

## Exploring Internship Readiness Among Working Students in Cebu, Philippines: A Thematic Analysis for Item Generation

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### Abstract

**Aim/Purpose:** This study aimed to develop a qualitative foundation for an Internship Readiness Scale for Working Students, addressing the unique challenges faced by students who balance academic coursework with part-time employment. The goal was to identify specific behaviors and competencies that constitute “internship readiness” for working students and to generate an initial pool of scale items grounded in those insights.

**Introduction/Background:** Internship readiness, which is the ability to apply academic knowledge, demonstrate professional behavior, and adapt to workplace demands, is especially challenging for working students who must balance classes, paid work, and internship duties, yet existing assessments overlook these pressures. Drawing on Social Cognitive, Experiential Learning, and Organizational Socialization theories, this study qualitatively developed a five-construct readiness scale (Work Attitude, Adaptability, Technical Skills, Communication and Teamwork, and Career Preparedness) tailored to the unique contexts of working interns.

**Methodology:** The researchers employed a qualitative descriptive design using semi-structured interviews with seven participants in Cebu City, Philippines. Participants were purposefully selected from three groups to provide diverse perspectives: five working students who had completed internships while holding part-time jobs, one internship program manager, and one academic internship instructor. Interviews (10–30 minutes each) were conducted face-to-face in private settings to encourage open discussion. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework. An interview guide structured around the five a-priori constructs ensured that each conversation elicited examples and reflections relevant to Work Attitude, Adaptability, Technical Skills, Communication and Teamwork, and Career Preparedness. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached. No new themes or codes emerged by the seventh interview, indicating sufficient coverage of concepts. The analysis was primarily deductive but allowed for inductive emergence of sub-themes. Reliability was reinforced through researcher triangulation in coding and iterative checking to confirm that the final themes consistently represented participants’ experiences.

**Findings:** Twenty-two distinct sub-themes were identified across the five constructs, illustrating a rich picture of internship readiness in working students. Under Work Attitude, for example, participants emphasized a Proactive Work Ethic and a Feedback-Driven Motivation that turns criticism into improvement. The Adaptability construct yielded themes like Workplace Integration and Task Strategy. For Technical Skills, participants highlighted Skill Application, Procedural Competence, and Self-Improvement. The Communication and Teamwork construct revealed the importance of Collaborative Problem-Solving, Feedback, and Conflict Management. For Career Preparedness, themes of Lifelong Learning and Self-Discovery were prominent. These qualitative insights were distilled into 41 draft scale items spanning the five constructs. For Work Attitude themes, items were written to capture behaviors such as volunteering for extra tasks and using feedback constructively;

for Adaptability, items reflect adjusting to new environments and managing multiple responsibilities. Each item is a concise statement that encapsulates a readiness attribute identified by participants.

**Contribution/Impact on Society:** This study provides one of the first in-depth qualitative examinations of internship readiness specifically for working students. The findings bridge a crucial gap by outlining concrete behaviors and skills that educators and employers can nurture to better prepare working students for internships. The initial item pool offers a practical tool for internship coordinators and career counselors to assess and support students who balance work and study, informing targeted interventions. By highlighting the five a-priori constructs, the study underlines how working students' experiences can be leveraged to enhance their career development. In the broader context, improving internship readiness among this population can lead to more successful internship outcomes, higher workplace performance, and ultimately a smoother transition of working students into professional workforces, benefiting not only the students themselves, but also employers and academic institutions that partner in internships.

**Recommendations:** Based on these findings, universities and internship programs should consider tailoring their preparation and support strategies for working students. For example, given working students' multiple responsibilities, institutions could provide preparatory training that emphasizes time management and self-care to prevent burnout. Mentorship programs could pair working interns with former working students or understanding mentors to help them navigate conflicts between job and internship demands. On a policy level, flexible scheduling or an adjusted internship timeline might be implemented to accommodate working students' time constraints, thereby enabling them to fully engage in both their work and internship roles without compromising performance.

**Research Limitation:** This qualitative study was conducted with a relatively small sample within a specific cultural and geographic context. As such, the findings may not capture all possible constructs of internship readiness relevant to working students in other regions or fields. Additionally, the results were based on self-reported experiences and perceptions, which may carry subjective biases. The researchers mitigated this through triangulating perspectives and reaching thematic saturation, but some nuances could still have been missed. Another limitation was that the study focused solely on the qualitative item generation phase.

**Future Research:** Future studies should pursue quantitative validation of the Internship Readiness Scale for Working Students. This could involve administering the 41-item scale to a larger sample of working students and applying factor analysis to refine the scale's structure. Cross-cultural research would also be valuable, examining if the readiness themes identified are relevant in different countries or educational systems, or if additional themes emerge elsewhere. Finally, intervention studies could be designed, implementing a preparatory program that targets the key readiness themes, and then evaluating its impact on working students' internship experiences.

**Keywords:** *Internship readiness, qualitative scale development, working students*

## **Introduction**

Internship readiness is the capability to translate classroom learning into workplace performance, exhibit professional conduct, and flexibly meet evolving internship demands (Cabrera, 2020; Sul-toni et al., 2022). Working students, those enrolled in coursework while holding part-time jobs, face distinctive time and energy constraints that intensify inter-role conflict and stress (Almadani et al., 2024). Balancing classes, paid work, and internship tasks demands a level of adaptability not typically required of full-time students (Misiran et al., 2013). Although more than two-thirds of undergraduates now work while studying (HEPI, 2024), readiness is still checked with broad attribute lists that ignore dual-role realities (Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015).

Popular instruments such as the Student Work Readiness Scale and the Work Readiness Assessment Tool emphasize competencies like time management and communication but seldom test

how those skills are enacted while juggling study and paid work (Sultoni et al., 2022; Cabrera, 2020). Likewise, generic workplace-readiness frameworks lack constructs tailored to internship performance in the context of simultaneous work and study (Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015).

The present study fills this gap by qualitatively generating items for an Internship Readiness Scale for working students. Five theoretically informed constructs, which are (a) Work Attitude, (b) Adaptability, (c) Technical Skills, (d) Communication and Teamwork, and (e) Career Preparedness, guided the data collection and analysis (Misiran et al., 2013; Cabrera, 2020). These constructs rest on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), and Organizational Socialization Theory (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

As the proportion of employed undergraduates continues to rise, clarifying what “ready” means for this population benefits students, universities, and employers alike (Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015). Thus, this qualitative phase establishes an evidence-based foundation for a context-specific measurement tool and targeted supports to enhance working student internship outcomes.

### **Literature Review**

Internship-readiness scholarship converges on three theoretical strands, which are self-regulation, experiential learning, and workplace assimilation, yet existing instruments seldom reflect the compounded demands on students who must earn wages while studying. Social Cognitive Theory positions self-efficacy as the engine of motivated action in novel roles (Bandura, 1986), Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle frames internships as iterative loops that convert concrete tasks into abstract competence and back again, accelerating skill acquisition (Kolb, 1984), while organizational-socialization studies highlight mentorship, information seeking and feedback as levers of newcomer adjustment (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011).

#### ***Self-Regulation***

A recent study found that higher levels of self-regulation were associated with greater confidence and perceived competence in employment-relevant tasks, supporting the role of self-efficacy in integrating education with work experiences (Esparcia & Fajardo, 2025). Consequently, scale items assessing Work Attitude and Career Preparedness should capture confidence in juggling simultaneous academic and occupational tasks, which are behavioral characteristics of many employed undergraduates in the Philippines and the broader ASEAN region.

Employability is widely regarded as a key indicator of educational system effectiveness in preparing students for workforce participation. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2025), individuals with higher levels of educational attainment exhibit a greater likelihood of employment, with evidence indicating that students who learn from work experiences, such as part-time employment, transition more smoothly from education to employment.

#### ***Experiential Learning***

Experiential-learning research further shows that well-structured internships guide students through cycles of experience, reflection, abstraction, and experimentation, yielding measurable gains in adaptability and domain-specific techniques (Eraut, 2004). Philippine case studies have indicated that rotating across workstations and using just-in-time digital resources enhance skill transfer for working interns (Cabrera, 2020), underscoring the need to embed Adaptability and Technical Skills items that probe tool-based adjustment and rapid learning.

#### ***Workplace Assimilation***

Workplace assimilation literature confirms that mentorship quality, peer acceptance, and structured feedback accelerate social integration (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Proactive behaviors such as collaborative problem-solving and conflict navigation mirror the tactics most predictive of newcomer success. Yet existing readiness measures remain largely generic. The Student Work Readiness Scale, normed on traditional full-time students, validates broad employability constructs but overlooks dual-role pressures (Sultoni et al., 2022).

### ***Gaps in Existing Measures***

Misiran et al.'s Internship Readiness Scale predates Industry 4.0 competence demands and omits the work–study interface (Misiran et al., 2013). Employer audits reinforce this mismatch; the National Association of Colleges and Employers Job Outlook 2025 survey records persistent gaps in communication, critical thinking, and professionalism between graduates and recruiters (NACE, 2025), pointing to the need for finer-grained, behavior-anchored metrics.

### ***Evolving Workforce Demands***

Labor-market analyses emphasize adaptability as a strategic capability in digitally transformed workplaces; Industry 4.0 roadmaps have highlighted flexibility, digital agility, and rapid learning as critical behavioral indicators (Sony & Mekoth, 2022). Working students now represent a sizeable and growing demographic; more than half of university students in the United Kingdom and comparable proportions in Southeast Asia combine full-time study with an average of 14–16 hours of paid work per week (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2025). Philippine reports link such employment not only to financial necessity, time compression, and heightened stress, but also to accelerated real-world competence (TeamAsia, 2023).

### ***Rationale for Scale Development***

Despite strong theoretical foundations and mounting empirical evidence, no published instrument has simultaneously targeted internship contexts, isolated working-student challenges, and grounded items in a multi-theory synthesis. The forthcoming Internship Readiness Scale for Working Students addresses this gap by translating empirically derived themes into behavior-anchored items across five theorized constructs. This context-specific metric promises a sharper diagnostic for educators, employers, and researchers seeking to support a growing, yet understudied, demographic.

### ***Research Objectives***

The study aimed to develop a qualitative foundation for an Internship Readiness Scale tailored to working students. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Define the construct of internship readiness for working students based on established theoretical frameworks.
2. Identify key behaviors and experiences that characterize readiness across the dimensions of Work Attitude, Adaptability, Technical Skills, Communication and Teamwork, and Career Preparedness through thematic analysis.
3. Develop an initial pool of behavior-based scale items grounded in participants' narratives.

### ***Methodology***

A qualitative descriptive design, grounded in best practices for scale development, guided the item-generation phase of this study. Interview data were interpreted through Braun and Clarke's six-phase reflexive thematic analysis, enabling systematic identification of patterned meaning while preserving researcher reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The overall process adhered to DeVellis's framework for scale construction, ensuring clear domain definition, rigorous item creation, and explicit theory alignment across the five a-priori constructs of internship readiness—Work Attitude, Adaptability, Technical Skills, Communication and Teamwork, and Career Preparedness (DeVellis, 2017).

The study was conducted across academic institutions in Cebu that offer internship programs and diverse workplace settings where student internships occur. This dual-environment approach captured both preparatory and practical aspects of internship readiness. The interviews were held in private offices, which ensured a quiet and comfortable setting for open and candid conversations where the concepts within this study could be discussed without hesitation. Informed consent to ensure voluntary participation and confidentiality was obtained from every participant before the interviews. Also, key interviewees were contacted personally and asked to participate in the data collection process to deepen and enhance the types of data collected for this study.

Purposive sampling targeted stakeholders with direct internship experience: five working students who had completed or were completing an internship while holding part-time employment, one internship program manager, and one academic instructor who had coordinated internship courses within the previous two academic years. Inclusion required documented involvement in student internships, and sampling continued until two consecutive transcripts produced no new codes, signaling thematic saturation at the seventh interview.

A structured interview guide served as the primary instrument. Questions were anchored to the study's five constructs and tailored for each respondent group to elicit concrete, experience-rich narratives—for example, "How do you handle feedback or criticism from supervisors or colleagues?" for Work Attitude and "How do you adjust to new work environments and expectations?" for Adaptability. The guide's wording drew explicitly on Social Cognitive, Experiential Learning, and Organizational Socialization theories to maintain conceptual coherence during data collection.

After informed consent was obtained, face-to-face interviews of 10–30 minutes were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Interviewers employed neutral prompts to clarify responses without leading participants, and field notes captured contextual observations immediately following each session.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's reflexive procedure: familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme review, theme definition, and report production. Initial coding used five constructs as deductive categories, remaining open to inductive sub-themes. The researchers independently coded a subset of transcripts and compared interpretations, reconciling discrepancies to enhance dependability. A detailed audit trail showed coding rules, analytic memos, and theme refinements.

Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of perspectives across students, a former hotel manager, and an internship coordinator, as well as iterative peer debriefing during analysis. Dependability and confirmability were supported by the coding audit trail and reflexive memos, whereas thick descriptions of participant roles and research settings enhanced transferability by helping readers judge relevance to their own contexts.

The study observed institutional ethical guidelines for human subjects research. Participants received written explanations of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality safeguards, and each signed an informed-consent form before data collection. They could withdraw at any time without consequence. Audio files and transcripts were stored on Google Drive and accessible only to the research team, and interviews were scheduled at convenient times to minimize burden and ensure respectful, non-coercive engagement.

## Research Findings

### **Construct 1: Work Attitude**

This construct reflects the internalized values, motivations, and professional behaviors that guided students' conduct in the internship setting. This encompassed students' ability to harmonize their internship responsibilities with academic or employment obligations through proactive engagement, ethical alignment, and disciplined time management. This was aligned with Cabrera (2020), who emphasized that work readiness is grounded in self-regulation and purpose-driven effort.

**Theme 1: Proactive Work Ethic.** The theme, proactive work ethic, aligns closely with Work Attitude. It transcends basic task completion; it reflects a student's ownership of their role and willingness to address unanticipated challenges. The act of "going beyond" also accelerates skill acquisition, as students engage with tasks outside their comfort zone, mirroring Cabrera's (2020) assertion that proactive behaviors bridge academic preparedness and workplace demands.

*My cooperating teacher was unexpectedly absent for a few days due to an emergency. I volunteered to take on extra responsibilities, including creating and delivering lesson plans, managing classroom activities, and communicating with parents. I even created a short video lesson for a student who was absent long-term. I spent extra hours preparing and making sure the students' learning was not interrupted. My cooperating teacher was very grateful, and it was a great opportunity to demonstrate my ability to handle unexpected challenges and take initiative. Informant C*

**Theme 2: Feedback-driven Motivation.** This theme aligns closely with Work Attitude. It reveals a growth-oriented mindset where criticism is reframed as a roadmap for improvement. Students who internalize feedback (e.g., Informant B's focus on gaining "knowledge and skills") exhibit emotional resilience, separating personal identity from professional critique. This theme aligns with Steelman et al. (2004), who argued that constructive feedback environments enhance job performance by fostering adaptability.

*So, for me, feedback is more like a motivation for me to do well because if the feedback comes from my supervisors or any colleagues, it helps me gain more knowledge and skills.* Informant B

**Theme 3: Ethical and Goal-oriented Mindset.** The theme, ethical and goal-oriented mindset, aligns closely with Work Attitude. An ethical mindset ensures students prioritize integrity over expediency, as seen in Informant F's emphasis on workplace "dos and don'ts." This theme highlights the tension between academic idealism and workplace pragmatism. By aligning tasks with career aspirations, students maximize the internship's Return on Investment, a practice underscored by Seibert et al. (2001) in their work on career capital.

*But students must know the do's and don'ts in the work area, such as . . . they have to keep things, or their confidential information to themselves, and it should not come out of the office. And also, with their colleagues, they have to respect or be polite to their colleagues, especially to the seniors, because since you're just an intern, you are basically considered the lowest member in the office. Which means like, maybe you'll be given tasks, and some interns might refuse because they think they're not there for that. But they have to understand that they're not just there to do paperwork or anything. They're there to learn, and that includes other learnings aside from document-related or office-related jobs.* Informant F

**Theme 4: Professional Discipline.** This theme also aligns closely with Work Attitude. Professional discipline highlights a working student intern's consistent adherence to workplace norms, schedules, and ethical standards as part of their work attitude. Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, this theme emphasizes self-regulation and responsibility in managing one's tasks and time (Bandura, 1986).

*I also make sure to observe the way that other teachers and staff members handle different situations. I know that it is very important to maintain student confidentiality, so I am always very careful with any student information. I also make sure to arrive on time and follow all school-wide schedules.* Informant C

## **Construct 2: Adaptability**

This construct refers to a student's ability to effectively respond to changes in workplace demands, acclimate to different organizational cultures, and sustain/modify performance under shifting circumstances. As noted by Rayner and Papakonstantinou (2015), adaptability is one of the core dispositions that relate to workplace preparedness and allows students to remain functional and calm during situations of uncertainty.

**Theme 1: Workplace Integration.** This theme aligns closely with Adaptability. This theme emphasizes social learning, where students mimic colleagues' behaviors to assimilate smoothly. Successful integration reduces the "newcomer anxiety" described by Loughlin and Priyadarshini (2021), fostering a sense of belonging and reducing the risk of early disengagement.

*But I believe to support with them in adaptability in each environment of the resort. So it's very important for them to communicate at the same time, to engage to the other staffs or to each other. So in order for them to adopt the work and they could also ask for help at the same time. Because they could really feel already they're belong. Feel already, um, they are belong.* Informant A

**Theme 2: Task Strategy.** This theme also aligns closely with Adaptability. Task strategy involves cognitive chunking, breaking complex projects into manageable units. This theme highlights executive functioning skills, such as planning and delegation, which are transferable across roles. By deconstructing tasks, students reduce feeling overwhelmed and create measurable milestones, a practice linked to higher self-efficacy in Parker et al.'s (2006) proactive behavior framework.

*I faced a challenging project that required a lot of research. I tackled it by breaking it down into smaller tasks and seeking help when needed.* Informant G

**Theme 3: Learning by Observation.** This theme aligns closely with Adaptability. Learning by observation refers to a working student intern's reliance on watching and modeling others to acquire new skills and behaviors. This reflects Bandura's concept of vicarious learning, where observing experienced colleagues provides a shortcut to mastery (Bandura, 1986). Consistent with Experiential Learning Theory, working student interns often begin in a peripheral role, quietly absorbing how tasks are done before attempting them (Kolb, 1984).

*Observing experienced teachers and learning from their techniques, I also believe that reflecting on my own teaching practices is crucial for growth. I regularly evaluate my lessons and identify areas where I can improve.* Informant C

**Theme 4: Workplace Observation.** Workplace observation aligns closely with Adaptability. Workplace observation extends beyond task learning to include scanning the organizational environment and culture to inform one's behavior. This theme is rooted in Organizational Socialization Theory, which posits that newcomers internalize workplace norms by watching how things are done around them. This contextual awareness helps them adjust their conduct to fit the company culture (Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015).

*I adapt by staying open-minded and observing how things work. It helps me blend in and understand expectations better.* Informant G

**Theme 5: Initiative for Adjustment.** This theme aligns closely with Adaptability. Initiative for adjustment captures how proactive working student interns are in making personal changes and seeking opportunities to better fit into their roles. Rather than waiting to be directed, interns exhibiting this theme take agentic steps to improve and adapt, reflecting career adaptability in responding to changing work demands (Savickas, 2005). They actively seek feedback and set learning goals to close gaps in their performance, demonstrating self-regulated learning in a workplace context (Zimmerman, 2000).

*When I started, I realized I was a bit weak in practical skills like time management and some specific software tools. I knew I had to step up my game.* Informant G

**Theme 6: Tool-based Adaptation.** This theme aligns closely with Adaptability. Tool-based adaptation refers to interns leveraging tools and technology to facilitate learning and performance in the internship. This theme highlights resourcefulness and aligns with the emphasis on the purposeful integration of technology to support learning and work performance (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

*From my coursework, I've applied several technical skills. I've utilized learning management systems (LMS) like Google Classroom to post assignments, share resources, and communicate with students and parents. I've also used presentation software like PowerPoint and Google Slides to create engaging lessons.* Informant C

**Theme 7: Task Rotation Flexibility.** Task rotation flexibility captures a working student intern's willingness and ability to switch between various tasks or roles and still maintain performance. It reflects adaptability through exposure to diverse experiences, as engaging in task rotation allows individuals to develop flexibility, teamwork, and efficiency when responding to changing work demands (Campion et al., 1994).

*During a parent-teacher conference week, there were multiple teachers that needed to rearrange the classrooms for presentations. My cooperating teacher and I worked with other teachers to move desks, arrange displays, and set up presentation areas. By working as a team, we were able to complete the task quickly and efficiently.* Informant C

**Theme 8: Experience-driven Adjustment.** This theme is also aligned closely with Adaptability. Experience-driven adjustment emphasizes how working student interns learn and refine their approach through direct experience and reflection. This theme is grounded in reflective practice, which highlights how individuals improve their performance by critically examining their actions and learning from experience to support continuous development (Schön, 1992).

*I also believe that reflecting on my own teaching practices is crucial for growth. I regularly evaluate my lessons and identify areas where I can improve.* Informant C

**Theme 9: Silent Adaptation.** Silent adaptation also aligns closely with Adaptability. Silent adaptation describes a more covert form of adjusting, where interns adapt to challenges without overtly seeking help or drawing attention to their struggles. Instead, they quietly observe, self-correct, and conform to expectations on their own. This behavior can be understood through the lens of both Social Cognitive Theory, as interns rely on observational learning and self-regulation, and Organizational Socialization Theory, as some newcomers prefer passive strategies like observation rather than overactive inquiry to assimilate into the workplace.

*I believe adaptability is key. When entering a new environment, I prioritize active observation and listening. I pay close attention to the school's culture, the classroom routines, and the expectations of my cooperating teacher.* Informant C

### **Construct 3: Technical Skills**

This construct denotes the actual abilities and task-specific abilities needed by students to be successful interns. This domain emphasizes the move from academic understanding to workplace practice through the application of practical skills, education protocol, and motivation for improvement. As Šimićević and Štetić (2017) argue, experiential learning not only reinforces academic foundations but also cultivates job-specific skills essential for real-world performance.

**Theme 1: Skill Application.** This theme aligns closely with Technical Skills. Skill application bridges theory-practice gaps. For example, using LMS platforms (Informant C) requires adapting classroom training to workplace constraints (e.g., time, resources). This theme underscores the importance of contextual adaptability, modifying academic knowledge to fit real-world scenarios, a competency that Šimićević and Štetić (2017) identify as critical for internship success.

*From my coursework, I've applied several technical skills. I've utilized learning management systems (LMS) like Google Classroom to post assignments, share resources, and communicate with students and parents. I've also used presentation software like PowerPoint and Google Slides to create engaging lessons.* Informant C

**Theme 2: Procedural Competence.** Procedural competence also aligns closely with Technical Skills. Procedural competence is rooted in precision and compliance. By "asking questions and reviewing protocols" (Informant G), students minimize errors and demonstrate respect for organizational hierarchies. This theme reflects procedural mindfulness, where attention to detail builds credibility and reduces friction in team workflows.

*I make it a point to read up on company protocols and ask questions if I'm unsure. It's key to staying on track.* Informant G

**Theme 3: Self-Improvement.** This theme is also aligned closely with Technical Skills. Self-improvement hinges on self-auditing, identifying gaps (e.g., Informant E's "need to improve practical skills") and pursuing targeted growth. This theme embodies lifelong learning, where humility and curiosity drive students to seek mentorship or upskill independently, aligning with Marsick and Watkins' (2015) model of informal workplace learning.

*I recognize my need to improve practical skills like time management and software use.* Informant E

**Theme 4: Procedural Modeling.** Procedural modeling aligns closely with Technical Skills. Procedural modeling in the internship context refers to a working student intern's capacity to learn and execute tasks by following established procedures or by emulating step-by-step demonstrations. This aligns with Bandura's (1986) concept of modeling in Social Cognitive Theory, as well as Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, where observation and practice lead to skill acquisition.

*I make a point of becoming very familiar with all school policies and procedures. I always ask my cooperating teacher for clarification on anything I am unsure of. I also make sure to observe the way that other teachers and staff members handle different situations. I know that it is very important to maintain student confidentiality, so I am always very careful with any student information. I also make sure to arrive on time and follow all school-wide schedules.* Informant C

#### **Construct 4: Communication and Teamwork**

This construct refers to the interpersonal competencies required for successful collaboration, conflict resolution, and professional interaction within the workplace. Under this construct, students demonstrate the ability to communicate and cooperate in an open, respectful, and purposeful manner while working as active members in a team. Cabrera (2020) highlighted that the ability to articulate ideas in understandable language, conducting discussions regarding roles and responsibilities, and the ability to demonstrate flexibility towards both interpersonal relationships and organizational design are key requirements for working in a readiness posture.

**Theme 1: Collaborative Problem-Solving.** This theme aligns closely with Communication and Teamwork. Collaborative problem-solving leverages collective intelligence. Informant C's teamwork ("complete[d] the task quickly") illustrates synergy, with diverse perspectives converging to enhance efficiency. This theme mirrors Mohanty and Mohanty's (2018) findings that collaborative environments reduce individual cognitive load and foster innovation through idea cross-pollination.

*During a parent-teacher conference week, there were multiple teachers that needed to rearrange the classrooms for presentations. My cooperating teacher and I worked with other teachers to move desks, arrange displays, and set up presentation areas. By working as a team, we were able to complete the task quickly and efficiently.* Informant C

**Theme 2: Feedback and Conflict Management.** Feedback and conflict management aligns closely with Communication and Teamwork. Conflict management is solution-focused, not avoidant. Informant G's approach ("address it directly but calmly") reflects emotional intelligence, balancing assertiveness with empathy. This aligns with Bucăța and Rizescu's (2017) emphasis on transactional communication, where clarity and respect resolve disputes while preserving relationships.

*If there's a conflict, I address it directly but calmly. Open discussions clear things up.* Informant G

**Theme 3: Transparent Communication.** Transparent communication is closely aligned with Communication and Teamwork. Transparent communication refers to open, honest, and frequent information-sharing by working student interns within their teams and with supervisors. This theme underscores the importance of clarity and proactivity in communication as a means of building trust and ensuring effective teamwork. It resonates with Organizational Socialization Theory, which highlights that open communication channels help newcomers integrate and "learn the ropes" of interpersonal dynamics.

*I prioritize open, clear, and professional communication. With my cooperating teacher, I maintain regular communication through daily check-ins, weekly planning meetings, and email. I provide updates on student progress, discuss lesson plans, and seek feedback. I also communicate proactively, letting them know of any potential issues or concerns. With other teachers and staff, I strive to be friendly, approachable, and respectful.* Informant C

#### **Construct 5: Career Preparedness**

This construct refers to a student's ability to transition from academic environments to working life by aligning their desire, ability, and attitude towards potential career paths. This principle captures a student's ability for self-discovery, goal setting, and future-oriented planning, which form the core of managing dynamic workplace demands. Misiran et al. (2013) posited that internship opportunities are a crossroads where students must balance their employability and establish their vocational goals.

**Theme 1: Lifelong Learning.** Lifelong learning aligns closely with Career Preparedness. Lifelong learning is self-directed and iterative. Informant E's use of YouTube tutorials exemplifies informal, just-in-time learning, which Mercader et al. (2021) argued is essential in rapidly evolving industries. This theme highlights resourcefulness, students leveraging free or accessible tools to stay competitive.

*Steps? Watch YouTube, learn something, do not stop learning because learning never stop[s].* Informant E

**Theme 2: Self-Discovery.** This theme aligns closely with Career Preparedness. Self-discovery through internships is a reflective process. Informant G's realization ("identify what I enjoy") underscores internships as identity workspaces, where students test career hypotheses and

recalibrate goals. This aligns with DiBenedetto and Willis' (2020) career readiness model, which prioritizes self-awareness as a foundation for professional growth.

*My internship has helped me identify what I enjoy and need to work on for my future career. Informant G*

### **Internship Readiness Scale for Working Students Item List**

Table 1 presents the item list for the Internship Readiness Scale for Working Students.

**Table 1** Item List

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Source</b>
Work Attitude	I take initiative in tasks even when they are not part of my assigned responsibilities	Informants C, D, G
	I willingly take on extra work when I see a need to	Informants C, D, G
	I volunteer to lead or support projects without being asked	Informants C, D, G
	I reflect on feedback to improve how I work	Informants A, B, C, D, F, G
	I communicate openly to clarify and apply feedback	Informants B, C, G
	I act respectfully and follow appropriate workplace behavior	Informants C, D, F
	I set personal goals that help me stay focused at work	Informants B, C, D, E
	I arrive on time or earlier than scheduled	Informants C, F, E
	I finish my tasks accurately and without supervision	Informants B, C, D
Adaptability	I take the lead in managing different tasks to meet deadlines	Informants B, C, D
	I break down complex tasks into smaller, manageable parts	Informants B, C, G
	I adjust my strategy when I face tasks that are new or unexpected	Informants B, C, D
	I adapt my work habits when situations change, even without being told	Informants A, B, C
	I rotate between different roles depending on what the task requires	Informants B, C, E
	I try different strategies when completing unfamiliar tasks	Informants B, C, D
	I use planners or digital tools to manage and adapt my workload	Informants A, C, G
	I observe others and adjust my behavior to fit a work setting	Informants A, C, G
	I ask for help when needed to better connect and work with others	Informants A, C, E
Technical Skills	I apply software and tools learned in school to complete tasks or responsibilities	Informants A, C, G
	I use knowledge from my classes to solve problems I encounter in a work situation	Informants C, D, E
	I follow standard operating procedures when performing tasks	Informants B, C, D, E, G
	I document procedures so I can remember how to do them later	Informants C, D, G
	I identify technical areas where I need to improve	Informants B, C, G
	I practice new skills until I can perform them correctly	Informants C, G, F
	I observe experienced workers to improve task performance	Informants A, C, D
Communication and Teamwork	I work with those I collaborate with to complete tasks efficiently	Informants B, C, D, G
	I communicate casually with others I work with to build stronger team relationships	Informants A, C, G
	I make sure responsibilities are shared fairly when working on group tasks	Informants B, C, F
	I resolve misunderstandings calmly and professionally	Informants B, C, D, G
	I help mediate misunderstandings between others I work with when needed	Informants B, C, D
	I give regular updates to people in charge of my progress and tasks	Informants B, C, G
	I ask for clarification when instructions are unclear to avoid mistakes	Informants A, C, E
Career Preparedness	I pursue learning opportunities beyond my tasks	Informants C, D, E, F, G
	I attend training sessions and seminars	Informants D, E, G
	I volunteer for additional responsibilities to grow my skills	Informants C, D, G
	I evaluate my performance regularly to identify areas for improvement	Informants B, C, F
	I am clear about the career path I want to pursue	Informants B, C, E
	I clarify my professional strengths and goals	Informants C, E, F
	I align my career goals with expectations in the field I aim to enter	Informants C, E, G
	I communicate my career goals with mentors or people in charge	Informants B, C, G
I use my experience to shape the direction of my future career	Informants C, D, E, G	

It includes 41 behavior-anchored statements grouped under five core constructs: Work Attitude, Adaptability, Technical Skills, Communication and Teamwork, and Career Preparedness. Each item reflects specific behaviors and competencies identified through interviews with working students, internship managers, and academic instructors. The items are designed to assess the key attributes essential for internship success, such as initiative, adaptability to tasks, application of technical skills, effective communication, and career planning.

The table includes references to the sources that anchor each item, ensuring that the behaviors are supported by the transcripts from the respondents. The items also include qualitative evidence from informants to substantiate the relevance and applicability of the behaviors. By assessing students across these constructs, the scale is intended to help educators, employers, and career counselors identify areas for improvement and tailor interventions to better prepare students for internships and their professional careers.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study identified twenty-two sub-themes across five constructs, shedding light on how working students balance academics, employment, and internship responsibilities. These themes form the empirical foundation of the Internship Readiness Scale for Working Students, showing that readiness emerges from self-regulation, experiential learning, and workplace assimilation.

Work Attitude included four sub-themes, emphasizing proactive engagement and responsibility-driven behaviors. Students who volunteered, embraced feedback, and aligned actions with career goals demonstrated Bandura's (1986) idea that motivation stems from belief in one's ability to meet demands. These insights shaped items assessing initiative, responsibility, and self-improvement. Adaptability, the most prominent construct with nine sub-themes, reflects Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle. Students learned through observation, experimentation, and strategy adjustment in the workplace, informing items focused on cognitive flexibility and problem-solving.

Technical Skills included four sub-themes highlighting procedural knowledge, digital tools, and self-improvement. These findings show how students apply academic learning in real-world settings, guiding items assessing procedural competence and job-relevant techniques. Communication and Teamwork incorporated three sub-themes focused on collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution, and communication, aligning with Organizational Socialization Theory. Items under this construct reflect dialogic communication, shared responsibility, and conflict management. Career Preparedness consisted of two sub-themes: Lifelong Learning and Self-Discovery. These themes show how students use internships for career exploration, aligning with career capital and self-directed growth. Its items assess planning, reflective evaluation, and career goal alignment.

Together, these findings underscored that internship readiness for working students is multidimensional and behavior-based, deeply rooted in their lived experiences shaped by multiple role obligations. Each sub-theme directly informed the development of the 41-item behavior-anchored scale, ensuring that the instrument is grounded in empirical evidence rather than abstract competency lists. By mapping the qualitative insights back to the three theoretical frameworks, the scale combines conceptual rigor with contextual relevance, addressing a clear gap in internship readiness assessment.

In conclusion, the Internship Readiness Scale is a diagnostic tool that captures the complexities of students balancing academic requirements, paid work, and internship duties. Its behavior-anchored items provide actionable indicators for educators, internship coordinators, and employers, enabling tailoring of training, mentoring, and program design. As educational institutions continue to assist a growing number of working students, this scale offers a structured approach to supporting their successful transition into professional environments, promoting long-term career readiness.

### **Implication and Contributions**

Implementing this scale across universities and industry partners can sharpen selection criteria and personalize mentorship, recognizing paid employment as a legitimate area of skill formation.

Aggregated scale data enables institutions to benchmark program effectiveness and help employers design targeted training. Wider adoption may yield smoother internship experiences, stronger on-the-job performance, and a more seamless transition of working students into professional workforces.

This study pioneers a focused qualitative exploration of internship readiness among students who simultaneously maintain paid employment. By capturing the real-world strategies these individuals use to juggle coursework and workplace demands, the study documents a collection of observable behaviors that had previously been described anecdotally by the interviewees. Mapping these behaviors onto five theoretically grounded constructs offers scholars a structured lens for analyzing how work responsibilities interact with academic development, thereby advancing current models of work-readiness beyond the traditional full-time student context.

The resulting 41-item pool furnishes internship coordinators and career counsellors with a practical diagnostic for identifying readiness gaps and tailoring interventions to students who split their time between campus and paid roles. Because each item is behavior-anchored, supervisors can integrate the scale into rotation planning and mentoring conversations, while universities may embed it in workshops to personalize coaching. Over time, wider adoption could translate into smoother internship experiences, stronger on-the-job performances, and a more seamless transition of working students into professional workforces.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

The qualitative sample consisted of five working students, one manager, and one instructor. This limited scope constrains both the breadth and the transferability of the findings. Conducting comparable studies in other Philippine regions or across ASEAN economies could reveal additional context-specific sub-themes. Reliance on self-reported narratives also introduces the risk of bias. Incorporating observational field notes in future work would help triangulate behavioral claims and mitigate this bias. Although the study employed an audit trail and peer-coding to enhance dependability, member-checking was omitted to preserve participant anonymity. Implementing structured respondent validation in subsequent research would further strengthen credibility.

Future research may begin with an expert review to assess item relevance and retain only statements with substantial agreement. A large, multi-institutional sample could then be used to conduct Exploratory Factor Analysis, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis, to establish and validate the scale's structure. Reliability and internal consistency should be examined to ensure stable measurement, while discriminant validity may be tested using the Fornell–Larcker criterion to confirm that each construct represents a distinct dimension of internship readiness.

### **Author Contributions.**

**John Ezekiel S. Tumalak:** Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, supervision, validation, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing; **Cielo M. Narca:** Data curation, investigation, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing; **Nino Ryan P. Dela Cruz:** Data curation, investigation, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing; **Laurence C. Duran:** Data curation, investigation, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing.

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