

From Theory to Practice: A Reflective Internship Account in International Education Consultancy

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ABSTRAK

Pengalaman magang telah diakui sebagai alat penting dalam memfasilitasi transisi antara pendidikan akademis dan praktik profesional, tetapi literatur tentang transisi tersebut masih terbatas, khususnya mengenai magang untuk konsultan pendidikan internasional di Asia Tenggara. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana pengetahuan akademis tentang manajemen bisnis ditransfer ke praktik profesional, bagaimana isu-isu utama yang dihadapi selama magang dikelola secara reflektif, dan apa pengaruh pengalaman ini terhadap pembentukan identitas profesional dan orientasi karir. Metodologi penelitian penyelidikan reflektif diadopsi, menggunakan wawasan yang diperoleh dari program magang sepuluh bulan peneliti di MoveAbroad Indonesia di Jakarta dari Maret 2025 hingga Januari 2026, menggunakan kerangka kerja pembelajaran pengalaman yang dimodifikasi oleh Morris (2020) dan siklus pembelajaran reflektif Schon (seperti yang dikutip dalam Pegg, 2014) yang terdiri dari refleksi-dalam-tindakan dan refleksi-atas-tindakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa refleksi atas pengalaman profesional memainkan peran penting dalam meningkatkan proses penerjemahan pengetahuan akademis menjadi keterampilan. Domain yang terbukti paling produktif untuk pembelajaran adalah domain yang terkait dengan pemasaran B2B berdasarkan CRM, bimbingan mahasiswa, dan kerja tim multikultural. Oleh karena itu, jelas bahwa program magang, jika dilakukan secara reflektif, dapat secara efisien berfungsi sebagai jembatan antara persiapan akademis dan kesiapan profesional, serta mendorong pengembangan identitas profesional.

Kata Kunci: *Magang, Praktik Reflektif, Pembelajaran Berbasis Pengalaman, Pendidikan Internasional, Pengembangan Profesional.*

ABSTRACT

Internship experiences have been acknowledged as essential tools in facilitating transitions between academic education and professional practice, but there is limited literature on such transitions, specifically concerning internships for international education consultancy in Southeast Asia. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how academic knowledge about business management was transferred to professional practice, how major issues encountered during the internship were managed reflectively, and what effect this experience had on shaping professional identity and career orientation. A reflective inquiry research methodology was adopted, using insights derived from the researcher's ten-month internship program at MoveAbroad Indonesia in Jakarta from March 2025 to January 2026, using Morris's (2020) modified framework of experiential learning and Schon's (as cited in Pegg, 2014) reflective learning cycle comprising reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The results have shown that reflection on professional experience plays a vital role in enhancing the process of translating academic knowledge into skills. The domains found to be most productive for learning were those associated with B2B marketing based on CRM, student advising, and multicultural team working. Therefore, it is evident that internship programs, when conducted reflectively, can efficiently serve as bridges between academic preparation and professional preparedness, as well as promote the development of professional identity.

Keywords: *Internship, Reflective Practice, Experiential Learning, International Education, Professional Development.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest problems in relation to business management graduates has been the gaps that exist between what is taught in school and what is needed at work in regard to skills and knowledge acquisition. While universities provide students with theoretical perspectives, models,

and concepts, the disconnect between the classroom and the job environment has been a well-documented phenomenon in higher education literature. Internships have been one of the most successful approaches in addressing this issue and providing students with structured learning opportunities for applying their theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. Jackson and Tomlinson (2022) indicate that graduates who participate in work-integrated learning (WIL) activities always feel better prepared for the working world and align themselves better with the academic knowledge and job requirements compared to those who lack such WIL experience. Similarly, Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright (2017) indicate that such organizational skills as teamwork, communication, and adaptive judgment are developed not only through classroom instruction but also through active participation in the workplace. The importance of experiential learning outside the classroom, which is the focus of this study, has been officially recognized in the Merdeka BelajarKampus Merdeka policy that states the use of experiential learning as an essential part of the undergraduate study programs across disciplines (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020).

One such professional environment of internship-based learning is the international education consultancy market, which is a highly dynamic and under-studied profession. As the swiftly moving organizational landscapes created by this demand are provoking interns to learn not only technical knowledge but also interpersonal agility at an unprecedented rate, as the demand has risen in the last several years, as noted by the OECD (2023) data. In a systematic review of international internship studies, Di Pietro (2022) confirms that professionally immersive placements are much more likely to generate strong outcomes in terms of skill development than shorter or less integrated forms of work experience, especially in areas such as intercultural communication, adaptive problem-solving, and professional self-efficacy. Though this is an increasing evidence base, little research studies how the business management students in Indonesian higher education negotiate the transition into international education consultancy, in particular, a professional environment that combines B2B marketing, student recruitment, and client-facing consultation in such a way that makes simultaneous and qualitatively distinct demands on the developing professional.

There is very little research that has been conducted with respect to reflective internship accounts of students who have been working at the intersection of the B2B outreach, CRM based marketing, and international education consultation in the Southeast Asian context. The bulk of available WIL studies is done based on quantitative results of the employability rate or graduate salary data, but not the qualitative, reflective aspects of the learning experience itself. In this way, this paper seeks to fill that gap by reflectively critiquing a ten-month professional internship experience with MoveAbroad Indonesia, an international education and migration consultancy based in Melbourne, Australia, in 1995 and operating in Jakarta through its branch office at Menara Astra, Central Jakarta. The article has three aims that include: to research how academic management knowledge of business was translated to professional practice, to identify what were the main challenges that were encountered and how they were negotiated in a reflective manner, and to understand how the experience at the internship shaped the way that the professional identity and professional career clarity of the author was formed. Hopefully, the findings of this article will help contribute to the growing body of literature on the value of reflective internship experience in higher education contexts in South East Asia, and will serve as useful information to students,

universities and industry partners who might want to make the most of the value of work-integrated learning experiences.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method of a qualitative reflective inquiry is used in the article to explore the experience of a professional internship with the organization MoveAbroad Indonesia, Jakarta. This study population is one embedded case where the author takes the role of an intern-practitioner in a ten-month professional placement between March 2025 and January 2026 consistent with the established case-based methodologies in internship and work-integrated learning research in the social and behavioral sciences. The sampling method that was applied was purposive self-selection since the internship was taken as a formal academic requirement of the Study Completion Program (SCP) to the Bachelor of Business Management degree in Nusa Putra University, Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia.

The main research methods to be used in this study were systematic reflective observation of professional activities, problems, and results throughout the internship period, with the help of current professional records, including outreach logs that were recorded using the NeoDove CRM platform, institutional databases that were compiled in Google Sheets, notes of consultation sessions, and promotional materials that were produced during the internship. These records were empirical anchors of the reflective analysis and provided a traceable and verifiable base of the interpretive claims of this article. The internship was carried out in Menara Astra, Jl. Jend. Central Jakarta, Sudirman No. 5, under the direct supervision of Mr. Aarav Patel, Chief Executive Officer of MoveAbroad Indonesia.

The analytical model that will be involved in the entire study is rooted in two tested theoretical models. Its key model is the updated Morris (2020) model of experiential learning, which presupposes that meaningful professional learning occurs in four iterative steps: contextually rich concrete experience, critical reflective observation, contextually-specific abstract conceptualization, and pragmatic active experimentation. The dual model of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, which is cited in Cimer, Cimer, and Vekli (2022), provides a complementary viewpoint to the discussion of the real-time process of professional decision making and post-hoc evaluative reflection. All the key professional experiences reported in this paper were systematically analyzed by mapping them onto both these frameworks, making it possible to gain a structured and theoretically-grounded interpretation of the process of learning.

The process of analysis entailed three steps. Firstly, the key professional experiences and problems were identified and described in terms of the immediate involvement and professional experience of the author. Second, each experience was critically analyzed through the prism of the two theoretical frameworks mentioned above, and which stage of the experiential learning cycle was triggered, and whether reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action or both were at work. Third, the interpretation of the findings was done in terms of the current peer-reviewed literature on work-integrated learning, professional development, and business management education to place the analysis within the broad academic discourse. The presence of consistency and systematic use of the developed theoretical frameworks in all experiences under study, as well as the engagement in peer-reviewed literature at all interpretive levels, assisted them in ensuring that validity and reliability of the analysis were supported.

The given research is carried out under an assumption that reflective self-report when based on verifiable professional records and analyzed with the help of established theoretical frameworks is a valid and replicable methodology of the internship-based research in social and behavioral sciences in accordance with the precedents made by Jackson and Tomlinson (2022). This study aims to focus on a single intern, a single organization and one professional context and findings are thus interpretive and context-specific instead of statistically generalizable. This limitation has been noted to be inherent in the reflective inquiry approach methodology and does not reduce the analytical value of the findings to the target audience of students, educators and practitioners in the field of work-integrated learning and international education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed at discussing three objectives, namely translation of academic business management knowledge into professional practice at MoveAbroad Indonesia, how to navigate through the key issues in professional practice in reflection, and how the internship influenced how the author of the study perceives professional identity and career clarity. The results discuss each of the objectives in turn, which is based on professional records that were generated during the placement and explained through the updated model of experiential learning, as well as the framework of reflective practice, as cited in Cimer, Cimer, and Vekli (2022).

The main finding of this study is that reflective practice involving professional experience is, to a great extent, structurally incapable of replicating classroom instruction. The author was engaged in 3 core aspects of professional responsibility during the ten-month placement in MoveAboard Indonesia: B2B outreach and development of partnerships, student-facing consulting services, and marketing and promotion activities. Table 1 gives a tabular overview of the most important activities undertaken, tools used, and measurable outputs that were achieved throughout the placement period.

Table 1. Summary of Internship Activities and Outputs at MoveAbroad Indonesia

Activity	Tools Used	Output
B2B Outreach & Partnership Development	NeoDove CRM, Gmail, WhatsApp Business, Google Sheets	100+ outreach communications; institutional partner database compiled
Student Consultation Services	Google Docs, direct consultation	10+ consultation sessions conducted
Marketing & Promotional Activities	Canva, Google Docs	Webinar flyers, info session materials, and event content produced
Visa Documentation Support	Gmail, Google Docs	Application materials reviewed and organized for multiple students

These outputs are not just important as a measure of professional learning in the form of an iteration, but important as a witness to the iteration-based cycle of professional learning which was continuously at work throughout the placement. Each of the activities created tangible experience, which in turn was reflected on and conceptualized within the framework of the academic theory, and used to inform adjusted professional behavior - exactly the process that Morris (2020) describes as the mechanism through which the experience in experiential learning generates sustained and transferable competency development. The very sheer volume and variety of professional interactions which are registered in Table 1 speaks to the fact that, ultimately, there exists a learning

opportunity that can possibly be created in the same measure by a classroom setting. The finding strongly concurs with that of Jackson and Tomlinson (2022), who report that those who participated in WIL are found to be more aligned between academic preparation and professional readiness precisely because they apply, test and refine theoretical knowledge in real rather than hypothetical situations. On the same note, Di Pietro (2022) also confirms that professionally immersive placements do produce much stronger skill development outcomes than their short or less-integrated work experience format.

The most analytically educative finding is on the challenge of controlling the CRM lead quality in the business-to-customer outreach area. A sizable percentage of leads generated via the NeoDove platform were not in line with the target student profile of MoveAbroad, and therefore led to a significant outreach effort that did not generate many conversion results. The reflective experience of this experience within the context of reflection-on-action by Schon revealed that there is a critical gap in the academic marketing coursework: the conceptual aspects of the segmentation theory, targeting models, and the marketing mix are taught well, but the practical implications of the poor state of upstream CRM data on downstream marketing effectiveness are barely present in the standard business management coursework. In a review of 21 years of CRM research, Meena and Sahu (2021) discover that the problem of data quality management has been one of the most intractable and under-researched problems in CRM implementation across organizational situations - a finding that directly supports the experience of its author and places it within the context of a recognizable trend within the wider CRM literature. In addition, as shown by Guerola-Navarro, Gil-Gomez, Oltra-Badenes, and Soto-Acosta (2024), CRM use, in the context of entrepreneurial marketing, requires not only the ability to effectively use the technical platform but also the strategic sense in the prioritization of the lead segment and the prioritization of the pipeline, which, in the context of the placement, is the required competency developed by the author through the reflective exercise during the placement. Gradually, the author evolved a more incisive, strategic way of leading the filtering of experience, one of the most transformative steps in the experiential learning cycle. Table 2 overlays this and other key internship experiences on the four-stage revised model of Morris.

Table 2. Application of Morris's (2020) Revised Experiential Learning Cycle to Internship Experiences

Stage	Description	Example from Internship
Contextually Rich Concrete Experience	Active engagement in real professional tasks	Conducting 100+ B2C outreach communications via NeoDove CRM
Critical Reflective Observation	Evaluating outcomes and identifying patterns	Recognizing that a high proportion of CRM leads did not match the target student profile
Contextual-Specific Abstract Conceptualization	Connecting experience to academic theory	Linking lead quality problem to CRM data management and marketing segmentation frameworks
Pragmatic Active Experimentation	Testing refined approaches based on reflection	Developing and applying a strategic lead filtering and prioritization system

The experiential learning cycle was also an iterative and recursive process that was triggered on a regular basis in different areas of professional practice throughout the placement, as illustrated in Table 2. This observation not only extends the current literature by providing qualitative evidence

of how the revised model by Morris (2020) works in the organizational context of the international education consultancy - a professional environment in which the simultaneous needs of the B2C relationship management, the B2C client service, and the marketing communication all create their respective distinctive learning dynamics. It also follows suit with Liedtka (2020), who argues that strong professional strategies are produced through circumstantially responsive experimentation and adaptive and circumstantially responsive experimentation instead of the actual execution of already thought-through academic structures. The fact that the author has worked out a strategy of lead filtering using trial and reflection as main tools instead of applying the simple method of applying the textbook segmentation models is what makes the author succeed in demonstrating this principle in its purest form. It also displays what Charoensukmongkol (2020) called cultural intelligence: the ability to read organizational and interpersonal situations in a way that allows one to modify one's approach in situationally appropriate ways - something that is needed in everyday work when one works in a multicultural team serving a diverse clientele of Indonesian students with varying regional and educational backgrounds.

The second important discovery is that reflection-in-action has evolved into a practical and implicative professional competency. Working on the resource-bound team, and at the same time maintaining the institutional outreach database, preparing consultation material, supporting the logistics of promotional activities, and responding to the incoming requests of the students, all forced the author to think and act on the fly, without the luxury of stepping outside and viewing the system in its entirety after each episode as a professional. It is simply the state, which one can identify, judge, and change his/her own practice, not just in retrospect. Such a dual reflective capacity, the capacity to think in and on action, is what makes developing professionals who are really growing, as opposed to those who are simply completing the assigned tasks. The practical implication is straightforward and practical: reflection-in-action cannot be cultivated with the assistance of the academic coursework, the practice of journals and seminars only. It encompasses the long-term, consequential exposure to real professional uncertainty - a structural feature of real professional situations that cannot be replicated with the same degree of fidelity in any academic simulation. This is in line with Noe et al. (2017), who state that adaptive professional competencies are most effectively developed through real interactions in the workplace, and elaborate on this fact by placing it in the context of the specific organizational dynamics of an international education consultancy in Jakarta.

The third and most personally important result is related to the role of the internship in shaping the professional identity and specification of the career orientation in the long-term. Yu et al. (as cited in Cimmer et al., 2022) have confirmed that there is a significant correlation between the formation of the professional identity of the undergraduates and their involvement in the practical work experience. In theory, the professional aspirations of the author before the placement were hypothetical and practically unfulfilled. This was changed radically due to ten months placement at MoveAbroad Indonesia. Being at the crossroads of the world of international education, the sphere of business development oriented on the B2B business, and the sphere of consultations oriented on the client, it became obvious that the personal values of the author, the interpersonal strengths, and the sphere of consultations oriented to the client are quite compatible with the specific demands of this professional area. The sense of purpose that would be virtually unavailable to such a degree by purely professional jobs would be associated with a professional role. Among the least valued outcomes of WIL participation, Jackson and Tomlinson (2022) give the development of professional

identity, indicating that students who have participated in the act of reflection on the internship experiences are not only more likely to experience a stronger perceived employability but also more grounded and confident in their sense of professional direction. The qualitative data that is provided in this work provides a rich qualitative support of this statement and extends it to the context of Indonesian higher education and the international education consultancy sector, a professional field that has had virtually no attention paid to it in the extant literature on identity formation.

A second cause, which can be offered to the learning outcomes recorded, should be considered. The reflective depth above-described, perhaps, is the expression of individual dispositional factors - that is, the already existing orientation that the author experienced towards the critical self-evaluation - and not the structural aspects of the internship program or of the professional environment at MoveAbroad Indonesia. A different student whose reflective disposition baseline is lower may have done the same placement and produced the same professional outputs without deriving a similar learning value. This type of alternative description should not be abandoned in a single-case reflective enquiry, or it results in what is likely to be a significant avenue in future research: the role of individual reflective disposition to moderate WIL learning outcomes. Future studies could be based on this by comparing designs among several interns in the same organization or through longitudinal measures of reflective competency development using valid measures. Another weakness that is identified in this paper as a natural weakness of the reflective inquiry methodology is the effect of retrospective coherence bias, or the tendency to retell the experience one had gone through as being more orderly than it felt at the time, having. This can be taken care of in future research through the deployment of multi-method designs that include supervisor rating, peer rating, or contemporaneous data on a diary form at regular intervals during the period of the placement period.

CONCLUSION

This paper has established that reflective engagement on professional internship experience is a qualitatively unique and incomparable form of learning that cannot be offered in academic coursework and cannot be substituted by other forms of learning. The results lead to three new conclusions. First of all, the procedure of changing academic knowledge into professional competency is not a simple and automatic process as the revised experiential learning model proposed by Morris (2020) predicts. What this paper brings to the existing framework is evidence of how it works within the multi-domain, client-facing, and culturally complex setting of the international education consultancy in Indonesia, a profession that has virtually no attention been given to this point in the current WIL literature. Second, the practical consequential professional abilities, the development of which can only take place under true professional circumstances, conditions, which, however, can only occur in real, ambiguous professional situations.

The implication of this conclusion is both direct and action-based in terms of what universities should do to ensure that the learning value of WIL participation by their students is maximized: structured reflection is what needs to be done. Third, building of professional identity - arguably the most personally important outcome of the internship in this article - is shown to be not only an incidental by-product of exposure in the

workplace, but a substantive outcome of development in its own right, the one that will enable graduates to possess the grounded self-knowledge and career clarity which the labor market is increasingly demanding. Together, the three findings provide a contribution to the academic discourse on WIL in Indonesian higher education by offering theoretically informed, qualitatively enriching evidence on a professional sector and a geographic context that has been largely under-represented in the extant literature, and on which specific actionable directions of future research and program development are ones that the field is well-positioned to pursue.

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