

Communicative Competence and Career Preparedness in the Era of Digitalization: Perspectives of Criminology Interns

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Abstract

Digitalization has transformed workplace communication and competency requirements across professional sectors, making communicative competence and career preparedness increasingly important for future criminology professionals. This study explored the perspectives of criminology interns on communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization. A qualitative interpretive descriptive research design was employed involving 14 purposively selected criminology interns who had completed or were undergoing internship training. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis generated six themes: Digital Communication, Communication Adaptability, Workplace Readiness, Digital Competence, Curriculum Innovation, and Experiential Learning. The findings revealed that digitalization has expanded opportunities for professional communication, strengthened workplace readiness, and increased the importance of digital competence alongside effective interpersonal communication. Participants likewise emphasized the need for curriculum innovation, technology-enhanced learning, and authentic experiential training to better prepare criminology students for digitally transformed professional environments. The study highlights the importance of integrating digital competencies into criminology education to strengthen communicative competence and career preparedness in the evolving digital workplace..

Keywords communicative competence, career preparedness, digitalization, criminology interns, digital competence, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence and career preparedness have become increasingly important in higher education as graduates prepare to enter workplaces shaped by rapid technological advancement and digital transformation. In the era of digitalization, professional communication extends beyond conventional face-to-face interactions to encompass virtual collaboration, digital documentation, online reporting, video conferencing, and technology-mediated communication platforms. Consequently, higher education institutions are challenged to equip students with competencies that enable them to communicate effectively while adapting to evolving digital work environments. Digitalization has transformed workplace expectations by requiring graduates to demonstrate not only technical expertise but also digital communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, and responsible use of digital technologies for professional practice (van Laar et al., 2020; Redecker, 2017; Vuorikari et al., 2022; Sangrà et al., 2019).

Within criminology education, communicative competence remains a fundamental professional attribute that supports effective law enforcement, criminal investigation, public safety, and community engagement. Future criminology professionals are expected to prepare incident reports, conduct interviews, present case information, communicate with multidisciplinary teams, and establish productive relationships with diverse stakeholders. As criminal justice agencies continue to adopt digital technologies for information management, communication, and operational processes, criminology interns must develop communication competencies that extend to digital environments while maintaining professionalism, ethical responsibility, and accuracy. These evolving workplace demands require future professionals to integrate effective communication with digital competence to enhance career preparedness and workplace performance (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2023; Bond et al., 2020; Billett, 2020). Recent studies have highlighted the growing influence of digitalization on graduate employability and workforce readiness across various professional fields. Digital technologies have transformed professional communication

by facilitating remote collaboration, digital information sharing, online learning, and technology-supported decision-making. Consequently, communication competence, digital literacy, and career preparedness have become increasingly interconnected as employers seek graduates who can effectively navigate digital workplaces and adapt to emerging technologies (van Laar et al., 2020; World Economic Forum, 2025; Vuorikari et al., 2022). Likewise, higher education institutions are encouraged to integrate digital competencies into academic programs to ensure that graduates remain competitive and responsive to the continuously evolving demands of the modern workforce (OECD, 2023; Sangrà et al., 2019).

Despite the growing significance of digitalization in professional education, limited qualitative research has examined how criminology interns perceive communicative competence and career preparedness within digitally transformed learning and workplace environments. Existing studies have primarily focused on oral communication proficiency, internship readiness, and English language development among criminology students, while providing limited attention to the broader influence of digitalization on communication practices, professional competence, and workforce preparation. Understanding these perspectives is important because digital transformation continues to reshape communication practices, organizational processes, and competency expectations within criminal justice institutions.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores the perspectives of criminology interns on communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization. By examining their experiences and insights, the study seeks to provide evidence that may guide curriculum enhancement, strengthen digital communication competencies, and support technology-enhanced professional preparation for future criminology professionals. The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of digital-ready criminology education and the development of graduates who can effectively communicate and perform in increasingly digitalized professional environments (UNESCO, 2023; Bond et al., 2020).

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative interpretive descriptive research design to explore the perspectives of criminology interns on communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization. Interpretive description was selected because it facilitates the examination of participants' experiences and perceptions within authentic educational and professional contexts while generating findings applicable to higher education and workforce development. This approach enabled an in-depth understanding of how digitalization influences communication practices and career preparation among future criminology professionals (Thome, 2016).

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 14 purposively selected criminology interns from higher education institutions in the Philippines who had completed or were undergoing internship placements in law enforcement agencies, criminal justice institutions, or related organizations. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Criminology program; (2) completed or actively engaged in internship or practicum training; (3) experienced the use of digital technologies in academic learning, professional communication, or internship-related activities; and (4) voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Purposive sampling ensured that participants possessed relevant experiences that directly addressed the research objective (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide consisting of three open-ended questions aligned with the research objective. The interview guide explored participants' perspectives on communicative competence, career preparedness, and the influence of digitalization on professional communication and internship readiness. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary to obtain richer descriptions and clarify participants' responses.

Table 1. Interview Guide Questions

Research Objective	Interview Question
To explore the perspectives of criminology interns on communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization.	1. How do you perceive the role of digitalization in shaping your communicative competence as a criminology intern? 2. In what ways has digitalization influenced your career preparedness and readiness for professional responsibilities during your internship? What recommendations would you suggest to strengthen communicative competence and career preparedness among criminology students in the era of digitalization?

Data Gathering Procedure

After securing the necessary permissions and obtaining informed consent, individual interviews were conducted either through face-to-face meetings or secure online communication platforms, depending on participants' availability and preferences. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants' narratives. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifying information from the transcripts.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2021): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) constructing themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. This analytical approach enabled the systematic identification of recurring patterns, meanings, and shared experiences related to communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, coding decisions and theme development were reviewed to ensure consistency with participants' narratives.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing qualitative research. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent before the interviews. They were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, and the measures implemented to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All interview data were securely stored and used solely for academic and research purposes in accordance with institutional ethical standards.

RESULTS

Research Objective. To explore the perspectives of criminology interns on communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization.

Interview Question 1. How do you perceive the role of digitalization in shaping your communicative competence as a criminology intern?

Theme 1. Digital Communication

Ten participants described digitalization as an important factor in strengthening their communicative competence by providing various platforms for professional communication, information exchange, and collaborative learning. They explained that digital technologies enhanced their ability to prepare reports, participate in online meetings, communicate through official digital channels, and access learning resources that improved their confidence in professional interactions. Participants emphasized that digital communication platforms exposed them to workplace communication practices that closely resemble those used in criminal justice institutions.

"Digital platforms helped me become more confident in communicating professionally because we regularly prepared reports, attended online meetings, and communicated through official applications." (Participant 7)
"Using digital communication tools improved how I organized information and expressed ideas more professionally." (Participant 2)

The findings indicate that digitalization has expanded opportunities for criminology interns to develop communication competencies required in contemporary professional environments.

Theme 2. Communication Adaptability

Four participants emphasized that digitalization required them to become more adaptable communicators by adjusting their communication styles across various digital platforms and professional situations. They explained that communicating through emails, virtual meetings, messaging applications, and online documentation required accuracy, professionalism, responsiveness, and ethical communication practices.

"Digital communication requires us to become more careful because written messages and online reports reflect our professionalism." (Participant 1)

"I learned to adjust my communication depending on whether I was talking to supervisors, colleagues, or clients through digital platforms." (Participant 5)

These responses suggest that communicative competence extends beyond verbal communication and increasingly includes adaptability within digital communication environments.

Interview Question 2. In what ways has digitalization influenced your career preparedness and readiness for professional responsibilities during your internship?

Theme 1. Workplace Readiness

Six participants perceived digitalization as enhancing their preparedness for professional responsibilities by familiarizing them with workplace technologies commonly used in criminal justice agencies. They shared that exposure to digital documentation, online information systems, electronic reporting, virtual collaboration, and digital case management increased their confidence before entering internship placements.

"Using digital systems during college prepared me for the technologies used during my internship." (Participant 3)

"Learning through digital platforms made it easier to adjust to workplace responsibilities because many processes are already computerized." (Participant 9)

The findings demonstrate that digitalization contributes to smoother transitions from academic learning to professional practice.

Theme 2. Digital Competence

Eight participants recognized that career preparedness now requires competencies beyond communication skills, including digital literacy, information management, online professionalism, critical thinking, and responsible use of digital technologies. They believed that employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate confidence in using digital tools while maintaining ethical standards and effective communication.

"Being digitally competent is now part of being professionally prepared because almost every task involves technology." (Participant 4)

"Career readiness today means knowing how to communicate, solve problems, and use digital systems responsibly." (Participant 6)

The findings indicate that digital competence has become an essential component of employability among future criminology professionals.

Interview Question 3. What recommendations would you suggest to strengthen communicative competence and career preparedness among criminology students in the era of digitalization?

Theme 1. Curriculum Innovation

Nine participants recommended strengthening academic curricula by integrating digital communication, workplace technologies, virtual simulations, online reporting systems, and technology-supported learning activities into criminology education. They believed that exposing students to authentic digital workplace scenarios would improve communication competence and professional preparedness.

"Our curriculum should include more digital communication activities that simulate actual workplace situations." (Participant 8)

"Students should learn how to prepare digital reports, conduct online presentations, and use communication technologies before internship." (Participant 12)

These findings suggest that curriculum innovation can better align educational experiences with evolving workplace expectations.

Theme 2. Experiential Learning

Five participants further emphasized the importance of providing authentic learning experiences through digital simulations, internships, collaborative projects, mock interviews, professional workshops, and technology-enhanced training. They believed that practical exposure would strengthen both communication competence and confidence before entering professional practice.

"Practical digital activities allow students to experience workplace communication before they begin their internship." (Participant 10)

"More simulations and technology-based training can prepare students for the real communication challenges in criminal justice agencies." (Participant 13)

These responses demonstrate that experiential learning supported by digital technologies can strengthen both communicative competence and career preparedness among criminology interns.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that digital communication has become an essential component of communicative competence among criminology interns. Participants perceived digitalization as expanding opportunities for professional interaction through virtual meetings, digital documentation, online reporting, and technology-mediated collaboration. These experiences suggest that communicative competence in contemporary criminal justice settings extends beyond traditional oral communication to include the effective use of digital communication platforms that support professional practice. This finding is consistent with van Laar et al. (2020), who emphasized that digital communication, collaboration, and information management have become fundamental competencies required in modern workplaces. Similarly, Redecker (2017) explained that digital competence involves the confident, responsible, and effective use of digital technologies for communication and collaboration. The DigComp 2.2 Framework further highlights that digital communication has become a core competence that enables individuals to participate effectively in increasingly technology-driven professional environments (Vuorikari et al., 2022). The present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that criminology interns recognize digital communication as a professional competency that enhances both workplace interaction and internship performance rather than merely serving as a technological tool.

Another important finding highlighted that workplace readiness and digital competence have become closely interconnected dimensions of career preparedness. Participants described digital technologies as facilitating their transition from academic learning to professional practice by exposing them to electronic documentation, virtual collaboration, digital information systems, and technology-supported work processes commonly utilized in criminal justice organizations. These findings are consistent with OECD (2023), which emphasized that digital transformation has reshaped workforce expectations by requiring graduates to combine occupation-specific expertise with adaptable digital competencies. Likewise, the World Economic Forum (2025) identified communication, analytical thinking, digital literacy, and adaptability among the most critical competencies required in future employment. Supporting these observations, Succi and Canovi (2020) found that employers increasingly value communication, adaptability, teamwork, and digital competencies as essential employability skills that complement technical knowledge. Unlike previous studies that primarily associated career preparedness with communication proficiency or technical competence, the present findings demonstrate that criminology interns increasingly perceive digital competence as an indispensable element of professional readiness within digitally transformed criminal justice workplaces.

The study further revealed that curriculum innovation and experiential learning are essential for strengthening communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization. Participants recommended integrating digital communication activities, workplace technologies, virtual simulations, online reporting systems, and authentic internship experiences into criminology education. They believed that these learning experiences would improve their confidence, communication abilities, and readiness to perform professional responsibilities in technology-enabled work environments. These findings support Carvalho et al. (2022), who

reported that technology-enhanced collaborative learning promotes communication, metacognitive development, and professional competence. Likewise, UNESCO (2023) emphasized that higher education institutions should integrate digital competencies into teaching and learning to prepare graduates for evolving workplace demands. Furthermore, Crawford et al. (2020) highlighted that digital learning environments promote flexibility, collaboration, and authentic learning experiences that strengthen students' professional preparedness in higher education. The present findings therefore suggest that curriculum enhancement should move beyond incorporating digital technologies as supplementary tools and instead embed technology-supported communication and authentic workplace experiences throughout criminology education.

A notable contribution of this study lies in its examination of communicative competence and career preparedness within the context of digitalization. Previous research has largely concentrated on oral communication proficiency, English language development, and internship readiness among criminology students, often emphasizing linguistic performance and remedial interventions. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that communicative competence has evolved into a multidimensional construct that integrates interpersonal communication, digital literacy, workplace adaptability, and professional use of technology. This finding broadens existing literature by illustrating how digital transformation has redefined the communication competencies expected of future criminology professionals. Moreover, by focusing on criminology interns in the Philippine context, the study provides localized evidence on how digitalization influences professional preparation within criminal justice education, thereby contributing to the growing body of knowledge on digital workforce readiness in higher education.

Overall, the findings indicate that communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization require a balanced integration of effective communication skills, digital competence, adaptability, and authentic professional experiences. As digital technologies continue to transform communication practices across criminal justice organizations, higher education institutions should strengthen curriculum innovation, technology-enhanced learning, and experiential training to ensure that future criminology professionals are equipped with the competencies necessary to communicate effectively, utilize digital technologies responsibly, and successfully navigate increasingly digitalized professional environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perspectives of criminology interns on communicative competence and career preparedness in the era of digitalization. The findings revealed that digitalization has transformed professional communication by expanding opportunities for digital collaboration, technology-mediated interaction, and workplace communication, thereby strengthening communicative competence among future criminology professionals. Participants further recognized that career preparedness extends beyond traditional communication skills to include digital competence, adaptability, ethical technology use, and the ability to perform effectively within digitally enabled professional environments.

The study also highlights the importance of curriculum innovation and experiential learning in preparing criminology students for the evolving demands of the criminal justice profession. Integrating digital communication, workplace technologies, simulation-based learning, and authentic internship experiences into criminology education can enhance both communicative competence and career preparedness. Ultimately, the findings underscore the need for higher education institutions to continuously align academic programs with digital transformation, ensuring that future criminology professionals are equipped with the communication, digital, and professional competencies required to succeed in increasingly technology-driven workplaces.

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