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Uncovering Vocational Students' Internship Skills Instruments to Improve Employability in Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

Employee performance is a crucial determinant of success in the competitive hospitality industry. Vocational education institutions are therefore required to prepare students with technical expertise and employability competencies aligned with authentic workplace demands. This study aims to develop an industry-informed internship assessment instrument for evaluating vocational students' employability-related competencies in the hospitality sector. A qualitative instrument-development design integrated a semi-systematic literature review, two rounds of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and preliminary expert review. The literature review synthesized 68 studies to establish the initial conceptual basis and candidate employability indicators. Industry consultation involved 20 human resource managers and training supervisors from 15 hotels in Jakarta, while five vocational education lecturers with internship supervision experience participated in the expert review. Qualitative content analysis was used to identify, refine, organize, and contextualize indicators according to hospitality workplace expectations. The final instrument comprises five domains: Communication Skills, Collaboration and Teamwork, Self and Character Development, Professional Ethics, and Creativity and Innovation, represented by 30 behavioral indicators assessed using a 10-point performance rating scale with behavioral descriptors. The development process resulted in substantive refinement, including replacing Problem Solving and Decision Making with Self and Character Development because vocational interns have limited authority to make independent workplace decisions. The study contributes an industry-informed and context-sensitive approach by translating broad employability concepts into observable workplace behaviors. The instrument provides a practical basis for internship supervision, formative feedback, curriculum alignment, and university–industry collaboration. Further psychometric validation is required to establish its reliability and construct validity.

Keywords: *Vocational Education, Internship Skills, Employability, Hospitality Industry, Assessment Instrument.*

1. Introduction

The competitiveness of modern industries is no longer determined solely by technical proficiency but also by the integration of non-technical, or soft, skills [1]. With rapid digitalization, employers acknowledge the growing importance of technical expertise while also emphasizing cognitive, social, and self-management abilities as important dimensions of employability and long-term performance [2]–[4]. In hospitality, these competencies are particularly relevant because service delivery depends on communication, teamwork, professional conduct, and responsiveness to guests. Recent hospitality research likewise shows that employers expect a broad combination of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes from hospitality graduates [14], [21].

Vocational education is expected to prepare students for authentic workplace demands, yet employability competencies are not always assessed with the same explicitness as technical competencies [6], [14]. Internships provide an important bridge between classroom learning and workplace practice and allow students to develop competencies through authentic experience [7], [22]. However, internship outcomes depend partly on what is assessed and how assessment is conducted. Previous research and reviews indicate continuing variation in employability definitions, competency groupings, and approaches to measuring work readiness [9], [16].

Despite extensive employability research, hospitality internships still require assessment approaches that are concise, industry-informed, and sufficiently specific to capture students demonstrated workplace behaviors. Hospitality research has shown that employers, educators, and students may differ in their perceptions of the competencies required for entry-level work, highlighting the importance of stronger

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industry–education alignment [14], [15]. This study addresses that need by synthesizing employability literature and co-defining core competencies and indicators through FGDs with hospitality industry stakeholders and vocational education representatives in Jakarta. The intended contribution is an industry-informed, context-sensitive assessment instrument that can support internship supervision, curriculum alignment, and university–industry collaboration.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of three elements into a single internship assessment framework. First, the framework is theory-informed, as its initial employability domains and indicators are derived from a synthesis of relevant literature. Second, it is industry-informed, because the indicators are refined and prioritized through two rounds of FGDs involving 20 human resource managers and training supervisors from 15 hotels in Jakarta. Third, it is context-sensitive, as the resulting framework incorporates hospitality-specific and locally relevant behavioral expectations, including politeness, professional ethics, mutual respect, and service-oriented problem-solving. Rather than treating employability solely as a generic set of transferable skills or as a distal employment outcome, the proposed framework emphasizes observable competencies demonstrated by vocational students during authentic internship experiences.

Accordingly, this study contributes an industry-informed and context-sensitive framework that translates the broad construct of employability into assessable domains and indicators for hospitality internship settings. The framework is intended to provide a practical basis for internship supervision, curriculum alignment, formative feedback, and collaboration between vocational education providers and hospitality employers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Employability in a service-intensive context

Employability has evolved from a narrow understanding of obtaining a job into a broader construct encompassing transferable skills, personal attributes, adaptability, and the capacity to sustain performance across changing work contexts [1], [6], [9]. Contemporary reviews emphasize that employability is multidimensional and includes combinations of cognitive, social, behavioral, and self-management competencies rather than technical knowledge alone [3], [9].

In service-intensive industries such as hospitality, employability is closely connected to the ability to perform technical tasks while maintaining effective interactions with guests and colleagues. Hospitality employers identify communication, interpersonal competence, professional behavior, and other transferable attributes as important elements of graduate readiness [12], [14]. The hospitality literature also emphasizes the importance of sustained collaboration between higher education and industry in preparing work-ready graduates [15], [21].

Literature also distinguishes between technical or hard skills and transferable or soft skills. Technical competence enables employees to perform job-specific tasks, whereas communication, teamwork, adaptability, and related competencies support effective performance across changing workplace situations [2]–[4], [9]. This distinction is particularly salient in hospitality, where customer interaction, teamwork, service recovery, and professional conduct occur continuously.

Context also shapes how employability is defined and enacted. International employability literature identifies transferable competencies such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, creativity, and problem solving [4], [9], [14]. Hospitality research adds an important sector-specific dimension by showing that employers value combinations of technical competence, interpersonal attributes, and workplace behaviors [14], [15]. These findings support the need for employability frameworks that retain broadly transferable competencies while allowing industry and cultural contexts to determine how those competencies are operationalized.

Therefore, employability in service-intensive contexts must be understood not only as a set of skills but also as a dynamic interaction between technical proficiency, behavioral competencies, and socio-cultural expectations. This conceptualization sets the stage for designing internship assessment instruments that capture both universal and context-specific elements of employability.

2.2. Models and skill taxonomies

Scholars have approached employability through multiple models and taxonomies, reflecting the changing demands of the labor market. Recent research emphasizes the integration of technical knowledge with transversal skills and broader personal attributes [6], [9]. Hospitality employer research similarly identifies a broad set of knowledge, skills, and personal competencies required for graduate readiness [14].

A more structured perspective is offered by Eimer and Bohndick [6], whose systematic review shows that employability models commonly combine transversal skills with dispositional and professional attributes. This perspective is important for assessment because employability cannot be represented adequately through technical outcomes alone; observable behaviors and personal attributes also need to be considered. Tushar and Sooraksa [9] further demonstrate the breadth of contemporary employability skills, including communication, creativity, flexibility, and digital competencies. Goulart et al. [2] similarly argue that higher education should balance technological competencies with human-centered capabilities such as empathy, leadership, and collaboration. Together, these studies support a multidimensional approach to employability assessment rather than a technology-only perspective.

Importantly, employability is also shaped by sectoral and institutional context. Hospitality research indicates that employers expect combinations of knowledge, technical skills, interpersonal competencies, and professional attributes [14]. A broader scoping review of hospitality–tertiary partnerships likewise report differences among industry, educator, and student perceptions of the competencies required for entry-level hospitality work [15]. These findings reinforce the need to contextualize general employability constructs through direct industry engagement.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that employability assessment should combine established competency frameworks with sector-specific expectations. For hospitality vocational education, this means retaining transferable competencies while translating them into observable behaviors that are meaningful within authentic workplace settings [14], [15].

2.3. Internships as experiential learning

Internships are widely recognized as an important form of workplace learning because they allow students to apply classroom knowledge in authentic settings. Kolb's experiential learning theory conceptualizes learning as a cycle involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation [22]. Internship experiences can therefore provide a setting in which students practice and refine competencies while receiving workplace feedback.

Empirical studies also indicate that the quality of internship experiences and supervision matters for students' professional development. Tuasikal et al. [10] examined internship students' teaching skills and learning effectiveness, while Charlevoix et al. [7] reported developmental benefits associated with internship-based professional experiences. Hospitality work-integrated learning research likewise highlights the role of workplace experiences in developing skills, resilience, and career-related learning [15], [18]–[20].

Evidence from different professional education settings further indicates that internships can contribute to preparedness and professional development. Zhang et al. [11] examined internship preparedness among medical students, while Zhao et al. [8] reported changes in professional commitment among undergraduate nursing students before and after internship. Although these studies come from other professional fields, they support the broader proposition that workplace learning can influence technical preparedness as well as professional attitudes and commitment.

Nevertheless, concerns remain about how employability and internship outcomes are assessed. Harvey [23] and Knight and Yorke [24] emphasize the difficulty of defining and measuring employability when assessment is reduced to narrow outcomes. Piopiunik et al. is not retained in the revised bibliography; instead, recent systematic-review evidence indicates that employability interventions and outcomes vary across higher education contexts [16]. These limitations strengthen the case for assessment approaches that capture observable competencies rather than relying only on completion or post-graduation outcomes.

A more process-oriented approach is therefore needed in which assessment captures observable performance during workplace learning. Such an approach is consistent with the experiential nature of internships [22] and with contemporary employability perspectives that treat competencies as multidimensional and context dependent [9], [14]. In the present study, this orientation is operationalized through behaviorally described indicators that supervisors can observe during authentic internship activities.

In sum, internships should be understood not just as transitional experiences but as structured, iterative learning processes. Their full potential can only be realized when assessment instruments move beyond static outcomes to capture the dynamic, behavioral dimensions of employability development in real workplace contexts.

2.4. Assessing employability: issues and directions

Although employability is widely acknowledged as an important outcome of higher and vocational education, its assessment remains challenging. Three issues recur in the literature: conceptual breadth, outcome bias, and insufficient standardization. Recent reviews show substantial variation in how employability is defined and grouped across studies [6], [9], [16]. This conceptual variation can make it difficult for institutions and employers to agree on consistent assessment criteria.

A second issue concerns the dominance of outcome-oriented indicators. Employability has often been discussed in relation to graduate employment and labor-market outcomes, yet such outcomes do not necessarily reveal how competencies were developed or demonstrated during workplace learning [23], [24]. A process-oriented assessment can provide more immediate evidence of students' strengths and developmental needs during the internship itself. Recent systematic-review evidence similarly shows that employability interventions in higher education vary in their effects and implementation, reinforcing the need for transparent assessment approaches [16]. Research on perceived graduate employability also shows that employability judgments are shaped by multiple personal and educational factors rather than by a single outcome measure [13].

The third issue is the need for industry-specific assessment tools. Generic employability frameworks identify broad competencies, but their observable manifestations can vary across sectors. Hospitality employers, for example, require combinations of technical competence, communication, interpersonal skills, and professional attributes [14]. A hospitality internship rubric therefore needs to translate broad competencies into behaviors that supervisors can recognize within actual service situations.

Recent work also supports stronger links between employability development and workplace contexts. Tuasikal et al. [10] demonstrate the importance of supervision and learning effectiveness during internship experiences, while Carlbäck et al. [5] highlight human-resource development issues in restaurant settings. Eimer and Bohndick [6] further show that employability models vary considerably in their conceptual structure, reinforcing the value of transparent operationalization when developing an assessment instrument.

Another important dimension is the relationship between transferable competencies and contextual expectations. Global employability reviews emphasize competencies such as communication, creativity, flexibility, and digital skills [9], while hospitality-specific research demonstrates that employers also value sector-specific combinations of technical and interpersonal capabilities [14], [15]. Effective assessment should therefore retain transferable competencies while adapting their behavioral indicators to the workplace context.

The Jakarta hospitality context illustrates the value of this contextualization. Rather than assuming that generic employability indicators can be transferred unchanged into internship assessment, the present study uses industry consultation to identify behaviors that are observable and meaningful within hospitality workplaces. This approach is consistent with evidence that closer industry–education partnerships can improve alignment between curriculum and workplace expectations [15].

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative instrument-development design integrating a semi-systematic literature review, focus group discussions (FGDs), and expert review. The research was conducted sequentially to develop an industry-informed framework for assessing vocational students' employability-related competencies during hospitality internships. The literature review provided the initial conceptual basis for identifying relevant employability domains and indicators. The findings were subsequently examined and contextualized through FGDs with hospitality industry stakeholders. The resulting indicators were then reviewed by vocational education experts to examine their relevance to vocational learning outcomes and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles.

The overall development process consisted of four sequential stages: (1) synthesis of relevant literature to identify preliminary employability constructs and indicators; (2) industry FGD to identify and contextualize competencies required during hospitality internships; (3) refinement and prioritization of indicators based on the second FGD; and (4) expert review of the preliminary assessment framework. This sequential design was intended to integrate theoretical evidence with workplace expectations and vocational education perspectives.

This study employed a semi-systematic literature review combined with focus group discussions (FGDs). A semi-systematic approach is appropriate when a topic is broad, interdisciplinary, and conceptualized differently across research traditions [25]. The review was therefore used to synthesize employability concepts and identify candidate domains and indicators, while the FGDs were conducted to ensure that

the emerging framework reflected hospitality workplace realities in Jakarta. By combining literature-based evidence with practitioner perspectives, the study integrated conceptual and contextual sources of evidence.

3.2. Literature Review Procedure

The literature review was conducted using a semi-systematic approach because employability research encompasses multiple disciplinary areas, including vocational education, psychology, human resource management, and hospitality. Relevant literature was identified through searches of Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using combinations of the keywords "employability," "internship assessment," "hospitality," and "soft skills."

Studies were considered for inclusion when they (i) addressed employability, work readiness, or internship-related competencies; (ii) focused on higher or vocational education or workplace preparation; and (iii) provided conceptual or empirical evidence relevant to employability assessment. Publications outside the defined scope were excluded. The search and screening process resulted in 68 articles being included for thematic analysis. The literature findings were used to establish the initial set of employability domains and indicators before the industry consultation stage.

3.3. FGD Participants and Procedure

The industry consultation was conducted in Jakarta's hospitality sector. Fifteen hotels representing three- to five-star establishments were purposively selected based on their involvement in hosting vocational student interns. The industry participants consisted of 20 human resource managers and training supervisors with experience in recruitment, staff development, and/or supervision of vocational interns.

Two rounds of FGDs were conducted with the industry participants. The first round was designed to identify a broad range of employability competencies based on participants' experiences with vocational interns and the skills expected in hospitality workplaces. The preliminary indicators generated from the first round were subsequently reviewed and refined in the second round. The second round focused on prioritizing the indicators and identifying areas of agreement regarding the competencies considered most relevant to internship performance.

During the FGD process, participants were also asked to assess the importance of the identified employability domains using a four-point scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important). The ratings were analyzed descriptively to support the prioritization and refinement of indicators, while the qualitative discussion data were used to refine their content and wording.

Focus Group Discussions – Two rounds of FGDs were held. The first round generated a broad list of employability indicators based on participants' experiences with interns. The second round refined and prioritized these indicators, leading to consensus on the most relevant domains.

The preliminary assessment framework was developed by integrating the indicators derived from the literature synthesis with those identified and refined through the two FGD rounds. Indicators that represented similar concepts were grouped into broader domains, while indicators considered contextually relevant to hospitality internship settings were retained. This process resulted in five core domains: communication skills, collaboration and teamwork, self and character development, professional ethics, and creativity and innovation.

The preliminary framework was subsequently reviewed by five vocational education lecturers with experience in internship supervision. The expert review focused on the relevance of the proposed domains and indicators to vocational learning outcomes and their alignment with OBE principles. Expert feedback was used to examine the appropriateness and clarity of the proposed framework before its use as a basis for internship assessment.

The expert review was treated as preliminary content validation. Because the present study focused on framework development and industry-informed content identification, empirical psychometric testing was not conducted at this stage. Large-scale testing of reliability and construct validity is therefore proposed as a subsequent research stage.

3.4. Instrument Development and Expert Review

The preliminary assessment framework was developed by integrating the indicators derived from the literature synthesis with those identified and refined through the two FGD rounds. Indicators that represented similar concepts were grouped into broader domains, while indicators considered contextually relevant to hospitality internship settings were retained. This process resulted in five core domains: communication skills, collaboration and teamwork, self and character development, professional ethics, and creativity and innovation.

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3.5. Data Analysis

The literature and FGD data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis proceeded through three stages. First, open coding was used to identify recurring employability-related concepts from the literature and FGD transcripts. Second, axial coding was used to group related concepts and indicators into broader competency categories. Third, selective coding was conducted to refine the categories and establish the final five employability domains.

To enhance consistency in the interpretation of the qualitative data, two researchers independently coded the relevant materials and subsequently compared their coding results. Differences in interpretation were discussed and resolved through consensus. The FGD rating data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the average score for each employability domain. These descriptive results were used to identify the relative importance assigned to each domain by industry participants and were not interpreted as psychometric evidence of instrument validity or reliability.

3.6. Trustworthiness and Preliminary Validity

Several strategies were applied to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. First, triangulation was achieved by integrating evidence from the literature synthesis, industry FGDs, and expert review. Second, preliminary findings from the FGD process were presented to participants for member checking and confirmation. Third, an audit trail was maintained to document the coding procedures and decisions made during the development of the employability domains and indicators.

The convergence of evidence across these sources provided a basis for establishing the preliminary content relevance of the proposed framework. However, this preliminary validation should not be interpreted as evidence of full psychometric validity. Further empirical testing with a larger sample of vocational students is required to examine the reliability, dimensionality, and construct validity of the assessment instrument.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to identify and refine employability competencies considered important for vocational students undertaking hospitality internships. The first FGD round generated a broad range of indicators based on the experiences of human resource managers and training supervisors in supervising vocational interns. The second round was subsequently used to review, refine, and prioritize the identified indicators according to their relevance to students' actual internship performance.

Table 1. Employability Domains and Indicators Identified through the FGD

No	Domain	Indicators
1	Communication Skills	Expressing ideas clearly; coherent delivery; active listening; effective use of professional language.
2	Collaboration & Teamwork	Active contribution; productivity in groups; openness to ideas; flexibility; responsibility; mutual respect.
3	Self & Character Development	Confidence; motivation to work; tolerance; politeness in interactions; alignment with personal strengths
4	Professional Ethics	Honesty; responsibility; integrity; confidentiality; adherence to professional standards and technical norms
5	Creativity & Innovation	Generating new ideas; elaboration; problem-solving in service contexts; applying creative improvements.

Source: FGD findings integrated with literature-derived indicators.

Table 1 summarizes the domains and broad indicators emerging from the FGD process, whereas Table 3 presents their refined operationalization in the final assessment instrument.

The five domains represent both general employability competencies and behavioral characteristics that are particularly relevant to hospitality internship settings. Communication Skills emphasizes the ability to convey information clearly, listen actively, and use appropriate professional language. Collaboration and Teamwork reflects students' ability to contribute productively, remain flexible, accept others' ideas, and demonstrate responsibility and mutual respect. Self and Character Development captures personal attributes such as confidence, motivation, tolerance, and politeness. Professional Ethics focuses on honesty, integrity, confidentiality, responsibility, and adherence to professional standards. Creativity and Innovation emphasizes the ability to generate ideas, solve problems in service situations, and apply creative improvements.

Importantly, the framework emphasizes observable behaviors during the internship process, rather than relying only on internship completion or subsequent employment outcomes. This orientation enables supervisors to identify students' strengths and areas for improvement while providing a basis for structured feedback and alignment with vocational learning outcomes and Outcome-Based Education (OBE).

These domains reflect both widely recognized employability competencies identified in the literature [4], [6], [9] and context-specific requirements identified through the hospitality industry consultation. The FGD therefore served not simply to confirm generic employability categories but to determine how those competencies should be expressed and prioritized within the internship context.

4.2. Comparison with prior research

The findings of this study show both convergence and contextual differences when compared with established employability frameworks and previous research. Communication and teamwork are consistently recognized as important employability competencies [4], [9], [14]. The identification of Communication Skills and Collaboration and Teamwork as core domains in the present study therefore confirms the continuing relevance of these competencies for vocational students preparing for hospitality work.

However, the findings also indicate that the meaning and expression of employability competencies are shaped by the context in which they are demonstrated. In the present study, industry participants placed particular emphasis on politeness, mutual respect, tolerance, and appropriate interpersonal behavior. These attributes illustrate how broad interpersonal competencies can be translated into workplace-specific behavioral expectations. This contextualization is consistent with hospitality research showing that employers value a wide range of interpersonal and professional attributes alongside technical competence [14], [15], [21].

Professional Ethics also emerged as an important domain. Although ethical and professional behavior is recognized in broader employability literature [6], [9], the present study translates this broad idea into specific workplace behaviors, including honesty, responsibility, integrity, confidentiality, customer orientation, professional competence, work attitude, and compliance with standard operating procedures. The contribution therefore lies in making professional ethics observable within everyday hospitality internship activities.

Creativity and Innovation represents another area of contextual refinement. Contemporary employability literature identifies creativity and adaptability as important competencies in changing work environments [2], [9]. In the present study, industry participants emphasized practical forms of creativity, such as generating new ideas, finding alternative ways of working, and applying creative solutions to workplace situations. This translates the broad concept of creativity into behaviors that can be observed in hospitality service settings.

An important difference concerns the treatment of Problem Solving and Decision Making. Although problem solving and decision making are frequently recognized as employability competencies [4], [9], the industry consultation in this study indicated that vocational interns have limited authority to make independent workplace decisions. Consequently, the initial Problem Solving and Decision Making domain

was removed and replaced by Self and Character Development. This finding demonstrates that the relevance of a competency depends not only on its recognition in general employability frameworks but also on the actual roles, responsibilities, and authority assigned to interns in the workplace.

Overall, the comparison indicates that the five domains identified in this study are not entirely new employability constructs. Rather, they represent a contextualized organization and operationalization of established competencies for hospitality internship assessment. The theoretical contribution therefore lies in translating broad employability concepts into observable behaviors that reflect industry expectations and the actual conditions of vocational internship.

4.3. Assessment Instrument Development and Validation

The findings from the literature synthesis and the two rounds of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were subsequently translated into an industry-informed internship assessment instrument for vocational students in the hospitality sector. The development process followed a construct-to-indicator approach. Literature synthesis provided the initial conceptual basis for identifying employability-related competencies, while the FGDs were used to contextualize, refine, and prioritize the indicators according to workplace expectations. The first FGD round generated a broad range of potential indicators, whereas the second round focused on refining the indicators and establishing agreement regarding the competencies considered most relevant to students' internship performance.

The final instrument comprises five employability domains and 30 behavioral indicators: Communication Skills (5 indicators), Collaboration and Teamwork (6 indicators), Self and Character Development (5 indicators), Professional Ethics (10 indicators), and Creativity and Innovation (4 indicators). The indicators were formulated as observable behaviors that can be demonstrated by vocational students during authentic internship activities. The final structure of the instrument is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Structure of the Final Internship Assessment Instrument

No.	Construct/Domain	No. of Indicators	Main Indicators
1	Communication Skills	5	Expressing ideas effectively; presenting ideas systematically; effective listening; communicating information clearly; using appropriate and effective language
2	Collaboration & Teamwork	6	Teamwork; productivity; giving and receiving ideas; flexibility and compromise; responsibility; respect for colleagues
3	Self & Character Development	5	Self-expression according to talents/interests; politeness; tolerance; confidence; motivation to work
4	Professional Ethics	10	Honesty; responsibility; customer orientation; integrity; objectivity; job-related hard skills; carefulness; confidentiality of company and guest data; soft skills and attitude; SOP compliance
5	Creativity & Innovation	4	Generating new ideas; maximizing creative efforts; finding new ways of working; applying creative solutions
	Total	30	

Source: Final Internship Assessment Instrument (Internship_Go).

The five domains represent the construct structure established through the literature synthesis and industry-informed refinement. Communication Skills focuses on students' ability to communicate ideas and information effectively. Collaboration and Teamwork captures productive participation, flexibility, responsibility, and respect in group work. Self and Character Development addresses personal and interpersonal characteristics relevant to workplace adaptation. Professional Ethics covers ethical conduct, customer orientation, professional competence, confidentiality, work attitude, and compliance with workplace procedures. Creativity and Innovation addresses students' ability to generate ideas and apply creative approaches to workplace situations. These domains are intended to assess observable employability-related behaviors during the internship process, rather than internship completion or post-internship employment outcomes.

The final instrument uses a 10-point performance rating scale (1–10). The numerical scale is accompanied by four behaviorally anchored performance categories: Not Good, Less Good, Good, and Very Good. The behavioral descriptors are used to distinguish levels of performance rather than relying solely on numerical scores. Thus, the assessment combines a quantitative rating with qualitative behavioral anchors to support more consistent interpretation by internship supervisors.

The use of behavioral descriptors is intended to help supervisors assess the extent to which students consistently demonstrate the expected behaviors in authentic workplace situations. The instrument therefore functions not only as a summative assessment tool but also as a basis for identifying students' strengths and areas requiring further development during the internship.

The final instrument was not obtained by directly transferring the indicators identified from the literature. The FGD process resulted in substantive revisions to the initial assessment structure. In particular, the initial Problem Solving and Decision-Making domain was removed because industry participants considered that vocational interns did not have sufficient authority to make independent workplace decisions. The domain was subsequently replaced with Self and Character Development. This decision demonstrates that the relevance of employability competency was considered in relation to the actual responsibilities and decision-making authority of vocational interns.

Professional Ethics also stood out as a major theme in the Jakarta findings. While ethical responsibility is acknowledged in employability literature [6], [9], participants in this study framed it in operational terms, such as safeguarding guest and company information, maintaining professional integrity, demonstrating appropriate work attitudes, and complying with workplace procedures. This illustrates how a general employability construct can be made more assessable by translating it into context-specific workplace behaviors.

Following the industry-informed refinement process, the preliminary assessment framework was reviewed by five vocational education lecturers with experience in internship supervision. The expert review examined the relevance of the proposed domains and indicators to vocational learning outcomes and their alignment with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles. This stage was treated as preliminary content validation rather than full psychometric validation. This distinction is consistent with contemporary instrument-development practice, in which expert review provides content evidence while construct validity and reliability require subsequent empirical testing [17].

The development process also incorporated industry/user evaluation of the preliminary indicators. The indicators were rated using a four-point importance scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important). These ratings were used descriptively to identify the relative

priority of the indicators, while the qualitative FGD discussions were used to refine their content and wording. The review resulted in several substantive decisions. The initial Problem Solving and Decision Making indicators received the lowest rating and were removed following the industry discussion. Several initial creativity indicators were also considered less applicable and were subsequently removed or simplified. In contrast, the Communication Skills, Collaboration and Teamwork, and Professional Ethics indicators received strong support and were retained with contextual refinement. The resulting instrument therefore reflects a combination of theoretical evidence, industry expectations, and vocational education considerations.

Accordingly, the present study establishes the content structure and preliminary content relevance of the internship assessment instrument but does not claim completed psychometric validation. The expert review and industry consultation provide preliminary evidence of content appropriateness and contextual applicability. Empirical testing of reliability, dimensionality, and construct validity using larger samples of vocational students remains a necessary subsequent stage of instrument validation.

4.4. Practical implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for vocational education institutions, internship supervisors, hospitality industry partners, and curriculum developers. First, the proposed assessment instrument provides vocational education institutions with a structured basis for assessing students' employability-related behaviors during hospitality internships. Rather than evaluating internship performance only through attendance, task completion, or final internship reports, the instrument enables assessment of observable competencies across communication, collaboration and teamwork, self and character development, professional ethics, and creativity and innovation.

Evidence from hospitality work-placement research also underscores the importance of structured workplace experiences for student development [19].

Second, the findings have implications for curriculum alignment and Outcome-Based Education (OBE). The five domains can be mapped to relevant learning outcomes and internship-related courses so that employability competencies are explicitly connected with vocational learning objectives. Such alignment can strengthen the relationship between classroom preparation, workplace expectations, and assessment during authentic industry learning experiences. The instrument can therefore serve as a reference for developing internship assessment rubrics and supporting curriculum–industry alignment.

Third, the instrument provides a basis for strengthening university–industry collaboration. Because the indicators were contextualized through industry consultation, hospitality partners can participate more actively in defining and assessing the competencies expected from vocational interns. This may facilitate a shared understanding between vocational institutions and industry regarding students' workplace readiness and the competencies that require further development.

Fourth, the findings suggest that internship assessment should consider not only technical competence but also interpersonal, ethical, and personal characteristics that are observable in workplace situations. The inclusion of politeness, respect, professional ethics, customer orientation, confidentiality, work attitude, and SOP compliance illustrates the importance of contextualizing employability assessment within the actual demands of hospitality work.

Overall, the proposed instrument can function as a practical bridge between vocational curriculum, industry expectations, internship supervision, and employability assessment. However, its practical use should initially be accompanied by appropriate supervisor guidance and should not be interpreted as a fully standardized psychometric instrument until further empirical validation has been completed.

4.5. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the literature on employability and vocational internship assessment. First, it contributes to the operationalization of employability by translating a broad and multidimensional construct into a structured set of observable competencies for hospitality internship contexts. The five domains identified in this study—Communication Skills, Collaboration and Teamwork, Self and Character Development, Professional Ethics, and Creativity and Innovation—provide a contextualized representation of employability that can be examined through students demonstrated behaviors during workplace learning.

Second, the study contributes a process-oriented perspective on employability assessment. Previous employability research frequently discusses competencies as graduate attributes or as factors associated with employment outcomes. The present framework shifts attention toward competencies demonstrated during the internship process itself. This perspective connects employability development with authentic workplace learning and emphasizes the role of internship assessment in identifying students' strengths and developmental needs while they are still engaged in workplace learning.

Third, the study contributes a contextualized understanding of employability in hospitality vocational education. Although competencies such as communication, teamwork, ethics, and creativity are well established in the broader employability literature, the findings demonstrate that their meaning and assessment need to be interpreted within the specific conditions of hospitality work. The emphasis on politeness, respect, customer orientation, confidentiality, professional ethics, work attitude, and service-related creativity illustrates how general employability competencies can be translated into context-specific workplace behaviors.

Fourth, the study demonstrates the theoretical value of integrating literature-based employability constructs with industry perspectives and vocational education considerations. Rather than adopting a generic employability taxonomy unchanged, the development process used literature as the conceptual foundation and industry consultation to refine the relevance and applicability of the indicators. The replacement of the initial Problem Solving and Decision-Making domain with Self and Character Development further demonstrates that the relevance of competency depends on the actual responsibilities and authority of vocational interns in the workplace.

Importantly, the contribution of this study should not be interpreted as the creation of entirely new employability constructs. Instead, its theoretical contribution lies in the contextual integration and operationalization of established employability competencies for hospitality internship assessment. The resulting framework provides a conceptual bridge between employability theory, vocational education, authentic workplace learning, and industry expectations.

Finally, the framework provides a basis for subsequent empirical investigation. Because the present study establishes the conceptual structure and preliminary content relevance of the instrument rather than its full psychometric properties, future research can examine whether the five-domain structure is empirically supported across larger and more diverse samples of vocational students and hospitality internship settings.

4.6. Limitations and Future Psychometric Validation

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the development and refinement of the internship assessment instrument were conducted within a specific hospitality context and involved a limited number of industry and vocational education participants. The industry consultation involved representatives from selected hospitality establishments, while five vocational education lecturers participated in the expert review. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent the expectations of all hospitality establishments, vocational institutions, or geographical regions.

Second, the present study primarily focused on the development and contextual refinement of the assessment instrument through literature synthesis, industry consultation, and expert review. Although these procedures provided preliminary evidence regarding the relevance and applicability of the indicators, they do not establish the empirical psychometric properties of the instrument. In particular, the present study did not examine internal consistency reliability, dimensionality, item functioning, or construct validity using responses from a large sample of vocational students.

The distinction between preliminary content validation and empirical psychometric validation is important. The expert and industry review established that the proposed indicators were considered relevant and applicable to the internship context, but this evidence should not be interpreted as confirmation that the five-domain structure is statistically stable across different student populations or internship settings. Accordingly, the instrument developed in this study should be regarded as an industry-informed and preliminarily validated assessment instrument that requires further empirical examination. Recent instrument-development research illustrates that empirical construct validity and reliability require subsequent quantitative testing, such as factor analysis and internal-consistency analysis [17].

Future research should undertake systematic psychometric validation using responses collected from a larger and more diverse sample of vocational students undertaking hospitality internships. The first stage should examine individual item performance and the internal consistency of the indicators within each domain. Reliability analysis can subsequently be conducted to determine the consistency of the indicators representing each construct. Where appropriate, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) can be used to explore the underlying dimensional structure, particularly if the instrument is further modified or expanded. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) can then be used to test whether the hypothesized five-domain structure—Communication Skills, Collaboration and Teamwork, Self and Character Development, Professional Ethics, and Creativity and Innovation—is empirically supported.

In addition, if sufficient response data are available and the characteristics of the 1–10 rating scale are appropriate, Rasch analysis or other Item Response Theory approaches may be considered to examine item functioning, response-category performance, and the measurement properties of individual indicators. These analyses would provide more detailed evidence regarding whether the indicators function consistently across different levels of students' internship performance.

Future validation should also involve students from different vocational institutions, hospitality establishments, and geographical regions. Comparing assessment results across different internship contexts would help determine the stability and transferability of the instrument. Where feasible, assessments from internship supervisors could also be compared with other relevant sources of evidence to examine the consistency of assessment perspectives.

Therefore, the contribution of the present study should be understood as the development and preliminary content validation of an industry-informed internship assessment instrument, rather than the completion of its psychometric validation. The resulting five-domain, 30-indicator structure provides a foundation for subsequent empirical testing of reliability, dimensionality, item functioning, and construct validity. Such validation is necessary before the instrument can be recommended as a fully standardized assessment measure for broader implementation across hospitality vocational internship settings.

5. Conclusion

This study developed an industry-informed internship assessment instrument for assessing employability-related competencies among vocational students in the hospitality sector. The development process integrated a semi-systematic literature synthesis, two rounds of FGDs with hospitality industry stakeholders, and preliminary expert review involving vocational education lecturers. The final instrument comprises five domains—Communication Skills, Collaboration and Teamwork, Self and Character Development, Professional Ethics, and Creativity and Innovation—with 30 behavioral indicators assessed using a 10-point performance rating scale accompanied by behavioral descriptors.

Although the instrument has established preliminary content relevance through industry consultation and expert review, its psychometric properties have not yet been empirically established. Future research should therefore validate the instrument quantitatively by examining item quality, reliability, dimensionality, and construct validity using larger and more diverse samples of vocational students. Such validation will strengthen the evidence base and support wider implementation of the instrument across hospitality internship settings.

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