

Original Article

Professional and Technical-Cognitive Competencies as Indicators of Workplace Readiness: Evidence from Practicum Evaluation Reports

Alnee Joy Azul ¹, Eduard Riparip ^{1,*}, Honey Liza Tamayo ¹, Ma. Leah Tabile ¹,
Sonia Janice Pilao ¹, Jean Marie Villanueva ¹, Ron Richard Callera ¹,
Abie Jane Pabalan ¹

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Abstract

The transition from academic learning to professional practice remains a key concern in higher education, particularly in ensuring that graduates possess the competencies required by industry. This study examined the workplace readiness of senior interns in terms of professional and technical-cognitive competencies and determined whether a significant difference existed between these dimensions. A descriptive-comparative mixed-method research design was employed. Using total enumeration sampling, 26 fourth-year Bachelor of Science in Business Administration major in International Management students participated in the study. Data were gathered through practicum evaluation reports completed by internship supervisors and qualitative comments regarding interns' performance. Results revealed that the interns demonstrated high levels of workplace readiness in both professional competencies and technical-cognitive competencies. Additionally, there was no significant difference between the two competency domains, indicating balanced development of workplace-related skills. Qualitative findings generated five themes: professionalism and work ethics, adaptability and willingness to learn, collaborative attitudes and interpersonal skills, initiative and independent task management, and communication confidence as an area

¹ Centro Escolar
University – Makati
Campus, Makati City,
Philippines
* emriparip@
ceu.edu.ph

for improvement. The findings highlight the value of practicum experiences in developing competencies essential for employment. The study recommends strengthening experiential learning opportunities, communication-focused training, and industry-academe collaboration to further enhance students' workplace readiness.

Keywords: internship, practicum program, professional competencies, technical-cognitive competencies, workplace readiness

1. Introduction

Aside from research, instruction, and extension, the university students' workplace readiness, or graduate employability, has always been one of the salient aspects of curriculum design. It remains the core concern among Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) and universities abroad as employers increasingly expect graduates to possess not only disciplinary knowledge but also a broad range of transferable skills (Thi & Van, 2026). The transition from academic learning to professional practice imposes a major challenge in higher education, specifically in making sure that would-be graduates possess the competencies required by industry.

It is in this respect that internships, practicums, or apprenticeships are essential in bridging theoretical knowledge gained in school and workplace expectations. They provide students with chances to apply theories learned from classrooms to real-world contexts. Moreover, they are considered vital tools for developing and enhancing workplace readiness among graduating students. However, the effectiveness of practicum programs in preparing students for employment depends significantly on the extent to which practicum trainers evaluate students' readiness based on professional and technical-cognitive competencies and the alignment between what educational programs teach and what employers expect.

In the 21st-century workplace, graduates need to develop soft skills, which are essential for their career success and employability (Tes & Khen, 2025). In modern professional contexts, workplace readiness is conceived as a multi-aspect construct involving both professional (soft) competencies and technical-cognitive (hard) competencies. Professional competencies include communication and interpersonal skills, work ethic, adaptability, and teamwork. On the other hand, technical-cognitive competencies refer to domain-specific knowledge, analytical thinking, and technological know-how. Soft skills such as written, oral, and non-verbal communication, leadership, critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, and creativity are important indicators of employee success in the era of the Fifth Industrial Revolution (Tibyana et al., 2025). Studies reliably show that soft skills are no longer complementary to hard skills but have become principal competencies that directly

impact both individual and organizational competitiveness (Tibyana et al., 2025; Rosenberg & Pack, 2024).

Significantly, experiential learning aims to develop these competencies. The objective of work-integrated learning (WIL) is to strategically inspire students to welcome potential future careers, thereby contributing to economic innovation and growth. WIL as an umbrella term includes a variety of strategies and approaches that incorporate theory with practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum (Srivastava & Haghi, 2024; Govender & Wait, 2017). Internships, externships, on-the-job trainings, practicums, work simulation, and similar work-based learning experiences are essentially considered links between theoretical classroom knowledge and authentic workplace expectations. Both internships and employability skills have a significant and positive impact on graduate work readiness, with core employability competencies identified including adaptability, communication, and problem-solving skills (Lugiani et al., 2025).

Although numerous HEIs acknowledge the significance of workplace readiness competencies, i.e. professional and technical-cognitive, a persistent gap still exists between higher education outcomes and industry expectations. A long line of proof suggests that a gap often exists between university preparation and workplace expectations (Thi & Van, 2026). It is revealed in interviews with employers and graduates that a disjuncture occurs regarding the skills that graduates obtain at university and those expected in soon-to-be workplaces, with a perceived insufficiency in graduates' soft skills upon entering the workplace (Lanuza et al., 2025; Edmonds et al., 2023). This skills gap presents a major issue for both graduates looking for employment and employers seeking qualified candidates. Industry expectations have evolved alongside technological advancements, globalization, and changing market needs, while graduate competencies, as developed through formal education, often struggle to align with these shifting demands (Hegde & Kavade, 2025).

The assessment of internship performance represents a valuable but underutilized instrument for evaluating workplace readiness. Competencies need to be accurately and factually assessed, tested, and verified to fulfill the regulations of academic internship experiences (Tinoco-Giraldo et al., 2021). While practicum evaluation reports completed by industry supervisors offer valuable data for evaluating students' competencies in authentic work environments, existing studies tend to center exclusively on quantitative metrics, often disregarding the rich qualitative feedback embedded in evaluators' narratives. A systematic analysis of how practitioners assess both professional and technical-cognitive competencies remains limited, specifically in a manner where evaluator perspectives can inform curriculum enhancement.

To address the established gap, the present study determined the professional and technical-cognitive competencies as indicators of workplace readiness among senior Bachelor of Science in Business Administration major in International Management students, using practicum evaluation reports as the primary data source. Universities and colleges ought to understand how industry practitioners assess interns across

different competencies, which are essential for the improvement of both practicum programs and curriculum design.

In particular, the study sought to: (1) determine the level of professional and technical-cognitive competencies among practicum students as assessed by industry supervisors; (2) compare performance across these competency domains; (3) analyze evaluators' comments on the performance of the interns to identify recurring themes; and lastly, to formulate recommendations based on the findings for the enhancement of practicum programs and curriculum design in higher education. It is also hypothesized that there is no significant difference between the levels of professional competencies and technical-cognitive competencies of senior interns.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Since this paper examined the professional and technical-cognitive competencies of senior interns of a private higher education institution (HEI) in Makati as indicators of workplace readiness based on practicum evaluation reports, it employed a descriptive-comparative mixed-method research design. The quantitative component used a descriptive and comparative approach to know the level of workplace readiness in terms of professional competencies and technical-cognitive competencies and to identify whether a significant difference existed between the two competency dimensions. Quantitative data were obtained from the internship evaluation ratings provided by internship supervisors. Meanwhile, the qualitative component utilized thematic analysis to analyze the comments and suggestions provided by internship supervisors regarding the interns' performance during their practicum experience.

2.2 Participants

The participants of the study consisted of twenty-six (26) fourth-year Bachelor of Science in Business Administration major in International Management students from Centro Escolar University (CEU) Makati who completed their internship or practicum requirements during the Second Semester of the School Year 2025-2026. Correspondingly, twenty-six (26) internship supervisors from various on-the-job training (OJT) sites or workplace locations where the interns were assigned served as evaluators of the students' workplace readiness and internship performance.

The study used total enumeration sampling, wherein all fourth-year BSBA major in International Management interns who completed their practicum during the specified period were included in the study. Likewise, all internship supervisors directly assigned to evaluate the interns were included as participants. The use of total enumeration sampling ensured that all available internship evaluation reports and supervisor feedback relevant to the study were represented in the data collection process.

2.3 Research Instrument

In the study, the main instrument employed was the validated “Practicum Evaluation Report” developed and utilized by Centro Escolar University (CEU). The instrument was designed to assess the workplace readiness and internship performance of student interns of the institution based on identified professional and technical-cognitive competencies.

The Practicum Evaluation Report consisted of indicators measuring two major dimensions: *professional competencies* and *technical-cognitive competencies*. The professional competencies component assessed areas such as communication skills, teamwork, interpersonal skills, work ethic, honesty and integrity, flexibility and adaptability, motivation and initiative, and detail orientation. Meanwhile, the technical-cognitive competencies component evaluated the interns’ analytical skills and computer skills. The instrument used a five-point Likert scale to know the extent to which the competencies were shown by the interns during their practicum experience, to wit: 4.21 – 5.00 (Highly Demonstrated); 3.41 – 4.20 (Demonstrated); 2.61 – 3.40 (Moderately demonstrated); 1.81 – 2.60 (Slightly demonstrated); 1.00 – 1.80 (Not demonstrated).

In addition, the instrument included an open-ended question that allowed internship supervisors to provide comments, observations, and suggestions regarding the interns’ performance. These qualitative responses served as the basis for the thematic analysis conducted in the study.

Although the Internship Evaluation Tool had undergone institutional validation and was officially adopted by CEU for evaluating internship performance, its internal consistency reliability was likewise established in the present study. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was 0.959, signifying excellent internal consistency reliability. These results demonstrate that the instrument consistently measures the workplace readiness competencies of student interns.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistical tools to analyze the quantitative data gathered from the internship evaluation reports. Weighted mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of workplace readiness of the interns in terms of professional competencies and technical-cognitive competencies. The weighted mean was used to identify the average level of competency demonstrated by the interns, while the standard deviation measured the consistency or variability of the evaluators’ responses.

To determine whether a significant difference existed between the levels of professional competencies and technical-cognitive competencies of the interns, a paired-sample t-test was used. This statistical tool was appropriate because the study compared two related competency dimensions evaluated from the same group of participants. The level of significance for the statistical analysis was set at 0.05.

For the qualitative component of the study, thematic analysis was employed to analyze the written comments and suggestions of internship supervisors. The responses were carefully reviewed, coded, categorized, and grouped into recurring patterns and themes related to workplace readiness and internship performance.

3. Results

3.1. Level of Workplace Readiness of Senior Interns According to Practicum Trainers' Evaluation

Table 1. Level of workplace readiness of senior interns based on their professional competencies.

Professional Competencies	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Communication Skills	4.62	0.70	Highly demonstrated
Honesty and Integrity	4.81	0.40	Highly demonstrated
Interpersonal Skills	4.73	0.45	Highly demonstrated
Motivation and Initiative	4.50	0.76	Highly demonstrated
Work Ethic	4.73	0.45	Highly demonstrated
Teamwork Skills	4.77	0.59	Highly demonstrated
Flexibility and Adaptability	4.58	0.64	Highly demonstrated
Detail Orientation	4.50	0.65	Highly demonstrated
Total	4.65	0.50	Highly demonstrated

Table 1 shows that the senior interns' professional competencies were highly demonstrated, with an overall mean of 4.65 (SD = 0.50). Honesty and Integrity received the highest rating (M = 4.81, SD = 0.40), followed by Teamwork Skills (M = 4.77, SD = 0.59), Interpersonal Skills (M = 4.73, SD = 0.45), and Work Ethic (M = 4.73, SD = 0.45). Motivation and Initiative (M = 4.50, SD = 0.76) and Detail Orientation (M = 4.50, SD = 0.65) obtained the lowest mean ratings, although both remained within the "Highly Demonstrated" category. The findings suggest that the internship or practicum program was effective in preparing students to adapt to organizational expectations and professional environments. Moreover, they entail that practicum experiences significantly added to the development of professional competencies among senior interns.

Table 2. Level of workplace readiness of senior interns based on their technical-cognitive competencies.

Technical-Cognitive Competencies	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Computer Skills	4.58	0.50	Highly demonstrated
Analytical Skills	4.54	0.64	Highly demonstrated
Total	4.56	0.55	Highly demonstrated

Table 2 shows the level of workplace readiness of senior interns in terms of technical-cognitive competencies. The overall mean score of 4.56 (SD = 0.55), verbally interpreted as "Highly Demonstrated," indicates that interns possessed strong technical and analytical abilities needed in workplace performance. Among the indicators, Computer Skills obtained a mean score of 4.58 (SD = 0.50), while

Analytical Skills garnered a mean score of 4.54 (SD = 0.64). Thus, the interns were proficient in using technological tools and were capable of applying critical thinking and problem-solving skills in work-related tasks.

3.2. Significant Difference between the Professional Competencies and Technical-Cognitive Competencies of Senior Interns

Table 3. Significant difference between the professional competencies and technical-cognitive competencies of senior interns.

Competencies	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Professional Competencies	4.65	0.50	1.936	0.064	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Technical-Cognitive Competencies	4.56	0.55				

The paired-samples t-test showed no statistically significant difference between the professional competencies ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.50$) and technical-cognitive competencies ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 0.55$) of the senior interns, $t = 1.936$, $p = .064$. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The computed Cohen's d of 0.38 indicated a small-to-moderate difference between the two competency domains.

3.3. Emergent Themes from the Evaluators' Comments and Suggestions Regarding the Performance of Senior Interns

The evaluation of the internship supervisors show that workplace readiness is a multidimensional aspect comprised of both technical competence and professional conduct such as behavior, adaptability, interpersonal effectiveness, initiative, and communication confidence. The emergent themes support the quantitative findings showing that the interns were highly evaluated in both professional and technical-cognitive competencies.

The analysis of the internship supervisors' comments and suggestions generated five themes as regards the performance and workplace readiness of the senior interns: (1) professionalism and strong work ethics; (2) adaptability and willingness to learn; (3) collaborative attitudes and positive interpersonal skills; (4) initiative and independent task management; and (5) communication confidence as an area for professional development.

Theme 1: Professionalism and Strong Work Ethics as Core Indicators of Workplace Readiness

The first emergent theme highlights professionalism and strong work ethics as central indicators of workplace readiness. Internship supervisors repeatedly described the interns as responsible, punctual, dependable, organized, and ethical in accomplishing assigned tasks. These characteristics were associated with

organizational trust and positive workplace performance. Internship supervisors said the following:

“Demonstrates high level of responsibility and professionalism in completing assigned task.”

“...demonstrated excellent professionalism throughout her internship... She is always punctual and consistent to work. She is a team player and very dependable.”

“Handles routine tasks with care, patience and strong sense of responsibility.”

These statements show that professionalism, responsibility, reliability, and work ethic were recurring characteristics identified by the supervisors in evaluating the interns' workplace performance.

Theme 2: Enhancement of Internship Performance through Adaptability and Willingness to Learn

The second theme emphasizes adaptability and willingness to learn as essential competencies that enhance internship performance. Supervisors appreciated interns who quickly learned tasks, adjusted to workplace systems, accepted feedback positively, and demonstrated openness to growth and improvement. The following responses illustrate this theme:

“He met successfully the target and consistently demonstrates the ability to learn quickly from my guidance and instructions... He adapts well to new tasks and applies what he has learned with minimal supervision.”

“She is a fast learner and quickly adapts to new tasks and responsibilities, showing strong potential for growth.”

“...able to demonstrate a strong willingness to learn and adapt well with current processes that we have.”

The comments of the supervisors show that learning agility and adaptability are highly valued in dynamic workplace environments. Modern organizations operate in rapidly changing contexts where employees are expected to continuously learn, adjust to new systems, and respond effectively to challenges. The interns' ability to adapt and learn efficiently indicates preparedness for evolving workplace demands.

Theme 3: Collaborative Attitudes and Positive Interpersonal Skills as Contributors of Organizational Effectiveness

The third theme underscores the importance of teamwork, cooperation, and positive interpersonal relationships in workplace readiness. Supervisors appreciated

interns who worked harmoniously with colleagues, contributed positively to team goals, and maintained positive workplace attitudes. The following statements exemplify this theme:

"Throughout the program, xxx demonstrated strong dedication, willingness to learn and the ability to work collaboratively within a team environment."

"...is a cooperative team member and contributes positively to the group efforts."

"She maintains a positive attitude and works well in a team environment."

The internship supervisors' statements demonstrate that workplace readiness includes relational and social competencies that facilitate teamwork and organizational effectiveness. Interns who display positive attitudes and collaborative behavior are perceived as valuable contributors because organizations rely heavily on teamwork, communication, and interpersonal coordination.

Theme 4: Initiative and Independent Task Management as a Reflection of Growing Professional Maturity

The fourth emergent theme pertains to initiative, proactiveness, and independent task management. Supervisors acknowledged interns who could work with minimal supervision, proactively assist others, and independently complete assigned responsibilities. The following comments support this theme:

"Shows initiative and can work independently with minimal supervision."

"He has shown dedication, initiative and willingness to learn throughout his internship."

"...is a reliable and proactive team member... readily taking on additional responsibilities as needed."

It bears stressing that evaluators associate workplace readiness with self-direction, accountability, and ownership of responsibilities. Interns who demonstrate initiative are perceived as more mature and capable of functioning effectively in professional settings because they require less supervision and can independently contribute to organizational goals.

Theme 5: Communication Confidence Still an Area for Professional Development

The fifth theme reveals that communication competence remains an important area for further professional development. Although supervisors generally praised the

interns' communication skills, several comments recommended improvements in confidence, assertiveness, eloquence, and clarity in speaking. The following statements illustrate this theme:

"Learn to speak more with clarity and more volume."

"To communicate with confidence and boldness."

"I recommend to cultivate eloquency in speaking with confidence."

The findings suggest that communication confidence is considered essential for professional growth, particularly in client-oriented and corporate environments. Supervisors recognized that while interns were capable of communicating, some still needed improvement in verbal confidence, assertiveness, and professional expression.

4. Discussion

4.1 Level of Workplace Readiness of Senior Interns Based on Professional Competencies

The findings suggest that the internship or practicum program was effective in preparing students to adapt to organizational expectations and professional environments. The high ratings in Honesty and Integrity, Teamwork Skills, Interpersonal Skills, and Work Ethic imply that practicum trainers highly valued ethical conduct, collaboration, and professionalism among the interns. In workplace contexts, integrity and teamwork are considered foundational employability skills because organizations increasingly prioritize employees who can collaborate effectively while maintaining ethical standards and accountability.

Employability and workplace readiness are strongly associated with soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and professionalism (Jackson, 2014). Similarly, Finch et al. (2013) identified interpersonal communication, integrity, and work ethic as among the most desired competencies of graduates who enter the workforce. The high ratings gained in these aspects entail that the interns were able to show behaviors needed in the industry.

Meanwhile, the strong rating in Communication Skills shows the interns' ability to express ideas effectively and interact professionally with supervisors, clients, and co-workers. Communication competence is widely recognized as a critical employability skill because it facilitates teamwork, problem-solving, and organizational productivity. According to Robles (2012), communication skills consistently rank among the top competencies employers seek in graduates and entry-level professionals.

The findings further reveal that Flexibility and Adaptability, Motivation and Initiative, and Detail Orientation were also highly demonstrated. These competencies are important indicators of workplace readiness because contemporary workplaces

require employees who can respond effectively to changing organizational demands, work independently, and maintain accuracy in task performance.

In general, the findings entail that practicum experiences significantly added to the development of professional competencies among senior interns. Internship programs provide experiential learning opportunities that bridge classroom instruction and actual workplace practices. Experiences in real organizational setups help students develop professional discipline, confidence, and social competencies essential for career success.

4.2 Level of Workplace Readiness of Senior Interns Based on Technical-Cognitive Competencies

As regards technical-cognitive competencies, the high rating in computer skills mirrors the increasing importance of digital literacy in workplaces. As industries become more technology-driven, graduates are expected to possess competence in digital tools, software applications, and information management systems. Succi and Canovi (2020) emphasized that digital competencies and technological adaptability are essential employability skills in the modern labor market.

Similarly, the strong performance in analytical skills demonstrates that interns were able to evaluate information, solve problems, and make sound decisions during their practicum experience. Analytical competence is considered an important cognitive skill because it enhances organizational efficiency and supports evidence-based decision-making. According to Andrews and Higson (2008), employers highly value graduates who demonstrate critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical capabilities in addition to academic knowledge.

Experiential learning theory posits that knowledge and competencies are strengthened through direct experience and reflective practice. Hence, internship programs expose students to authentic workplace tasks that enhance both technical proficiency and cognitive processing skills, thereby improving workplace readiness and employability.

Although the professional and technical-cognitive competencies received consistently high ratings, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Supervisor-based evaluations in internship settings may be influenced by leniency bias, a common rating tendency in which evaluators assign more favorable scores than warranted because of supportive relationships with trainees, a desire to encourage students, or reluctance to provide low ratings (Jawahar & Williams, 1997). Thus, the high mean scores may reflect both the interns' satisfactory performance and evaluative tendencies inherent in workplace assessments.

Nevertheless, the qualitative comments provide evidence that internship supervisors exercised discernment in their evaluations. In addition to praising the interns' professionalism, adaptability, and teamwork, they also identified areas requiring improvement, particularly communication confidence, assertiveness, and independent task management. These constructive recommendations suggest that the

supervisors did not merely assign uniformly high ratings but offered balanced evaluations that recognized both strengths and developmental needs.

4.3 Significant Difference Between Professional and Technical-Cognitive Competencies

The findings indicate that the trainees exhibited balanced development in both professional and technical-cognitive dimensions of workplace readiness. This balance is important because employment skills are no longer limited to technical expertise alone; rather, institutions increasingly require graduates who possess both hard skills and soft skills.

The absence of a significant difference suggests that the practicum program integrated professional values and technical competencies in preparing students for workplace demands. Moreover, the computed Cohen's d of 0.38 indicates a small-to-moderate practical difference, signifying that while professional competencies tended to receive slightly higher ratings, the magnitude of this difference was not substantial enough to conclude that one competency domain was more developed than the other. This finding supports the notion that workplace readiness is multidimensional, requiring an integration of technical expertise and professional attributes rather than emphasizing one over the other.

Previous studies focus on the relationship between technical competencies and interpersonal competencies in determining employability outcomes. Jackson and Chapman (2012) noted that employers prefer graduates who can integrate technical knowledge with communication, teamwork, adaptability, and professional conduct. Similarly, Clarke (2018) argued that workplace readiness involves a combination of cognitive, technical, and socio-emotional competencies that collectively contribute to career success.

Internship experiences may have provided students with holistic exposure to workplace realities, allowing them to simultaneously develop technical abilities and professional behaviors. Practicum programs, therefore, serve as an important mechanism for aligning higher education outcomes with industry expectations.

Hence, the results demonstrate that the senior interns were perceived by practicum trainers as highly workplace-ready in both professional and technical-cognitive competencies. The lack of significant difference indicates that the interns demonstrated relatively comparable levels of professional and technical-cognitive competencies necessary for professional practice and employment.

4.4 Emergent Themes from Evaluators' Comments and Suggestions Regarding the Performance of Senior Interns

Theme 1: Professionalism and Strong Work Ethics as Core Indicators of Workplace Readiness

Based on Theme 1, it is worth noting that workplace readiness extends beyond technical competencies and includes behavioral and ethical dimensions. Supervisors valued interns who exhibited accountability, reliability, and professionalism because these traits contribute to workplace efficiency and organizational trust. Jackson (2014) emphasized that employability is strongly associated with professional behavior, responsibility, and ethical conduct developed through work-integrated learning experiences. Similarly, Finch et al. (2013) found that employers highly value dependability, professionalism, and integrity as indicators of graduate employability.

In fact, in the study of Riparip and Caballes (2024), students have developed their sense of ethics in the digital space. According to them, “the relevance of ethical awareness in the context of digital media, particularly amid the ongoing pandemic, is paramount. Despite the challenges posed by remote learning and increased reliance on online platforms, students demonstrate a commitment to upholding ethical standards, reflecting a resilient and adaptable approach to digital media usage.”

On the other hand, the emphasis on punctuality, responsibility, and professionalism is also a reflection of the significance of work ethics in organizational settings. In present-day workplaces, technical skills alone are not enough without the ability to demonstrate discipline, professionalism, and ethical decision-making. Thus, the internship experience appears to have helped students internalize workplace norms and expectations necessary for professional success.

Theme 2: Enhancement of Internship Performance through Adaptability and Willingness to Learn

Adaptability and willingness to learn emerged as important characteristics because interns entered environments that required them to adjust to unfamiliar tasks, processes, and expectations. The supervisors particularly valued interns who responded positively to instruction, learned quickly, and applied feedback with minimal supervision.

Theme 2 suggests that practicum experiences should not be viewed solely as opportunities to demonstrate previously acquired competencies. They also function as environments in which students learn how to learn professionally—that is, how to receive feedback, adjust behavior, acquire unfamiliar skills, and respond constructively to workplace demands.

The findings suggest that learning agility and adaptability are highly valued in dynamic workplace environments. Modern organizations operate in rapidly changing contexts where employees are expected to continuously learn, adjust to new systems,

and respond effectively to challenges. The interns' ability to adapt and learn efficiently indicates preparedness for evolving workplace demands.

Succi and Canovi (2020) argued that adaptability and learning orientation are important employability skills in present-day industries. Similarly, Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) stressed that work-integrated learning enhances students' adaptability and capacity to apply academic learning in authentic workplace settings. The supervisors' comments show that interns who are willing to embrace learning opportunities are more likely to perform effectively and integrate successfully into organizational environments.

Theme 3: Collaborative Attitudes and Positive Interpersonal Skills as Contributors to Organizational Effectiveness

Workplace readiness includes relational and social competencies that facilitate teamwork and organizational effectiveness. Interns who display positive attitudes and collaborative behavior are perceived as valuable contributors because organizations rely heavily on teamwork, communication, and interpersonal coordination.

The study of Robles (2012) identified teamwork and interpersonal skills as among the top soft skills required by employers. Moreover, Finch et al. (2013) found that interpersonal competence and collaboration significantly influence graduate employability. The comments of supervisors therefore suggest that the ability to maintain productive workplace relationships is an important marker of professional preparedness.

The positive attitudes demonstrated by the interns may contribute to workplace morale and productivity. Supportive and cooperative employees help foster healthier organizational climates, which are essential for effective team performance and operational success.

Theme 4: Initiative and Independent Task Management as a Reflection of Growing Professional Maturity

It bears stressing that evaluators associate workplace readiness with self-direction, accountability, and ownership of responsibilities. Interns who demonstrate initiative are perceived as more mature and capable of functioning effectively in professional settings because they require less supervision and can independently contribute to organizational goals.

Clarke (2018) explained that employability involves not only technical competencies but also individual attributes such as self-management, initiative, and confidence. On the other hand, Mainga et al. (2022) said that proactive learning behavior and self-management skills are critical competencies sought by employers in modern workplaces. The supervisors' recognition of proactive behavior suggests that the internship experience helped students transition from passive learners into more

autonomous and responsible individuals capable of adapting to professional expectations.

Theme 5: Communication Confidence as an Area for Professional Development

Communication confidence is considered essential for professional growth, particularly in client-oriented and corporate environments. Supervisors recognized that while interns were capable of communicating, some still needed improvement in verbal confidence, assertiveness, and professional expression. Andrews and Higson (2008) emphasized that communication skills are among the most important employability competencies expected by employers. Further, Robles (2012) found that communication competence consistently ranks among the top soft skills needed in the workplace. Effective communication enables employees to express ideas clearly, collaborate with teams, and engage confidently with clients and supervisors.

The supervisors' recommendations imply that higher education institutions and practicum programs should continue strengthening students' oral communication, presentation skills, and professional confidence through authentic workplace exposure and communication-centered training activities.

In conclusion, the qualitative data reveal that workplace readiness is holistic and multidimensional. Internship supervisors valued not only technical competence but also professionalism, adaptability, teamwork, initiative, and communication confidence. These themes reinforce the quantitative findings that the interns were highly prepared for workplace environments and demonstrate the important role of practicum experiences in developing employability competencies among students.

4.5 The Implications of the Findings for the Enhancement of the Practicum Programs and Curriculum Design in Higher Education

The findings emphasize the important role of practicum programs in promoting and developing workplace readiness among college students. It can be noted that the high evaluation in both professional and technical-cognitive competencies, coupled with the qualitative themes of professionalism, adaptability, teamwork, initiative, and communication, suggest that workplace readiness is best developed through meaningful experiential learning opportunities. Consequently, higher education institutions (HEIs) should design practicum programs that balance technical competence with the cultivation of essential soft skills.

Thus, there is a need to solidify curriculum integration of professional values, ethical behavior, adaptability, collaboration, and self-directed learning. Learning experiences should extend beyond technical knowledge by incorporating authentic workplace tasks, problem-based activities, leadership opportunities, and interdisciplinary projects that mirror real-world professional environments. In addition, communication skills should be embedded across the curriculum to enhance students' confidence and effectiveness in workplace interactions.

The absence of a significant difference between professional and technical-cognitive competencies further highlights the importance of maintaining a balanced approach to competency development. Curriculum frameworks should therefore align academic instruction, experiential learning, and industry expectations to produce graduates who are both technically proficient and professionally competent. Finally, stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and industry partners is essential to ensure that practicum objectives, assessment standards, and learning outcomes remain responsive to evolving workplace demands. Collectively, these measures can enhance graduate employability and facilitate a smoother transition from academic preparation to professional practice.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, senior interns exhibited high levels of workplace readiness in both professional and technical-cognitive competencies, as perceived by their internship supervisors. The interns received particularly high evaluations in professionalism, work ethic, teamwork, adaptability, communication, computer skills, and analytical skills, indicating that they generally exhibited the competencies expected in workplace settings. Moreover, no significant difference was found between professional and technical-cognitive competencies, suggesting that the interns displayed comparable levels of competence across these two domains. The qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results by highlighting professionalism, adaptability, teamwork, initiative, and communication competence as the most valued workplace attributes. At the same time, the supervisors consistently identified communication confidence, assertiveness, and clarity in speaking as areas requiring further development.

Thus, higher education institutions should continue providing authentic work-integrated learning experiences that reinforce both professional and technical competencies. Since communication confidence emerged as the primary developmental need, practicum programs should incorporate structured oral communication activities, workplace presentations, mock client interactions, professional meetings, and regular supervisor feedback and coaching sessions to strengthen students' confidence and professional communication skills. Curriculum developers are likewise encouraged to integrate employability competencies, including teamwork, adaptability, initiative, professionalism, and ethical behavior, across academic courses while maintaining strong collaboration with industry partners to ensure that curriculum outcomes remain aligned with evolving workplace expectations.

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The study was limited by its relatively small sample size, reliance on supervisor evaluations, and cross-sectional design, which precludes conclusions regarding changes in competencies over time or the direct effects of the practicum experience on workplace readiness. In addition, the comparison between professional and technical-cognitive

competencies should be interpreted with caution because the technical-cognitive domain was represented by only two indicators in the institutional evaluation instrument, whereas the professional competency domain comprised a broader range of competencies. Future studies are therefore encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples, adopt longitudinal or pretest-posttest designs, triangulate supervisor evaluations with other assessment sources, and utilize a more comprehensive and balanced technical-cognitive competency framework. These refinements would strengthen the assessment of workplace readiness and provide more robust evidence to inform practicum program enhancement and curriculum development in higher education..

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors affirm that there are no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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