



# The Effectiveness Of An Internship Program: A Case Study At PT Kulina Putra Madya

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of the Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB) through a qualitative case study of interns placed at PT Kulina Putra Madya (KPM) under APINDO coordination. Despite the program's promise of strategic roles as "business consultants" for MSMEs, interns faced a significant expectation-reality gap, often assigned administrative or operational tasks with minimal mentorship. Interviews with three interns revealed three key issues: (1) misalignment between job descriptions and actual responsibilities, (2) structural challenges such as poor communication and lack of guidance, and (3) self-initiated adaptation strategies like peer learning and resilience-building. Findings indicate that while interns developed soft skills (e.g., adaptability), the program failed to deliver promised professional development. The study underscores the need for clearer job design, structured mentoring, and stronger institutional coordination to align internships with educational objectives. Recommendations include formalized learning agreements, host company training, and integrating student-led adaptive practices into program design. These improvements could enhance both intern satisfaction and the program's credibility in bridging academia and industry.

## INTRODUCTION

Internship programs are widely recognized as a bridge between academic learning and professional practice, equipping students with skills to navigate real-world workplace demands (Narayanan et al., 2010). In Indonesia, the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative particularly its Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB) aims to strengthen this link by placing students in industry roles aligned with their academic training. However, despite structured policies, mismatches between intern expectations and actual experiences

persist, risking student disillusionment and program inefficacy. This study investigates such gaps through a case study of MSIB interns at PT KPM, a company partnered with APINDO to host "business consultant" interns for MSME development.

The study's purpose is twofold: (1) to analyze the disconnect between the program's promised roles (e.g., strategic business consulting) and interns' day-to-day tasks (e.g., administrative work), and (2) to identify systemic barriers such as weak mentorship and poor communication that hinder internship effectiveness. This research is motivated by recurring reports of intern dissatisfaction in large-scale programs (Pertiwi & Linando, 2024), alongside evidence that task misalignment undermines skill development and career readiness (D'Abate et al., 2009). By focusing on PT KPM, the study offers a microcosm of broader challenges in Indonesia's internship ecosystem.

Using a qualitative case study approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with three interns to explore their experiences. Findings reveal a stark expectation-reality gap: interns were relegated to operational tasks (e.g., inventory management, sales support) with minimal strategic involvement, despite their "consultant" titles. Challenges included unclear job descriptions, absent mentorship, and ad hoc task assignments. Notably, interns developed informal coping strategies (e.g., peer learning, self-directed problem-solving), highlighting the program's reliance on student resilience over structured support.

This study contributes practical insights for policymakers, universities, and host companies. It underscores the need for standardized learning agreements, mentor training, and accountability mechanisms to align internships with pedagogical goals. By addressing these gaps, programs like MSIB can better fulfill their promise of preparing graduates for Indonesia's evolving workforce.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Internships are widely recognized as a critical bridge between academic theory and workplace practice, enabling students to apply disciplinary knowledge in authentic professional contexts (Jackson, 2015; Thompson et al., 2021).

Beyond technical competencies, internships also foster employability by developing soft skills, expanding professional networks, and offering direct exposure to industry culture (Silva et al., 2016). In the Indonesian higher education context, the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative embeds internships as a credited academic component, reinforcing their strategic importance in preparing graduates for the job market (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). However, the success of such programs depends heavily on the alignment between academic objectives and host organizations' operational realities. When well-designed, internships provide structured learning objectives, relevant job roles, and active mentorship (Binder et al., 2015). Interns frequently experience a misalignment between their academic training and assigned tasks, leading to frustration and boredom, especially when tasks are unrelated to their expertise (Mokoena & Seeletse, 2024).

The effectiveness of internship programs is commonly assessed through indicators such as student satisfaction, skill acquisition, and perceived relevance to career goals (Farmaki, 2018). High satisfaction typically reflects a strong match between learning objectives and task assignments, effective mentorship, and clear communication channels (Gault et al., 2010; Qu et al., 2021).

Conversely, mismatches between expectations and reality often arising from vague job descriptions or inadequate supervisory support undermine the perceived value of internships and can lead to disengagement (Vo, 2022). In large-scale programs involving multiple stakeholders, maintaining consistency and quality control presents an additional challenge (Pertiwi & Linando, 2024). Without systematic evaluation and oversight, these programs risk losing credibility among students and industry partners alike.

One recurring issue in the literature is the expectation–reality gap in internship roles. Studies have repeatedly found that students often anticipate engagement in strategic or analytical projects aligned with their academic background but are instead assigned repetitive administrative duties (Wolinsky-Nahmias & Auerbach, 2022). Such mismatches can result from weak communication between universities, coordinating institutions, and host organizations (D’Abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009).

From the perspective of psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 2015), these gaps represent a breach of implicit agreements, leading to dissatisfaction, reduced engagement, and diminished trust in institutional promises. The problem is further compounded when prestigious-sounding titles such as “business consultant” mask work that is largely operational or menial, creating a disconnect between expectations and actual responsibilities.

Multiple interrelated factors influence whether internships deliver meaningful outcomes. Clear guidance and well-defined objectives enhance task relevance and help students connect theory with practice (Wolinsky-Nahmias & Auerbach, 2022a). The quality of mentorship plays a pivotal role, as regular feedback and role modeling support effective skill transfer (D’Abate et al., 2009).

Organizational culture also shapes the internship experience; a supportive and inclusive environment improves engagement and encourages interns to take initiative (Smith & Campbell, 2020). Close coordination between academic and industry stakeholders helps mitigate role misalignment (Ajjawi et al., 2019), while student readiness often enhanced through prior involvement in extracurricular activities improves adaptability in unstructured work settings (Mulyana & Linando, 2024).

In Indonesia, the MBKM’s flagship Magang dan Studi Independen Bersertifikat (MSIB) program, launched in 2020, has partnered with over 1,200 organizations to provide structured experiential learning opportunities (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). The program aims to reduce graduate unemployment by improving work readiness and aligning academic curricula with industry needs.

However, evaluation reports highlight recurring challenges, including task irrelevance, inadequate supervision, and inconsistent role definitions (Saweho et al., 2025). These findings echo global trends but require context-specific solutions. Scholars recommend stronger policy enforcement, standardized mentor training, and the integration of reflective learning tools to formalize informal adaptive strategies that students often develop independently (Pertiwi & Linando, 2024).

Overall, the literature emphasizes that the effectiveness of internships hinges on the interplay between program design, stakeholder collaboration, and organizational commitment to student learning. While initiatives like MSIB have the potential to transform graduate readiness, persistent expectation–reality gaps threaten their credibility and long-term impact. Addressing these gaps requires systemic reforms, including standardized learning agreements, structured mentorship frameworks, and transparent role definitions, to ensure that internships fulfill their dual purpose of advancing student competencies while also contributing meaningfully to host organizations’ objectives.

## METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore the effectiveness of the Magang dan Studi Independen Bersertifikat (MSIB) internship program in the context of PT KPM. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate as it allows for an in-depth examination of participants’ lived experiences, perceptions, and adaptive strategies in response to the expectation–reality gap during the internship (Creswell, 2013). This approach enabled the researcher to capture rich, contextualized insights that could not be obtained through purely quantitative methods.

### **Sampling**

The unit of analysis comprised undergraduate students who participated as business consultant interns at PT KPM under the MSIB Batch 5 program coordinated by APINDO. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had directly experienced job description misalignment during the internship.

Three interns representing 75% of the total five interns placed in the same division were recruited, ensuring diversity in gender, educational background (public and private universities), and roles performed. This sample size was deemed sufficient to achieve thematic saturation while providing varied perspectives within a manageable scope for qualitative analysis.

### **Data Collection**

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences while enabling the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes. Interviews were conducted via Zoom to accommodate logistical constraints, with each session lasting between 45 and 60 minutes.

An interview guide was developed to cover three main topics: (1) manifestation of the expectation–reality gap; (2) challenges faced during the internship; and (3) adaptation strategies employed. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

### **Measures**

The study's data collection instrument was designed to elicit detailed narratives rather than numerical measures, consistent with the qualitative approach. The semi-structured interview protocol included open-ended questions based on themes identified in the literature review, such as clarity of job descriptions, mentorship quality, and task relevance (D'Abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009). To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, multiple trustworthiness strategies were employed:

1. **Credibility** – Data triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing interview responses with official program documentation and researcher field notes. Member checking allowed participants to verify the accuracy of transcribed responses.
2. **Dependability** – A reflexive journal was maintained throughout the research process to document analytical decisions and minimize researcher bias.
3. **Confirmability** – Peer debriefing with an academic colleague helped identify blind spots and strengthen interpretive rigor.
4. **Transferability** – Thick descriptions of the research context and participants' backgrounds were provided to enable readers to assess applicability to other settings.

By integrating these methodological safeguards, the study ensured that its findings are both trustworthy and replicable by experienced researchers operating under similar conditions.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis of semi-structured interviews with three MSIB Batch 5 interns at PT KPM revealed three central themes: (1) the manifestation of the expectation–reality gap; (2) the main challenges encountered during the internship; and (3) the adaptive strategies employed in response to these challenges.

These themes emerged from iterative coding and thematic analysis of interview transcripts, supported by triangulation with program documents and researcher field notes.

### Expectation–Reality Gap

All participants reported a significant mismatch between their anticipated role as “business consultants” and the tasks actually assigned. Prior to the internship, they expected involvement in strategic functions such as market analysis, business development planning, and problem-solving discussions for MSMEs. Instead, their work primarily comprised operational and administrative tasks, including data entry, sales assistance, and even physical tasks such as packaging orders.

This gap was exacerbated by the absence of a clear job description or formal onboarding process, leaving interns uncertain about their responsibilities and contribution to organizational goals.

### Challenges Faced

The lack of structured mentorship emerged as a dominant challenge. Participants reported minimal supervision and scarce feedback, which hindered skill development and role clarity. Communication between APINDO (as coordinating body) and PT KPM was described as fragmented, resulting in sudden task changes without context. Additionally, the rigid hierarchical culture within PT KPM limited interns’ opportunities to propose or participate in strategic initiatives, further diminishing the developmental value of the internship.

### Adaptive Strategies

Despite these structural shortcomings, interns demonstrated adaptability through self-directed learning and peer support. Informal knowledge-sharing sessions among interns, often facilitated via group messaging platforms, became an essential coping mechanism. Participants also adopted proactive problem-solving approaches, such as independently seeking workflow information and initiating communication with supervisors to clarify ambiguous tasks. While these adaptive strategies facilitated the development of soft skills—such as flexibility, communication, and emotional resilience—they were reactive measures to systemic gaps rather than planned learning interventions.

**Table 1. Research Findings**

No	Key Finding	Issues
1	Expectation-Reality Gap in Internship Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Misleading program branding and unclear role expectations</li> <li>- Actual tasks misaligned with intern titles</li> <li>- Company SPV focused on operations</li> </ul>
2	Challenges Faced by Interns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Absence of clear job descriptions and onboarding</li> <li>- Lack of mentorship and evaluation</li> <li>- Unclear reporting structure</li> </ul>
3	Interns’ Adaptive Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reliance on peer learning</li> <li>- Self-initiated understanding of workflows</li> <li>- Emotional adaptation and soft skill development</li> </ul>

## DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the Magang dan Studi Independen Bersertifikat (MSIB) program in the context of PT KPM, with a focus on understanding the expectation–reality gap experienced by interns, the challenges they faced, and the adaptive strategies they employed. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research sought to provide an in-depth account of how internship design and implementation affect student learning outcomes, particularly in the Indonesian higher education and MSME development context.

The study makes several important contributions. First, it identifies the structural and communication-related deficiencies that undermine the developmental value of internships, such as the absence of a clear job description, inadequate onboarding, and weak mentorship structures. Second, it highlights the resilience and adaptability of interns, who, despite these limitations, engaged in self-directed learning and peer collaboration to navigate ambiguous work environments. Third, it contextualizes these findings within the broader MSIB policy framework, offering practical recommendations for improving program quality and alignment with academic objectives.

In line with the research objectives, the results showed that the expectation–reality gap was the most prominent issue. While the MSIB and APINDO program branding implied strategic business consulting roles, actual tasks were operational and administrative, echoing the concerns of previous studies on role misalignment in internships (Barnett, 2012). This mismatch aligns with Rousseau's (2015) psychological contract theory, which posits that unfulfilled implicit agreements diminish motivation and trust. The lack of structured mentorship and evaluation processes further parallels the findings of Pertiwi and Linando (2024), who noted that many Indonesian internship programs suffer from inconsistent supervision and unclear performance expectations.

The adaptive strategies observed such as reliance on peer networks and self-initiated workflow learning reflect elements of self-directed learning theory (Morris et al., 2025). While these strategies foster soft skills like flexibility, communication, and resilience, their emergence as reactive coping mechanisms indicates systemic weaknesses in internship design. This finding aligns with Naz et al. (2020), who emphasize that a supportive work environment should be intentionally structured to enhance learning and retention, rather than relying solely on informal coping mechanisms.

Unexpectedly, the study found that even in the absence of structured mentoring, interns reported gains in non-technical competencies, particularly adaptability and interpersonal skills. One possible explanation is that unstructured, unpredictable work environments force interns to develop self-reliance and problem-solving abilities a phenomenon also noted by Rivera (2016) in her study on resilience-building in uncertain professional contexts. However, while these gains are valuable, they do not replace the technical and strategic competencies that were part of the original learning objectives, thus raising concerns about program effectiveness.

From a managerial perspective, these findings underscore the need for host companies and coordinating institutions to develop clear, role-specific learning agreements, assign trained mentors from relevant departments, and maintain regular performance evaluations. For policymakers and program administrators, the results highlight the importance of aligning promotional job titles with actual work content to avoid mismanaging student expectations. Failure to address these issues may not only diminish the perceived value of the program among students but also weaken partnerships with industry.

This study is not without limitations. Its qualitative nature and small sample size limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Moreover, the data reflect the perspectives of interns only; incorporating the views of supervisors, coordinators, and program administrators could provide a more holistic understanding. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods

approach, combining qualitative insights with quantitative measures of skill acquisition and satisfaction across multiple internship sites. Comparative studies between internships with high and low levels of mentorship support could also offer valuable evidence on best practices.

In summary, the study's findings reaffirm that the success of internship programs depends not only on providing workplace exposure but also on ensuring role clarity, structured mentorship, and alignment between academic and organizational objectives. Addressing these factors is essential for realizing the dual purpose of internships: preparing students for professional careers and delivering value to host organizations.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the effectiveness of the Magang dan Studi Independen Bersertifikat (MSIB) internship program at PT KPM, focusing on the expectation–reality gap in assigned roles, the challenges faced by interns, and the adaptive strategies they employed. The findings reveal that while the program offered opportunities for soft skill development particularly adaptability, communication, and resilience it fell short in delivering the strategic, career-aligned learning experiences implied by its program branding. The absence of clear job descriptions, structured mentorship, and consistent communication between stakeholders significantly limited the program's potential to meet its stated objectives.

The study's limitations include its qualitative scope, small sample size, and reliance on intern perspectives, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the exclusion of viewpoints from supervisors and program administrators restricts the breadth of insights into institutional and managerial factors influencing program implementation. These limitations may have shaped the interpretation of results, particularly regarding systemic causes of role misalignment and mentorship gaps.

Future research should adopt a broader, mixed-methods approach to assess internship effectiveness across multiple organizational contexts, incorporating both student and organizational perspectives. Comparative studies of internships with varying levels of mentorship support could further clarify the relationship between structured guidance and skill development. For program administrators and host organizations, the results underscore the need to align promotional role descriptions with actual tasks, formalize learning agreements, and embed structured mentorship as a core component of the internship experience. By addressing these areas, internship programs like MSIB can more effectively bridge the gap between academic preparation and industry practice, ultimately enhancing both student readiness and organizational value.

## **LIMITATION**

As with any research, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was small only three participants which, while sufficient to reach thematic saturation in this qualitative case study, limits the generalizability of the findings to other internship contexts. This narrow scope means that the patterns identified may reflect specific conditions at PT KPM and may not fully capture the diversity of experiences within the broader MSIB program.

Second, the study relied exclusively on the perspectives of interns, without incorporating input from supervisors, program coordinators, or representatives from APINDO. This single-sided viewpoint may have resulted in an incomplete picture of the systemic and managerial factors influencing role assignments, mentorship quality, and communication flows. Including organizational perspectives could have provided greater balance and a deeper understanding of the causes behind the expectation–reality gap.

Third, the qualitative design, while effective in capturing rich narratives, inherently lacks the capacity to measure internship outcomes in quantifiable terms. Without complementary quantitative measures such as skill acquisition ratings, satisfaction scores, or post-internship employability metrics the study cannot fully assess the scale or statistical significance of its findings.

Finally, the research was conducted within a single organizational and sectoral context, namely an MSME-focused company under APINDO coordination. Sector-specific dynamics, such as operational priorities in the MSME sector, may have shaped the observed task allocations and mentorship practices, thus influencing the results.

These limitations do not diminish the relevance of the study's insights but should be taken into account when interpreting its findings. Future research can address these gaps by expanding the sample size, incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives, adopting mixed-methods approaches, and comparing results across different industry sectors to strengthen the external validity of conclusions.

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