

Transformation Of Managerial Competence Of Education Administration Students Through Improvement Project In Non-School Work Environment

Pepi Januar Pelita¹, Ana Ratnasari²

¹²Universitas Muhammadiyah Bogor Raya, Indonesia

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Abstract

Transformation of Managerial Competence among Educational Administration Students through Improvement Projects in Non-School Work Environments. The shift toward an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum paradigm requires Educational Administration (EA) students to build competence that is flexible enough to adapt outside the conventional school ecosystem. This study analyzes the process of managerial-competence transformation among EA students through an Improvement Project scheme carried out with non-school work partners. A qualitative descriptive case-study approach was used, focusing on the Analyze–Develop–Validate–Recommend intervention stages. Participants comprised six-semester EA students undertaking internships, unit mentors from four partner entities (a sharia savings-and-loan cooperative, a service/clinic cooperative, a consumer cooperative, and a baitul maal), and the internship supervising lecturer. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, passive participant observation, and documentation analysis (logbooks, executive summaries, and draft SOPs/digital media). Findings show substantial transformation across three competence domains: (1) improved hard skills in digital archiving and operational SOP development; (2) a shift in soft skills from a routine administrative mindset toward a service mindset and complex problem-solving; and (3) strengthened cross-sector adaptability alongside strict data confidentiality (zero compromise on confidentiality). The study demonstrates that Improvement Projects situated in non-school work environments effectively accelerate the multidimensional work-readiness of Educational Administration students and offer a transferable model for embedding cross-sector experiential learning within outcome-based curricula.

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Corresponding Author:

Pepi Januar Pelita

Universitas Muhammadiyah Bogor Raya, Indonesia

Email: pjanuarpelita@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Indonesian higher education driven by the Independent Curriculum policy and the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) requires a fundamental shift in the preparation of graduates of education study programs, especially Education Administration (AP). Historically, the Education Administration study program focused on preparing education personnel and school managers. However, the dynamics of the modern world of work and the quality assurance framework of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 53 of 2023 emphasize the importance of mastering Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL) that is adaptive, multidimensional, and based on

concrete outputs (output-driven). This curriculum reorientation triggers the urgency of expanding the work area of student internships to the non-educational sector, such as public agencies, Islamic microfinance institutions, cooperatives, and social-philanthropic organizations.

Previous studies have shown that the main challenge for education graduates lies in the gap between academic theoretical competence and work-readiness in industry (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Healy, Hammer, & McIlveen, 2022). Both studies highlight the limited theoretical-practical exchange between graduate employability research and career development in higher education. In line with that, the Jackson and Bridgstock (2021) study confirms that student involvement in real-life experiential learning activities—both curricular and co-curricular—contributes more to job readiness than theoretical learning alone in the classroom. These findings are reinforced by the case study of Jackson, O'Brien, and Richards (2023) on master's of management students, which shows that experiential learning in a real work environment accelerates the mastery of employability skills while strengthening professional self-efficacy. However, the literature that specifically dissects the process of transforming the managerial competencies of AP students when faced with Improvement Project interventions in the non-school work ecosystem is still very limited.

Epistemologically, this research rests on two complementary umbrellas of learning theories. First, Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) views knowledge as the result of the transformation of concrete experience through the cycle of concrete experience – reflective observation – abstract conceptualization – active experimentation. Second, transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) emphasizes that an individual's frame of reference changes occur when a person is confronted with a disorienting dilemma—an experience that shakes old assumptions and triggers critical reflection. The combination of these two frameworks is relevant for reading AP students' internship processes in a non-school setting, which naturally presents a dissonance between old habits (school governance) and new demands (business/cooperative governance).

At the level of the concept of work competence, this study refers to the multidimensional employability model developed by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006), which states that job readiness is not just the mastery of technical skills, but a combination of anticipatory-optimization competencies, personal flexibility, self-awareness, and balance. This framework is enriched by the concept of graduate capital (Tomlinson, 2017), which divides graduates' work readiness capital into human capital (knowledge/skills), social capital (networking), cultural capital (understanding of the value of the world of work), identity capital (professional self-concept), and psychological capital (resilience and confidence). This dimension of psychological capital is specifically rooted in the construct of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), which is an individual's belief in his or her ability to complete a particular task—a belief that, according to Bandura, is most effectively built through mastery experience or hands-on experience of mastering real challenges, as facilitated by the Improvement Project scheme in this study. Meanwhile, at the internship practice level, this research is positioned in the cross-sectoral work-integrated learning (WIL) tradition. Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) emphasized that the effectiveness of WIL in developing employability attributes is largely determined by the extent to which the curriculum provides a pedagogical structure and a clear assessment of students' work experience, rather than just passive placement at the internship site. This view is reinforced by Zegwaard and Pretti (2023) who document the expansion of WIL practice to various non-traditional sectors as a global strategy to bridge the graduate competency gap. The three

theoretical umbrellas experiential/transformational learning, multidimensional employability competencies, and cross-sectoral Wis are synthesized in the conceptual framework of the research in Figure 2, which illustrates how the Improvement Project intervention is projected to transform the three domains of students' managerial competencies towards multidimensional job readiness.

This research orientation is designed to fill the empirical gap (state of the art and scientific novelty). The scientific innovation of this research lies in the formulation of the model of integrating Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984) and transformational learning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991) through the Improvement Project scheme which requires students to design real operational solutions (such as the preparation of SOPs, digitization of archives, and service information systems) for non-school partners. This model also enriches the graduate capital framework (Tomlinson, 2017) and the multidimensional employability competency model (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) with a specific context across sectors in Indonesia.

In the local context, the ecosystem of non-school partners in this study, the Sharia Savings and Loan and Financing Cooperative (KSPPS) and its Baitul Maal unit operate under the regulatory umbrella of the Regulation of the Minister of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises Number 16/Per/M.KUKM/IX/2015 concerning the Implementation of Sharia Savings and Loan and Financing Business Activities by Cooperatives. The characteristics of KSPPS governance that combine sharia principles, member service orientation, and financial accountability based on public trust make it a work context that contrasts and is complementary to the school ecosystem where AP students are usually formed, so that theoretically it has the potential to trigger a sharper competency transformation than internships at institutions similar to their academic backgrounds.

Reviewing the literature that has been described, it can be identified that three research gaps underlie this study. First, previous work-integrated learning and graduate employability studies (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Healy, Hammer, & McIlveen, 2022; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017) generally researches the business/general student population and has not targeted students of educational study programs such as Education Administration. Second, cross-sector work-integrated learning studies (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023) document the expansion of the internship sector globally, but have not yet unraveled the gradual process of competency transformation (not just the final outcome) when education students are placed in sharia-based institutions such as KSPPS/Baitul Maal. Third, no research has been found that explicitly uses a structured intervention model (Analyze–Develop–Validate–Recommend) as an instrument to map the transformation of managerial competencies gradually and verifiably through concrete output products. The novelty of this research lies in the combination of the three gaps at once: this study is a study that traces the gradual—not just final result—of the transformation of the managerial competence of Education Administration students through the Improvement Project intervention scheme in the context of sharia-based work that contrasts with the academic background of students, while offering a conceptual model (Figure 2) that has the potential to be replicated in the context of non-school cross-sector others.

Based on the background and literature review, the formulation of the problem in this study is: (1) What is the form of managerial competence of AP students before and during the implementation of internships in a non-school work environment? (2) How does the process of transforming students' managerial competencies occur through the Improvement Project (Analyze–Develop–Validate–Recommend) stage? (3) To what extent does the output of the Improvement

Project provide value-added to the operational governance of partners while strengthening student work readiness?

In line with the three problem formulations above, this study aims to: (1) describe the form of managerial competence of AP students before and during the implementation of internships in a non-school work environment; (2) analyze the process of transforming students' managerial competencies through the Improvement Project (Analyze–Develop–Validate–Recommend) stage; and (3) evaluate the value-added output of the Improvement Project for partner operational governance as well as student work readiness.

The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe in depth the dynamics of the transformation of managerial competencies of AP students through the Improvement Project in non-school partners.

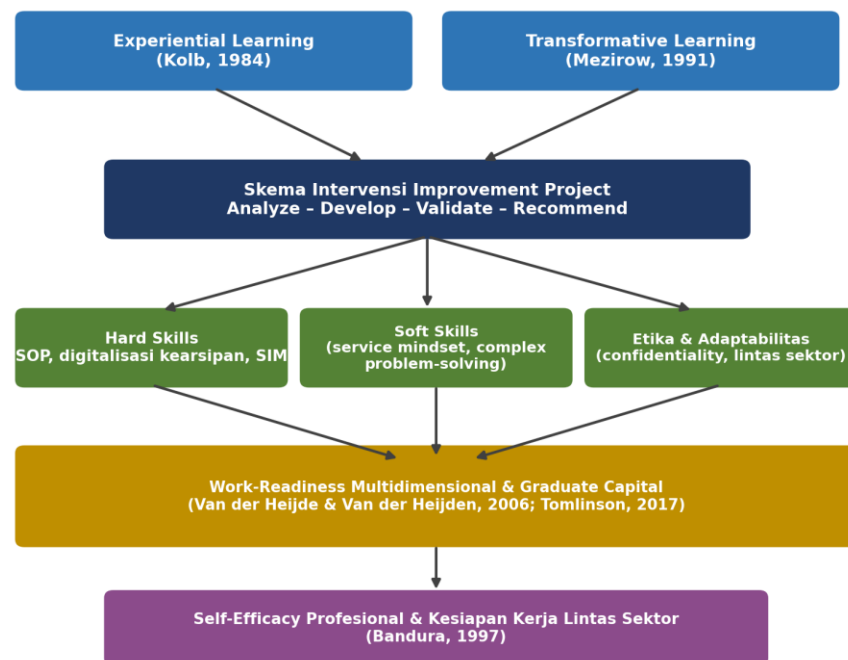
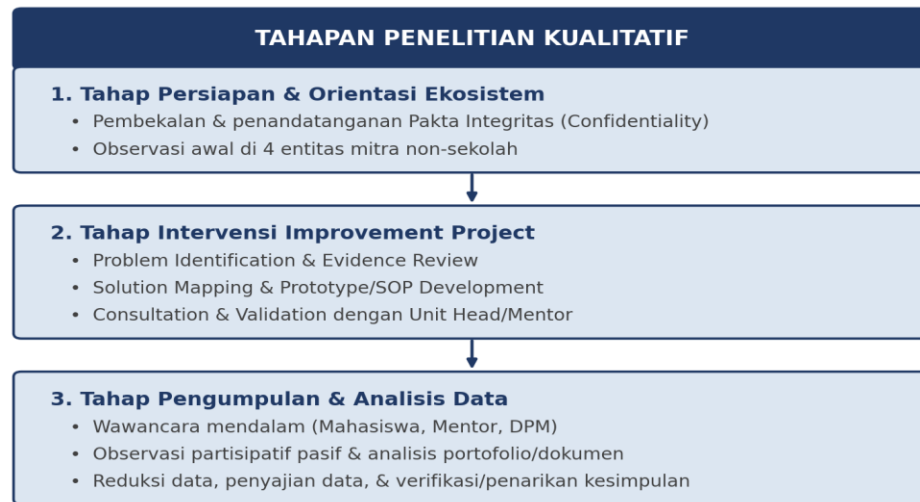


Figure 2. Research Conceptual Framework

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was chosen to delve deeply into the process of changing managerial competencies and authentic experiences (lived experiences) of AP students in a non-school work environment.



The research was carried out on the ecosystem of the Khairu Ummah Group, a sharia cooperative-based business group that houses four business units: Sharia Savings and Loan and Financing Cooperatives (KSPPS), Service/Clinic Cooperatives, Consumer Cooperatives, and Baitul Maal. These four units operate based on sharia principles as stipulated in the Regulation of the Minister of Cooperatives and SMEs Number 16/Per/M.KUKM/IX/2015, with governance characteristics that emphasize member services, fund accountability, and social fund management (ZISWAF). The selection of this location was based on the consideration that the four units are completely outside the school ecosystem, so it is representative to test the transferability of AP students' managerial competencies to the non-educational sector.

The research subjects were selected by purposive sampling, consisting of: (1) 3 AP semester 6 students who carried out internships for 3 weeks in the Khairu Ummah Group scheme (including KSPPS units, Service Cooperatives/Clinics, Consumer Cooperatives, and Baitul Maal); (2) 4 Mentor Unit/Head Unit partners; and (3) 1 Internship Supervisor (DPM). The characteristics of the participants are briefly presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Category Participant	Quantity	Unit/Role	Engagement Methods
Semester Educational Administration Students	6 3 person	Intern in 4 units of Khairu Ummah Group	Interviews, observations, documentation
Mentor Unit/Head Unit	4 person	KSPPS, Service Cooperative/Clinic, Consumer Cooperative, Baitul Maal	Interviews, performance evaluations

Category Participant	Quantity	Unit/Role	Engagement Methods
Internship Supervisor (DPM)	1 person	Academic supervision of internship programs	Interviews, portfolio reviews

Data collection techniques include: In-depth Interview: Conducted with students and mentors to understand changes in mindset, adaptation constraints, and hard/soft skills spikes. Passive Participatory Observation: Observing daily interactions, coaching, and Final Presentation sessions in front of partner leaders. Documentation Study: Describe the daily logbook, executive summary, draft SOP/module, digital service instruments, and mentor evaluation sheets.

Data analysis follows the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion/verification. Data reduction was carried out by categorizing interview transcripts and observation notes into three main themes according to the conceptual framework: change in hard skills, change in soft skills, and strengthen ethics and adaptability. Data presentation was carried out in the form of a matrix of Improvement Project stages (Table 2) to map the relationship between activities, outputs, and competency changes in each phase.

The validity of the data was tested through source triangulation (comparing the perceptions of students, mentors, and DPM) and technical triangulation (testing the consistency of interview results with physical evidence of Improvement Project product documents), following the rules of qualitative research credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In addition, member checking was carried out by reconfirming the researcher's interpretation to students and mentors in the Final Presentation session, to ensure the compatibility between the findings and the actual experience of the participants.

Data collection was carried out in three time stages that were aligned with the 3-week internship cycle (see Figure 1). Week I was used for initial passive observation and baseline interviews with students to map managerial competencies before the intervention, along with the signing of the Integrity Pact. Week II focused on participatory observation during the Analyze and Develop phases, accompanied by mid-cycle interviews with mentors to record changes in performance that began to appear, as well as the collection of work documents (draft SOPs, evidence notes). Week III included observations at the Validate and Recommend stages, final interviews with students, mentors, and DPM, as well as the collection of final documents (executive summary, mentor evaluation sheet). All data collected at each stage are then reduced and juxtaposed across sources as explained in the data validity section above, so that the triangulation process takes place continuously throughout the research cycle, not just at the end of data collection.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data collection during the 3-week internship cycle, the research findings are grouped into three main phases of transformation of students' managerial competencies:

1. Pre-Intervention Phase and Mindset Disruption (Week I) In the early stages, AP students experience mindset shift. Accustomed to the school administrative structure that tends to be static and oriented towards the learning process, students are faced with the work rhythm of non-school agencies

(KSPPS, Cooperatives, and Baitul Maal) that are dynamic, financially measurable, and based on customer satisfaction (customer/service excellence). These findings strengthen and expand the argument of Rowe and Zegwaard (2017), who emphasize that the value of work-integrated learning for job readiness is largely determined by the level of structuring of work experience, rather than just passive placement at the internship site. In contrast to the pattern of routine observation-based internships (job shadowing) that is commonly found in conventional educational practices, the disruption of the work rhythm experienced by students in this study occurred from day one because partner institutions demanded active and measurable engagement an empirical contribution that complements the findings of Jackson and Bridgstock (2021) that learning is based on real experience, rather than internship placements that are merely formalities, has a greater impact on job readiness. Strict supervision related to the confidentiality of member data (zero compromise on confidentiality) has formed professional ethics awareness and work accountability since day one.

2. Improvement Project Execution Phase (Week II–III) The massive transformation process of managerial competence occurs when students carry out four stages of the Improvement Project:

Table 2. Matrix of Project Improvement Stages and Managerial Competency Changes

Stages Project	Aktivitas Utama Mahasiswa	Luaran Konkret (Deliverables)	Perubahan Kompetensi Manajerial
Analyze	Identify the root cause of the archiving problem and the flow of the service queue.	Problem Statement and Evidence Note	Critical thinking acumen and governance analysis.
Develop	Designing draft SOP improvements for digital archives and information media.	Draft SOP and Digital System Accessibility	Mastery of hard skills in modern administration & driver's license.
Validate	Consult and test the feasibility of draft with the Mentor/Head Unit.	Revised Draft SOP and Validation Notes	Persuasive communication and negotiation skills.
Recommend	Present the final solution in front of the Management and Management Partners.	Executive Summary & Final Proposal	Leadership, public speaking, and problem-solving.

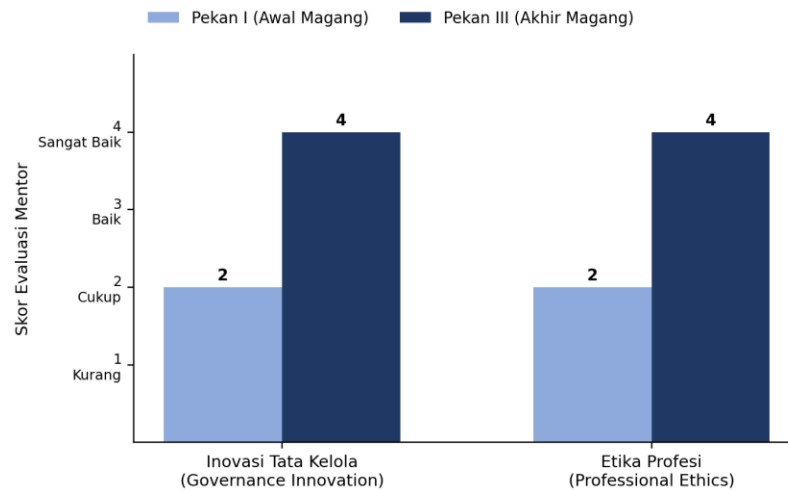
Transformation in the Three Domains of Competence

In the realm of technical competence, the most prominent transformation can be seen in the ability of students to prepare draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for digital archives and design information media-based service instruments. Prior to the intervention, AP students were generally only exposed to manual filing in the style of school administration; Through the Develop stage in the Improvement Project, students are required to understand digital workflows, simple management information systems (SIM), and data accessibility mechanisms that suit the operational needs of cooperatives. This mastery shows that educational administration skills are transferable to the context of non-school document governance, as long as students are given the space to practice them directly on real problems—not just simulations in the classroom.

1. Transformasi Soft Skills

The most significant shift occurred in the realm of soft skills, especially the change from an administrative-passive mindset to a proactive service mindset. Students who were previously accustomed to carrying out standard instruction in school administration are required to identify the root of operational problems (Analyze stage), formulate solutions (develop stage), and communicate and defend the proposal in front of mentors and partner leaders (Validate and Recommend stage). This series trains complex problem-solving, persuasive communication, negotiation, and situational leadership simultaneously—four competencies that are rarely explicitly trained in conventional school internship schemes

2. **Strengthening Adaptability and Work Ethics** The third area that has been transformed is adaptability across organizational cultures and professional ethical awareness. The principle of zero compromise on confidentiality strictly applied by KSPPS and Baitul Maal to member data forces students to develop new disciplines in the management of sensitive information—a dimension of archival ethics that is rarely emphasized in conventional school internship practices. The combination of the demands of customer satisfaction-based work speed and the obligation to maintain data confidentiality results in a dual form of adaptability: students learn to work quickly and carefully, two orientations that are generally considered to be in conflict in the operations management literature.
3. **Competency Transformation and Impact on Partners** The results of the mentor evaluation showed an increase in the average student performance score from the "Sufficient" category (score 2) in the first week to "Very Good" (score 4) in the third week, especially in the aspect of innovation in professional governance and ethics, as illustrated in Figure 3. The resulting Improvement Project products, such as draft SOPs, digital-based incoming/outgoing letter archiving, and customer satisfaction instruments—were accepted by partner management to be adopted as new operational standards.



This discovery confirms Kolb's (1984) theory of Experiential Learning, in which the transformation of knowledge occurs effectively through a cycle of reflection on concrete experiences in the real world. This process can also be interpreted as transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991): students' initial disorientation when entering the non-school work ecosystem triggers critical reflection that ultimately changes their perspective (frame of reference) towards the Education Administration profession. This thinking is in line with a study by Jackson, O'Brien, and Richards (2023) which shows that students who engage in authentic problem-solving in a real work environment experience an increase in professional self-efficacy much faster than students who only perform daily routine tasks. Conceptually, the transferability of Education Administration knowledge to the non-school sector has proven to be very feasible, in line with the principle of work-integrated learning across sectors affirmed by Zegwaard and Pretti (2023). The basic principles of education management—such as document management, workflow organization, organizational communication, and program evaluation—have an identical structure to the governance of non-educational institutions. The only difference is context-specific knowledge. The Improvement Project has proven to act as a bridging mechanism that transforms managerial theoretical knowledge into adaptive practical skills.

In addition to hard skills, strengthening soft skills is an important finding. AP students who are initially passive develop into proactive in identifying operational problems. This strengthening enriches psycho-social capital and student identity capital as conceptualized in the framework of graduate capital (Tomlinson, 2017), as well as answering the research gap identified by Healy, Hammer, and McIlveen (2022) between the study of graduate employability and career development. The emphasis on the principles of controlled access and confidentiality in non-school institutions also teaches high-level archival ethics that have been poorly accommodated in conventional school internship practices. Thus, diversification of internship locations to the non-school sector has been proven to expand the career spectrum of AP graduates without sacrificing their main scientific identity, as well as strengthening the position of student competencies within the framework of multidimensional employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

The findings of this study extend the application of Experiential and Transformative Learning theories to the realm of vocational-educational higher education that has rarely been tested outside the school context. This study also provides empirical evidence that the graduate capital framework (Tomlinson, 2017) and the multidimensional employability model (Van der Heijde & Van der

Heijden, 2006) can be applied cross-disciplinary, including in Education Administration study programs that have historically been oriented to a single sector (schooling). Practical Implications. For study program managers, these findings encourage the expansion of internship partnership schemes to the non-school sector as an official pathway and equivalent to school internships, complete with output-based evaluation instruments (deliverable-based assessment) such as the Analyze–Develop–Validate–Recommend stage model tested in this study. For non-school partners, the results of the study show that the involvement of education students in operational improvement projects can be a source of governance innovation at a low cost. Policy Implications. At the policy level of the study program, the results of this research are relevant to support the implementation of Independent Learning–Independent Campus (Sopiansyah & Masruroh, 2022) and Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 concerning Quality Assurance of Higher Education, especially in designing Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL) that accommodates cross-sector work experience as a legitimate form of achieving managerial competence.

This research has a number of limitations that need to be considered in the use of its findings. First, the limited number of research subjects (3 students) and the relatively short duration of internships (3 weeks) in one partner group (Khairu Ummah Group) make these findings contextual and cannot be generalized widely to the entire student population of Educational Administration. Second, the evaluation of student performance scores is sourced from mentor assessments that are qualitative-descriptive, so that they have the potential to contain the subjectivity of the assessor. Third, this study has not tracked the long-term impact of non-school internship experiences on students' career trajectories after graduation. Based on these limitations, further research is recommended to: (1) expand the number of subjects and the variety of non-school partners to test the transferability of the model in more diverse contexts; (2) using longitudinal design to track long-term impacts on graduates' job readiness and career trajectory; and (3) developing a more standardized managerial competency evaluation instrument to increase the reliability of measuring competency transformation across intern partners. 4. CONCLUSION The conclusion describes the answers to the research hypothesis and/or objectives, or the scientific findings obtained. The conclusion does not contain a repetition of the results and discussion, but rather a summary of the findings as expected in the objectives or hypothesis.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Improvement Project-based internship programs in non-school work environments are effectively able to transform the managerial competencies of Education Administration students. This transformation process includes: (1) improving technical capabilities (hard skills) in system analysis, SOP preparation, and archival digitization; (2) the escalation of soft skills characterized by a measurable shift from an administrative-passive role to an active problem-solver role, evidenced by an increase in mentor evaluation scores from the "Sufficient" category to "Excellent" in three weeks (Figure 3) which includes complex problem-solving skills, service mindset, and situational leadership; and (3) the establishment of an accountable professional work ethic, characterized by the internalization of the principle of zero compromise on confidentiality from the first day of the internship. Practically, these findings show that student Improvement Project products (draft SOP for digital archiving and customer satisfaction instruments) are worthy of being

adopted by partners as a new operational standard, so that this internship model can be replicated by other Education Administration study programs as a formal partnership scheme with Islamic microfinance institutions or similar non-school organizations. The implications of this study encourage the managers of the Education Administration study program to permanently integrate multi-sector partnerships and output-driven approaches into OBE-based curricula, in line with the spirit of Independent Learning–Independent Campus (Sopiansyah & Masruroh, 2022).

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