

## THE URGENCY OF PRE-INTERNSHIP SOFT SKILLS TO PREPARE PROFESSIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES

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### ABSTRACT

The internship program is one of the mandatory courses that students in college must undertake. With this internship program, students are expected to gain knowledge from the company where they are interning and be able to directly apply the theory gained in lecture activities. However, unfortunately, until now there are still many companies that complain about the poor behavior of students who take part in internships at their companies. Behavior related to soft skills. This research aims to answer the questions of how internship preparation is implemented by universities before students start their internship and what things that make companies often complain about the quality of students who take part in internships at their companies. This is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews with the head of human resources who periodically recruits students for internships. The research results show that the majority of students who take part in internship programs do not have adequate soft skills competencies. This can be seen from 4 (four) aspects, namely communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, teamwork, ethics and morals.

**Keywords:** Internship, soft skills, professional

### INTRODUCTION

An internship is a learning activity that is usually carried out by pupils, students or fresh graduates who want to gain practical experience in a field of work. However, apart from providing opportunities to learn, internships also have a significant impact on improving the quality of the workforce. Internships provide an opportunity to deepen knowledge and skills in a specific field of work. During internships, students can learn directly from practitioners in their field, experience real-world situations, and practice the skills they have learned. This helps them be better prepared when entering the real world of work.

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Not only that. During internships, students can interact with people in the same industry, get to know company leaders, and make connections that are useful for future careers. A strong professional network can help in getting a job in a better place in the future. According to Lerner (in Chen et al. 2020) internships can help students gain work experience in certain career fields and ultimately increase their potential to have a successful career in the future.

Higher education as the final level of education, directs individuals with different capabilities to actualize themselves into various fields that are concentrated according to the field they wish to pursue. The output of college graduates is considered to have higher skills and professionalism, not only in theoretical skills but also in applied skills. Work skills in Chhinzer & Russo's (2018) research are described in the form of general skills in time management, teamwork interactions, the ability to complete a subject, work intentions, and providing reciprocity. The level of work professionalism resulting from the experience of conducting studies can be a benchmark for how high a student's level of readiness is to enter the world of work.

According to research by Tyas Sari & Nurhidayati (2022), acquiring knowledge while studying in class cannot prepare students to be able to directly face the realities of the world of work. Based on this, almost all universities prepare practical internship courses and encourage their students to take part in internship activities. Mustari (2021) explains that internships can be a learning companion for students to enrich their abilities and skills related to what is learned in college. Internships are also considered to be able to open students' perspectives on how practice is carried out in the world of work.

One very important factor that every student must have when taking part in an internship is soft skills. Research conducted by Rugaiyah (2011) concluded that internship programs can improve students' soft skills. The soft skills in question include the ability to communicate well in the environment, adaptability, ability to work in a team, social skills, and integrity at work. What makes people successful is 80% *soft skills* and 20% *hard skills* and keeps them moving forward (Sudiana, 2010).

*Soft skills* are said to be important because they are related to employee behavior and attitude issues. The emergence of a bad attitude in the company can have a serious impact on work, and all of this can affect the conditions and situations in the company environment because it will have a negative impact on work. In contrast to *hard skills* which emphasize technical abilities, planning, budgeting, foreign language skills and more.

Illah Sailah (2008) believes that *soft skills* are a person's skills in relating to other people (interpersonal skills) and skills in managing oneself (intrapersonal skills) which are able to maximize a person's performance. Apart from that, soft skills are also expected to be able to balance the hard skills that students have honed during their studies, where hard skills use more left brain abilities to develop students' academic intelligence.

*Soft skills* are defined as a person's skills in communication, dexterity, social skills, and the ability to adapt to new environments (Deryane 2023). Lecturers can make *soft skills* the basis for character learning in higher education, which consists of three alternative ways, including through stand-alone course learning activities, through the use of lecture methods by integrating them into certain courses, and by making lecturers as role models for the students. By reflecting on the research results in several reference articles used, it contains findings that the development of *soft skills* can be viewed from three aspects, namely morals or politeness, attitudes such as discipline, work ethic, and interaction (Cahyaningrum and Martono 2019).

However, unfortunately, many companies have submitted complaints to universities due to the very low quality of students participating in internships. This mainly concerns issues of communication ethics, discipline and work ethic which are very far from minimum standards. In general, students still think that internships are work training, and not real work, so they often act casually by coming late to the office. They also use their cell phones almost all the time even though they are working. Students also lack initiative. Things like this show that students are less equipped to enter the world of internships by universities.

This research is aimed at answering the questions of how internship preparation is implemented by universities before students start their internship and what things that make companies often complain about the quality of students who take part in internships at their companies.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Definition of Internship**

An internship is work experience or work that is closely supervised where a student has a learning objective, namely reflecting on what he or she can gain from the experience (Michael, 2002). According to Maertz Jr et al (2013) internships are a bridge between classroom theory and the world of practice. According to Chen et al (2011) internships are part of the curriculum, professional practicums which are carried out by arranging for students to gain real experience through working in industry. According to Chen et al (2011) that internship programs provide students with the opportunity to discover their interests and work goals through real work experience under professional guidance. According to Shoenfelt et al (2013) internships are important as a step towards employability in the first professional position and a portal to long-term career success. Based on the description above, it can be seen the importance of internship programs for students to gain experience and make decisions after the graduation.

According to Henry Simamora (Mustofa Kamil, 2010:71) practical work or internship is usually called built in learning, apprenticeship, learning by doing or on the job training/off the job training, where this program is designed for a higher level of expertise. Therefore, practical work (internship) learning programs (learning by doing) tend to focus on education rather than training in terms of knowledge and in carrying out a skill or a series of interconnected jobs. Therefore, the Practical Work (internship)

program combines training and experience on the job with instruction obtained in a particular place for certain subjects.

## **Soft Skills**

*Soft skills* are non-technical abilities that a person has that have been within him since birth, non-technical abilities that are invisible but are very necessary for a person to achieve success. Non-technical abilities can be talents and can also be improved with training. The definition of soft skills according to Ichsan S. Putra and Ariyanti Pratiwi (2005: 5) states that "*Soft skills are invisible abilities needed for success, for example the ability to work together, integrity and so on*". Based on this definition, it is clearer that soft skills are related to personal skills. This is in accordance with the statement according to Furhan (2011) that, "*a person's skills in relating to other people are divided into two categories, namely interpersonal and intrapersonal soft skills.*" A person can possess these two abilities through the learning process and the habituation process in everyday life. So, what is meant by *soft skills* are abilities that are not visible in every human being which can develop along with the knowledge that exists within each person about how to live their life and anticipate every problem they face at that time.

According to Elfindri et al (2011: 67), *soft skills* are defined as follows: *Soft skills* are skills and life skills, either for oneself, in a group or in society, as well as with the Creator. By having soft skills, a person's presence will be increasingly felt in society. Communication skills, emotional skills, language skills, group skills, ethics and morals, manners and spiritual skills.

Meanwhile, according to Iyo Mulyono (2011: 99), *soft skills* are a complement to *hard skills*. This type of skill is part of a person's intellectual intelligence, and is often used as a requirement for obtaining certain positions or jobs." Aribowo, as quoted by Illah Sailah (2008: 17), mentions *soft skills* as follows: *Soft skills* are a person's skills in relating to other people (including himself). *Soft skills* attributes, thus include espoused values, motivation, behavior, habits, character and attitudes. Each person has these soft skills attributes to varying degrees, influenced by habits of thinking, saying, acting and behaving. However, this attribute can change if the person concerned wants to change it by practicing getting used to new things.

## **Components of Soft Skills**

According to (Devadason et al., 2010) in his research, *soft skills* are important and several basic components needed in the world of work include communication, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork and ethics. With these basic components, it is easier to map and examine in detail students' *soft skills* abilities. The following is an explanation of the *soft skills* components:

1. Communication

According to Setyadi (2014) in his research discussing *soft skills*, communication is a process where one or more individuals, groups, organizations and communities create and use information to relate to the environment and other people. Communication can be verbal which can be understood by both. The indicators used are as follows:

- a. Able to provide clear information
- b. There is interaction (exchanging information)
- c. There is information that can be explored

Refers to the activities carried out in developing student communication. The communication skills to be acquired can be categorized into three main dimensions: verbal, written, and social communication skills.

2. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Critical thinking can be said to be an intellectual discipline process of actively conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information collected or resulting from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to action (Snyder & Snyder, 2008).

3. Teamwork

Teamwork is an activity where an individual and one or more other individuals do one thing together with a predetermined goal. In research conducted by Svanbjörnsdóttir et al. (2016) the most effective team in training is called a learning team which shows constant and committed cooperation, with efforts to strengthen all members through constructive reflection and collective understanding of the principles. which are actually. Long and committed cooperation, aimed at strengthening the team, trying to use the strengths of all team members as much as possible, working in an understanding way with each other.

4. Ethics/morals

Ethics is important to build trust and mutual understanding between colleagues for a sustainable and healthy organization, and also to avoid scandal or crime. Ethics is the study of morality and especially making decisions or choices in a moral context (Armstrong, 1993). In this case, integration includes the actions or behavior of intern students in the learning process such as being exemplary, punctual, showing responsibility and integrity.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Research methods are the procedures and schemes used in research. Research methods allow research to be carried out in a planned, scientific, neutral and valuable manner. Research methods are a strategy for collecting data and finding solutions to problems based on facts (Gounder, 2012; Williams, 2017). Creswell in (Murdiyanto, 2020) defines qualitative research as the process of investigating a social phenomenon and human problem. Qualitative research is also defined as a strategy to search for meaning, understanding, concepts, characteristics, symptoms, symbols and descriptions of a phenomenon, focused and multimethod, natural and holistic in nature, prioritizing quality, using several methods, and presented narratively in scientific research (Sidiq & Choiri, 2019). Thus, it can be concluded that qualitative research is a research technique

that uses narratives or words to explain and explain the meaning of each phenomenon, symptom and particular social situation.

Phenomenological research is a type of qualitative research that looks at and listens more closely and in detail to individual explanations and understanding of their experiences. Phenomenological research aims to interpret and explain the experiences a person experiences in life, including experiences when interacting with other people and the surrounding environment (Sugianto, 2015: 13). Qualitative research with a phenomenological approach was chosen because not many people have used this approach, especially with the themes or problems being researched. Apart from that, phenomenology also explains the nature of phenomena, so that it is able to provide an overview of something as it is and in accordance with the actual situation.

Data collection was carried out using documentation techniques and semi-structured interviews. Documentation was obtained from research results related to internships, internship reports from companies, as well as news from digital newspapers. In this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted. According to Sugiyono (2016), semi-structured interviews are interviews where the implementation is freer compared to structured interviews. The purpose of this interview is to find problems more openly, where the party being interviewed is asked for their opinions and ideas.

In this research, researchers interviewed 10 Human Resources Managers of private companies who regularly accept interns at their companies. To maintain the validity of the data, researchers also triangulated sources by interviewing 10 students from 5 universities to obtain information about the preparations provided by campuses before students take part in internships.

Data analysis in this research uses data analysis techniques from data analysis techniques in phenomenological research according to Creswell (1998) as follows: (1). The researcher began by thoroughly describing his experience. (2). Horizontalization of data means that the researcher finds statements (in interviews) about how people understand the topic, details these statements and treats each statement as having equal value, and develops these details without repeating or overlapping. (3). Textural Description, namely grouping data into meaningful units. The researcher details these units and writes an explanation of his experience, including careful examples. (4). Structural Description, namely reflecting on one's thoughts and using imaginative variation, looking for all possible meanings through divergent perspectives, considering the frame of reference (phenomenon), and constructing how the phenomenon is experienced. (5). Construct all explanations about the meaning and essence of the experience. (6). This process is the first step for researchers to express their experiences, and is then followed by the experiences of all participants. After all that is done, then the composite description is written.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, researchers used 4 components of soft skills in collecting data from informants consisting of HRD managers in private companies. The four components of soft skills are: Communication, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Teamwork and Ethics/Morals.

**Table 1**  
**Results of interview with HRD Managers**

No	Soft Skills Components	Response of HRD
1.	<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Do not have good interpersonal skills.</li> <li>b. Still shy and lacking confidence in introducing myself and expressing opinions.</li> <li>c. Not understanding communication in the workplace, whether communicating with supervisors or superiors. communication with guests or customers, communication with staff.</li> <li>d. Not able to communicate well verbally and in writing.</li> <li>e. Not able to communicate well in verbal and non-verbal language.</li> </ul>
2.	<b>Critical Thinking and Problem Solving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Still lack of initiative.</li> <li>b. Not able to provide input.</li> <li>c. Have no curiosity.</li> <li>d. Lack of analytical skills.</li> <li>e. Not able to use logic and reasoning to solve problems.</li> <li>f. Not able to evaluate ideas and information critically.</li> <li>g. Not able to make rational decisions.</li> <li>h. Not able to see a problem from various points of view.</li> </ul>
3.	<b>Teamwork</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. There appears to be a gap in communication.</li> <li>b. Lack of trust in others.</li> <li>c. Poor decision making.</li> <li>d. Poor Conflict resolution.</li> <li>e. Difficulty accepting input from others.</li> <li>f. Egoism is still high.</li> <li>g. Not able to provide support to others.</li> <li>h. Not able open to new ideas.</li> </ul>
4.	<b>Ethics / Moral</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Do not have integrity yet.</li> <li>b. Always blaming others.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. Don't care about other people.</li> <li>d. Don't respect other people.</li> <li>e. Feel most righteous.</li> <li>f. Taking other people for granted.</li> <li>g. Still can't apply 3 special words: <i>Thank you, Sorry, Please.</i></li> </ul>
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From the data above, it is known that the majority of students who take part in internships at companies still do not have good soft skills. From a communication perspective, there are still many students who cannot communicate well at their internships. This was expressed by the HRD manager who often recruits students for internships.

“ In general, students who do internships at our place are those who are already in their 6th or 7th semester. However, if you look at the way they communicate, they still seem very stiff and afraid. Doesn't have a strong sense of self-confidence. Even when talking to customers, they are still shy and afraid, especially when talking to managers. This shows that students are not provided with soft skills to enter the world of work.” (RE – HR Manager of International Company)

Judging from critical thinking and problem solving skills, most students who intern at private companies do not have critical thinking skills yet and cannot solve problems well.

“ This can be seen when they work every day. In general, they are not able to see a problem clearly. Complaints from customers, for example, cannot be digested and understood properly, so small problems that they should be able to resolve do not go well because they prefer to call staff or supervisors to deal with customers and resolve the problem. This shows that students are not yet able to think critically.”  
(YU - HRD Manager BUMN)

Students' ability to work together in teams is also still very low. This is clearly seen during the internship period in which students are given the opportunity to work on a project. There are still many students who do not understand how to build a cohesive teamwork. They still seem to prioritize their own egos.

“ When we gave assignments to students to work on a project, it was apparent that they did not understand how to build togetherness in a team. This causes them to appear isolated. They also cannot accept input from other people. Indeed, not all students behave like this. There are also students who can quickly adapt to new environments. Willing to accept criticism and learn quickly. But the number is very small compared to students who need a long time to adapt.” (ER - HR International Company)

Judging from an ethical/moral perspective, there are still many students who do not have good attitude and behavior. This can be seen not only from the way they

communicate, but also from the way they respond to customer complaints, how they complete their work, arriving late because they feel that the internship is not real work, and they are busy with their cell-phones in the working hours. This is far from good ethics.

“ There are still many students who don't seem to have good ethics and behavior. This can be seen from the way they communicate with customers, staff or managers at the company where they intern. Many students also do not have the ability to control their emotions. This can be seen from the expression on their face when receiving a warning from their supervisor.” (RS-HRD National Company)

The results of the analysis above illustrate that the role of universities in providing provision related to soft skills to prepare students to enter the industrial world is very important. soft skills are considered to be a complement to hard skills. This type of skill is part of a person's intellectual intelligence, and is often used as a condition for obtaining certain positions or jobs (Mulyono, 2011: 99).

Human resources managers agree that universities only prepare their students in terms of hard skills, but soft skills aspects are not a priority. This is very contrary to what is needed in the world of work. Lack of soft skills competency will indicate student unprofessionalism at work.

“ It is time for universities to provide training related to soft skills such as politeness, good communication and high initiative. Don't put the burden on companies to teach students things like this.” (TU – HRD manager of State Owned Company)

Meanwhile, the results of interviews with students show that universities do not specifically provide preparation for students who will undertake internships. According to students, it is very important to provide guidance to students before they start their internship because the theories they learn in class do not technically discuss cases that occur in the world of work. In general, students say that the university only helps to establish collaborations with companies to facilitate student internship placements, however, the university does not provide special training before students take part in internships, especially matters related to soft skills.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of this research show that the majority of students who take part in internship programs do not have adequate soft skills competencies. This can be seen from 4 (four) aspects, namely communication skills that are still low, whether communicating with customers, guests or even with superiors. Students also do not have critical thinking skills and are not able to solve problems well. This can be seen from the lack of initiative, and from guests' complaints which cannot be digested properly.

Students also do not have the ability to work well in teams. This can be seen from high levels of egoism and not being able to accept input from other people, and a lack of desire to learn. Lastly is the lack of ethics. There are still many students who do not seem to have good ethics and behavior. This can be seen from the way they communicate with customers, staff or managers at the company where they intern. Many students also do not have the ability to control their emotions. For further research, the researchers suggest that research be carried out regarding provision before entering an internship program with a different approach.

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