

Competency Gap Analysis and Experiential Learning Needs in Student Organization

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Abstract

Background – Student organizations serve as strategic non-formal learning environments in which university students can develop competencies that are not fully acquired through classroom instruction. However, competency development programs within these organizations are frequently designed on an ad hoc basis and rely on assumptions rather than systematic needs assessments.

Research Urgency – The absence of objective diagnostic data may lead to learning interventions that are irrelevant, inefficient, and poorly aligned with the actual competency needs of student organization administrators. A systematic analysis is therefore required to identify competency gaps and establish appropriate intervention priorities.

Research Objective – This study aimed to identify and map the competency gaps among student organization administrators and determine their priority learning intervention needs.

Research Methods – The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase involved a survey of 46 administrators of the Psychology Student Association at Universitas Negeri Semarang using an instrument developed based on McGehee and Thayer's Training Needs Analysis framework. The quantitative findings were subsequently explored through focus group discussions involving 23 student representatives.

Research Findings – The findings identified the most substantial competency gaps in time management, innovation, and event management. The qualitative results indicated that the underlying causes of these gaps were primarily situated at the organizational level rather than solely at the individual level. Participants also expressed a strong preference for experiential learning approaches that provided opportunities for practice, reflection, collaboration, and direct application in authentic organizational contexts.

Research Conclusion – A systematic diagnostic approach enables student organizations to identify the actual competency needs of their administrators and design more relevant learning interventions. Experiential learning can serve not only as an effective competency-development strategy but also as a form of non-financial compensation that supports administrator engagement and organizational sustainability.

Research Novelty/Contribution – This study demonstrates the application of the Training Needs Analysis framework as a formal diagnostic tool within a student organization as a non-formal educational setting. It also connects competency-gap diagnosis with experiential learning design and positions learning opportunities as a form of non-financial compensation for student organization administrators.

Keywords: competency gaps; experiential learning; non-formal learning; student organization; training needs analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education faces a fundamental paradox in its goal of preparing students for the workforce. On one hand, university curricula tend to focus on theoretical content mastery and hard skills (Yong & Ling, 2023). Conversely, the industrial paradigm has shifted, placing non-technical competencies (soft skills) as the differentiating factor in human resource quality (Mary Gatta, 2025). Data from the Global Talent Shortage survey confirms that 74% of 40,000 companies struggle to find graduates with the necessary competencies (ManpowerGroup, 2025). Furthermore, the Future of Jobs report identifies skills such as analytical thinking, leadership, and time management as the most sought-after competencies (World Economic Forum, 2025). This paradox between academic focus and industrial needs demands adaptation from higher education institutions. A shift in focus is required, moving from purely theoretical knowledge acquisition toward the facilitation of applied skills.

To respond to these demands, Student Organizations serve as a crucial non-formal learning environment within the higher education ecosystem. Unlike structured formal curricular learning, Student Organizations function as a medium for students, acting as adult learners, to apply theories (Aulia et al., 2025; Mulyana & Linando, 2024). Participation in these organizations facilitates experiential learning, encouraging students to actively engage in the internalization of professional roles. This process requires the activation of higher-order thinking skills to manage resources, make decisions, and realize complex work programs (Doty, 2025). Literature in student development identifies this direct engagement as the primary mechanism resulting in significantly different competency achievements between active and passive students (Borges et al., 2017; Natsir et al., 2025). Thus, Student Organizations are not merely extracurricular activities, but essential pedagogical components in student development.

Structurally, Student Organizations are non-profit entities run by administrators with volunteer status, rather than employees receiving financial compensation. Unlike the corporate sector, the primary motivation of these administrators is intrinsic and oriented toward personal development (Nugroho et al., 2018). Theoretically, this aligns with the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary & Snyder, 1998). In this theory, key functional motivations for volunteers include the Career Function (the drive to gain career-relevant experience) and the Understanding Function (the drive to learn new skills). Consequently, competency development serves as the primary non-financial compensation sought and expected by administrators from the organization.

Despite high expectations for competency development, HR management practices within Student Organizations have not systematically responded to these needs. A review of various studies indicates that learning interventions in these organizations tend to be *ad-hoc* and reactive to emerging problems, rather than based on a structured competency needs analysis. For instance, management and regeneration training at UMMI Student Organizations was organized as a response to the finding that "organizational stewardship remained primordial" (Munajat et al., 2018). Learning intervention designs are also dominated by institutional agendas or inherited program traditions. This is evident in the civic education training at Universitas Hang Tuah, designed to meet university goals (Universitas Hang Tuah, 2025) and the routine annual Management Training at Universitas Widya Husada (Universitas Widya Husada, 2021). Although some training topics have been based on

observations and interviews (Siagian et al., 2022), the primary focus remains on achieving organizational goals, rather than systematically addressing individual competency gaps.

The gap between expectations and implementation reality in Student Organizations has been confirmed by prior findings. A study by Seneru et al., (2024) identified that the selection of learning intervention topics is more frequently based on leaders' assumptions or general literature studies, rather than objective diagnostic data. This finding is reinforced by Ariyanti et al. (2025), who revealed that the identification of administrator needs is often not conducted in depth. The serious consequences of assumption-based interventions include irrelevant interventions, uneven program effectiveness, and inefficient resource allocation (Ariyanti et al., 2025).

This urgency is further amplified by the unique operational constraints of student organizations. Unlike corporate entities with substantial resources and long-term retention, these organizations operate within short tenure cycles, typically one year, and rely on volunteerism. In such a transient environment, there is no margin for trial and error regarding competency development. Ineffective interventions not only waste limited financial capital but also deplete the cognitive resources of administrators who must balance organizational duties with academic demands (Mulyana & Linando, 2024; Natsir et al., 2025). Consequently, a shift from intuition-based planning to a precision based diagnostic approach becomes a strategic imperative to ensure that every learning intervention yields maximum impact within the limited timeframe.

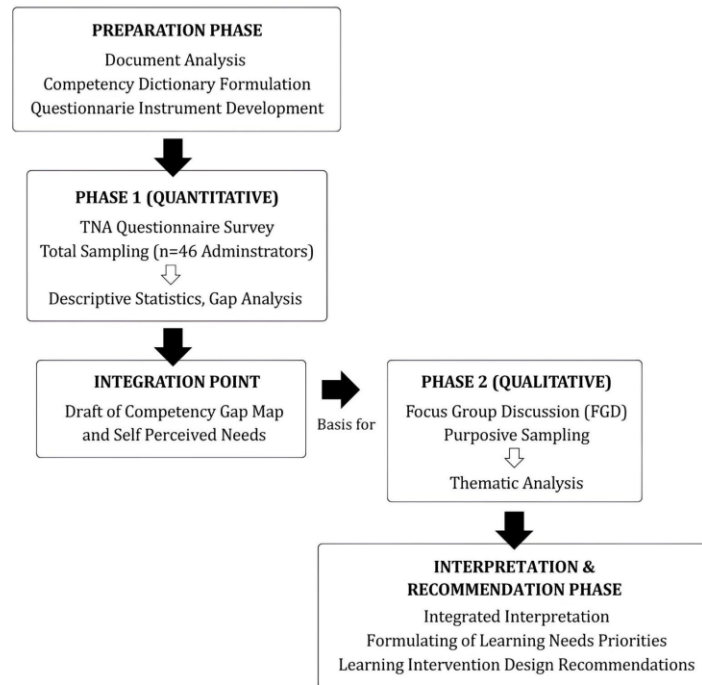
Fundamentally, such assumption-based implementation practices contradict the formal diagnostic assessment approach long adopted in educational psychology and organizational management. Learning Needs Assessment, better known as Training Needs Analysis (TNA), is a methodological prerequisite for designing effective interventions (Ludwikowska, 2018; Raj et al., 2024). The foundational framework for learning needs assessment is the three-level TNA model (McGehee & Thayer, 1961). This model presents a systematic process to identify needs at three levels: (1) organizational (analyzing the strategic goals of the learning environment), (2) task (analyzing required competencies), and (3) individual (analyzing actual learning gaps among administrators). Thus, TNA serves as a diagnostic tool to ensure alignment between interventions and diagnostic results.

Although TNA is an industry standard (Amin & Hossain, 2024; Mamun, 2021; Markaki et al., 2021) its application in the context of student affairs suffers from a significant methodological gap. Existing literature (Aulia et al., 2025; Natsir et al., 2025; Ramdani et al., 2025) to focus on qualitative-phenomenological impact reports or general self-reports. Research applying a formal diagnostic assessment framework to design learning interventions in Student Organizations is minimal. This study contributes to the application of the TNA framework to formulate effective learning intervention designs in a non-formal environment.

Based on the practical, theoretical, and methodological urgency outlined above, this study aims to (1) map administrator competency gaps, and (2) analyze the strategic priorities for learning intervention needs.

METHODS

This study utilized a cross-sectional study design (Cohen et al., 2017) with an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach (QUAN → qual) (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The quantitative phase was conducted through a learning needs assessment survey, the results of which were subsequently deepened through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) in the qualitative phase. The assessment framework referred to the three-level TNA model: organizational analysis, task analysis, and individual analysis (McGehee & Thayer, 1961). The research flow is visualized in Figure 1.



Source: Author's elaboration

Figure 1. Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Flow Diagram

The subjects of the quantitative study were 46 active administrators of the UNNES Psychology Student Association for the 2025/2026 period (total sampling). Qualitative subjects for the FGD were selected via purposive sampling, consisting of 23 key administrators (comprising executive board members, heads, and secretaries of departmental bureaus) who possessed the strategic capacity to validate TNA data.

Quantitative data were collected using a Google Forms questionnaire. Questionnaire items were structured based on a Competency Dictionary formulated through organizational document analysis (Constitution and Bylaws [AD/ART] and Vision-Mission). Referring to the procedure, the draft competency dictionary was validated through expert judgment by a context expert (The Chairperson) and a methodology expert (Faculty Supervisor) to ensure linguistic clarity and item suitability with theoretical constructs (Azwar, 2012). The questionnaire measured competency levels, barriers, and training preferences (Instrument design is presented in Table 1). Subsequently,

qualitative data were collected through FGDs. In the FGDs, quantitative findings were presented to the 23 key administrators for confirmation, priority analysis, and discussion of relevant learning intervention designs.

Table 1: TNA Questionnaire Instrument

Questionnaire Section	Dimensions/Variables Measured	TNA Level	Question Form
Section A	Administrator Competency Level based on Competency Dictionary	Individual Analysis	Likert Scale 1-5
Section B	Performance Barriers	Individual and Organizational Analysis	Open-ended Question “What are the current conditions of the Association’s administrators that potentially hinder the success of work programs?”
Section C	Perceived Training Needs	Individual Analysis	Multiple Choice (with ‘Other’ option)
Section D	Training Method Preferences	Individual Analysis	Multiple Choice
Section E	Training Expectations	Individual Analysis	Open-ended Question “Expectations for the upcoming training”

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (Pallant, 2001). Competency gap analysis was calculated from the difference between the ideal score and the actual average score per competency to determine priorities. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). In the interpretation stage, qualitative findings were integrated to validate, explain, and enrich the quantitative gap findings as well as to determine relevant interventions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings and discussion are presented integrally to address the two research objectives. Data were obtained from a total of 46 administrators (n=46). As detailed in Table 2, the demographic composition of respondents includes representation from all organizational levels, ranging from the strategic level (Executive Board), managerial level (Heads/Secretaries of Departmental Bureaus), to the operational level (Staff). Consequently, the results of this TNA reflect a comprehensive view from all lines of administrators.

Table 2: Respondent Distribution by Position

Position	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Executive Board	4	8,69%
Head of Department/Bureau	10	21,7%
Secretary of Department/Bureau	8	17,39%
Staff	24	52,17%

Mapping of Administrator Competency Gaps

Quantitative analysis (presented in Table 3) identified three competency gaps with the highest priority in sequential order: (1) Time Management, (2) Innovation, and (3) Event Management. These quantitative findings were confirmed by qualitative data (Table 4) regarding performance barriers. Thematic analysis indicated that 'Time Management' was the barrier most frequently reported by administrators, aligning with its position as the highest competency gap.

Table 3: Results of Administrator Competency Gap Analysis

No.	Competency Item	Ideal Score	Actual Score (Mean)	Gap Score
1.	Time Management	5	2,74	2,26
2.	Innovation	5	2,91	2,09
3.	Event Management	5	3,11	1,89
4.	Negotiation	4	3,24	0,76
5.	Communicative	5	3,26	1,74
6.	Initiative	4	3,28	0,72
7.	Collaborative	5	3,43	1,57
8.	Service Excellence	4	3,50	0,5
9.	Adaptive	4	3,52	0,48
10.	Empathy	4	3,93	0,07
11.	Integrity	5	3,93	1,07

Table 4: Key Themes of Performance Barriers

No.	Key Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Representative Quotes (Anonymous)
1.	Time Management	24	52,17%	"It is very difficult for members to manage time when academic assignments pile up while at the same time they must meet the Association's program deadlines."
2.	Communicative	17	36,95	"Hard to communicate, rarely replying to chats, seeming to avoid contact when asked"
3.	Initiative	8	17,39	"Lack of initiative to ask questions or request assistance."
4.	Integrity	7	15,21	"People like to be late ('rubber time'), starting events not in accordance with the scheduled time."
5.	Awareness	5	10,86	"Members lack awareness and a sense of belonging or responsibility in running a work program."

These quantitative findings were subsequently explored deeper through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to identify the root causes of each gap.

FGD analysis confirmed that the 'Time Management' gap is a crucial issue. However, the root cause was identified as twofold. First, individual factors related to the adaptation challenges of new administrators. This was revealed by Informant 23 (Department Secretary):

"[...] because this is my first time in an organization. So, balancing college assignments with organizational busyness [...] is difficult."

The second factor is systemic, namely the high interdependence of workflows. FGD participants identified that a bottleneck in one individual would affect the progress of others.

"[...] in one event [...] things are interconnected [...]. So, if one is [late], the others cannot progress" (Informant 21, Department Secretary).

This data provides a mechanistic explanation for the findings of Ariyanti et al. (2025) regarding 'inefficiency of resource allocation'. FGD findings identified that this inefficiency is also systemic, caused by workflow bottlenecks, not purely due to individual competency deficits. Thus, these findings imply that individual-level interventions such as time management training will not be effective if not balanced with organizational-level interventions, namely workflow improvement.

Unlike 'Time Management' which has dual root causes, FGD analysis on the 'Innovation' gap (second priority in Table 3) identified that the root cause is non-individual, specifically a consequence of organizational culture.

"[...] indeed, many still stick to last year's [format]. Because we are still learning, we haven't dared to [express] new ideas. Still [mostly] [looking at] the previous year." (Informant 16, Head of Department).

The informant's phrase implies low *psychological safety* as defined by (Edmondson, 1999) an environment that is unsafe for administrators to experiment. This finding expands on the literature by Munajat (2018), which identified "primordial" practices in Student Organizations. This FGD analysis explains the psychological mechanism behind the persistence of such traditions: new administrators tend to conform to inherited work programs. This conformity can be understood as a rational response by administrators to an organizational climate that is not open to innovation. Consequently, individual-level interventions such as innovation training will not be effective without being preceded by organizational-level interventions aimed at building a culture of psychological safety.

In addition to the cultural gap in 'Innovation', FGD findings also identified pedagogical process failure as the root cause of the 'Event Management' competency gap (third priority in Table 3). This was confirmed by the Chairperson (Informant 1) who stated:

"Indeed, the execution of the recent onboarding was not optimal; it was still in the form of theory, one-way lectures, and lacked practice."

The ineffectiveness of the new administrator onboarding process reflects the paradox identified in the introduction. Theoretically, Student Organizations should function as an "essential pedagogical component" to facilitate applied skills (Borges et al., 2017). However, these findings indicate that in practice, Student Organizations actually replicate the failures of the formal curriculum which focuses on theoretical content delivery through one-way lectures (Yong et al., 2023). This failure of knowledge transfer indicates that the organization has not yet functioned as an effective non-formal learning environment.

Needs Analysis and Learning Intervention Priorities

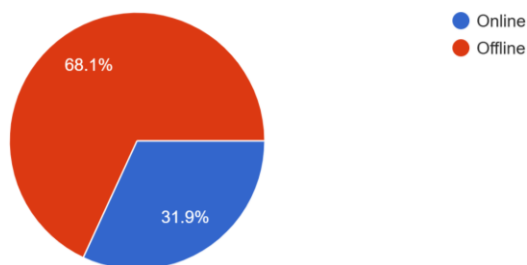
The analysis was conducted by comparing individual perceived needs with the strategic priorities of the organization agreed upon in the FGD. Quantitative survey data (presented in Figure 2) mapped administrators' perceptions of the most needed training topics. The results placed 'Leadership and Decision Making' as the highest priority. The high demand for this training indicates administrators' awareness of the importance of leadership competencies. This reflects global labor market demands that place Leadership as one of the core skills most sought after by industry (World Economic Forum, 2025).



Source: Author's elaboration

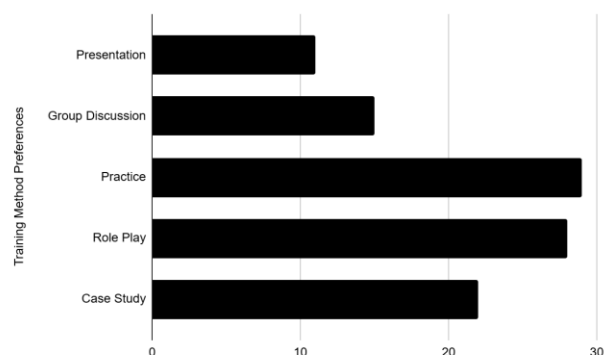
Figure 2. Percentage Graph of Perceived Training Needs

In addition to topics, administrator preferences regarding training formats and methods were also mapped (Figures 3 and 4). Data showed a dominant preference for the 'Offline' training format. Furthermore, the most interesting learning methods were interactive ones, namely 'Practice and Role Play' and 'Case Study'.



Source: Author's elaboration

Figure 3. Graph of Training Format Preferences



Source: Author's elaboration

Figure 4. Graph of Training Method Preferences

Qualitative data from open-ended responses (Table 5) provided a deep explanation for why these method preferences emerged. Thematic analysis of administrator expectations showed a strong demand for “tangible impact” and learning that is “practice-focused”, accompanied by explicit rejection of the dominance of theoretical material considered boring.

Table 5: Thematic Analysis of Administrator Expectations for Training

No	Key Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Representative Quotes (Anonymous)
1.	Tangible Impact and Quality Improvement	19	41,30%	“I hope the training truly creates a significant effect so it isn’t in vain.” “I hope this training can add insight and skills useful in the Association.”
2.	Focus on Practical, Applicative and Interactive Methods	16	34,78%	“Hopefully short but effective, not dragging on. Don’t give too much material, it makes us sleepy. Focus on practice, case studies and discussion with fellow functionaries.”
3.	Relevance to Urgent Problems	11	23,91%	“Can solve existing problems. An improvement, especially in self-awareness in positioning oneself and carrying out responsibilities.”
Total		46	100%	

These findings validate the theoretical framework of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al., 1998). The strong preference for practical methods is not merely a learning style choice, but a reflection of functional motivation. Administrators seek the ‘Career Function’ in the form of practical experience and the ‘Understanding Function’ in the form of new skills as non-financial compensation (Nugroho, 2018). Administrators’ demands for training that does not “drag on” and “don’t give too much material” are implicit critiques of the passive learning models they receive in formal lectures, while reaffirming their need for an applicative learning environment.

The quantitative TNA findings and qualitative aspirations were then discussed in the FGD to establish the organization's strategic priorities. First, regarding priority topics. FGD participants agreed on ‘Leadership and Decision Making’ as the primary training material. This decision was based on the strategic need for regeneration and organizational sustainability at the end of the stewardship period.

“[If] at the end of the period, [we] really need something that can equip administrators [...]. Especially for those who want to continue in the Association...”
(Informant 1, Chairperson).

Second, FGD participants established ‘Innovation’ as the second priority material. The selection of this topic was based on findings of high competency gaps (Table 3) and the awareness

that this competency is not facilitated in the formal academic curriculum. As revealed by Informant 5 (Head of Bureau):

“The second topic is innovation... Because [...] we never [get] that knowledge in lectures, but we are always required to be innovative.”

Third, regarding training methods, FGD participants agreed on an ‘Outbound Training’ strategy to train other competencies such as ‘Collaborative’, ‘Initiative’, and ‘Awareness’. This decision was taken as a strategic response to prevent administrator burnout while satisfying the preference for practical methods (Figure 4). The selection of this method aligns with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that soft skills competency learning is most effectively achieved through reflection on concrete experience, not merely abstract conceptualization (Kolb, 1984). FGD participants firmly rejected conventional lecture methods as they were deemed ineffective for optimizing administrator participation.

“Those three competencies [...] are all important [...]. [Just make it] outbound! There are still competency gaps... And indeed, those are basic soft skills...” (Informant 16, Head of Department).

“[If] the training is [just] lectures [...] no one will want to come.” (Informant 11, Head of Department).

“[So that] [we] don't get bored and can practice directly. So there must still be practice sessions with case studies and other methods” (Informant 13, Chief Executive of Upgrading).

Based on the integration of individual needs analysis (TNA) and organizational strategic validation (FGD), the learning intervention design for the Association's administrators was established as presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Final Learning Intervention Design

Format	Priority Topic	Training Method	Target Competency
In-House Training	Leadership & Decision Making	Interactive Lecture, Case Study, Role Play	Leadership (Self-Perceived Need)
	Innovation	Interactive Lecture, Case Study, FGD	Innovation (Gap 2,09)
Outbound Training	Teamwork, Initiative, Awareness	Experiential Learning Games	Collaborative (Gap 1,57), Initiative (Gap 1,72), Awareness (Self-Perceived Need)

The learning intervention design in Table 6 represents the practical contribution of this research: a learning intervention design that is data-driven, not merely assumption-based.

However, revisiting the root cause analysis in the competency gap section, the researcher offers a critical perspective. Although ‘Leadership’ and ‘Innovation’ training (individual-level interventions) are highly relevant for regeneration and competency development, their effectiveness

is potentially hindered if not preceded by improvements in the organizational climate. This aligns with the study by (Burke & Hutchins, 2007) on transfer of training, which asserts that individual training interventions often fail to impact performance if not supported by a conducive work environment. As found in the FGD analysis, the main barrier to innovation is not individual inability, but an organizational culture that lacks support for psychological safety. According to Edmondson (1999), psychological safety is an absolute prerequisite for learning behavior. Without it, individuals will be reluctant to take risks to apply new skills even after receiving training. Therefore, the researcher's recommendation is to integrate the implementation of 'Leadership' and 'Innovation' training with organizational-level intervention efforts aimed at building a safe climate for administrators to make decisions and voice new ideas.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the primary competency gaps in 'Time Management,' 'Innovation,' and 'Event Management' are not purely individual in nature but are rooted in organizational-level problems, specifically systemic workflows, an organizational culture that lacks support for psychological safety, and pedagogical failures in the onboarding process. Furthermore, the analysis confirms a strong motivational demand from administrators for experiential learning methods, aligning with the fulfillment of non-financial compensation needs. The primary scientific contribution of this research is the demonstration of the application of the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) model as a formal diagnostic tool. This model has proven effective in uncovering hidden root causes within non-formal learning environments while bridging the methodological gap resulting from the dominance of assumption-based approaches. Despite these contributions, this study is limited by a subject scope restricted to a single specific student organization. Thus, the generalization of findings to broader organizations should be approached with careful consideration.

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