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Exploratory study on the impact of internship experiences on Critical Core Skills (CCS)

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study investigates the impact of internship experiences on the development of Critical Core Skills (CCS) among tertiary students in Singapore, with a focus on both STEM and non-STEM disciplines. As workforce demands shift towards greater emphasis on soft skills, the study aims to assess whether internships significantly enhance students' perceived competencies in adaptability, communication, problem-solving, and other essential skills as outlined by SkillsFuture Singapore. Utilizing a mixed-method sequential explanatory design, the research involved 134 students from four academic schools who completed self-assessment surveys before and after their internship programs. Quantitative analyses, including paired sample t-tests and ANOVA, examined changes in 16 CCS competencies, while correlation analyses linked perceived skill importance to observed growth. Qualitative data from post-internship focus group discussions with selected students provided deeper insights into key enablers of soft skills development.

Findings revealed significant improvements in CCS, particularly among STEM students who initially reported lower self-assessments of soft skills. Perceived skill relevance to internship tasks strongly correlated with skill development, notably in adaptability, communication, and transdisciplinary thinking. Interestingly, dimensions such as digital fluency and global perspective showed weaker correlations, suggesting underutilization in internship settings. Four enablers—autonomy and choice, relevance of tasks, broad exposure, and supportive workplace culture—were identified as critical drivers of growth through qualitative analysis. The study underscores the vital role of experiential learning in bridging the gap between academic preparation and workforce expectations. It advocates for more intentional internship designs that integrate task relevance and supportive environments to foster holistic development. These insights offer valuable implications for educators, policymakers, and industry partners aiming to optimize internship programs to better prepare graduates for the evolving demands of the modern workplace.

Keywords: Critical Core Skills, Workplace Learning, Softskills Development, On the Job Training