



Improving the quality of internship programmes in African universities: Using the university of professional studies (UPSA), Accra, Ghana students' experiences and perceptions

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Abstract

Internships provide avenues for students to obtain work experience and earn academic credits in many higher and tertiary institutions, including the University of Professional Studies in Accra, Ghana. Over the years, assessors from the National Accreditation Board (NAB), renamed The Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) in 2021, raised concerns regarding the mandatory internship policy and the quality of students' internship reports during their visits to UPSA. The study, intended to establish, assess and evaluate UPSA students' experiences and perceptions regarding the mandatory internship programme as well as to identify the associated deficiencies and improve the general quality of internship at UPSA. A sample of 413 was drawn from a population of 2799 internship students in 2017. An online questionnaire and mobile phone interviews were used to obtain information on their experiences and perceptions of the 8-weeks mandatory internship programme. Although most students overwhelmingly supported the internship programme, weekend students benefited less as opposed to the morning and evening sessions students because most of them were already working when they enrolled for the programme. Pre-internship orientation, supervision, close monitoring and evaluation, as well as active involvement of the university in finding placement for students in organizations could improve students' internship experience.

Keywords: quality assurance, higher and tertiary education, internship quality, student experiences

Introduction

Several studies (Idris & Bako, 2021; Dondofema, *et al*, 2020) [15, 11], have shown that student internship programmes can bridge the gap between formal classroom work and the real world of work. The University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana, in its effort to leverage a structured mix of scholarship with professionalism, has incorporated mandatory internship in its curricula for all undergraduate Bachelors and Diploma programmes. Students are expected to undertake mandatory internship for a period of 8 weeks for which they receive 3 academic credit hours for the first semester of their final year.

On the contrary, some programme assessors visiting the University over the years have expressed concern about why student internship should be made mandatory for all undergraduate programmes. A concern expressed by these assessors was as a result of the perceived difficulty in getting student placement for internship in industry.

Some tertiary institutions incorporate internship into their curriculum to create opportunities for their students to have real work experience, (Anjum 2020, Zehr *et al*, 2020; Pusiran *et al*, 2020; Bukaliya, 2012; Dodge and Mckoeugh, 2003) [31, 21, 9]. It is also believed that mandatory internship, when included in a curriculum, can improve the quality of education and help students to develop and practice important employment seeking skills like conducting a formal job search, writing resumes and application letters, making follow-up calls, and completing interviews in real world situations (Bolli, *et al*, 2021; and Zimmerman, 1996) [8, 32].

Therefore, this case study sought to ascertain students' perceptions of the internship programme run by the

University and further determine the extent to which it benefitted them. The study further aimed to find out if there were more reasons why the University of Professional Studies should maintain the internship programme as a mandatory course for all undergraduate Bachelors and Diploma programmes. Some ways of improving the quality of the existing internship programme at the University were also explored through this study.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, programme assessors from the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) have expressed concern over the mandatory internship policy of the university for all undergraduate programmes because of the possibility of some students not getting placements. In addition, the assessors' noted the poor quality of internship reports produced by some students and stressed on the need to improve their quality. This study, therefore sought to find out how UPSA students perceived the mandatory internship programme and to further find out whether the students who undertake internships at this institution know what is required of them when writing their internship report with the ultimate goal to improve the internship programme quality at the institution.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this survey was to obtain students' perceptions on the mandatory internship programme at the University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana in order to identify the gaps that might have been compromising the quality of the programme over the years. This would help to make

appropriate recommendations, workplan and action plan to be implemented in a bid to improve the programme quality.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study on the internship programme include the following aspects;

1. Find out the overall perception of the 2017 cohort of students regarding internship at UPSA.
2. Find out where students did their internship
3. Analyze the adequacy of students' knowledge and skills on internship report writing
4. Determine how students benefited from the internship programme
5. Identify students' challenges and areas where the students would need support
6. Find out students' view of how to improve the quality of internship at the University

Rationale of The Study

The rationale of the study was to come up with recommendations that would help to improve the quality of internship programmes at UPSA and other higher institutions of learning.

Delimitation of the Study – Geographical and Study Scope

This study covers students who had their internship in 2017 and completed their programme of study at the University of Professional Studies at the end of 2017/2018 academic year. The population is made up of undergraduate level 300 and Diploma level 100 2017 internship students.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study will contribute, in a way, to the existing literature on internships, the perception of the industry on how internship programmes should be improved would have given a more rounded picture of how to improve the quality of internship programmes in general.

Literature Review

Although tertiary institutions may have good reasons for incorporating internships in their curricula, interns on the other hand may have either positive or negative perceptions about the internship programme. A study by Tran & Trang (2020), showed that, interns perceived personal skills and employment gain but not professional skills as the most beneficial aspects of internship. Other studies also reported moderate levels of perceived interns' satisfaction with the internship programme with positive opinions on the conditions of the work places but others indicated that the internship attachment was not able to give them the expected benefits (Vijayakiruthika & Maheswaranathan, 2015; Okay & Şahin, 2010; Muhamad *et al.* 2009)^[29, 19]. In yet another study by Karunaratne & Perera (2019)^[16], it was noted that internship programmes provided opportunities for creativity build up activities, teamwork and developing managerial skills.

Perceptions of students may vary with respect to internship so are the benefits documented in various studies. In addition to giving interns the opportunity to interact with employees in the real workplace, internship enhances students' soft skills and their ability to retain a position or find job after graduation (Tran & Trang, 2020; Amin *et al.*, 2020)^[26, 31]. Positive learning experiences with internship

such as oral presentation, writing skills and learning to work in teams were also reported by Renganathan & Karim (2012)^[22]. In addition, internship as an avenue for enhancing students' employability after graduation has been emphasized in some studies (Van Belle *et al.*, 2020; Di Meglio *et al.*, 2021; Saniter & Siedler, 2014)^[28].

A study by Di Meglio, *et al.*, (2022)^[12] however revealed that the ease of employability of graduates was largely due to their continued stay in the same firm after the internship experience ends. Van Belle *et al.*, (2020)^[28] also found a positive effect between student employment and labour market outcomes and showed that the probability of students being invited for a job interview increased with internship experience. Internship has also been found as a way of integrating academic knowledge with practical applications (Zenol & Ismail, 2010; Beard, 2007)^[32, 6]. It also has a positive effect on wages as well as greater overall job satisfaction (Oswald-Egg & Renold 2021; Bolli & Oswald-Egg, 2021; Tzanakou *et al.*, 2020; Gault *et al.*, 2000)^[20, 8, 27, 14]. Although the cited literature has shown how beneficial internship is, it has also been found that internship can be less valuable for students who have some form of work experience (Bolli & Oswald-Egg, M. E. (2021)^[8]. This serves to demonstrate the fact that mandatory or voluntary internship may have either positive or no effect to some students depending on their work experience background.

Institutions advocating for mandatory internship believe that internship can improve the quality of education of its graduates. An empirical study by Silva, *et al.* (2018)^[25] that tested mandatory internships found that a well-organized internship, when incorporated into programmes, tends to significantly enhance graduate employment. Baert, *et al.* (2021)^[5], confirmed in their study that students who were given the option to undertake internship, even if these internships substitute for another elective course, will enhance their labour market outcomes after graduation. Bittmann, & Zorn (2020)^[7] on the other hand investigated the effect of both mandatory and voluntary internships on labour market outcomes, including income, job mismatch, and job satisfaction and found no effect for mandatory internship on the indicators. However, there was highly significant positive effects with voluntary internships. Klein & Weiss (2011)^[17] examine whether compulsory internships provide extra benefits for graduates from families with lower educational background and found no positive effect of compulsory internships on labour market outcomes in general.

Despite the benefits, internships sometimes come with challenges. According to Gashaw (2019)^[13] and Adeosun *et al.* (2021)^[1], internship challenges include but are not limited to; students not being able to settle down smoothly for the internship programme due to financial constraints. They also identified the problem of absence of a close working relationship between the industry and the university on how internships should be conducted. They said, this resulted in supervisors engaging interns in petty work not related to their programme of study. However, well supervised internship as well as orientation of students can also lead to positive outcomes (Shaketange *et al.*, 2017; Agoston *et al.*, 2017; Marinaş & İgret, 2017; Okay & Şahin, 2010; Zimmerman, 1996)^[24, 2, 18, 33]. It is very important to observe that for internship to be meaningful, tasks performed by students during industrial attachment, should

be linked to the field of study and theoretical knowledge delivered at the university (Goia *et al*, 2017). In addition, the challenge of students looking for placement on their own without the help of their institutions was cited in a study by Adeosun *et al*, (2021) ^[1]. Some studies have shown that some students consider the duration of the internship programme to be too short for them to maximize its benefits (Gashaw, 2019; Bukaliya, 2012) ^[13, 9]. Amin *et al* (2020) ^[3] and Muhamad *et al* (2009) ^[19] opined that internship achieves its goal when its duration is taken into consideration, as short periods of internship will not achieve the intended results.

Benefits of internship programmes will be maximized if there is proper collaboration between the universities and industry, hence the need for universities to identify and form partnerships with relevant entities (be it small and medium enterprises) for their field of studies (Baert, *et al*, 2021; Gashaw, 2019; Goia *et al*, 2017) ^[5, 13]. Other studies mentioned the need for students interns to be paid by the organization where internship is taking place (Pusiran *et al*, 2020; Okay & Şahin, 2010) ^[21].

Studies have also shown that the benefits resulting from the internship programme has a bearing on its quality. In Ghana for instance, a study noted that because of poor coordination between tertiary institutions, students and industry, internships are not well-structured resulting in most students not being able to apply the skills acquired in the classroom to actual workplace setting after going through the internship (Baah-Boateng and Twum 2020). It is light of this that Young and Baker (2004) ^[30] indicated the need for institutions to develop formal educational objectives to guide the activities associated with internship as a course in order to create credibility and integrity of the programme. Interns should be aware of the course objectives and learning outcomes of the internship programme and this should be stated in a comprehensive syllabus.

Material and Methods

The sample of the study was taken from a population of undergraduate interns of 2017 made up of level 300 and diploma level 100. These students had their 8 weeks of internship in 2017 and completed their programme of study at the University of Professional Studies at the end of the 2017/2018 academic year. The initial population was purposively selected and random sampling of 414 interns was done, representing 14.8% of the 2799 student population.

E-mail addresses of the selected students were obtained and an online questionnaire, designed using Google forms was sent out to obtain information on the internship programme run by the University. The study made use of the mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) research. A structured questionnaire with both open-ended and closed questions was used. The questionnaire captured demographic information of respondents, issues relating to pre-internship orientation and internship report writing as well as students' experiences with the internship programme at the university. Information on how they benefitted from the programme and what could be done to improve the internship programme at the University was also obtained from students. The percentage scores, means and standard deviations from respondents' data were computed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 24. This helped to determine how students of the

various sessions at the university benefitted from the internship programme and its implications for the internship policy aspect at the University.

Findings

There were 413 respondents in total of which 36.8 % were female and 63.2 % male. Students were drawn from the following programmes of study; Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) (37.3%), BSc Accounting (31.2%), BSc. in Banking and Finance (14.5%), BSc. in Marketing (9%), BSc. in Information Technology (2.4%), Diploma in Accounting, Management, Marketing, and Public Relations (2.9%, 1.5%, 1.0%, and 0.2% respectively). The different University programmes sessions were represented as follows: evening students (20.1%) of the respondents, morning (70.2%), and weekend (9.7%). The 409 out of 413 interns who responded to the question on the institutions they were placed has been indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Institutions where students were placed

Institution	Frequency	Percent
Civil Society/Other	7	1.7
Financial Institution	78	19.1
Government	154	37.7
Private Sector	170	41.6
Total	409	100.0

Pre-Internship Orientation

Table 2: Responses on Whether the University should organize any industrial attachment orientation exercise for students or not

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	315	79.1
Yes	83	20.9
Total	398	100.0

The university officially organizes pre-internship orientation for prospective interns and when respondents were asked whether a pre-internship orientation was organized for them or not, their responses were as shown in Table 2. A total of 398 responded to the question of which 79.1% (315) indicated that no orientation was organized for industrial attachment whilst 20.9 % (83) said that an orientation was organized. Interestingly, of the 20.9% respondents who indicated that the University organized industrial attachment orientation for students, only 57 indicated that they attended the orientation, a result which was further supported by respondents' comments on how to improve the internship programme at the University.

Mandatory Internship Period and Academic Credits

Table 3: Period of Internship

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 8-week period	83	20.1
Mandatory 8-week period	273	66.1
more than the 8-week period	57	13.8
Total	413	100.0

Students of UPSA are required to undertake mandatory internship for a period of 8 weeks for which they receive three (3) academic credit hours for the first semester of their final year. When respondents were asked to indicate how long their internship programme lasted during the long

vacation, out of the 413 who responded to the question, 79.9 % were able to get placement on time to enable them have their internship for the eight-week period or beyond as shown in table 3 above.

Respondents gave reasons for why their internship period was either more than or less than the 8-week mandatory period. For respondents who had their internship for less than the 8-week period (20.1%), some of the reasons given include, delay in getting placement with institutions; institutions employed interns in batches because of the number of applications received from interns and the delay in receiving acceptance letters from the internship institutions.

Respondents who had their internship for more than the 8-week period (13.8%) stated one of the following reasons:

- Institution found intern to be hard working and committed and therefore asked to extend the period
- The institution was understaffed and there was a lot of work to be completed
- It is the requirement of the institution that interns work for more than 8 weeks
- had to finish the work that they started

Students' Understanding of the Requirement for internship report writing

To find out why some students submit poor quality internship report, a question was asked about whether students understood the requirements for internship report writing as stated in the guidelines form they are given by the university. About sixty eight percent (67.8%) of the total respondents (413) indicated that they understood all the requirements for writing an internship report whilst 32.2 % of them responded otherwise. Although 67.8% of the total respondents mentioned that they understood the requirements for writing an internship report, 98 % agreed or strongly agreed that orientation was needed on internship report writing as indicated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: The extent to which students agreed or disagreed that an orientation should be given to students on internship Report writing

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	103	24.9
Disagree	6	1.5
Strongly Agree	302	73.1
Strongly Disagree	2	.5
Total	413	100.0

The study also revealed whether there was a significant difference between male and female responses to their opinion on the need to have orientation on internship report writing as presented in Table 5 below. The results did not show much difference between the computed means of both male and female respondents, indicating that both gender responses to orientation on internship report writing was similar. The standard deviation of the female respondents however shows that the female respondents' agreement is stronger than the male. Generally, both male and female respondents agreed on the need for an orientation on internship report writing.

Table 5: Responses on whether orientation should be given to students on internship Report writing or not (with items on the guideline form explained)

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Median	Range
Male	1.32	261	.530	1.00	3
Female	1.24	152	.488	1.00	3
Total	1.29	413	.516	1.00	3

Former Students' Experience with Internship Report Writing

(R1): We were provided with guidelines, but I remember vividly there were aspects of the guidelines which were not quite clear when we were writing the reports. I had to call some friends, former students and other students to ask about what was required. No orientation.

(R2): Good idea. I like it. It actually helps the school to know what you want to do or study.

(R3): Short deadline for report writing. Not really in terms of challenges. The deadline for report writing was short for some students especially those who took time to get internship.

(R4): We were given guidelines to follow. I had students who were ahead of us. I went to them for coaching to be able to write the report successfully. The school gave guidelines but what they did not do was to assemble all of us together and say, "When writing your report you do it this way." The research course helped because one would know that you write the introduction.

(R5): We were given guidelines on how we should write a report. It really helped. We didn't get help. It was stated in the guidelines, the format on how we should write. Where we did not understand, we engaged ourselves as friends and discuss on how to write the report. It was not really tedious.

(R6): Report writing was not a problem because I jotted down all the things I did during internship. It was easy. There was no orientation on report writing. We asked our colleagues. Someone provided something from the library from one of the old students and we used that. In the absence of a training session or seminar on report writing for students, they devised other strategies amongst themselves to make sure that they produce good reports.

Overall assessment of vacation internship

Respondents were asked to state whether they benefited from the vacation internship and out of the 405 who responded to the question, majority (98.8%) indicated that they benefited from the internship. Two unedited comments from respondent on benefits experienced are as follows:

The industrial attachment has exposed me to the business world. It has also established a potential working relationship between the organization and me. It has also widened my knowledge about things we learn in class and things we do on the field in the practical aspects of studying. There is a big difference between what I personally learnt in class and what happens in the workplace, but the internship helped to link the theories to practice.

Interviewee 1: *There were so many things that were taught in class and I now had first-hand experience. It made me understand so many concepts especially in accounting.*

Interviewee 6: *I enjoyed my internship experience. It was very practical. It provided me with the skills that I am still using today. I applied what we learnt in school and learnt new things making sure that the client's financial statements are accurate.*

Further analysis of the data on benefit derived by respondents showed a slight variation of overall benefit to students enrolled in different sessions at the university as indicated in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Students' benefits from the vacation internship

6. Session	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Range	Median
Morning	1.01	285	.084	1	1.00
Evening	1.01	81	.111	1	1.00
Weekend	1.05	39	.223	1	1.00
Total	1.01	405	.111	1	1.00

Although the computed means show that respondents of all sessions benefitted from the internship programme, the standard deviation figures for the weekend students showed a significant dispersion from the mean value, an indicator that the benefit from the internship programme to the weekend student respondents was lower than respondents in the morning and the evening sessions. Respondents' comments on how they benefitted from the vacation internship were summarized as follows:

- Exposure to the real world of work (119)
- Ability to apply theories and concepts taught in class to real life situations (161)
- General skills and qualities acquired: Respondents commented that after the internship, they developed the following:
 - Appreciation of the importance of teamwork (23)
 - Enhancement of Communications /Human relations skills and self-confidence (62)
 - Practical use of computer software and other technologies in real work situations (8)
 - Time consciousness and punctuality (13)
 - Skills in administrative work (writing reports, minutes filing, record keeping etc.) (12)
 - Better understanding of area of study (5)
 - Helped in choosing the career path to take (4)
 - Working under pressure and without supervision (4)
 - Financial benefits (11)
 - Creation of a network for future job search and business dealings (16)
- Acquired experience not necessarily related to field of study (6)

What Students Learnt From Internship

Interviewee 2: *I did Accounting at UPSA and I did my internship at a Micro Finance company. We did trial-balance, I applied what I learnt.*

Interviewee 3: *I got a little experience from other departments. I did not practice what I learnt at school. We studied how to prepare financial statements. Work at the offices was quite different.*

Interviewee 4: *I learnt to see things in other perspectives, to be open-minded. I learnt to be accommodating, tolerant, open-minded, listening to others. I had to be serious.*

Interviewee 5: *Because I went for internship in an NGO there is one thing I learnt. I learnt time management, honesty and transparency. It has really helped me a lot, to care about people, engage people and approach people better.*

Interviewee 6: *I was able to be equipped to apply what I learnt. What we learnt at the institution is important but the*

application is different. I was able to see the link between what I learnt and the application.

Why internship did not benefit others

Whilst most respondents benefitted from the internship programme, few respondents (1.2%) who commented on why they did not benefit from the vacation programme mentioned reasons such as, being sent on errands, less work at the institution, problems with transportation to and from work, already an employee of the institution as was case of most weekend students.

There are many other reasons why some students did not benefit from internship. Interviewee 5 explained that failure by personnel in the organization/company to interact with interns negatively affect them. Secondly, he noted that internships can be compromised by high levels of confidentiality where interns may not be taught how to do certain confidential tasks and/or not allowed to work on such tasks by the company/organization. He said, "My first day I was not happy, there was no form of engagement. "Are you an intern?" One lady asked. I was assigned to the Business Development Office. We were not much engaged because what they were doing was confidential, so I was basically doing basic office management. No one would really teach you how to do things, if sensitive, they would tell you that they are busy."

According to Interviewee 3, "At times students are given work that is not related to their areas of study. In that case, they have very little to nothing to learn."

One of the reasons why some students did not get much benefit from internship was empty promises and failure to cater for students' needs. Interviewee 5 noted that, "There was limited care for students. I felt that what I wanted to learn, I was not exposed to them (company supervisors and mentors). They did not create time to teach you. At times you would be left alone. They continued to say we will give you your computer soon."

It was picked from the interview session that there were students who did not do internship but just wrote reports and submitted due to lack of supervision by the institution. They would write their reports, approached some companies for signatures and stamps, paid them and submit their reports when they never did any internship. Interviewee 5 revealed that, "Most students do not really do the internship but they end up getting it. The schools should write to companies, assign us to companies and follow up with the monitoring that will help in checking students on internship...There is no form of monitoring. We were just teaching ourselves. It depends with the individual but internship is good. It gives opportunities and makes you appreciate what you did in class. It gives a different perception on how to study."

Students' Opinion on Mandatory Internship

When asked whether internship should be mandatory, respondents' preference indicated that they favoured the mandatory internship programme run by the University as indicated in Figure 1 below.

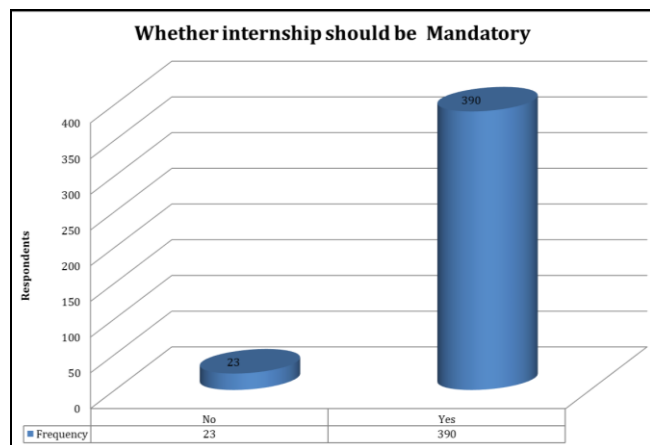


Fig 1: Opinion on Mandatory Internship

Respondents (94.4%) who gave further comments for mandatory internship mentioned reasons such as, the ability to gain practical experience on the job, application of classroom knowledge, networking opportunities and exposure to the real world of work. The small percentage (5.6%) of respondents who were for optional internship cited difficulty in getting placement, financial burden with respect to transportation, task given by institutions not related to their field of study and being already employed as some of the reasons.

Students' Challenges and Areas where they needed institutional Support

The institution did not orient and prepare students for internship neither did the industry. Students were therefore left stranded and had to figure out their way on how to get along with the internship programme. In addition, the institution left the internship placement entirely to the students who then had many challenges like late placement, finding placement too far away from where they stayed thereby generating a transport issue. However, not all students faced challenges. Interviewee 3 and 6 said that they never faced any challenges just like some of the students. Interviewee 2 explained that, *The challenge was the perception that the lecturer would come and tell me what to do. The challenge of transportation since one may not get internship nearby. The transportation too is quite a challenge because you don't have a company or somewhere to do your internship considering where you will be coming from.*

The above was supported by Interviewee 5 who said that, *Finding the place to do internship and distance. First time I went for an internship and I was told that there were a lot of people so you could not go through successfully so we cannot pick you. It takes time ... if you do not get a company earlier you will not have anything to write. I picked three different trotros (minibuses) before I got to work which was very tedious. Transportation was really a major challenge for me. I felt that what I wanted to learn, I was not exposed to them.*

Two interviewees mentioned a situation where some students never went for the internship but wrote reports and got companies to sign and stamp their internship reports which they then submitted and mostly passed. One of the interviewees who did internship was lucky to have someone attached to him as a mentor.

Interviewee 1 had this to say, *I did mine in a government institution. The supervision was there too but it was not quite good as expected. Some of the work was not easy...Students may not even do the internships, but they wrote reports, but they had companies which signed and stamped for them.*

Interviewee 2 concurred by saying that, *Supervision is a good idea. Some people do not do it (internship) but they get good marks... She was purposely assigned to me, at the end of each day I reported to her.*

Students' Suggestions on How to Improve the Internship Quality at UPSA

The study also sought to get the views of respondents on how to improve the internship programme at the University. Overall, 393 (95.2%) respondents gave some of the following 4 broad recommendations on how internship can be improved;

- Need for orientation on Internship and Internship Report writing
- Institutions should collaborate with industry to get placements for students
- Supervision of students during internship
- Timely issuance of internship letters

(R1): Seminars can be organized for orientation. Basically, seminars and small workshops about the guidelines to help students to be more familiar with what is required of them, especially the report writing guidelines.

(R2): The guidelines have been provided but if they can organize a talk to explain what they expect from each guideline...

(R3): UPSA should write to firms so that the internship should be easier for students to get.

(R4): Especially when UPSA assemble a number of institutions where students can choose from to do internship. It reduces the burden of struggling for a place to do internship.

If students can be taken through a formal way of report writing.

(5A): You should assign us companies/organizations. The institutions should talk to those companies or they can give us a problem in the society to go and solve. To have a pilot program in the village.

Orientation before internship, at least a seminar. It will really help us... to really give us knowledge on what to do when we go for internship. BSC Accounting.

(R6): They have to do orientation. Internship can be done at the end of every year at least a month. One can accumulate all that as job experience. You need to help students to write the report.

The institution should put in place a robust Monitoring and Evaluation system so that the students who do not do internship should be detected by the system and will not pass that component.

Discussion

Students' perception of the internship programme at the university in general is positive. By introducing them to the real world of work, the internship programme helped to expose students to the practical aspect of their programme of study. The outcome of this 2017 study of interns showed that respondents benefitted greatly from the vacation internship programme and therefore an overwhelming percentage supported the mandatory internship programme

run by the UPSA. Some of the benefits that came out of the study concur those which have been identified in most internship literature, include the ability to apply theories and concepts taught in class (Idris & Bako, 2021; Dondofema, *et al*, 2020) ^[15, 11], learning to work in teams reported by Renganathan & Karim (2012) ^[22], integrating academic knowledge with practical applications (Okay & Şahin, 2010; Beard; 2007) and the development of important skills for future job employment of students (Renganathan & Karim, 2012; Tran & Trang, 2020; Amin *et al*, 2020) ^[22, 26, 3], among others.

Further analysis of the benefits from the internship programme proved that students of the morning and evening sessions at the university benefitted more than students in the weekend sessions. One reason that was attributed to this difference by respondents is that most weekend scholars enrolled on the University's programmes are already employed and in most cases could identify the link between the theory taught in class and what actually happens in the real world of work. This finding is in agreement with the study by Bolli & Oswald-Egg (2021) ^[8, 20] who also found internship to be less valuable for students who have some form of work experience. *The result therefore raises a question as to whether internship as a course should be mandatory for students who are already working before enrolling on any programme at UPSA or not. It may require UPSA to consider applying Bolli & Oswald-Egg's (2021) ^[8, 20] recommendation to consider waiving a mandatory internship requirement for students who have already worked. This will also create more room for the needy students and reduce pressure for internship seeking. To make up for the credit hours for the internship, such students should have the option of choosing an elective course that will increase their knowledge in the field of study.*

Internship programmes sometimes come with challenges. Some challenges found in the literature which were also reported in this study include supervisors engaging interns in petty work not related to interns' programme of study and students not being able to settle down smoothly for the internship programme due to financial strain (Gashaw, 2019; Adeosun *et al*, 2021) ^[13, 1]. Proper coordination between the university and industry will ensure that students are assigned tasks that are related to their field of work and also improve their internship experience.

The study further showed that, for the university to improve on the quality of students' internship reports, students should be given an orientation on internship report writing. Furthermore, attention should be given to the content of pre-internship orientations at the university. Respondents in their comments emphasized supervision of interns at their internship locations as a way of improving internship at UPSA. The literature also noted that a well supervised internship as well as orientation of students can improve internship programmes (Shaketange *et al*, 2017; Goia *et al*, 2017; Marinaş & İğret, 2017; Okay & Şahin, 2010; Zimmerman, 1996) ^[24, 2, 18, 33]. Proper collaboration between the universities and industry is also needed for successful internship (Baert, *et al*, 2021; Gashaw, 2019; Goia *et al*, 2017) ^[5, 13] as collaboration will also help in the placement of students with industry, a suggestion made by respondents in this study.

There are students who do not do internship but just write reports and submit due to lack of supervision by the institution. The institution should put in place a robust

Monitoring and Evaluation system so that the students who do not do internship should be detected by the system and will not pass that component. The study has shown that mandatory internship is good for the university. However, there are areas mentioned in the study that the university must pay attention to in order to strengthen the existing internship programme for the benefit of all.

Conclusion

The study has shown how important the mandatory internship programme is for students at the University. Mandatory internship is not beneficial to students who are already working before enrolling into an UPSA programme. Despite the difficulties experienced by some respondents in getting placement their comments indicated that, the decision of the University to make internship a mandatory course is in the right direction. In addition, the internship experience helped students to learn the practical aspects of the theories taught in class. The repetitive comments of respondents on the need for pre-internship orientation and education on internship report writing, among other things is worth noting. It is believed that the findings and conclusions from the study will go a long way to enhance the internship programme at the University.

Recommendations

Some recommendations that can be derived from the study to improve internship experience of students at the university and other institutions of higher learning include the following:

1. Since the internship programme at the University is mandatory and credits are awarded to students who undertake it, it is necessary for the University to ensure that the programme is well structured, and this will involve proper coordination between the university and industry. In doing so, students would be able to develop some of the important skills and qualities needed in the real work situation and be prepared for the career path they may choose.
2. Since most weekend scholars enrolled on the University's programmes are already employed following what has also been observed in other studies, there is the need for the university to consider waiving a mandatory internship requirement for students who have already worked and give students the option of choosing an elective course that will increase their knowledge in the field of study.
3. For internship to have the intended outcomes, institutions must pay attention to how the programme is structured and organized. For this, UPSA must develop a comprehensive internship manual that will provide information on internship policies, orientation, students' responsibility/expectations and evaluation among others.
4. To improve on the quality of students' internship reports, the university must ensure that students are given orientation on internship and internship report writing and also measures should be put in place to ensure that students attend such orientations.
5. The university should put in place proper measures to ensure that students are supervised at their internship locations at least twice during their internship period.

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