

The effectiveness of a university internship programme: Student perspectives of stakeholder roles and responsibilities

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Abstract

The background to this research is an increased academic and practitioner discussion around graduate work readiness and the need for educational institutions to better prepare graduates for employment. Internships are widely regarded as an essential platform for students to gain the necessary work experience to enable a successful transition into employment, however not all internship programmes can engender the necessary employment skills in participating interns. This research aims to examine the effectiveness of an internship programme from the perspective of university interns, exploring their role and perceptions of employers and the university. Using a google survey with 146 interns and supported by intern focus groups this research reveals that students were suitably motivated to be active participants in their internship but would gain more from the experience if employers improved levels of mentorship and the university made improvements to the structure of the internship programme, levels of staff engagement and the support of career services. The research contributes to existing knowledge by examining interns' perspectives of not only the internship programme itself but the role of the stakeholders, including a reflection on the students' own motivation and engagement with the internship.

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Introduction

Effective internships provide a structured learning-experience that offers 'realistic' work experience to students in an appropriately supervised environment (Renganathan, Karim and Li, 2012; Taylor, 1988). The experience allows participating students to align their studies with their career-interest (Gardner, 2013; Slaybach, 2018), proving beneficial to not only the student but also the employer. Internships can be led by the employer, through recruitment platforms, or by the university in conjunction with the employer. The

focus of this research is university-led internships where the university embeds internships into the curriculum to address an identified skills gap between the education provider and the labour market. Internships alone however cannot address the skills gap, universities have to implement other business engaging initiatives which are either embedded into the curriculum or run as extracurricular activities such as engaging businesses and business speakers, participating in external competitions and business events and using business simulations as

assessments which individually and collectively assist in preparing a graduate for work (Jackling and Natoli, 2015; King, 2003; Luecking and Fabian, 2000). Although these other initiatives are important, internships are arguably the most appropriately positioned to provide a student with sustained exposure to business and are therefore considered, if structured and managed correctly, a potentially effective facilitator of employability skills. The extent to which a university-led internship can address the graduate skills gap and prepare them for an increasingly competitive and disruptive employment market (King, 2003; Turner and Tee, 2018) will be evaluated in this research, contributing to previous discussion on the use and usefulness of internships in creating an employment ready graduate (Holyoak, 2013; Maertz Jr, Stoeberl and Marks, 2014; Slides and Mrvica, 2007; Turner and Tee, 2018).

Literature Review

The concept of internships is usually contextualised in the ‘experiential learning’ literature which discusses the application of theories learned in classrooms to practical work and includes work-based learning, business-simulation challenges, live case-studies and business related competitions (Galloway *et al.*, 2005; Renganathan, Karim and Li, 2012; Stansbie, Nash and Chang, 2016; Turner and Tee, 2018). Observed themes to a successful internship programme are the ability(ies) to engage with stakeholders (see **Table 1**), and provide a platform for students to gain exposure of a real-working environment and test their abilities in a business setting (Holyoak, 2013; Maertz Jr, Stoeberl and Marks, 2014).

Table 1: Themes to emerge from the literature on the success of the internship programme

Theme	Academic Research
Student full-time employment opportunities	Bruening, <i>et al.</i> . (2003); Holyoak (2013); Jackling and Natoli (2015); James (2018); Moghaddam (2011); Renganathan, Karim and Li (2012); Templeton, Updyke, and Bennett (2012).
Student skills improvement	Alpert, Heaney and Kuhn (2009); Divine <i>et al.</i> , (2015); Holyoak (2013); Jackling and Natoli (2015); James (2018); Moghaddam, J. M. (2011); Templeton, Updyke and Bennett (2012); Turner and Mulholland (2017)
Student and employer network development	Divine <i>et al.</i> , (2015); Moghaddam (2011); Renganathan, Karim and Li (2012); Templeton, Updyke and Bennett (2012).
Employer engagement and responsibilities	Alpert, Heaney and Kuhn (2009); Divine <i>et al.</i> , (2015); Maertz Jr, Stoeberl and Marks (2014); Moghaddam (2011); Templeton, Updyke and Bennett (2012).
Universities engagement and responsibilities	Chen, Ellworth and Schwarz, 2015; Green, Graybeal and Madison, 2011; Holyoak, 2013; Maertz Jr, Stoeberl and Marks (2014).

Given the inter-related nature of internships, relying on stakeholders working together, there can be obvious barriers to their success which include insufficient planning, inadequate mentorship and supervision, and the difficulties associated to the linking of theory to practice (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Hanson, 1984;

Templeton, Updyke and Bennett, 2012; Toncar and Cudmore, 2000). Since internships are conducted on business premises that are comparatively less within the university’s control, their full educational benefit may not be realised (Alm, 1996; Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Toncar and Cudmore, 2000). This makes

the structure of an internship program and the associated administrative roles so important to the program's effectiveness (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009). It is a collective effort with students, education providers and employers required to communicate and actively engage with the internship programme to enable a successful transition of students to the workplace.

Evaluation of the internship programme - students Schmutte (1986:229) argues that "the ultimate test of any internship program is the extent to which participating students are benefited". The internship programme is an opportunity for students to prepare for the world of work (Beard, 1998; Beck and Halim, 2008; Knouse, Tanner and Harris, 1999) and gain clarity in their career direction (Beck and Halim, 2008; Liu, Xu, and Weitz., 2011; Martin and Wilkerson, 2006; Moghaddam, 2011). Students can develop a range of skills which include interpersonal and socialisation skills (Beard, 1998), leadership (Green, Graybeal and Madison, 2011), and gain business contacts (Groves *et al.*, 1977), and the understanding of business applications (Beard, 1998; Green, Graybeal and Madison, 2011).

Previous research suggests that exposure to the working environment allows students to apply theoretical models learned in the classroom to real-world scenarios and as a result, see the importance of learned theory and therefore engage more with learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991; Clark, 2003; Risby *et al.*, 2013; Stansbie, Nash and Chang, 2016; Young, Wright and Stein, 2006) and achieve better academic results (Clark, 2003; Risby *et al.*, 2013). A further more pragmatic benefit from the internship experience is the likelihood that students will receive more job opportunities after graduation (Galloway *et al.*, 2005; Holyoak, 2013; Slides and Mvirca, 2007). In other words, when appropriately implemented, internships can provide students with academic and interpersonal benefits (Templeton, Updyke, and Bennett, 2012), however students need to be engaged, tasks provided by employers have to be meaningful and the university-led programme has to be structured and comprehensive. The

internship requires that students receive significant development professionally and educationally (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Toncar and Cudmore, 2000). However, there has to be reasonable expectations about what can be achieved from the internship by students, employers, and the university (Holyoak, 2013; Jackling and Natoli, 2015; Lang and McNaught, 2013; Turner and Tee, 2018).

Students are the "most important beneficiary of the internship outcomes" (Schmutte, 1986:227), able to use the opportunity to evaluate the industry sector, the organisation and its culture (Moghaddam, 2011; Varshney and Mishra, 2014). However, they have a responsibility to take an active role in their learning experiences and be suitably self-motivated to engage with the internship as it impacts on the outcomes and achievements they gain from the experience (Johari and Bradshaw, 2008). To benefit from an internship, students should not only be motivated, but demonstrate an understanding of the business they intend to work in (Maertz, Stoeberl, and Marks, 2014; Young, Wright and Stein (2006). Employers often assess a prospective employee's understanding of the company (Galloway *et al.*, 2005; Varshney and Mishra, 2014) as it demonstrates their commitment (Wanless, 2013) and willingness to learn (Holyoak, 2013; Wanless, 2013).

During a student's time on the internship they would be expected to have a positive work-ethic (Rigsby *et al.*, 2013), demonstrate good interpersonal skills (Holyoak, 2013), relationship building (Maertz, Stoeberl, Marks, 2014; Varshney and Mishra, 2014) and professionalism (Rigsby *et al.*, 2013; Renganathan, Karim, and Li, 2012). Interns are expected to exhibit punctuality, and similarly to a full-time employee, make a positive impact on the business (Beard and Wilson, 2006; Ooi, 2016). To do this however requires support from the business through providing the intern with appropriate tasks and assigning a mentor (Holyoak, 2013; Ooi, 2016; Wanless, 2013). This mentor can be an individual within the company who is senior to the intern and

who is the person interns can seek advice and guidance from, helping them explore their strengths and weaknesses (Ooi, 2016; Wanless, 2013).

Evaluation of the internship programme – employers

Successful internships need engagement particularly from mentors and managers, to ensure interns receive a meaningful experience (Turner and Tee, 2018; Wanless, 2013). A key success to an internship programme therefore lies primarily within the employers' planning process (Templeton, Updyke, and Bennett, 2012), objectives setting with clear direction, relatable and meaningful tasks (Maertz, Stoeberl, Marks, 2014), and a positive relationship with the intern (Templeton, Updyke, and Bennett, 2012; Wanless, 2013).

Students perform well when a job description defines the assignments as well as having clear expectations from the immediate supervisor. The employer must develop dynamic projects to ensure students remain engaged and motivated throughout the programme, it creates a sense of direction and is a measurable tool to evaluate interns performance during and after the completion of the internship (Maertz, Stoeberl, Marks, 2014). Interns are no longer interested in basic housekeeping tasks, such as filing, or rudimentary administration (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Thiel and Hartley, 1997). They require meaningful tasks to expose them to the real job scope and working culture of the company (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009).

Good performance reviews and guidance are also critical to maintain strong relationships between a mentor and an intern (Beard and Wilson, 2006), managers and co-workers (Beard and Wilson, 2006; Holyoak, 2013; Maertz, Stoeberl, Marks, 2014). In contrast, interns with negative encounters with managers and co-workers in the first 90 days are argued to feel 'left out', leading to poor performance, period of absenteeism, or quitting the job (Gardner, 2013). Unfortunately, evidence suggests that support from managers or

co-workers declines significantly after the first few weeks of an interns 'probation' period (which often runs for 90-days) (Beard and Wilson, 2006; Gardner, 2013), either due to job pressures or assisting other, newer employees joining the firm. This would suggest a possible disconnect between intern and mentor which could negatively impact on the learning experience.

A successful internship programme is important for employers, given it is commonplace for employers to offer a full-time job to their interns. Reputable employers in sectors such as finance and technology hire full-time staff almost exclusively through their internship programs (Divine et al., 2015; Gardner, 2013; Rigsby *et al.*, 2013). Being able to assess interns during the internship period offers them reasonable confidence in what they can expect if they were to become full-time (Jacking and Natoli, 2015). Employers therefore use internships as a 'trial period' and to embed fresh ideas and energy in their working environment (Gardner, 2013; Rigsby *et al.*, 2013; Slaybach, 2012).

Internships are however time consuming for employers. Supervisors and managers tend to only seek motivated interns to work independently with little supervision (Bruening *et al.*, 2003; Clark, 2003; Divine et al., 2015). When employers and supervisors are unable to develop suitable projects, interns may not feel equally treated as other employees. Thus, a poor match between the intern and employer decreases the quality and effectiveness of the internship experience (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Toncar and Cudmore, 2000). As a result, interns may not receive a formal orientation program, making their transition from university unnecessarily difficult which may impact on performance (Tovey, 2001). Furthermore, company supervisors with limited interest or engagement in the intern's evaluation have been found to affect intern performance (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Henry, Rehwaldt and Vineyard, 2001). Heavy workloads, scheduling complications and firm size can also negatively impact the depth and breadth of feedback an intern receives (Beard, 1997), which

are common complaints from interns (Beard, 1997; Thiel and Hartley, 1997).

Evaluation of the internship programme – universities

In an attempt to address issues relating to employer-student relationships, the role of the internship supervisor is particularly important. These individuals coordinate, organise, monitor and evaluate students' internship experiences (Ackerman, Gross and Perner, 2003; Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Watson, 1992) and are an integral component of the internship programme. There are arguably eight separate stages identified that are required to maintain an internship program (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Holyoak, 2013; Jackling and Natoli, 2015; Thiel and Hartley, 1997): student recruitment; academic preparation for the internship; identification of firms; matching students to the right firm; matching the internship to academic records; intern orientation; academic assignments and appraisal; and finally, internship results. The collective effort involved represents a higher cost and higher commitment for the various departments, career-service centre, faculty members, and even students but are viewed as essential to ensure a meaningful and positive student experience.

The role of universities are to prepare students to discover 'the right career' (Green, Graybeal, and Madison, 2011; Knouse, Tanner, and Harris, 1999) using career workshops, partner employers, job-search tools, interview preparation, and resume training (Sani and Rosli, 2018; Steed, 2018). It is crucial that universities provide a framework, which employs career advising, life coaching, mentorship, and employment policies (Chen, Ellworth, and Schwarz, 2015) so that students do not make the wrong choice and are able to explore their career options (Liu, Xu, and Weitz, 2011). Supporting students to reflect on discovering their interests and purpose is not only a 'feel-good' exercise, it increases the likelihood of students graduating and being employed (Beck and Halim, 2009; Martin and Wilkerson, 2006). Such measurable outcomes have clear benefits for

universities, improving employability figures, generating a productive alumni and developing the institution's reputation; thus, attracting more students to the institution. A successful internship programme also increases the viability of programs and courses (Clark, 2003; English & Koeppen, 1993; Templeton, Updyke and Bennett, 2012) and allows measurement of objective goals in a real-work setting (Templeton, Updyke and Bennett, 2012).

As the literature has indicated, a successful internship programme entails engagement from identified stakeholders, what this research contributes to knowledge is the focus on the role of the student, not only their perspectives of employers, mentors and the education provider but their attitudes towards the internship. For an internship programme to prove successful, students' need to be thoughtful in their selection of the right internship placement (Holyoak, 2013; Jackling and Natoli, 2015) and be prepared, with the support from the education provider, before entering the programme (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Holyoak, 2013). Whilst on the programme the student needs to demonstrate initiative and attitude (Beard, 2006) with the support of the employer and internship supervisor (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009), the tasks and responsibilities given by employer have to be appropriate (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Jackling and Natoli, 2015), and students' should reflect on the learning experience (Beard, 2006; Jackling and Natoli, 2015). Students should complete their internship program feeling they have improved their employability skills, have a better idea on their future career and developed a sense of autonomy, responsibility and self-worth (Maertz Jr, Stoeberl and Marks, 2014).

Internship Model

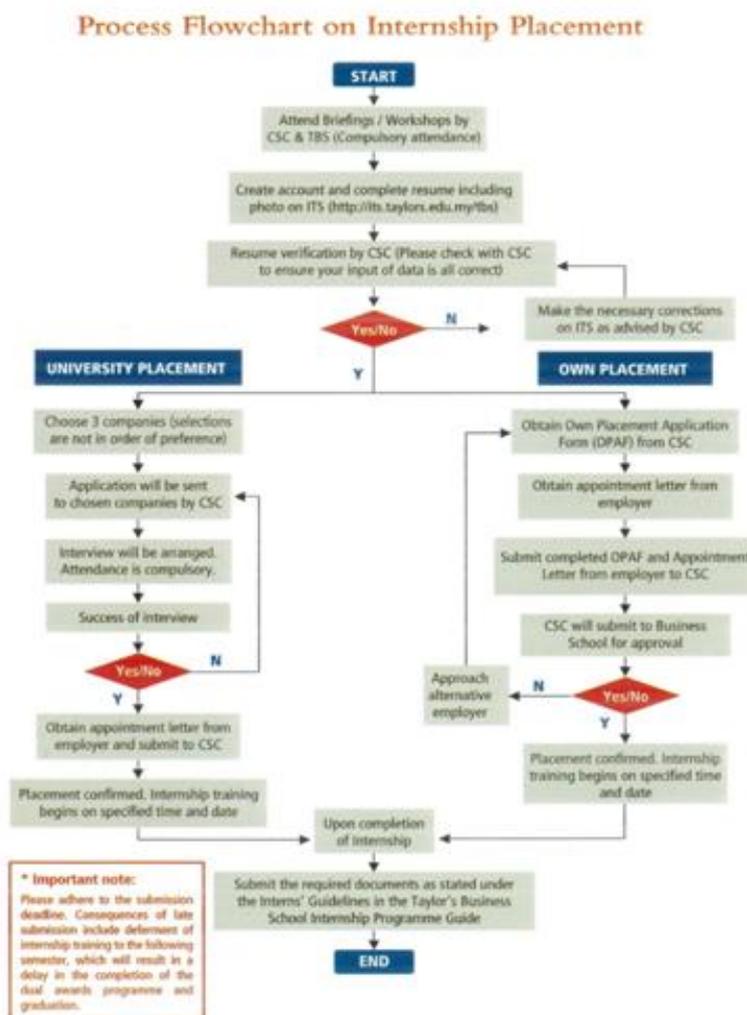
The internship programme which is the subject of this research has been in operation since 2011. It is a 10-week program and is a mandatory component of an undergraduate degree. The internship provides students with the opportunity to gain practical experience, to develop leadership skills, to supplement classroom experiences, to

explore future employment, and to understand their own capabilities (Taylor's Business School, 2018).

The Internship Program contributes to students' credit hours and is graded by an Internship Supervisor based on 4 components (pre-internship – 5%; successful completion of the internship – 20%; evaluation of the company supervisor – 25%; and the internship report – 50%) and follows the process illustrated in Figure 1. It is compulsory for students to attend workshops organized by the Career Services Centre (CSC) prior to the internship with topics focusing on Resume Writing Skills, Interview Skills, Personal Image

and Grooming, and Ethics and Etiquette at Work. Students can either choose from a pre-approved list from the CSC via the university portal which includes more than 60 multinational industry partners, including Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG, PWC, Louis Vuitton, General Electric, BMW, and DHL. Alternatively, students can seek a company on their own, but the company must be approved by the CSC to ensure students gain the necessary real-life experience (Taylor's Business School, 2018). Following completion of the internship, students are required to submit a reflective report of their learning experience for their internship supervisor to grade.

Figure 1: Internship Placement Process Flowchart



Taylor's Business School (2018)

The internship programme provides interns with work experience for a 10-week period, however such a time frame has been argued to be insufficient in providing experience of organisational dynamics (Garder, 2013), and allow the intern to become a fully functional employee (Chen, Ellsworth, Schwarz, 2015; Gardner, 2013; Green, Graybeal, Madison, 2011; Marin and Wilkerson, 2006; Narayanan, Olk, and Fukami, 2010). A 3-month internship is sometimes referred to as a 'honeymoon period' with 6 to 12 month internships preferred (Gardner, 2013; McHugh, 2016; Narayanan, Olk, and Fukami, 2010) to enable the recognition of conflicts, job scope and company culture (Garder, 2013; Hora, Wolfgram, and Thompson, 2017; McHugh, 2016; Marin and Wilkerson, 2006; Moghaddam, 2011).

Gaps in the literature

Existing research acknowledges that the internship is an effective tool to ensure students are prepared and employable for the job market (Beck and Halim, 2008; Hora, Wolfgram, and Thompson, 2017; Martin and Wilkerson, 2006; Turner and Tee, 2018). However, the discussion on internships is rather broad given the various components engaged with the programme (Narayanan, Olk, and Fukami, 2010), with an identified knowledge gap on the students' preparedness for an internship programme. This research not only consolidates existing research on internships, it takes research forward by specifically evaluating the role of students, their motivation, and expectations as the consumer of an internship programme (Green, Graybeal, Madison, 2011; Moghaddam, 2011; Ooi, 2016; Varshney and Mishra, 2014).

Methodology

Between September and November 2018 the research targeted all 457 Business School students who had completed their university-led internship programme at a Malaysian education provider and received 146 responses, which was a response rate of 32%. The research used a sequential explanatory design, where the quantitative data

was collected first followed by the qualitative data collection (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Walliman, 2018). Such an approach provides a more holistic understanding of the research problem, with the quantitative component able to gather students' overall perspective of the internship programme, and the qualitative component able to further elaborate on the quantitative findings by reflecting on specific and detailed questions (Creswell, 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Williman, 2018).

The quantitative component of the research used a Google form, which respondents took approximately three minutes or less to complete. The questions were derived from themes to emerge from the literature and focused on the role of the student, the employer and the education provider in creating an internship programme capable of engendering a more employment ready graduate. To explore the themes to emerge from the quantitative research, two focus groups were conducted with 10 respondents, each taking one hour to conduct.

To ensure respondent understandability of the survey instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 7 business students who had completed the university-led internship in their previous semester. Even though respondents understood the questions easily, there were two suggestions to improve the readability of the survey. The first suggestion was to decrease the amount of questions focused on specific skills, namely to replace "The internship improved my leadership skills", "The internship improved my communication skills", "The internship improved my project-management skills", and "The internship improved my presentation skills" with "The internship improved my hard and soft skills that classroom activities did not." The second suggestion which was related to the first, was that respondents advised these detailed questions should be emphasised during the focus group interviews to allow respondents to further explain how they improved each specific skill during their internship.

A pilot focus-interview was conducted with 3 of the 7 students who participated in the pilot survey. Respondents suggested 2 additional questions, firstly “What could the Career Service do to improve students’ preparedness before the internship?” and secondly “What could mentors focus on to ensure interns enjoy and benefit from the internship?”. Both pilot studies confirmed the appropriateness, clarity, and respondent’s ability to interpret the logic behind the sequence of the questions. To further measure validity and appropriateness of the research a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was used. The test revealed a figure of 0.658, which represents a good scale and valid test model (Malhotra and Birks, 2006).

Results and Discussion

In terms of respondent demographics, 54.1% were female and 45.9% male, with the majority of respondents from Accounting and Finance (31.5%), and International Business and Marketing (28.1%) and Marketing (12.3%). Students from all courses in the Business School were represented in the research including students from International Business (8.2%), Banking and Finance (8.2%), Finance and Economics (5.5%), Human Resources Management (4.8%) and Business Administration (1.4%). The distribution of responses reflects the number of students enrolled on the respective programmes, with International Business and Marketing and Accounting and Finance having the largest student cohorts at the education provider.

With regards respondents semester of study, 63% were in Semester 6¹, 22.6% in Semester 5, and 8.9% in Semester 7 with the majority of respondents (42.5%) completing the internship in less than 3 months, while 39.8% completed it in 3 months, and 12.3% completed in 4 to 6 months. Only 1.4% of the respondents completed the internship between 7 and 12 months, with 0.7% completing in 12 months. An explanation for those students taking over 6 months to complete

an internship was that those individuals were Accounting and Finance or Finance and Economics students who were required to complete 2 internships.

Students’ level of motivation towards the internship programme

When the research investigated students’ motivation to engage with the internship programme, there was a high level of agreement (see Table 2) with the majority of respondents agreeing (93.1%) that they were very motivated to do the internship. Of the variables gender, semester of study, academic programme and duration of internship which were tested for significance using multiple linear regression, none proved significant.

Table 2: Statistics relating to students’ level of motivation towards the internship programme

Question	Strongly Agree/Agree/Slightly Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Slightly Disagree	Significant Variables
“I was very motivated to do the internship programme.”	93.1%	6.9%	None

When respondents were asked what motivated them to participate on the internship programme the most popular responses (see Figure 2) were to gain more work experience (58.2%), to begin their career-path and earn a reputation (57.5%), and to test-drive a career, company, or industry (56.2%). A minority of respondents indicated extrinsic motivation, to earn salary (21.2%) or to pass their degree requirement (21.9%).

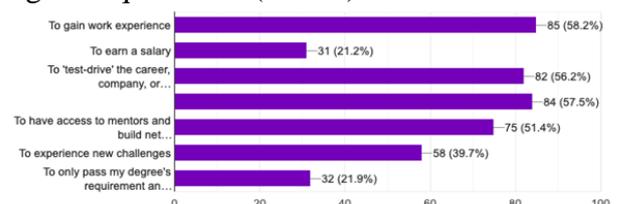


Figure 1: Students motivation to participate on an internship programme

¹Each year had 2 semesters for Semesters 6 and 7 are referring to Year 3 of the studies

Respondents were then asked about their expectations from the internship programme, with the most popular responses (See Figure 2) being to work for a reputable company (71.2%), to improve their hard and soft skills (59.6%), and to discover their career-interests (56.2%) and be challenged in tasks and responsibilities (55.5%). Similarly, to responses regarding motivation to participate on the internship programme, to gain high internship salary (17.8%) received the lowest response rate.

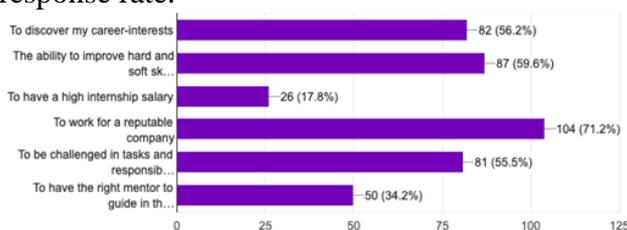


Figure 2: Students expectations from an internship programme

The results collectively demonstrate that the majority of students were motivated to engage with the internship as a means to gain work experience, to begin and/or test-drive their career, and to build their reputation in business. The majority of respondents expected to work for a reputable company, discover their career interests and enhance their skills set and work readiness, all results which are reflected in the literature (Moghaddam, 2011; Varshney and Mishra, 2014). The main reasons for respondents indicating the importance of a business's reputation are two-fold, firstly because of the number of reputable employers associated with the internship programme which include Petronas, Shell, J.P. Morgan, Goldman Sachs, Google and

Amazon. Secondly, the opportunities working for those companies provide interns with the chance to secure full-time employment as these companies tend to hire full-time candidates almost exclusively through their internship programme (Divine et al., 2015; Gardner, 2013; Risgby, 2013). Connley and Welch (2018) believe earning a position at one of these companies is like 'winning the lottery' and hence the importance students place on the internship employers reputation.

It should also be noted that more than half the respondents (51.4%) were motivated to participate on an internship programme because it gave them access to mentors and build their network. This reflects previous research which emphasise the importance for students to build networks with the 'insiders' of a company or industry (Maertz, Stoeberl, Marks, 2014; Varshney and Mishra, 2014). In today's employment market, it is considered vital to have good referrals and connections in an industry (Slaybach, 2018).

The role of employers in a successful internship programme

To investigate students' perspectives on the employers' role in the internship programme, a series of questions were asked relating to the employer and the mentor (See Table 3) with themes examined in the focus-groups. Of the variables gender, semester of study, academic programme and duration of internship which were tested for significance using multiple linear regression, semester of study, academic programme and duration of internship proved significant.

Table 3: Statistics relating to employer's role in the internship programme

Question	Strongly Agree/Agree/Slightly Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Slightly Disagree	Significant Variables
"I was satisfied with the internship programme and my expectations were met."	94.5%	5.5%	None

“The internship gave me an insight into the company’s working culture.”	75.9%	24.1%	The semester students’ in p<0.001
“The task on my internship were challenging and stimulating.”	89.1%	10.9%	The duration of internship p<0.001
“My industry mentor gave my confidence by guiding me through the job tasks.”	71.2%	28.8%	None
“My mentor helped me to discover my hidden potential and skills.”	46.2%	53.8%	The semester students’ in p<0.001 The programme students are in p<0.002
“While on the internship, I was treated on the same level as other employees.”	75.3%	24.7%	The duration of internship p<0.001

Respondents had a high degree of satisfaction (94.5%) with the internship and considered it challenging and stimulating (89.1%), which implies that the employers offered meaningful tasks to students that portrayed the correct ‘image’ of the job-scope (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009). According to the literature, satisfaction with an internships related to the types of tasks and responsibilities they are given and the relationship they have with their mentors (Rigsby *et al.*, 2013; Templeton, Updyke, and Bennett, 2012). If interns are offered dynamic projects, tasks, and responsibilities they are likely to be more engaged and motivation (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks, 2014; Toncar and Cudmore, 2000) which is the case with this cohort of interns as illustrated earlier in this research.

In the focus groups, the majority of respondents believed the internship was challenging with stimulating tasks similar to those of full-time employees, which reflects the work of Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn (2009). The participants typically responded that they wanted “to feel that they are working there full-time.” When respondents were specifically asked about type of tasks they preferred, the majority stated alternating tasks, with a typical response being,

“alternating tasks every two weeks is reasonable to give us an introduction to the job scope. It is more satisfying to work and make friends with other people in the company. It is also an opportunity to assess which aspect of the job we favor.” A minority of the participants who experienced alternating tasks claimed that, *“it allows us to explore our strengths, weaknesses, and preferences.”*

The minority of respondents that disagreed with the statement blamed monotonous tasks and responsibilities, with a typical response being, *“the tasks did not provide meaningful work.”* Tasks, such as data-entry, filing, and organising files in drawers, were considered repetitive with respondents claiming these tasks *“do not stimulate any mental challenge.”* These results indicate that even though there were less ‘photocopying’ tasks offered to interns (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Hora, Wolfgram, and Thompson, 2017), the tasks still contribute to an interns’ perceptions of and motivation with an internship (Gardner, 2013).

The role of mentors in a successful internship programme

Related to interns’ engagement with the business, is mentorship, which is argued to influence motivation and attitude (Beard and Wilson, 2006; Maertz, Stoeberl, Marks, 2014; Holyoak, 2013; Beard and Wilson, 2006). When respondents were asked if their mentor increased their confidence, 71.2% of respondents agreed(see Table 3) which implies that the mentors were providing appropriate levels of support. However, when interns were asked if their mentor helped them to discover their hidden potential and skills, only 46.6% agreed to the statement. Young, Wring, and Stein, (2006) and Galloway (2005) indicated that the internship is a platform to highlight interns’ best characteristics traits as well as their area of improvements, however the findings from this research indicate that mentors need to improve on their feedback which is supported by Thiel and

Hartley (1997) and Beard (1997). Poor guidance reduces the quality and effectiveness of the internship experience (Alpert, Heany, and Kuhn, 2009; Toncar and Cudmore, 2000) and impacts on an interns’ motivation (Young, Wring, and Stein, 2006; Galloway *et al.*, 2005).

The role of university in a successful internship programme

The university is the third stakeholder that plays a significant role in ensuring students have a successful internship programme. To investigate its role questions focused on the extent lecturers and CSC prepared students before the internship (Table 4).Of the variables gender, semester of study, academic programme and duration of internship which were tested for significance using multiple linear regression, none proved significant.

Table 4: Statistics relating to the university’s role in the internship programme

Question	Strongly Agree/Agree/Slightly Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Slightly Disagree
“The career-service center helped me find, identify, and prepare for the internship.”	50%	50%
“The career-service center should offer more career-fairs, career-talks, and company visits”	90.4%	9.6%
“The career-service center ensured I was knowledgeable of the industry and the company I chose to complete my internship.”	19.8%	80.2%
“My lecturers helped me find, identify and prepare for the internship.”	18.3%	81.7%

As it can be observed, with the exception of the question relating to the CSC offering more engagement with business, which actually is in fact a criticism of the CSC, there were low levels of agreement to the majority of questions relating to the universities role in the internship programme. Table 4 indicated that only 50% of the respondents agreed CSC helped to find, identify, and prepared them for the internship.

When specific questions were asked during the focus-group interview, all participants agreed that the workshops organized by CSC contributed to the preparation of the programme to some extent. Typical responses were, “*the workshops were useful as they provided tips on resume and interview skills.*” However, participants also agreed that CSC could provide more in-depth workshops as the workshop information “*can be*

retrieved easily from Google.” A typical response was: “CSC should provide sample copies of good resume and cover letter, let us create the resumes together with CSC supervisors in the workshop, guide us one by one, instead of simply listing the do’s and dont’s.”

In terms of the structure of the workshop, participants agreed that CSC should provide additional workshops throughout “consistent periods so students can display the progress of their preparation with a tutor or supervisor. It could be an optional workshop.” A minority of the participants highlighted that CSC could be more creative during the workshops, with a typical response being: “the real interview was so much more than the list of questions they provided. We need real-life interview simulation workshops”.

When respondents were asked if CSC ensured they were knowledgeable of the industry and company they chose to complete their internship, 80.2% disagreed with the statement. Burnett and Evands (2016) suggest issues surrounding false assumptions of certain jobs and industries must be addressed at university level before graduates are left unemployed. During the focus-group interview, all respondents thought the CSC should do more, with a typical response being: “CSC should provide information on career-pathways of different industries step-by-step, from junior staff to senior executives, with detailed information of their salaries and the duration to get there.” This result supports previous findings by Sani and Rosli (2018) and Burnett and Evands (2016) who argue that many universities graduates enter a career-path that leave them hopeless and unsatisfied as their expectations did not match the

reality. The CSC was identified as a stakeholder who needs to do more to improve the internship experience of students.

Lecturers should also contribute to mentorship, career-advising, and life coaching to ensure students chose to the right internship (Chen, Ellwroth, and Schwarz, 2015). Arguably in contrast to the CSC, lecturers may have a better understanding of students’ strengths and weaknesses based on first-hand experiences work with the students on specific modules. However, when respondents were asked if lecturers helped them find, identify and prepare for the internship, 83.7% of respondents disagreed. Results from the qualitative component of the research indicated that lecturers do not go in-depth in terms of applying theory to real-world application. A typical response was: “lecturers come, teach, and prepare us for assignments and exams, but we don’t understand the significance of what we are learning and where we can apply them.” These results indicated that lecturers need to input more effort in identifying students’ skills and attributes, as supported by Liu, Xu, and Weitz (2011), it ensures students are able to match those set of skills and attributes during career-fairs (Certo *et al.*, 2003).

The capacity of the internship to prepare the intern for employment

To understand interns’ perspective of the internship in terms of preparing them for employment, respondents were generally in agreement (See Table 5). Of the variables gender, semester of study, academic programme and duration of internship which were tested for significance using multiple linear regression, none proved significant.

Table 5: Statistics relating to students’ overall perspectives towards the internship programme

Question	Strongly Agree/Agree/Slightly Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Slightly Disagree
"The internship gave me enough work-experience and a realistic preview of a full-	53.4%	46.6%

time job"		
"I feel more confident and motivated to enter a full-time job after my internship"	90%	10%
"I plan to return to the same company or industry"	79.5%	20.5%

It was revealed that 53.4% of students agreed that the internship gave them enough work-experience and a realistic preview of a full-time job. In order to ensure students gain sufficient exposure in a working-environment, the structure of the internship must be thoughtfully planned so objectives can be met (Maertz, Stoeberl, and Marks, 2014). This result is supported by the fact that 92.5% of respondents agreed that a longer internship period would allow them to learn more about the job, company, and industry, and 90.6% of respondents would prefer to have at least 6 to 12 months of internship experience which is supported by the work of (Gardner, 2013; Narayanan, Olk, and Fukami, 2010; McHugh, 2016).

Despite the relatively low level of agreement relating to the internships capacity to provide work-experience and a realistic preview of a full-time job there were higher levels of agreement to other questions. There was a 90% level of agreement that the internship made them feel more confident and motivated to enter a full-time job after the internship, which was supported by the qualitative component of the research with a typical response being: *"I feel confident as I got to experience working with people in real professional setting."* Seventy nine percent(79.5%) of respondents agreed they plan to return to the same company or industry, which confirms previous research where the internship programme improves students' confidence in career directions, exploration, and reality testing (Liu, Xu, and Weitz., 2011; Moghaddam, 2011; Beck and Halim, 2008; Martin and Wilkerson, 2006).

To test the strength and direction of association between two ranked variables, students' satisfaction and the factors that affected their

satisfaction, a series of correlations were conducted using Spearman's Rho test. All of these correlations were statistically significant and positive. The strongest correlations were between students' satisfaction and if they feel more confident and motivated to enter a full-time job after their internship, with $r=0.440$, $p<0.001$ and Students satisfaction and their motivation to do the internship programme, with $r=0.336$, $p<0.001$. The significance and positive relationship of the factors that influence students' satisfaction indicates that the role of students, employers, and university are important in ensuring they benefit from a successful internship programme.

Conclusion

This research revealed the key components to a successful internship revolved around the role of students, employers, and the education provider. The surveyed cohort of students displayed an appropriate level of intrinsic and enthusiastic motivation, which influenced their willingness to actively engage in a company to ensure they benefit from a successful internship. Students indicated that they were satisfied with the internship and the tasks they were given by their respective employer and thought the time they spent on their internship increased confidence and motivation to enter a full-time job. It was also interesting to note that the majority of students plan to return to the same company or industry following completion of their internship. There were however identified areas for improved engagement from employers and education providers. With regards employers, mentors could provide more constructive feedback and develop interns hidden potential and skills. For education providers, the structure and planning of the programme require some attention and lecturers and the CSC need to provide better support to ensure a more successful and effective internship

programme. These findings consolidate existing literature in the area of the structure of the internship programme and takes research forward in the area of investigating student motivation towards internships and identifying the relationship between internships, career services, academic lecturers and employer mentors.

The research however is not without its limitations, the first of which is the focus on one school. There were other schools which operate an internship at the education provider, the School of Hospitality and Tourism and School of Culinary Arts, also practice the internship programme. This was not viewed as a significant limitation as the structure of the internship programmes across the schools are the same with similar levels of engagement from students, employers and the education provider. That said, in a future study, these two schools will be surveyed to allow a comparison of student and employer perspectives on the internship programme. The second limitation linked to the first is that only the perspectives of interns were included in this research, which although this was the focus of the research, for future studies it would be interesting to gain the insights from employers, particularly around mentoring. Another area for future research

would be to conduct a wider comparative study in Malaysia to explore the influence of the internship programme provided by the education provider and the type of employer, this would enable further insight into the importance of structure of the programme, mentoring and lecturers and the CSC.

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