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## Perception of UiTM Students and Employers' Expectation on Practical Training During Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

A practical training is a structured off-campus learning to provide students with industrial and professional experience before they go out to work in the real world. The COVID-19 pandemic had forced organisations to be more agile and adapt to crises in difficult times. The purpose of this study is to identify the students' perceptions and the employers' expectations when the students underwent internship during the COVID-19 pandemic, to identify the various communication skills required at the workplace as well as to explore employers' expectations on industrial training practices during this challenging period. 100 final year students from UiTM who had completed their internship program were involved in the study. Using a mixed-method approach, the data obtained from questionnaires and interviews were triangulated. The findings of the study highlight that students faced many challenges during their practical training from various aspects namely health and safety, academic and university regulations, language, communication and adapting to the workplace environment. The study also provides insight into the important skills required by employers for practical training. This information is useful for both universities and organisations for a better internship arrangement in the future.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Internship, Practical Training, Skills, Perceptions, Supervisor

### Background of The Study

Industrial training or internship program is a period of professional learning experience for students to work in a related field of studies or interest. National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018) defines internship as a form of experiential learning which allows students to incorporate theories learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internship too, provides opportunities for students to gain invaluable practical experience and establish connections in professional fields they are

considering for their career paths. Through this programme, employers could have the chance to guide and evaluate talents.

Many universities across the globe have included practical training as one of the compulsory courses in their academic curriculum due to its significance in enhancing graduates' employability and in providing the graduates with real working experience. Internship experience within the industry has been identified as an important element for a candidate to be hired in a particular organisation. Based on the Job Outlook Report by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018), when employers need to narrow down their choices from two or more candidates, candidates with internship experience would have the most influence over another and would have a higher chance of getting hired.

Internship provides students with new knowledge and experience of what to expect in the real situation. Such exposure would equip students with world experience and further develop their knowledge and many other skills like communication, leadership, as well as problem solving skills. According to Abidin, et.al (2017), employers expect the graduates to possess several sets of positive qualities including a high communicative ability, to be well motivated, to have a positive attitude, willingness to learn and interpersonal skills. Experiential learning through internships is seen as immensely helpful to cater such needs for graduating students.

The importance of internship is undeniably compelling for graduates' employability and various skills development. However, the situation of COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the educational landscape which may also affect real working experience gained through industrial training. While the formal teaching and learning activities are mainly carried out in virtual mode through online distance learning (ODL), internship programs are executed differently. Depending on the nature of work or industry as well as the company's requirements, students are allowed to work from home or at least on a rotational basis according to the scheduled shifts. Some companies would still demand the students to work from the office especially for those who are involved in essential services. The adjustments made on the internship program due to the MCO have impacted interns in several ways. Hence, the purpose of this study is to identify the students' perceptions and the employers' expectations when the students underwent internship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Problem Statement**

Students who were allowed to work from home faced several challenges in terms of network connectivity and documentation. Like online teaching and learning, poor internet connection has been cited as students' main concern when performing work from home (Karim, 2020). Some companies did not allow the students to work from home considering the unsecured network. There were also situations where students needed to handle information and documents which were confidential and restricted within the companies and can only be accessed using an intranet network.

Changes in university's policies as well as on industrial training practices, have inflicted students with numerous challenges. On top of distinguished problems faced by interns at the workplace such as excessive workloads, being assigned with unrelated work with academic courses and communication barriers, safety, and ability to handle virtual communication have become new concerns among students. When MCO was announced by the government, those who were not allowed to work from home needed to choose between completing the internship program or prioritising their safety and health as commuting to work and working at the company itself had put students' health and security at stake.

Even though there are dearth of studies focusing on the effects of working from home (WFH) on communication skills among students during their internship, Ahmad (2020) did conclude in her studies on some problems encountered by students during internship in pandemic situations. WFH posed some constraints to the students in terms of communication skills. Ahmad (2020) highlighted one of the shortcomings students faced during internship was miscommunication and late response from clients, supervisors, and colleagues. Due to the slow reply, it affected them to complete their work on time. In another study, Raišienė et al. (2020) stated that employees who WFH during the pandemic were not in favour of WFH because of the lack of face-to-face interaction with the manager. Although this study focused on full time employees, it does address the challenges faced related to communication during WFH period.

Therefore, realising the importance of internship programs for students' development and the new sets of challenges possibly faced by the students, this study aims to investigate students' perception about industrial training practices as well as the challenges faced by industrial training students at the workplace during COVID-19 pandemic. It also aims to identify the various communication skills required at the workplace for interns who needed to complete their internship during COVID-19 pandemic. This study, too, intends to explore employers' expectations on industrial training practices during this challenging period.

### **Objectives of The Study**

There are four objectives of the study which include:

1. To investigate students' perceptions about industrial training practice during COVID-19 pandemic
2. To identify the challenges faced by industrial training students at the workplace during COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To identify the various communication skills required at the workplace for interns who needed to complete their internship during COVID-19 pandemic.
4. To determine employers' expectations on industrial training practices during COVID-19 pandemic

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guide the study are as follows

1. What are the students' perceptions about industrial training practice during COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the challenges faced by industrial training students at the workplace during COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What are the communication skills required at the workplace for interns who needed to complete their internship during COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What are the employers' expectations on industrial training practices during COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Significance of The Study**

This study is important in providing insights on the perceptions and challenges faced by industrial training students at the workplace during COVID-19 pandemic. It will also shed light on the types of communication skills required at the workplace considering the new practices and norms due to certain restrictions like limitation in terms of face-to-face interaction

because of the pandemic. The findings of the study will be beneficial in constructing pedagogical instructions and guidelines for students who will be joining the industry to equip them with relevant skills to meet the current and future demand.

## **Literature Review**

### **Challenges at the Workplace During COVID-19 Pandemic**

When the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, it certainly impacted the educational scene. Both educators and students were forced to adapt to the situation at a fast pace so teaching and learning can be conducted as usual. From face-to-face mode of delivery, teaching and learning have shifted to online platforms. As for the students who were scheduled to undergo internship, new challenges appeared due to COVID-19 pandemic and series of MCO were imposed in response to better managing the situation in the country. Recruiting strategies as well as internships were done virtually by companies during the pandemic (Kimble-Hill, et.al., 2020). Similar situations were observed in Malaysia. Some companies allowed their employees to work remotely from home or on rotation basis during the MCO while those who are in the essential services category had to work from the office. Students undergoing internship programmes are not an exception to the situation.

The term e-internships which refers to a new form of internship being conducted virtually has issued challenges to interns, supervisors, and organisations (Jeske & Axtell, 2014). Undoubtedly, students who went for internships during this difficult time might experience challenges at their workplace. While students reported they have become more adept in technology due to e-internship, yet they experience lack of team-spirit in the working environment as they are working remotely is one of the drawbacks (Varghese & Francis, 2020). They further assert, maintaining work life balance is challenging when they work from home. In addition, the hospitality students also faced challenges in their internship during COVID-19 pandemic as their internships were cancelled or the duration was reduced (Dani et al., 2020). The students were not able to put into practice the skills learnt due to this situation. Hence, this affects their internship program and at the same time it also affects their study plan.

Internships also may not remain the same for some students as there are companies that have begun to implement hybrid working conditions since pandemic starts. Hence, students who underwent internship during pandemic are graduating into the new practice of a blended professional (Gill, 2020). This could be a challenge for them to adapt to the new environment of working professionally. Gill (2020) also claimed that based on their internship experiences, few skills such as using social media for main communication means, video-conferencing skills, strategies for self-management of assignments, flexible timetabling and desktop research are acknowledged to be vital in working remotely. The additional skills set has become integral in the workplace. Even though doing an internship during the pandemic does pose several challenges for some students, it also seems to have less impact for some.

### **Communication Skills at the Workplace**

Other than the challenges that the internship students faced during COVID-19 pandemic, communication skills at the workplace is another issue that this study will be looking at. Ideally, students will master or acquire their communication skills upon completing their internship especially if they are working with people from different cultures and backgrounds. In a study on e-internships, AlGhamdi (2022); Varghese and Francis (2020), they shared positive experiences. They highlighted that the students were content with undergoing their

internship virtually and it helps in improving their communication skills. Furthermore, a study concerning the mechanical engineering undergraduates' perspective of going through internship during COVID-19 reveals that they are satisfied with the skills possessed during the internship period (Roselina et.al., 2021). Improvement in communication skills including oral presentation skills, written communication, and ability to communicate ideas as well as professionalism aspects were noted among the participants. The students indicated that the 10 weeks training or more resulted in improvement among the participants as they have more opportunities to learn. Thus, determining the communication skills required at the workplace for interns during COVID-19 pandemic is needed in this study.

There are also several past studies on workplace communication skills. One of them is on the diverse workplace communication skills. According to Coffelt et al (2019), the diverse workplace communication skills can be divided into four modes: written, oral, visual, and electronic. The researchers further stated that written communication can be in the form of writing a document and email is considered as a part of electronic communication (Coffelt et al., 2019). Furthermore, oral communication may relate to the way one interacts, presents, and conducts meetings and visual communication was recognised as data visualisation which refers to nonverbal communication. In another study on language proficiency and communication skills, it was revealed that employers in the private sector view these two skills as distinct abilities (Ting, et al., 2017). They claimed that good communication skills involve beyond the capability to communicate with others. Therefore, in view of the significance as well as various types of communication skills which are considered pertinent at the workplace, this study focuses on communication skills required at the workplace for interns during COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Employers' Expectation on Internship Students**

Another aspect to be considered in this study is the employers' expectation on internship students during COVID-19 pandemic. Kapareliotis et al (2018) investigated internship and employability prospects by assessing student's work readiness and revealed that students understood employers' expectations of them during internship. Other than that, basic academic skills, high-order skills and professional skills required by employers were successfully applied by the interns and they did understand the "work-readiness" concept. In another study, it is reported that there is a mismatch between the expectations of the organisation and what interns were able to perform (Abidin et al., 2017). Employers seem to expect qualities of experienced workers from internship trainees such as confidence, proactiveness and independence (Abidin et al., 2017). Kapareliotis et al (2018) stress that internship contributes to interns' readiness to enter the job market because throughout internships, the interns develop a wide range of skills required by the employees. These include verbal and written communication skills, effective collaboration, being able to work in a team, tech savvy and problem-solving skills (Kapareliotis et al., 2018). Therefore, it is vital for this study to highlight on exploring students' perception and employers' expectation on practical training during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Methodology**

A mixed-method approach was employed to investigate the perceptions of students and the expectations of employers regarding practical training during the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure comprehensive data collection, a triangulation approach was utilized, incorporating both interview and questionnaire data. The study focused on final year students from UiTM

who had completed an internship program. A total of 100 students participated in the study and were invited to complete online questionnaires. The questionnaire used in this research was developed by drawing upon questionnaires utilised in three previous studies conducted by (Carol et al., 2011; Chan, 2014; Shreenidhi and Rengadevi, 2020). The questionnaire encompassed five sections. The first section aimed to gather demographic information, including gender, the industry in which the participants worked or interned, and the mode of internship (e.g., remote or on-site). Sections 2 to 5 of the questionnaire were designed to collect data on the following aspects:

- i. Students' perceptions on internship
- ii. Challenges faced by students during the internship
- iii. Reading and writing skills required during the internship
- iv. Speaking and listening skills required during the internship

The collected questionnaire data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics was employed to present the findings of the study, whereby tables and graphs were utilised to visually illustrate the data. In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative data was gathered through purposive sampling. This sampling strategy aimed to identify subjects who met predefined criteria to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research questions (Denieffe, 2020). To obtain in-depth insights from stakeholders, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both industrial players and interns using a set of predetermined questions based on the developed questionnaire used in the study. All interviews were recorded with the participants consent. Four workplace supervisors from various organisations were identified, and five students were selected for the interview sessions. These participants were interviewed between 20 to 30 minutes by the authors. The interviews were then transcribed with the assistance of a professional transcriber to facilitate the analysis. Additionally, data triangulation was utilised by incorporating the interview data from the students. Triangulation, through the use of multiple data sources, helps to promote social change, mitigate bias, enhance data saturation, and provide deeper insights into the collected data (Fusch et al., 2018).

### Results and Discussion

This section discusses students' perception of internships as well as the challenges they faced while completing the industrial training based on the questionnaire. It also discusses the required communication skills at the workplace based on the tasks carried out by the students during the internship program.

Table 1

*Demographic Data*

Gender	N	%
Male	20	20.0%
Female	80	80.0%

Table 2

*Working/Internship Industries*

Industries	N	%
Accounting	12	12.0%
Advertising	3	3.0%
Architecture	12	12.0%
Auditing	9	9.0%
Banking	1	1.0%
Business	2	2.0%
Engineering	10	10.0%
Communication	2	2.0%
Creative industry	1	1.0%
Education	5	5.0%
Finance	4	4.0%
Food & beverages	2	2.0%
Hotel & tourism	1	1.0%
Information Technology (IT)	10	10.0%
Insurance	4	4.0%
Healthcare	4	4.0%
Oil & gas	2	2.0%
Publication	6	6.0%
News & media	4	4.0%
Others	6	6.0%

Table 1 shows the demographic data of respondents who participated in the study with the majority of respondents (80%) being female students. All respondents worked in various industries during the internship period which include accounting, auditing, insurance, engineering, hotel and tourism, publication, and few others (refer Table 2). Most of the respondents were required to work from the office (57.6%) while 30.3% of the respondents worked on a rotational basis. Only 12.1% of the students worked from home and underwent the internship program virtually (Table 3).



Table 3

*Mode of Internship*

Mode	N	%
Work from office	57	57.0%
Work from home	12	12.0%
Both (rotation based)	31	31.0%

**Students' Perception on Internship**

About 63.3% respondents conducted the practical training as part of university regulation, whereas 25.3% more worked to gain industrial hands-on experience. Majority of the respondents (95.9%) received supervision and guidance during internship and 85.6% of the respondents felt that their academic knowledge was applied at the workplace. Most students (97.9%) believed that they acquired new skills from the industrial training and most of them too (86.6%) found the overall internship experience was satisfactory. Consistent with the findings on virtual internship conducted during COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia AlGhamdi (2022), and Kerala Varghese and Francis (2020), the interns were satisfied with their internship experiences despite the unprecedented situation that hit the world.

The results from these findings also corroborated with the interviews conducted with the students whereby the majority of the interviewees acknowledged that they received sufficient training from their supervisors even though they did their internship during the pandemic. However, some also felt doing internships during the pandemic had limited them from fully experiencing the real work atmosphere. According to one of the interviewees who worked on a rotational basis

S1: *"Bagi saya, saya personally memang rasa OK. Tapi cuma sebab macam as a student kita nak merasai suasana kerja yang sebenar, so agak limit kat situ sebab kekangan masa kan?"*

S1: To me, personally I feel it is okay. However, as a student I want to feel the real work atmosphere, so it is limited in that sense because of the time limitation.

Furthermore, one of the interviewees stated that it was hard to find a place for internship during the pandemic, S2, *"...masa tu pun tengah pandemic kan. Susah I think nak cari tempat yang accept untuk internship."* This corresponds to Dani et al (2020) who revealed the students' internships were cancelled or the duration was reduced due to COVID-19.

**Challenges Faced by Students During Internship**

The questionnaire included 8 variables for which a 5-point Likert scale was given. Only a small percentage of 7% of the respondents agreed that they were assigned work unrelated to their academic course. On workload, the majority of 41% felt neutral about the amount of work assigned to them. Most of the respondents did not find work timings for internship during the COVID-19 pandemic challenging as only 7% of the respondents strongly agreed that the work timings were inappropriate.

S2 who studied in the public relation programme shared, *"...sebab dia macam tak relate jugak lah actually. Tapi I did belajar one semester untuk HR. So, I think I boleh lah nak macam faham sikit scope yang I kena buat tu..."* Some of the works assigned to her had a lack of relation to the programme she studies. However, she managed to complete the tasks due to the fact that she had some knowledge about it because of the human resource (HR) subject she took during her studies.

In terms of allocation of time given for the students who underwent practical training to accomplish other academic activities like final year project and internship report, most of the respondents (40%) felt that they had enough time to get the assigned tasks done and very few (7%) found the internship hours were inadequate. For job description, more than 70% of the respondents were confident and had clear ideas on what they should do during the internship. 25% of them felt shy and had their inhibitions to find out about the job scope from their employer or superior.

One of the interviewees confessed that it was challenging to juggle between internship and doing my FYP. S3 said, "Well, since it was our final year, and I had other assignments to do like my Final-Year Project. So, I would say it was a bit challenging '...cause I had to juggle with internship work and also, doing my FYP'. Varghese and Francis (2020) also concluded in their study that it is challenging to maintain work life balance when working from home.

In addition, based on the survey results, it was discovered that facilities or infrastructure like the internet, electronic devices and gadgets were a problem for 20% of the respondents. This could probably because the majority of the respondents were working from the office where computers and the internet were not an issue. Other than that, communication with colleagues while working from home was found quite challenging for 36% of the respondents.

Table 4

*Challenges Faced by Students During Internship*

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Neutral (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (%)</b>
Assigned work unrelated to academic course	20	24	30	19	7
Workload was in excess	7	23	41	18	11
Inappropriate work timings	32	34	19	8	7
Lack of time to do other academic activities (e.g. final year project, internship report, etc.)	15	25	24	22	15
Inadequate internship hours/time	24	33	25	11	7
Feeling shy or inhibited to ask for job description from the company	18	31	26	18	7
Lack of facilities or infrastructures to carry out the task/s (devices, gadgets or internet)	31	28	21	13	7
Difficult to communicate with colleague (s) when working from home	23	20	21	19	17

The students were also asked to describe other forms of difficulties they faced while completing the internship period. Other than allowance, overwhelming workloads and struggles in finding a place for internship, issues like safety and university guidelines were found burdensome to the interns. Some of the respondents reported that the company they

served did not adhere to the standard operating procedure (SOP) provided by the government where there was no rotation of working days and physical distancing. Other than that, university regulations and guidelines which did not allow students from the red zone to work from the office had affected their placement and completion date of the internship. Language and communication barriers were also seen as one of the major challenges faced by the students. Some respondents reported that it was 'overwhelming at first having to talk or consult virtually' with the people at work. Lack of feedback from fellow colleagues was also regarded as a challenge for the interns to keep effective communication. Furthermore, there was also a response from the students who expressed difficulty in communicating with co-workers from other races.

### Communication Skills Required at the Workplace

Various skills were required from the interns during their industrial training. For reading skills, it was noted that 88% of the respondents needed to use computers for working purposes and 75% of the respondents needed to browse the internet to complete daily tasks. Other tasks that required the students to apply their reading skills would include reading letters and memos (42%), reading emails (44%) and reading materials from the internet (60%).

One of the interviewees (S1) expressed her statement saying that the reading tasks she was involved in was reading the background information of the organisation, Majlis Daerah Kerian. S1 shared, '*Dia banyak minta saya tahu tentang Majlis Daerah Kerian.*'.

On writing skills, more than half of the interns (63%) responded that they needed to write notes and work-related reports (60%). Other types of correspondence prepared by the interns at the workplace include emails (41%), memos (26%), accounts (26%), proposals (25%) and websites (26%). It is also worth mentioning that 39% of the students were expected to be able to prepare filing systems, advertisement materials like flyers and brochures (18%) and they were also needed to conduct some sort of research (17%) (See table 5). During the interview, S1 mentioned that "*...Tapi ada juga masa tu saya pernah buat infografik lah, and then, tapi dia bagilah draft dekat paper and then kita kena buat, macam tu lah.*" highlighting that preparing infographic materials was also one the writing tasks assigned to her.

Table 5

#### *Reading & Writing Tasks Required During the Internship*

Reading & Writing tasks	Frequency	Percentage
Using computer for office purposes	88	88
Browsing the internet	75	75
Reading materials from the websites	60	60
Reading external/internal email messages	44	44
Reading letters and memos	42	42
Reading reports	0	0
Taking notes	63	63
Writing reports	60	60
Writing external/internal email messages	41	41
Writing letters and memos	26	26
Writing/updating information on the website	26	26
Writing notes, agenda and minutes	17	17
Preparing the filing system	39	39
Preparing promotional materials	17	17

Preparing flyers/brochures/posters/advertisements	18	18
Preparing circular/newspaper articles	9	9
Preparing manuals/catalogues	4	4
Preparing legal documents / contracts	24	24
Preparing proposal	25	25
Preparing accounts	26	26
Conducting research	17	17
Other	4	4

For listening and speaking skills (refer Table 6), an overwhelming majority (90%) of the students were involved in communication with colleagues. 85% of the interns communicated directly with superiors and 76% of them needed to give and receive instructions. Other situations where these two essential skills were applied would include making and receiving phone calls (58%), group discussion (64%), meetings (57%) and interaction with clients or customers (31%). It can also be observed that most spoken interactions at the workplace involved inter-organizational communication where negotiation networking skills were required.

S4 shared he was also involved with handling some projects. In order to complete the projects he was regularly involved in communicating with the vendors regarding marketing of the products, "Whenever we have to deal with vendors to create the comic strips or the marketing things,".

Table 6

*Speaking & Listening Tasks Required During the Internship*

<b>Speaking &amp; Listening tasks</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Making / receiving phone calls	58	58
Communicating with other colleagues	90	90
Communicating with superior	85	85
Giving/receiving instructions	76	76
Handling telephone enquiries	34	34
Participating in discussions	57	57
Interacting with clients/customers	51	51
Participating in meetings	57	57
Dealing with public relations	26	26
Networking with clients/customers	31	31
Negotiating with clients/customers to make a deal	25	25
Contacting with other firms	19	19
Making oral presentations	25	25
Promoting products or services	14	14
Making announcements	7	7
Attending to clients/customers complaints	16	16
Attending professional briefings/workshops	18	18
Holding briefings	6	6
Making online ticketing & online hotel reservations	1	1

The finding of this study proved that the students partake in activities that utilise the four modes of communication skills namely written, oral, visual, and electronic which is in line with (Coffelt et al., 2019).

### **Employers' Expectation on Practical Training during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

A study conducted by Azmi and Hashim (2020) mentioned that graduates need to be prepared with social skills and employers also expected them to have good communication skills at the workplace.

Based on the interview conducted with the employers, it was found that the interns met their expectations at the workplace regardless of working from home or working from office during the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of work performance, attitude and personality. This is taken from one of the employers interviewed;

SV4 "So far all the interns during the pandemic COVID-19 met our expectations here in terms of work performance, attitude and personality"

The employers seem happy with the performance of the interns at the workplace because the interns delivered a good quality of work with a good attitude and personality too. She added that the interns also mingle around with the staff at the workplace very well as they had no issues with them communicating professionally and socially, according to what she mentioned during the interview;

SV4 "They mingle around *OK jer, time kerja ok, time lunch sama-sama pon ok*"

Although the practical training was done during the pandemic and they sometimes needed to work from home, they still met the expectations from the employers as they had good relationships with the staff at the workplace. Hence, the work performance was delivered successfully which makes the employers happy with the outcome and quality of the work done.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The findings of this study highlight the perception of UiTM students towards internships that they underwent during COVID-19 pandemic. So much so that teaching and learning practices have (re)shaped, practical training has been seen to be evolving at the same time to adapt with the health crisis. Considering the time of crisis, universities and industries need to find ways for students to undergo internship as real working experience and many other skills offered through this kind of experiential learning are very invaluable for students' development.

Most of the students found the internship program was a great opportunity to apply knowledge and theories they learned in the university. They too have acquired new skills through these 14 weeks internship period which could be a good kickstart for their career paths. Challenges faced by the students involved many aspects from health and safety, academic and university regulations, language, and communication as well as adaptability to the virtual environment at the workplace.

On communication skills practiced and required at the workplace, interns were expected to be able to interact with colleagues, superiors, and clients in many professional interactions. Considering the above-mentioned challenges and the real situations where reading, writing, listening and speaking skills are involved, future interns should be strengthened with the required skills. This is especially significant for new normal practices where conferences and discussions are conducted in virtual modes and online communications demand skills and etiquettes different from face-to-face interactions. Students need exposure to these new practices to be able to meet the current and future demands.

These findings contribute to the field of knowledge especially to the curriculum designers and faculties to ensure flexibility in designing the syllabus. This can be done by expanding existing theories, applying them to new contexts, or integrating multiple theories to develop a comprehensive understanding. The involved parties should consider embedding the skills needed in relevant courses taught in the university.

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