

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF INTERNSHIPS ON CAREER PREPAREDNESS AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

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Abstract:

Internships play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academic learning and professional practice, equipping students with essential skills for successful career transitions. This research evaluates the impact of internships on career preparedness and employability skills, focusing on their ability to enhance students' readiness for the workforce. The study examines the specific competencies and professional attributes students develop through these experiential learning opportunities, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. It also explores the challenges and barriers students face in accessing and completing internships, including financial constraints, lack of guidance, and limited availability of quality placements.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this research gathers data from students, to assess the effectiveness of internships in preparing students for real-world demands. The findings aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role internships play in career development and highlight areas for improvement. Based on these insights, the study proposes actionable strategies for designing and implementing internships that maximize their benefits for students and align with industry requirements. This research underscores the importance of internships in fostering employability and provides recommendations for stakeholders to enhance the internship experience for future professionals.

Keywords: Internships, Career Preparedness, Employability Skills, Experiential Learning, Workforce Readiness

Introduction:

Internships have long been recognized as a critical component of higher education, providing students with an invaluable opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in real-world settings. These experiential learning opportunities serve as a bridge between academic theory and professional practice, equipping students with essential skills that are pivotal for career success (Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 2008). The integration of internships into academic curricula is not only beneficial for students' personal and professional growth but also plays a significant role in their employability (Rothman & Mangan, 2016). As the labor market becomes increasingly competitive, employers seek graduates who are not only academically prepared but also possess practical, job-ready skills. Hence, the role of internships in enhancing career preparedness and employability has gained considerable attention from both educational institutions and industry professionals.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of internships on career preparedness and employability skills among students. Career preparedness refers to the degree to which students are equipped with the skills and competencies necessary to transition smoothly from the academic environment to the professional workforce (Holland, 2014). Employability skills, often referred to as "soft skills," include competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, and adaptability, which are essential for students to succeed in their chosen careers (Bridgestock, 2009). Internships are seen as an ideal mechanism for developing these skills, as they provide students with hands-on experience in real-world work environments.

Research has shown that internships contribute significantly to the development of employability skills. Through internships, students gain exposure to industry practices, work in team settings, and often tackle complex problems that require critical thinking (Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, internships provide students with networking opportunities, enabling them to establish valuable professional relationships that can lead to future job prospects (Coco, 2000). While the benefits of internships are well-documented, the quality and effectiveness of these experiences can vary considerably based on factors such as the nature of the internship, the level of support provided by educational institutions, and the availability of placement opportunities (Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010).

Despite the clear advantages, many students encounter challenges in accessing internships. These challenges include financial constraints, lack of guidance from academic institutions, and limited availability of quality placements (D'Abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009). Additionally, the lack of standardized internship programs and inconsistent employer involvement can hinder the overall learning experience. Therefore, it is essential to examine not only the positive outcomes of internships but also the barriers students face, in order to develop strategies for enhancing the design and implementation of such programs.

This research aims to address the gap in understanding the effectiveness of internships in preparing students for the workforce, particularly in terms of employability skills. By using a mixed-methods approach, the study will gather quantitative data through surveys and qualitative insights through interviews with students, educators, and employers. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how internships influence career readiness, the types of employability skills students develop, and the challenges they face. The results of this study will also inform recommendations for improving internship programs, ensuring they better align with industry expectations and better prepare students for their future careers.

Literature Review:

Internships play a pivotal role in enhancing students' career preparedness and employability, acting as a bridge between academic learning and professional practice. They are widely recognized as a key component of higher education that not only equips students with practical experience but also contributes significantly to the development of critical soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving (Knouse, Tanner, & Harris,

2008). As the workforce becomes more competitive, the need for graduates with both academic knowledge and practical experience has led to an increased emphasis on internships in the educational sector. This literature review examines the impact of internships on career preparedness, employability skills, and the challenges that students encounter in accessing quality internship opportunities.

- **The Role of Internships in Career Preparedness**

Internships are commonly regarded as an essential mechanism for improving career readiness, which refers to the skills, competencies, and experiences that prepare students for successful entry into the workforce (Holland, 2014). Through internships, students are exposed to real-world work environments where they can apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. These opportunities help students develop both technical and soft skills that are directly relevant to their future careers. Holland (2014) suggests that career preparedness extends beyond the acquisition of job-specific technical skills, as it also includes the development of interpersonal competencies like adaptability, problem-solving, and communication, which are increasingly valued by employers.

The importance of internships in enhancing career preparedness is underscored by research from Rothman and Mangan (2016), who argue that internships provide students with essential exposure to industry practices and help them transition more smoothly from academic settings into professional roles. Internships give students the opportunity to observe professionals in action, to learn workplace norms, and to develop an understanding of the expectations employers have for entry-level employees. This firsthand experience is often cited as one of the most beneficial aspects of internships, as it allows students to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical application (Bridgestock, 2009).

- **Employability Skills Developed through Internships**

Employability skills often referred to as "soft skills," include a broad range of competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, and critical thinking (Bridgestock, 2009). These skills are crucial for students' success in the workforce, as they are directly linked to performance in professional settings. Jackson (2015) emphasizes that internships provide a unique opportunity for students to develop and refine these skills. Working within real-world teams, interns are often tasked with problem-solving and critical thinking, which are key skills that employers seek in job candidates.

In addition to improving general employability, internships also offer specific benefits related to career specialization. For example, students in fields such as engineering, business, and health sciences often engage in internships that provide hands-on experience with industry-specific tools, technologies, and methods. Gault, Leach, and Duey (2010) argue that these specialized internships not only enhance students' technical knowledge but also foster essential interpersonal and professional attributes such as confidence, professionalism, and work ethic. The exposure to diverse workplace cultures and the need to collaborate with professionals from various backgrounds further contributes to the development of

adaptability and interpersonal communication skills, which are highly valued in the modern workplace.

- **Networking and Career Opportunities**

Beyond skill development, internships serve as an important vehicle for students to build professional networks. According to Coco (2000), internships provide students with access to industry professionals and potential employers, offering valuable networking opportunities that can lead to future job prospects. This professional networking is one of the primary reasons internships are so highly regarded by both students and employers. By establishing relationships with professionals in their field, students increase their chances of securing permanent employment upon graduation. Jackson (2015) supports this view, noting that many students who complete internships are more likely to be offered full-time positions with the same employers.

The long-term value of internships extends beyond immediate job offers. As students begin their careers, the networks they develop through internships provide ongoing support in terms of mentorship and career guidance, which can be critical during the early stages of professional development (Coco, 2000).

- **Challenges and Barriers to Accessing Internships**

Despite their significant benefits, internships are not without challenges. A major barrier to accessing internships is financial constraint, as many internship opportunities, particularly in fields such as the arts and media, are unpaid or offer low compensation. D'Abate, Youndt, and Wenzel (2009) identify financial limitations as one of the primary obstacles that prevent students from participating in internships. This is particularly problematic for students from low-income backgrounds who may not be able to afford the costs associated with unpaid internships, such as travel or housing expenses. Without access to paid opportunities, many students may miss out on valuable learning experiences, limiting their career prospects.

In addition to financial barriers, many students face difficulties in securing quality internship placements. Gault et al. (2010) point out that the availability of internships can be inconsistent, depending on the industry, geographic location, and academic discipline. As a result, students in highly competitive fields or regions with limited internship opportunities may struggle to gain relevant work experience. Furthermore, the quality of internships can vary significantly. Some internship may not provide meaningful learning experiences, instead offering administrative tasks that do not contribute to skill development or career preparedness. The lack of structured internship programs with clear learning objectives can lead to suboptimal experiences for students (D'Abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009).

- **Recommendations for Enhancing Internship Programs**

To maximize the impact of internships on career preparedness, several strategies can be implemented to address these challenges. One recommendation is the creation of more paid internship opportunities. Financial support for internships, either through government programs or industry partnerships, would ensure that a greater number of students can afford to participate. This would help eliminate the financial barrier that limits access to internships and increase the diversity of participants.

Additionally, educational institutions should strengthen their relationships with industry partners to ensure that internships align with academic curricula and provide students with meaningful learning experiences. Developing standardized internship programs that include mentorship, feedback, and clear learning objectives could further enhance the quality of internships. According to Rothman and Mangan (2016), academic institutions should also provide greater support to students in finding and securing internships, including career counselling and dedicated resources for internship placement.

Objectives:

1. To examine the role of internships in enhancing students' career readiness.
2. To analyse the specific employability skills developed through these experiential learning opportunities.
3. To identify challenges and barriers faced by students in accessing and completing such internships.
4. To recommend strategies for improving the design and implementation of internships to maximize their impact on career preparedness

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Internships positively influence students' career readiness by enhancing both their technical and soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork.

Hypothesis 2: Financial constraints, lack of guidance, and limited availability of quality placements significantly hinder students' access to and successful completion of internships.

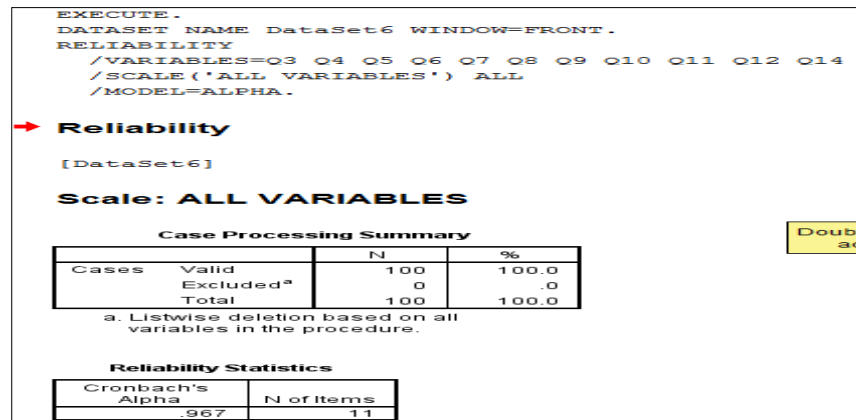
Research Methodology:

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the impact of internships on career preparedness and employability skills. An explanatory research design integrates surveys, interviews, and document analysis to collect and triangulate data, ensuring comprehensive insights. The target population includes undergraduate and postgraduate students with internship experience, academic coordinators, and industry professionals. Using stratified random sampling, the study ensures representation across disciplines, involving 100 students.

Data collection includes structured Likert-scale questionnaires to gather quantitative data on student perceptions of internship effectiveness, while semi-structured interviews with educators and employers provide qualitative insights into challenges and opportunities. Open-ended student responses add further depth. Quantitative data is analysed using statistical tools such as SPSS, employing descriptive and inferential techniques to identify patterns, while qualitative data undergoes thematic analysis through coding and categorization.

Ethical considerations are prioritized, with informed consent obtained from all participants and strict confidentiality maintained. The study acknowledges limitations such as potential self-reporting biases and restricted generalizability, addressing these through representative sampling and data triangulation. This methodology ensures a balanced and

rigorous evaluation, offering valuable recommendations for enhancing internship programs and fostering career readiness.



EXECUTE.
DATASET NAME DataSet6 WINDOW=FRONT.
RELIABILITY
/VARIABLES=Q3 Q4 Q5 Q6 Q7 Q8 Q9 Q10 Q11 Q12 Q14
/SCALE('ALL VARIABLES') ALL
/MODEL=ALPHA.

→ **Reliability**

[DataSet6]

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	100	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	100	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.967	11

Source: SPSS Statistics

Result and Discussion:

A) Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test analysis:

Interpretation: - Cronbach's Alpha (α) is used to check how well a set of items work together to measure one concept. In this case, the calculated *Cronbach's Alpha is 0.967 for 11 items*. A value of 0.967 is considered excellent, meaning the items are highly consistent and closely related.

B) Hypothesis No. 1

H₁ (Null Hypothesis – H₀): Internships do not have a significant positive influence on students' career readiness and do not enhance their technical and soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving and teamwork.

H₁: Internships positively influence students' career readiness by enhancing both their technical and soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving and teamwork.

→ **One-Sample Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
My internship helped me improve communication skills.	100	3.46	1.283	.128
I developed better teamwork and collaboration skills during my internship.	100	3.47	1.251	.125
The internship improved my ability to solve problems effectively.	100	3.36	1.352	.135
I gained time management and organizational skills through the internship.	100	3.45	1.250	.125

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
My internship helped me improve communication skills.	26.978	99	.000	3.460	3.21	3.71
I developed better teamwork and collaboration skills during my internship.	27.740	99	.000	3.470	3.22	3.72
The internship improved my ability to solve problems effectively.	24.847	99	.000	3.360	3.09	3.63
I gained time management and organizational skills through the internship.	27.594	99	.000	3.450	3.20	3.70

Source: SPSS Statistics

Interpretation: - The significance (2-tailed) value (p-value) is 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that internships do not have a significant positive influence on students' career readiness and do not enhance their technical and soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, is rejected. This suggests that internships contribute significantly to students' career readiness and skill development.

C) Hypothesis No. 2

H₂ (Null Hypothesis – H₀): Financial constraints, lack of guidance and limited availability of quality placements do not significantly hinder students' access to and successful completion of internships.

H₂: Financial constraints, lack of guidance and limited availability of quality placements significantly hinder students' access to and successful completion of internships.

→ T-Test					
[DataSet3]					
One-Sample Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Q10	100	3.23	1.384	.138	
Q11	100	3.23	1.213	.121	
Q12	100	3.33	1.319	.132	
Q14	100	3.47	1.226	.123	

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Q10	23.333	99	.000	3.230	2.96	3.50
Q11	26.624	99	.000	3.230	2.99	3.47
Q12	25.256	99	.000	3.330	3.07	3.59
Q14	28.293	99	.000	3.470	3.23	3.71

Source: SPSS Statistics

Interpretation: - The significance (2-tailed) value (p-value) is 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the

null hypothesis, which states that financial constraints, lack of guidance and limited availability of quality placements do not significantly hinder students' access to and successful completion of internships, is rejected. This is proved that, financial constraints, lack of guidance and limited availability of quality placements significantly hinder students' access to and successful completion of internships.

Findings:

Internships and Career Readiness: Internships significantly enhance students' career readiness. Students develop both technical and soft skills through internship experiences, including communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. The statistical analysis shows that these improvements are meaningful and impactful.

Barriers to Internship Access: Financial constraints pose a significant challenge to students in securing internships. A lack of proper guidance and limited availability of quality placements further hinder internship access and completion. These factors negatively impact students' ability to gain real-world experience and professional exposure.

Reliability of Survey Items: The survey items used to assess the impact of internships are highly reliable. The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.967 indicates excellent internal consistency, demonstrating that the items consistently measure the intended concepts.

Recommendations:

- 1. Enhancing Internship Placement Support:** Educational institutions should establish dedicated internship placement cells that collaborate with various industries to secure diverse and meaningful internship opportunities for students. These placement cells can also organize workshops on resume building, interview skills, and professional etiquette to better prepare students for the internship selection process.
- 2. Financial Assistance Programs:** Many students face financial barriers when participating in internships, especially unpaid ones. Institutions and organizations should introduce financial support programs, such as stipends, travel reimbursements, or grants, to help students cover expenses. Collaborations with government bodies and industry partners could encourage paid internship opportunities, reducing financial challenges.
- 3. Structured Feedback Mechanisms:** Companies offering internships should provide structured feedback sessions to students throughout the internship period. Feedback can be given in formal review meetings at regular intervals, focusing on both strengths and areas for improvement. This practice will help students better understand organizational expectations and refine their professional skills.
- 4. Tailored Internship Experiences:** Internships should be designed to align closely with students' academic backgrounds and career aspirations. Institutions can achieve this by partnering with organizations that provide specialized roles relevant to various fields of study. Personalized placements help students gain practical skills that directly complement their academic learning.
- 5. Guidance and Mentorship Programs:** Establishing mentorship programs where students are paired with experienced professionals during their internships can significantly

enhance learning experiences. Mentors can provide guidance on navigating workplace challenges, improving technical skills, and building professional networks. This guidance fosters confidence and career growth among students.

Conclusion:

This research underscores the pivotal role of internships in enhancing students' career preparedness and employability skills. Internships provide a bridge between academic learning and professional practice, equipping students with essential competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability. The findings demonstrate that students who complete internships are better positioned to meet the demands of the competitive job market, as they gain both technical expertise and practical insights into industry operations.

However, the study also highlights significant barriers that hinder students' ability to access and complete internships. Financial constraints, lack of structured guidance from academic institutions, and limited availability of quality placements emerge as key challenges. These barriers can diminish the benefits students derive from internship experiences and restrict their opportunities for professional development.

To address these challenges, actionable recommendations have been proposed, including the establishment of dedicated internship placement cells, the provision of financial assistance programs, and the development of structured feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, personalized internship experiences and mentorship initiatives are crucial for fostering meaningful learning and professional growth among students.

By aligning internship programs more closely with academic curricula and industry requirements, educational institutions and employers can maximize the benefits of these experiential learning opportunities. Ultimately, fostering well-structured and inclusive internship programs will not only enhance students' employability but also contribute to a more competent and job-ready workforce.

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