

## **STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME : ACADEMICIANS AND COMPANIES EVALUATION**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Internship is one of the medium and method used to produce high-quality graduates in market place. It is distressing to discover, however, that the performance of students in the practical training program is still questionable. Evaluation by academicians is important as well as the on-site assessment done by the students' respective employers, in order to provide a holistic evaluation of the students' practical training performance. The purposes of this study are to identify which attributes contribute less to internship programme and to evaluate students' rate of performance in internship programme. The seven criteria assessed are students' commitment, work quality, effort, communication skills, and comprehension of work, self-confidence and technical skills. The study involved 185 students who were undergo internship programme and employed descriptive analysis to evaluate students' performance in internship programme. The data for this study were collected through supervisors' evaluation form comprised of five sections, Section I: Demographic Information, Part II: Performance of Tasks Execution, Part III: Personality of Student, Part IV: Skills and Part V: Overall Performance. Analysis on the mean indicates that attribute of effort has the lowest mean compared to other attributes towards the rate of students' performance during internship programme. In addition, the findings also indicate that most of the students performed well during internship based on interview with organisations' supervisor for evaluation due to all measured attributes were rated as good and excellent. The supervisors of companies suggested that the students need to improve on work quality, communication skills and technical skills.

***Keywords:*** *Internship Programme, Evaluation, Communication Skills, Performance.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Higher education institutions are facing challenges in supplying graduates to fill the job market demand. The creating programmes such as internship programme is seen as one initiatives programme to help organizations in supplying the job market demand and also to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Nowadays, internship programme is one of the common practices of higher educations in Malaysia for enhancing the learning experience and technical skills among their students. Most of the internship programme not only to develop students' professional attributes but also the opportunity to acquire professional networks and career paths. Internship is seen as a stepping stone for students to the world of work. Through internship, students have the opportunity to apply their theoretical and practical knowledge into

the real work environment. In addition, students can also learn the new skills required in their area of specialization such as using certain software to solve the issues or problems.

The internship programme also enhances the potential of students' marketability. In the context of higher education institutions, internship programmes are one of the mechanisms that can be used to evaluate a programme of study. Through the internship programme, the institution can get useful information on the adequacy of a programme which involves the structure of the program, the structure of the academic course and the quality of the graduates to be produced. Studies however caution that unplanned internship programmes will negatively affect students. The studies done by Almoayad and Ledger (2018) and Wu and Wu (2006) proved that there are students who are less confident about the future of their careers after completing the internship programme. An unplanned internship can thus lead to a student who does not feel confident to venture into a career that is in line with their speciality. In that regard, the planning and implementation of an internship programme should be taken seriously by institutions of higher learning to ensure that through the internship programme students gain valuable work exposure and experience.

The most obvious benefits provided through an internship are those to the students participating in the internship. Internships present the student with an opportunity to gain invaluable experience. They offer the student a chance to bridge the gap between expectations developed in the classroom and the reality of the working environment. Internships can help expand upon immediate skills that can improve course performance, such as better time management and communication skills, better self-discipline, heightened initiative and an overall better self-concept (Dennis, 1996). Overall, interns are better prepared to enter the job market and enjoy greater job satisfaction (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000). Employers are looking for students who have gained hands on experience throughout their college education. Internships supply the student with the real world experience employers require.

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In today's competitive world, gaining employment is a tough task. Students from all higher institutions must compete to one each other to get the job. Hence, to be secure or to get a good job, both theoretical and practical knowledge must be applied as well as been an innovator and team player. The critical issue of employability is where the imbalance happens between the numbers of graduates and employers' demands.

Report of graduates statistics by Department of Statistics Malaysia 2019 shows that the number of unemployed graduates in 2019 was 170.3 thousand persons, which is increased 5.5% from year 2018 (2018: 161.3 thousand persons). Active unemployed graduates accounted for 74.8% (127.4 thousand persons) to the total unemployed graduates. More than half of active unemployed graduates were unemployed less than three months which was 51.6% (65.7 thousand persons) while 29.5% (37.5 thousand persons) of them were unemployed within three months and less than six months. On the other hand, 10.9% (13.9 thousand persons) of them were unemployed within six months and less than a year whereas another 8.1% (10.3 thousand persons) were unemployed more than a year. Meanwhile, inactive unemployed graduates comprised of 25.2% (42.8 thousand persons) of the overall unemployed graduates. In a line of graduates' unemployment, the Job Street Malaysia's Employer survey in 2019 has listed the five top reasons of fresh graduates' unemployment in Malaysia as shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1 : Reasons of Fresh Graduate Unemployment in Malaysia**

No	Reasons of Graduate Unemployability in Malaysia
1	68% of them asking for unrealistic salary/ benefits
2	64% of them have poor command in English

3	60% of them choosy about the job or company
4	60% of graduates poor of communication skills
5	59% of graduates poor of character, attitude and personality
6	Majority of graduates also lack of ability to work independently.
7	Majority of graduates also lack of willingness to learn.
8	Majority of graduates also lack of ability to work under pressure.

The survey also was done by the Job Street Malaysia in year 2019 for Employer Hiring stated that 96% of the Malaysia employers are maintaining or increasing hiring placement for fresh graduates for the past 5 years but the number of unemployed graduates are increased to 5.5% from year 2018 (161.3 thousand persons to 170.3 thousand persons). The number shows that the reason of graduate employability in Malaysia is the quality of graduates that do not commensurate with the demand of the industry. Therefore, most higher education institutions in Malaysia are prompted to tighten the structure of internship programme by restructure the module or component in internship programme to increase employability rates in future.

The study by Renganathan, Abdul Karim & Chong (2012) mentioned about an outcome-based internship that involve undergraduates, university's supervisor and the industry mentor come together to address the issue of graduate unemployability. The study concludes that percentage of unemployability can be reduced when university worked closely with the participating host companies. The host companies can suggest appropriate training areas and also recommend suitable specific tasks, assignments and projects, which can be evaluated by both the academic and industry supervisors. The solution of unemployability based on Cutting & Hall (2008) in the study, highlighted that to organise a quality internship programme demands commitment in terms of sufficient resource, the employer's interest in seeing the learning growth of the interns, redesign of works that match with the interns' learning outcome and capabilities and also a progressive framework of assessment. Henry et al., (2001) concluded that various stakeholders such as the firm, the intern and the university have different objectives and aspirations in their participation in this work-based learning, a learning agreement should be prepare by the university to delineate the objectives for each party and signed as key apparatus for elucidating such expectation from each party. This learning agreement should be utilised as the yard stick to measure the performance. This intern's performance evaluation should be a compromise between the principles of academic and real work experience obtained.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Internship is also called as practical education. Through internship program intern acquire more knowledge of teaching and learn or sharpen the needed skills, attitudes and values associated with efficient performance of their job. Internship helps student to modified knowledge and skills such as what students know, how they will work and how they adapt with work environment. Hence, internship programme is an act of imparting or improving or updating knowledge and skills of a student which they learn in the form or theory. Internship programme can help students exposed to real work situation while working and expanding their knowledge and skills. Internship programme also give space for students to improvement in aspects of self-discipline, working according to actual work procedures, performing a project or task and attitude of working in a team (Hun, 2009).

#### **3.1 INTERNSHIP AND JOB PROSPECT**

In the review of the benefits of the internship programme, Knouse and Fontenot (2008) identified various benefits enjoyed by students who choose to participate in internships. These benefits were students increase their chances to find jobs, may be given an offer for full-time job position by the companies who have hired them as interns, acquire such experiences, which may motivate them to choose a specific career path which were not known to them before the internship and get a realistic view of work and its requirements and become clear regarding what they wish to do in the career trajectory. In line with the above findings, review from Sanahuja Vélez and Ribes Giner (2015) identified three types of benefits for graduates, namely (1) those related to the enhancement of employment opportunities (2) those related to the improvement of skills and competencies and (3) those related to the effects on career exploration. In the same review like Sanahuja Vélez and Ribes Giner (2015), several studies provide evidence that students are increasingly seeing internships as a practical tool which will give them the green light to employment (Cannon and Arnold, 1998). Young graduates who have participated into internship programs are more likely to get proposed for continuation of their employment in the internship (Zhao and Liden, 2011), receive on average higher compensation and more job offers (Callanan and Benzing, 2004; Coco, 2000; Gault et al., 2000), find their first job more quickly (Gault et al., 2000; Knouse et al., 1999), enhance their future career prospects (Wan et al., 2013) and solidify or clarify their interest in a specific work setting (Varghese et al., 2012).

### **3.2 SKILLS IN INTERNSHIP**

Skills development is essential for increasing the productivity and sustainability of enterprises and improving working conditions and the employability of workers. In order to secure that first job as well as navigate in the labour market, fresh graduates need the technical skills to perform specific tasks as well as core work skills, such as learning to learn, communication, problem-solving and teamwork. Development of core skills is the building blocks for lifelong learning and capability to adapt to change.

The internship allows students to develop their generic and specific skills while gaining work experience. Concerning on employability or work skills, several categorizations can be found in the previous studies. O'Neil (1997) in the study classifies employability skills in four categories, namely basic academic skills (listening and speaking), high-order thinking skills (reasoning, problem solving and creativity), interpersonal and teamwork skills and personal characteristics and attitudes (self-esteem, motivation and responsibility). Gault et al., (2000) reviewing the literature on the most important skills among hiring criteria used to select new graduates, such as communication skills (oral presentations, proposal writing and written communication), academic skills (analytical skills, computer applications, creative thinking, information search and problem solving), leadership skills (leadership/teamwork and relationship building) and job acquisition skills (résumé writing, job interviewing and job networking). In line with previous studies, Chhinzer and Russo (2018) mentioned on the sought-after skills by hiring companies illustrate that “generic skills (time management, working in a team, attention to detail), general mental ability, subject-specific knowledge, willingness to work, attitudes and behaviours and responsiveness to feedback” are the key criteria considered by hiring companies when evaluating candidates' employability prospects.

The previous studies, such as Zarina, et al., (2011) and Nor Aini et al., (2013) defined skill as a set of characteristics which include knowledge, know how, attitudes and behaviour that contribute to individuals to be employed. In a context of effort, which can be related to attitudes, Copland (2010) emphasized the element of effort in internship programme. Effort is a quality dimension in the sense that some kinds of effort are potentially more educative than other. All learning and development requires an investment of time and effort by student.

Hopland and Henning (2016) in the study also stated that student effort is assumed to be vital determinant for successful educational outcomes. Student satisfaction with their learning environment at school motivates them and also stimulates effort. This finding is line with Debora and Carolyn (2017), discovered a significant influence of e-internship conditions. Individuals in high effort conditions involving lower goal clarity and less support reported that they were less productive (in terms of job performance). They also felt less appreciated than their counterparts in low effort conditions.

In addition to better perform in internship, students should improve technical skills. The employment market now does not only demand graduates who have a high level of academic knowledge but also graduates who can demonstrates core competencies essential to succeed in the work environment (Binks, 1996; Johnson, 2000; Okay and Sahin, 2010). Some of these competencies such as working in teams, presenting orally and problem-solving skills can enhance graduate employability (Mason et al., 2006). Hence, through internship placements, students have the opportunity to develop these needed skills while pursuing their academic qualifications in the universities (Semedo et al., 2010). The study done by Zaharim et al (2008) which claims that communication attributes should be improved among graduates in order to be competent in job industries. Other than communication attributes, Adeel (2018) claimed that there is a positive impact of ethics on employee job satisfaction, motivation and organizational commitment.

#### **4. KUIS's INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS**

The nature of each programme may differ according to the aims and objectives set by institutions. However, generally the internship programme provides opportunities for students to acquire workplace skills, enhance interpersonal communication, step up networking and hopefully get a greater chance to secure employment. The internship programme described in this paper is designed for the undergraduate students of Faculty of Management & Muamalah, KUIS. The seven dimensions which were identified as important aspects that contribute towards developing well-rounded graduates are work quality, effort, student's commitment, comprehension of work, ethics, technical skills and communication skills. Therefore, KUIS's internship programme is specifically designed to enable students to develop in all these seven dimensions especially in the practical abilities dimension. The internship programme is compulsory for all undergraduates and required to undergo this three-month programme (14 weeks), four-month programme (18 weeks) and six-month programme (26 weeks) prior to the completion of diploma or degree programme. The students go for internship programme in third year, six semester of diploma programme and fourth-year, and eight semester of degree programme. KUIS's industrial internship programme aims to allow students to integrate theory with practice, to experience industry work and its culture and also to establish contacts with industrial practitioners. In view of the significant credit-hours (4-credits and 8-credits) awarded to students for internship programme, KUIS has also developed a structured assessment method whereby both the industrial supervisor from the host company and lecturers from KUIS are able to assess student's performance during the internship. The assessments include overall performance evaluation, logbook assessment and final report.

#### **5. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of this paper are to identify which attributes contribute less to internship programme and to evaluate students' rate of performance in internship programme. The relevant data were obtained through industrial training performance evaluation by organizational supervisor upon students return from attachment in the industry.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

All 340 students from Faculty of Management and Muamalah, KUIS were completed their final year must undergo practical training as a requirement. These students are from various undergraduate level of study (diploma and degree) and courses such as Business Management, Human Resource Management, Islamic Banking, Economics, Accounting, Communication and English language.

The training will give them an opportunity to apply the theory-based knowledge that students obtained in university. During the three to four months of training, appointed lecturers will meet with the supervisor to evaluate what the students have learned while work as trainees in the organization to which students have been assigned. After the students have completed the training, they will be asked to submit the final report including the log book to the lecturer as a supervisor from the university. They have to give report on all the activities that they have done, their experiences and the lessons learned during their practical training. This assessment is the final stage of the training that the students have to undertake. In the present study, three hundred and forty (340) students have completed their practical training in two hundred and fifty-four (254) organizations decided by the university.

The criteria used to evaluate student performance are limited. This is because the evaluator is also an academician who is not frequently with the students in their internship programme. There are seventy lecturers involved in the evaluation which is based on a short discussion with the students, feedback from the student's supervisor during his or her visit and on the student's final report. However, for this paper, the performance evaluation will be selected among one hundred and eighty five (185) whose based on seven criteria rated by the supervisors in organisation with full marks of 60% allocated in the evaluation form.

Taking into account the classification of skills and the study of O'Neil (1997), Zaharim et al (2008) and Chhinzer and Russo (2018), seven categories of skills were adapted as follows; work quality, effort, student's commitment, comprehension of work, ethics, technical skills, and communication skills. The overall mark will be calculated by combining all evaluated criteria. The mean is rated based on the descriptions below:

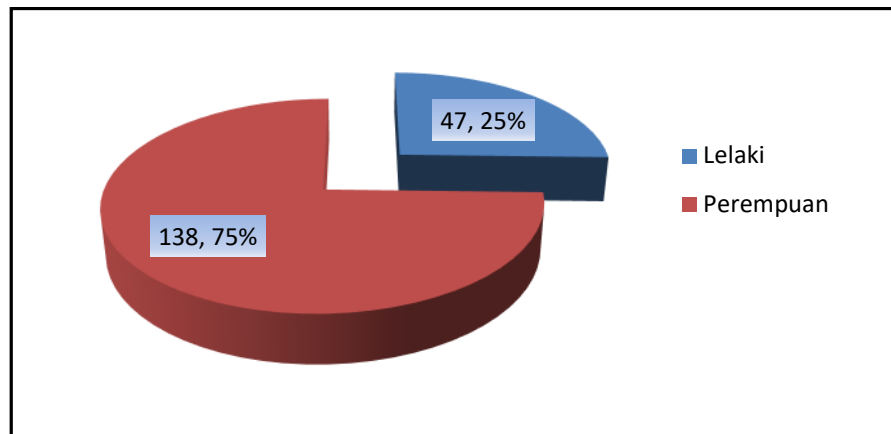
- if the mean score is between 1 and 1.49, the performance is rated as very poor
- if the mean score is between 1.50 and 2.49, the performance is rated as poor.
- if the mean score is between 2.50 and 3.49, the performance is rated as moderate.
- if the mean score is between 3.50 and 4.49, the performance is rated as good.
- if the mean score is between 4.50 and 5.00, the performance is rated as excellent.

**Table 2 : Performance Rating Guidance**

1	2	3	4	5
1	1.5	2.5	3.5	4.5
Very Poor	Poor	Moderate	Good	Excellent

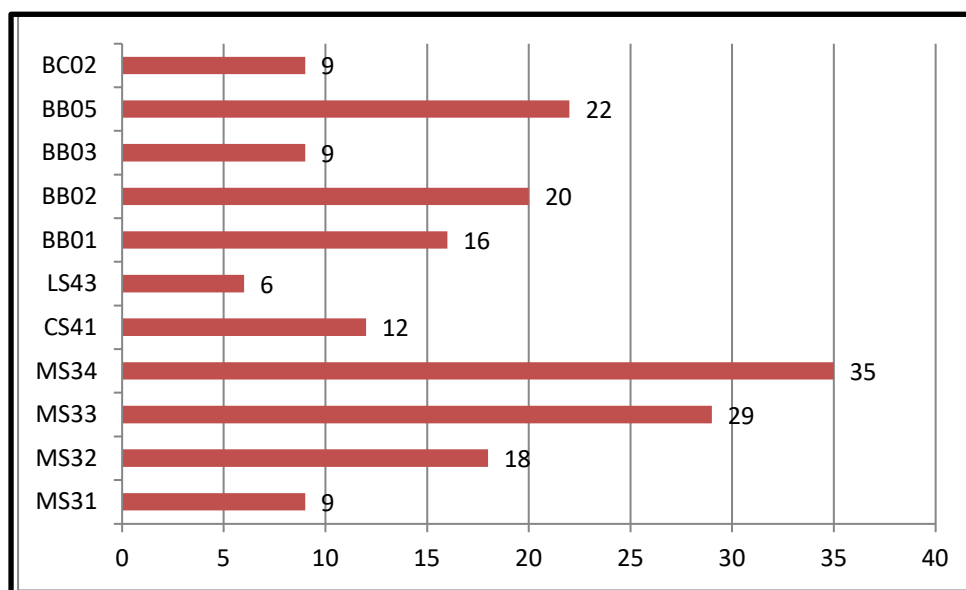
## 7. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

There are 185 students rating chosen as sample which will be analysed and discussed in this paper. 138 or 75% of total respondents are female and the remaining of 25% or 47 is male.



**Figure 1:** Variation of Respondents by Gender

Various undergraduate level of study and courses involved in this research as shown in Figure 2. The findings show about 18.9% are students from Diploma of Human Resource followed by 29 (15.7%) are Diploma of Banking, 22 (11.9%) are Degree in Banking, 20 (9.09%) are Degree in Human Resource, and 18 (9.7%) are Diploma of Business. The remaining respondents are among Degree in Communication, Degree in Economics and Diploma of Accounting which contribute equal respectively 4.86% of total respondents (9 persons each). Only 6 students of Diploma English Language whose contribute the very minimum respondent of 3.24%. The results in Table 3 shows the number of samples collected and the mean, standard deviation and rate of performance in each attribute measured. As shown in Table 3, the total sample is 185 persons in each attributes.



**Figure 2:** Variation of Respondents by Courses Taken

**Table 3 :** The results for student performance attributes

Attributes	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rate of Performance
Work Quality	185	3	5	4.32	0.65	Good

Effort	185	3	5	4.18	0.75	Good
Commitment	185	3	5	4.64	0.61	Excellent
Comprehension work	185	3	5	4.25	0.68	Good
Ethics	185	4	5	4.74	0.61	Excellent
Technical Skills	185	4	5	4.4	0.66	Good
Communication Skills	185	2	5	4.23	0.71	Good
<b>Overall mark</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4.39</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>GOOD</b>

Concerning the overall grade of student performance, the number of students who have been evaluated are one hundred and eighty five (185). The range of the rate of performance is between 1= Very Poor and 5= Excellent, with a mean of 4.39 and standard deviation of 0.67. The lowest mean was in effort, with a mean of 4.18 [SD=.75]. One possible reason for this lack of effort is attitude. The highest mean was for student ethics, with a mean of 4.74 [SD=0.61]. Although students' effort is still rather inadequate, they have been observed to have an excellent level of ethics during the practical training because they seem to regard superiors in the internship as their potential employers when they graduate. The rates of performance for both of them however are still more than good.

The results indicate that, because all measured attributes were rated as good and excellent, most of the students performed well in their interview for the practical training evaluation. The academicians perceived that the students were committed to their work and produced quality work while they try to do their best in their practical training. The students also showed that they had comprehended work when they were interviewed by the academicians and demonstrated excellence in their adoption of technical and communication skills. Students clearly put effort into their practical training, and importantly, the students were observed to have understood their job very well.

## **8. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

The study explores the evaluation of effectiveness of internship programme. Drawing upon the assessment by the supervisor of organisations in Malaysia or abroad, it analysed the students' performance during their internship programme regarding seven categories of skills; work quality, effort, student's commitment, comprehension of work, ethics, technical skills, and communication skills. In line with the extant literature that analyses the skills during internship for students (Semedo et al., 2010, Zarina, et al., 2011, Zhao & Liden, 2011 and Nor Aini et al., 2013), the findings of this study suggest that KUIS's internship programme sufficiently prepare students to adjust the realities of the work life since all measured attributes were rated as good and excellent. Students were assessed positively regarding the overall understanding during internship experience. The internship experience allowed students to realize how they can excel well in the workplace, identify what matters to them in order to be fully engaged in the completion of a work activity and feel more confident about how to effectively use their skills in the work place. Indeed, a wide range of skills much wanted by future employing companies were found to be developed in the internship programme. Consistent with the findings of previous studies by Chhinzer and Russo (2018) and Gault et al., (2000), verbal and written communication (communication skills), effective collaboration, working as team



member & commitment, problem solving, taking initiatives (effort) and assuming responsibility are some of the skills that supervisor of organisations reported through their comments in employing staffs.

The findings of the study have implications for students, universities and organisations that offer the placement. Students who have clear understanding of the reasons that they should invest into the internship, as well as what they have to do in order to benefit the most from it, may increase and improve their skills in order to employability prospects. Universities that incorporate internship with organisations on the other hand may smoothen out the transition of their students from academic world to the business world and thus increase their reputation in providing the excel students during internship. The curriculum makers who decide to include the internship component in the curriculum's structure should consider the types of skills needed by organisations and how the latter are aligned to the skills that the students have already built in the classroom environment. Furthermore, a process of screening the students for internship would allow a very good fit between the profile of the internship candidate and the profile of the placement provider and enhance the effectiveness of the internship experience for both parties. An interview between these two parties would pave the way for clarify the range of skills and growth opportunities that the candidate interns are seeking to experience and also the expectations from the placement provider. Finally, the internship programme is seen to be supporter to employers to find the right candidates for the jobs at hand. Companies could work closely with universities to improve or update the skills set of their prospective human capital addressing the evolving needs of globalised work place. Intercultural communication and technological skills, for example could be acquired through internship opportunity in one subsidiary.

There are several limitations in the study. The limitations of the study are based on sample. A large sample could be employed to confirm reliability and examine construct validity. Furthermore, the sample chosen in the study were students who intern in Session II 2020/2021 only. Therefore, the findings are limited to the educational institution examined and may not represent the interns' population in Malaysia. Further research may needed, for instance to examine the comparison of different private universities in relation to evaluating the effectiveness of internship programme. Further studies also can be done to explore the effect of different majors of studies on the internship's performance.

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