International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design
Volume 14 • Issue 1

The Evaluation of Internship in the Digital Information Age:
A Case Study

Hussein Fakhry, Zayed University, UAE
Mathew Nicho, Rabdan Academy, UAE
Emad Bataineh, Zayed University, UAE
Shini Girja, Zayed University, UAE*

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the merits and challenges associated with onsite and online internships, focusing on their impact on objective achievement, intern-industry interaction, interdisciplinary learning, and globalization through the four-I's framework: intentional, interconnected, interdisciplinary, and international. By comparing the experiences of 21 students engaged in eight-week onsite programs alongside 21 online interns, the study finds that online internships offer flexibility and global accessibility, enhancing international skills. However, they score lower in intentionality, interactivity, and interdisciplinary learning. In contrast, onsite internships excel in providing hands-on experiences, real-time observation, teamwork, and the development of interdisciplinary skills development, albeit underutilizing international dimensions. Future investigations could explore how technological advancements like augmented reality and virtual reality might enhance online internships. Additionally, it could examine how digital tools and social media platforms could facilitate interaction among online interns, mentors, and host companies within the evolving internship landscape.

KEYWORDS

curriculum alignment, intentional, interconnectivity, interdisciplinary, international, internship, mentor, professionalism

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of the modern internship emerged in the medical field in the 1920s (Taylor Research Group, 2014) and has since gained widespread adoption in academia across the globe. Internships, essentially a modern form of professional apprenticeships that originated in the trade guilds of Europe in the 11th and 12th centuries (Forbes, 2009), saw a surge due to the expansion of the Internet in the 1990s, providing more opportunities for student participation. The growing IT sector, particularly the application of information communication technology (ICT) for socioeconomic development, led to increased investment in developing nations (Fry et al., 2008).

DOI: 10.4018/IJOPCD.333630 *Corresponding Author

Internships include any professional work experience related to a student's academic major. Students partner with organizations, engaging in work that benefits both parties (Friesenborg, 2002). The governments of developing countries have established internship programs in universities to help students understand how ICT can be integrated into society (Crossley et al., 2012). Universities' emphasis on internships supports economic growth by facilitating students' acquisition of the essential skills needed to compete in demanding and evolving national and global economic environments (Schambach & Dirks, 2002).

To enhance learning, educators frequently employ experiential learning pedagogies (Leary & Sherlock, 2020). However, for an internship to be effective, students must consciously engage and not simply view it as a job or potential gateway into future full-time employment (Cannon & Geddes, 2019).

The aim of internship programs is to help the transition of students from academia to a professional work environment (Nicho et al., 2021). During internships, students have opportunities to acquire extensive hands-on experience in a variety of business situations (Crossley et al., 2012). These experiences allow them to put abstract concepts and derived knowledge to practical use (Fry et al., 2008), expanding their subject knowledge (Leary & Sherlock, 2020). Internships also allow them to establish connections with global businesses and industries, strengthening their capacity to recognize opportunities and repurpose their knowledge (Aldianto et al., 2018).

From an industry perspective, the managers of 94.9% of companies in one worldwide survey described internships as a crucial component of all students' training, crucial for shaping their personalities and preparing them for the workplace (Elad, 2022). Internships also introduce young professionals with new ideas and ways of thinking into businesses, increasing the competitiveness of the workforce. Thus, an internship can be described as a structured form of academic and interdisciplinary knowledge acquisition that is both challenging and largely practice-oriented (Agnew & Kahn, 2014).

The global higher education sector has increasingly turned to experiential learning pedagogies, including internships and service-learning opportunities, to complement teacher-centered knowledge-transfer approaches. This approach actively involves students in the learning process (A. Kolb & D. Kolb, 2006). Meanwhile, digital technologies offer new resources to help individuals' engagement in professional contexts and the development of new skills for navigating the challenges posed by the information age (Bowen, 2012). While internships have been associated with concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (McMullan & Cahoon, 1979), these areas must now be adapted for the 21st-century workplace.

1.1 Problem Statement

Researchers and educators have been debating the value of internships, particularly for undergraduate students, as they are viewed as both a contributing factor to and a potential solution for the challenge surrounding youth unemployment (Frenette et al., 2015). Internships provide numerous advantages; however, challenges persist when bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Gashaw, 2019).

Interns face challenges in both onsite and online internship programs. Regarding the onsite perspective, these challenges include a limited connection between the industry and the university, instances where company supervisors assign tasks to interns that are unrelated to their field, and infrequent visits by university supervisors (Gashaw, 2019). This is supported by empirical research that highlights several issues, including supervisors' lack of interest in involving students in relevant tasks, inadequate mentoring, and support from supervisors (Birhan & Merso, 2021). In addition, there is a mismatch between interns' skills and expectations and what the organization requires. Interns also may lack interest and underestimate the true nature of the work (Soffi et al., 2020).

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of virtual or remote internships had been steadily rising (Feldman, 2021; Pittenger, 2021). However, the pandemic helped educators' exploration of alternative teaching and learning methods (Seo & Kim, 2021). In this respect, virtual internships help interns enter organizations of their choice, regardless of their location or potential limitations due