding of workplace expectations.	3.52	0.55	SA
3.	increased my preparedness for future employment opportunities.	3.48	0.57	SA
4.	helped me identify the skills needed to succeed in my chosen career.	3.49	0.53	SA
5.	motivated me to pursue my professional goals.	3.43	0.58	SA
Composite mean		3.48	0.55	HE

Note. 4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Highly Effective (HE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Effective (E); 2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Less Effective (LE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Effective (NE)

The highest mean ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.55$) was obtained for the indicator stating that the externship program enhanced students' understanding of workplace expectations. This finding underscores the program's strength in providing students with practical insights into organizational norms, performance standards, and professional conduct. Understanding workplace expectations is a critical dimension of career readiness, as it allows students to align their competencies with industry requirements and adapt to professional environments. As highlighted by Jackson and Tomlinson (2020), exposure to real-world work settings enables students to develop informed perceptions of employer expectations, which in turn enhances their employability, confidence, and preparedness. Similarly, Clarke (2018) emphasized that career readiness depends not only on academic knowledge but also on students' ability to interpret and respond to workplace demands, a competence best developed through authentic experiential learning contexts.

In contrast, the lowest mean ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.58$) was recorded for the indicator stating that the externship program motivated students to pursue their professional goals, although it remains within the Strongly Agree range. This suggests that while the externship effectively enhanced students' awareness and readiness, its influence on motivational dimensions may be comparatively less pronounced. This pattern reflects a well-documented distinction in the literature between cognitive/behavioral readiness and affective outcomes such as motivation. Robson (2023) argued that career motivation is shaped by broader socio-economic and personal factors, including individual aspirations, perceived opportunities, and self-efficacy, which extend beyond immediate experiential exposure. In addition, Marijani et al. (2023) noted that while WIL experiences enhance career clarity and preparedness, sustained motivation often requires structured reflection, career planning interventions, and continuous developmental support. Thus, the relatively lower rating may indicate that externship programs, while effective in building awareness, need to be complemented by intentional career development strategies to fully influence students' professional aspirations.

Overall, the findings indicate that the externship program is highly effective in enhancing students' career awareness and readiness, particularly in strengthening their understanding of workplace expectations and preparing them for future employment. However, the comparatively lower rating on career motivation highlights the need for a more holistic approach to career development within externship programs. Integrating reflective activities, mentoring systems, and career coaching components may help students internalize their experiences

and translate them into sustained professional motivation. Consistent with recent literature, the impact of work-integrated learning is maximized when experiential exposure is coupled with structured reflection and career planning processes that enable students to connect their experiences with long-term career goals (Jackson, 2024a; Clarke, 2018).

Table 5 presents the perceived level of effectiveness of the externship program in terms of adherence to institutional policies and professional standards. The results revealed a composite mean of 3.61 (SD = 0.49), interpreted as Highly Effective, indicating that the externship program was particularly successful in instilling discipline, ethical awareness, and compliance with institutional and organizational expectations. This suggests that the program did not merely facilitate experiential exposure but also served as a mechanism for professional socialization, in which students internalize norms of accountability, ethical conduct, and adherence to formal guidelines. This finding aligns with contemporary research emphasizing that work-integrated learning environments play a critical role in shaping students' professional behavior, particularly in fostering regulatory compliance and ethical decision-making through authentic workplace immersion (Sheridan et al., 2021).

Table 5. *Perceived Level of Effectiveness of the Externship Program in Terms of Adherence to Institutional Policies and Professional Standards*

Indicators	M	SD	VD/VI
As a student, I perceive that the externship program...			
1. guided me to follow the externship guidelines set by the institution.	3.58	0.50	SA
2. encouraged compliance with workplace rules and regulations.	3.63	0.49	SA
3. promoted the demonstration of ethical behavior in assigned activities.	3.60	0.49	SA
4. reinforced professionalism in terms of punctuality, attire, and conduct.	3.56	0.52	SA
5. instilled respect for confidentiality and organizational policies in the workplace.	3.70	0.46	SA
Composite mean	3.61	0.49	HE

Note. 4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Highly Effective (HE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Effective (E); 2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Less Effective (LE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Effective (NE)

The highest mean ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.46$) was obtained for the indicator stating that the externship program instilled respect for confidentiality and organizational policies in the workplace. This result highlights the program's strong contribution to ethical formation, particularly in reinforcing students' awareness of confidentiality, data protection, and institutional integrity. Such competencies are essential in professional practice, especially in contexts where sensitive information and organizational trust are involved. Empirical studies have shown that exposure to real-world organizational settings enhances ethical sensitivity and strengthens adherence to formal policies, as students observe and emulate professional conduct in situ (López et al., 2025). Moreover, research by Donald, Baruch, and Ashleigh (2019) indicates that employability development increasingly emphasizes ethical literacy and responsible behavior as key graduate attributes, suggesting that programs that cultivate these dimensions are better aligned with industry expectations. Thus, the high rating of this indicator reflects the externship program's effectiveness in embedding ethical consciousness in students' professional preparation.

In contrast, the lowest mean ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.52$) was recorded for the indicator, stating that the externship program reinforced professionalism in terms of punctuality, attire, and conduct, although it remains within the Strongly Agree range. This suggests that while students generally demonstrated professional behaviors, these aspects may have been less emphasized or less consistently reinforced than deeper ethical and policy-related dimensions. This pattern is consistent with literature suggesting that surface-level professional behaviors, such as punctuality and dress, are often acquired more informally and may depend on individual disposition and contextual expectations rather than structured learning interventions (Loer Hansen & Daniels, 2023). Additionally, Jackson (2024b) argued that while employability frameworks emphasize professionalism, the development of behavioral consistency in areas such as conduct and workplace discipline requires sustained reinforcement, mentoring, and feedback mechanisms within experiential settings. Hence, the relatively lower rating may reflect variability in how these aspects were modeled or monitored across placement sites.

Overall, the findings indicate that the externship program is highly effective in promoting adherence to institutional policies and professional standards, particularly in fostering ethical awareness and respect for organizational rules. However, the comparatively lower rating on observable professionalism suggests the need for more structured reinforcement strategies. Embedding explicit guidelines, performance monitoring, and mentor feedback related to professional conduct may enhance consistency in students' behavioral development. As highlighted in recent studies, the full impact of work-integrated learning on professional formation is achieved when both ethical understanding and behavioral competencies are systematically developed through guided

practice, reflection, and institutional support.

Table 6 shows that the externship program obtained an overall composite mean of 3.53 (SD = 0.54), verbally interpreted as Highly Effective. This indicates that, taken as a whole, the externship was perceived by students as a valuable and productive educational experience. The pattern of responses suggests that students did not view the externship merely as a peripheral requirement but as a meaningful component of their higher-education formation. This interpretation is consistent with recent scholarship arguing that work-integrated learning is most educationally powerful when it is intentionally embedded in curriculum, clearly linked to learning outcomes, and experienced by students as personally and professionally consequential (Ferns et al., 2025; Jackson, 2024a). It is also supported by broader higher education literature showing that employability-oriented learning experiences are increasingly treated as a core function of university education rather than an optional add-on (Tight, 2023).

Table 6. Overall Level of Perceived Effectiveness of the Externship Program

Indicators	M	SD	VD/VI
As a student, I perceive that the externship program...			
1. is an effective learning experience.	3.58	0.52	SA
2. contributed positively to my overall development.	3.52	0.53	SA
3. is meaningful and worthwhile.	3.58	0.52	SA
4. resulted in a satisfactory overall externship experience.	3.43	0.56	SA
5. is beneficial to my academic growth.	3.56	0.52	SA
6. enhanced my readiness for future employment.	3.52	0.59	SA
7. is relevant to my personal and professional goals.	3.55	0.55	SA
8. is recommendable to other students.	3.53	0.52	SA
9. met my expectations as a learning experience.	3.41	0.56	SA
10. is a valuable component of my education.	3.58	0.52	SA
Composite mean	3.53	0.54	HE

Note. 4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Highly Effective (HE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Effective (E); 2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Less Effective (LE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not Effective (NE)

The highest mean (M = 3.58, SD = 0.52) was shared by three indicators: that the externship is an effective learning experience, is meaningful and worthwhile, and is a valuable component of my education. The convergence of these top-rated indicators is analytically important because it points to students' strong endorsement of the externship's overall educational legitimacy. In other words, the program appears to have achieved more than simple exposure; it was experienced as educationally relevant, worthwhile, and substantively connected to students' development. This finding resonates with Dempsey et al. (2024), who showed that placement experiences can function as identity work, enabling students to negotiate how academic learning, self-concept, and professional possibility intersect. It also aligns with Dollinger et al. (2024), who theorized placements as important sites where students build career stories and make sense of their future selves through workplace participation. Together, these studies suggest that students rate externships highly when such experiences help them interpret education as purposeful and connected to future professional life rather than as detached classroom preparation alone.

By contrast, the lowest mean (M = 3.41, SD = 0.56) was obtained by the indicator stating that the externship met my expectations as a learning experience, although it still remained within the Strongly Agree range. This result deserves careful interpretation. It does not indicate dissatisfaction; rather, it suggests that the externship's general value was rated more strongly than the extent to which it fully matched students' prior expectations. That distinction is significant in experiential learning research. Quinlan and Corbin (2023) demonstrated that students' career interests and academic orientations evolve during higher education through multiple influences, including curriculum and placements, meaning that expectations are often fluid rather than fixed. In the same way, inclusion-focused work on work-integrated learning shows that students do not enter placements with uniform resources, assumptions, or opportunities, and therefore the fit between expectation and experience can vary considerably across contexts (Garant-Jones et al., 2024). Thus, the relatively lower rating on expectation fulfillment may reflect differences in placement quality, supervision, task exposure, or student anticipation rather than a fundamental weakness of the externship program itself.

Overall, the findings affirm that the externship program is highly effective in its broad educational purpose. Its strongest contribution lies in being perceived as worthwhile, educationally valuable, and genuinely effective as a learning experience. At the same time, the comparatively lower score on meeting expectations suggests a practical area for improvement: externship coordinators may need to strengthen pre-placement briefing, clarify realistic

learning outcomes, and improve alignment between host-site opportunities and student expectations. Recent work on work-integrated learning design supports this implication by arguing that high-impact externship experiences depend not only on access to workplaces but also on deliberate curricular design, explicit expectation-setting, and structured support before, during, and after placement (Ferns et al., 2025; Jackson, 2024a). This means the program may already be pedagogically sound, but its impact can be further deepened through tighter design coherence and stronger expectation management.

Table 7. *Difference in the Perceived Effectiveness of the Externship Program When Grouped According to Program/Discipline and Year Level*

Variable	Group	n	M	SD	F	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Program/Discipline	BA Communication	17	3.512	0.464	0.395	0.675	Fail to reject H_0	Not significant
	BA Political Science	13	3.631	0.373				
	BS Psychology	56	3.507	0.474				
Year Level	Second Year	21	3.562	0.488	0.086	0.918	Fail to reject H_0	Not significant
	Third Year	34	3.521	0.489				
	Fourth Year	31	3.510	0.405				

Table 7 revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of the externship program when respondents are grouped by program/discipline, as indicated by the computed F-value of 0.395 and p-value of 0.675, which exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. Although the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science group obtained a slightly higher mean ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.37$) compared to the Bachelor of Arts in Communication ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.46$) and Bachelor of Science in Psychology ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.47$), the differences among group means are minimal and statistically negligible. This suggests that students across different academic disciplines perceive the externship program to be similarly effective. Such a pattern indicates that the program is likely implemented with a high degree of consistency and alignment across disciplinary contexts, ensuring equitable learning opportunities. This finding supports contemporary work-integrated learning (WIL) literature, which emphasizes that well-structured internship and externship programs tend to produce comparable positive outcomes across disciplines, particularly when learning experiences are intentionally aligned with academic competencies and industry expectations (Jackson, 2024b; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Silva et al., 2018).

Similarly, the results indicate no statistically significant difference in perceived effectiveness when respondents are grouped by year level, as reflected by the F-value of 0.086 and the p-value of 0.918. The mean scores are closely clustered, with Second Year students obtaining the highest mean ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.49$), followed by Third Year ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.49$) and Fourth Year students ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.41$). The negligible variation among these groups suggests that students across different stages of academic progression experience similar benefits from the externship program. This finding implies that the program is accessible, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate, enabling even lower-year students to gain meaningful professional exposure and learning gains comparable to those of their senior counterparts. Recent studies affirm that early exposure to workplace-based learning enhances employability competencies regardless of academic level, particularly when structured reflection, supervision, and task alignment are present (Jackson, 2023a; Dlamini, 2025; Hwang et al., 2026).

Taken together, the absence of statistically significant differences across both program/discipline and year level indicates that the externship program demonstrates a uniformly positive impact across diverse student groups. Rather than reflecting a limitation, this homogeneity suggests that the program has achieved equity in delivery and effectiveness, ensuring that all participants benefit regardless of academic background or progression. This aligns with emerging perspectives in higher education that emphasize inclusive and scalable experiential learning models, with a focus on ensuring consistent quality rather than differentiated outcomes across groups (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Silva et al., 2018; Suyitno et al., 2025).

From a programmatic standpoint, these findings suggest that institutional efforts should focus on sustaining and enhancing the core features of the externship program, including structured workplace exposure, clear alignment with curricular outcomes, and guided reflective practices. Since no group appears to be disadvantaged, enhancement strategies may prioritize deepening the quality of learning rather than redistributing opportunities, including strengthening mentorship mechanisms, improving feedback systems, and ensuring stronger integration between academic instruction and field experience. Furthermore, the results reinforce the importance of maintaining strong partnerships between higher education institutions and industry stakeholders, as such collaborations are consistently identified in the literature as critical to the success of WIL programs (Jackson, 2023a;

Hwang et al., 2026). Ultimately, the findings suggest that the externship program serves as a valuable and inclusive component of higher education, contributing to students' academic, professional, and personal development in a consistent and meaningful manner.

Table 8. *Lived Experiences of Students During Their Participation in the Externship Program*

Themes	Subthemes	Initial Codes	Representative Statements	Interpretation
1. Authentic Workplace Immersion as an Eye-Opening Learning Experience	Exposure to real work settings; observing actual professional processes; seeing the "reality" of the field	eye-opening, real-world exposure, workplace observation, actual tasks, real environment, work reality	"Exposure in externship helps me to see how things actually work in real life"; "It opened my eyes to the reality of my field"; "I was able to observe how the actual workplace works."	Students primarily described the externship as a first meaningful encounter with the realities of work. Their lived experiences were shaped by observation, immersion, and firsthand exposure, suggesting that the externship served as an authentic transition point between classroom learning and the lived culture of professional practice.
2. Bridging Theory and Practice Through Applied and Situated Learning	Applying classroom knowledge; translating concepts into action; learning by doing and observing	theory-practice link, application, hands-on learning, actual responsibilities, practice-based learning, contextual understanding	"It allowed me to apply what I learned in school to real-life situations"; "This experience bridged the gap between theory and practice"; "I saw how theories and classroom concepts are applied in real-world situations."	Students experienced externship as a site of situated learning where knowledge became more concrete, usable, and professionally meaningful. The narratives suggest that understanding deepened when concepts were witnessed or enacted in actual organizational settings.
3. Growth in Confidence, Skills, and Professional Behaviors	Increased confidence; communication and teamwork; discipline, responsibility, adaptability	confidence, communication, teamwork, professionalism, accountability, discipline, adaptability, time management	"I gradually became more confident"; "It helped me build more confidence"; "I learned the importance of teamwork, discipline, and professionalism"; "I became more comfortable in handling my tasks."	Students' lived experiences were not limited to exposure alone; they also involved personal and professional growth. Many accounts show that externship participation supported the development of confidence, workplace communication, collaboration, and self-regulation.
4. Formation of Professional Identity, Career Direction, and Sense of Future Role	Clarifying career path; understanding responsibilities; becoming more certain about future profession	career clarity, role realization, future professional, commitment, motivation, direction, vocational choice	"It helped me see what my work will be like after I graduate"; "I realized that I am interested in this field"; "It gave me a clearer idea of the kind of professional I want to become"; "It helped me decide on my profession."	Students often described the externship as identity-shaping. The experience clarified what kind of work they valued, what specialization they might pursue, and what attitudes and responsibilities would define their future professional selves.
5. Humanized Understanding of Practice Through Empathy, Ethics, and Service	Compassion for clients/communities; ethics and confidentiality; people-centered and inclusive practice	empathy, patience, kindness, compassion, confidentiality, justice, service, advocacy, inclusion, ethical awareness	"It taught me patience, empathy, and adaptability"; "I learned the importance of confidentiality"; "My role is not only to apply theories but to help and support holistic development"; "It showed me that governance is people-centered."	Students did not describe professional work only in technical terms. Many reported a deepened sense of empathy, ethical responsibility, inclusion, and public service, indicating that the externship also shaped the moral and relational dimensions of professional identity.
6. Adjustment Difficulties, Limited Immersion, and Uneven Learning Opportunities	Initial anxiety and stress; short duration; limited participation; mismatch between expectations and opportunities	nervousness, challenge, stress, limited time, observation only, not allowed to interact, confusion, requirement only	"At first, I felt nervous"; "It is meaningful and stressful at the same time"; "We were not able to do much aside from sitting and observing"; "I feel like I am only doing it because it is part of the course requirement."	Not all experiences were uniformly positive. Some students reported restricted participation, brief exposure, and uncertainty, suggesting that externship quality depends heavily on placement conditions, supervision, and requirement.

The thematic analysis presented in the Table 8 revealed that students generally described their lived externship experiences as authentic, eye-opening, and professionally formative. Across the responses, students consistently portrayed the externship as their first meaningful exposure to the actual rhythms, expectations, and responsibilities of workplace life. Many emphasized that the experience allowed them to “see how things actually work,” understand how organizations function, and witness the day-to-day realities of professional roles. Rather than viewing the externship as a mere academic requirement, most participants framed it as a significant transitional space where classroom knowledge began to take on practical and human meaning. This pattern aligns with recent research showing that students value high-quality placement experiences that provide authentic learning opportunities, supportive environments, and meaningful participation in real work settings. For example, Chu et al. (2024) found that students’ positive placement experiences were strongly associated with learning opportunities, supportive staff attitudes, and team-based learning environments, while Gutiérrez-Pulido and Orozco-Rodríguez (2025) reported that structured internships were positively perceived for supporting satisfaction and the practical application of academic knowledge.

A second major pattern in the narratives was the strong sense that externship bridged theory and practice. Students repeatedly stated that concepts previously learned in the classroom became more understandable when applied, observed, or contextualized in real settings. This was especially evident among those assigned to psychology, law, political science, communication, education, and organizational placements, where students observed how abstract principles are applied through concrete tasks, case handling, service delivery, and professional decision-making. The findings suggest that the externship functioned as a form of situated learning: students did not simply recall knowledge but reinterpreted it through experience. This interpretation is consistent with recent internship literature emphasizing that internships become educationally powerful when they link academic training to practical demands and help students translate conceptual learning into work-relevant action. Gutiérrez-Pulido and Orozco-Rodríguez (2025) found that internships support the practical application of academic knowledge and the development of both technical and interpersonal competencies, and Pantaruk et al. (2025) similarly concluded that internships serve as a critical bridge between theoretical learning and practical employability skills.

The responses also show that students experienced externship as a space to build confidence and develop soft skills and professional behaviors. Many students described beginning the placement with nervousness, uncertainty, or hesitation, but gradually becoming more confident as they handled tasks, interacted with professionals, and received trust, responsibility, or feedback. Communication, teamwork, discipline, adaptability, responsibility, and professionalism emerged repeatedly in their narratives. Importantly, confidence was often not presented as an abstract feeling but as something built through actual participation, such as being allowed to assist, observe closely, contribute to outputs, or perform tasks with some degree of independence. This pattern is strongly supported by recent empirical work. Channa et al. (2024) reported that students in clinical placement settings described increased confidence after placement and identified empowerment, growth, collaborative learning, and support as central to their experience. Likewise, Johnson Smith et al. (2024) found themes such as enhanced communication, increased confidence, enhanced skills, and research attitude in students’ accounts of research placement experiences.

Another prominent theme was professional identity formation and career clarification. Students frequently stated that the externship helped them understand what kind of professional they wanted to become, which field they might pursue, and what values and responsibilities would define their future work. Some respondents explicitly said the experience helped them decide on law, organizational work, media, public service, or a specific branch of psychology, while others said it strengthened their commitment to a path they were already considering. These accounts indicate that the externship did not merely provide information about jobs; it allowed students to test their fit with the profession and imagine themselves within it. This interpretation is consistent with current higher education research showing that placements shape not only skill development but also career trajectories and professional self-concept. Anyango et al. (2024) found that placements influenced students’ career decisions by helping them create new career paths, refine existing plans, or reaffirm prior choices. In a broader higher education context, Quinlan and Corbin (2023) found that placements are one of the identifiable influences on changes in students’ career interests during higher education.

The data further indicate that empathy, ethics, and humanized understandings of practice profoundly shaped students' lived experiences. This was especially visible in responses involving children, persons with disabilities, public service, legal practice, banking, and psychology-related settings. Students described learning patience, compassion, confidentiality, inclusion, advocacy, and the importance of understanding people rather than judging them superficially. In several accounts, externship became a moment of moral awakening; students realized that their future profession is not only about technical competence, but also about careful judgment, ethical conduct, and meaningful service to others. Such narratives suggest that lived externship experiences can contribute to the relational and ethical dimensions of professional identity, not just technical proficiency. This resonates with recent literature arguing that inclusive and well-designed work-integrated learning can shape students' awareness of diverse learners, equitable practice, and broader professional responsibility. Garant-Jones et al.'s (2024) scoping review, for instance, emphasized the importance of designing work-integrated learning environments that attend to inclusion and equitable access to meaningful learning.

At the same time, the analysis also revealed a counter-theme of adjustment difficulties, limited immersion, and uneven learning opportunities. A smaller but important group of students described the experience as stressful, brief, confusing, overly observational, or insufficiently hands-on. Some said they were only allowed to sit and watch, were unable to interact directly with clients or learners, or felt that the externship did not yet provide enough practical skill development. Others felt uncertain because they were still in the early stages or because the placement seemed more like a requirement than a transformative experience. These responses are analytically important because they show that the effectiveness of externship is not automatic; it depends on supervision, task authenticity, placement structure, and the degree of active engagement students are allowed to undertake. This is consistent with recent placement research showing that even when overall placement satisfaction is high, less positive experiences are often linked to inadequate learning support, missed expectations, or uneven access to meaningful work opportunities. Chu et al. (2024) specifically noted that the lack of learning support contributes to less positive student experiences, while Channa et al. (2024) found that pre-placement anxiety and unmet informational needs remained important concerns even within otherwise positive placement environments.

Taken together, the findings suggest that students' lived experiences during externship were fundamentally transformative but unevenly mediated by context. At its best, externship enabled students to encounter the reality of work, connect theory to practice, develop confidence and soft skills, clarify career direction, and internalize empathy and professionalism. At its weakest, it risked becoming too short, too observational, or too dependent on the host site's willingness to meaningfully involve students. This means the externship program is not merely a field-exposure mechanism; it is a developmental space where learning, identity, ethics, and career imagination converge. However, to maximize this developmental potential, institutions must ensure that placements provide not only exposure but also active participation, reflective support, and inclusion-sensitive supervision. Contemporary work-integrated learning scholarship reinforces this point by emphasizing that purposeful curriculum design, strong supervision, and equitable learning opportunities are central to meaningful externship outcomes.

The qualitative findings in Table 9 reveal that students encountered a range of developmental, contextual, and structural challenges during their externship participation. The most dominant theme was difficulty in adjusting to the professional environment, as many students described their initial experience as unfamiliar, overwhelming, and disorienting. The transition from structured classroom settings to dynamic workplace environments required students to quickly adapt to new expectations, norms, and interpersonal dynamics. This finding aligns with recent studies indicating that early-stage work-integrated learning experiences often involve "transition shock," where students struggle to reconcile academic preparation with workplace realities (Jackson, 2024a; Rowe et al., 2021). Such adjustment challenges are not necessarily negative; rather, they signal the beginning of authentic professional socialization.

Table 9. *Challenges and Difficulties Encountered by Students During the Externship Program*

Themes	Subthemes	Initial Codes	Representative Statements	Interpretation
1. Adjustment Difficulties to New Work Environments	Transition from school to workplace; unfamiliar setting; adapting to expectations	adjustment, unfamiliarity, first-time exposure, workplace transition, new environment	"Adjusting to a new environment"; "Everything felt unfamiliar – the tasks, expectations, and people";	Students commonly experience difficulty transitioning from academic settings to real workplaces, indicating that externships

			"First day... we were clueless what to do."	represent a critical yet challenging adjustment phase.
2. Lack of Experience and Feelings of Unpreparedness	Limited skills; unfamiliar tasks; lack of prior exposure; theoretical vs practical gap	unprepared, lack of experience, unfamiliar tasks, knowledge gap, uncertainty	"I felt unprepared when given tasks I had not experienced before"; "I lacked experience in applying what I learned"; "I was unsure if I was doing things correctly."	Students' challenges largely stem from insufficient practical exposure, revealing a gap between academic preparation and workplace expectations.
3. Communication Anxiety and Interpersonal Difficulties	Shyness; fear of speaking; difficulty interacting with professionals/clients	shyness, anxiety, fear of speaking, hesitation, communication difficulty	"I struggled with being shy... hesitant to ask questions"; "I felt nervous talking to professionals"; "I was afraid of making mistakes when communicating."	Interpersonal engagement emerged as a major difficulty, particularly for students with limited prior exposure to professional communication contexts.
4. Task Complexity, Workload, and Time Management Challenges	Multiple responsibilities; deadlines; balancing school and externship	time pressure, workload, multitasking, deadlines, fatigue	"Handling multiple tasks at once felt overwhelming"; "Time management and travel time were challenging"; "Balancing externship and academic work is difficult."	Students experienced cognitive and physical strain due to workload demands, highlighting the need for structured scheduling and manageable task allocation.
5. Limited Hands-On Opportunities and Short Duration	Observation-only roles; lack of engagement; insufficient exposure time	limited tasks, observation only, short duration, restricted participation	"We were mostly limited to observation"; "20-hour externship is too short"; "Employers were hesitant to assign tasks."	Structural limitations of the program (e.g., duration and placement conditions) constrained the depth of experiential learning.
6. Emotional and Psychological Challenges in Real-World Exposure	Anxiety, pressure, discomfort, exposure to conflict or trauma	stress, pressure, anxiety, discomfort, emotional strain	"I felt overwhelmed and pressured"; "Clients shouted at me"; "Hearing traumatic stories made me uncomfortable."	Externship exposed students to emotionally demanding situations, requiring psychological readiness and resilience.
7. Context-Specific and Situational Challenges	Technical skills gaps; dealing with clients; ethical/professional dilemmas; logistics	technical difficulty, unfamiliar tools, client interaction, transportation, policies	"Learning equipment was difficult"; "Handling legal documents was challenging"; "Transportation and schedule were issues."	Challenges varied depending on placement context, indicating that externship experiences are highly situational and field-dependent.

Closely related to this was the theme of lack of experience and feelings of unpreparedness, which was consistently expressed across responses. Students frequently reported uncertainty when handling unfamiliar tasks, reflecting a perceived gap between theoretical knowledge and practical competence. This supports existing literature emphasizing that students entering workplace learning environments often experience a "theory–practice gap," particularly when they have limited prior exposure to real-world applications (Clanchy et al., 2021; Cereda, 2025). Importantly, students' recognition of this gap suggests greater self-awareness of their developmental needs, a critical outcome of experiential learning.

Another major difficulty involved communication anxiety and interpersonal challenges, particularly among students who identified themselves as shy or inexperienced in professional interaction. Many participants reported hesitation to ask questions, fear of making mistakes, and discomfort engaging with supervisors, clients, or colleagues. This finding is consistent with research highlighting that communication competence is not automatically developed through classroom instruction but requires authentic interaction in real settings (Jackson, 2024b). The externship environment, therefore, functions as a critical space where students confront and gradually overcome these interpersonal barriers.

In addition, students reported task-related and logistical challenges, including workload pressure, time management difficulties, and the need to balance externship responsibilities with academic demands. These findings are supported by studies showing that students in work-integrated learning programs often experience role strain due to competing academic and professional expectations (Abu Farha et al., 2022; Bilgin et al., 2024). The presence of such challenges suggests the importance of structured scheduling and institutional support to prevent overload and maximize learning outcomes.

A particularly important finding was the theme of limited hands-on opportunities and short duration of externship exposure. Several students noted that they were restricted to observation rather than active participation, often due to the brief 20-hour requirement or employer hesitation. This structural limitation significantly affects the depth of experiential learning, as students are less able to practice skills independently. Recent work-integrated learning literature emphasizes that active engagement—not passive observation—is a key determinant of learning effectiveness (Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). Thus, the findings suggest that program design plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of student experiences.

The data also revealed emotional and psychological challenges, including anxiety, pressure, exposure to conflict situations, and emotional discomfort when dealing with vulnerable populations or real-world problems. These findings highlight that externship is not only a cognitive learning experience but also an emotional one. Students are confronted with real human conditions—such as trauma, conflict, or high-pressure environments—which require emotional regulation and resilience. This supports contemporary perspectives on professional preparation, which must include emotional competence and reflective capacity (Bašová et al., 2026).

Finally, the analysis showed that challenges are highly context-dependent, varying across fields such as law, psychology, media, education, and public service. Technical difficulties (e.g., equipment use, document handling), situational pressures (e.g., deadlines, client interactions), and logistical concerns (e.g., transportation, schedules) were reported. This indicates that externship experiences are not uniform but shaped by the specific demands of each professional setting. As such, a “one-size-fits-all” externship model may not be sufficient, and discipline-specific preparation may be necessary.

Overall, the findings suggest that while externship programs are highly valuable, they are inherently challenging developmental spaces where students confront gaps in knowledge, skills, confidence, and professional readiness. These challenges should not be viewed as program weaknesses but as essential components of experiential learning. However, to maximize their benefits, institutions must provide structured support, clearer role expectations, sufficient time for exposure, and guided reflection, ensuring that challenges lead to growth rather than disengagement.

The thematic analysis in Table 10 indicates that students perceived the effectiveness of the externship program to depend chiefly on the quality of supervision, authenticity of task engagement, and conduciveness of the workplace environment. The most recurrent facilitator in the responses was the presence of supportive, approachable, and patient mentors or staff members who explained tasks clearly, welcomed questions, and offered practical feedback. Students repeatedly described learning as more meaningful when supervisors took time to orient them, model professional behavior, and make them feel comfortable enough to participate. In the literature, this is strongly supported by recent work on placement quality and work-integrated learning design. Chu et al. (2024) found that three of the most important dimensions of a positive placement experience were staff and facilitator attitudes, learning opportunities, and a team-based learning environment, while Mensah et al. (2025) reported that interns’ satisfaction was strongly associated with supervisors being available to answer questions and provide guidance. These studies support the interpretation that supportive supervision is not a peripheral feature of externship quality but one of its central enabling conditions.

Table 10. *Perceived Facilitating and Hindering Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of the Externship Program*

Themes	Facilitating Factors	Hindering Factors	Representative Statements	Interpretation
1. Supportive Supervision and Approachable Mentors as Primary Learning Enablers	Guidance from supervisors, mentors who explain patiently, approachable staff, willingness to answer questions, constructive feedback	Busy supervisors, inconsistent supervision, limited guidance, delayed support	“The supportive staff and organized workplace helped enhance my learning”; “The mentors really love what they are doing”; “There were moments when guidance was limited because supervisors were often busy.”	Students perceived externship to be most effective when workplace adults were accessible, patient, and willing to teach. The quality of supervision shaped not only task understanding but also confidence and motivation to participate.
2. Hands-On Tasks and Authentic Workplace Immersion Deepen Learning	Real-life tasks, direct application of classroom knowledge, participation in actual	Observation-only roles, restricted participation, limited access to complex	“Hands-on exposure to real tasks allowed me to apply theoretical knowledge”; “They didn’t just let us watch; they actually	Students valued externship most when they moved beyond passive observation into authentic participation. Learning was seen as stronger

	operations, observation with practice	tasks, few task options	encouraged us to try"; "There were only specific tasks assigned to externs."	when they were entrusted with meaningful tasks connected to real workplace functions.
3. A Welcoming, Collaborative, and Psychologically Safe Environment Supports Engagement	Friendly atmosphere, supportive co-workers, supportive classmates/peers, open communication climate	Intimidating environments, discomfort in new settings, not knowing anyone, weak orientation	"The best part was how welcoming the team was"; "Being with my classmates helped me become comfortable"; "Sometimes we were the first group, so we did not know what to do at the beginning."	Students' learning was enhanced when the workplace felt safe, inclusive, and communicative. A positive climate reduced fear and made it easier for students to ask questions, participate, and learn through interaction.
4. Structured Guidance, Clear Instructions, and Preparation Shape the Quality of Learning	Clear procedures, organized workplaces, orientation, explainers from staff, feedback on performance	Unclear instructions, poorly defined tasks, lack of prior orientation, reactive rather than proactive coaching	"Clear procedures helped me understand workplace responsibilities better"; "The project I was assigned wasn't super well-defined"; "Guidance was mostly provided after an issue occurred rather than beforehand."	Students perceived the effectiveness of externships to depend heavily on how well the experience was structured. When expectations and procedures were explicit, learning accelerated; when roles were vague, students felt confused, hesitant, and less effective.
5. Program Duration and Scheduling Conditions Strongly Shape Effectiveness	More exposure time, consistent schedule, enough hours to adjust and practice	Short duration, limited required hours, schedule conflicts with classes, travel burden, inconsistent schedule	"The number of hours"; "10-20 hours isn't enough"; "Limited time to complete required hours"; "Conflict in schedules."	Time emerged as the most recurring structural constraint. Students believed that short and fragmented exposure restricted deeper immersion, confidence-building, and mastery of more complex responsibilities.
6. Personal Readiness, Confidence, and Prior Knowledge Influence How Much Students Benefit	Confidence-building through practice, communication skills, adaptability, initiative, asking questions	Self-doubt, shyness, lack of confidence, lack of experience, unfamiliar terminology, technical skill gaps	"My lack of confidence in communicating independently"; "Lack of prior knowledge"; "I was afraid to do something"; "Lack of knowledge in computer."	Students recognized that learner characteristics also mediate the effectiveness of externships. Even in supportive environments, self-doubt and limited prior knowledge could reduce participation and slow learning.
7. Resource and Context-Specific Constraints Limit the Breadth of Experience	Access to departments, equipment, community interaction, varied units, real cases	Lack of equipment, limited access to senior officials or units, confidentiality barriers, few placement options, resource shortages	"Limited access to senior officials"; "Lack of equipment"; "We don't have many options, which area or workplace to immerse ourselves into."	Some barriers were not personal but contextual. The placement site's resources, openness, and capacity to involve externs affected how much students could observe, practice, and understand.

A second major theme was the importance of hands-on learning and authentic participation in real workplace tasks. Students consistently valued externship experiences that allowed them to apply classroom knowledge, assist in actual operations, and observe how work is truly done in professional settings. They described such experiences as more memorable, confidence-building, and educationally worthwhile than observation alone. This finding is consistent with Ferns et al. (2025), who argue that a work-integrated learning curriculum must be deliberately designed around authentic participation, meaningful activity, and the integration of academic and workplace learning rather than mere exposure. Similarly, Mensah et al. (2025) found that internship satisfaction increased when students had opportunities to demonstrate initiative beyond basic requirements and contribute to meaningful outcomes. The present dataset, therefore, suggests that students define externship effectiveness not simply in terms of presence in a workplace, but in terms of whether they are given chances to do, contribute, and learn in context.

Students also emphasized the role of a welcoming, collaborative, and psychologically safe environment in enhancing learning. Responses frequently mentioned friendly teams, approachable co-workers, supportive classmates, and workplaces where students were not made to feel like outsiders. This kind of environment appeared to reduce anxiety and enabled students to ask questions more freely, engage more actively, and interpret mistakes as part of learning rather than as failure. Recent research supports this reading. Channa et al. (2024) found that positive placement experiences were associated with collaborative inter-professional learning, peer

support, and a positive learning culture, while Dempsey et al. (2024) show that placement experiences can become sites of identity development when students feel able to engage meaningfully with professional possibilities rather than merely observe them from the margins. In this sense, a safe and inclusive environment appears to function not only as a source of emotional support but also as a pedagogical condition for deeper learning and the formation of professional identity.

In contrast, the most frequently cited hindering factor was the short duration or limited number of externship hours. Many students explicitly stated that 10 to 20 hours was not enough to gain a deep understanding of the workplace, build confidence, rotate across units, or develop mastery of technical tasks. This theme was so recurrent that it can be interpreted as the principal structural limitation of the program from the students' perspective. The same concern is visible in recent scholarship. Mensah et al. identified program duration as one of the central challenges in internship effectiveness and recommended longer placement periods, while Curto-Reverte et al.'s (2025) systematic review on work-integrated learning in the European Higher Education Area emphasizes that the educational value of WIL depends not only on access to workplace settings but also on sufficient depth and continuity of experience. The present findings, therefore, suggest that students do not reject the externship model itself; rather, they perceive that its developmental value is constrained when exposure is too brief to allow meaningful immersion.

Beyond time limitations, students also identified unclear instructions, limited guidance, and poorly defined roles as major barriers. Some respondents said they did not know what to do upon arrival, received guidance only after problems occurred, or were assigned vague tasks without adequate orientation. Others felt constrained by busy supervisors, insufficient explanation, or the lack of clear expectations for externs. This finding is particularly important because it suggests that even potentially rich placements can become less effective when the instructional structure is weak. In Ng et al.'s (2023) study of internship environmental factors, learning opportunities, variety of skills, supervisor support, and interpersonal relationships were shown to shape how students process and benefit from internship experiences. Likewise, Ferns et al. (2025) argue that work-integrated learning must be intentionally designed, not simply arranged, if it is to produce coherent learning outcomes. In short, the present data suggest that externship effectiveness is facilitated not only by the workplace itself but by the degree to which the experience is pedagogically organized.

Another important theme was the influence of personal readiness, confidence, and prior knowledge. Several students admitted that shyness, fear of making mistakes, weak communication, unfamiliar vocabulary, or insufficient technical knowledge reduced how fully they could participate. These accounts show that externship effectiveness is partly mediated by the learner's own sense of preparedness. However, the same responses also suggest that supportive conditions can compensate for these limitations by encouraging students to ask questions, observe, and gain confidence through guided participation. This interpretation is supported by Dollinger et al. (2024), who argue that work placements are not neutral learning spaces but uneven opportunities that shape students' career stories differently depending on how access, inclusion, and support are distributed. The implication is that externship programs should not assume that all students arrive equally ready; rather, they should include scaffolds to support students who are initially hesitant, underprepared, or unfamiliar with professional norms.

Finally, the findings reveal that some hindrances were contextual and resource-based, including limited access to units or senior personnel, lack of equipment, few placement options, confidentiality restrictions, budget constraints, and transportation or scheduling burdens. These responses show that students' externship experiences are shaped not only by their motivation and supervisors' support, but also by the material realities of the placement environment. Mensah et al. (2025) similarly found that financial issues, supervision quality, and adherence to program requirements affected internship quality, while Chu et al. (2024) underscore that placement satisfaction is influenced by institutional and site conditions, not just student attitudes. Taken together, the present results suggest that the effectiveness of externship is co-produced by multiple interacting layers: program design, host-site capacity, supervisory quality, and student readiness.

Overall, the qualitative evidence indicates that students perceive externship effectiveness to be maximized when they are placed in supportive, well-structured, and authentic learning environments that provide guidance, hands-on opportunities, psychological safety, and enough time to adjust and participate meaningfully. Conversely, effectiveness is reduced when exposure is too brief, tasks are vague or overly limited, guidance is

inconsistent, and students must navigate the placement with insufficient confidence or support. For dissertation-level interpretation, this means that externship should be understood not as a single intervention but as an ecosystem of conditions. Its success depends on the alignment of mentor quality, task authenticity, curricular design, time allocation, and student support mechanisms.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings presented in Table 11 reveals a high level of convergence, indicating that the students' lived experiences strongly support and explain the high perceived effectiveness of the externship program across all measured dimensions. Quantitatively, all domains—learning outcomes and professional exposure, alignment with academic discipline, communication and interpersonal skills, career awareness and readiness, adherence to professional standards, and overall effectiveness—were rated as Highly Effective, with composite means ranging from 3.47 to 3.61. These consistently elevated ratings suggest that students generally perceived the externship program as a meaningful, relevant, and developmentally valuable component of their academic formation. The qualitative findings reinforce this interpretation by demonstrating that students experienced externship as an authentic, immersive, and transformative learning process, characterized by real-world exposure, skill development, and professional identity formation.

First, the qualitative themes on authentic workplace immersion and hands-on learning directly explain the high quantitative ratings in learning outcomes and professional exposure. Students repeatedly emphasized that observing real tasks, participating in workplace activities, and engaging with professionals allowed them to better understand how theoretical knowledge is applied in practice. These lived experiences provide a concrete basis for the high mean scores related to gaining real-world insights and exposure to professional practices. This convergence aligns with contemporary work-integrated learning literature, which asserts that experiential engagement enhances knowledge transfer, practical competence, and contextual understanding (Ferns et al., 2025).

Second, the theme of bridging theory and practice supports the strong quantitative results, aligning with the academic discipline. Students described how externship enabled them to connect classroom learning with actual workplace tasks, reinforcing their understanding of course content. This explains why indicators related to applying theoretical knowledge and recognizing connections between coursework and practice were rated highly. The findings corroborate studies showing that alignment between academic preparation and workplace experience is a key determinant of perceived program effectiveness (Ng et al., 2023).

Table 11. *Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings on the Perceived Effectiveness of the Externship Program*

Quantitative Domain	Key Quantitative Result (Composite Mean)	Supporting Qualitative Themes	Nature of Integration	Integrated Interpretation
Learning Outcomes and Professional Exposure	3.49 (Highly Effective)	Theme 1: Authentic workplace immersion; Theme 2: Hands-on learning; Theme 7: Context-specific exposure	Convergence (C)	Students' high ratings are directly supported by their lived experiences of real-world exposure, observation of actual practices, and participation in workplace activities, confirming that externship enhances practical understanding.
Alignment with Academic Discipline	3.47 (Highly Effective)	Theme 2: Bridging theory and practice; Theme 4: Professional identity formation	Explanation (Ex)	Qualitative data explain how students recognized alignment—through applying classroom knowledge in real settings and understanding how their academic program connects to professional roles.
Communication and Interpersonal Skills Development	3.49 (Highly Effective)	Theme 3: Communication anxiety and growth; Theme 6: Emotional challenges; Theme 1: Workplace interaction	Expansion (E)	While quantitative data show high skill development, qualitative findings expand this by revealing that improvement occurred through overcoming fear, shyness, and real interpersonal challenges.
Career Awareness and Readiness	3.48 (Highly Effective)	Theme 4: Career clarification; Theme 1: Exposure to roles; Theme 5: Ethical awareness	Convergence (C)	Students' narratives confirm that externship clarified career paths, strengthened motivation, and improved readiness for future employment.
Adherence to Institutional Policies and Professional Standards	3.61 (Highly Effective)	Theme 5: Professionalism and ethics; Theme 1: Observing workplace norms	Convergence (C)	High quantitative ratings are supported by qualitative accounts of learning punctuality, confidentiality, discipline, and ethical behavior through real workplace exposure.

Overall Effectiveness of the Externship Program	3.53 (Highly Effective)	All Themes (1–7), especially Themes 1, 2, 3, and 6	Expansion (E)	Qualitative data expand the overall effectiveness by revealing both strengths (supportive mentors, hands-on learning) and limitations (time constraints, limited tasks, lack of confidence).
Program Facilitators (Qualitative Only)	—	Theme 1: Supportive mentors; Theme 2: Hands-on tasks; Theme 3: Positive environment; Theme 4: Structured guidance	Expansion (E)	These factors explain <i>why</i> quantitative ratings are high—effective externship programs are characterized by strong supervision, authentic engagement, and supportive environments.
Program Constraints (Qualitative Only)	—	Theme 5: Limited time; Theme 6: Lack of confidence; Theme 7: Resource constraints; Theme 4: Unclear instructions	Expansion (E)	These findings explain slight variations in quantitative scores and identify areas for improvement, particularly in program design and student preparation.

Third, the qualitative findings on communication development, confidence-building, and interpersonal interaction expand the quantitative results on communication and interpersonal skills. While the quantitative data indicate high levels of perceived improvement, the qualitative narratives provide depth by revealing that these improvements often emerged from overcoming initial anxiety, shyness, and fear of professional interaction. Students’ accounts of gradually becoming more confident through repeated engagement with supervisors, clients, and peers explain the strong ratings on communication-related indicators. This is consistent with research indicating that interpersonal competence develops most effectively in authentic social contexts rather than simulated environments (Channa et al., 2024).

Fourth, the themes related to career clarification, professional identity formation, and motivation strongly support the quantitative findings in career awareness and readiness. Students reported that the externship helped them understand career paths, clarify their professional goals, and envision their future roles. These lived experiences explain why indicators related to preparedness for employment and understanding workplace expectations received high ratings. Such findings are consistent with recent studies showing that work-integrated learning plays a significant role in shaping career trajectories and strengthening employability readiness (Dollinger et al., 2024).

Fifth, the qualitative theme on professionalism, ethics, and adherence to workplace norms reinforces the high quantitative ratings in adherence to institutional policies and professional standards. Students described learning punctuality, confidentiality, ethical behavior, and appropriate workplace conduct through direct observation and participation. These narratives provide contextual grounding for the high scores in this domain, suggesting that professionalism was not only taught but also internalized through real-world exposure. This supports the argument that workplace learning environments are critical in developing professional values and ethical awareness (Bašová et al., 2026).

Finally, the qualitative findings both support and expand the quantitative results in overall effectiveness. While the quantitative data indicate that students generally perceive the externship as highly effective, the qualitative data reveal the underlying mechanisms that contribute to this perception—namely, supportive mentors, hands-on opportunities, a welcoming environment, and opportunities for growth. At the same time, the qualitative findings introduce important nuances by identifying limiting factors, such as short duration, limited hands-on exposure, unclear instructions, and lack of confidence. These factors help explain why certain indicators (e.g., meeting expectations) received relatively lower, though still high, ratings. This expansion highlights that while the externship is effective overall, its impact is moderated by both structural and individual conditions.

Taken together, the integration demonstrates that the qualitative findings do not contradict the quantitative results but rather enrich and contextualize them. The convergence confirms the robustness of the findings, while the expansion provides a more nuanced understanding of how and why the externship program is effective. In line with mixed-methods principles, the qualitative data illuminate the processes behind the numerical ratings, revealing that externship effectiveness is shaped by the interaction of program design (e.g., duration, structure), workplace environment (e.g., supervision, opportunities), and student characteristics (e.g., confidence, readiness). This integrated interpretation aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing that the success of work-integrated learning depends on the alignment of these multiple dimensions (Ferns et al., 2025; Rowe et al., 2021).

Overall, the mixed-methods integration affirms that the externship program is a high-impact educational practice while underscoring the need for enhancements, including extended duration, structured guidance, and increased opportunities for active participation. These improvements would not only sustain the already high levels of perceived effectiveness but also address the gaps identified in the qualitative findings, thereby strengthening the overall quality and impact of the externship experience.

Proposed Program Enhancement Strategies for the Externship Program of the College of Arts and Sciences

The proposed enhancement strategies are grounded in both quantitative and qualitative findings, which collectively indicate that while the externship program is highly effective, its impact can be further strengthened through targeted improvements in duration, structure, supervision, and student preparedness. The most critical recommendation is the extension and restructuring of the externship duration, as time limitations emerged as the most consistent constraint affecting depth of learning and student engagement.

Key Issue Identified	Evidence from Findings	Proposed Enhancement Strategy	Specific Activities/ Interventions	Responsible Units	Expected Outcomes
1. Limited Duration of Externship (Most Recurring Constraint)	Qualitative: "limited time," "20 hours is not enough"; Quantitative: slightly lower scores on expectation fulfillment	Extend and scaffold externship duration	• Increase required hours (e.g., 20 → 60–120 hrs) • Implement phased externship (Year 2 observation → Year 3 participation → Year 4 immersion)	Dean, Program Chairs, REPO, Partner Institutions	• Deeper immersion • Increased skill mastery • Higher satisfaction and expectation alignment
2. Limited Hands-On Task Engagement (Observation-Heavy Placements)	Qualitative: "mostly observation," "not given tasks"	Structured task-based externship model	• Develop a task checklist per discipline • Require minimum hands-on outputs (reports, case summaries, outputs) • Learning contracts with host agencies	Program Chairs, Industry Partners	• Increased active participation • Stronger skill acquisition • Improved learning outcomes
3. Inconsistent Supervision and Guidance	Qualitative: "limited guidance," "unclear instructions"	Formal mentor-supervisor system	• Assign designated workplace mentors • Orientation for supervisors • Weekly feedback sessions	OJT/Externship Coordinator, Host Institutions	• Improved guidance quality • Better student performance • Reduced confusion
4. Lack of Structured Orientation and Expectation-Setting	Qualitative: "did not know what to do," "unclear tasks"	Pre-Externship Readiness Program	• Conduct pre-deployment orientation • Provide externship handbook • Simulated workplace training (mock tasks, role-play)	College, Faculty, Guidance Office	• Clear expectations • Reduced anxiety • Faster adjustment
5. Communication Anxiety and Lack of Confidence Among Students	Qualitative: "shy," "afraid to speak," "lack of confidence"	Soft Skills and Professional Readiness Training	• Workshops on communication, workplace etiquette • Confidence-building activities • Peer mentoring system	Faculty, Student Affairs, Guidance Office	• Improved communication skills • Increased confidence • Better workplace interaction
6. Mismatch Between Academic Preparation and Workplace Demands	Qualitative: "unprepared," "gap in knowledge"	Curriculum-Externship Alignment (OBE-based)	• Align course outcomes with externship competencies	Curriculum Committee, Faculty	• Reduced theory-practice gap • Improved readiness • Stronger academic relevance

			• Integrate case-based and applied learning in courses • Capstone pre-externship training		
7. Variability in Placement Quality and Opportunities	Qualitative: "limited access," "few tasks," "no orientation"	Standardized Partner Agency Framework	• Accreditation of partner agencies • MOA with defined roles and expectations • Periodic evaluation of placement sites	Dean, Linkages Office, REPO	• Consistent externship quality • Better learning environments • Strong institutional partnerships
8. Scheduling Conflicts and Workload Stress	Qualitative: "conflict with classes," "time pressure"	Flexible and student-centered scheduling system	• Dedicated externship period (midterm/term break) • Hybrid scheduling options • Reduced academic load during externship	Academic Affairs, Registrar	• Reduced student stress • Better focus on externship • Improved performance
9. Lack of Reflective Learning and Integration	Qualitative: learning is not always processed deeply	Structured Reflection and Assessment System	• Reflective journals • Weekly reflection prompts • Post-externship debriefing sessions • Portfolio submission	Faculty, Research Office	• Deeper learning • Critical thinking development • Better integration of experience
10. Limited Monitoring and Evaluation System	Implicit across findings	CQI-based Externship Evaluation System	• Student feedback surveys • Supervisor evaluation forms • Annual program review using data analytics	REPO, QA Office, Program Chairs	• Data-driven improvements • Continuous program enhancement • Evidence-based decision-making

Moreover, the findings underscore the need to shift from a predominantly observational model to a task-based, outcomes-driven externship framework, where students are actively engaged in meaningful workplace activities aligned with their academic competencies. This aligns with outcomes-based education (OBE), where learning is measured not only by exposure but by demonstrable performance and skill acquisition.

The integration of structured supervision, pre-deployment training, and reflective learning mechanisms is also essential to ensure that students are not only exposed to professional environments but are guided, supported, and able to critically process their experiences. Furthermore, strengthening institutional partnerships through standardized placement frameworks will ensure consistency in learning opportunities across different externship sites.

Finally, adopting a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approach will enable the institution to systematically monitor, evaluate, and refine the externship program based on empirical evidence, ensuring its sustainability and alignment with industry demands.

Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrate that the externship program of the College of Arts and Sciences is highly effective across key domains, including learning outcomes, alignment with academic discipline, communication and interpersonal skills, career awareness and readiness, adherence to professional standards, and overall student experience. Quantitative results consistently yielded high ratings, while qualitative findings provided strong corroboration by revealing that students experienced the externship as an authentic, immersive, and transformative learning opportunity. Through real-world exposure, hands-on engagement, and interaction with professionals, students were able to bridge theory and practice, develop confidence and essential workplace

skills, and gain clarity regarding their career paths. However, the study also identified critical areas for improvement, particularly limited duration, inconsistent supervision, restricted hands-on opportunities, and varying levels of student preparedness, which somewhat constrained the full realization of the externship's educational potential. In terms of practical implications, the findings underscore the necessity of institutionalizing structured supervision protocols, establishing clear task-based learning frameworks, and fostering sustained institutional-industry partnerships to ensure that externship placements are both meaningful and discipline-relevant. Academic coordinators and program administrators should use these findings as evidence-based input for policy development, curriculum review, and program redesign, ensuring that externship requirements are responsive to both students' developmental needs and evolving industry demands.

In light of these implications, it is recommended that the College of Arts and Sciences adopt a structured, outcomes-based enhancement of the externship program by extending placement duration, strengthening partnerships with host institutions, and implementing a supervised learning framework to ensure meaningful student participation. Comprehensive pre-externship orientation and skills training should also be provided to improve student readiness, alongside continuous mentoring and feedback mechanisms to support learning throughout the placement. Furthermore, integrating reflective practices and a systematic monitoring and evaluation system aligned with Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) principles will ensure that the program remains responsive to student needs and industry demands. Collectively, these improvements will not only sustain the program's high level of effectiveness but also enhance its capacity to produce graduates who are competent, confident, and professionally prepared for the demands of the contemporary workplace.

Contributions of Authors

Author 1: Led the conceptualization and research design of the study, supervised the overall research process, conducted data analysis and interpretation, and was primarily responsible for writing the original draft and finalizing the manuscript, including the development of the proposed framework.

Author 2: Assisted in data gathering and facilitated field data coordination, including communication with participants and support in the administration of research instruments.

Author 3: Assisted in data gathering and field data coordination, including logistical support during data collection and ensuring completeness of responses.

Author 4: Assisted in data gathering and field data coordination, including logistical support during data collection and ensuring completeness of responses.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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