From Theory to Practice: Exploring Criminology Students' Experiences During Internship Program

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Abstract: This study examined how criminology interns apply academic knowledge in real-world law enforcement settings in a private higher educational institution in Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Using a qualitative case study design, purposive sampling selected eight criminology interns, one internship coordinator, and one public safety supervisor. Data from in-depth interviews were analyzed using Yin's (2014) case study method, thematic analysis, and data triangulation. Findings revealed six key themes: navigating the gap between theory and practice, transformative learning through mentorship, cognitive and ethical integration, applying knowledge and teamwork in field tasks, strategic adaptation, and developing core professional competencies. The study concludes that while challenges persist in bridging theory and practice, structured mentorship, immersive field exposure, and supportive environments enhance students' competence and readiness. It recommends strengthening curricula, fostering school-agency partnerships, and promoting holistic, competency-based training.

Keywords: *Experiential Learning, Internship, Law Enforcement, Mentorship, Practical Application, Skills Integration, Theoretical Knowledge.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The field of criminology has consistently emphasized the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application. Criminology students were expected to grasp the complexities of criminal behavior, justice systems, and law enforcement through classroom instruction while applying this knowledge in real-world settings. Internships served as a vital bridge between academic learning and professional practice, offering students firsthand experience in the field. Recent studies underscored the significance of these internships in enhancing students' competencies. For instance, Libradilla et al. (2023) highlighted that internships significantly influenced the knowledge and skills development of criminology interns, emphasizing the role of experiential learning in shaping their professional readiness.

Building upon this foundation, classroom learning focused on equipping students with foundational knowledge, including theories of crime, justice system processes, and crime prevention strategies. Internships, on the other hand, provided experiential learning opportunities where students encountered real-life scenarios, interacted with professionals in the field, and applied theoretical concepts in practical contexts. This dynamic interplay between theory and practice was essential for preparing students to navigate the complexities of criminology professions. However, the extent to which students effectively integrated classroom discussions into their internship experiences varied widely and warranted further exploration. Mapangdol (2024) evaluated the implementation of the Criminology Internship Program at Mountain Province State Polytechnic College and found that while the program was effectively implemented, challenges such as inadequate communication equipment impacted the overall internship experience.

Despite the structured nature of these programs, criminology students often faced challenges in bridging the gap between academic instruction and the multifaceted realities of professional environments. These challenges included discrepancies between theoretical frameworks taught in the classroom and the practical procedures observed during internships, a lack of preparedness for real-world complexities, and varying levels of support and supervision during their placements. Lumingkit et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative study that identified emotional stress, transportation challenges, time management issues, and academic pressure as significant hurdles faced by criminology interns during their internship programs.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced additional complexities to the internship experience. Solis (2024) explored the lived experiences of criminology student-interns during the pandemic and found that students

faced challenges such as limited learning opportunities, health issues due to exhaustion, and difficulties in managing time. These findings highlighted the need for adaptive strategies to ensure that internships remained effective even amidst unprecedented challenges.

In the Philippine context, while studies like that of Libradilla et al. (2023) and Mapangdol (2024) provided insights into the effectiveness of criminology internship programs, there remained a significant research gap in understanding how these internships influenced students' preparedness for law enforcement careers. Specifically, there was a lack of comprehensive research on how real-world internship experiences directly impacted students' career choices, adaptability, and integration into law enforcement roles. Addressing this gap was crucial for improving internship curricula, ensuring that students gained practical skills that aligned with industry needs, and bridging potential disparities between academic training and actual fieldwork.

Recognizing the importance of experiential learning, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines mandated internship programs for criminology students through its Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSG). As per CHED Memorandum Order No. 05, Series of 2018, the criminology internship program was designed to integrate theoretical instruction with practical training, ensuring that students acquired the necessary competencies before entering the workforce. The PSG outlined specific expected learning outcomes for criminology students upon completing their internships, including demonstrating proficiency in fundamental criminology concepts, applying theoretical knowledge to practical law enforcement and correctional practices, and exhibiting professionalism and ethical behavior.

In conclusion, while criminology internship programs played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academic instruction and professional practice, there remained areas that required further investigation and improvement. By exploring the challenges faced by criminology interns and understanding the factors that influenced their preparedness for law enforcement careers, this study aimed to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing the overall effectiveness of criminology education and internship programs in the Philippines.

The findings of this study will be particularly beneficial to criminology educators, internship coordinators, and policymakers striving to refine internship structures and mentorship programs (Stockdale et al., 2022). Strengthening internship frameworks and ensuring better alignment between academic curricula and fieldwork requirements will equip criminology students with the necessary skills and competencies to navigate the complexities of professional practice in law enforcement, corrections, and related fields (Albina &Sumaylo, 2022).

Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on experiential learning by offering actionable recommendations for bridging the gap between theory and practice in criminology education. Through a more structured and well-supported internship experience, students will be better prepared to meet the demands of their future professions, thereby enhancing the overall quality of criminology education and practice in the Philippines (Moriarty & Parsons-Pollard, 2024; Rasmitadila et al., 2024).

II. METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to explore the experiences, challenges, and learning outcomes of criminology interns in real-world settings. Conducted in a private higher education institution in Misamis Occidental, Philippines, the research focused on interns assigned to various law enforcement agencies such as the PNP, BJMP, BFP, PDEA, NBI, and local government units. Participants included eight criminology interns, the current Internship Coordinator, a faculty member, and supervisors from these agencies, all selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews using an interview guide translated into the vernacular for clarity. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes, was audio-recorded, and later transcribed for thematic analysis. Following institutional approvals and participant consent, interviews were scheduled based on availability, with the researcher ensuring confidentiality, accuracy, and completeness of data throughout the collection and transcription process.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study, Informed consent was obtained from participants, who were fully briefed on the study's purpose, their rights, and their option to decline participation without consequence. The researcher complied with Republic Act No. 10173, or the "Data Privacy Act of 2012," ensuring the confidentiality and security of all personal information. Data were anonymized, access was restricted to authorized personnel, and all records were securely disposed of after the retention period.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The 10 individuals, comprising eight criminology interns, 1 practicum supervisor and one field supervisor, voluntarily contributed to this study. Through analysis of their responses, six overarching themes emerged: Navigating the Disconnect Between Theory, Practice, and Personal Growth in Criminology Internships, Transformative Learning Through Structured, Supportive, and Immersive Mentorship, Bridging Theory and Practice Through Cognitive, Practical, and Ethical Integration, Integration of Theoretical Knowledge, Technical Skills, and Teamwork in Real-Life Law Enforcement Practice, Strategic Adaptation through Knowledge Application, Team Synergy, and Self-Initiative in Bridging Theory-Practice Gaps, and Developing Core Competencies for Professionalism in Law Enforcement and Emergency Services.

A. Navigating the Disconnect Between Theory, Practice, and Personal Growth in Criminology Internships

Criminology internships serve as vital platforms for bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world application. However, a significant disconnect often exists between theoretical knowledge and its practical application in various criminology fields. Studies indicate that students frequently encounter challenges when translating classroom concepts into actual law enforcement scenarios, as these experiences demand practical decision-making skills that are not always fully covered in theoretical training (Gordon & Kelly, 2019). This discrepancy underscores the necessity for curricula to integrate more experiential learning opportunities to better prepare students for the complexities of the criminal justice system (Sweeney & Haskins, 2021).

This main theme was developed from the three subthemes: these are *Discrepancies Between Theoretical Knowledge and Real-World Application in Various Criminology Fields, Observations of Professionalism and Approachability in the Field, Personal Challenges in Real-Life Situations and Performance*. The three subthemes emerged from the participants' responses.

➢ *Discrepancies Between Theoretical Knowledge and Real-World Application in Various Criminology Fields.*

Theoretical knowledge in criminology often fails to fully prepare students for the practical demands of the field. Interns report that while academic training provides foundational concepts, it lacks the depth required to navigate real-world challenges effectively. This gap between theory and practice is particularly evident in areas such as criminal investigations and law enforcement, where interns must adapt to unexpected situations that theory alone cannot address. Research highlights that experiential learning, such as simulations and on-the-job training, significantly helps bridge this gap by offering opportunities for interns to apply theoretical concepts to real-life situations (Williams & Clark, 2020). This emphasizes the importance of incorporating more hands-on experiences and case-based learning into criminology programs to enhance students' readiness for professional practice.

➢ *These are the Shared Statements of Participants:*

"In theory, it's more on standard procedures, but in reality during our duty in PNP, BFP, etc, there's always a difference... it's easier for them to reach their goal than to follow standard procedures." (P1)

"In the Bureau of Fire Protection, we had lessons on fire safety, but applying it in real-life was so difficult... the sequence of events is very fast, and there is life involved." (P3)

"When I was assigned in traffic... I know the right thing to do but how do I do it in a professional way so that the driver would not get angry." (P6)

"I asked one personnel from the forensic group if he was an expert witness, but he said that he is just an ordinary witness... in Forensic Chemistry we were taught that there

are two kinds of witnesses, but in reality only the judge determines this." (P7)*

➢ *Observations of Professionalism and Approachability in the Field.*

Professionalism and approachability are critical attributes for criminology interns as they transition into the workforce. Interns' performance evaluations often emphasize the importance of interpersonal skills, including effective communication and teamwork. These evaluations suggest that professionalism in the field of criminology is not only a measure of competence but also an essential element of maintaining positive relationships with colleagues and the public. Additionally, approachability helps interns navigate the workplace by fostering trust and collaboration with supervisors and peers, enhancing their overall internship experience (Baker & Green, 2020). Therefore, fostering professionalism and approachability is essential for successful integration into law enforcement environments.

➢ *These are the Shared Statements of Participants:*

"Some personnel are very hard to approach, high-standards, and they will not mind us because we are just interns, but in theory, police officers must approach and pay respect to citizens." (P2)

"In the subject LEA we were taught that law enforcers must be approachable as public servants, but most Police Officers are literally not approachable." (P5)

"I know the right thing to do but how do I do it in a professional way... how can I tell that driver...?" (P6)

➢ *Personal Challenges in Real-Life Situations and Performance.*

Interns frequently face personal challenges that impact their performance during internships. Issues such as emotional stress, time management difficulties, and financial constraints are commonly reported by criminology students. These challenges can hinder their ability to perform effectively, leading to dissatisfaction with their internship experiences (Smith, 2019). Emotional stress, particularly when dealing with sensitive cases or encountering traumatic situations, can affect an intern's performance and well-being. These findings suggest the need for support systems and coping strategies within internship programs, including mentorship and stress management training, to assist interns in navigating the demands of their roles (Harris & Monroe, 2021).

➢ *These are the Shared Statements of Participants:*

"I felt anxious, nervous... even though we were given instructions, it's a whole new feeling when it comes to the actual performance." (P4)

"The big difference is how the bureaus or agencies discipline us... you need to have the initiative to work and perform certain tasks... also to have the initiative to talk with your group mates to strengthen your bond." (P8)

"Even if they have their face-to-face class as early as their 2nd year, that doesn't mean they're fully equipped with the basics… The main challenge was to discuss real-world scenarios and give them an overview of what might happen during their internship." (IC)

"Some interns lack hands-on experience with real-time traffic enforcement, which can affect their confidence and decision-making in the field." (FS)

Criminology internships often serve as a bridge between academic knowledge and real-world application, but many students encounter a noticeable disconnect between theoretical learning and field realities. While the classroom provides a solid foundation in criminal law, investigative procedures, and ethical frameworks, these principles are not always clearly mirrored in practice. According to Dizon and Yusingco (2020), criminology students in the Philippines often struggle to reconcile what they learned in lectures with the complex, sometimes ambiguous, situations encountered during their on-the-job training in police stations, correctional institutions, or forensic units. This disconnect can lead to confusion and diminished confidence, particularly when students witness operational shortcuts, resource limitations, or ethical gray areas that contrast with the idealized standards presented in academia (Lopez, 2021). Consequently, this gap highlights the need for curriculum adjustments and closer collaboration between academic institutions and host agencies to create more synchronized training experiences.

Despite these challenges, the internship experience remains a vital arena for personal and professional development. Students report growth in areas such as communication skills, critical thinking, and resilience—attributes often underemphasized in traditional lectures but crucial in fieldwork (Garcia et al., 2022). This process of adapting and learning through firsthand exposure supports Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning as a process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Furthermore, research by Santos and Ramos (2023) underscores the importance of reflective practices during internships, suggesting that structured mentorship and post-experience debriefings can help students make sense of discrepancies and cultivate a more grounded professional identity. Ultimately, while the gap between theory and practice persists, internships provide fertile ground for personal growth, prompting students to refine their values, question assumptions, and develop a more nuanced understanding of the criminological field.

This study affirms that criminology students learn best through authentic, hands-on experiences anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory. The internship provides a critical space for applying knowledge, developing practical skills, and refining professional identity (Garcia et al., 2022). However, consistent with Cognitive Load Theory, students often face cognitive overload when field realities conflict with classroom theories, affecting confidence and decision-making (Lopez, 2021; Pérez et al., 2022).

These findings underscore the need for curricular reforms integrating experiential learning, reflective practices, and structured mentorship to help students process complex field experiences (Santos & Ramos, 2023). Such strategies will bridge the theory-practice gap and better prepare criminology interns for real-world demands (Lozano et al., 2023).

This highlights the need for educational institutions to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and field experiences through enhanced pedagogical strategies. Recent studies emphasize that while criminology curricula provide foundational theories and legal frameworks, interns often encounter unpredictable, complex situations that demand adaptive decision-making and emotional resilience, which are not always explicitly taught in academic settings (Pérez et al., 2022). To address this, pedagogical approaches must incorporate experiential learning models, reflective practice, and mentorship programs that foster not only technical competencies but also personal and professional identity development (Smith & Lewis, 2021). This alignment is essential to prepare criminology students for the realities of law enforcement, corrections, and investigative work, ensuring that theoretical concepts are meaningfully integrated into practical scenarios and that students' personal growth is nurtured as part of their professional formation (Lozano et al., 2023).

B. Transformative Learning Through Structured, Supportive, and Immersive Mentorship

Transformative learning in criminology internships is most effectively achieved through structured, supportive, and immersive mentorship. Such mentorship models empower students to transition from passive learners to active participants in professional environments. Structured programs not only expose interns to practical scenarios but also cultivate personal and professional growth through guided reflection and direct interaction with experienced personnel. Cartajenas et al. (2024) emphasized that structured mentorship improves students' adaptability, critical thinking, and role readiness. Furthermore, Solis (2023) highlighted how immersive environments coupled with supportive mentorship lead to the internalization of values, discipline, and confidence necessary for careers in law enforcement. Thus, a well-designed mentorship framework fosters holistic development, going beyond skills training to instill lifelong learning and ethical responsibility.

This main theme was developed from the two subthemes: these are *BFP's One-on-One Instruction and Motivational Guidance and Practical Hands-On Mentorship in the PNP and PMFC*. The two subthemes emerged from the participants' responses.

➤ *BFP's One-on-One Instruction and Motivational Guidance.*

The Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) provides an excellent model of individualized mentorship through one-on-one instruction and motivational guidance. During internship programs, BFP trainers offer direct supervision in rescue and emergency response operations, enabling

students to develop hands-on competence and internalize the discipline of public safety work. For instance, in a two-day internship program by BFP in 2024, criminology students underwent Basic Rope Rescue Training and emergency drills, facilitated by trained personnel who provided both technical instruction and motivational leadership (St. Peter's College, 2024). This personalized mentoring approach boosts intern confidence and enhances their professional identity, a finding consistent with Cartajenas et al. (2024), who argued that motivational mentorship leads to higher student engagement and better learning outcomes in criminology fieldwork.These are the responses of the participants:

➢ *These are the Shared Statements of Participants:*
"...in BFP they have the best guidance and mentorship... very effective for those students that are slow learners." (P1)

"...the BFP... they will give their all out to guide us during activities... they allow us to speak and give encouragement..." (P4)

"...BFP has the best guidance... always give instructions and are very open to us." (P2)

(BFP part): "...BFP provides the best guidance on how to perform such activities with safety, gives instructions on what needs to be done..." (P5)

"...in BFP, all their experiences during their training they will share it to us." (P6)

"In the BFP we are very disciplined... wear our uniforms to look decent..." (P8)

➢ *Practical Hands-On Mentorship in the PNP and PMFC.*
The Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Provincial Mobile Force Company (PMFC) foster transformative learning through practical, hands-on mentorship. Criminology interns assigned to PNP and PMFC units participate in exercises such as firearm safety handling, police formation drills, and simulations of law enforcement operations. In a 2023 training held at Camp Bado Dangwa, interns from the University of the Cordilleras received mentorship from the Regional Mobile Force Battalion, which emphasized both technical skill-building and value formation through direct engagement (University of the Cordilleras, 2023). This method aligns with the findings of Solis (2023), who noted that field-based mentorship combined with structured training significantly enhances interns' preparedness for the realities of policing. The immersive, real-world context also reinforces discipline, confidence, and respect for law enforcement protocols.These are the shared statements of the participants with positive outlook:

➢ *These are the Shared Statements of Participants:*
"...best guidance was in the 1st Provincial Mobile Force Company... Police Officers are hands-on... taught disarming, handcuffing, bullet handling..." (P3)

(PNP part): "...PNP provides clear information or knowledge... they let us see and make blotters." (P5)

"...PNP has the best guidance... assigned at the investigation section... introduced to CIRA... asked many questions and they gladly answered." (P7)

Transformative learning through structured, supportive, and immersive mentorship has gained substantial attention in recent educational research, highlighting its profound impact on student development. A study by Calderwood and Rizzo (2023) emphasized that the student-supervisor relationship significantly influenced transformative learning outcomes in social work education. They identified attributes such as trustworthiness, respect, engagement, care, and humility as pivotal in creating a transformative learning environment. This approach fosters professional identity development and critical self-reflection, aligning with the core objectives of social work education (Calderwood & Rizzo, 2023). Similarly, a case study by Pacheco Figueroa and Alvarez Lemus (2025) demonstrated that mentoring programs utilizing social technologies empowered women in STEM fields by enhancing soft skills and fostering professional growth. The integration of digital tools in mentorship provided a structured and supportive framework that addressed gender disparities and promoted inclusivity in scientific and technological careers.

Moreover, the immersive aspect of mentorship has proven effective in cultivating resilience and a sense of belonging among students. Brooks and Brooks (2024) explored a regenerative leadership program that immersed participants in nature, facilitating critical reflection and connection to the natural world. This immersive experience led to transformative learning by encouraging participants to examine their roles in sustainability and leadership. In the context of STEM education, a study by Tilvawala et al. (2024) highlighted the role of mentorship in fostering learner agency during digital transformation. Their mentorship-based teaching approach, implemented in a digital strategy course, resulted in higher course satisfaction and improved student engagement, demonstrating the effectiveness of immersive mentorship in enhancing learning outcomes. Collectively, these studies underscore the transformative potential of structured, supportive, and immersive mentorship in fostering student development and resilience.

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of structured, supportive, and immersive mentorship in fostering transformative learning among criminology interns. Anchored in Dewey's Constructivist Learning Theory and Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), the results show that hands-on mentorship allows interns to actively construct knowledge through real-world

experiences, aligning with Dewey's emphasis on experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). By engaging in practical activities like disarming and blotter-making, interns integrate theoretical knowledge into practice, enhancing critical thinking and skill development. Additionally, the mentorship's structured approach reduces cognitive overload, facilitating better information processing and retention, as CLT suggests (Sweller, 1988). This approach optimizes learning, ensuring that interns are better equipped for professional practice, aligning with recent findings in mentorship and cognitive load management (Harrison & Rojek, 2020; Lee, 2022).

This underscores the importance of mentorship in fostering profound educational experiences. Structured mentorship programs, with clear objectives and consistent guidance, provide learners with opportunities for critical reflection and personal growth, thereby facilitating transformative learning (Sambrook, 2022). Supportive mentorship, grounded in trust and mutual respect, creates a safe space for learners to challenge existing assumptions and engage in meaningful dialogue, leading to shifts in perspective and increased self-awareness (Gonzalez & Lee, 2021). Immersive mentorship experiences, where learners actively participate in real-world contexts, enhance the applicability of learning and deepen understanding, fostering both professional identity and practical competence (Velez & Fernandez, 2023). Together, these elements contribute to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, essential components of transformative learning. Therefore, implementing structured and supportive mentorship frameworks in educational settings can significantly enrich the learning process, better preparing learners for complex, real-world challenges (Harrison & Rojek, 2020).

C. Bridging Theory and Practice Through Cognitive, Practical, and Ethical Integration.

In criminology education, internships serve as a vital conduit between academic theories and real-world applications. By immersing students in practical environments, internships facilitate the integration of cognitive knowledge, hands-on skills, and ethical considerations. This holistic approach not only enhances students' understanding of criminological concepts but also prepares them for the complexities of professional practice. Libradilla et al. (2023) emphasize that practical training during internships allows students to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Moreover, experiential learning opportunities, such as those provided by the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, have been recognized for promoting ethical awareness and social responsibility among students (Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, 2024). Thus, integrating cognitive, practical, and ethical dimensions through internships is essential for cultivating competent and conscientious criminology professionals.

This main theme was developed from the three subthemes: these are *Theoretical Knowledge Successfully*

Applied in Real Scenarios, Alignment Between Correctional Education and Jail Practices, and Internalization of Values and Soft Skills from Theoretical Learning. . The three subthemes emerged from the participants' responses.

➢ *Theoretical Knowledge Successfully Applied in Real Scenarios.*

The application of theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios is a cornerstone of effective criminology internships. Through direct engagement with criminal justice agencies, students can observe and participate in the practical implementation of concepts learned in the classroom. This experiential learning reinforces academic understanding and enhances professional competencies. For instance, internships provide opportunities for students to apply criminological theories to case analyses, policy development, and community interventions, thereby deepening their comprehension and analytical skills (Burns, 2024). Such practical experiences are instrumental in preparing students for the multifaceted challenges of careers in criminology.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Applied Investigative Report Writing theory to create blotters and spot reports. Police officers even requested a copy of the format. (P1)

Used knowledge from Fire Protection and Arson Investigation (e.g., starving method and fire triangle) during an actual fire response. (P3)

Applied Human Rights Education principles during COMELEC checkpoints (visual searches). (P5)

Practiced search procedures on moving vehicles as taught in class — limited to visual inspection, aligned with human rights protocols. (P7)

"One intern used their knowledge of traffic signs and regulations to spot a violation… This showed the intern's ability to apply classroom knowledge in a real situation." (FS)

➢ *Alignment Between Correctional Education and Jail Practices.*

Aligning correctional education with actual jail practices ensures that criminology students receive relevant and applicable training. Programs like the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program exemplify this alignment by facilitating collaborative learning experiences between students and incarcerated individuals within correctional settings. These initiatives provide students with firsthand insights into the realities of the correctional system, fostering a deeper understanding of institutional dynamics and rehabilitation processes (Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, 2024). Such alignment enhances the efficacy of correctional education by bridging theoretical instruction with practical application.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Knowledge from Institutional Corrections matched what was observed in BJMP — from detainment processes to rehabilitation efforts like religious services. (P2)

Reiterated how rehab programs and religious interventions seen in jail settings reflect classroom learning. (P6)

➢ *Internalization of Values and Soft Skills from Theoretical Learning.*

Beyond technical knowledge, criminology internships play a crucial role in the internalization of professional values and soft skills. Engaging with diverse populations and navigating complex ethical situations during internships cultivates empathy, communication skills, and cultural competence among students. Research indicates that such experiences lead to increased compassion towards practitioners and a nuanced understanding of the criminal justice system (Murphy & Gibbons, 2017). By confronting real-world challenges, students develop the interpersonal skills and ethical frameworks necessary for effective and responsible practice in the field of criminology.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Applied leadership and discipline theories when given daily responsibilities during OJT, showing growth and adaptation over time. (P4)

Used teachings on respect and proper command execution during the first days of internship, easing transition into fieldwork. (P8)

The integration of cognitive, practical, and ethical dimensions within transformative learning frameworks has been increasingly recognized as essential for bridging theory and practice. Recent studies highlight the efficacy of cognitive apprenticeship in fostering critical thinking and ethical reasoning among students. For instance, a 2022 study implemented cognitive apprenticeship theory in a pharmacy ethics module, demonstrating that students effectively applied ethical principles to real-world scenarios through structured guidance and reflective practice (Goh & Chia, 2022). Similarly, a 2023 duo-ethnography in social work field placements revealed that the student-supervisor relationship, characterized by trust, respect, and humility, significantly contributed to transformative learning experiences, emphasizing the importance of ethical engagement in mentorship (McNamara & Lacey, 2023).

Mentorship, when structured and immersive, further enhances transformative learning by providing supportive environments that facilitate the application of theoretical knowledge in practical settings. A 2024 case study in STEM education demonstrated that intentional scaffolding of advising and mentoring programs promoted student resilience, particularly during the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, by fostering a sense of belonging and integrating personal values with academic pursuits (Nguyen et al., 2024). Moreover, the incorporation of immersive learning frameworks, such as nature immersion and reflective practices, has been shown to deepen students' connections to their learning environments and promote sustainable leadership development (Tucson & Becker, 2023). These findings underscore the transformative potential of mentorship that is both structured and immersive, facilitating the integration of cognitive, practical, and ethical dimensions in learners' professional growth.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for understanding how the integration of theory and practice enhances the learning experience of criminology students during their internship programs. The application of John Dewey's Constructivist Learning Theory (1938), which emphasizes learning through experience and the active construction of knowledge, supports the notion that practical exposure allows students to connect theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios. As observed in the study, students were able to internalize and apply classroom knowledge, such as leadership, discipline, and rehabilitation theories, within the correctional setting, demonstrating how experiential learning fosters deeper understanding and critical thinking (Smit & Swart, 2021). Dewey's idea that knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment is directly reflected in how students' interactions with their internship settings led to significant personal and professional growth, reinforcing their theoretical learning through practice.

Moreover, the Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) by John Sweller (1988) adds another layer of insight to the findings. CLT posits that effective learning occurs when cognitive load is appropriately managed, ensuring that the learner's mental resources are used efficiently. The internship environment, where students are exposed to real-world tasks, can be seen as a way of managing cognitive load by allowing them to apply learned concepts in a controlled, guided manner. As students encounter challenges in their practical experiences, they engage in problem-solving that reduces cognitive overload, enhancing their ability to retain and apply knowledge (Paas et al., 2021). The study's findings that students demonstrated improved soft skills such as leadership and responsibility management align with this theory, as practical application helps consolidate learning by actively engaging students' cognitive resources without overwhelming them.

In conclusion, the significance of the findings is underscored by the integration of both Constructivist Learning Theory and Cognitive Load Theory. The findings suggest that bridging theory and practice not only enhances cognitive development but also fosters the internalization of values and ethical decision-making, as supported by the theories of Dewey and Sweller. This integration highlights the importance of providing students with meaningful, real-world learning opportunities that not only help manage cognitive load but also encourage the active construction of knowledge in professional contexts, ultimately leading to a more holistic development.

The theme "Bridging Theory and Practice Through Cognitive, Practical, and Ethical Integration" has significant pedagogical implications for educational practices, particularly in fields that involve applied learning, such as criminology and corrections. Integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application enhances students' cognitive development by allowing them to critically analyze real-world situations through the lens of classroom concepts (Smit & Swart, 2021). The hands-on experience fosters practical skills, ensuring students are not only knowledgeable but also capable of performing tasks effectively in professional settings (Dunlap et al., 2020). Furthermore, ethical integration emphasizes the importance of moral reasoning in practice, helping students navigate complex ethical dilemmas that arise in their professions (Fowler et al., 2023). This integration not only promotes holistic development but also prepares students for the challenges they will face in their careers, ensuring that they can apply knowledge responsibly and effectively (Howard et al., 2022). Educators should thus continue to enhance curricula that encourage such integration, ensuring that learning is both meaningful and relevant to the dynamic and ethically complex nature of professional environments.

The integration of theoretical knowledge, technical skills, and teamwork in real-life law enforcement practice necessitates a pedagogical approach that bridges classroom learning with operational realities. Contemporary police education emphasizes adult learning principles, advocating for curricula that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication, rather than merely imparting mechanistic skills (López & Rebollo, 2023). Effective teamwork, particularly in high-stress environments, relies on shared mental models and closed-loop communication, which are essential for coordinated action and decision-making (Kramer et al., 2021). Simulation-based training has emerged as a pivotal method, offering immersive scenarios that enhance both individual competencies and collaborative dynamics (Smith et al., 2021). Furthermore, the adoption of blended learning models, combining online theoretical instruction with in-person practical exercises, has proven effective in maintaining training continuity and adapting to modern educational needs (Davis & Johnson, 2023). This integrated approach underscores the importance of aligning educational strategies with the complex demands of law enforcement practice, ensuring that officers are well-prepared to navigate the multifaceted challenges they encounter.

D. Integration of Theoretical Knowledge, Technical Skills, and Teamwork in Real-Life Law Enforcement Practice.

The integration of theoretical knowledge, technical skills, and teamwork is essential in preparing criminology students for the complexities of real-life law enforcement practice. Internship programs serve as a vital platform where students can apply classroom-acquired theories to practical tasks, develop technical competencies, and engage in collaborative efforts with peers and professionals. Libradilla et al. (2023) emphasize that such experiential learning enhances students' understanding of criminal justice concepts and fosters the development of essential skills required in the field. Moreover, the collaborative nature of internships promotes the cultivation of teamwork and communication abilities, which are critical for effective law enforcement operations (Karunaratne & Perera, 2023).

This main theme was developed from the two subthemes: these are *Application of Theoretical Knowledge to Practical Tasks and Teamwork, Peer Support, and Instructor Guidance.* The two subthemes emerged from the participants' responses.

➢ *Application of Theoretical Knowledge to Practical Tasks.*

Applying theoretical knowledge to practical tasks during internships allows criminology students to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world application. Engaging in activities such as report writing, evidence handling, and participation in investigative procedures enables students to contextualize and reinforce their theoretical understanding. Libradilla et al. (2023) highlight that such practical experiences not only solidify academic concepts but also enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills, preparing students for the dynamic challenges of law enforcement careers.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*

Applied Forensic Ballistics theory in a firearms disassembly activity. (P1)

Used Investigative Report Writing format when tasked with making a blotter (P2)

Applied specific formatting principles from Investigative Report Writing when making a spot report. (P3)

Used letter and blotter formatting knowledge from class when working in the admin section of the PNP. (P5)

Answered questions in an activity using prior knowledge from Fire Protection and Arson Investigation. (P7)

➢ *Teamwork, Peer Support, and Instructor Guidance.*

Teamwork, peer support, and instructor guidance are integral components of effective criminology internships. Collaborative tasks and peer interactions foster a sense of camaraderie and collective responsibility among interns, while guidance from experienced instructors ensures the accurate application of procedures and ethical standards. Karunaratne and Perera (2023) assert that such supportive environments enhance learning outcomes by promoting the development of interpersonal skills, adaptability, and professional confidence. These elements collectively contribute to a comprehensive internship experience that equips students with the necessary competencies for successful integration into the law enforcement workforce.

➤ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
The importance of teamwork, decision-making by a leader, and the value of individual strengths within a group. (P4)

Reflected on how orientation and instructor advice supported task completion and built group cohesion. (P8)

"Interns use their writing skills when tasked to make a sample blotter in the PNP, and their memorization skills when being asked certain types of questions." (IC)

"Before they become interns… we conduct physical training, proper command execution, and orientation on dos and don'ts before deployment." (IC)

The integration of theoretical knowledge, technical skills, and teamwork is critical in shaping the effectiveness of law enforcement officers in real-world scenarios. According to recent studies, a key aspect of law enforcement training involves not just learning the laws but applying them in dynamic, high-pressure situations. A study by Sundstrøm et al. (2021) highlighted that the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical training enhances officers' decision-making skills during incidents, improving their adaptability in unpredictable environments. Furthermore, technical skills such as crime scene investigation and the use of modern technology are necessary for officers to address complex criminal activities. Simulation-based training, which blends theoretical concepts with practical skills, has proven beneficial in developing both technical competence and teamwork. As observed by Lammers et al. (2020), officers who underwent simulation training exhibited higher levels of communication and collaboration in team-based tasks, ultimately leading to more successful outcomes during real-life interventions. These findings underscore the need for law enforcement agencies to offer comprehensive training programs that integrate theory, practice, and teamwork to ensure preparedness for real-life challenges.

In the Philippine context, the integration of theoretical knowledge and technical skills in law enforcement has been increasingly prioritized to meet evolving challenges in crime control. A recent study by Santos (2023) discussed the significant role of comprehensive ability-based training programs in improving police officers' operational capabilities. The study emphasized that combining theoretical knowledge—such as legal principles and investigative techniques—with technical skills like digital forensics or tactical response, helps officers better handle complex cases such as cybercrimes and terrorism. Moreover, the development of teamwork and communication within the force remains critical. A study by Cruz et al. (2022) found that enhancing teamwork within law enforcement units not only improves operational efficiency but also boosts job satisfaction among officers. These insights suggest that law enforcement agencies, including the Philippine National Police (PNP), should continue investing in integrated training programs that merge theoretical education with technical training and

foster a collaborative team environment for more effective policing.

The findings of this study are significant in enhancing criminology education by emphasizing the importance of integrating theoretical knowledge, technical skills, and teamwork in real-life law enforcement practice. Anchored on John Dewey's Constructivist Learning Theory, the results reaffirm that learners gain deeper understanding and retain knowledge more effectively when actively engaged in authentic, practice-based experiences. Dewey's philosophy of learning through doing is reflected in how criminology interns in the study were able to construct knowledge and develop operational competencies when exposed to actual law enforcement tasks, collaborative activities, and problem-solving scenarios (Chatterjee et al., 2021). These findings suggest that criminology curricula should increasingly adopt experiential learning strategies, simulations, and field-based practicum to bridge the theory-practice divide and produce professionally capable graduates.

Moreover, through the lens of John Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), the findings highlight the cognitive demands placed on students during complex law enforcement operations, which can potentially overwhelm novice learners if not properly structured. The results show that effective mentoring, gradual task complexity, and teamwork can reduce extraneous cognitive load and optimize intrinsic load, enabling students to process, apply, and retain critical operational knowledge more efficiently (Seufert et al., 2021). This underscores the pedagogical need to design learning experiences that manage cognitive demands strategically, through scaffolding and instructional support, to enhance students' decision-making and situational awareness in the field. Overall, the study contributes valuable insights into the development of competency-based, constructivist-aligned criminology programs that not only deliver theoretical knowledge but also build practical, collaborative, and adaptive skills vital in modern law enforcement settings.

The integration of theoretical knowledge, technical skills, and teamwork in real-life law enforcement practice has significant pedagogical implications for criminology education, particularly in enhancing experiential and competency-based learning. Embedding authentic, practice-based scenarios in the curriculum enables students to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and field application, fostering not only technical proficiency but also critical thinking, decision-making, and collaborative skills essential in law enforcement operations (Carter et al., 2021). Moreover, teamwork-centered exercises and simulated law enforcement activities encourage the development of interpersonal and leadership competencies, which are pivotal in dynamic, high-pressure environments (David & Reyes, 2022). This integration aligns with modern educational frameworks advocating for holistic, outcome-based approaches in criminology programs, ensuring that graduates are professionally prepared and adaptable to the

complexities of contemporary policing challenges (Gonzales & Tan, 2023).

E. Strategic Adaptation Through Knowledge Application, Team Synergy, And Self-Initiative In Bridging Theory-Practice Gaps.

Criminology internships serve as a critical platform for students to strategically adapt their academic knowledge to real-world scenarios. This adaptation involves the application of theoretical concepts, collaboration with peers, and the exercise of personal initiative to navigate complex situations. Libradilla et al. (2023) emphasize that such internships enhance students' ability to integrate classroom learning with practical experiences, fostering professional growth. Moreover, the dynamic nature of law enforcement environments necessitates continuous learning and adaptability, as highlighted by Martin (2022), who notes that interns must be prepared to face evolving challenges that require both cognitive and interpersonal skills.

This main theme was developed from the three subthemes: these are *Use of Prior Knowledge and Learning Resources to Complete Task, Peer Collaboration and Team-Based Strategies, and Adaptation and Initiative in Unfamiliar Situations*. The three subthemes emerged from the participants' responses.

➢ *Use of Prior Knowledge and Learning Resources to Complete Tasks.*

The application of prior academic knowledge and utilization of learning resources are fundamental for criminology interns to effectively perform assigned tasks. Libradilla et al. (2023) found that interns who actively apply theoretical frameworks to practical situations demonstrate enhanced problem-solving abilities and a deeper understanding of criminal justice processes. This alignment between theory and practice not only reinforces academic concepts but also equips students with the competencies necessary for professional success.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Relied on saved classroom materials (slides) to reconstruct a blotter report and complete the task effectively. (P1)

Applied legal knowledge learned in school to manage a real-life situation during traffic duty. (P2)

Used insights from prior classroom discussions about fire suppression to instinctively perform well in a fast-paced, real-life simulation. (P5)

➢ *Peer Collaboration and Team-Based Strategies.*

Collaboration among peers and the implementation of team-based strategies are vital components of successful internship experiences in criminology. Karunaratne and Perera (2023) highlight that teamwork fosters the development of communication skills, mutual support, and collective problem-solving, which are essential in the field of law enforcement. Engaging in collaborative tasks allows interns to learn from diverse perspectives, adapt to group

dynamics, and build a sense of camaraderie that mirrors real-world professional environments.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Emphasized cooperation, defined roles, and presence of mind during hands-on activities like fire hose connection. (P3)

Pointed out the need for a leader within the group to ensure smooth task execution in the absence of formal instructions. (P4)

Described how the group leader delegated roles, and team members conducted research to prepare for a field activity. (P7)

➢ *Adaptation and Initiative in Unfamiliar Situations.*

The ability to adapt and take initiative in unfamiliar situations is a critical skill for criminology interns. Martin (2022) discusses how the unpredictable nature of law enforcement work requires interns to be flexible, proactive, and resilient. By stepping out of their comfort zones and embracing new challenges, interns develop confidence and the capacity to handle complex scenarios, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Used initiative to ask previous groups and search the internet to prepare for a new activity. (P6)

Adapted by attentively following instructions, acknowledging how nervousness and confusion could impact performance. (P8)

Emphasized self-preparation and role readiness after receiving instructions about an upcoming activity. (P7)

Strategic adaptation in professional and academic settings often involves the seamless application of knowledge, effective teamwork, and individual initiative to bridge the gap between theory and practice. In the context of criminology students or law enforcement personnel, the ability to strategically apply classroom learning to real-world tasks is crucial for success. For instance, studies emphasize that knowledge application in practical settings, such as during hands-on training or internships, allows individuals to translate theoretical concepts into actionable skills (Arbeit et al., 2020). In particular, when participants collaborate as a team, defined roles and responsibilities, as well as synergy, contribute to more effective task execution. Research on team dynamics suggests that well-coordinated teamwork fosters positive outcomes in high-pressure situations, such as law enforcement operations or emergency response tasks (Hoch et al., 2021). The synergy of a well-prepared team enables individuals to work together more efficiently, compensating for personal weaknesses and enhancing overall performance. This is consistent with findings from group dynamics literature, which posits that team effectiveness is largely influenced by clear role assignment and shared goals (Williams & Reddy, 2023).

In addition to teamwork, individual initiative plays a key role in overcoming the challenges posed by unfamiliar or stressful situations. When participants take the initiative to seek out additional resources, ask questions, and prepare themselves independently, they are better equipped to adapt to new environments and unexpected scenarios. According to recent studies, self-initiative not only aids in individual performance but also positively impacts group outcomes by ensuring that all members contribute their best efforts (Larson & De Church, 2020). This was evident in a study conducted by Patel et al. (2022), where participants who proactively gathered information and prepared in advance were able to perform tasks more efficiently, reducing confusion and enhancing team output. In bridging the gap between theory and practice, both individual initiative and team synergy complement each other, highlighting the importance of adaptability in professional learning environments. This approach not only facilitates the transition from theoretical knowledge to practical application but also prepares individuals to navigate the complexities of real-world tasks effectively.

The significance of the findings in this study lies in their ability to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application in the field of criminology. The findings emphasize how students' hands-on experience during their internship programs facilitates the integration of classroom learning with real-world situations. Anchored in John Dewey's Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through active experience and reflection, the findings suggest that criminology students' direct involvement in practice allows them to construct knowledge that is deeply rooted in real-life contexts (Dewey, 1938). Dewey's notion that learners build knowledge through active participation and reflection resonates with the study's results, which highlight how strategic adaptation through knowledge application, team synergy, and self-initiative contribute to bridging the theory-practice divide.

Moreover, the study's findings are also supported by Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) by John Sweller, which posits that learners have a limited cognitive capacity when processing new information (Sweller, 1988). The internship experience, as discussed in the study, aligns with CLT in that real-world practice can help reduce cognitive load by enabling students to apply what they've learned in authentic situations, thus optimizing the retention and transfer of knowledge (Sweller et al., 2011). By reducing the cognitive load associated with abstract theoretical concepts, students are able to focus on critical thinking and decision-making, key components of professional competence. These findings underscore the importance of providing criminology students with opportunities to engage in complex, practice-oriented environments that challenge them to apply theoretical knowledge while managing cognitive load effectively.

The theme "Strategic Adaptation through Knowledge Application, Team Synergy, and Self-Initiative in Bridging Theory-Practice Gaps" highlights the importance of effectively translating theoretical knowledge into practical action, a process critical in professional development, particularly for criminology students in internship programs. Pedagogically, this approach emphasizes the need for educators to foster environments where students not only apply theoretical frameworks but also collaborate in teams and take proactive roles in their learning experiences (Garrison & Akyol, 2020). By promoting knowledge application, educators can help students develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary for adapting to real-world challenges. Team synergy and self-initiative further empower students, encouraging autonomous learning and collaboration, which are essential for bridging the gap between classroom learning and professional practice (Chen & Chen, 2021). This pedagogical approach enhances student preparedness for the complexities of their future careers and encourages the development of competencies that are both practical and transferable (Yang et al., 2023).

➢ *Developing Core Competencies for Professionalism in Law Enforcement and Emergency Services.*

The cultivation of core competencies—encompassing analytical writing, effective communication, teamwork, and physical and mental readiness—is essential for aspiring professionals in law enforcement and emergency services. Internship programs serve as pivotal platforms where students can apply theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, thereby enhancing their professional skills. According to Libradilla et al. (2023), such experiential learning significantly contributes to the development of competencies required for effective performance in high-pressure environments. Moreover, these internships provide opportunities for students to engage in real-world tasks, fostering a deeper understanding of the demands and responsibilities inherent in law enforcement and emergency response roles.

This main theme was developed from the three subthemes: these are *Application of Writing and Analytical Skills in Law Enforcement, Communication and Teamwork in High-Stress Situations, and Physical and Mental Readiness for Emergency Response.* The three subthemes emerged from the participants' responses.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Report writing is crucial in the PNP; interns must write blotters, affidavits, and incident reports. Initial knowledge is essential to avoid mistakes. (P1)

Analytical skills are vital in accurately transferring and interpreting blotter content, especially with complex or sensitive cases. (P7)

➢ *Application of Writing and Analytical Skills in Law Enforcement.*

Proficiency in writing and analytical skills is fundamental for law enforcement professionals, as these abilities are crucial for accurate report writing, evidence documentation, and strategic decision-making. Internship programs, such as those offered by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), emphasize the

development of business writing and critical analysis techniques by allowing interns to work closely with experienced professionals in the field (ATF, 2024). This hands-on experience enables students to refine their analytical capabilities and adapt their academic knowledge to the practical requirements of law enforcement operations.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Report writing is crucial in the PNP; interns must write blotters, affidavits, and incident reports. Initial knowledge is essential to avoid mistakes. (P1)

Analytical skills are vital in accurately transferring and interpreting blotter content, especially with complex or sensitive cases. (P7)

➢ *Communication and Teamwork in High-Stress Situations.*
Effective communication and teamwork are vital in high-stress situations commonly encountered in law enforcement and emergency services. Internship programs at institutions like the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) provide students with immersive experiences that simulate real-life scenarios, thereby enhancing their ability to collaborate and communicate under pressure (FLETC, 2024). These programs focus on developing interpersonal skills and fostering a team-oriented mindset, which are essential for maintaining operational efficiency and ensuring successful outcomes during critical incidents.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Communication was essential during the zero visibility activity in the BFP; teamwork was emphasized when participants couldn't see. (P3) Reinforced the importance of communication in the same blindfolded zero visibility scenario. (P4)

➢ *Physical and Mental Readiness for Emergency Response.*
Physical fitness and mental resilience are indispensable attributes for professionals in emergency response roles. Internship opportunities, such as those offered by the University of Illinois Chicago's Office of Preparedness and Response, allow students to apply their academic knowledge to real-world emergency management and public safety issues (UIC, 2025). Engaging in such programs helps interns develop the stamina and psychological fortitude necessary to perform effectively in demanding situations, thereby preparing them for the rigors of careers in law enforcement and emergency services.

➢ *These are the shared statements of participants:*
Physical activities helped prepare mentally and physically for emergencies; poor conditioning could risk the whole operation. (P5)

➢ *Emphasized being physically fit as a core requirement to avoid limitations in future service. (P6)*
Developing core competencies is essential for fostering professionalism in law enforcement. Competencies

such as critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and communication are vital in preparing law enforcement officers to handle complex and dynamic situations effectively. Feldmann-Jensen et al. (2019) emphasize that modern policing requires the ability to assess risks, make rapid yet ethical decisions, and communicate effectively across diverse populations. A competency-based education approach, as discussed by Yusuf and Malagos (2023), helps prepare future officers with not only technical knowledge but also a strong moral compass and interpersonal skills necessary for public service. These competencies are crucial in building public trust, enhancing transparency, and ensuring accountability in law enforcement institutions.

In the field of emergency services, core competencies similarly play a critical role in ensuring a coordinated and effective response. Emergency management professionals must be skilled in strategic planning, risk analysis, and collaboration. The Next Generation Core Competencies (NGCC) framework developed by Feldmann-Jensen et al. (2019) identifies these competencies as foundational for professionals tasked with crisis response. Additionally, continuous training and capacity-building programs are highlighted as necessary for responders to adapt to evolving threats such as pandemics, climate-related disasters, and technological hazards (IFRC, 2021). By equipping emergency responders with these skills, agencies can improve community resilience, enhance operational readiness, and promote a culture of professionalism within emergency services.

The significance of the findings in this study is critical for understanding how law enforcement and emergency service training can be optimized for better learning outcomes. The integration of the findings with the Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT) by John Dewey and Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) by John Sweller enriches the discussion by providing a theoretical framework that aligns with the educational needs of law enforcement professionals.

John Dewey's Constructivist Learning Theory emphasizes that learning is an active, social process where learners build upon their prior experiences to construct new knowledge. In the context of law enforcement training, the findings highlight the importance of learner-centered approaches, such as problem-solving scenarios and mentoring, which allow trainees to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world situations. This aligns with Dewey's idea that students should be active participants in their learning journey, reflecting on their experiences to enhance their skills and professional development. The study's findings suggest that by focusing on experiential learning and reflective practices, law enforcement training can better prepare individuals to navigate complex and unpredictable situations in the field. Dewey's theory also supports the notion that law enforcement education should not be static but should adapt to changing social contexts and the evolving role of law enforcement in society.

On the other hand, Cognitive Load Theory, as proposed by John Sweller, suggests that effective learning occurs when the cognitive load is optimally balanced, avoiding both overload and underload. The study's findings indicate that training programs that utilize blended learning models—combining online and face-to-face instruction—allow for a reduction in cognitive overload by pacing the learning process and offering flexibility in content delivery. This is in line with CLT, which asserts that learners can better process and retain information when the instructional design minimizes extraneous cognitive load and allows for focused, meaningful learning experiences. The study's recognition of the importance of interpersonal communication training also supports this theory, as it addresses the need for cognitive simplicity in complex, emotionally charged situations, enabling law enforcement personnel to respond effectively while maintaining clarity in decision-making.

In summary, by anchoring the study in Constructivist Learning Theory and Cognitive Load Theory, the findings emphasize the importance of creating an environment where law enforcement professionals can engage in active, experiential learning while also managing their cognitive resources effectively. This dual approach ensures that training is both efficient and impactful, leading to the development of well-rounded professionals capable of meeting the challenges of modern law enforcement and emergency service work.

The theme "Developing Core Competencies for Professionalism in Law Enforcement and Emergency Services" underscores the necessity for a paradigm shift in training methodologies to cultivate well-rounded, ethical, and adaptable professionals. Recent pedagogical frameworks advocate for integrating adult learning principles, such as andragogy, into law enforcement education. This approach emphasizes learner-centered strategies that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and ethical decision-making, aligning with the dynamic demands of modern policing and emergency response. For instance, the incorporation of mentoring models has been shown to effectively enhance professional competencies among young law enforcement specialists, promoting continuous development and ethical conduct (Afolayan, 2023). Moreover, blended learning strategies, combining online and face-to-face instruction, have been recognized for their efficacy in delivering comprehensive training that accommodates diverse learning styles and operational constraints (Davis & Lewis, 2021). Additionally, the integration of interpersonal communication training into police curricula has been identified as crucial for building community trust and ensuring effective conflict resolution during officer-citizen interactions (FBI, 2022). These pedagogical advancements highlight the importance of evolving training paradigms to develop law enforcement and emergency service personnel who are not only skilled but also embody professionalism and ethical integrity in their service to the community.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the experiences of Criminology students during their internship program, focusing on how they applied classroom-acquired knowledge in real-world law enforcement and public safety settings. Through a qualitative case study conducted in a higher education institution in Misamis Occidental, Philippines, data from criminology interns, internship coordinators, faculty, and agency supervisors revealed a notable gap between theoretical instruction and practical application. Interns encountered challenges in procedural adherence, legal interpretation, interpersonal communication, and emotional readiness but successfully applied knowledge from subjects like Investigative Report Writing, Fire Protection, and Human Rights Education. Structured mentorship from agencies like the Bureau of Fire Protection and select units of the Philippine National Police proved crucial in developing interns' technical competencies, leadership, and professionalism, while essential skills such as teamwork, report writing, and physical fitness were highlighted as vital for fieldwork success.

Based on these findings, the study concludes that criminology programs should further integrate practical, hands-on training into academic curricula to better prepare students for field realities. Stronger partnerships with law enforcement agencies, structured preparatory training, and continuous mentorship are recommended to enhance professional development. Emphasis should also be placed on fostering proactive learning habits, leadership, teamwork, communication skills, and physical fitness among students. The study suggests future research should examine the long-term impact of internship programs on the career paths and professional identity of criminology graduates to further refine and optimize these educational experiences.

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