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Repurposing Internship Programs for EFL Students: A Study of the Perceptions of Students and Training Institution Representatives

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Abstract
Universities offer internship programs to help students apply academic knowledge, gain skills, and support future careers. These programs should be updated to meet evolving labor market demands. In EFL, emphasis has been on pre-service teacher education, with internships for EFL learners. Studies on internships for EFL students in non-educational courses, such as literature and translation, are few. Given the importance of English in globalization and soft skills aligned with SDG 4, addressing this gap is vital. The current study surveyed 82 EFL interns who completed 8-week training at 24 organizations, as well as their representatives. It evaluates internship programs for EFL students in non-educational tracks by examining the perceptions of interns and representatives of training institutions to improve curricula and better meet labor market needs. Quantitative data (intern responses) were analyzed descriptively and with t-tests in SPSS, while qualitative data (institution responses) were analyzed thematically using MAXQDA. The study found that the trainees and institutions were satisfied with the internship plan and its management. Nevertheless, they reported a mismatch between the skills targeted by the academic program and the skills needed in the labor market. These findings imply that EFL programs should be updated in line with the perspectives of all stakeholders to ensure that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the 21st-century workplace, while also responding to the knowledge-based economy and to global calls for inclusive, high-quality education under SDG 4.

Keywords: EFL graduates' skills, EFL internship, Experiential learning, Field training, SDG 4

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Introduction

It has long been assumed that internship programs provide students with the opportunity to apply their acquired skills in real-life contexts, develop their professional skills, and gain valuable work experience. Accordingly, the effectiveness of internships for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) can be an interesting topic in the field of English language education. Most studies addressing this issue have focused on internships in educational institutions and on examining preparatory training programs for future language teachers (Hudson et al., 2008; Alamri, 2018). These studies have shown that internship programs have a positive impact on student teachers that is reflected in their professional practice.

Other programs focused on teaching English language and literature have not attracted the same level of research attention. Relatively few studies have examined the effectiveness of internship programs for non-educational EFL students (Bosley, 1988) and how students and educational institutions perceive them. Internships are designed to improve EFL learners' language skills and prepare them for professional life (Warawudhi, 2013). By offering students the opportunity to apply their language skills in real-life contexts, internships can help bridge the gap between language learning and professional development (Nicholas, 2016). However, it is important to consider students' and training institutions' perspectives when designing and implementing internship programs for EFL learners. Students may have different expectations and needs, and ensuring that the internship experience is relevant and meaningful for them is essential. In turn, training institutions can provide insightful feedback on training plans, students' competencies, and the extent to which program outcomes align with labor market requirements. Recently, the world has witnessed significant changes in the skills required in the labor market, necessitating adaptations and updates to EFL programs to meet these requirements (Warawudhi, 2013).

Internship programs can be effective tools to achieve this objective. They can simultaneously provide experiential learning that prepares students for real-world professional practice and provide feedback on EFL learners and on program readiness for such a world (Nicholas, 2016). Accordingly, the present study has two main objectives: (1) to examine EFL students' perceptions of their internship experience, including the internship plan, its management, and its relevance to their academic preparation; and (2) to examine training-institution representatives' perceptions of the internship plan and of interns' competencies, including any skill gaps and challenges. To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How do EFL students perceive their internship programs?

RQ2. How do training institutions perceive internship plans and students' competencies?

By answering these questions, the researchers aim to investigate the effectiveness of internship programs as perceived by students and training institutions. The study is expected to provide implications for designing internship programs that align with job market needs and are grounded in clear, applicable plans. The study is based on longitudinal data collected over six semesters and targets students in a program aligned with a strategic plan to prepare cadres for a developing labor market. This fact makes the study results capable of informing how to employ internship programs both as experiential learning techniques and as a rubric for assessing program learning outcomes that align with labor market requirements. The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature on experiential learning and internship programs and identifies the research gap. This is followed by the Methodology section, which describes the research design, participants, instruments, and data-analysis procedures. The Results section then presents the quantitative and qualitative findings. The Discussion section interprets

these findings in relation to the research questions and prior literature and outlines the study's limitations. The final section presents the Conclusion and recommendations for practice and future research.

Literature Review

Internship courses and plans are mainly based on the concept of experiential learning. These courses have been used in various EFL programs for a long time under different terms and rubrics. What is common to most of them is that they aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice and prepare students for their future professional lives.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is broadly understood as a process in which learners acquire knowledge and competencies through direct engagement in real-world experiences rather than through reading, writing, or talking about a subject (Tate & Keeton, 1978). Across this literature, three converging strands support its value: theoretically, it positions experience itself as the essential source of learning and development (Tate & Keeton, 1978); procedurally, its benefit is understood to derive from a cycle of application, reflection, and refinement based on feedback (Ramnarine-Rieks et al., 2011); and empirically, it is consistently found to yield gains beyond theoretical knowledge alone, extending into practical competence (Ardianto, 2019).

Within this framework, internships represent one of several possible instructional forms alongside apprenticeships, service learning, and outdoor education (Kolb, 2014), typically implemented through case-study or internship-based approaches (Green & Farazmand, 2012). What unites this body of work is the assumption that internship programs are not incidental to experiential learning but are grounded in it directly, serving simultaneously as a vehicle for developing students' knowledge and insight (D'abate et al., 2009), a source of lifelong learning (Kolb, 2014), and a mechanism for preparing students to compete in the job market (Nicholas, 2016). This convergence across theoretical, procedural, and applied perspectives establishes experiential learning as the conceptual foundation on which internship-program research, including the present study, is built.

Internship Programs

Because of the increasing importance of linking the learning outcomes with the requirements of the labor market, “internships are becoming more widely used as learning tools for students to help fill the gap between classroom learning and the practice of business” (D'abate et al., 2009, p. 527). These programs primarily aim to help students make decisions about their future careers by informing them about different professions and building their confidence (Neapolitan, 1992). Therefore, it is envisaged that these training opportunities will “improve their professional and personal skills as well as increase their workplace-related satisfaction” (Jaradat, 2017, p. 109). Thus, several university programs across various disciplines offer internships under many titles and rubrics, such as practicum, cooperative learning, field training, and field experience.

As the business world is dynamic and many changes evolve in response to rapid advances, especially in the Information Technology (IT) field, it is envisaged that improving learning outcomes is necessary to cope with these advances. One way to assess such outcomes is through internship programs. Hence, improving internship programs is vital. One way to achieve this is to provide students with “practical projects that can increase the satisfaction level concerning their

internship experiences" (Hussien & Lopa, 2018, p. 505). Moreover, it is crucial to consider students' perspectives on internships to reshape the conversation about employability and incorporate their experiences. This will help avoid standardized internship models and promote student self-reflection. (Hora, Parrott, & Her, 2020).

Many previous studies have explored students' perspectives on internship programs in various fields. The results show that students generally view internships as helpful in choosing their careers (Muhamad & Mahzan, 2009). However, school support during these training periods is often limited (Vukić et al., 2022). This leads to an overall positive attitude towards internships (Hung, 2025) influenced by factors such as practical tasks and supervisor leadership (Cheng-Fie, 2014). With advances in educational technology and the post-COVID-19 context, some research has examined students' perceptions of innovative approaches such as virtual internships. However, if students are not adequately prepared, these new methods could cause "social anxiety and challenges related to real-world work experience" (Aljohani & Aljehani, 2024).

When it comes to EFL programs, ample attention is given to internships for student teachers. The research showed that teachers found the internship mostly beneficial, with varying levels of challenge (Alamri, 2018), and that the teaching practicum "makes a significant contribution in preparing teachers" (Alamoudi, 2021, p. 57) and provides a thorough understanding of teaching. However, there is still room to improve the experience.

Internship courses in other EFL programs have not been examined proportionally. Limited research has investigated internships in translation, literature, and linguistics programs. These studies show that students generally view internships positively, but they also reveal a mismatch between classroom learning and workplace practice, which can be challenging for students. (Liu, 2017; Xu, 2019).

Taken together, this body of research consistently shows that internship/practicum experiences are viewed positively by students and are grounded in experiential-learning theory (Kolb, 2014; Nicholas, 2016), and that a recurring finding across contexts is a perceived mismatch between classroom preparation and workplace practice (Liu, 2017; Warawudhi, 2013; Xu, 2019). However, this literature is heavily weighted toward pre-service teacher practicum programs (Alamri, 2018; Cheng-Fie, 2014; Hudson et al., 2008) and toward non-EFL fields such as accounting, hospitality, and tourism (Muhamad & Mahzan, 2009; Vukić et al., 2022). Comparatively little is known about internships for EFL students pursuing non-educational tracks such as literature and translation, and even fewer studies examine the perspectives of both interns and host institutions in the same study. The present study addresses this gap by jointly examining student and institutional perspectives on internship programs for non-educational EFL students, using longitudinal, authentic institutional data rather than a single cross-sectional survey.

The present study drew on prior literature to contextualize the topic and identify the research gap. It is expected that examining the perceptions of both interned students and the training organization regarding the training plan and students' skills will provide an insightful portrait of the realities of internship courses in non-educational EFL programs. Practitioners and curriculum designers can use these insights to improve internship courses in these programs.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study employed a convergent (parallel) mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which quantitative data from the intern questionnaire (addressing RQ1) and

qualitative data from the training-institution survey (addressing RQ2) were collected concurrently and analyzed separately before being merged at the interpretation stage. This design was selected because the two research questions target two distinct stakeholder groups whose data could not be meaningfully combined into a single scale, but whose results needed to be compared and triangulated in the Discussion to identify areas of convergence (e.g., positive perceptions of the training plan) and divergence (e.g., differing views on the sufficiency of academic preparation).

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data, and qualitative data analysis was used to ground the discussion of the qualitative data. The data for this quantitative analysis are authentic in the sense that they were not primarily collected for research purposes; rather, they are collected biannually for internal assessment and course improvement. Longitudinal data for the last six semesters (from January 2023 to June 2025) were collected. Data were pooled into a single dataset for analysis rather than analyzed as separate cohorts, because the training plan, questionnaire instruments, and eligibility criteria remained unchanged across this period, and because the number of institutions and interns per single semester was too small to support reliable semester-level statistical comparisons.

Participants

The sample for this study was selected using nonprobability, convenience sampling (Mackey & Gass, 2016). All participants who met specific criteria were surveyed. The primary criterion was successful completion of the field training course (ENG 4590) within the specified period. Another criterion was the availability of all participants' documents, including follow-up reports, end-of-training surveys, and final discussion session reports. Data from students who did not complete or pass the training course for various reasons were excluded (approximately 8 cases). Overall, 82 male interns and 24 representatives of training institutions participated in the study. This is best described as a purposive/convenience sample restricted to the full population of eligible interns and their host institutions over six semesters, rather than a sample drawn from a larger pool by random selection; consequently, findings should be generalized with caution to other universities, non-male student populations, or programs with different eligibility criteria. However, because the sample includes the entire population of eligible interns and institutions for the period studied (an approximate census rather than a subsample), selection bias linked to sampling procedure is minimized, even though the male-only, single-institution context still limits generalizability (see Limitations). The intern sample size (N = 82) exceeds conventional minimums for one-sample t-tests with the observed effect sizes. The institutional sample (N = 24) represents the full set of institutions that hosted interns during the period, consistent with sample sizes used in comparable qualitative institutional surveys in the literature (e.g., Cheng-Fie, 2014).

Students and Program

All students were enrolled at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. All participants are male students, as the Saudi educational system separates campuses for males and females. The students are between 21 and 24 years old and are enrolled in the College of Sciences and Humanities, studying English Language and Literature. According to the program documentation, the program primarily aims to prepare competent cadres in English language and literature, as well as in translation, who align with Saudi Vision 2030, a national strategic plan aimed at modernizing and improving various sectors such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, tourism, and more. One of the vision programs is the Human Capability Program, which "aims to

ensure that Saudi citizens have the required capabilities to compete globally by instilling values and developing basic and future skills, as well as enhancing knowledge" (Saudi Vision 2030, 2023). Since its launch in 2016, the vision has informed educational plans in the kingdom, including program and course specifications.

The program includes 41 courses: 13 language skills courses, 4 translation courses, 1 ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course, and the remaining 23 covering linguistics and literature. Additionally, there is a field training course, ENG4590 Field Training, worth 3 credit hours. As outlined in the course specifications, students may participate in field training only after completing at least 90 credit hours, which constitute 66% of the total program credits. For organizational reasons, students are typically enrolled after completing over 105 hours (77%) of the program's credit hours. Graduates are expected to work in a range of roles, including translators, public relations officers, mass media professionals, content writers/editors, news editors, reporters, and diplomats. They can also work as teachers after completing additional courses in pedagogy.

Training Institutions

The interns completed 8 weeks of field training at various training venues that provided instruction in one of the domains assigned by the program. These institutions were selected based on their ability and willingness to provide training in one of the following domains. (1) Translation and interpretation, (2) teaching and training, (3) content management and media, (4) tourism and travel, and (5) health services. The sample of this study, which underwent training at 24 institutions, met these criteria. These institutions included medical institutions, governmental agencies, private companies, and educational institutions that work in the selected fields. Only one of these institutions offered paid internships for the trainees. Figure 1 details the institutions surveyed for the study.

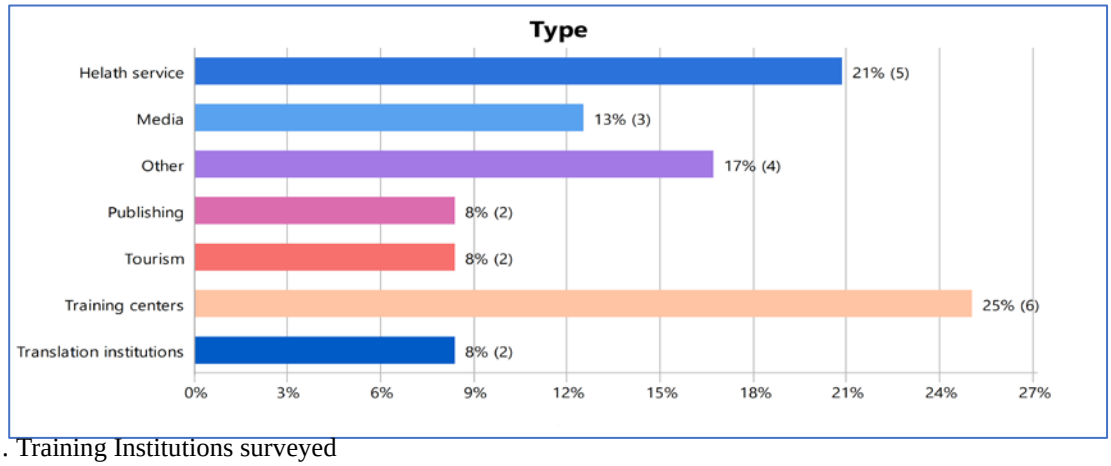


Figure 1. Training Institutions surveyed

Data Collection

The data were collected using two questionnaires, as detailed below.

Intern Questionnaire

The intern questionnaire is distributed to interns at the end of the training period to collect feedback on the overall quality of the field training. This questionnaire is part of the field training course and is required for issuing the final evaluation. It is intended for use by the training unit and

the departmental council to improve the training program and adapt it in response to any feedback identified as requiring intervention. It is a 12-item, 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire developed by education specialists and approved by the department council. The original questionnaire is a formal institutional tool used by the department for quality control, not specifically designed for research, so no public statistical data is available. However, it has been continuously piloted, with the number of items reduced from 20 to 12, suggesting that the current version is reliable and suitable for use. For this study, the researchers selected 9 items to assess the training experience, excluding items related to training supervisors, as they are beyond the study's scope.

Training Institution Questionnaire

The training institution questionnaire is a 12-item, open-ended survey administered to the training institution at the end of the training period. The survey aims to collect feedback from institutions on the qualifications and performance of the interns. The items were designed to investigate institutions' perspectives on the alignment between interns' qualifications and their training tasks, any perceived gaps in trainees' skills, the challenges institutions face in conducting training, and the recommendations they offer to improve training programs.

Data Analysis

Intern Questionnaire Analysis

The questionnaire items addressed different aspects of the internship experience, including training planning, placement suitability, curriculum relevance, skills development, assessment procedures, and overall satisfaction. Given the diverse nature of these constructs, the items were analyzed individually rather than combined into a single composite scale.

To analyze the intern questionnaire, a quantitative approach using descriptive and inferential statistics was employed. Means and standard deviations were computed for each item to assess students' perceptions of the internship program. Additionally, one-sample T-tests compared each item's mean score to the midpoint of the scale, $\mu_0 = 3$ (the neutral point of a 1–5 scale), with df = 81 for all tests. Mean scores significantly higher than 3 indicated positive agreement or satisfaction, whereas mean scores significantly lower than 3 indicated disagreement or dissatisfaction. Statistical significance was evaluated at the ($\alpha = .05$) level. The selection of one-sample t-tests was based on the rationale that each questionnaire item represents a conceptually distinct construct (e.g., training-plan clarity vs. curriculum relevance) for which a composite score would obscure meaningful item-level differences, and because the research question concerns whether student perceptions differ from a neutral reference point rather than differences between groups. The normality assumption was assessed via skewness/kurtosis statistics; given the sample size (N = 82), the t-test is considered robust to minor deviations from normality under the Central Limit Theorem

Training Institution Questionnaire Analysis

We conducted a thematic analysis using MAXQDA (version 26). Qualitative responses from the training institution survey were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. MAXQDA served solely as a data management and coding organization tool rather than as an analytic method in itself. Following this framework, the researchers first familiarized themselves with the data by importing all responses into MAXQDA and reading them

repeatedly (Phase 1: familiarization). Initial codes were then generated inductively from recurring patterns and ideas across the dataset (Phase 2: generating initial codes). These codes were subsequently collated into broader candidate themes centered on training institution requirements, required skills, skill gaps, challenges, and recommendations (Phase 3: searching for themes). The resulting themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the full dataset, with a second coder independently coding approximately 20% of the data and disagreements resolved through consultation to refine the coding scheme (Phase 4: reviewing themes). Themes were then further refined and clearly defined (Phase 5: defining and naming themes), before representative quotations were selected to illustrate key patterns in the write-up of findings (Phase 6: producing the report). Figure 2 shows the codebook used and validated by a second coder.

Code	Subcodes					
TYPE	Translation	Tourism	Media	Publishing	Health	Instruction
ALIGNMENT	No_match	Poor_match	Partial_match	Good_match		
REQUIRED_SKILLS	ICT	Translation	Time_management	Teamwork	Communication	Punctuality
SKILL-GAP	Weak_translation	Weak_IT	Weak_Comm	Weak_Prof	Weak_ling	
CHALLENGES	No_motiv	Supervision	Professional	Collaboration	Time/workload	
RECOMMENDATIONS	Uni_collaboration	Guidelines	Better_supervision	Longer_duration	Practical_training	Curriculum

Figure 2. Code system for institution survey data

The final themes were then reviewed across the entire dataset, and representative quotations were selected to illustrate key patterns identified in the analysis. Figure 3 shows the code system and matrix with the documents reviewed by the second coder highlighted.

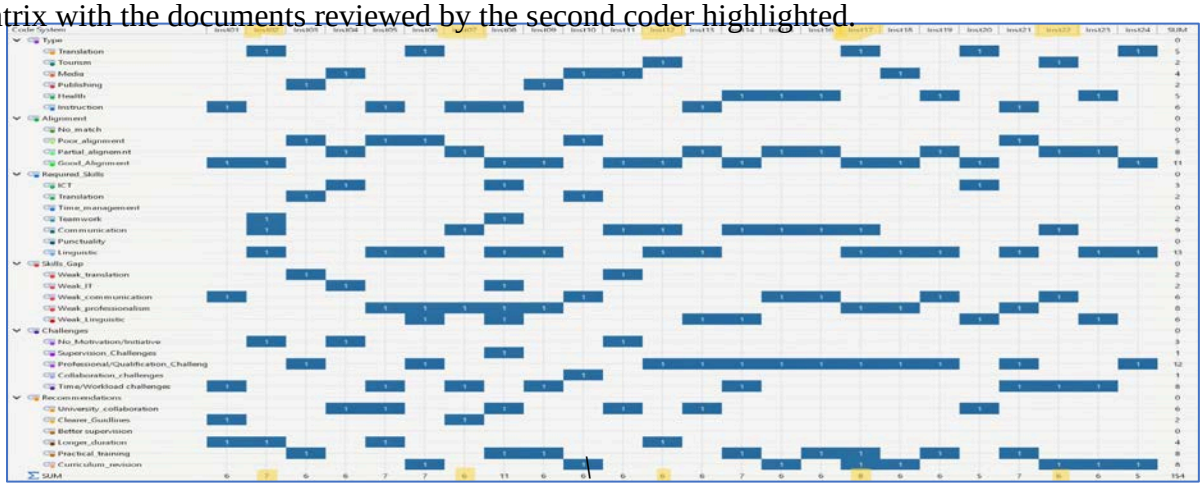


Figure 3. Code system and matrix

The analysis revealed the study's findings, which are presented in the next section.

Results

The results of the study are presented according to the research questions, the research sample, and the tool used.

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Interns' perspectives on field training

The results of the intern questionnaire are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Interns' responses to the training evaluation survey*

No.	Item	Mean	SD	Result
1	The training plan was clear	4.68	0.47	Strongly Agree
2	Institution matches specialisation	4.11	0.52	Strongly Agree
3	Topics related to college study	2.77	0.42	Neutral
4	Applied college knowledge	4.15	0.53	Agree
5	College courses helped tasks	2.94	0.57	Neutral
6	Learned major skills	4.46	0.50	Agree
7	Learned professional skills	4.63	0.48	Strongly agree
8	Assessment plan satisfactory	4.84	0.43	Strongly Agree
9	Overall satisfaction	3.88	0.33	Agree

The descriptive results reveal that EFL students hold generally positive perceptions of their field training experience, with seven out of nine items falling in the agree-to-strongly agree range. The highest-rated items were the clarity of the assessment plan (M = 4.84, SD = 0.43), the clarity of the training plan (M = 4.68, SD = 0.47), and the development of professional skills (M = 4.63, SD = 0.48). These results suggest that students were particularly satisfied with the structural and organizational aspects of their internship as well as its contribution to their professional growth. Overall satisfaction with the field training experience was also favorable (M = 3.88, SD = 0.33), reinforcing the broadly positive picture.

Items related to the alignment between college preparation and training demands were exceptions. Students responded neutrally to whether training topics related to their college studies (M = 2.77, SD = 0.42) and to whether college courses helped with tasks (M = 2.94, SD = 0.57). These neutral responses, along with the overall descriptive results, require further analysis to move beyond mere description of the data and to derive a deeper understanding. Accordingly, we apply inferential statistics to gain deeper insights from the data.

To address RQ1 inferentially, a series of one-sample t-tests was conducted, one for each of the nine questionnaire items. These tests compared students' average responses to the scale's midpoint ($\mu_0 = 3$), which reflects a neutral position on the 1-5 Likert scale. Our goal was to understand how students perceive their internship experience across different areas; therefore, each item was tested separately rather than combined into a single comparison. A two-tailed test with a significance level of $\alpha = .05$ was used, and 95% confidence intervals were reported for each t-value to show both the direction and precision of the estimated deviation from neutrality. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. One-Sample t-Test results against scale midpoint ($\mu_0 = 3$)

Item Code	Item Description	Mean	SD	Mean Diff.	T-value (*df*=81)	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Q1	The training plan was clear	4.68	0.47	+1.68	32.55	**<.001**	1.58	1.79
Q2	Institution matches specialization	4.11	0.52	+1.11	19.28	**<.001**	1.00	1.22

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Item Code	Item Description	Mean	SD	Mean Diff.	T-value (*df*=81)	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Q3	Topics related to college study	2.77	0.42	-0.23	-4.94	**<.001**	-0.33	-0.14
Q4	Applied college knowledge	4.15	0.53	+1.15	19.81	**<.001**	1.03	1.26
Q5	College courses helped tasks	2.94	0.57	-0.06	-0.96	**.339**	-0.19	0.07
Q6	Learned skills (major)	4.46	0.50	+1.46	26.41	**<.001**	1.35	1.57
Q7	Learned skills (professional)	4.63	0.48	+1.63	30.53	**<.001**	1.53	1.74
Q8	Assessment plan satisfactory	4.84	0.43	+1.84	34.49	**<.001**	1.74	1.95
Q9	Overall satisfaction	3.88	0.33	+0.88	24.15	**<.001**	0.81	0.95

The series of one-sample t-tests shows that eight of nine items differed significantly from the neutral midpoint ($p < .001$). Seven of these showed notably positive deviations, with consistent responses and narrow confidence intervals (CI), especially for the clarity of the assessment plan ($M = 4.84$, $Mdiff = 1.84$, $t(81) = 34.49$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.74, 1.95]), the clarity of the training plan ($M = 4.68$, $Mdiff = 1.68$, $t(81) = 32.55$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.58, 1.79]), and the development of professional skills ($M = 4.63$, $Mdiff = 1.63$, $t(81) = 30.53$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.53, 1.74]). Q3 was the only item with a significant negative deviation ($M = 2.77$, $Mdiff = -0.23$, $t(81) = -4.94$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.33, −0.14]), indicating that students generally disagreed that training topics aligned with their college coursework. The only result that was not significant was Q5 ($M = 2.94$, $Mdiff = -0.06$, $t(81) = -0.96$, $p = .339$, 95% CI [−0.19, 0.07]), where responses did not differ from neutrality, so we cannot draw a firm conclusion about agreement or disagreement there. Overall, these tests suggest that EFL interns generally have strong, positive perceptions of the structure and growth opportunities during their internships. However, the link between academic preparation and real workplace tasks still seems somewhat uncertain or misaligned.

Training Institutions' Perspectives on Field Training

To address the second research question, the survey data from the training institutions were examined. The findings from the qualitative analysis of institutional perspectives on EFL training were organized into five main constructs: the alignment of field training with the institution's actual work, perceived skill gaps among trainees, the skills considered necessary by institutional representatives, the challenges they encounter, and their recommendations related to these aspects. The results of this analysis are presented below.

Field Training Alignment

In response to the survey question about how well the training activities provided met the institution's actual work requirements, the responses are shown in Figure 4 below:

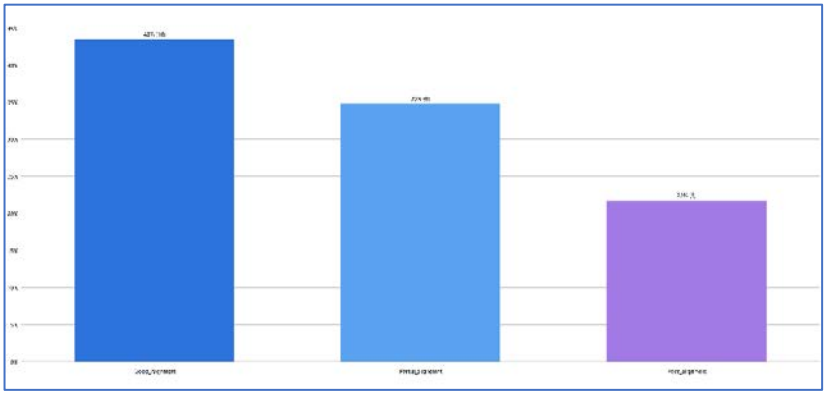


Figure 4. Field Training alignment with the institution's actual work

It's noted that most of the institutions' representatives think they provided training activities that align well with the actual work requirements. Other institutions, however, admitted that their activities partially aligned with the actual work requirements, while the fewest institutions reported poor alignment. The type of institution is related to this, as observed in the analysis of the code relation matrix in Figure 5.

Code System	Poor_alignment	Partial_alignemnt	Good_Alignment
Type			
Translation	1		4
Tourism		1	1
Media	1	1	2
Publishing	1		1
Health		4	1
Instruction	2	2	2
SUM	5	8	11

Figure 5. Training alignment with institution work by institution type

The code matrix revealed that translation institutions mainly report good alignment between the training task and the work, whereas health institutions report partial alignment. On the other hand, instructional institutions reported varying levels of alignment between the training tasks and their actual work requirements.

Skills Gaps

The surveyed institutions reported various skill gap patterns as revealed in Figure 6

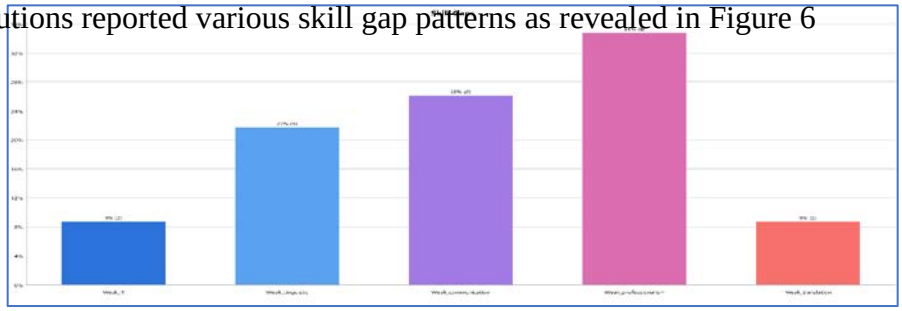


Figure 6. Skills Gaps reported by institutions

As observed, institutions mostly report gaps in professional practice, communication, and, to a lesser extent, linguistic competency. On the other hand, gaps related to translation and IT are less expressed. At the institution-type level, gaps are distributed among institutions, as shown in Figure 7.

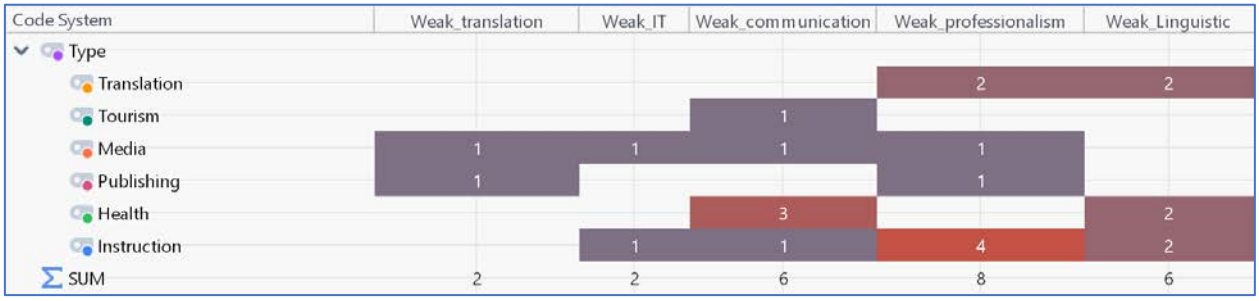


Figure 7. Skills Gaps by institution type

The results revealed that most institutions in the instruction sector report weak professional practice, while the health sector reports a mismatch in communication skills. Nevertheless, the translation sector does not express translation skills gaps.

Required Skills

In line with the aforementioned dimensions, the survey explored institutional perspectives on the most required skills in their fields. The results show that most institutions express the need for two types of skills, as shown in Figure 8.

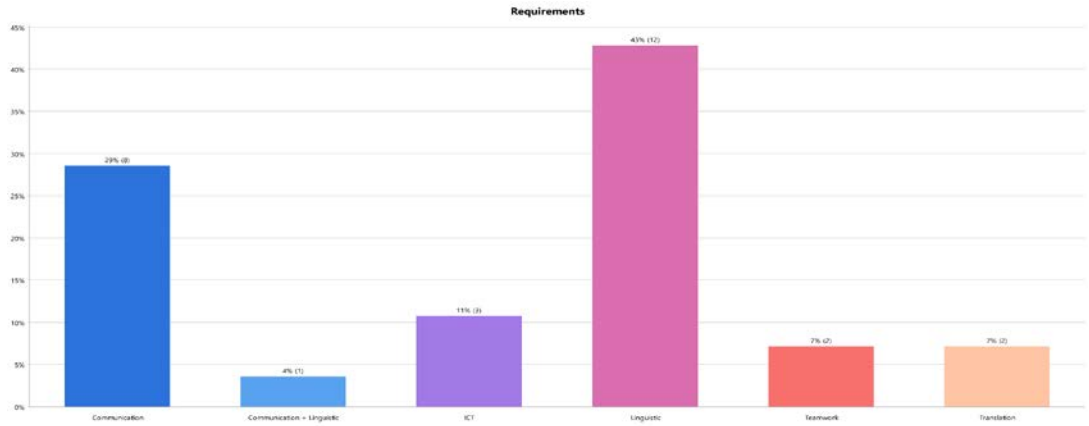


Figure 8. Required skills as perceived by the training institutions

As shown in Figure 8, 43% of the surveyed institutions reported that they require high levels of linguistic skills, and 29% reported that they require communication skills. Other institutions express the need for ICT, teamwork and translation.

Challenges

It was also deemed insightful to explore institutions' perspectives on the challenges they face in training EFL students, as these findings may be used to develop internship programs. The results of this part are shown in Figure 9 below.

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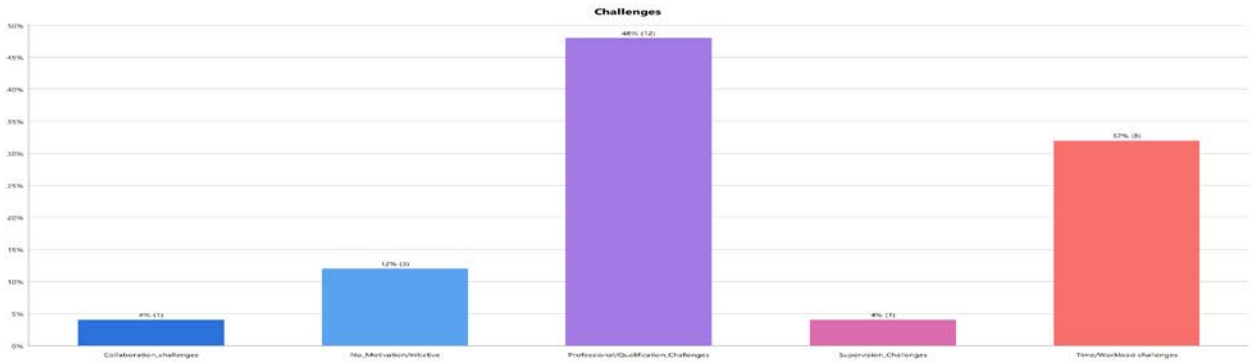


Figure 9. Challenges facing institutions while applying field training

The most reported challenges were related to professional practice and interns' qualifications (reported by 48% of the institutions) and time or workload (reported by 32% of the surveyed institutions). On the other hand, 12% of the institutions noted that the trainees' lack of motivation was a challenge.

Recommendations

The above-mentioned challenges were expected to be solved, according to the institutional representatives, by applying a set of recommendations which are presented in Figure 10 below.

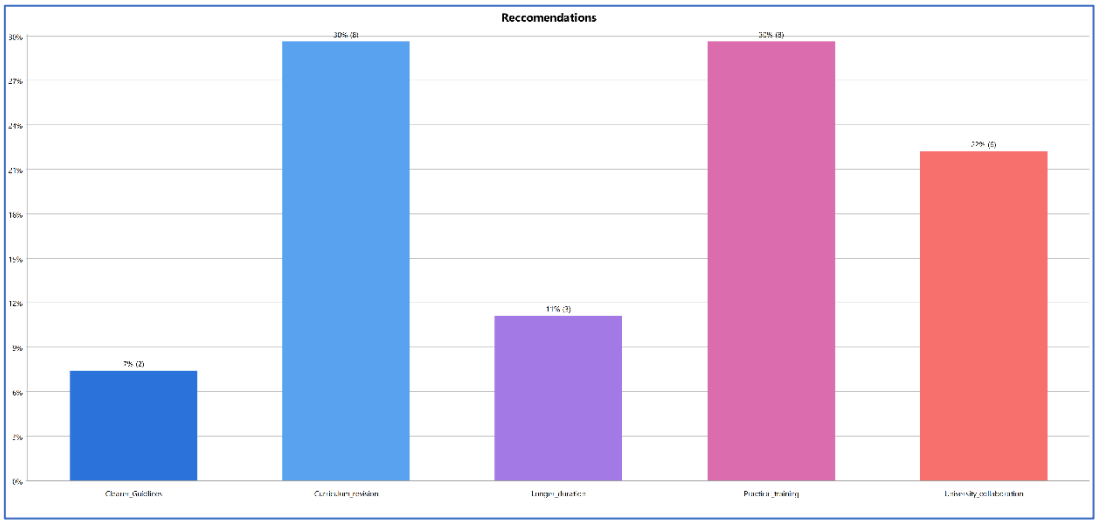


Figure 10. Institutions' recommendations to develop EFL training programs

Practical training and curriculum revision were the most provided recommendations to solve training gaps and requirements. Also, institutions call for greater collaboration among universities to address the above challenges and bridge the gap between labor market requirements and training program design.

The results of the study can be contextualized by the study's variables and analyzed to highlight their implications for future updates to EFL training programs and to inform future research, as discussed in the following section.

Discussion

This study is driven by two research questions: how EFL students perceive their internship programs (RQ1), and how training institutions perceive internship plans and students' competencies (RQ2). Regarding RQ1, the intern survey and t-test results show that students held strongly positive perceptions of the internship's structure, management, and contribution to their skill development, but neutral-to-negative perceptions of the alignment between college coursework and internship tasks. Regarding RQ2, the institutional survey results show that institutions were generally satisfied with training-task alignment but identified persistent gaps in professional practice, communication, and, to a lesser extent, linguistic and IT skills, as well as implementation challenges related to interns' qualifications, workload, and motivation. The following subsections interpret these findings in relation to prior research.

Generally speaking, the students reported that the internship program was satisfactory, well-planned, and conducted at appropriate institutions. They also believed it developed their soft and hard skills. The low SD values suggest minimal variation among participants' perspectives, indicating consensus on their experience. This result is consistent with previous research on students' expectations about field training (e.g., Nicholas, 2016; Teng et al., 2022; Hussien & Lopa, 2018) and on the impact of internship programs on students' achievement (Ardianto, 2019). The interns' perspectives, as reported in the survey, were supported in later discussion sessions, where they elaborated on the benefits of the field training. They summarized that they gained new experiences in language skills, workplace competencies, and other professional practices. Frequently, students cited "using new writing and translation techniques, learning new terminology, working with teams, and communicating with customers and coworkers" as new experiences. Such outcomes resonate with the objectives of SDG 4, particularly in promoting relevant skills for employment and lifelong learning.

The most striking finding emerges from the combination of the high acquisition of professional skills and the perceived lack of utility of formal college coursework. Specifically, while respondents highly agreed that they developed strong professional skills (Q7: M = 4.63) and major-specific capabilities (Q6: M = 4.46), they simultaneously reported that the topics covered during their training had a low relation to their college study (Q3: M = 2.77) and that their college coursework did not significantly help them complete their practical tasks (Q5: M = 2.94). These two patterns are not necessarily contradictory: interns' satisfaction largely reflects the internship's organizational quality (clear planning, appropriate placement, structured assessment) and the experiential-learning opportunity itself, rather than a judgment of their prior coursework. In other words, students may credit the internship setting for their skill gains precisely because they experienced those skills as newly acquired on the job, even though some underlying competencies (e.g., research and writing fundamentals) may have originated in coursework but were not recognized as transferable. This pattern is consistent with experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2014), in which skills consolidated through direct practice are more salient to learners than those acquired through classroom instruction, even when the latter provides a necessary foundation.

This disconnect points to several critical insights regarding the modern academic-to-professional transition. First, this gap strongly suggests a curricular misalignment between the theoretical foundations taught in the classroom and the practical demands of the contemporary workplace. While students are successfully learning to handle professional situations and develop useful skills on the job, it seems their academic studies may not fully prepare them for these practical challenges. The differences seen in Q3 and Q5 suggest that college curricula might focus

more on historical or theoretical ideas, which can leave a gap when students are required to follow real operational procedures. As a result, the high scores in skill development reflect the strength of the training programs and students' flexibility, rather than what they learned directly from their university courses.

This perceived mismatch has been noted in previous studies exploring the alignment between internship programs and workplace requirements (Xu, 2019). Addressing such mismatches is central to achieving SDG 4, particularly its emphasis on improving the relevance of higher education systems.

Interned students elaborated on these differences during discussion sessions, reporting that they faced terminological difficulties while translating work-related documents. This suggests the need to develop translation courses that account for the target field in which program graduates are expected to work. Updating the programs with ESP courses is also required. These courses should align with the significant shift in workplace requirements and the adoption of new tools, such as social media, AI applications, and other internet-based solutions, across many sectors. Accordingly, graduates should be equipped with strong IT competencies to compete in the job market. One student reported that "all that we learned about writing, including developing sentences and punctuation and choosing topics, was not applicable; writing emails and reports is something different". Another student, trained at a company in entertainment and tourism, reported that he was responsible for content management and editing. He added, "Believe me, my own experience in social media made me successful. I think I successfully accomplished the tasks because I am addicted to X Platform, in Arabic of course, but I studied nothing about communication in social media, initiating posts or comments; all we studied about writing was about essays, paragraphs, and research reports". These findings further support the call of SDG 4 to integrate digital literacy and relevant technical skills into education systems.

Another problem that the interned students encountered in the training institutions was the language skills used. Students identified new writing styles as the most acquired skill from the training. This indicates a discrepancy between the program's writing courses and the actual writing practice in real-world workplaces. Furthermore, during the discussion session, several interns reported difficulties they faced when communicating in the workplace. These include informal language, accent differences, and technical terms. Several previous studies reported these findings. For example, Warawudhi (2013) recommended that language skills be incorporated into curricula based on their actual use in the workplace. The study noted that reading and writing skills are not widely used in the workplace, even though they are emphasized in curricula.

On the other hand, Liu (2017) noted that workplace communication is a skill not covered in classroom teaching, though it is highly required of translation students and interns. As detailed in the Methodology (students and program), the program's 41 courses are composed largely of linguistics and literature courses, relative to language skills, translation, and ESP courses, making it hard for students and training institutions to see their relevance to actual work experience. This imbalance underscores the importance of SDG 4 in ensuring that curricula are both inclusive and practically oriented toward real-world communication needs.

From the institutions' perspective, a higher percentage reported that their training activities matched actual workplace requirements. Translation institutions, in particular, reported that their tasks reflect actual professional translation practice, advancing authentic experiential learning in which students can apply and test theoretical skills in professional contexts. Such alignment facilitates this crucial stage of learning, when students apply conceptual knowledge to actual

practice. On the other hand, health and instructional institutions reported a weak correlation between training tasks and the actual work environment, underscoring the importance of carefully selecting training assignments that align with the host institution's practices. Not all training programs are equally relevant, so there is a need to recalibrate and optimize training tasks in line with actual professional work requirements.

However, when it comes to skill gaps, training organizations might take a broader view. The results show that most institutions reported weak professional practice and communication, indicating a gap in employability skills. Gaps in linguistic competency and IT skills were less pronounced in the transition sector. Apparently, these gaps in soft and hard skills varied by institution type. This emphasizes the importance of sector-specific improvements that can focus on a thoughtful mix of hard and soft skills required in each field. Program designers should better integrate sector-specific skills into the academic content.

These results are consistent with previous studies showing that employers “often seek and prioritize graduates who possess practical competencies and 21st-century skills such as problem-solving and communication” (Oraison et al., 2019, p. 174). Overall, such skills are not typically taught in academic courses such as writing or translation. Jackling and Natoli (2015) also report that “organizational skills are most necessary for interns; professional attributes include motivation and personality/attitude” (p. 757). Accordingly, it might be a hasty generalization to claim consensus among students and training institutions that students lack certain skills unless these skills are first determined and specified by both parties. There is a difference between employers' and students' expectations regarding employability criteria. This hypothesis is based on previous research findings indicating that students rely on what they learned in college as sufficient preparation for employers' requirements.

In contrast, employers prioritize other employability skills that should be incorporated into EFL programs (Phan et al., 2022). These considerations should inform the design of internship programs. Such alignment between stakeholder expectations is essential for advancing the inclusive and equitable quality education agenda of SDG 4.

The survey revealed an overwhelming emphasis on linguistic and communication skills. Around three-fourths of respondents expressed a need for these skills, while others cited ICT, teamwork, and translation skills. This consensus underscores that, although technical skills are valued, they are not enough to guarantee workplace success. The ability to communicate effectively and work collaboratively remains a key factor. EFL curricula should ensure the development of both domain-specific knowledge and cross-cutting soft skills. This aligns with SDG 4, which promotes the development of transferable skills necessary for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.

Implementing field training faces many challenges, including a lack of professional practice, inadequately qualified interns, timing issues, workload constraints, and low motivation. Resolving these issues requires setting clear expectations and preparing interns accordingly. The selection process for intern training should be streamlined and made more rigorous. Support mechanisms should be put in place to address timing and workload-related issues. Addressing these systemic challenges improves the overall quality and effectiveness of education systems, a key priority of SDG 4.

Several institutions recommended strategies to address the challenges and skill gaps, aligning with the growing emphasis within SDG 4 on strengthening links between education providers and the labor market. Increasing practical training for interns and revising curricula to reflect

workplace realities better were the most common suggestions. Moreover, collaboration between universities and host institutions should be enhanced to present an integrated approach to designing internship programs and assessment methodologies. Such integration can better respond to the evolving labor market demands and bridge the persistent gaps between training institution requirements and interns' abilities.

Furthermore, training organizations are required to properly implement the training plans provided by the programs. Inappropriate design and assignment of training tasks may also result in the underutilization of interns' skills (Feldman & Bolino, 2000) and, consequently, inaccurate assessment of their actual skills and competencies, leading to their underestimation. Many previous studies have found that interns were not treated as regular employees in terms of task assignment, responsibility, and trust (Kaşli & Ilban, 2013), which may prevent interns from reflecting on their actual skills. This might also be a cause of the underestimation of the participants in the current study.

A possible limitation of the present study may be the lack of a clear operational definition of skills and competencies for both interns and institutions. While students interpret skills as hard skills related to the academic courses they have studied, institutions might refer to employability skills. In both cases, however, institutional representatives' perspectives should serve as red flags that prompt updates to program learning outcomes to align with job requirements. These updates should be based on structured reviews of the required skills and clear explanations of those the interns lack. Also, standardizing the training tasks assigned to interns and the rubrics used to evaluate them will provide more accurate feedback on their skills and lend greater credibility to their evaluations.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the sample was drawn using convenience purposive sampling restricted to interns and institutions from a single university and a single academic program over six semesters, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other universities, programs, or national contexts. Second, the student sample consisted exclusively of male interns, reflecting the institution's gender-segregated structure; the findings may not generalize to female EFL students or mixed-gender programs. Third, both intern and institutional data relied on self-reported perceptions rather than objective performance measures, which may be subject to social-desirability or recall bias. Fourth, the training-institution sample (N = 24) is relatively small, and results based on this sample, particularly comparisons by institution type, should be interpreted with caution.

Conclusion

This study aims to evaluate internship programs for EFL students in non-educational tracks by examining the perceptions of both interns and training-institution representatives to inform internship-program design that aligns with labor-market needs. Regarding EFL interns' perceptions (RQ1), the findings show that students were highly satisfied with the internship's planning, placement, and contribution to professional-skill development, but perceived a mismatch between college coursework and internship tasks. Regarding training-institution representatives' perceptions (RQ2), the findings show general satisfaction with training-task alignment alongside reported gaps in trainees' professional practice, communication, and (to a lesser extent) linguistic and IT skills, as well as implementation challenges related to workload and trainee readiness.

However, both parties reported a mismatch between students' competencies and labor market requirements, which may pose a key challenge for SDG 4 in ensuring the relevance of higher education outcomes.

This suggests that English literature programs should be updated to include practical, digital, and employability skills, such as IT, AI tools, communication, and teamwork, which are essential components of quality education and lifelong learning under SDG 4. Accordingly, it is recommended that internship programs incorporate well-defined tasks and assessment rubrics and that stronger collaboration between universities and training institutions be established. Future research should extend this work by including larger and more diverse samples, particularly female EFL students, by employing longitudinal designs that track cohorts across semesters rather than pooling data cross-sectionally; and by conducting comparative studies across different internship contexts (e.g., by sector, institution type, or country) to determine which findings generalize beyond the present setting. Such research would further support the alignment of academic learning with workplace skills and the continuous improvement of education systems as advocated by SDG 4.

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