

Criminology Internship Experiences in Relation To Self-Efficacy and Career Readiness

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100300248>

Received: 11 March 2026; Accepted: 16 March 2026; Published: 02 April 2026

ABSTRACT

The development of professional competencies, self-efficacy, and career readiness is a critical aspect of preparing criminology students for the workforce. This study examined the relationship between internship experiences, self-efficacy, and career readiness among Bachelor of Science in Criminology students from two tertiary schools in Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines. A quantitative correlational research design was employed, with 120 interns who completed their internship during the 2024–2025 academic year serving as respondents. Data were collected through validated researcher-developed questionnaires measuring internship experiences, self-efficacy, and career readiness, and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson's correlation coefficient. Findings revealed that internship experiences were generally high, with interns reporting meaningful tasks, supportive supervision, ample learning opportunities, and high perceived value. Self-efficacy was also rated high, encompassing task-specific confidence, problem-solving confidence, and learning self-efficacy. Career readiness was similarly high, with strong ratings in professionalism and work ethic, teamwork and collaboration, leadership and initiative, and career management. Correlation analysis indicated very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between internship experiences, self-efficacy, and career readiness.

These results suggest that well-structured internship programs contribute substantially to interns' professional competence, self-confidence, and preparedness for career entry. It is recommended that the College of Criminology enhance internship program design, enhance supervisory support and mentorship, integrate career development activities, and promote reflective learning practices to further support students' professional growth and career readiness.

Keywords: criminology interns, internship experiences, self-efficacy, career readiness, professional competence

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

Criminology education increasingly emphasizes the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical experience to prepare students for the complex demands of the criminal justice system. While classroom instruction provides foundational understanding of criminal laws, investigative procedures, and criminological theories, academic learning alone is insufficient to cultivate the practical skills and competencies required for professional practice (Liang et al., 2021; Okeke et al., 2022). Internship programs address this gap by offering students real-world exposure to professional settings, enabling them to apply classroom learning, participate in case management, assist in investigations, and observe ethical and procedural standards in practice (Afolabi et al., 2023; Chandra & Singh, 2024). These immersive experiences are particularly critical in criminology, where students must navigate high-pressure and ethically complex environments.

A key benefit of internships is the development of self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks. Engagement in meaningful, supervised activities strengthens students' confidence, problem-solving capabilities, and adaptability in professional contexts (Nguyen et al., 2021; Ahmed

& Malik, 2023). Students with higher self-efficacy are better equipped to manage ethically challenging situations, make informed decisions, and perform duties with competence, whereas lower self-efficacy may impede professional growth despite strong academic preparation. By cultivating self-efficacy, internships help bridge the gap between knowledge acquisition and practical application, ensuring that students are prepared for the demands of the criminal justice workforce.

In addition to self-efficacy, internships enhance career readiness, encompassing technical skills, critical thinking, professional communication, ethical decision-making, and overall preparedness for employment (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2025). Exposure to professional environments allows students to evaluate their competencies, identify skill gaps, and refine career goals in line with industry expectations. Internships also offer mentorship opportunities and firsthand insight into organizational culture, which are essential for fostering professionalism and informed career planning. This experiential learning is especially important for criminology students, who must demonstrate competence in complex, dynamic, and ethically demanding work settings.

Despite growing research on internships across various disciplines, empirical studies focusing specifically on criminology students in Southeast Asia remain limited (Chandra & Singh, 2024; Tan et al., 2025). Many studies generalize findings across broader student populations without capturing the unique challenges and experiences of criminology interns, such as exposure to high-stakes decision-making, interaction with law enforcement, and application of ethical frameworks in practice. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how these internship experiences directly influence both psychological factors (e.g., self-efficacy) and employability outcomes (e.g., career readiness). Addressing this gap, the present study examines how criminology internship experiences relate to self-efficacy and career readiness, providing evidence to improve internship program design, enhance professional preparation, and ensure the development of competent, confident, and career-ready criminology professionals.

Statement Of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the relationship between internship experience, self-efficacy, and career readiness among criminology students.

Specifically, the study will answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of criminology interns' experiences in terms of task complexity, supervision quality, learning opportunities, and perceived value?
2. What is the level of criminology interns' self-efficacy in terms of task-specific confidence, problem-solving confidence, and learning self-efficacy?
3. What is the level of criminology interns' career readiness in terms of professionalism and work ethic, teamwork and collaboration, leadership and initiative and career management?
4. Is there a significant relationship between internship experience and self-efficacy among criminology interns?
5. Is there a significant relationship between internship experiences and career readiness among criminology interns?

METHODS

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive–correlational design to examine relationships among variables. Data collection was conducted in Oroquieta City among fourth-year criminology students enrolled in accredited higher education institutions. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling, including only those who had completed at least 75% of their required internship or on-the-job training. A total of 120 students participated, representing a diverse demographic profile in terms of age, gender, and academic performance, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing career readiness. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent.

Data were gathered using a structured, researcher-developed questionnaire comprising three components: an Internship Experience section adapted from established evaluation frameworks, a Self-Efficacy scale modified from the General Self-Efficacy Scale, and a Career Readiness section based on the NACE competencies framework. Content validity was established through expert evaluation, and reliability testing yielded acceptable internal consistency coefficients. Specifically, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were obtained, yielding $\alpha = 0.89$ for internship experiences, $\alpha = 0.87$ for self-efficacy, and $\alpha = 0.91$ for career readiness, indicating high reliability of the instruments.

Quantitative analyses included descriptive statistics to determine mean scores and standard deviations for internship experience, self-efficacy, and career readiness. Pearson’s correlation was employed to examine the strength and direction of relationships between internship experiences and career readiness, self-efficacy and career readiness, and internship experiences and self-efficacy. Ethical considerations were observed through institutional approvals and strict adherence to confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right of participants to withdraw without consequence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Level of the Criminology Intern’s Experiences

Table 1. Level of the Criminology Intern’s Experiences

Statements	Mean	Description
A. Task Complexity	3.65	Highly Experienced
B. Supervision Quality	3.75	Highly Experienced
C. Learning Opportunities	3.84	Highly Experienced
D. Perceived Value	3.88	Highly Experienced

The findings in Table 1 indicate that criminology interns in Oroquieta City reported consistently high levels of experiential engagement across all measured dimensions, with the greatest ratings observed for perceived value and learning opportunities. This suggests that interns not only encountered tasks of sufficient complexity but also engaged in activities that they regarded as meaningful and professionally relevant. High perceptions of supervision quality further imply that mentor guidance and feedback were significant components of these internship experiences. Prior research has found that internships offering a balance of challenging tasks and supportive guidance enhance students’ practical competence and foster substantive experiential learning (Koczberski et al., 2021; Bailey & IFATE, 2022).

Moreover, the robust mean scores for learning opportunities and perceived value underscore the importance of internships in helping students contextualize theoretical knowledge within professional environments. Studies have demonstrated that internships characterized by authentic learning experiences significantly contribute to skill development and improve students’ confidence in their ability to perform professional roles (Tymon et al., 2020; O’Donovan & McAuliffe, 2023). Together, these results affirm that well-structured and systematically implemented internship programs are critical for enriching criminology education, aligning academic preparation with workplace expectations, and supporting students’ transitions into the criminal justice workforce.

Level of the Criminology Intern’s Self-efficacy

Table 2. Level of the Criminology Intern’s Self-efficacy

Statements	Mean	Description
A. Task-specific Confidence	3.70	High Self-efficacy

B. Problem-solving Confidence	3.67	High Self-efficacy
C. Learning Self-Efficacy	3.75	High Self-efficacy

The data in Table 2 show that criminology interns report high levels of self-efficacy across all measured dimensions, with the strongest mean score observed for learning self-efficacy. Interns demonstrated strong confidence in their ability to perform specific professional tasks, solve problems, and engage in ongoing learning. These results indicate that internship participation not only enhances practical abilities but also strengthens criminology students' belief in their capacity to succeed in demanding and uncertain work situations. This further implies that experiential exposure plays a significant role in shaping students' psychological preparedness for professional practice. Recent research affirms that internship experiences characterized by task engagement and reflective practice are positively associated with increased self-efficacy among students in professional disciplines (Liu et al., 2021; Smith & Peterson, 2023).

Furthermore, the consistently high self-efficacy ratings for task-specific and problem-solving confidence suggest that exposure to real-world challenges during internships helps students translate theoretical knowledge into effective action. Studies have shown that internships offering structured opportunities for problem resolution and feedback significantly contribute to students' sense of agency and professional confidence, thereby supporting successful transitions into the workforce (Gür & Yılmaz, 2022; Herrera & Vega, 2024). These enhanced self-efficacy levels likely support better adaptability, resilience, and career preparedness among criminology interns as they approach graduation and entry into criminal justice professions.

Level of the Criminology Intern's Career Readiness

Table 3. Level of the Criminology Intern's Career Readiness

Statements	Mean	Description
A. Professionalism and Work Ethic	3.76	Highly Ready
B. Teamwork and Collaboration	3.82	Highly Ready
C. Leadership and Initiative	3.74	Highly Ready
D. Career Management	3.66	Highly Ready

The results in Table 3 show that criminology interns reported high levels of career readiness across all evaluated dimensions, with particularly strong ratings for teamwork and collaboration and professionalism and work ethic. These findings suggest that participation in internship programs significantly contributes to the development of competencies that are highly valued in professional settings. In line with existing research, structured internship experiences provide students with practical opportunities to refine interpersonal, collaborative, and ethical work behaviors, facilitating a smoother transition from academic learning to workplace expectations (Wilopo et al., 2025). Interns who engage in real-world tasks and team-based projects are typically better prepared to meet workplace demands, demonstrating both competence and confidence as they enter their careers.

In addition, the high mean scores for leadership and initiative and career management indicate that internships not only help students adapt to professional norms but also foster proactive and forward-looking career behaviors. Prior studies affirm that internship participation enhances graduates' readiness for employment by strengthening their ability to navigate career pathways, manage responsibilities, and exercise leadership in diverse contexts (Musa et al., 2025). By exposing students to industry practices and expectations, internships cultivate essential soft skills and professional acumen that support long-term employability. These findings further suggest that internship experiences serve as a critical bridge between academic preparation and actual workforce integration. Collectively, these findings reinforce the value of experiential learning in criminology education and underscore the role of internships as a key strategy for preparing students to function effectively

and confidently in their chosen professions. In this regard, internships function not only as training platforms but also as mechanisms for strengthening students' professional identity and confidence.

Significant Relationship between the Criminology Intern’s Experiences and Self-efficacy

Table 4. Significant Relationship between the Criminology Intern’s Experiences and Self-efficacy

Variables	<i>r</i> value / <i>p</i> value	Remark
Task Complexity and Task Specific Confidence	.880** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Task Complexity and Problem-Solving Confidence	.868** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Task Complexity and Learning Self-Efficacy	.904** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Supervision Quality and Task Specific Confidence	.850** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Supervision Quality and Problem-Solving Confidence	.839** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Supervision Quality and Learning Self-Efficacy	.880** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Learning Opportunities and Task Specific Confidence	.902** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Learning Opportunities and Problem-Solving Confidence	.907** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Learning Opportunities and Learning Self-Efficacy	.941** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Perceived Value and Task Specific Confidence	.876** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Perceived Value and Problem-Solving Confidence	.868** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Perceived Value and Learning Self-Efficacy	.926** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant

The correlation analysis presented in Table 4 reveals very high and statistically significant relationships between criminology interns’ experiences and their levels of self-efficacy across all examined pairings. Task complexity, supervision quality, learning opportunities, and perceived value consistently demonstrated strong positive associations with task-specific confidence, problem-solving confidence, and learning self-efficacy. These findings suggest that rich and structured internship experiences are closely linked with higher self-efficacy among interns. This indicates that the quality of internship exposure directly influences students’ confidence in performing professional responsibilities. Empirical research supports this pattern, indicating that internships characterized by meaningful, well-designed tasks and supportive supervision significantly contribute to students’ belief in their competence and confidence in professional contexts (Wang & Hessel, 2021). When internships offer a balance of challenge and support, students are more likely to internalize professional skills and develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy.

Moreover, the particularly strong correlations observed between learning opportunities and all dimensions of self-efficacy highlight the role of experiential learning in reinforcing interns’ confidence to learn, adapt, and perform effectively in real work settings. Prior studies have found that internships that provide diverse learning experiences enhance cognitive engagement and increase students’ self-regulated learning, which in turn promotes stronger professional self-beliefs (Osei-Kofi & Agyekum-Mensah, 2022). Similarly, when interns perceive their experiences as valuable and closely linked to real-world demands, they tend to exhibit greater persistence and confidence in mastering tasks (Lee & Kim, 2024). These findings emphasize that learning-rich environments are essential in maximizing the developmental impact of internship programs. Together, these results underscore the importance of internship design that integrates quality tasks, meaningful learning opportunities, and reflective practice to foster robust self-efficacy among criminology interns.

Significant Relationship between the Criminology Intern’s Experiences and Career Readiness

Table 5. Significant Relationship between the Criminology Intern’s Experiences and Career Readiness

Variables	r value	Remark
Task Complexity and Professionalism and Work Ethic	.897** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Task Complexity and Teamwork and Collaboration	.898** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Task Complexity and Leadership and Initiative	.871** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Task Complexity and Career Management	.860** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Supervision Quality and Professionalism and Work Ethic	.905** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Supervision Quality and Teamwork and Collaboration	.902** .000	Very High Correlation Highly Significant
Supervision Quality and Leadership and Initiative	.862**	Very High Correlation

	.000	Highly Significant
Supervision Quality and Career Management	.849**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant
Learning Opportunities and Professionalism and Work Ethic	.946**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant
Learning Opportunities and Teamwork and Collaboration	.944**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant
Learning Opportunities and Leadership and Initiative	.912**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant
Learning Opportunities and Career Management	.896**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant
Perceived Value and Professionalism and Work Ethic	.942**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant
Perceived Value and Teamwork and Collaboration	.943**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant
Perceived Value and Leadership and Initiative	.916**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant
Perceived Value and Career Management	.890**	Very High Correlation
	.000	Highly Significant

The correlation results in Table 5 reveal very high and statistically significant relationships between all dimensions of criminology internship experiences and aspects of career readiness. Task complexity, supervision quality, learning opportunities, and perceived value all display consistently strong associations with professionalism, teamwork, leadership, and career management competencies. These findings indicate that rich, meaningful internship experiences play a vital role in preparing students for the professional demands of the criminal justice field. This further confirms that experiential learning is a strong predictor of employability outcomes among criminology students. Consistent with existing research, structured and engaging internship environments enhance students' development of workplace behaviors, including ethical professionalism and effective collaboration skills, thereby strengthening overall career preparedness (Jackson et al., 2021; Kumar & Jayasuriya, 2023).

In addition, the particularly robust correlations observed between learning opportunities and all career readiness indicators highlight the importance of diverse and relevant experiential learning in internship programs. Prior studies have shown that internships which offer extensive real-world task engagement and reflective practice significantly improve graduates' readiness for the workforce by fostering both technical and soft skills, such as leadership, adaptability, and strategic career management (Rahman et al., 2022; O'Neill & Murphy, 2024). These outcomes suggest that internship experiences that are thoughtfully designed and aligned with industry expectations contribute substantially to students' readiness to navigate the professional landscape effectively.

The findings underscore the need for institutions to continuously enhance internship quality to sustain high levels of career readiness among graduates.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that criminology interns generally experience highly meaningful and engaging internships, with adequate supervision, practical exposure, and learning opportunities. Interns demonstrated strong self-efficacy and high career readiness, reflecting the effectiveness of internship programs. Furthermore, very strong and statistically significant relationships confirm that internship experiences are key determinants of both self-efficacy and career readiness.

These findings highlight the importance of continuously improving internship structures to ensure alignment with industry demands and evolving professional standards. However, this study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data and its focus on selected institutions within a specific geographic area, which may affect the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should explore additional variables such as demographic factors, institutional differences, and qualitative insights to provide a more comprehensive understanding of internship outcomes. Longitudinal studies may also be conducted to examine the long-term impact of internship experiences on career development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Criminology programs should continue to enhance internship design by providing balanced exposure to analytical, administrative, and field-based tasks. Supervisory and mentorship systems should be strengthened to ensure continuous guidance and constructive feedback. Institutions are also encouraged to establish formal partnerships with law enforcement agencies and related organizations to ensure high-quality placement opportunities. Integrating career development workshops can further support students' career readiness. Encouraging reflective learning can help interns connect theory with practice. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate mixed-method approaches and expand the scope to other regions or institutions to improve the generalizability and depth of findings. Additionally, researchers may explore the potential mediating or moderating effects of self-efficacy and other psychological variables on career readiness outcomes.

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