THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY AT PT ERICK MARSUDI UTOMO

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The Effectiveness of the Internship Program: A Case Study at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo

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Prepared and submitted to fulfill the final exam requirements to obtain a Bachelor's degree at Strata-1 level in the Management Study Program, Faculty of Business and Economics, Universitas Islam Indonesia

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

Here I declare the originality of the thesis; I have not presented anyone else‘s work to obtain my university degree, nor have I presented anyone else’s words, ideas or expression without acknowledgement. All quotations are cited and listed in the bibliography of the thesis. If in the future this statement is proven to be false, I am willing to accept any sanction complying with the determined regulation or its consequence.

Yogyakarta, July 7 th 2025

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APPROVAL PAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of the Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB), focusing on a case study of student interns placed at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo under the APINDO coordination. While the program promoted roles as "business consultants" for MSMEs, interns frequently encountered a mismatch between job expectations and reality. Interns were often assigned operational and administrative tasks, with limited strategic involvement or mentoring, leading to frustration and decreased motivation. Through a qualitative case study approach involving interviews with three interns, this research identifies three main issues: (1) a significant gap between job expectations and actual tasks; (2) challenges related to unclear job descriptions, weak communication, and lack of mentorship; and (3) self-initiated adaptation strategies developed by interns in response to these limitations. The results indicate that while interns gained soft skills such as adaptability and resilience, the program fell short of delivering professional development as promised. This study recommends that program administrators and host companies adopt clearer job design, structured mentoring, and consistent evaluation systems to enhance the learning experience and avoid undermining student trust. By addressing systemic weaknesses and incorporating student-led adaptive practices into formal learning structures, the MSIB program can better fulfill its educational objectives.

Keyword: internship effectiveness, expectation–reality gap, MSIB program, mentorship.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Company Profile

The Indonesian Employers Association, widely recognized by its Indonesian acronym APINDO *(Asosiasi Pengusaha Indonesia)*, serves as a pivotal organization representing the voice and interests of the business community across Indonesia. Established on January 31, 1952, APINDO has played a vital role in advocating for the rights and development of employers in various sectors of the Indonesian economy. Over the decades, APINDO has evolved into a highly structured and expansive organization, headquartered in Jakarta under the coordination of the National Leadership Council (Dewan Pimpinan Nasional/DPN). In order to effectively reach and support employers throughout the archipelago, APINDO has also developed a strong regional presence through its Provincial Leadership Councils (Dewan Pimpinan Provinsi/DPP) in all 34 provinces, as well as 350 City/Regency Leadership Councils, enabling it to maintain close relationships with businesses at all levels and respond to regional economic dynamics.

One of APINDO's strategic focuses in recent years has been the empowerment of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), recognizing the crucial role these businesses play in sustaining the national economy, creating jobs, and fostering innovation across diverse sectors. MSMEs form the backbone of Indonesia's economic landscape, and APINDO, through its various programs and collaborations, has taken proactive steps to nurture and enhance the capacity of these enterprises.

As part of this commitment, APINDO has actively participated in the Merdeka Student Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB) under the

APINDO UMKM Merdeka initiative. This innovative program aims to bridge academia and industry by placing university students in real-world business environments, thereby equipping them with practical skills while simultaneously supporting MSME growth through fresh ideas and youthful energy. One of the prominent collaborations within this framework is with PT Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera (PT EMU), a company that manages and oversees notable brands such as Ayam Bakar Pak D and Belindo.

Ayam Bakar Pak D, in particular, is a standout example of an MSME success story that has undergone remarkable transformation and expansion. Initially operating under the humble name of Depot Pak D, it began as a small family-owned eatery dedicated to serving affordable and delicious traditional Indonesian grilled chicken dishes. Over the years, through consistent quality, strong organizational values, and strategic business decisions, it has grown into the much larger enterprise known today as Rumah Makan Ayam Bakar Pak D. What distinguishes this culinary business is not only its commitment to taste and customer service, but also its deep-rooted emphasis on spiritual principles that guide its internal culture and leadership approach. These values form the foundation of the company's identity and are reflected in its day-to-day operations, employee interactions, and business ethics.

Currently, Ayam Bakar Pak D operates over 60 outlets spread across Surabaya, Sidoarjo, Gresik, Malang, and numerous other cities throughout Indonesia. The brand continues to experience steady growth and is focused on expanding its footprint to reach even more regions, while maintaining the authenticity and integrity that originally defined its appeal.

In addition to its culinary ventures, PT Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera has diversified into the retail sector through the creation of a sub-brand called Belindo.

Belindo serves as a complementary business to Ayam Bakar Pak D, operating as a retail platform that provides a wide range of household necessities, catering to the everyday needs of Indonesian consumers. This diversification not only strengthens the overall brand portfolio of the parent company but also contributes to the broader ecosystem of local entrepreneurship and commerce.

Through these initiatives and collaborations, APINDO exemplifies its mission to promote sustainable business development, support innovation, and uplift local enterprises by connecting them with broader economic opportunities. The partnership with PT Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera, and the success stories of Ayam Bakar Pak D and Belindo, serve as inspiring examples of how strategic support and values-driven leadership can lead MSMEs to thrive and become influential players in Indonesia's vibrant economy.

1.2 Vision and Mission Company

1.2.1 Vision

Vision Elevating the richness of Indonesian culinary heritage to an international level.

1.2.2 Mission

1. Forming Outstanding Individuals who are Devout and have a Warrior Character
2. Creating New Trends in the Culinary Industry
3. A Path to Prosperity & Striving in the Way of God
4. Providing Service that is Fast, Friendly, Familiar, and Full of Warmth
5. Fostering Entrepreneurial Spirit among Team Members and the Community

1.3 Product and Service

PT Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera is a dynamic and rapidly growing business entity that provides a diverse range of services and products through its two primary brands: Ayam Bakar Pak D and Belindo. These two brands represent the company's strategic presence in both the culinary and retail sectors, serving distinct yet complementary aspects of the everyday needs of Indonesian consumers.

The first and perhaps more widely recognized brand under PT Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera is Ayam Bakar Pak D, which has carved out a strong identity within Indonesia's vibrant food and beverage industry. Specializing in the art of preparing Ayam Bakar a beloved Indonesian grilled chicken dish—the brand is known for its authentic flavors and dedication to traditional cooking techniques. Each dish is carefully crafted using a blend of heritage spices and marinades, passed down through generations, which highlight the rich culinary diversity of the archipelago. The grilling process itself is carried out using methods that preserve the natural taste of the chicken while infusing it with the bold, aromatic flavors characteristic of Indonesian cuisine. What sets Ayam Bakar Pak D apart is its unwavering commitment to quality and consistency, ensuring that every meal served across its growing number of outlets meets the high standards that customers have come to expect.

In addition to its culinary excellence, Ayam Bakar Pak D places strong emphasis on values-based management. The brand integrates spiritual principles and ethical business practices into its organizational culture, fostering a positive work environment for employees and cultivating trust and loyalty among its customers. The restaurant has expanded from a modest local eatery to a recognized chain with over 60 outlets in key cities such as Surabaya, Sidoarjo, Gresik, Malang,

and beyond. Each location is designed to offer a welcoming atmosphere where customers can enjoy flavorful meals with family and friends, reflecting the communal spirit that is central to Indonesian dining culture.

Complementing its success in the food industry, PT Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera also operates Belindo, a retail brand established to meet the household and daily lifestyle needs of its customer base. Belindo offers a broad selection of practical and essential products that support day-to-day living, including kitchenware, cleaning supplies, personal care items, and a variety of household necessities. With a focus on affordability, accessibility, and quality, Belindo seeks to make everyday essentials available to a wide demographic, particularly catering to families and working professionals who value convenience and reliability in their shopping experience.

The synergy between Ayam Bakar Pak D and Belindo reflects PT Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera's holistic approach to business development—one that is rooted in understanding and responding to the evolving needs of the modern Indonesian consumer. While Ayam Bakar Pak D satisfies culinary desires through flavorful, traditional meals, Belindo complements the experience by ensuring that households are well-equipped with trusted products. Together, these brands embody the company's vision of providing comprehensive value to the community by supporting both lifestyle and livelihood.

Through this dual-brand strategy, PT Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera not only contributes to economic growth and job creation but also reinforces its reputation as a responsible and innovative enterprise committed to enhancing the quality of life for Indonesians across various regions. The company continues to invest in expansion, quality improvement, and customer satisfaction, positioning itself as a

key player in Indonesia’s MSME and retail ecosystems.

1.4 Background

Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) is an initiation from the Directorate General of Higher Education (Ditjen Dikti) under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) that focuses on reforming the higher education system in Indonesia. One of the main programs within the MBKM framework is the Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB). This program provides students with the opportunity to gain practical experience in industry through internships or to develop new skills through structured independent studies. To participate in MSIB, students are required to be in at least the 4th semester for vocational program or the 5th semester for undergraduate program, with a remaining credit load of no more than 20 credits (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). The integration of practical experiences into academic curricula is essential for preparing students to meet workforce demands (Ferns et al., 2024) Furthermore, Internship programs enhance students' employability and help bridge the gap between theory and practice (Luk & Chan, 2024)

By immersing students in professional environments under guided supervision, MSIB aims to produce adaptable graduates while strengthening Indonesia's ecosystem for talent development though its effectiveness, as seen in cases like PT EMU, hinges on robust communication between educational institutions, program coordinators like APINDO, and host companies to ensure alignment with learning objectives. At PT EMU, this study found several unrelated job tasks. This happened because of misunderstandings between APINDO as partner institutions in MSIB and PT EMU as host company under APINDO. So

there is no obvious rule and job desk which was agreed upon by APINDO and PT EMU. To gain a deeper understanding of this issue, interviews were conducted with MSIB participants at PT EMU to gather relevant data. Poor communication and unclear job roles are major factors hindering intern learning outcomes (Shen et al., 2024). Clear job roles and responsibilities significantly impact interns' learning experiences and satisfaction (Mokoena & Seeletse, 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the root causes of the persistent gap between expectation and reality in the role of business consultants within the MSIB program. Using a case study of the internship experience at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo, this research seeks to analyze the impact of job desk misalignment on intern satisfaction and competency development. The findings are expected to provide actionable recommendations for program organizers and host companies to enhance the effectiveness of future internship programs. Internships that provide structured mentorship and learning tasks result in stronger development outcomes for students (Shen et al., 2024). Mentorship relationships contribute significantly to career development during internships (Liu et al., 2024)

The research will explore how motivational tools and HR strategies are applied in real organizational settings, particularly in supporting young professionals through internship programs at PT EMU. Formal HR strategies like mentoring and feedback systems influence interns' perceived program effectiveness (Liu et al. 2024). A supportive and communicative workplace culture enhances internship outcomes and fosters skill development (Naz et al., 2020). In doing so, the study aims to bridge academic knowledge with industry realities, while providing constructive feedback that can be used to enhance future internship programs and HR policies at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo Sejahtera. mentoring and feedback systems influence interns' perceived program effectiveness (Liu et al.

2024). A supportive and communicative workplace culture enhances internship outcomes and fosters skill development (Naz et al., 2020).

This study is important to evaluate how business internships positively affect job marketability and skill readiness (Mokoena & Seeletse, 2024). The focus of this research is to identify gaps in the internship implementation, such as mismatches between the tasks assigned and the competencies expected, and how this affects students' satisfaction and professional development. Addressing mismatches between assigned tasks and students' academic competencies is critical to improve internship experiences (Shen et al., 2024)

1.5 Research Questions

The MSIB program allows university students to gain real work experience through internships. One of the program's partners is APINDO, which places students in various small and medium enterprises, including PT Erick Marsudi Utomo (PT EMU). In this program, some students take on the role of business consultant interns at PT EMU. However, a gap often exists between students' expectations of the role and their actual experiences during the internship. This gap raises several important questions: How closely do the tasks assigned align with the job description? How effective is the internship in developing the professional skills that are expected? What challenges do interns face when their roles differ from what was initially expected? And how do interns adapt to these discrepancies in their roles?

To address the challenges identified above and to build a more effective internship program, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the gap between expectations and reality manifest in the role of interns at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo?
2. What challenges are faced by interns during their internship at PT Erick

Marsudi Utomo?

3. What adaptation strategies have they employed in response to role discrepancies?

1.6 Purpose

1. To find out how the difference between what interns expected and what really happened is experienced by interns at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo.
2. To learn what problems the interns face during the internship
3. To learn how they deal with those problems when their role is not as expected.

1.7 Benefits of Research

For Students

1. The research aims to develop strategies that enhance the quality of internship programs, resulting in a more enriching, engaging, and valuable experience for students.
2. By aligning training and development opportunities with interns' career goals, students gain relevant professional skills and real-world insights that prepare them for future employment.
3. A supportive program design and a positive work environment help boost intern morale, confidence, and active participation during the internship.
4. Exposure to structured development opportunities can help students identify their strengths, career interests, and potential future roles, both within the company and beyond.

For the Company

1. The company can implement targeted strategies that make the internship program more efficient, productive, and aligned with organizational goals.

2. Motivated and satisfied interns are more likely to perform better, contribute meaningfully, and even consider longer-term collaboration with the company.
3. A reputation as a company that values and nurtures young talent helps attract high-quality candidates in the future, positioning the company as an ideal place for internships and early careers.
4. A well-developed internship program contributes to a sustainable talent pipeline, ensuring the company remains competitive and innovative.

For Intern

1. Interns involved in a more structured internship program will have the opportunity to develop practical skills relevant to the industry. By addressing the gap between expectations and reality in their tasks, interns can gain hands-on experience that helps improve both technical and soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and decision-making.
2. This study will provide insights into the importance of having a clear job description that matches the actual tasks faced by interns. With alignment between the outlined responsibilities and the actual tasks, interns can work more efficiently and make the most of their skill development in relevant fields.
3. Interns participating in a more structured program will learn how to adapt to dynamic work environments, which helps them become more prepared and confident to enter the professional world. This study will explore the challenges interns face and how adaptation strategies can improve their career readiness

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theorical Basis

2.1.1 Internship Program

Internships are a form of experiential learning whereby students can apply and practice their skills in a professional setting while gaining career and life experience (Thompson et al., 2021) also Internships have been widely recognized as a crucial bridge between academic learning and professional practice. Scholars such as (Pianda et al., 2024) emphasize their role in experiential learning such as internships helps students apply academic knowledge in practical settings, although institutional and industry collaboration remains key market. By engaging in hands- on work it can help students define clearer career goals through meaningful, discipline-spanning experiences (Luk & Chan, 2024).

Such opportunities are instrumental in shaping professional identities and informing future career choices. Employers consistently favor candidates with internship experience, as it signals practical competence and adaptability (Banker & Borchardt, 2025). Beyond skill development, internships facilitate networking, industry exposure, and firsthand insights into workplace dynamics. Expand students' professional networks while offering insight into real workplace environments (Chin et al., 2020). These benefits collectively enhance employability and prepare students for smoother transitions into their chosen fields.

Globally, educational institutions and governments increasingly prioritize experiential learning by integrating internships into academic curricula. Structured programs often partner with industries to offer students accredited work experiences, combining professional training with academic credit. This study

examines such internship frameworks, evaluating their effectiveness in delivering meaningful experiential learning outcomes.

2.1.2 The Effectiveness of Internship Programs

The effectiveness of internship programs is often evaluated through the degree of student satisfaction during the internship period (Banker & Borchardt, 2025). High levels of satisfaction generally indicate a successful connection between academic preparation and practical workplace experience, which plays a crucial role in shaping students' career paths and future employment decisions. Internship experiences can either confirm students' initial career interests or prompt them to reconsider their chosen paths, thereby influencing future job search strategies (Ng et al., 2023). Industrial internships enable students to develop hard and soft skills relevant to field requirements, and provide real experience and insights into the application of learning outcomes obtained at university (Apriyani et al., 2023). Although much of the current research focuses on specific sectors such as hospitality, core themes like the alignment of expectations, clarity of learning objectives, and the presence of supportive mentorship are widely relevant across various fields

Structured internship initiatives are designed to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-world application by placing students in professional environments that reflect their areas of academic specialization. Ideally, these programs offer clear job roles, defined learning outcomes, and active mentoring throughout the experience. However, as such initiatives expand in scale and complexity, they often encounter challenges in ensuring consistent quality and meaningful engagement across different host organizations.

Studies suggest that a notable gap between what students expect and what they actually experience during internships can negatively affect satisfaction, as unmet expectations often arise from unclear job descriptions, insufficient

supervisory support, and inadequate coordination among stakeholders (Vo, 2022). This misalignment may stem from unclear job descriptions, limited supervisory support, and weak coordination among educational institutions, placement providers, and program facilitators. These challenges are particularly evident in large-scale internship programs involving multiple stakeholders, where communication breakdowns can easily lead to discrepancies.

Addressing these issues is essential not only to enhance the educational value of internships but also to maintain the credibility of such programs as legitimate extensions of formal learning. Research demonstrates that student satisfaction significantly influences skill development outcomes, career commitment, and perceptions of the internship's alignment with professional preparation (Qu et al., 2021). As such, evaluating internship success requires more than just providing workplace exposure; it demands a close look at the relevance of assigned tasks, the clarity ofroles, the strength putriof mentorship, and the effectiveness of coordination among those involved.

This research investigates internship effectiveness from the student perspective, focusing on common issues such as mismatched roles, communication failures, and unmet expectations. By exploring these experiences, the study aims to provide practical insights that can help improve the design and implementation of internship programs across diverse educational and professional contexts.

2.1.3 Misalignment of Job Desk and Reality in Internship Programs

Internship programs are ideally designed to act as a bridge between academic learning and practical workplace experience, enabling students to apply their theoretical knowledge in real-world professional settings. Despite this intended purpose, several studies have highlighted a recurring issue: interns often face a disconnect between their assigned tasks and their educational background, leading

to boredom, frustration, and disengagement (Mokoena & Seeletse, 2024). These mismatches frequently arise due to weak communication between academic institutions and host organizations, vague or overly general job descriptions, and poorly structured internship programs (Wolinsky et al. 2022).

In many large-scale internship initiatives intended to provide meaningful and career-aligned experiences, such misalignments persist. Some students are placed in roles that significantly diverge from their area of study, or are relegated to performing repetitive and low-skill tasks that offer minimal developmental value (Quinto & Diase, 2024). This gap between expectation and reality not only fosters dissatisfaction but also exposes deeper coordination challenges among the various parties involved, namely educational institutions, placement providers, and program administrators.

If left unaddressed, these mismatches can have lasting negative effects on students' motivation and engagement, potentially influencing their attitudes and behavior even after the internship ends (Hasyim, 2023). Prior research indicated that a disconnect between academic preparation and job responsibilities undermines both intrinsic motivation (such as a sense of purpose and personal growth) and extrinsic motivation (such as recognition and performance feedback). This reduction in motivation may result in lower organizational commitment and a higher likelihood of turnover intentions (Hasyim, 2023).

Moreover, when interns are given tasks that do not challenge or interest them, this can lead to increased stress, emotional fatigue, and eventually burnout, factors that adversely impact both their personal well-being and workplace productivity (Nangia & Garg, 2025). In the broader context of internship programs that aim to scale and deliver consistent value, these psychological consequences represent a

critical area of concern. Therefore, ensuring that interns are given responsibilities aligned with their academic training, interests, and long-term career goals, while also fostering clear and continuous communication among stakeholders, is essential for improving the overall effectiveness and sustainability of internship programs.

2.1.4 Factors Influencing Internship Effectiveness

Internship effectiveness is shaped by a variety of interrelated factors that collectively influence the quality of learning and outcomes for student participants. One fundamental element is the presence of clear guidance and well-defined objectives from both academic institutions and host organizations. As demonstrated by Wolinsky et al. (2022), well-structured internships with clearly defined goals, relevant professional tasks, and consistent supervisory feedback significantly enhance student engagement and perceived program value. Effective communication between interns and their supervisors fosters mutual understanding and collaboration, laying the groundwork for a constructive working relationship, while also requiring interns to actively adapt, engage, reflect, and seek opportunities for professional growth throughout the placement (Ajjawi et al., 2019). The organizational culture and work environment established by the host organization, including the support and collaboration of industry mentors with relevant expertise, play a critical role in shaping students' learning experiences and professional development (Mwiinga, Maimbolwa, & Muleya, 2017; Thessin, Clayton, & Jamison, 2018). Furthermore, close coordination between academic supervisors and industry mentors, combined with timely feedback, autonomy, and encouragement, can significantly enhance interns' ability to overcome workplace challenges and complete program requirements effectively (Schneider et al., 2024).

Individual characteristics and the nature of the internship experience itself also have a notable impact on perceived effectiveness. Internships are considered more beneficial when they provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful work, discover personal strengths, and develop resilience in response to authentic workplace challenges (Ocampo et al., 2020). Additional factors, such as program structure, supervisor support, and the relevance of assigned tasks, also influence how students perceive the quality and value of the experience (Mokoena & Seeletse, 2024). Beyond the immediate experience, internships contribute to broader developmental outcomes such as work readiness, self-efficacy, and motivation, particularly when hands-on professional practice is integrated with reflective observation and active experimentation in line with experiential learning theory (Thompson et al., 2021). Moreover, empirical studies indicate that internship participation can improve academic achievement, post-graduation employment rates, and career advancement (Ocampo et al., 2020), while inclusive and supportive organizational cultures enhance satisfaction and engagement across diverse student populations (Smith & Campbell, 2020). Finally, structured evaluation approaches can help identify strengths and areas for improvement in aligning academic instruction with real- world applications.

2.1.5 Internship in Indonesia

In Indonesia, internships (*magang*) have gained significant prominence in recent years, particularly since the launch of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program in 2020 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The program provides students with the opportunity to gain real-world experience through structured internships, aimed at narrowing the gap between academic knowledge and professional practice. Internships under MBKM are designed to last up to one semester and include various forms of experiential

learning, such as student exchanges, research, independent projects, and work placements in companies and organizations. One of the flagship initiatives under MBKM is the *Magang dan Studi Independen Bersertifikat* (MSIB), which has collaborated with more than 1,200 industry partners including major corporations such as Telkom Indonesia, Bank Rakyat Indonesia, and Astra International and has recorded a consistent increase in student participation across its first six cohorts (Kemendikbudristek, 2023).

As stated by Thompson et al. (2021), "Internships serve as a critical bridge between academic learning and practical application, equipping students with the skills necessary for the workforce." This initiative reflects a broader national agenda to produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also industry- ready. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) show that despite the growing adoption of MSIB, the unemployment rate among university graduates fluctuated declining from 5.98% in 2021 to 4.80% in 2022, but rising again to 5.18% in 2023 indicating that program effectiveness in reducing graduate unemployment still requires deeper evaluation (Saweho et al., 2025).

However, similar to global challenges, internship programs in Indonesia often face issues related to task misalignment and ineffective communication between stakeholders. Many students have reported that their assigned duties during internships are administrative or irrelevant to their academic major, leading to demotivation, boredom, and reduced learning outcomes. This issue reflects findings from earlier discussions, where internship effectiveness is significantly influenced by how well tasks match students' skills, expectations, and career goals. As Mokoena and Seeletse (2024) noted, "The alignment of internship tasks with students' academic backgrounds is crucial for maximizing the learning experience." Poor coordination between universities and host organizations, along

with the lack of clear guidelines or supervision, exacerbates these problems. Findings from MSIB evaluations also reveal that some host companies provide limited exposure to industry-relevant projects, creating a gap between the intended learning outcomes and actual internship tasks (Saweho et al., 2025).

As highlighted by both local and international literature, such misalignment can lead to emotional exhaustion, low job satisfaction, and diminished organizational commitment, ultimately undermining the value of the internship experience. To ensure internships in Indonesia are effective and truly educational, multiple structural improvements are required. These include fostering stronger collaboration between universities and industry, clearly defining intern roles and responsibilities, and ensuring supervisors are trained to provide meaningful mentorship and feedback. Furthermore, internship programs should be evaluated not only by completion but by student satisfaction, learning outcomes, and professional growth. As Shen et al. (2024) suggested, Evaluating internships based on comprehensive criteria can enhance their effectiveness and relevance to students' career aspirations. Saweho et al. (2025)

further recommend aligning internship curricula with evolving industry demands, strengthening government–industry–university collaboration, and providing pre-program training in technical and soft skills to maximize student readiness.

A positive and inclusive organizational culture, supportive leadership, and opportunities for interns to make impactful contributions are key elements that influence the perceived success of internships. With thoughtful implementation, internships particularly under the MBKM framework can become a transformative experience that enhances students' career readiness, self-efficacy, and motivation.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. The writer chose this method because the writer want to understand the personal experiences of interns regarding job description mismatches at PT EMU. Qualitative methods are a research approach used to understand social, cultural, or psychological phenomena in depth through the analysis of non-numeric data, such as text, images, or interviews. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on measurement and statistical analysis, qualitative methods emphasize understanding the context, experiences, and perspectives of individuals or groups being studied. This approach is often used to explore meanings, interpretations, and processes underlying real- life events or situations.

As Creswell (2013) noted, Qualitative methods provide a different way of studying academic topics compared to quantitative research methods. While both methods share some similarities, qualitative methods focus more on text and image data, use different steps in analyzing data, and involve various research designs. When writing the methods section for a qualitative research proposal or study, it's important to explain the purpose of qualitative research, describe the research designs used, consider the researcher's role in the study, use different types of data, follow clear protocols for recording data, analyze the data in several stages, and explain how the accuracy or validity of the data will be ensured. This chapter covers these essential parts of writing a strong qualitative methods section.

3.2 Unit of Analysis

This study establishes internship students at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo as the unit of analysis. The primary focus examines the misalignment between initially

communicated job descriptions and the actual tasks performed during the internship. This phenomenon proves critical as it directly impacts internship effectiveness, particularly in achieving learning objectives and developing students' professional competencies.

The selection of internship students as the analysis unit stems from their unique position as direct participants who can provide firsthand accounts of the expectation-reality misalignment in work assignments. The research specifically investigates how this job description misalignment affects.

3.3 Data Collection Method

3.3.1 Interview

Interview is a key method in qualitative research because they help researchers explore people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences in depth. Instead of just collecting short or surface-level answers, interviews allow participants to explain their views in their own words and provide context behind what they say (Alshenqeeti, 2014). This makes participants feel more involved and respected. Through interviews, researchers can discover deeper insights such as hidden knowledge, mixed emotions, or even contradictions that may not appear in surveys or other quantitative methods. By focusing on personal stories, interviews help combine facts with personal meaning, making the research more complete and meaningful.

This study employed semi-structured interviews as a primary data collection method, conducted with interns at PT EMU. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring alignment with the research objectives by targeting individuals who had experienced the phenomenon under investigation.

Prior to data collection, the researcher scheduled appointments with willing participants and conducted interviews via Zoom to accommodate accessibility and logistical considerations. A detailed list of interviewees, including relevant demographic or contextual information, is presented in the table below.

Table 3.1 Respondent Profile

Name	Home University	Sex	Internship Tenure
DW	Public	Female	5 Months
DI	Private	Female	5 Months
DH	Public	Male	5 Months

During one internship period, there were five interns assigned to the business consultant division. The three informants were selected to capture a variety of experiences based on their university background and task assignments. Data collection was stopped after the third interview as thematic saturation was reached, where subsequent interviews yielded no new significant themes or insights relevant to the research questions.

The selection of informants also took into account the diversity of their backgrounds and the responsibilities they held throughout the internship. As a result, the data obtained is rich and varied, providing in-depth insights into the internship process within the business consulting context.

3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected from the three MSIB interns at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo were first carefully transcribed verbatim, preserving the exact words, expressions, and nuances of the participants' speech. This step was crucial to maintain data integrity and ensure that no meaning was lost during the transition from spoken

to written form. Each transcript was reviewed multiple times for accuracy, and any unclear words were clarified immediately after the interview sessions through follow-up confirmations with participants where necessary.

Once transcription was complete, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method widely recognized as both flexible and rigorous for organizing and interpreting qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was selected because it allows the researcher to systematically identify recurring patterns of meaning within a dataset, while still giving space for participants' voices to be heard directly. This approach was considered the most suitable for this study's aim of exploring interns' lived experiences, as it enabled the development of rich, detailed, and nuanced themes that directly answer the research questions.

The data analysis process was conducted through six iterative stages as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), ensuring that the process remained systematic and transparent.

1. Familiarization with the Data – The first stage involved immersing the researcher in the data to build a deep understanding of its content. This was achieved by repeatedly reading all three interview transcripts while listening to the original audio recordings. Notes were taken in a reflexive journal to capture early impressions, recurring ideas, and significant emotional tones expressed by the participants. This phase was critical for gaining a holistic sense of the data before moving to more detailed coding.

2. Generating Initial Codes – In the second stage, each transcript was read line by line, and meaningful segments were highlighted. Codes were assigned to capture the essence of each segment, such as "unclear job description," "lack of mentorship," "peer support," "administrative workload," and "gap between expectation and reality." Coding was done manually using Microsoft Word's comment and highlight

functions, which allowed the researcher to remain closely engaged with the data and reflect critically on each coding decision. At this stage, the focus was on staying close to the participants' language and avoiding premature interpretation.

3. Searching for Themes – After coding was completed, similar or related codes were collated into potential themes. This involved grouping codes that spoke to the same underlying issue. For instance, codes such as "lack of onboarding," "role ambiguity," and "absence of job description" were clustered together under a broader theme labeled "Structural and Guidance-Related Challenges." Similarly, codes related to feelings of mismatch between expectations and assigned tasks were grouped under "Manifestation of the Expectation–Reality Gap." This phase was highly interpretative, requiring the researcher to step back and identify overarching patterns that cut across individual interviews.

4. Reviewing Themes – Once potential themes were identified, they were carefully reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately reflected the coded data and the dataset as a whole. This step involved two levels of review: first, checking that all data within each theme formed a coherent pattern (internal homogeneity) and second, ensuring that the themes were clearly distinct from one another (external heterogeneity). During this stage, some themes were merged (when they overlapped conceptually) and others were split into sub-themes to capture more nuanced differences.

5. Defining and Naming Themes – In the fifth stage, the finalized themes were clearly defined and given descriptive names that captured their essence. Each theme was written up in detail, including what aspect of the interns' experience it captured, why it was significant, and how it related to the research questions. The three major themes that emerged from this process were: (1) Manifestation of the Expectation–Reality Gap, (2) Structural and Guidance-Related Challenges, and (3) Intern-Led

Adaptation Strategies. These names were chosen to be both concise and descriptive, allowing readers to quickly grasp their focus.

6. Producing the Report – The final stage involved weaving the themes into a coherent narrative that formed the basis of Chapter IV (Findings). Direct quotations from participants were carefully selected to support each theme, ensuring that the voices of the interns remained central to the reporting. The analysis was written in a way that directly addressed the research questions, making clear links between data, interpretation, and conclusions.

Throughout the entire process, multiple strategies were employed to ensure trustworthiness covering credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants and asking them to verify whether the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. Triangulation was used by comparing interview data with researcher observations and relevant program documents to cross-validate findings. Peer debriefing sessions were held with academic supervisors to challenge assumptions, refine codes, and minimize researcher bias. Additionally, a detailed audit trail was maintained, including coding notes, analytic memos, and decision logs, to provide transparency and allow others to trace how conclusions were derived from the raw data.

This rigorous, multi-step approach ensured that the analysis was systematic, credible, and grounded in the participants' lived experiences. It also enabled the study to produce findings that are both richly descriptive and theoretically meaningful, offering insights that can inform future internship program design and implementation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULT AND DUSCUSSION

4.1 Research Findings

The data collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the three selected interns underwent a thorough thematic analysis. This systematic process involved several stages, including transcription, coding, categorization, and the iterative refinement of emerging patterns. As a result, three overarching themes were identified, each of which directly addresses the research questions and sheds light on the interns' lived experiences. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of how interns perceive and navigate their internship journey. The three key themes are: (1) The Manifestation of the Expectation–Reality Gap, which explores the mismatch between interns' initial expectations and the realities they encountered; (2) Structural and Guidance-Related Challenges, which highlights the organizational, supervisory, and communication issues that shaped their learning experiences; and (3) Intern-Led Adaptation Strategies, which focuses on the coping mechanisms and proactive steps interns employed to overcome obstacles and maximize their learning. Each theme is discussed in detail in the following subsections, supported by direct quotes and interpretations that capture the interns' perspectives.

4.1.1 Manifestation of the Expectation-Reality Gap Among Interns at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo

The interview transcripts reveal a significant disparity between interns' initial expectations and their actual experiences at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo. Prior to the internship, participants envisioned roles aligned with business consulting, such as conducting market analyses, developing UMKM growth strategies, or engaging in problem-solving discussions with stakeholders. For instance, DH emphasized her excitement about "brainstorming strategies" for Ayam Bakar Pak D, while DI anticipated applying classroom knowledge to "real business cases". To maintain

confidentially, all names cited in this chapter are pseudonyms. The initials DH, DI, and DW refer to three interns from the MSIB Batch 5 program who participated in this research. These expectations were rooted in the program's branding under MSIB and APINDO, which implicitly promised professional development in strategic business roles. However, the reality diverged sharply, with interns predominantly assigned repetitive administrative tasks data entry, inventory management, and even sales support tasks they perceived as mismatched with their envisioned consultant titles. The gap was further exacerbated by a lack of clarity in job descriptions and communication. Interns reported receiving no formal briefing about their responsibilities, leading to confusion about their purpose within the company. DW's statement *"We were just told to help wherever needed, like packing orders or cleaning up"* highlights the ad-hoc nature of their assignments. This ambiguity created frustration, as interns struggled to reconcile their academic preparation (e.g., business analysis skills) with menial tasks that required no specialized knowledge. Notably, the absence of structured onboarding or mentorship left interns feeling like "floating resources" rather than valued contributors, undermining their motivation and sense of professional growth.

Underlying this gap were systemic issues in program coordination between APINDO and PT EMU. Interns noted minimal interaction with APINDO representatives, while PT EMU's management treated them as temporary operational staff rather than future business consultants. DI's remark *"We were never included in decision-making, even for UMKM projects we supposedly 'consulted' on"* exposes the program's failure to bridge theory and practice. The interns' experiences reflect a broader pattern in internship programs where institutional promises (e.g., skill development, strategic roles) clash with host companies' utilitarian needs (e.g., filling operational gaps). This misalignment not

only diminished the internship's educational value but also raised questions about the program's credibility in preparing students for careers in business consulting.

4.1.2 Challenges Faced by Interns

Intern participants encountered numerous challenges throughout the program, primarily stemming from the mismatch between their expectations and the actual roles they were assigned. DH stated, *"To be honest, it was quite far from what the writer imagined. Most of the tasks the writer received were administrative, such as inputting data or helping to draft reports sometimes the writer didn't even understand the purpose of those reports."* Similarly, DW expressed her disappointment, saying, *"There were many tasks that had nothing to do with business or consulting. The writer was once asked to help with selling on-site, packing goods, and even kitchen work."* DI added, *"I felt like I was 'working' instead of 'learning'. The title 'business consultant' was just a label it didn't reflect what we were actually doing."*

A key contributor to their dissatisfaction was the absence of mentoring and structured guidance. DI shared, *"We were basically 'left alone' without any proper onboarding,"* while DH said, *"We were mostly thrown directly into tasks without any clear briefing or preparation."* DI further noted, *"There wasn't any assigned mentor who really guided us."* This lack of supervision and feedback sessions left interns uncertain about whether their performance aligned with the goals of the internship.

Another major issue was poor communication and coordination between the coordinating institution (APINDO) and the host company (PT Erick Marsudi Utomo). DH explained, "Sometimes our tasks changed suddenly without explanation, and we often had to follow instructions without knowing the context,"

while DW emphasized, *"Communication between the two parties was very minimal."* As a result, interns frequently felt confused about their actual roles and to whom they were accountable.

4.1.3 Adaptation Strategies Employed by Interns

Despite the various structural shortcomings of the program, the interns demonstrated significant adaptability. One of the most frequently mentioned coping strategies was peer-based support. DH shared, *"We supported each other so that we didn't feel alone,"* while DI noted, *"I often discussed things with fellow interns to stay motivated and avoid feeling isolated."* These informal peer discussions became a crucial alternative to the missing formal mentoring structure.

Interns also resorted to self-directed learning approaches to compensate for the lack of formal guidance. DW explained, *"I often had to figure things out on my own or ask fellow interns. Luckily, we supported one another,"* while DH stated, *"I tried to maintain active communication with both supervisors and fellow interns."* DI added, *"Since many tasks were assigned suddenly and without clear instructions, I had to learn to take initiative and quickly adjust myself."*

Although these strategies emerged out of necessity rather than design, they contributed meaningfully to the interns' personal growth especially in the development of soft skills such as adaptability, patience, communication, and emotional resilience. DI reflected, *"This experience made me more mentally prepared and helped me understand the importance of communication and clear systems at work."* DW noted, *"From a mindset perspective, I learned to be flexible and patient, and not expect everything to go as planned."* DH summarized, *"Even though it wasn't an ideal internship experience, I still grew learning to be patient, adaptable, and professional in a less-than-ideal environment."*

These reflections underscore the reality that, while the program failed to meet expectations in terms of technical or strategic skill-building, it nonetheless provided valuable lessons in navigating real-world workplace uncertainties.

Table 4.1 Research Findings

No	Key Finding	Issues
1	Expectation-Reality Gap in Internship Roles	- Misleading program branding and unclear role expectations - Actual tasks misaligned with intern titles - Company SPV focused on operations
2	Challenges Faced by Interns	- Absence of clear job descriptions and onboarding - Lack of mentorship and evaluation - Unclear reporting structure
3	Interns' Adaptive Strategies	- Reliance on peer learning - Self-initiated understanding of workflows - Emotional adaptation and soft skill development

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Analyzing the Expectation-Reality Gap

The gap between interns' expectations and their actual experience can be understood through the lens of Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 2015), which explained how unspoken assumptions between individuals and institutions, when broken, lead to dissatisfaction. In this case, the MSIB/APINDO program presented itself as a professional business consulting internship, yet interns found themselves performing repetitive administrative tasks with limited strategic value. This breach not only reduced their motivation but also damaged the perceived credibility of the program. This expectation–reality gap is not superficial; it reflects a deeper misalignment between the stated objectives of the internship

program and the operational priorities of the host companies. While the program aimed to offer strategic, skill-building roles, host companies such as PT EMU primarily utilized interns as temporary labor to support routine functions. A similar mismatch was identified by Pertiwi and Linando (2024), who found that many students expected to gain professional experiences and technical competencies, but were often placed in roles with limited learning value, performing tasks that were disconnected from their academic or career aspirations.

Moreover, the program's promotional materials often used job titles such as "business consultant," which were not reflected in actual responsibilities. Pertiwi and Linando (2024) describe this as a recurring issue where prestigious-sounding titles were used despite the reality that students were mostly engaged in menial administrative duties. This mislabeling reflects a systemic issue in program design and communication.

Further analysis reveals that this gap is caused by several interrelated factors. First, there is a lack of coordination and shared understanding between APINDO, educational institutions, and the host companies. Each stakeholder operates with different priorities APINDO focuses on scaling participation, universities aim to fulfill academic credit requirements, and host companies prioritize operational support. Without a unified pedagogical framework to govern internship design, students are left to navigate a fragmented system (Pertiwi & Linando, 2024). Second, the program lacks structured evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms. According to Pertiwi and Linando (2024), the absence of job audits, mid-term evaluations, and field supervision results in highly inconsistent internship experiences across host organizations. This lack of oversight prevents early detection of mismatches and hinders corrective action. As a consequence, the responsibility

for ensuring a meaningful learning experience falls unfairly on the interns themselves.

In terms of responsibility, the primary accountability lies with the program organizers, particularly APINDO and MSIB, for failing to enforce quality control and alignment between promotional content and field implementation. As (Ferns et al., 2024) argued, “the effectiveness of internship experiences is strongly influenced by the degree of organizational involvement in program design and implementation” (p. 62).

To effectively bridge the persistent gap between student expectations and workplace realities in internship programs, comprehensive and multi-level reforms must be implemented with urgency. At the systemic level, program administrators and policymakers need to establish formalized learning agreements that clearly delineate responsibilities for all parties involved. These agreements should include detailed provisions about task relevance, specific skill-building objectives, and clearly defined mentoring responsibilities, all structured within a standardized framework that properly aligns job titles with actual deliverables and learning outcomes (Abidin, 2017).

The corporate sector equally bears significant responsibility for meaningful reform. Host organizations should be required to develop and submit comprehensive internship plans detailing structured learning milestones for all tasks including operational ones as Abidin (2017) found that even routine assignments can be transformed into valuable learning opportunities when deliberately aligned with skill-building objectives. This is particularly crucial because, as Farr (2024) warned, poorly structured internships risk prioritizing short-term organizational needs over the professional growth of interns, perpetuating a transactional dynamic that undermines the educational purpose of internships.

The consequences of inaction are significant. While paid internships may mitigate financial exploitation, research by Perlin (2011) and Rogers et al. (2021) reveals that without clear developmental frameworks, such programs often fail to deliver meaningful skill acquisition. Longitudinal studies demonstrate that internships lacking intentional job design - particularly in task characteristics, feedback mechanisms, and vocational relevance - erode both student satisfaction and trust in academic-professional partnerships (Feldman & Weitz, 1990, as cited in Rogers et al., 2021). Without systemic reforms that address fundamental work structure disparities between paid and unpaid roles, even compensated internships risk degenerating into task-oriented arrangements that neither benefit students nor prepare them for future careers. To prevent this, organizations must align internship structures with pedagogical goals through deliberate job crafting (Ajjawi et al., 2019), ensuring mutual value creation while addressing the inherent power imbalances documented in contemporary internship ecosystems.

4.2.2 Structural Challenges for Improvement

The second key finding reveals that interns experienced confusion and frustration resulting from systemic structural deficiencies in the internship program. While the program aimed to provide professional development opportunities, its implementation at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo lacked essential elements such as clear job descriptions, formal onboarding sessions, dedicated mentorship, and performance evaluations. These deficiencies created an environment in which interns were unsure of their responsibilities and struggled to connect their academic learning with real-world applications.

Although interns made efforts to adapt, these challenges underscore a deeper organizational issue. PT EMU's bureaucratic yet unstructured culture often led to last-minute task assignments with little relevance to learning objectives. For

instance, an intern's proposal to digitize SME documentation was dismissed as “not a priority,” indicating a rigid hierarchy that stifled innovation and disengaged interns from meaningful contributions. This condition reflects what Pertiwi and Linando (2024) describe as the absence of structured guidance and mentorship in many MSIB internship sites, where interns are expected to function independently without meaningful feedback or direction.

To address these issues, improvements must be made at multiple levels. At the micro level, host companies should develop internship handbooks, assign trained mentors from strategic divisions, and establish weekly feedback sessions. At the meso level, coordinating institutions like APINDO should co-design structured internship curricula with business partners and ensure task alignment with learning objectives. At the macro level, national stakeholders should enforce policies requiring host companies to implement competency frameworks, submit progress reports, and issue certificates of achievement (Pertiwi & Linando, 2024).

4.2.3 Adaptive Strategies and Informal Learning

Despite the structural limitations of the internship program, interns at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo displayed notable adaptability. Lacking formal guidance, they developed informal coping mechanisms such as self-monitoring, peer-to-peer discussions, and observation-based learning. These responses demonstrate a level of autonomy and initiative consistent with Self-Directed Learning Theory (Morris et al., 2025), which frames SDL as a process where learners take control of their learning objectives and means even in unstructured environments. The study’s systematic review highlights how SDL fosters inclusion ‘in’ education through collaborative, learner-driven strategies (e.g., peer networks), mirroring the interns’ WhatsApp groups for information exchange and emotional support. These informal networks compensated for the absence of designated mentors and structured

onboarding, echoing findings by Pertiwi and Linando (2024) on MSIB interns' reliance on peer forums and personal logbooks.

However, Morris et al. (2025) caution that SDL's success depends on learners' readiness and contextual support a nuance often overlooked in internship programs. Not all students possess equal capacity to adapt; behaviors like self-monitoring require self-confidence, communication skills, and social support, which may be unevenly distributed among interns. The study warns that over-reliance on self-driven strategies risks marginalizing those with lower self-efficacy or fewer resources, as structural barriers (e.g., lack of mentorship) can exacerbate inequalities. This aligns with critiques that SDL, while empowering, cannot substitute for institutional accountability in designing equitable learning environments.

However, not all students possess the same capacity to adapt. Adaptive behaviors such as these require certain levels of self-confidence, communication skills, and social support, which may not be equally distributed among interns. When internship programs overly depend on self-driven strategies, they risk marginalizing students with lower self-efficacy or fewer resources.

At this point, it is important to note that students who previously engaged in student organizations were often better equipped to handle the ambiguities and challenges of unstructured internships. According to Mulyana and Linando (2024), participation in student organizations significantly contributes to the development of critical soft skills such as leadership, time management, communication, negotiation, teamwork, and problem-solving that are directly applicable in the workplace. These experiences not only foster resilience and initiative, but also enhance students' ability to navigate uncertainty and collaborate with others effectively. In this context, organizational experience becomes an asset that enables

interns to turn informal and ambiguous settings into meaningful learning opportunities.

Therefore, institutions should not interpret these informal strategies as replacements for formal structures, but rather as supplementary practices that, if scaffolded properly, can enrich experiential learning. Embedding peer collaboration, reflective logbooks, and structured informal discussions into internship curricula could transform these survival strategies into equitable, intentional components of professional development (Pertiwi & Linando, 2024).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the results of the thematic analysis and the subsequent discussion, this study arrives at three major conclusions that collectively address the research questions and provide a comprehensive understanding of the internship experience at PT EMU under the APINDO Certified Internship Program. These conclusions highlight the dynamics between interns' expectations, the structural realities of the workplace, and the strategies they employed to adapt and make meaning of their experience.

The first and perhaps most significant finding relates to the Manifestation of the Expectation–Reality Gap. The research demonstrates that there was a substantial disconnect between the interns' anticipated role and the actual tasks assigned to them. At the beginning of the program, the interns were led to believe—through program branding, official announcements, and promotional materials—that they would be engaged in a strategic, consultant-like capacity, working on real business problems and contributing to organizational decision-making. Instead, their day-to-day responsibilities were largely administrative, operational, and logistical in nature, such as compiling reports, handling basic clerical tasks, and assisting with routine company processes. This mismatch created a sense of disillusionment, as the interns felt that their potential was underutilized and that the internship did not align with their academic preparation or career aspirations. The gap can be traced to several key factors, including the lack of a structured onboarding process, insufficient communication of role expectations, and a broader misalignment between APINDO's vision for the program and PT EMU's operational needs.

The second conclusion concerns the Challenges Faced by Interns, which were found to be systemic and structural in nature rather than isolated or incidental. One of the most critical issues was the absence of clear job descriptions and learning

objectives, which left interns with significant role ambiguity. They often did not know what was expected of them, what success would look like, or how their work contributed to the company's goals. Compounding this issue was the complete lack of a structured mentoring or supervision system. There was no designated mentor who could provide regular feedback, answer questions, or guide the interns' professional development. This absence of guidance led to feelings of isolation and uncertainty, forcing interns to rely on trial-and-error learning. Furthermore, weak communication and coordination between APINDO and PT EMU exacerbated these challenges, resulting in confusion over responsibilities, unclear reporting lines, and limited accountability. Taken together, these structural weaknesses significantly undermined the quality and effectiveness of the internship as a learning experience.

Despite these difficulties, the third conclusion highlights that the interns were not passive recipients of their circumstances but instead engaged in meaningful, self-directed efforts to overcome obstacles. This is captured under the theme of Adaptation Strategies Employed. The interns initiated informal coping mechanisms, such as forming peer support networks, holding discussions among themselves, and creating WhatsApp groups to share information and provide moral encouragement. They also relied on self-directed learning strategies, closely observing company workflows, asking questions whenever possible, and seeking to independently understand processes that were not formally explained. Over time, these experiences contributed to the development of crucial soft skills including adaptability, resilience, initiative, and patience which were not explicitly stated as program objectives but nonetheless emerged as valuable outcomes of navigating a challenging, unstructured environment. For many interns, these skills became the most lasting and transferable lessons from the program, shaping their confidence and approach to future professional situations.

In sum, this study concludes that the APINDO internship program at PT EMU presented a mixed learning experience. While the program fell short of delivering on its stated goals of providing a structured, meaningful, and strategic professional development opportunity, it nonetheless became a setting for the interns to cultivate critical personal and interpersonal competencies. These findings suggest that for internship programs to maximize their potential as educational interventions, they must ensure clear role definitions, structured mentoring, and effective coordination between program organizers and host companies. At the same time, the interns' capacity to adapt underscores the importance of viewing challenging internship contexts not only as failures but also as opportunities for the development of resilience and professional maturity.

5.2 Recommendation

Derived from the conclusions of this study, several recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders to improve the effectiveness and overall quality of internship programs. For program organizers such as APINDO and MSIB, it is highly recommended to design and implement a comprehensive learning agreement that is formally signed by all relevant parties, including the program organizer, the host company, the university, and the student. This agreement should explicitly outline the roles, tasks, learning objectives, and mentoring responsibilities of each party in order to prevent ambiguity and miscommunication. Alongside this, program organizers should establish a structured quality assurance and monitoring mechanism that includes mid-term check-ins and standardized intern satisfaction surveys. These measures would create a feedback loop that ensures program promises remain aligned with field implementation and allows for timely corrective actions when issues arise. Furthermore, program organizers should consider conducting mandatory training sessions for company supervisors who will serve as mentors.

These sessions would help standardize the quality of guidance provided to interns, reinforce the educational nature of the internship, and equip mentors with tools to offer meaningful feedback and support throughout the program.

Host companies, such as PT EMU and similar partners, also play a crucial role in shaping the quality of the internship experience. It is therefore recommended that companies provide interns with a comprehensive internship handbook and organize a formal onboarding session at the start of the program. This onboarding process should clearly communicate the company's structure, reporting lines, and overall expectations, thereby helping interns to better situate themselves within the organization. Additionally, companies should assign a dedicated mentor from a relevant strategic department—such as Business Development or other departments that align with the program's promise of a "business consultant" experience—rather than placing interns solely in operational units. The mentor should be available for regular check-ins and feedback sessions, offering guidance and helping the intern to reflect on their learning process. Companies are also encouraged to integrate interns into meaningful, project-based work and to include them, whenever possible, in strategic discussions or meetings, even if only as observers. Such exposure would not only allow interns to experience decision-making processes firsthand but also provide them with a clearer understanding of the business context and a stronger sense of purpose within the organization.

Universities likewise hold an essential responsibility in preparing students for real-world internship experiences. It is recommended that universities strengthen their pre-internship briefing programs to manage student expectations more effectively, equipping them with practical strategies for dealing with ambiguity, taking initiative, and seeking out learning opportunities even when faced with challenging or unstructured environments. This preparation could involve workshops

on workplace communication, problem-solving, and resilience building. Furthermore, universities should maintain close and ongoing communication with both the program organizers and host companies, serving as a supportive bridge for students who face significant implementation gaps. By proactively addressing issues as they arise, universities can help ensure that internships fulfill their educational purpose and do not become merely administrative or symbolic experiences.

Finally, this study also highlights several directions for further research that would enrich the understanding of internship program dynamics. Because this study focused on a single case, future research could adopt a multiple-case study design across various companies, sectors, and internship models to generate more transferable findings. Including the perspectives of program organizers and company supervisors in future studies would provide a more holistic view of the systemic challenges involved in managing large-scale internship initiatives and might reveal misalignments in expectations between stakeholders. Moreover, longitudinal studies that track the professional trajectories of MSIB alumni would be particularly valuable in assessing the long-term impact of such internship programs on employability, career readiness, and professional skill development. Insights from such research could guide policymakers, universities, and industry partners in designing internship programs that better balance educational objectives with organizational realities, ultimately resulting in more impactful learning experiences for students.

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ATTACHMENT

Coding Table

Raw Data Excerpt	Initial Code	Theme
"I was quite excited because I heard we'd act as business consultants for MSMEs. My hope was to be directly involved in helping MSMEs grow…"	High expectation for strategic and impactful work	Manifestation of the Expectation–Reality Gap
"Most of the job tasks I received were just administrative, like data entry, helping to create reports… it wasn't really connected to the role of a business consultant."	Administrative tasks dominate, misaligned job role	Structural and Guidance-Related Challenges
"No clear job description; we just figured things out on our own."	Lack of onboarding, role ambiguity	Intern-Led Adaptation Strategies
"Formal training or guidance was almost non-existent… I mostly took my own initiative, like asking permanent employees or discussing with other interns."	Absence of mentorship, reliance on self-learning	Structural and Guidance-Related Challenges
"We made a WhatsApp group to share updates and motivate each other."	Peer support network.	Intern-Led Adaptation Strategies
"I learned to take initiative myself and adapt quickly… useful for surviving in the real working world."	Adaptability and initiative-taking	Intern-Led Adaptation Strategies

1. What were your expectations when you were first accepted for an internship at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo through the MSIB program?

   DH : Initially, I was quite excited because I heard we'd be placed under APINDO and act as some sort of business consultant for MSMEs. My hope was to be directly involved in helping MSMEs grow whether it was in terms of marketing strategy, finance, or operations. Especially when I heard about Ayam Bakar Pak D, I thought I'd be brainstorming strategies, developing plans, or creating business development programs. So, my expectations were quite high for a hands-on experience.

   DW : When I was first accepted, I was really excited because I thought I'd be learning directly how to help MSMEs grow through a business approach. I imagined I'd be given analysis projects, making business plans, or at least assisting MSMEs.

   DI : Same here, I also hoped to apply my campus knowledge and get relevant experience that could improve my skills as a future business consultant. I thought there would be many discussions, case studies, or direct involvement in developing small business strategies.

2. To what extent do you feel the job description given matched the job description of a business consultant at APINDO?

   DH : Honestly, it was quite far from what I imagined. Most of the job tasks I received were just administrative, like data entry, helping to create reports whose purpose I didn't even understand. So, it wasn't really connected to the role of a business consultant, who should be more focused on analysis

and providing recommendations to MSMEs. I felt my role wasn't very impactful.

DW : Frankly, the job description was very far off. Many tasks had nothing to do with business or consulting. I once was asked to help with field sales, packing, and even kitchen duties.

DI : Yes, and I think that was quite disturbing. Because I felt like I was "working" not "learning." The position of business consultant felt like just a title, but the practice didn't seem to go in that direction.

3. Have there been any changes in the tasks you've performed since the beginning of the internship until now?

DH : The changes haven't been very significant. From the beginning until now, the tasks tend to be repetitive and lack challenge. There were occasional times when I was asked to help in the field or attend meetings, but it was just limited to observation; I wasn't actively involved. So far, there hasn't been any progress or shifting in job descriptions that made me feel more developed.

DW : The tasks haven't changed much. From the beginning until now, it's pretty much been the same. Sometimes it even gets more unclear, depending on who asks for help that day.

DI : Yes, initially I was given hope that I would participate in MSME development projects, but it turns out that lately I've been asked to help with operations more. So it wasn't a change for the better, but rather it became more ambiguous.

4. How would you describe your overall internship experience at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo?

DH : Overall, the internship experience was quite mixed feelings. On one hand, I'm grateful for the opportunity to intern here, get to know the working world, and learn to adapt. But on the other hand, I also felt I didn't get the experience in line with the MSIB program's goals—especially in terms of tangible contributions to MSMEs and self-capacity development. So, sometimes I felt like "it's a waste that my potential wasn't maximized."

DW : To be honest, it was quite disappointing. I felt that the learning opportunities I should have gained were lost because the focus wasn't on our development as intern students.

DI : True. But I try to take the positive side—like learning to adapt, communicate in a work environment, and how to deal with ambiguity in the real world. Although, for the initial goals, it was far off track.

5. Was there a significant difference between your initial expectations and the reality of the work you performed during the internship?

DH : Yes, quite significant. My initial expectation was to gain experience as an MSME consultant, thinking about strategy, helping to solve problems, or at least being involved in discussions about crucial business matters. But in reality, it was mostly technical tasks that weren't very connected to that role. So, yes, you could say the gap between expectation and reality was quite noticeable.

DW : The difference was huge. My expectation was to learn to be a business consultant, but in reality, it was more like being part ofthe operational staff asked to help with this and that.

DI : Agreed. From expecting strategic work to doing technical and, frankly, miscellaneous tasks. If I had known it would be like this from the start, I might have reconsidered the internship program.

6. In your opinion, to what extent was the job description you received relevant to the profession of a business consultant?

DH : If I'm honest, the job description I currently have has minimal relevance to the business consultant profession. A consultant's role should be more about giving strategic input, helping identify MSME problems, and providing solutions based on analysis. But what I'm doing now is more about support or operational work that doesn't require much critical thinking or problem-solving.

DW : Almost no relevance at all. A business consultant should provide insights to MSMEs, help with strategy, or at least simple analysis. But here, my work is more about operational support and never truly discussing business development.

DI : I also felt the job description was too far from the business consultant role. We were never involved in business decision-making processes or discussions about MSME performance evaluation. So, it really missed the initial goal of the internship.

7. What were some tasks or responsibilities you performed that were actually inconsistent with the job description of a business consultant?

DH : Some tasks that I felt were less appropriate include, for example, being asked to input administrative data, helping manage inventory, and even being asked to help document activities without a business context. Such

things are important, but they are more suited for administrative or logistics departments, not the realm of a business consultant who should be more strategic.

DW : I once helped pack products, helped with sales, sometimes was asked to help the admin department, and even cleaned the place. I think all of those are important for a business, but they shouldn't have been the focus of an internship for a consultant position.

DI : I was once asked to help create social media content and document activities, even though I wasn't an intern in digital marketing. Also, I was often asked to help with event logistics for MSMEs, which is more like an event organizer's job than business consulting.

8. Do you feel there was a gap between the skills expected of a business consultant and the skills you applied in your daily work?

DH : Yes, the gap was very noticeable. For instance, I felt I didn't get to use much data analysis skills, strategic communication, or problem-solving abilities that should be a basic skill for a business consultant. What I did daily was more technical and operational, so the strategic skills I wanted to develop weren't honed.

DW : Definitely. The skills I hoped to develop were like critical thinking, business data analysis, strategic communication, or market research. But in reality, it was mostly technical work that didn't require any of that.

DI : Yes, it ended up not feeling like professional development. Instead of learning consulting, we were more often just support staff. The gap between classroom knowledge and field reality was huge.

9. Were there any tasks you performed that were more geared towards other jobs or fields, besides business consulting?

DH : Yes, some tasks were even more geared towards warehouse operations, activity documentation, and sometimes like an event assistant. For example, I was asked to help with logistics during internal activities, or asked to make activity reports without knowing what business insights should be taken from them. So the direction was more towards a support role, not business development or consulting.

DW : Yes, for example, I often helped with operational aspects at Ayam Bakar Pak D restaurant. So it was more about hospitality and F&B management than consulting. Even though that's not a field I'm interested in.

DI : Same here. Some tasks were more suitable for an intern position in admin, logistics, or even production. So it was like shifting from wanting to learn strategy to just helping run the business.

10. How was the communication process regarding task changes between APINDO and PT Erick Marsudi Utomo during the internship?

DH : From my experience, communication regarding task changes wasn't very clear. We rarely got direct updates from APINDO, and on PT Erick Marsudi Utomo's side, there was also a lack of clarity about our role. Sometimes there were sudden task changes without explanation, so we mostly just followed directions without knowing the context. This made it confusing and difficult to reflect or objectively measure our contribution.

DW : Honestly, it was unclear. Communication between the two parties was minimal. We never got an official explanation about task changes or why we were placed in inappropriate jobs.

DI : True, sometimes it felt like we were just thrown into the field without explanation. So we were confused, were these tasks from APINDO or from PT EMU's internal team? The coordination was weak, and we felt lost during the internship.

11. What new skills or knowledge did you learn during the internship, even if they were not in line with the initial job description?

DH : Even though it didn't align with the initial job description, I still learned some new things. For example, I gained a better understanding of the operational workflow in MSMEs, especially those in the culinary field like Ayam Bakar Pak D. Additionally, I learned how to adapt in a dynamic work environment, manage time, and communicate with various parties—although not in the context of a consultant.

DW : I learned how to communicate in a work environment full of sudden changes. And I also learned to adapt to the work rhythm of MSMEs, which is sometimes not as structured as large companies. Even though it didn't match the initial job description, at least I learned to survive and be flexible.

DI : For me, it was probably more about time management and informal team work coordination. Because there were many sudden tasks and no clear direction, I learned to take initiative myself and adapt quickly. Not consulting-related, but useful for surviving in the real working world.

12. Do you feel you received enough training or guidance during this internship?

    If not, how did you overcome it?

    DH : Honestly, formal training or guidance was almost non-existent. We were mostly asked to jump directly into tasks without clear preparation. So, I mostly took my own initiative, like asking permanent employees, reading materials myself, or discussing with other interns. Fortunately, my peers were supportive, so we could exchange insights even though formal guidance was minimal.

    DW : Not at all. There was no permanent mentor who truly guided us. So I often found out things on my own or asked other interns. Luckily, we supported each other.

    DI : Agreed. Everything was based on self-initiative. We were like "let loose," without clear onboarding. So I relied on personal initiative and learned from observation. If I wasn't proactive, I might have just ended up as support staff without gaining any insights.

13. Were there any specific projects or tasks that you feel provided valuable learning experiences?

    DH : There was one moment when I was invited to help with direct field observation for an MSME promotion activity. Although my role was small, from that, I could directly see their challenges in the field—like branding, service, and logistics. From there, I got a real picture of what could potentially be improved. That, to me, was a quite valuable experience compared to other routine tasks.

DW : I once helped observe an offline promotion activity conducted by an MSME, and I participated in taking notes and giving small suggestions. Even though it wasn't a serious discussion topic, that was the only moment I felt I was truly "consulting."

DI : I once helped with a simple evaluation of product catalog effectiveness. Although the results weren't followed up, that was the moment where I felt, "Oh, this is where we should be involved more."

14. To what extent did the work you performed help you in your future professional development?

DH : In terms of technical consulting, I'd say it wasn't very helpful because the job description wasn't relevant. But in terms of soft skills, I feel there was still development—like learning patience, adaptability, and remaining professional even in less-than-ideal conditions. All of that is still important for future work, especially if I have to work in a dynamic and fast-changing environment.

DW : If the benefit is from a mental perspective, yes—I'm more prepared if I encounter a less-than-ideal work environment in the future. But when talking about consulting skills, it hasn't had much impact.

DI : The impact on technical consulting skills was minimal. But in terms of experiencing less-than-ideal work conditions, it helped a lot. I feel more mentally prepared and better understand the importance of clear communication and work systems.

1. What was the biggest challenge you faced during your internship at PT Erick Marsudi Utomo, and how did you overcome it?

DH : The biggest challenge was the lack of clarity regarding roles and job expectations. Sometimes it was just confusing what we were assigned to do, and where the output was supposed to go. To deal with it, I tried to actively communicate—both with my direct supervisor and fellow interns. We also helped each other so we wouldn't feel alone. Besides that, I kept my spirits up and looked for small things I could learn from daily tasks.

DW : The biggest challenge was losing direction. Because there was no direction, no clear role. I overcame it by discussing more often with other interns, so I wouldn't feel alone and could maintain my spirits.

DI : The main challenge was the mismatch in job descriptions. Sometimes it felt futile. But I tried to change my mindset: consider this a learning experience about what to avoid in the workplace, and how to remain productive even if it's not ideal.

15. In your opinion, how effective was this internship program in developing skills relevant to your future career field?

DH : In my opinion, this program wasn't very effective in developing skills directly relevant to my desired field, which is business consulting. Many tasks performed didn't touch on business analysis or MSME development strategies. So, for future career preparation, I still need to seek additional learning outside of this internship.

DW : From the perspective of business consultant skill development, this program was less effective. It was mostly technical and operational tasks that weren't connected to the field I'm pursuing after graduation.

DI : I also felt it wasn't maximized. The relevant skills came from personal initiative, not from the program's structure. So the impact on my future career isn't very noticeable yet.

16. Did you receive any feedback from your mentor or supervisor that helped improve your performance?

DH : I rarely received direct feedback from my mentor or supervisor. Mostly, we did tasks without regular evaluation sessions or written feedback. So, it was self- evaluation, and sometimes sharing with friends to know if I was doing well or not. DW: Honestly, no. At most, just general task directions, and even those sometimes changed and there was no evaluation. So we just went along on our own.

DI : Yes, formal feedback was almost non-existent. We mostly evaluated ourselves with other interns. So performance development was more about individual effort.

17. Do you feel this internship program provided a beneficial experience in improving your future job prospects?

DH : Honestly, the benefits were there but not maximized. Perhaps what I gained was teamwork experience, learning communication in a work environment, and directly seeing MSME challenges from an operational perspective. But when talking about improving job prospects in business consulting, it's still lacking because I didn't get tasks that supported that career path.

DW : If the benefit is from a mental perspective, yes—I'm more prepared if I encounter a less-than-ideal work environment in the future. But when

talking about consulting skills, it hasn't had much impact.

DI : Agreed. In terms of field experience, yes. But the relevance to the job position I'm targeting is still lacking. I still need to find other additional experiences after this.

18. If you could provide suggestions to improve this internship program, what would you suggest?

DH : My suggestions are, first: the job description must be clearer and aligned with the promised position. Second, an active mentoring system is needed—so we don't just do tasks for the sake of doing them, but have direction and evaluation. Third, perhaps APINDO and the host company could coordinate more often so that the program isn't just a formality, but truly beneficial for interns and the mentored MSMEs.

DW : Provide clarity and consistency in job descriptions from the beginning. Internships should teach and prepare, not just 'help with tasks.' Mentors also need to be more actively involved in guiding.

DI : And it's really important to have regular evaluations. So interns can develop and know what needs to be improved. Communication between institutions also needs to be fixed.

19. Do you feel the work you performed during the internship provided a meaningful contribution to PT Erick Marsudi Utomo and APINDO?

DH : To be honest, my contribution wasn't significantly felt. Many tasks were just supporting roles, not those with a big impact on business or decision-making. So, yes, it still felt like "just helping out," not yet at the level of "providing a meaningful contribution."

DW : I think the contribution was more about helping with daily operations. Not something strategic or long-term impactful, so it felt more like just helping out. DI: Agreed. There are no clear indicators of whether our work really made a difference or not. So sometimes it felt like "stuck in place."

20. How do you evaluate the communication between APINDO and PT Erick Marsudi Utomo during the internship program? Were there any communication barriers that affected your work?

DH : Communication between APINDO and PT Erick Marsudi Utomo, in my opinion, was still not synchronized. As interns, we often got confused about who to obey, and directions from above sometimes changed without explanation. This significantly affected our work morale, because we felt like we were "tossed around" without knowing our true role.

DW : Communication was minimal. There were no joint briefings or updates from APINDO. So we were also confused about what our responsibilities truly were in APINDO's eyes.

DI : Absolutely true. In the end, we just followed the flow from PT EMU, without knowing what our position should be as MSIB participants representing APINDO.

21. Do you feel your role in specific projects or tasks had a significant impact on the company, or did it feel more like administrative work?

DH : Honestly, it felt more like administrative work. There hasn't been any project that I felt had a big impact on the company. Perhaps because we weren't very involved in decision-making or brainstorming sessions, so the results of our work felt like just complementary.

DW : More like administrative and operational. Not very impactful. Never involved in decisions or strategies, even though our position is business consultant.

DI : Yes, there was no room for us to give insights or analysis. So, we just did what was asked, without knowing the bigger direction.

22. To what extent do you feel this internship introduced you to a work culture relevant to the professional world outside of campus?

DH : In terms of work culture, it was pretty good. I learned what it feels like to work under pressure, adapt to various personalities, and the importance of communication in a work environment. Although not ideal, it still added experience about the real working world.

DW : In terms of MSME work dynamics, I got a picture. But when talking about professional work culture in terms of structure, direction, and mentoring systems, I didn't get much.

DI : Yes, what I learned was a less-than-ideal work culture, so it can be a comparison if I work elsewhere later. More like a "lesson from experience."

23. Were there any opportunities for you to provide input or ideas regarding the work or projects being done during the internship?

DH : Opportunities to give input were almost non-existent. We were mostly just executors, not invited to discussions or brainstorming. Even if we had ideas, sometimes we were confused about who to convey them to, because the communication structure and authority were also unclear.

DW : Opportunities existed, but sometimes they weren't considered. I once gave

advice, but it wasn't followed up or was ignored.

DI : Agreed. We could speak, but it wasn't necessarily heard. So, eventually, we also became less motivated to take initiative because it felt like our input wasn't valued.

24. What do you think could be done to make this internship experience more relevant to your chosen field of expertise or the career you wish to pursue in the future?

DH : Most importantly, the job description and responsibilities of interns need to be aligned with the promised position. If placed as a business consultant, we should be involved in business analysis, strategic planning, or at least discussions about MSME challenges. Additionally, there needs to be regular training or mentoring, so our skills can be honed according to our respective fields.

DW : We should be directly involved in MSME projects, given tasks related to business analysis, marketing strategy, or business assistance. To align with the consultant role.

DI : And it's really important to have a mentoring system or supervisor who understands the field. If it's a business consulting internship, the supervisor should also have a relevant background. So we can truly learn, not just help with tasks.