

Student Participation in The Certified Internship and Independent Study Program and the Improvement of Soft Skills Among Students in Indonesia

Riana Nurhayati^{1*}, Fitriana Tjiptasari², Evi Rovikoh Indah Saputri³

¹Departement of Educational Policy, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Department of Non-Formal Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³Departement of Educational Policy, Pendidikan Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Email: riana_nurhayati@uny.ac.id

Abstract

Background - The background of this study lies in the high unemployment rate among university graduates in Indonesia, which reached 842,378 people in 2024. This situation is largely caused by a mismatch between graduates' competencies and industry needs, revealing a critical gap in the readiness of graduates to enter the labour market.

Research Urgency - The urgency of this research is strengthened by the role of the Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB) as a form of service learning that aims to improve students' soft skills, particularly in areas such as communication, creativity, and conflict resolution.

Research Objectives - This study measures the impact of MSIB on the overall improvement of students' soft skills and to examine its influence on three specific dimensions, namely communication skills, creativity, and conflict resolution.

Research Methods - The study employed a quantitative approach involving 118 MSIB participants from Yogyakarta State University. Data were collected using a Likert scale questionnaire and analysed through simple correlation and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to obtain valid insights into the program's outcomes.

Research Findings - MSIB has a significant positive effect on the overall development of students' soft skills, with a contribution of 12.1 percent. More specifically, the program exerts the strongest influence on communication skills, accounting for 50 percent of the variance, followed by creativity with 37.4 percent and conflict resolution with 36.8 percent. These results confirm that MSIB not only provides experiential learning opportunities but also directly enhances competencies that are essential for workplace readiness.

Research Conclusion - MSIB proves to be an effective strategy in bridging the competency gap between higher education outcomes and industry demands. By fostering critical soft skills, particularly communication, the program contributes to increasing the employability of university graduates and thus helps address the pressing issue of graduate unemployment in Indonesia.

Research Novelty/Contribution - The novelty of this research lies in its empirical measurement of MSIB's impact using correlation and MANOVA analysis, offering strong evidence on which aspects of soft skills are most improved.

Keywords: The Certified Internship; Independent Study Program, Soft Skill, Student Competence.

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INTRODUCTION

University graduates in Indonesia face high unemployment rates, reaching 842,378 people in 2024, far exceeding diploma graduates at 170,527 (BPS - Statistics Indonesia, 2025). Elly Malihah identifies the root of the problem as the mismatch between university curricula and industry needs (Pramudya, 2025). Undergraduate education is seen as too theory-focused, failing to adequately develop the practical soft and hard skills required by the job market, unlike vocational/diploma education, which is more applied (Huang, 2025; Qiu, 2023). Ironically, despite their limited skills, many university graduates have high expectations for salaries and positions, such as wanting to become managers or supervisors immediately, roles that require experience. Elly emphasizes that university graduates must start their careers from entry-level positions first.

Other factors exacerbating the situation include intense job competition, insufficient job opportunities, and technological disruption replacing certain professions. To enhance competitiveness, Elly suggests optimizing programs like Kampus Merdeka Merdeka Belajar (MBKM), where graduates can develop additional competencies (e.g., mathematics graduates learning a foreign language to open international job opportunities, such as in Japan) and leveraging internship opportunities to enrich the experience, whether for employment or entrepreneurship. She also highlights differences in work ethics across generations; Generation Z tends to be more willing to switch jobs than Millennials, who prioritize stability (Pramudya, 2025). Current studies suggest that instructional approaches designed around students' real-world challenges and need help to complete their studies more quickly while sharpening their competencies (Saepudin et al., 2025).

Rising unemployment among the educated is a serious concern, especially during economic slowdowns, as historical data shows that middle- and high-educated workers experience a much sharper spike in unemployment rates than their less-educated counterparts. Research indicates that while higher education generally reduces the risk of unemployment through improved job stability and job search efficiency, these advantages may diminish or even reverse during crises or when the supply of graduates exceeds labour market demand, thereby increasing competition and vulnerability in the modern sector (Dănăciță et al., 2023; Girsberger & Meango, 2022). Studies in various regions, including Indonesia, Romania, and West Africa, confirm that a surge in highly educated graduates without commensurate job creation can trigger unemployment and underemployment among the educated, even driving migration or placing individuals in less desirable jobs (Dănăciță et al., 2023; Girsberger & Meango, 2022; Setyadi et al., 2019).

The duration of unemployment for educated workers also tends to be longer because they are more selective in seeking employment and often rely on unemployment benefits, which further complicates the process of re-entering the workforce (Altindag et al., 2022; Setyadi et al., 2019). Policies that solely focus on job creation in the public sector risk suppressing opportunities in the private sector. In contrast, strategies promoting private sector growth and entrepreneurship have proven more effective and equitable in reducing educated unemployment (Girsberger & Meango, 2022). Overall, aligning higher education outcomes with labour market needs and promoting diverse employment opportunities are key to reducing the economic vulnerability of educated workers (Dănăciță et al., 2023; Girsberger & Meango, 2022; Setyadi et al., 2019).

In response to the challenge of mismatched graduate competencies with labour market demands, which has triggered economic vulnerability, various studies have begun to highlight service learning as a pedagogical strategy that can bridge the skills gap through practical experience and soft skill strengthening. Service-learning is an experience-based education model that benefits service providers

and recipients, emphasizing a balance between service and learning (Kerins, 2016). Research on service learning has grown significantly over the past few decades. Research on service-learning practices has attracted researchers' attention following the issue of unemployment among university graduates caused by a lack of soft skills.

Take, for example, the research conducted by Mamat et al. (2019), which found that many students recognize the importance of soft skills and job competitiveness, even though students do not consider achieving these skills as the main reason for their involvement in community programs. Students also acknowledge that they have gained many positive impacts on their personality, behaviors, self-confidence, values, beliefs, and motivation from participating in these programs (Widiastuti et al., 2023). The study by Nabors et al. (2018) found that high school students involved in service-learning programs were interested in continuing similar programs after observing their effectiveness in enhancing leadership and problem-solving skills. A meta-analysis conducted by Jieqi (2023) found a moderate average effect ($g = 0.38$) on communication competencies; however, most of these studies originated from developed Western countries, so the results may not fully represent the global context.

Meanwhile, discussions on soft skills are interdisciplinary and rapidly evolving, with more than 75 publications since 2010. However, research is still concentrated in developed Western countries (Hallinger & Narong, 2024). Students value service-learning programs for their ability to enhance personal skills, reflecting the knowledge framework or interests of Habermas (Caspersz & Olaru, 2015). Research on soft skills related to gender differences in understanding and perceiving values has also been explored (Caspersz & Olaru, 2015). Going forward, more rigorous and theory-based research is needed to understand the effects of service learning on students. Service learning, which integrates community service with academic study, has been widely studied for its impact on students. The research consistently shows that service learning positively affects students' academic, personal, social, and civic development, though the strength and nature of these effects can vary. Future research should also examine service learning in developing countries, evaluate diverse theoretical perspectives, and use mixed methods to investigate cultural, social, and, if possible, political influences (Hallinger & Narong, 2024). However, some gaps remain. There is no national-scale quantitative research assessing the impact of service learning on specific soft skills dimensions in Indonesia. This gap is significant given the ongoing expansion of the MSIB program.

In recent years, service learning has become a learning method developed in Indonesia. While service learning has become an important learning method in the United States, especially in higher education (Morillo-Flores et al., 2022), in Indonesia, service learning has begun to develop in the learning process, particularly in higher education. In the Indonesian education system, service learning is translated as the Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB). MSIB is a program offered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to facilitate students in developing their skills by learning outside their major programs. MSIB also aims to prepare students for their future careers. Through MSIB, students can participate in internship or independent study programs (Arisandi et al., 2022; Suryatno & Insana, 2022). In this program, students learn theories in the classroom while engaging as volunteers in various activities or organizations. These organizations are typically non-profit organizations or social service groups. Student involvement helps deepen their understanding of the theories learned in the classroom.

Participating in this service-learning program will give students a deeper understanding of their relationship with the community. They will also gain a better understanding of their capacity to serve others. They will hone their decision-making skills and acquire other career skills. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of responsibility and develop an awareness of cultural differences. Under the policy framework of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 53/2023, 2024 is the year with the highest number of students enrolling in the MSIB program. Over

150,000 students from 700 universities under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology have registered for the MSIB program.

To make service learning appealing to students, examining the benefits students can gain through implementing service learning in their studies, particularly those related to character development, is necessary. Therefore, the objectives of this study are: 1) to measure the impact of the MSIB program on the overall improvement of students' soft skills; 2) to analyze the effects of MSIB on three specific aspects: communication skills, creativity, and conflict resolution.

This study contributes by providing empirical evidence of the measurable impact of service learning through the MSIB program on students' soft skills. The findings highlight communication as the most significantly improved dimension, followed by creativity and conflict resolution. These results offer practical insights for universities and policymakers to optimize service learning as a strategy to enhance graduate employability and bridge the gap between academic outcomes and industry needs.

METHODS

This research adopted a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the relationship between students' participation in the Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB) and the improvement of their soft skills. The choice of a quantitative approach was based on the need to measure the impact of the program numerically and to test the relationship and effects statistically. The research participants consisted of 118 students from Yogyakarta State University who joined the MSIB program. The sampling technique applied was purposive sampling, meaning that only students who had direct experience in the program were selected as respondents. This ensured that the data truly reflected the experiences of students engaged in service learning through MSIB.

The data collection technique relied on a structured questionnaire distributed to all respondents. The questionnaire was constructed using a five-point Likert scale with response options ranging from "very appropriate," "appropriate," "less appropriate," "inappropriate," to "very inappropriate." The items in the questionnaire were designed to measure students' perceptions of their improvement in overall soft skills as well as three specific dimensions: communication, creativity, and conflict resolution. To guarantee the validity and reliability of the data, the questionnaire was first reviewed by experts in education and psychology to ensure content validity. A pilot test was then conducted to examine the clarity and relevance of the items. Reliability testing was performed using Cronbach's Alpha, and the results indicated that all items had acceptable reliability values ($\alpha > 0.70$), demonstrating internal consistency of the instrument.

The data analysis procedure involved two main techniques. First, simple correlation analysis was carried out using SPSS software to determine the extent of the relationship between participation in MSIB and the overall improvement of students' soft skills. Second, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was applied to further explore the specific effects of the MSIB program on three key dimensions: communication skills, creativity, and conflict resolution. This dual analysis approach allowed the study not only to test the general relationship but also to identify in detail which aspects of soft skills were most strongly affected by the program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is an important foundation in shaping children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. At this level, the curriculum acts as the main guideline in designing learning activities that are appropriate to the child's developmental stage. However, the dynamics of curriculum changes require the adaptability of PAUD institutions, especially Play Groups (KB) and

Kindergartens (TK). Without clear management guidance, the process of curriculum adjustment often runs undirected and creates a quality gap between institutions.

On the other hand, many non-formal institutions, especially KB and kindergartens that have not been accredited or have only had minimal accreditation, face great challenges in aligning the curriculum. The absence of strategic guidelines that can be implemented causes the Heads of Family Planning and Kindergarten to have difficulty in managing the curriculum transition effectively. Therefore, it is necessary to have a curriculum alignment management guidance model that is not only valid in substance, but also practical in the field (Hidayat et al, 2024).

This research is here to answer this need by developing a model for harmonizing the PAUD curriculum based on systematic management. With a Research and Development (R&D) approach using the ADDIE model, this research is expected to be able to produce products that are tested for validity and practicality. Through expert validation and trials on the Heads of Family Planning and Kindergarten, this guide is expected to be a strategic and practical reference in supporting PAUD institutions to face curriculum changes in a more targeted and effective manner. This is the first step to take before explaining the results and discussion.

Classical Assumption Test

Normality test

Based on the output obtained from Table 1, the significance value of Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.200 is greater than 0.05. Therefore, by the decision in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test, it can be concluded that the data has a normal distribution. Thus, the assumption of normality for the simple linear regression model has been fulfilled.

Table 1. One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		118
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	0.0000000
	Std. Deviation	8.60954551
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	0.069
	Positive	0.053
	Negative	-0.069
Test Statistic		0.069
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		0.200 ^{c,d}

a. Test distribution is normal
b. Calculated from data
c. Lilliefors Significance Correction
d. This is a lower bound of true significance

Linearity Test

Based on the output shown in Table 2, the Deviation from Linearity Sig. A value of 0.103 is greater than 0.05. Therefore, a significant linear relationship exists between the MSIB Program variable and the Student Soft Skills variable.

Table 2. ANOVA Table

			Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Softskill* Program MSIB	Between Groups	(Combined)	3666.719	25	146.669	2.148	0.005
		Linearity	1275.028	1	1275.028	18.676	0.000
		Deviation from Linearity	2391.692	24	99.654	1.460	0.103

Within Groups	6280.848	92	68.270
Total	9947.568	117	

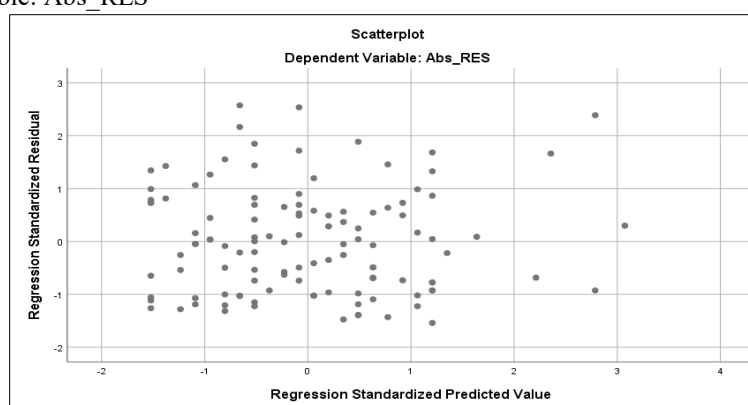
Heteroscedasticity Test

The heteroscedasticity test was conducted using the Glejser test, by regressing the soft skill variable against the absolute residual value (Abs_RES).

Table 3. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	13.422	5.812		2.309	0.023
	Program MSIB	-0.071	0.065	-0.101	-1.098	0.274

a. Dependent Variable: Abs_RES



Picture 1. Heteroscedasticity Test

Based on the output in Table 3 and Figure 1, with the Abs_RES variable, a Sig. A value of 0.274 greater than 0.05 was obtained. From the scatter plot results, the residuals are randomly distributed. It can be concluded that there is no heteroscedasticity in the regression model.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Based on the output, the significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 is less than 0.05, indicating that the MSIB Program affects students' soft skills. Furthermore, from the comparison between the t-calculated and t-table values, the t-calculated value is 4.130, greater than the t-table value of 1.981. Therefore, it can be concluded that the MSIB Program affects students' soft skills (Table 1).

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	84.718	10.296		8.228	0.000
	Program MSIB	0.474	0.115	0.358	4.130	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Softskill

Student soft skills can be estimated using the regression equation $Y = 84.718 + 0.474X$. The regression coefficient shows that every 1% increase in the MSIB Program level will result in a 0.474 increase in student soft skills.

Table 5. R Square Calculation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.358 ^a	0.128	0.121	8.64658	1.675

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Program MSIB
b. Dependent Variable: Softskill

The extent of the MSIB Program's influence on students' soft skills can be seen from the R Square value of 0.128 (Table 5). This value means that the MSIB Program's influence on students' soft skills is 12.1%, while 87.9% of students' soft skills are influenced by other variables that were not studied.

The Effect of Internship Programs and Certified Independent Study (MSIB) on Communication Skills, Creativity, and Conflict Resolution Skills

Based on Table 6, the output results show that the Box's M value is 206.924, with a significance (Sig.) of 0.087, greater than 0.05. This indicates that the assumption of covariance homogeneity is fulfilled.

Table 6. Box's M value

Box's M	206.924
F	1.651
df1	90
df2	2734.916
Sig.	0.087

Tests the null hypothesis that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables are equal across groups

- a. Design: Intercept + MSIB

In Table 7, the output results show the significance value (Sig.) based on the Mean variable of Communication Skills of 0.079, the Creativity variable of 0.064, and the Conflict Resolution Skills variable of 0.055, all of which are greater than 0.05. It can be concluded that the data variance is homogeneous. Therefore, the assumption of variance equality is fulfilled.

Table 7. Lavene Test

		Lavene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Communication Skills	Based on Mean	1.562	20	97	0.079
	Based on Median	0.880	20	97	0.612
	Based on the Median and with adjusted df	0.880	20	55.546	0.612
Creativity	Based on trimmed mean	1.471	20	97	0.110
	Based on Mean	1.987	20	97	0.064
	Based on Median	0.820	20	97	0.685
	Based on the Median and with adjusted df	0.820	20	47.868	0.679
Conflict Resolution Skills	Based on trimmed mean	1.852	20	97	0.025
	Based on Mean	1.772	20	97	0.055
	Based on Median	0.713	20	97	0.804
	Based on the Median and with adjusted df	0.713	20	56.749	0.796
	Based on trimmed mean	1.635	20	97	0.059

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups

- a. Design: Intercept + MSIB

Table 8. Multivariate Tests

Effect	Value	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
intercept	Pillai's Trace	0.999	34581.705 ^b	3.000	95.000	0.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.001	34581.705 ^b	3.000	95.000	0.000
	Hotelling's Trace	1092.054	34581.705 ^b	3.000	95.000	0.000
	Roy's Largest Root	1092.054	34581.705 ^b	3.000	95.000	0.000
MSIB	Pillai's Trace	1.191	3.195	60.000	291.000	0.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.196	3.442	60.000	284.263	0.000
	Hotelling's Trace	2.381	3.716	60.000	281.000	0.000
	Roy's Largest Root	1.538	7.460 ^c	20.000	97.000	0.000

a. Design: Intercept + MSIB

b. Exact statistic

c. The statistic is an upper on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.

d. Computed using alpha=,05

Based on the values of Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root, which shows a significance value of 0.000, less than 0.05, it can be concluded that the MSIB Program has a significant effect on the variables of Communication Skills, Creativity, and Conflict Resolution Skills.

Table 9. Test

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Communication skills	309.466	20	15.473	4.853	0.000	0.500
	Creativity	441.456	20	22.073	2.896	0.000	0.374
	Conflict resolution skills	268.438	20	13.422	2.825	0.000	0.368
Intercept	Communication skills	98728.577	1	98728.577	30963.598	0.000	0.997
	Creativity	288731.536	1	288731.536	37881.430	0.000	0.997
	Conflict resolution skills	112896.702	1	112896.702	23758.613	0.000	0.996
MSIB	Communication skills	309.466	20	15.473	4.853	0.000	0.500
	Creativity	441.456	20	22.073	2.896	0.000	0.374
	Conflict resolution skills	268.438	20	13.422	2.825	0.000	0.368

The output results show the extent of the MSIB Program's influence on each variable. Each dependent variable has a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000, less than 0.05, indicating that the MSIB Program significantly influences all dependent variables.

To determine the magnitude of the MSIB Program's influence on each dependent variable, the Partial Eta Squared (PES) output can be examined, which indicates the proportion of variance explained by the independent variable on a specific dependent variable. PES values range from 0 to 1; the higher the value, the greater the influence of the MSIB Program on a specific dependent variable.

The PES value for the Communication Skills variable reaches 0.500, meaning that 50% of the variance in Communication Skills can be explained by the MSIB Program, indicating a relatively significant effect. For the Creativity variable, the PES value is 0.374, which means that the MSIB Program explains 37.4% of the variance in creativity. Meanwhile, the PES value for the Conflict Resolution Ability variable is 0.368, which means that the MSIB Program can explain 36.8% of the variance in Conflict Resolution Ability.

Service learning is a high-impact practice that improves academic, civic, and personal outcomes for students. Its benefits are maximized when programs are well-designed, reflective, and closely linked

to academic goals. Ongoing research will help refine best practices and deepen understanding of its long-term impact. Service-learning integrates community service activities, learning concepts, and reflection that enrich the teaching-learning experience and promote community awareness and engagement (Caspersz & Olaru, 2015; Whitley, 2014).

Many benefits can be gained through service learning in the learning process. In their meta-analysis study, (Thornburgh et al., 2022) stated that students who applied service learning showed significant improvements in five aspects: attitude towards themselves, attitude towards school and learning, involvement in the community, social skills, and academic achievement. Other research explains that service-based learning can enhance understanding of learning materials, provide students with opportunities to apply theories learned in the classroom in real-world contexts and develop students' character traits such as creativity, hard work, communication skills, and social responsibility (Handoyo et al., 2020).

Service learning is an educational approach that involves community engagement across institutions and disciplines at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Drewery & Lollar, 2024). service learning has become part of teaching and learning methods (Mamat et al., 2019), teaching methodology, pedagogy, student development, and the learning process (Benneworth & Charles, 2013), learning strategies and experience-based learning (Nuangchalem, 2014), experience-based learning models (Ardani et al., 2016), as well as community-based and service-learning (Nabors et al., 2018).

Service-based learning is different from volunteer activities (Greenwood, 2015). According to him, a clear and comprehensive understanding of the differences between the objectives and implementation will result in quality learning that can benefit students, universities, and society.

Experience-based learning has proven to be a practical teaching-learning approach because the theoretical knowledge (cognitive) gained in lectures is applied to the real world (Nabors et al., 2018). Many positive changes have been experienced by students who apply service learning. The first is a change in their behaviour when engaging in activities with the community; while at the university, these changes can be seen in students' attitudes toward learning (Gerholz et al., 2018). Second, service-learning has channelled students toward sustained civic engagement and awareness (Gerholz et al., 2018; Huda et al., 2018). Third, service learning has successfully improved students' social skills, particularly communication, leadership, and problem-solving (Gerholz et al., 2018). Fourth, community service-based learning has successfully facilitated students' academic achievement (Banerjee & Jackson, 2017). However, this raise concerns that students may prioritize internships as a space for subjective experiences. This activity also poses the potential for a singularized society.

Service learning has five stages: Investigation, Planning and Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration. Students' character is processed and developed through these five stages. Diana et al. (Handoyo et al., 2020) state that students can develop curiosity, communication skills, social awareness, and honesty through the investigation stage. Students can develop creativity, hard work, communication skills, and responsibility through the Planning and Preparation stage. Through the Implementation stage, students can develop character traits of hard work, discipline, responsibility, communication skills, and social awareness. Through the Reflection stage, students can develop honesty, and through the Demonstration stage, students can develop honesty and communication skills.

Quantitatively, the contribution of the MSIB program to the variance in students' soft skills was recorded as $R^2 = 0.121$. Conversion to Cohen's effect size yielded $f^2 \approx 0.14$, which is close to the "moderate" category ($f^2 = 0.15$) in Cohen's classification (Lorah, 2018). This value is lower than the average effect of service learning in Western countries, as reported in Thornburgh (2022) meta-analysis, which indicated a range of $g = 0.27$ – 0.43 for the domains of attitude, social, and cognitive skills among students. When examined by domain, the communication pathway showed the highest coefficient ($\beta \approx 0.50$, significant effect), while creativity ($\beta \approx 0.28$) and conflict resolution ($\beta \approx 0.22$) were at a moderate

effect level. Several factors may explain this discrepancy: (1) the relatively short duration of the MSIB program (one semester), limiting opportunities for critical reflection; (2) the self-rating assessment method, which tends to underestimate the development of non-communication competencies; and (3) the high mentor-to-student ratio ($> 1:10$), resulting in suboptimal individual feedback. These findings indicate that, while MSIB is effective primarily for communication skills, optimizing structured reflection components and intensive coaching is necessary to bring its impact on creativity and conflict resolution closer to international standards.

The MSIB program stands out because it combines classroom learning with real-world industry experience lasting 16–24 weeks, and the results can be converted into 20–40 credits, making it fully integrated into the formal curriculum (Larasati, 2022). Upon graduation, students receive a globally recognized competency certificate, an official document detailing their achievements and duration of study, and it has been proven to enhance graduates' competitiveness in the job market (MoECRT, 2023). The program's scale continues to expand: over 150,000 applicants from 700 universities by 2024, indicating high public confidence in its benefits (Ihsan, 2024); partnerships now include over 360 companies/organizations, offering greater diversity in placement options (Humas Ditjen Diktiristek, 2024). The empirical findings of this study confirm these advantages, with the communication pathway recording the most significant effect coefficient ($\beta \approx 0.50$), indicating that intensive interaction with industry mentors effectively strengthens students' professional communication skills. In addition to enhancing soft skills, the program helps universities meet Key Performance Indicators-1 (graduate employment rate) and Key Performance Indicators-2 (extracurricular experience) in the National Higher Education Standards, thereby providing institutional incentives for its sustainability.

Although effective in improving soft skills, this evaluation revealed four structural issues that still hinder the program. The four structural issues are: 1) Self-selection bias. Participation is voluntary and requires students to be at least in their 4th/5th semester (Kusuma, 2025). As a result, only highly motivated candidates qualify, leading to an average soft skills achievement that may be distorted to be better than the general population. 2) Mentor-to-student ratio exceeds the optimal threshold. Guidelines stipulate one mentor per 10 students (internship) and one mentor per 25 students (independent study) (Kusuma, 2025). In practice, partners with many applicants often approach the upper limit, reducing the intensity of coaching and individual feedback, especially in creativity and conflict resolution domains, which previously only showed moderate effects. 3) Reflection is still predominantly “once at the end.” Guidelines require students to prepare a final report containing personal reflections (Hayati & Wardhana, 2025), but not all partners facilitate the weekly reflection cycles recommended by service-learning literature. As a result, the metacognitive process that should deepen learning is often delayed until the report-writing phase. 4) Gap in expectations between partners and students. Recent studies have identified barriers such as suboptimal communication, non-standardized internship standard operating procedures (SOPs), and a lack of transparency in Key Performance Indicators (KPI), making it difficult for students to interpret performance targets (Agustin et al., 2024). As a result, some participants feel that routine tasks are unchallenging and inconsistent with their personal development goals. These issues underscore the need to strengthen governance, particularly by limiting mentor-to-student ratios, scheduling tiered reflections, and aligning expectations through learning contracts and transparent KPIs, to ensure that the impact of MSIB across all soft skill dimensions approaches international standards.

CONCLUSION

This study proves that participation in the MSIB program significantly improves students' soft skills, especially in the aspects of communication (50% contribution), creativity (37.4%), and conflict

resolution (36.8%). Although MSIB's contribution to the overall soft skills improvement was 12,1%, this result confirms the relevance of service learning as a pedagogical approach to mitigate the mismatch of graduates' competencies with the job market. The practical implication is that the government and universities must expand access to MSIB while strengthening collaboration with industry. Further research recommendations include investigating 87.9% of non-MSIB factors that influence soft skills (e.g. curriculum, lecturer support), expanding the sample nationally, exploring other variables such as leadership or technology adaptation, and examining the long-term impact of MSIB on graduate absorption in the workforce. The MSIB program has proven to be a strategic move but needs to be integrated with holistic policies to address the economic vulnerability of higher education graduates.

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