THE IMPACT OF INTERNSHIP ON EARLY CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATES
An experiential learning approach

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Review Paper

The impact of internship on early career development of graduates: An experiential learning approach

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This paper examines the role of internship as a bridge between higher education and the workplace. It reviews the studies relating to internship and its effect on early career development of higher education graduates. With high levels of unemployment, the job market has become highly competitive. There is need, therefore, to come up with graduates who are ready for the job market, fully equipped with practical experience. The paper reviews various studies done by scholars in the area of internship, and recommends practical solutions that can be used to enhance the crucial role of internship for Kenya to achieve vision 2030. This paper recommends that training authorities need to make a deliberate effort to promote internship by giving incentives to industries to offer internship opportunities even lobbying government to enact supportive laws.

Key words: Internship, Career Development, Experiential Learning

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment among college graduates is a main issue within the Kenyan economy. According to Haji (2007), some of the reasons behind youth unemployment include preference by employers for experience; lack of work experience during school years, poor quality in education; inadequate preparation of the youth in career development and mismatching between schools and labour long-term transition from school to the labour market among others. Nyerere (2009) has noted that in Kenya, the education and industry sectors exist separately from each other and while the importance of the school-to-work transition of students is being advocated, discussion of these matters has failed to probe deeper, resulting in a lack of realistic policy linking school education to the labour market. This article reviews various studies done on internship and aims to establish whether indeed internship plays any significant contribution in the development of careers of young graduates in Kenya and whether it is necessary component of a study programme.

Review of empirical studies

A study by Callanan and Benzing (2004) indicate that completion of an internship is a significant variable in terms of influence on ability to obtain a career-related position. They indicate that internship and related programmes have proven to be an invaluable career management tool for college students in the development of a clear self-identity and in the setting of career goal. For students to meet the skills requirements needed in an ever changing labour market, adequate resources need to be invested in appropriate forms of work experience and in building up transferable skills. Placing college graduates/students in firms through internships can enhance active labour market policy by improving graduates prospects in the labour market (Mihail 2006). Academic work, structured work experiences, and internships are all valuable components of the career preparation process. Preparation for entry-level employment in their chosen professions is a high priority end-of program student outcome. Analysis of students’ perceptions of and performance during the internship, due to its on-site and full-time nature, is clearly an appropriate venue for assessment of this learning outcome. Educators are challenged to assist students with their internship placements so that resulting experiences contribute positively to students’ career development. Knowledge about internship site characteristics, particularly those that are perceived to contribute positively to students’ career development may
aid faculty members in their guidance practices. As relationships with internship sites develop, educators will benefit from discussions with potential site supervisors about the types of activities and the general internship environment that will contribute to student experiences. Students will benefit from an opportunity to actively seek internship environments that are most likely to provide characteristics associated with a satisfactory experience (Paulins 2008).

Academic driven internships organize and promote the placement of students in private enterprises and other organizations to foster the work experience so that students will attain the necessary skills to supplement their theoretical training. While students are still at university or college, internships can help them develop a core of global marketing skills that are now considered requirements, such as communication and time management skills, better self confidence and better self motivation (Gill and Lashine 2003; Dennis, 1996 as in Mihall 2006). Internship provides credible means for softening the reality shock of transitioning from the world of academics to the working world (Garavan and Murphy 2001; Collin and Tynjalla 2003).

Kenya's vision 2030, envisions that the country will have transformed into a middle income country with newly industrialised status by 2030. Among the enablers of this vision is manpower development to supply the new industries will skilled and competent manpower.

By focusing attention on the important aspect of early career development, this study is important to education institutions since it places emphasis on business schools to come up with programmes where students get an opportunity to practice what they learn. It is also beneficial to participating organizations as it points out the benefits that may accrue by offering internship opportunities to college students. More importantly, it points out at the mutual benefits that can accrue from collaboration between higher education and industry.

In Kenya, The National Industrial Training Institute (NITA) runs a government internship programme whereby employers who are registered with NITA can claim reimbursement from the government of any expenses incurred in providing internship to students training in government institutions and private institutions that are NITA registered. This is a deliberate government incentive to promote internship.

Emerging issues and propositions

Drawing from the existing studies on the role of internship on early career development of graduates in terms of the amount of time taken to get an entry level position; realistic career expectations; time taken to settle in a chosen career; and self confidence, four propositions can be made: graduates with internship experience exhibit relatively higher levels of employability than those with no internship experience; graduates with internship experience take relatively shorter time to settle in their chosen careers than those with no internship experience; graduates with internship experience demonstrate higher levels of transference of learning than those lacking such experience in terms of self confidence and internship programs play a major role in bridging the gap between higher education and industry.

CONCLUSION

The review was aimed at establishing the impact of internship on early career development of graduates. It can be concluded that internship plays a vital role in the transformation from college to the workplace. The study supports the proposition that internship helps in enabling graduates to acquire entry level positions relatively faster than their non interning counterparts. This is supported by the fact that such students have a chance to showcase their skills and knowledge long before they graduate. They also get an opportunity to create professional networks. They therefore tend to have more social capital than those without the internship experience.

Related to social capital is the self confidence that those with internship experience tend to manifest. By virtue of having experienced the real work, graduates tend to become more confident during interviews than their non-interning counterparts. This in turn may ensure that they take lesser time to get an entry level position. The internship experience demystifies the real work situation thus enabling graduates to have more confidence even as they embark on looking for jobs. When students get opportunities to work as interns, there is likelihood that they will be retained as employees by the participating organization if they perform satisfactorily during the internship. They may thus not spend time looking for employment.

On the question of settling in a chosen career, it was noted that those students with internship experience tend to settle on their chosen careers faster. Students on internship experience the challenges of real workplace. They get a chance of discussing those challenges with their colleagues. They get to understand how they can handle those challenges without necessarily having to run away from them. This helps them to mature as employees and can also have a bearing on turnover intention. Internship therefore helps students in settling in their chosen career.

It is concluded that higher education and industry can gain a lot by working together to achieve the goal of both the industry and academia. Close collaboration is beneficial in providing students with meaningful education experience. The needs of the industry must be considered in curriculum development. One such need is the ability of learners to translate theory to practice. Organizations must also provide the interns with real learning opportunities. They should “open the doors” for
the interns and play the role of mentors and coaches to young graduates of higher education institutions.

Recommendations
Institutions of higher learning should ensure that the students are well prepared to meet the challenges of the workplace. Programmes that enhance transfer of learning through experiential learning should be integral part of the curriculum. No student should graduate without attainment of a given number of weeks of practical training in a typical workplace. Learners should be linked up with supervisors who are well placed to provide them with relevant coaching and mentoring to achieve the objectives of the internship. Internship should be considered as an integral part of evaluation of the effectiveness of training in higher education. This is a better way of determining whether graduates are able to apply what they learnt in the classroom.

The transition between classroom and the workplace should be treated as an important aspect of career development. Students should be given an opportunity to familiarise themselves with workplace and professional requirements long before they are released to the world of work. This will enable them to increase their self-confidence, soft skills and employability. To bridge the gap between higher education and industry, there is need for collaborative efforts in curriculum development. Industry experts should have an input into the curriculum. They should provide feedback to higher learning institutions so that necessary curriculum interventions can be implemented. They should also provide professional support such as mentoring and coaching to interns attached to their organizations. The value of mentors and developmental relationships to career success cannot be overemphasized. There is need for hypothesis to be developed from the propositions and an empirical study carried out to test the hypothesis.

Deliberate efforts should be made by training authorities to create incentives for industries to offer internship opportunities. It would go a long way if such training authorities and training umbrella bodies can lobby the government to support internship with policies or even enact a law that require industries to offer a certain number of internship opportunities to trainees. This can be pegged on the industry size or on a percentage of a firm’s number of employees. This would also work out for employers who would require less time and expenses to train newly hired employees as they have already acquired real work based skills during internship. In countries where national service is compulsory for every citizen, certain life skills and national values and norms are inculcated into every citizen when they go through national service. Internship can be looked at in a similar way where all industries set aside a certain percentage of their staffing levels to

REFERENCES