

The Effect of Internship on Job Performance: An Assessment of Students' Perception

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Abstract— This study is to determine students' perception on the internship embarked upon by students of Polytechnics on their eventual job performance. Variables used in the study include working environment, internship reporting, and transfer of knowledge across context and organizational participation. Primary data for the study was collected using questionnaires that were distributed to 526 students that have completed the internship course at Politeknik Ungku Omar (PUO). The result showed that most of the respondents concurred with the fact, that working environment, internship reporting, knowledge transfer across context and organizational participation obtained during internship has positive effects on graduates' on the job performance. The findings of the study therefore indicate, that the internship course of the PUO by students view and assessment has positive impact on graduates' performance on the job.

Index Terms— Internship, students' perception.

1 INTRODUCTION

INTERNSHIP is part of the curriculum structure in Polytechnics. Students are expected to undergo and complete prior to obtaining a Diploma from a Polytechnic. The course is intended to expose students' the practical aspect of their study over a specific period. The internship is also expected to improve students' confidence in the area of working environment, internship reporting, and knowledge transfer across context and organizational participation.

The purpose of the internship, is to equip the graduates for the work environment through experience gained. In addition, the course also aims at producing skilled, knowledgeable and experienced polytechnic graduates as required by employers. That is graduates who have practical knowledge of what they have been taught in the polytechnic and can apply same at in the work environment. The course is also intended to ensure, that the graduate is made aware of the expectations of the industry. Lastly, the training is expected to further solidify what has been learnt on campus.

Through the internship period, students are expected to develop their personality, self-confidence, independence; as well as learn how to take decisions with little or no assistance. They are also expected to learn how to interact with other employees while carrying out their tasks with minimal supervision through finding a link between modules of study and work process while being trained. Furthermore, students' it is anticipated will develop communication skills, discipline, time management, commitment to tasks and other leadership abilities that will enable them cooperate with others, engage in group discussions that will lead to the meeting of industrial targets. By learning to take liability and responsibility, they are expected to gain the support of their peers (Harter, 1999).

Feedbacks received from industries, point to the fact that most graduates of Polytechnics lack some basic and personal skills such as cooperation with others. The feedbacks also indicate, that most students fall short of expectations, because of their inability to effectively communicate with their colleagues. This is exhibited, when they are required to participate in programmes or organize a seminar by the organization. Some show evidence of outright lack of knowledge and inability to coordinate or carry their colleagues along. This study was therefore carried out to establish if the internship course is still worth it despite these reported shortcomings especially from the perspective of the student who are made to go through the training before a certificate is awarded to them.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Internship

Interactions with employers indicated that most employers expect graduates to have a wide range of skills and other capabilities that they need to engage in a wide range of activities. It is a fact, that the internship is crucial to assessing these abilities in students /graduates across nations and cultures (Abderrahman Hassi & Giovanna Storti, 2011). In training, diversity, inclusivity, equality and fairness in organizations are as important as the development of human resources. So, there is need for communities to adopt more proactive roles in addressing the issue of diversity through research and course curricular (David McGuire & Mammed Bagher, 2010).

2.2 Working Environment

Rothman (2007) opine that students see the internship as a form of preparation for full time working environment in industry or with employers. It is therefore necessary, that internship materials or hand-outs clarify expectation with regards to internship.

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The coordinator should ensure that the students are equipped with improved students' skills and abilities. The students should also protect against unexpected situations (Collins, 2002).

According to Collins (2002), the Industrial Training Coordination Office (ITCO) should collaborate with the organization in order to have proper working environment. This include positions and responsibility given to interns, department rotation, working hours, meals, transportation, uniforms and accommodations, salary, social security insurance and health insurance.

2.3 Internship Reporting

The assessment for the internship course is completed by the departmental coordinator. Table 1 shows the course requirements.

Table 1: Internship requirements for course assessment

Item	Mark (%)
Practical Tasks	40
Reflective Journal	20
Observation	10
Presentation	10
Internship Report	20
Total	100

The reflective journal is a daily and weekly record of all related activities students have to perform within the period of their internship (*Garis Panduan Pengurusan dan Kaedah Penilaian Latihan Industri, Politeknik KPT, 2011*). These include: diagrams, and other related information. When students are through with the training, the reflective journal is submitted to the industrial supervisor for assessment. In addition to this, students have to write a summary in which they are to give a brief of the technical aspect of their training. The summary is also to be assessed by the polytechnic's departmental coordinator. The next assessment is a presentation by the students highlighting the interesting elements during their internship. A copy of the presentation is kept in a faculty database to be assessed by other students of the institution.

There is an aspect of the assessment, which requires the employer to fill a practical task form, to directly assess the student's performance during their internship. This facilitates the assessment of the programme's outcome. By these assessments, the faculty also receives valuable information from employers on how to improve the internship course.

During the internship, a lecturer is assigned to visit each student at their place of internship. Through these visits, feedback is obtained from the employer with regards to each student's performance, on the internship course. Such visits also give the institution an opportunity to assess the suitability of a company to provide training for the students' (Nordin Jamaluddin, Afida Ayob, Siti Aminah Osman, Moh'd Zaidi Omar, Norhisham Tan Koffi and Suhanajohar, 2013).

Internship assessment/grading is not only difficult but the least research related. In order to meet the needs of all concerned, it is advisable, that a balance is struck between academic standards, the integration of theoretical principles and work experience. There is also a need to properly integrate the internship course with formal evaluation so as to facilitate a positive perception of the institution's graduates (Gault et.al, 2000).

The style of assessment vary considerably from institution to institution. In this study, a range of items have been used to evaluate student interns, these include: portfolio of work, activity log, weekly journal/reports, literature reviews and article analyses, oral presentations, class briefings and final papers (which most times are retrospective reflections of the internship programme) (Henry et.al, 2001; Thiel and Hartley, 1997; Toncar and cudmore, 2000; Tovey, 2001; Watson, 1992). Most institutions which run the internship course require some form of written work from interns except for larger institutions' which require journals and work experience reports rather than research, theory or practical reports (Gryski, et.al, 1987).

Determining the most suitable grading system is therefore a difficult task. Grading and maintaining the integrity of the grading system, presents a challenge for the internship course. Empirical studies have revealed that employers' often react differently to internship and their choice of grading system. While some accept inputs from such assessment, others are resistant to it (Ellis, 2000). Those that are resistant prefer home grown solutions to issues identified (Ellis, 2000). Others still prefer more creative assignment that will challenge the thinking ability of the interns (Ackerman, et.al 2003). While others still prefer minimal involvement in academic grading of students (Henry, et.al, 2001). An agreement, stating the content of the programme is therefore necessary to clarify these issue to stakeholders (Henry et.al, 2001; Melton, 1989). On the final analysis, all parties can participate in internship assessment. It is a fact that academic supervisors often prefer to grade the interns on the final analysis (Gryski et.al 1987; Tovey, 2001), while company supervisors provide feedback as part of the process. It is a fact, that industry based supervisor's evaluation may help to open a window of dialogue between the intern and the industry based supervisor not only on the technical aspect of their output, but also on their comportment during the internship.

2.4 Transferring Knowledge across Context

For the students, internship provides an opportunity for "hands on" experience as in real life situation with the difference being the guidance and support received during the internship programme. Internship acts as a bridge between theory and practice (Mihail, 2006; Nevett, 1985) and between classroom education and the real industry life (Meredith and Burkle, 2008); provide opportunity for a more valuable learning experience (Hite and Bellizzi, 1986; Karns, 2003; Wasonga and Murphy, 2006; Watson, 1992); enhance the impact of the

programme (Thiel and Hartely 1997) and creates feelings of social and personal efficacy (Bernstien, 1976).

The goals of internship from the institutions point of view are multifarious. Quite often, the institution seeks as much maximal benefit from the programme as the interns themselves. Some expectations of institutions from the programme include: practice in theory application, enhanced job readiness and improved employment readiness and prospect (Alpert, et.al 2009).

2.5 Participation of organization

Organizations have come under criticism for lack of careful planning, adequate supervision, application of theory and uniform requirement; which have brought into question, the academic legitimacy of the internship programme (Hanson, 1984). Since the internship is often carried out away from the campus, their full educational benefit it is the view in some quarters may not be fully realized (Alm, 1996). Most times industry based supervisors do not expose students' to some aspects of the job, consequently, the interns may not be carried along and this may affect the internship experience (Toncarand and Cudmore, 2000).

The objectives of internship is defeated, if students are not involved in any meaningful work, (like "intern making the photocopy" syndrome), the employer not considering the intern a serious part of the work process and the institution not considering the internship a part of educational programme because of its perceived lack of rigour and academic content (Thiel and Hartely, 1997).

3 METHODOLOGY

The sampling frame of the study consists of 526 interns for December 2017 session. Primary data was collected using questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the students at the completion of their industrial training. The statistical mode of analysis is the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The study was conducted at Politeknik Ungku Omar and covered 5 Departments which offer 18 courses. Table 2 shows the demographic background of the respondents.

Table 2: Demographic Background

Item	Frequency	Percentage	
Department	Civil Engineering	93	17.7
	Electrical Engineering	81	15.4
	Mechanical Engineering	109	20.7
	Commerce	170	32.3
	Information Technology	73	13.9
Selection of organization	Peer suggestion	85	16.2
	Suggested by institution	11	2.1
	Self-application	430	81.7

Organization Category	Government	141	26.8
	Private sector	385	73.2
Training allowances	Below RM200	197	37.5
	RM201 – RM500	240	45.6
	RM501 – RM 700	57	10.8
	RM701 – RM1,000	29	5.5
	RM1,000 and above	3	0.6
Job offered	Yes	243	46.2
	No	283	53.8
Feedback for job offered	Accepted	299	56.8
	Rejected	227	43.2
Acceptance of student for future industrial training	Yes	506	96.2
	No	20	3.8

32.3% (170) respondents are students of the Department of Commerce, 20.7% (190) are students of Mechanical Engineering Department, 17.7% (93), Civil Engineering Department, 15.4% (81), Electrical Engineering Department and 13.95% (73) respondents are students of Information Technology Department.

81.7% (430) of the respondents selected the organization they had the programme with by themselves, 16.2% (85) selected theirs through peer suggestion and 2.1% (11) had theirs selected for them by the institution.

73.2% of the respondents (385) did their intern with the private sector, while the remaining 26.8% (141) had theirs in government establishments.

All the respondents were paid allowances in the course of the training. 45.6% (240) were paid between RM201-RM500. 37.5% (197) were paid below RM200; 10.8% (57) were paid RM501-RM700; 5.5% (29) RM701-RM1, 000 and 0.6% (3) received RMI, 000 and above.

46.2% (243) of the respondents received job offers after their internship, while 53.8% (283) did not receive any job offer. 56.8% (299) of those who were offered accepted it, while 43.2% (277) rejected the job offer. In addition, 96.2% (506) of the respondents revealed that the organizations where they had their internship indicated interest in having more students from PUO for internship programme in the future, while only an insignificant 3.8% (20) would not want to have students from the institution for internship programme in the future.

Mean scores (Table 3) are derived to determine whether the students have positive or negative perception regarding the industrial training program.

Table 3: Mean Scores

Variables	Mean
Working environment	3.5209
Internship reporting	3.3308
Transferring knowledge across contexts	3.4832
Participation of organization	3.3710

The mean score for students' view about the environment in their places of internship is: 3.5209. This indicates that respondents strongly agreed the fact that the industrial training programme is effective.

The mean score for knowledge transfer across context, organizational participation and internship reporting is 3.4832, 3.3710 and 3.3308 respectively. The conclusion can therefore be safely reached, that a good percentage of the respondents agree with the fact that the three aspects contribute to the effectiveness of the industrial training programme.

The findings imply that the respondents perceive the industrial training program favorably and thus, indicating that PUO's industrial training program is effective from the students' point of view.

5 CONCLUSION

This study set out to assess students' perception about the internship course at PUO. Using the questionnaire as the instrument for data gathering, and the SPSS as the mathematical mode of analysis, the study tested: working environment, internship reporting, and knowledge transfer across context and organizational participation in relation to the internship course. The findings of the study show that the internship could be made more effective, if synergy is formed between the polytechnic and organizations that receive the students' for training in the areas of: working environment, knowledge transfer across context, organizational participation and internship reporting. The findings of this study can be used by another Polytechnic Malaysia. Besides that another variables can be included for future research.

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