

Challenges and Soft Skills of Student Interns



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ABSTRACT: This paper aimed to determine the extent of practice of the soft skills of student interns along the dimensions, namely: collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and selfregulation. Specifically, this paper purposed to ascertain significant differences in the extent of practice of the soft skills of student interns along the aforementioned dimensions and when they were grouped according to sex, program, and campus. Furthermore, the challenges that the student interns encountered in the acquisition of soft skills were also identified. The respondents were the 345 student interns of Carlos Hilado Memorial State College enrolled during the School Year 2018-2019. Employing the descriptivecomparative research design, a researcher-made questionnaire was used to gather data about the soft skills of the respondents. Mean, Independent Samples t-test, One-Way ANOVA, and frequency were used to gather data. The findings reveal that the extent of practice of the six soft skills among student interns when they were taken as a whole was high. There was no significant difference in the extent of practice of the six soft skills when they were classified according to sex. However, there was a significant difference in the extent of practice of the six soft skills when they were classified according to campus and college. The top five challenges that the student interns encountered in the acquisition of soft skills were lack of selfconfidence, fear of committing mistakes, fear of being laughed at, being anxious about others' impressions or reactions, and lack of confidence in their knowledge or abilities.

KEYWORDS: Soft Skills, Employable Skills, Student Interns

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Professional success indubitably entails possessing both technical skills and soft skills (Chiu et al., 2016), so budding professionals like student interns should welcome the extensive efforts organizations expend to help them acquire the soft skills that they need to possess or that their jobs necessitate. Although technical skills and soft skills are equally important, student interns are expected to equip themselves more with the latter.

Memorandum Order No. 104, Series of 2017 (Commission on Higher Education, 2017, page 2) in the Philippines mandates higher education institutions to “develop the life skills of student interns, including those relevant to the values of professionalism and work appreciation. The student interns are expected to acquire soft skills necessary to address the demand of the employers such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, financial literacy, etc.” Likewise, the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (2018) recommended that “desirable attitudes, personal discipline, and values” be included in the Outcomes-Based Education syllabi in all subjects offered by Carlos Hilado Memorial State College so that graduates will perform well in the job market.

Carlos Hilado Memorial State College has recognized the preeminence of soft skills in sustainable employability. Hence, this study was conducted to identify the soft skills that its interns possess vis-à-vis the 21st-century skills namely: collaboration, communication, creativity, critical/analytical thinking, curiosity/inquisitiveness, decision-making and reasoning, leadership, listening, problem-solving, self- awareness, self-regulation, and teamwork skills. The said soft skills were strongly suggested by education stakeholders from four countries including the Philippines in a study conducted by Care et al. (2017). The challenges encountered by the student interns in the acquisition of soft skills were also identified.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed the descriptive-comparative research design to determine the extent of practice of and the significant differences in the soft skills of the student interns.

The respondents of the study were the 345 student interns from the four campuses of Carlos Hilado Memorial State College, namely: CHMSC Talisay, CHMSC Alijis, CHMSC Fortune Towne, and CHMSC Binalbagan enrolled during the Second Semester, Academic Year 2018-2019.

To gather data about the soft skills of the respondents, a researcher-made questionnaire was used. Part I of the questionnaire contains the demographic profile of the respondents, such as sex, program, college, and campus. Part II of the questionnaire consists

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of a checklist that pertain to the soft skills of the respondents, namely: collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and self-regulation, which were the 21st Century Skills identified in the survey spearheaded by the Skills for a Changing World Project in 2017. Part III of the questionnaire required the student interns to write the challenges that they encountered in the acquisition of soft skills.

As to descriptive statistics, mean was used to determine the extent of practice of the soft skills of the respondents when taken as a whole and when classified according to sex, program, and campus along the dimensions, namely: collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and self-regulation.

As to inferential statistics, Independent Samples t-test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in the extent of practice of the soft skills of the respondents when taken as a whole and when classified according to sex along the dimensions, namely: collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and self-regulation, Independent Samples t-test was used; One-Way ANOVA was used to determine the significant differences in the extent of practice of the soft skills of the respondents when grouped according to program and campus using F test; and frequency to identify the challenges that the student interns encounter in the acquisition of soft skills .

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Extent of Practice of Soft Skills as a Whole

The extent of practice of the soft skills of the student interns was high when taken as a whole ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.445$). Collaboration ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.498$) had the highest mean value, followed by communication ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.500$), self-regulation ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.540$), leadership ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.545$), critical thinking ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.516$) and creativity ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.562$).

Table 1. Extent of Practice of the Soft skills of Student Interns when taken as a Whole

Dimension	M	SD	Interpretation
Collaboration	4.34	0.498	High Extent
Communication	4.33	0.500	High Extent
Creativity	4.14	0.562	High Extent
Critical Thinking	4.25	0.516	High Extent
Leadership	4.27	0.545	High Extent
Self-Regulation	4.28	0.540	High Extent
Whole	4.27	0.445	High Extent

The findings imply that the student interns significantly possessed the six soft skills and that they practiced them to a great extent. Furthermore, the student interns exhibited collaboration more than communication, self-regulation, leadership, critical thinking, and creativity.

The study of Sahrir et al (2016) revealed that the extent of practice of the soft skills of fifty-seven interns (of which were twenty-five education students) was high after completing a three-month internship. On the contrary, the studies of Ravindran and Bandara (2015) and Ahmad et al. (2018) discovered that the extent of practice of the soft skills of the student interns was only moderately high. Furthermore, Ismael, Ahmad, and Awang (2017) disclosed that the extent of practice of communication and leadership skills of four hundred eighty Polytechnic students in Malaysia was moderately high.

Collaboration

The extent of practice of collaboration among student interns when grouped according to sex, campus, and college was high. The mean value of the male respondents ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.521$) was lower than that of the female respondents ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.478$). The respondents from the Binalbagan campus ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.538$) had the highest mean value, followed by the respondents from Fortune Town ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.479$), Alijis ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.480$), and Talisay campuses ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.505$). Moreover, the respondents from the College of Fisheries ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.538$) had the highest mean value, followed by the respondents from the College of Art and Sciences ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.359$), College of Business Management and Accountancy ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.479$), College of Information and Technology ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.480$), CIT ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.500$) and College of Education ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.38$).

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Table 2. Extent of Practice of Collaboration among Student Interns when Classified according to Sex, Campus, and College

Variables	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Sex				
Male	158	4.33	0.521	High Extent
Female	187	4.36	0.478	High Extent
Campus				
Talisay	157	4.29	0.505	High Extent
Fortune town	75	4.43	0.479	High Extent
Alijis	86	4.34	0.480	High Extent
Binalbagan	27	4.46	0.538	High Extent
College				
COED	70	4.26	0.538	High Extent
CIT	71	4.28	0.500	High Extent
CAS	16	4.43	0.359	High Extent
CBMA	75	4.43	0.479	High Extent
CINFOTECH	86	4.34	0.480	High Extent
COFI	27	4.46	0.538	High Extent
Whole	345	4.34	0.498	High Extent

The findings imply that the female respondents and the respondents from the Binalbagan campus and from the College of Fisheries preferred working in teams, creating constructive relationships, and learning from others and helping them learn than their counterparts did. The studies of Washor (2015) and Patacsil and Tablatin (2017) verify the findings of this study. Washor (2015) found out that the extent of practice of teamwork (one of the components of collaboration) was high among the interns at both public and private institutions of higher education who represented thirty majors including accounting, business administration, and communication studies. Patacsil and Tablatin (2017) also learned that the extent of practice of teamwork among forty-six information technology interns was high.

Communication

The extent of practice of communication among students when grouped according to sex, campus, and college was high. The mean value of the male respondents ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.536$) was less than that of the female respondents ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.469$). The mean value of the respondents from the Binalbagan campus ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.532$) was higher than that of the respondents from the Fortune Town campus ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.485$), Alijis campus ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.558$) and Talisay campus ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.461$). Furthermore, the respondents from the College of Arts and Sciences ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.415$) had the highest mean value, followed by the respondents from the College of Fisheries ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.532$), College of Business Management and Accountancy ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.485$), College of Education ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.486$), College of Information and Technology ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.558$), and College of Industrial Technology ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.440$).

Table 3. Extent of Practice of Communication of Student Interns Communication when Classified according to Sex, Campus, and College

Variables	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Sex				
Male	158	4.31	0.536	High Extent
Female	187	4.36	0.469	High Extent
Campus				
Talisay	157	4.30	0.461	High Extent
Fortune town	75	4.44	0.485	High Extent
Alijis	86	4.27	0.558	High Extent
Binalbagan	27	4.46	0.532	High Extent
College				
COED	70	4.29	0.486	High Extent
CIT	71	4.26	0.440	High Extent

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CAS	16	4.48	0.415	High Extent
CBMA	75	4.44	0.485	High Extent
CINFOTECH	86	4.27	0.558	High Extent
COFI	27	4.46	0.532	High Extent
Whole	345	4.33	0.500	High Extent

The findings suggest that the female respondents and the respondents from the Binalbagan campus and from the College of Arts and Sciences gave importance to understanding and using language efficiently than their counterparts did.

Washor (2015), Patacsil and Tablatin (2017), and Losekoot, Lasten, Lawson, and Chen (2018) revealed that the extent of practice of communication among student interns was high. In contrast, the study of Lim, Rashid, Mahat, Razak and Omar (2016) found out that the extent of practice among student interns was only moderate.

In the study of Hirsch (2017), it was found out that the extent of practice of communication among female interns was slightly higher than that of the male interns.

Creativity

The extent of creativity among student interns when grouped according to sex, campus, and college was high. The mean value of the male respondents ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.523$) was slightly higher than that of the female respondents ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.593$). When grouped according to campus, the mean value of respondents from the Fortune Town campus ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.469$) was higher than that of the respondents from the Binalbagan campus ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.567$), Alijis campus ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.495$) and Talisay campus ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.593$).

Moreover, the respondents who came from the College of Business Management and Accountancy ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.469$) had the highest mean value, followed by the respondents who came from the College of Fisheries ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.567$) College of Information Technology ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.495$), College of Arts and Sciences ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.660$), College of Education ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.521$), and College of Industrial Technology ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.633$).

Table 4. Extent of Practice of Creativity among Student Interns when Classified according to Sex, Campus, and College

Variables	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Sex				
Male	158	4.18	0.523	High Extent
Female	187	4.12	0.593	High Extent
Campus				
Talisay	157	4.00	0.593	High Extent
Fortune town	75	4.39	0.469	High Extent
Alijis	86	4.16	0.495	High Extent
Binalbagan	27	4.29	0.567	High Extent
College				
COED	70	4.09	0.521	High Extent
CIT	71	3.88	0.633	High Extent
CAS	16	4.09	0.660	High Extent
CBMA	75	4.39	0.469	High Extent
CINFOTECH	86	4.16	0.495	High Extent
COFI	27	4.29	0.567	High Extent
Whole	345	4.14	0.562	High Extent

The findings indicate that the male respondents and the respondents from the Fortune Town campus and from the College of Business Management and Accountancy had the ability to advance or improve an idea, to make discoveries, and to take risks in thinking and creating more than their counterparts did.

Critical Thinking

The extent of practice of critical thinking among student interns when grouped according to sex, campus, and college was high. The mean value of the male respondents ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.560$) was slightly lower than that of the female respondents ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.477$). The mean value of the respondents from the Binalbagan campus ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.528$) was higher than that of the respondents from the Fortune Town campus ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.492$), Talisay ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.528$) and Alijis campus ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.491$). Furthermore, the mean value of the respondents from the College of Fisheries ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.528$) was higher

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than that of the respondents from the College of Business Management and Accountancy ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.492$), College of Arts and Sciences ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.484$), COED ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.587$), College of Industrial Technology ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.479$), and College of Information and Technology ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.491$).

Table 5. Extent of Practice of Critical Thinking among Student Interns when Classified according to Sex, Campus, and College

Variables	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Sex				
Male	158	4.25	0.560	High Extent
Female	187	4.26	0.477	High Extent
Campus				
Talisay	157	4.21	0.528	High Extent
Fortune town	75	4.36	0.492	High Extent
Alijis	86	4.18	0.491	High Extent
Binalbagan	27	4.41	0.528	High Extent
College				
COED	70	4.21	0.587	High Extent
CIT	71	4.19	0.479	High Extent
CAS	16	4.29	0.484	High Extent
CBMA	75	4.36	0.492	High Extent
CINFOTECH	86	4.18	0.491	High Extent
COFI	27	4.41	0.528	High Extent
Whole	345	4.25	0.516	High Extent

It can be inferred through the findings that the female respondents and the respondents from the Binalbagan campus and from the College of Fisheries were able to analyze discourses, make inferences and decisions, solve problems, and evaluate situations more than their counterparts did.

Leadership

The extent of practice of leadership among student interns when grouped according to sex, campus, and college was high. The mean value of the male respondents ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.575$) was lower than that of the female respondents ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.517$). The mean value of the respondents from the Binalbagan campus ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.480$) was higher than that of the respondents from the Fortune Town campus ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.564$), Talisay campus ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.516$), and Alijis campus ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.575$). In addition, the mean value of the respondents from the College of Fisheries ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.480$) was higher than that of the respondents from the College of Arts and Sciences ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.341$), College of Business Management and Accountancy ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.564$), CIT ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.469$), College of Education ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.587$) and College of Information and Technology ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.575$).

Table 6. Extent of Practice of Leadership among Student Interns when Classified according to Sex, Campus, and College

Variables	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Sex				
Male	158	4.23	0.575	High Extent
Female	187	4.30	0.517	High Extent
Campus				
Talisay	157	4.23	0.516	High Extent
Fortune town	75	4.36	0.564	High Extent
Alijis	86	4.18	0.575	High Extent

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Binalbagan College	27	4.50	0.480	High Extent
COED	70	4.19	0.587	High Extent
CIT	71	4.23	0.469	High Extent
CAS	16	4.40	0.341	High Extent
CBMA	75	4.36	0.564	High Extent
CINFOTECH	86	4.18	0.575	High Extent
COFI	27	4.50	0.480	High Extent
Whole	345	4.27	0.545	High Extent

The findings imply that the female respondents and the respondents from the Binalbagan campus and from the College of Fisheries exhibited leadership skills like inspiring others to act more than their counterparts did.

The study of Ismail, Ahmad, and Awang (2017) revealed that the extent of practice of four hundred eighty student interns was only moderately high.

Self-regulation

The extent of practice of self-regulation among student interns when grouped according to sex, campus, and college was high. The mean value of the male respondents ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.582$) was lower than that of the female respondents ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.501$). The respondents from the Binalbagan campus ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.497$) had a higher mean value than that of the respondents from the Fortune Town campus ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.572$), Alijis campus ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.611$) and Talisay campus ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.478$). Furthermore, the mean value of the respondents from the College of Fisheries ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.497$) was higher than that of the of the respondents from the College of Business Management and Accountancy ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.572$), College of Arts and Sciences ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.402$), College of Information Technology ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.611$), COED ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.499$) and College of Industrial Technology ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.473$).

Table 7. Extent of Practice of Self-regulation among Student Interns when Classified according to Sex, Campus, and College

Variables	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Sex				
Male	158	4.24	0.582	High Extent
Female	187	4.31	0.501	High Extent
Campus				
Talisay	157	4.21	0.478	High Extent
Fortune town	75	4.36	0.572	High Extent
Alijis	86	4.27	0.611	High Extent
Binalbagan	27	4.46	0.497	High Extent
College				
COED	70	4.19	0.499	High Extent
CIT	71	4.19	0.473	High Extent
CAS	16	4.36	0.402	High Extent
CBMA	75	4.36	0.572	High Extent
CINFOTECH	86	4.27	0.611	High Extent
COFI	27	4.46	0.497	High Extent
Whole	345	4.28	0.540	High Extent

The findings indicate that the female respondents and the respondents from the Binalbagan campus and from the College of Fisheries exuded a knack to convert their mental abilities into useful skills more than their counterparts did.

Difference in the Extent of Practice of the Soft Skills According to Sex

There was no significant difference in the extent of practice of the soft skills of student interns when classified according to sex along collaboration [$t(343) = 0.557$, $p = 0.578$], communication [$t(343) = 0.953$, $p = 0.341$], creativity [$t(343) = 1.016$, $p = 0.310$],

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critical thinking [$t(343) = 0.136, p = 0.892$], leadership [$t(343) = 1.181, p = 0.238$], and self-regulation [$t(343) = 1.189, p = 0.235$] at 0.05 level of significance.

Through the findings, it can be deduced that sex did not influence the student interns' practice of all the six soft skills.

The findings of Ismail, Ahmad, and Awang (2017), Ozkan et al. (2014), and Sugawara et al. (2017) are in consonance with the findings of this study. There was no significant difference in the extent of practice of communication and leadership skills among male and female student interns as revealed by Ismail, Ahmad, and Awang (2017). There was no significant difference in the extent of practice of communication skills among male and female student interns as revealed by Ozkan et al. (2014) and Sugawara et al. (2017).

Difference in the Extent of Practice of Soft Skills According to Campus

There was a significant difference in the extent of practice of the soft skills among student interns when classified according to campus along the dimensions of creativity [$F(3, 341) = 9.466, p = 0.000$], critical thinking [$F(3, 341) = 2.996, p = 0.031$], and leadership [$F(3, 341) = 3.307, p = 0.020$] at 0.05 level of significance.

The findings suggest that the campus where the student interns studied influenced the extent of their practice of creativity, critical thinking, and leadership.

Difference in the Extent of Practice of Soft Skills According to College

There was a significant difference in the extent of practice of creativity among students when classified according to college [$F(3, 341) = 6.850, p = 0.000$] and leadership [$F(3, 341) = 2.374, p = 0.039$] at 0.05 level of significance.

The findings suggest that college courses affected the student interns' practice of creativity and leadership. However, it is noteworthy to mention that the student interns' practice of collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and self-regulation were not influenced by their college courses.

The study of Ismail, Ahmad, and Awang (2017) revealed that there was a significant difference in the practice of communication skills among civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering interns at Near East University and Mugla Sitki Kocman University in Turkey. All the student interns generally practiced collaboration, communication, critical thinking, leadership, and self-regulation to a high extent. Relatively speaking, the student interns' willingness to connect to every individual they came across to learn something – knowledge or soft skill and their ability to discern and to practice the soft skills they needed to become employable graduates were the reasons why the extent of their practice of the six soft skills was high.

The extent of practice of collaboration was found to be higher than communication, critical thinking, leadership, and self-regulation since the student interns could have believed that it is the soft skill that is very much necessitated by employers and is of paramount importance in the workplace (Social Darwinism).

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

All the student interns were significantly equipped with the soft skills, namely: collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and self-regulation. Apparently, they will most likely to be able to become employable individuals.

Being male or female, the school campus and the college course did not affect the degree to which each student intern exercised collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and self-regulation. Thus regardless of the aforementioned variables, the students' soft skills may assist them in succeeding in their future careers.

Lack of confidence, may be a hindrance to acquiring the skills, qualities, and attitudes that employers say are essential for their workplace. It is therefore essential to develop innovativeness, creativity and self-esteem among student interns to be able to perform well in the workplace.,

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