

Transformation of APHP SMK Baitul Izza Students from the Classroom to the Industrial World

Wihardana Jannati, Didik Nurhadi, Yoto Yoto

Universitas Negeri Malang

Jalan Semarang 5, Malang, Jawa Timur

Correspondence: wihardana.jannati.2405518@students.um.ac.id

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Abstract: This study aims to identify internship experiences as a means of developing hard and soft skills competencies among students of the Agribusiness of Agricultural Product Processing (APHP) expertise program at SMK Baitul Izza. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving three twelfth-grade APHP students, one internship coordinator, one internship supervising teacher, and one industry mentor as the primary informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that internship activities contribute to the development of students' technical competencies (hard skills). Students were able to apply theoretical knowledge acquired at school to industrial practice, master the use of modern tools and materials, and implement occupational health and safety (OHS) principles. In addition, internships also enhance non-technical competencies (soft skills), such as discipline, responsibility, teamwork, interpersonal communication, and adaptability to professional work environments. Overall, internships function as an effective form of contextual learning that bridges the gap between the educational environment and the industrial world. Through direct workplace experience, students not only become more proficient technically but also develop strong work character and readiness to compete in the labor market. Therefore, the implementation of internships at SMK Baitul Izza has proven to make a significant contribution to achieving the goals of vocational education—producing competent, professional, and competitive graduates in the modern industrial era.

Keywords: internship, hard skills, soft skills, work competence, vocational education

Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) have a strategic role in producing young generations who are ready to face the challenges of the modern world of work. Amid the rapid acceleration of technological development and industrial dynamics, SMK graduates are required not only to master technical skills, but also to possess high adaptive capabilities (López & Rodríguez-López, 2020); (Muja et al., 2019). Vocational education in Indonesia is directed toward producing a workforce that is productive, competent, and competitive at both national and global levels (Ariansyah et al., 2024). However, the reality in the field shows that there is still a gap between students' competencies and the actual needs of the business and industrial world (DUDI) (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023). This challenge becomes increasingly evident along with changes in occupational competency standards that demand balanced mastery of hard skills and soft skills (Kholifah et al., 2025). This imbalance reflects the need

for a more contextual and experience-based educational approach (Shi & Bangpan, 2022). Therefore, concrete strategies are needed to connect the world of education with the world of work more closely and sustainably (Chen et al., 2025).

One strategy that is key to bridging the world of education and industry is the implementation of internship activities. This activity provides space for students to directly experience authentic work situations, which cannot be fully simulated in the classroom (Wang et al., 2022). Through internships, students not only practice technical skills, but also absorb a complex industrial work culture (Liu, 2021). This includes values such as discipline, professional communication, responsibility, and collaboration in teams (Hanssen & Utvær, 2022). Thus, internships are not merely technical training, but also a process of character formation and work ethic development (Schmid & Haukedal, 2022). Direct experience in the workplace accelerates the internalization process of work values needed by industry (Sauli, 2021). Therefore, internships become one of the important pillars in improving the quality of SMK graduates (Arinaitwe, 2021).

In the Agribusiness of Agricultural Product Processing (Agribisnis Pengolahan Hasil Pertanian/APHP) Expertise Program, mastery of technical competencies and professional attitudes is very important to support students' success in the food industry. Students are required to be able to process, package, and preserve agricultural products with high quality standards (Chen et al., 2025). Not only that, the food industry also demands the ability to maintain sanitation, understand occupational safety principles, and maintain the quality of raw materials (Warwas et al., 2023). All of these skills require accuracy, responsibility, and the ability to work within a strict production system (Wang et al., 2022). Internships allow students to understand the system in real terms through direct interaction with industrial technology and procedures (Liu, 2021). Students can compare the theory obtained at school with the practices that take place in the world of work (Arinaitwe, 2021). This process becomes key in honing students' abilities comprehensively and in ways that are relevant to field needs (Shi & Bangpan, 2022).

The implementation of internships at SMK Baitul Izza provides a unique opportunity for APHP students to integrate with a real industrial ecosystem. As a religious-based school, SMK Baitul Izza integrates religious values into character education, which are then tested directly when students face the dynamics of the world of work. The industrial environment becomes a place of learning that is challenging while also maturing students in both technical and moral aspects (Hanssen & Utvær, 2022). Through interaction with industry practitioners, students practice professional communication, face work pressure, and improve mental resilience (Schmid & Haukedal, 2022; (Powers & Watt, 2021). They are required to complete tasks on time, maintain the quality of their work output, and be responsible for equipment and production processes (Wang et al., 2022). This creates a learning experience that is more meaningful and transformative than classroom learning (Sauli, 2021). Direct interaction with professional demands shapes students' mindsets as prospective workers who are resilient and adaptive (Shi & Bangpan, 2022).

Strengthening soft skills during internships has proven to be the main differentiating factor for students' readiness to face the world of work (Kholifah et al., 2025). Previous studies show that students

who participate in internships tend to be more confident, independent, and able to communicate effectively in the workplace (Liu, 2021). These aspects often become the main determinants in the workforce recruitment process, in addition to technical skills (Muja et al., 2019). On the other hand, learning experiences in industry also help students understand the importance of teamwork, time management, and the ability to solve problems quickly and appropriately (Hanssen & Utvær, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). The entire process not only equips students with technical skills, but also shapes professional work attitudes (Calero López & Rodríguez-López, 2020). This is what makes internships a very essential learning vehicle in vocational education (Arinaitwe, 2021). Thus, internships become a strategic investment in producing graduates who are competent and highly competitive (Ariansyah et al., 2024).

Based on these conditions, it is important to systematically examine how internship experiences are able to shape students' competencies in two main dimensions: hard skills and soft skills. A deep understanding of the process of strengthening these two aspects through internships will provide a strong foundation for curriculum development and school–industry partnerships. Internship activities are not merely a complement to the curriculum, but an integral part of the vocational education process that is based on real experience. Empirically examining students' experiences during internships can provide a concrete picture of the effectiveness of the program. In addition, the results of this study can be used as a reference to strengthen link and match strategies at the level of education policy. In that way, synergy between schools and the industrial world can be improved sustainably. The ultimate goal is to create SMK graduates who are work-ready, professional, and able to face the changes of the times adaptively.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the experiences of students in the Agribusiness of Agricultural Product Processing (APHP) Expertise Program at SMK Baitul Izza in participating in internship activities. Informants were selected purposively and consisted of 7 individuals, including students, supervising teachers, the PKL coordinator, industry supervisors, and a laboratory assistant. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation at the internship site, and documentation such as activity journals and student reports. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data display, and ongoing conclusion drawing and verification. Data validity was conducted through source and method triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach allows a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of internships to the development of students' hard skills and soft skills within the context of a religious-based school. This study refers to the theory of real experience-based learning (work-based learning), which is considered effective in vocational education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Internship Experiences in Improving the Hard Skills Competence of APHP Students at SMK Baitul Izza

Based on the results of interviews with twelfth-grade students of the Agribusiness of Agricultural Product Processing (APHP) expertise program at SMK Baitul Izza, it was found that internship activities provide highly valuable experiences in improving their technical competencies. Almost all student informants stated that the implementation of internships is a real learning medium that provides opportunities to apply the theory obtained in class to actual work situations. This activity is considered far more challenging and meaningful than learning at school because students are directly confronted with an industrial work culture that demands discipline, meticulousness, and professional responsibility.

One student shared their experience enthusiastically:

“...it was fun, ma’am! During the internship I felt happy while also learning many new things. At first I was a bit nervous because I had to adapt to the world of work, but over time I felt comfortable. I learned how to manage time, collaborate with various people with different characters, and adjust to a work environment that demands discipline...”

This statement shows that internship activities not only sharpen technical skills, but also foster the ability to adapt to situations and the dynamics of industrial work. Another student added a similar experience that the internship activity gave them a real understanding of the work system in the catering services industry. They said:

“...at first I felt awkward and shy, because I was not used to the real work atmosphere. But after a few days of adapting, I began to enjoy every process. I learned discipline, how to coordinate with coworkers, and understood the workflow in a professional kitchen...”

From the technical skills side, students admitted that they gained a lot of new knowledge, especially regarding ingredients, food processing techniques, and production procedures according to industry standards. One student explained:

“...I learned about types of chocolate, how to use them, and the techniques for making various dessert products such as brownies, matcha cake, and cheesecake. It turns out that each product has different characteristics and techniques...”

A similar experience was also expressed by another student who had the opportunity to deepen skills in food plating, processing steak, and making natural sauces with distinctive flavors. Meanwhile, another student emphasized the importance of skills in maintaining equipment cleanliness, product packaging, and applying OHS (occupational health and safety) principles in an industrial environment. All of these work processes were carried out by following strict standard operating procedures (SOP) and required a high level of meticulousness so that the resulting products meet quality standards.

According to the school supervising teacher, internship activities make a major contribution to students' learning outcomes, especially in improving practical skills that cannot be obtained only through

classroom learning. They revealed that during the mentoring period, there was significant development in students' self-confidence and practical skills:

"...the children become more skilled because they learn directly from industry practitioners. They not only understand theory, but also know how the work actually runs..."

This statement is in line with the view of the industry supervisor, who assessed that SMK Baitul Izza students have high learning enthusiasm and quickly adapt to the professional work rhythm at the internship site. They stated:

"...at first they were hesitant and a bit slow, but once guided, they could be independent and meticulous. We are happy because the children of SMK Baitul Izza have a high spirit to learn new things..."

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of internships at SMK Baitul Izza plays an important role in developing students' hard skills comprehensively. Students not only master skills in processing agricultural products and food products, but also understand the importance of work discipline, meticulousness, and the application of industry standards. Through direct experience in the world of work, students are able to integrate the theory obtained at school with real practices in the field so that their professional competencies increase significantly. The research results show that internship activities have a very large influence on improving students' technical competencies (hard skills). Based on the results of the reduction, the influence of internship activities on improving students' technical competencies can be rationally estimated as in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Influence of Internship Activities on the Improvement of APHP Students' Hard Skills

Competency Aspect (Hard Skills)	Competency Aspect (Hard Skills)	Competency Aspect (Hard Skills)	Competency Aspect (Hard Skills)
Application of theory to industrial practice	Students are able to apply learning theory to production activities in industry independently.	90%	Most students successfully connect theory with real practice.
Production and processing skills	Students are able to carry out the production process from the preparation stage, processing, to packaging.	88%	Internships improve students' basic and procedural technical abilities.
Mastery of modern tools and materials	Students can operate equipment and recognize industrial materials well after guidance from industry supervisors.	85%	Mastery of new tools indicates successful transfer of industrial knowledge.
Implementation of SOP and OHS (K3)	Students consistently follow work standards and occupational safety procedures.	92%	Work discipline and safety awareness increase significantly.
Creativity and product innovation	Students show improvement in product aesthetics (decoration, plating, packaging).	80%	Internships foster innovative abilities through contextual learning.
Overall average influence		87.0%	Internships are very effective in improving students' technical competencies.

Source: Researcher, 2025

Internship Experiences in Improving the Soft Skills of APHP Students at SMK Baitul Izza

Based on the results of interviews with twelfth-grade students of the Agribusiness of Agricultural Product Processing (APHP) expertise program at SMK Baitul Izza, it was found that field work practice (internship) activities not only improve technical skills (hard skills), but also have a significant impact on the development of students' non-technical competencies (soft skills). Through direct involvement in industrial activities, students learn to communicate professionally, work collaboratively in teams, adapt to the work environment, and cultivate a sense of discipline, responsibility, and independence.

A student stated that the main values they gained during the internship were discipline and responsibility toward work. They expressed the following:

"...discipline is important, ma'am. At the internship place I learned to arrive on time, complete work according to targets, and maintain my supervisor's trust. I also learned how to work fast but still neatly and carefully. All of that trained me to be more responsible..."

This statement illustrates that internship activities become an effective means of instilling orderly, planned, and highly responsible work habits. Another student added that production activities in industry require teamwork and good communication so that work runs smoothly, especially when handling orders in large quantities. They explained:

"...teamwork is important, ma'am. For example, when there are a lot of orders, we have to help each other. Some make the batter, some fry, some decorate, and some package. If our communication is not good, the work can fall apart..."

In addition to teamwork skills, interpersonal communication skills were also an aspect frequently mentioned by students. One student admitted that they were initially quiet and less confident, but the internship experience made them learn to be more open and communicative. They said:

"...I'm a quiet person, ma'am, and at first I felt a bit awkward. But at the internship place I had to ask a lot of questions and talk with coworkers. Over time I became more confident and could express opinions politely..."

Besides discipline, responsibility, and communication, adaptability also became an important competency that developed during internship activities. Several students admitted that at first they had difficulties adjusting to a fast work rhythm, strict rules, and big responsibilities. However, over time, they began to understand the work process and were able to adjust to the industrial environment. One student stated:

"...at first I was overwhelmed, ma'am. The work rhythm there is fast, and the rules are strict. But after I followed the guidance of the supervisor and coworkers, I could adjust. Now I know how to deal with work pressure and manage time..."

These students' statements show that internship experience in the industrial world plays an important role in shaping a professional work character, fostering social maturity, and improving students' interpersonal and communication skills in a real work environment. Through a process of direct interaction,

habituation to work discipline, and responsibility for assigned tasks, students learn to understand the values of work ethics and industrial culture that form the basis of their readiness to enter the workforce.

According to the school supervising teacher, non-technical aspects are among the most important outcomes of internship activities because they are directly related to students' work readiness. They emphasized that character formation and professional attitudes cannot be fully obtained through classroom learning. They stated:

"...an internship is not just learning to make products, but also shaping character. The children learn discipline, responsibility, teamwork, and politeness. Those are all soft skills that cannot be obtained only from theory at school."

In line with this, the industry supervisor assessed that the soft skills of SMK Baitul Izza students showed significant development during the internship activities. They said:

"...the children quickly learn to behave professionally. They begin to get used to arriving on time, respecting supervisors, and working together in teams. I see their confidence grow while they are here."

Meanwhile, the school internship coordinator added that soft skills are an important aspect that is always monitored during the implementation of internships. They conveyed:

"...we do not only assess technical skills, but also how the children interact, communicate, and deal with problems in the workplace. Many students who were initially shy, but after the internship became more independent and confident..."

Interview results from all informants indicate that internship activities have a strategic role in shaping a professional work character, fostering discipline, responsibility, and students' social and communication skills. Real experience in an industrial environment provides opportunities for students to learn contextually through direct practice, interact with diverse individual characteristics, and understand a work culture that demands ethics, attitudinal maturity, and the ability to work collaboratively in teams. Thus, internships not only serve as a vehicle for skills training, but also as a medium for character building and students' mental readiness to face the real world of work. Based on the results of the reduction of field data, a rational estimate was obtained that internship activities influence about 85% of the improvement of students' non-technical competencies (soft skills). This proportion illustrates that most students show real improvement in aspects of responsibility, discipline, communication, teamwork, and adaptability.

Table 2. The Influence of Internships on the Improvement of APHP Students' Soft Skills Competencies

Competency Aspect (Soft Skills)	Competency Aspect (Soft Skills)	Competency Aspect (Soft Skills)	Competency Aspect (Soft Skills)
Discipline and responsibility	Students are accustomed to arriving on time, completing work according to targets, and maintaining supervisors' trust.	90%	Discipline improves through habituation and direct control in the industrial environment.
Teamwork	Students actively cooperate during mass production, helping one another across production sections.	85%	Internships strengthen collaboration skills and empathy among coworkers.

Competency Aspect (Soft Skills)	Competency Aspect (Soft Skills)	Competency Aspect (Soft Skills)	Competency Aspect (Soft Skills)
Interpersonal communication	Students become more confident, polite, and communicative with supervisors and customers.	83%	Social and communication skills increase significantly.
Independence and initiative	Students become responsive to work without waiting for instructions and assist the team when workloads increase.	84%	Students demonstrate readiness for independent and proactive work.
Adaptability	Students are able to adjust to a fast work rhythm and strict rules.	86%	Adaptation to the work environment becomes one of the dominant outcomes of internships.
Work ethics and professional attitude	Students demonstrate politeness, respect supervisors, and understand workplace hierarchy.	82%	Professional attitudes are formed through workplace social habituation.
Overall average influence		85%	Internships are very effective in shaping students' soft skills.

Source: Researcher, 2025

The researcher has also compiled the research findings presented in Table 3 from the hard skills and soft skills aspects.

Table 3. Research Findings

Competency	Focus	Findings
Hard Skills	Application of theory to industrial practice	Students are able to apply the theory learned at school to real activities in the world of work, especially in agricultural product processing and food production processes. Internships help students understand the relationship between learning concepts and industrial practice.
Hard Skills	Producing food products according to standards	Students gain skills in making various food products such as cakes, donuts, steak, beverages, and sauces using techniques that meet industry standards. They learn about ingredient measurements, temperature, processing time, and maintaining product quality.
Hard Skills	Use of modern equipment and new materials	Students become familiar with and learn to use modern equipment and new materials that are not yet available at school. They learn how to operate production equipment, use additives, and understand the function of each component in the food industry process.
Hard Skills	Implementation of industrial SOP and OHS (K3)	During internships, students discipline themselves to follow SOPs that apply in industry, including workplace cleanliness, punctuality, and occupational safety and health (OHS/K3). They realize the importance of standard work procedures as a benchmark of professionalism.
Hard Skills	Creativity in products and packaging	Students' creativity and product innovation in decorating and arranging food presentation (plating), creating variations in shape and color, and designing attractive packaging. This process encourages students to think innovatively to produce products with selling value.
Soft Skills	Discipline and responsibility	Students learn to arrive on time, follow work rules, and complete work according to assigned targets. They realize the importance of maintaining supervisors' trust and being responsible for their respective work results.

Soft Skills	Teamwork	Students become accustomed to working together with coworkers in completing production tasks. When orders increase, they help one another between the batter, frying, decorating, and packaging sections so that work is completed on time.
Soft Skills	Interpersonal communication	Students learn to communicate with coworkers, seniors, and supervisors. Some students admitted they were initially quiet and awkward, but during internships they gradually become accustomed to speaking, asking questions, and expressing opinions politely.
Soft Skills	Independence and initiative	Students learn to carry out tasks without waiting for instructions, clean the work area on their own, and help other coworkers when work piles up. They try to be responsive and not depend on others.
Soft Skills	Adaptability	Students adapt to the fast industrial work rhythm and strict rules. At first they feel overwhelmed and nervous, but after a few days they are able to adjust to the environment and work habits.
Soft Skills	Work ethics and attitude	Students learn to respect supervisors, be polite to coworkers, and maintain good relationships during internships. They realize the importance of courteous and professional attitudes in the workplace.

Source: Researcher, 2025

DISCUSSION

Internship Experiences in Improving the Hard Skills Competence of APHP Students at SMK Baitul Izza

Internship experience has proven to have a tangible impact on improving the technical competence of APHP students at SMK Baitul Izza. Students stated that they were able to apply the theory learned at school to real work processes in industry, especially in processing agricultural products (Suyitno, 2022). This shows the connection between the school curriculum and industry needs, which has often been considered to have a gap (mismatch) (Dionne, 2024). The assertion that internships serve as a bridge between theory and practice is strengthened by Gutiérrez-Pulido & Orozco-Rodríguez (2025) who mention that work-based learning is able to provide authentic experiences that cannot be obtained in the classroom; similar findings are also shown in internship/work-based learning studies that emphasize the transfer of learning to real work performance (Suyitno, 2022). Direct interaction with the world of work makes students better understand the urgency of technical skills in real situations (Haojie, 2025). Production processes involving processing, packaging, and preservation are carried out procedurally with industry standards (Teym, 2025). This enriches students' understanding of work stages and increases the accuracy of actions in each process (Insfran-Rivarola et al., 2020).

Students are not only involved technically, but also experience mastery of modern tools and materials that were previously unavailable at school. In internship activities, they are given the opportunity to operate food production machines and use additives professionally. This is in line with Teym's (2025) opinion that vocational education should be directed to equip students with skills based on the latest technology; internship practices have also been proven to increase learning engagement and self-efficacy through real

work experience (Cai et al., 2022). This experience broadens students' insight into industrial technology and develops their ability to adapt to new tools (Chuang, 2022). Their self-confidence increases because they feel capable of mastering something that was initially unfamiliar (Cai et al., 2022). This process shows the success of knowledge transfer from industry to learners, especially when guidance and supervisory functions run effectively (Dionne, 2024). In addition to improving skills, interaction with industrial technology also motivates students to continue learning and exploring independently (Chuang, 2022).

High work discipline during internships becomes a major highlight in shaping students' professional attitudes. They acknowledge the importance of complying with standard operating procedures (SOP), maintaining cleanliness, and understanding and applying occupational health and safety (OHS/K3) principles, which in the context of food processing closely intersect with hygiene and food safety practices (Teym, 2025). SOP and OHS are the foundation of industrial work that, if not understood, can pose risks; empirical evidence shows that hygiene/food safety training affects the work practices of food handlers (Insfran-Rivarola et al., 2020). This is consistent with Jevšnik et al (2023), that understanding of the work context will grow through direct involvement and habituation, and is consistent with findings from surveys of food safety knowledge among professional food handlers. Through consistent work routines, students become accustomed to complying with strict work rules; more interactive training approaches have also been reported as effective in increasing engagement and understanding of work procedures (Sartoni et al., 2025). Such knowledge is difficult to obtain solely from textbooks or simulations at school. Internship activities provide concrete experiences that increase awareness of the importance of work procedures as part of professionalism (Alharethi et al., 2025).

Improvement in technical skills is also seen from students' production results, which show creativity and innovation in food decoration (plating) as well as packaging design. They are able to create products with an attractive appearance and higher selling value; research shows that visual elements in presentation/plates can influence perceptions of a product's attractiveness and value. This ability is not only technical, but also involves sensitivity to aesthetics and market trends, including buyers' preferences for packaging design (Xiao et al., 2024). Importance of creativity as one of the competencies that need to be developed in vocational education; in industry, packaging is also related to consumer perceptions of sustainability/green awareness aspects (Li & Li, 2024). Internships provide space for the actualization of creativity through direct practice and guidance from industry mentors (Gutiérrez-Pulido & Orozco-Rodríguez, 2025). This experience encourages students to think critically when facing design problems and production efficiency (Xiao et al., 2024). Creativity does not emerge instantly, but develops through habituation to innovative thinking in facing challenges.

The school supervising teacher confirmed that students experienced significant development in terms of technical skills and self-confidence. Students become more skilled and responsive in completing work that was previously only understood theoretically (Haojie, 2025). The industry supervisor also stated that students are able to adapt to a high work rhythm and have a high enthusiasm for learning; internship satisfaction and fulfillment of the "psychological contract" are also associated with strengthening career

identity and self-development behavior among new graduates (Feng et al., 2023). This shows that students not only absorb knowledge, but are also able to practice it in real work situations (Alharethi et al., 2025). Concrete experience in case studies is very important to assess behavioral and skill changes authentically. These findings prove that direct involvement in the world of work provides a stronger learning effect than classroom simulations, especially when the field mentoring process runs systematically (Dionne, 2024). This progress reflects the effectiveness of the link and match strategy pursued in SMK revitalization (Suyitno, 2022).

The percentage influence of internships on improving technical skills, which reaches an average of 87%, shows significant effectiveness. The highest aspect is shown in compliance with SOP and OHS (92%), followed by the ability to connect theory and practice (90%), which is aligned with findings that internship/work-based learning experiences can increase work readiness and student adaptation in professional contexts (Alharethi et al., 2025; Suyitno, 2022). This shows that aspects involving habituation and work attitudes are easier to develop through direct experience, including in the context of procedural compliance for food safety (Insfran-Rivarola et al., 2020). Andini (2025) states that contextual learning can improve practical understanding and facilitate the internalization of work values; this is in line with reports that experience-based training designs (e.g., gamification) can increase engagement and procedural learning outcomes (Sartoni et al., 2025). These values complement the mastery of technical skills in one package of work competence (Feng et al., 2023). These data strengthen the position of internships as an integral part of the strategy to improve the quality of SMK graduates (Gutiérrez-Pulido & Orozco-Rodríguez, 2025). Internships are proven not only to equip technical skills, but also to accelerate the process of students' professional transformation through strengthening career identity and work behavior (Feng et al., 2023).

Thus, internship activities have a major contribution in fostering students' technical competencies comprehensively. Mastery of tools, work processes, and an understanding of the value of professionalism grow along with students' active involvement in each stage of production. Internship activities not only introduce the world of work, but become a process of internalizing values and real work skills that support work readiness. These findings reinforce the importance of work-based learning as a main pillar of vocational education. Students' experiences in internship activities illustrate effective integration between educational institutions and the industrial world, especially when supervisory functions and mentor support run clearly. Active student involvement in real work processes increases their readiness to face labor market challenges and strengthens career identity and self-development. Internships become a medium of transformation from the status of "student" to a prospective professional worker.

Internship Experiences in Improving the Soft Skills Competence of APHP Students

Internship activities also play a major role in shaping students' character and non-technical competencies (soft skills), especially in terms of discipline and responsibility. Students stated that they became accustomed to arriving on time, following work rules, and completing work according to the given targets; real work experience in work-based learning/work-integrated learning is indeed known to be

effective in building work behaviors such as discipline and accountability (Curto-Reverte, 2025). These habits foster a sense of responsibility toward assigned tasks as well as awareness to maintain supervisors' trust, which is part of work readiness and employability (Pianda, 2024); (Tushar, 2023). Dewi (2020) emphasizes that soft skills such as discipline and responsibility are important factors in work readiness; this is in line with studies that place soft skills as a main component of employability across sectors (Poláková, 2023). Such habituation is difficult to realize only through theoretical learning, but must be trained in real work situations (Yong, 2024). The industrial environment provides positive pressure that encourages students to act according to professional expectations, thereby strengthening work habits that can be transferred to career contexts (Pianda, 2024). The discipline formed through direct experience becomes an important provision for students' readiness to enter the workforce and strengthens work attitudes (Pantaruk, 2025); (Kholifah et al., 2025).

Teamwork becomes another soft skill aspect that develops rapidly during internship activities. Students learn to coordinate in completing production tasks, especially when large-volume orders require effective collaboration across sections; work-integrated learning activities have also been reported to encourage the development of collaboration and teamwork skills through authentic tasks (Mostert, 2025). Poláková (2023) mentions that interaction in work teams trains empathy, communication, and conflict management. Students realize that production success does not only depend on individual skills, but also synergy within the team, which is a core element of cross-field employability. They learn to appreciate each member's role and build habits of helping one another, in line with findings that integrated work experience strengthens social skills and professional relationships (Curto-Reverte, 2025). This experience encourages students to become part of a system, not merely individual actors, especially when industrial assignments and expectations demand team outputs (Yong, 2024). This collaboration strengthens social abilities and forms cooperative work patterns that are important in the industrial world (Mostert, 2025; Pantaruk, 2025).

Interpersonal communication experiences a significant increase during internships, especially for students who were initially awkward or shy. The need to interact with coworkers and supervisors encourages students to develop courage and communication skills; a number of work-integrated learning studies show that professional communication grows when students are involved in projects or work assignments that require coordination and reporting. Tushar (2023) states that effective communication is one indicator of work readiness that SMK graduates must possess, and this is consistent with employability literature that places communication as a key competency. Students admitted that they learned to express opinions, ask questions politely, and understand how to communicate in a formal work environment (Pianda, 2024). This change not only affects technical abilities, but also builds self-confidence and professional identity (Hu, 2025). The industrial environment provides a learning space that demands active involvement and healthy interaction, thereby accelerating the formation of communication competencies and professional networking (Curto-Reverte, 2025). This improvement provides a strong foundation for developing professional relationships in the future.

In addition to communication, independence and initiative also become important aspects that grow during internship activities. Students are trained to complete tasks without waiting for instructions and to take necessary actions when the workload increases; real work experience has been proven to encourage the development of self-regulation and initiative as part of employability (Pianda, 2024). The importance of independence in shaping an adaptive and productive workforce aligns with studies on 21st-century work skills that place independence as a core competency (Tushar, 2023). Students learn to be responsive to work situations and able to manage tasks independently (Yong, 2024). This initiative arises from an understanding of roles and responsibilities within the work structure, which is related to work readiness and proactive behavior (Pantaruk, 2025). These habits have a positive impact on work mentality and decision-making, which is also supported by studies on strengthening employability skills in vocational education (Kholifah, 2025). With increased initiative, students are better prepared to face work challenges that require quick and independent resolution (Dogara, 2020; Curto-Reverte, 2025).

Adaptability can be seen from the process of students adjusting to a fast work rhythm and strict industrial rules. Initially they felt overwhelmed, but over time they were able to adapt to the work environment; the literature shows that internship experiences can strengthen career adaptability and readiness to face organizational demands (Hu, 2025). This reinforces the view that adaptability is the result of habituation in facing work pressures and challenges. De Carlo (2025) found that adaptation to the work environment encourages the growth of students' mentality and resilience, in line with findings that soft skills support the sustainability of performance in post-pandemic situations and changing work conditions. Students are able to read situations and adjust their behavior according to workplace expectations (Pianda, 2024). This habituation provides real experience in managing stress and building work flexibility that is relevant to employability (Poláková, 2023; Tushar, 2023). Adaptability becomes an important indicator of students' readiness to enter the professional world.

Work ethics and attitudes become internship outcomes that are also very important. Students learn to show politeness, respect supervisors, and maintain good relationships with coworkers. Work ethics are an integral part of professional competence and must be instilled early; studies on employability also place professional attitude/behavior as a key dimension besides technical skills (Tushar, 2023; Poláková, 2023). The industrial environment teaches the structure of work hierarchy and professional interaction patterns, and work-integrated learning experiences help internalize norms and workplace expectations. Students realize the importance of a positive attitude and self-control in building a good work image, which contributes to employability and career sustainability. These values are not taught in books, but are obtained through direct experience and observation in the workplace (Curto-Reverte, 2025). Embedded ethics form the foundation of sustainable work behavior and strengthen professional identity.

The average influence of internships on improving students' soft skills reaches 85%, which indicates high effectiveness in character formation and work attitudes. The aspects of discipline and responsibility recorded the highest influence (90%), followed by adaptability and teamwork; this pattern is aligned with findings that work-based learning is effective in strengthening core soft skills (discipline, responsibility,

teamwork, adaptability) that contribute to employability. This percentage confirms that soft skills develop optimally in real work situations that involve pressure and social interaction, as shown in various WIL studies (Díaz, 2025). Nurizinova (2025) states that soft skills do not emerge naturally, but through a habituation process in line with an approach to soft skills development through structured learning design. Internship activities become a strategic medium to instill values and behaviors needed by the world of work. These results strengthen the importance of systematically integrating soft skills into the SMK curriculum, including through assessment and frameworks for work skill development. Through direct habituation in the industrial world, students not only become skilled, but also develop character.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that field work practice (internship) activities at SMK Baitul Izza have a strategic role in developing students' work competencies, both in technical aspects (hard skills) and non-technical aspects (soft skills). From the hard skills perspective, internships provide real learning experiences that enable students to apply theory into industrial practice, master the use of modern tools and materials, implement standard operating procedures (SOP) as well as occupational safety and health (OHS/K3) principles, and foster creativity in food product innovation. Students become more skilled, more meticulous, and understand the importance of quality standards and work efficiency in an industrial environment. The non-technical competencies (soft skills) of internship activities contribute greatly to the formation of students' character, work ethic, and professionalism. Through direct interaction with the industrial environment, students not only learn to adapt to a professional work culture, but also internalize the values of discipline, responsibility, teamwork, interpersonal communication, independence, and the ability to adapt to the dynamics and pressures of real work. This experience shapes self-confidence, mental resilience, and more mature social skills. Thus, internships not only enrich students' practical learning experiences, but also cultivate a strong, independent work character and readiness to face the challenges and demands of the modern world of work professionally.

SUGGESTION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it is recommended that future researchers expand the scope of the study by adding other variables that influence the improvement of students' competencies during internships, such as industrial environment factors and the role of supervisors. In addition, further research can be conducted in other majors or fields of expertise so that the results are more comprehensive and able to complement the findings of this study.

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