

THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNSHIP PROGRAMMES IN AN ODL INSTITUTION: A CASE FOR THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Several studies done elsewhere have indicated and concluded that a gap really exists between the quality of graduates produced and what the market demands (Mpairwe, 2010). For this and other reasons, training institutions and employers have accepted the need to seek mitigatory steps to bridge the gap. Among other steps, institutions of learning have introduced internship programmes also referred to as field attachment in some of their degree and non-degree programmes. There has also been the realisation that imparting the relevant practical skills is a partnership between the training institution and the prospective employers through student internships. However, despite these positive intentions, interns on field attachment have faced serious challenges among which are insufficient time and lack of funding for the programmes. It is behind this background that the present study sought to establish the benefits and challenges faced by student interns at the Zimbabwe Open University. The study focussed on two of the university's faculties: the Faculty of Science and technology and that of Applied Social Sciences. Most of the students on internship were from these faculties. Being quantitative in nature, the study employed the use of the questionnaire to solicit data from the 50 respondents chosen through convenience sampling. Results showed that the majority of the students preferred the attachment programme because it exposed them to the real expectations of the world of work. However, a number of challenges militated against the effectiveness of the programmes. Challenges include some fulltime employees being reluctant to disclose important information to students. A number of supervisors are too busy to provide effective supervision. Current duration of attachment is not sufficient for all the disciplines. Moreover, some employees regard interns as a threat to their position and in some cases some supervisors possess inferior qualifications than the student interns.

Key words: Challenges, Internship programmes, Open and Distance learning.

INTRODUCTION

In order to accord the ODL student the opportunity to attain hands on experience, the Zimbabwe Open University introduced internship programmes in a number of both undergraduate and post graduate studies. This has been done to provide students with a smooth transition from the academic world to the working environment.

According to Tackett *et al* (2001), internships have taken on an increasingly important role in education over the past decade since they present students with many advantages, ranging from gaining experience and obtaining career-related direction to networking with other students from various institutions as they at the organisation providing the internship (Lubbers, 2008). The learning or parent institutions offering internship programmes have also benefitted through increased cooperation and rapport with the industry (English and Koeppen, 1993). Employers have not been left out of the benefits as internships can provide them with inexpensive help, new ideas and potential future employees (Rothman, 2007; Cannon and Arnold, 1998)

though at times complaints have been raised employers for treating the interns as cheap labour. The benefits have, therefore, accrued to the tripartite stakeholders: the students, parent institutions and employers (Cook *et al.*, 2004; Lam and Ching, 2007).

However, the mode of delivery in Open and Distance Learning institutions places the prospective student intern in a difficult position as he/she has to balance between the requirements of his/her full time employment and the new role as an intern. It is behind this background that the present study seeks to unearth the benefits and challenges of internships in an ODL setting. The study also seeks to find strategies that can be adopted to alleviate the challenges arising for the unique characteristics of the ODL learner.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) is an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in Zimbabwe, established to cater for a substantial component of people who, by design or unintentionally, could not be accommodated in conventional universities, by offering them the opportunity to study in their homes and in their workplaces through distance education. The ZOU was established on 1st March 1999 through an Act of parliament (Chapter 25:20), ZOU currently has four faculties which are the faculty of Arts and Education, the faculty of Science and Technology, the faculty of Commerce and Law and the faculty of Applied Social Sciences. These faculties offer undergraduate diploma and degree programmes and Masters and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in all the four faculties. The internship programmes are currently offered in all but one in the Applied Social Sciences, internships are offered in the Bachelor of Science degree in Counselling and the Master of Science in Counselling. The Faculty of Arts and Education, through the Department of Education, offers internships in a different form that is, teaching practice. The programmes offering teaching practice are the Diploma in Education (both primary and secondary) and Bachelor of Education (secondary). Internships were also introduced in the Faculty of Science and Technology in Physical Education and Sport. This initiative to introduce the internships was upon realisation that they were of utmost importance to the different degree and diploma programmes in which they were introduced. However, despite the positive intentions of their introduction, there have been pockets of challenges interfering in the smooth completion of the internships. This study therefore sought to unearth the benefits accruing to the student, the institution and the employer. The study also intends to explore the challenges encountered by the three parties and provide recommendations for the smooth administration of internships. The three areas to be explored by the current study are answered by responses obtained from the following research questions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Internships have been hailed for integrating classroom education with practical experience in enabling graduates to develop their professional knowledge and professional skills (Beard, 1998). However, unlike in the conventional system and owing to a diversity of factors in an ODL setting, the concept has encountered challenges. The current study therefore, aims at assessing student interns' perceptions of internship programmes at the Zimbabwe Open University. The study seeks to identify the direct benefits accruing to the interns, areas in which they faced challenges as well as actions to remedy the situation for future improvement. The study also focuses on impediments affecting the smooth flow of the internship process as well as the field process.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In an attempt to provide answers to the main research question, the following sub problems stood as research questions:

1. What are institutional benefits of internships in Open and Distance Learning?
2. How do students benefit for the internship programmes in an Open and Distance Learning institution?

3. What benefits accrue to employers of Open and Distance Learning employing ODL interns?
4. What challenges are faced by three parties in the process instituting internship programmes for Open and Distance Learning interns?
5. How can the challenges faced by student interns be overcome in order to make the attachment programme more effective?

Literature Review

This section of the paper reviews literature on internships and presents some models of internships that have been adopted by various institutions.

Internships

Most definitions on the concept Internships have been in agreement making it easy to explain the term. According to Furco (1996) internships are defined as programmes engaging students in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing them with hands-on experience that enhances their learning or understanding of issues relevant to a particular area of study. On the other hand, McMahon and Quinn (1995) note that internships are supervised work experiences whereby students leave their institutions and get engaged in work related programmes, during which period they are closely supervised by experienced job incumbents.

Internships are therefore any carefully monitored piece of work or service experience in which an individual has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what she or he is learning throughout the experience or duration of attachment.

Theoretical framework

From a variety of research available, internship programmes, have tended to benefit the student, the student's institution and the employer. However, for the student, it is the learning that is of utmost benefit. The individual can apply knowledge learned in the classroom to the workplace. The individual gains knowledge of the qualifications and duties of a position and can explore their interest in a field. The individual gains an understanding of the skills and knowledge required in the workplace. Personal development - The individual gains decision making skills, critical thinking skills, increased confidence and self-esteem.

Theory is abounding as to what forms internships take. Internships vary in duration; they can last from a month (or less) to two years (or more) and may be part-time or full-time. Internships can take place in any work or service setting and be paid or unpaid. They may be part of an educational programme and carefully monitored and evaluated for academic credit, as is the case with internships at the Zimbabwe Open University. Or, they can be part of a learning plan that the intern develops for personal benefits. It is for these reasons that a number of models of internships have been brought to being.

Types of Internship Programmes

According to the Employers' Internship Toolkit (2005), internships are commonly used term in experiential education. Internships takes take place during different times of the year: summer, winter or spring. These may be part-time or full time internships over different durations. Typical internships are entry-level, educational jobs that can be paid or unpaid and usually give you college credit for your work (but not always). Usually, these internships last for one semester, although sometimes you can find internships that last for two semesters. Figure1 below shows the general types of internship programmes.

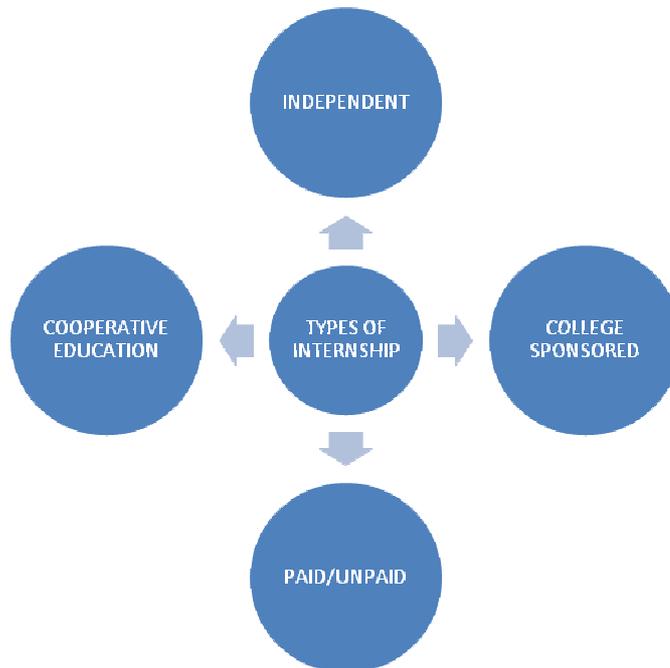


Figure 1.1: Types of internship programmes
 Hereunder, the different types of internships are discussed.

Cooperative Internships

Some colleges and universities use the term Cooperative Education for a certain type of workplace position that is experiential, that is, experience-based education. In this way co-ops are fundamentally similar to internships; students learn while applying knowledge and skills from the academic setting to a work setting. Connotations of these two terms (internships and co-ops) are often unique to the persons or organizations using them. What an organization may call 'internship' may be referred to by a college or university as a 'co-op'. The different uses of these terms sometimes cause confusion between the university, the employer and the student. Generally speaking, co-ops or cooperative education programmes involve paid positions. These **cooperative education experiences** are internship programmes that are usually required and are available only to students in certain majors. Usually, they are full-time, and you're much more likely to be offered a full-time job. If your college requires an internship, they usually have a cooperative education programme. These positions are easier to get than typical internships and externships. They sometimes entail two six-month assignments, with an academic semester or year in between rotations, but they are not always structured on this timetable. Co-op programmes are often, though not always, run at engineering schools.

Paid and Unpaid Internships

Internships are sometimes paid and sometimes unpaid. Ultimately, this is a decision of the employer. Some schools may have a policy on paying interns from their institution, but most will facilitate both types of internships for employers. The "market" will typically drive the issue of paid and unpaid interns. For example, in the fields of accounting and engineering where students provide very tangible benefits to employers and competition for interns is keen, most internships positions are paid. On the other hand, internships in human services and advertising are most often unpaid. The same goes for interns who are attached to government departments.

However, when students are under unpaid internships, the following factors need to hold true for a legitimate internship where a company is not paying the student:

- The work of the intern is an integral part of the student's course of study.
- The student will receive credit for the work, or the work is a requirement of graduation.
- The student must prepare a report of his/her experience and submit it to a faculty supervisor.
- The employer receives a letter or some other form of documentation from the school indicating that it approves of the internship and it's educationally relevant.
- Learning objectives are clearly defined.

Independent and College Sponsored Internships

It is possible for students to engage in internships experiences either through the school, college or university that they attend or independent of them. Schools can have both loose and close relationships with various employers. Most will advertise internship opportunities to students. How closely they monitor internship programmes, varies. Most colleges and universities will allow students to earn academic credits for participating in internships. It is also entirely possible for students and employers to arrange internships independent of schools. This approach is better suited for situations where internships are paid and learning objectives are secondary to performing a job.

Previous research studies

An attempt is made in this section of the paper to present previous findings on the benefits and challenges of internships so that comparisons can be made with the same programmes instituted at the Zimbabwe Open University.

Benefits of internships to students

Furco (1996) defines Internship have been viewed by different researchers as offering a diversity of benefits to the student intern. They engage the intern in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing them with hands-on experience that enhances their learning or understanding of issues relevant to a particular area of study. They assist the internee to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality (Furco, 1996; Lam and Ching, 2007). McMahon and Quinn (1995) note that internship is supervised work experiences where students are closely supervised. Research highlighting the importance of relevant practical experience for students has been carried out (Mounce *et al*, 2004) but the effects of these internships on the success of the intern to transfer the field practice into the actual workplace engagement needs follow up (Beard and Morton, 1999). The importance of internships have also been established in recruiting decisions by employers (Pasewark *et al*, 2001) and research studies in accounting internships have shown improved subsequent academic performance (English and Koeppen, 1993).

The internship programme contributes significantly and positively towards enhancing the knowledge base and motivational level of students (Beard, 1998).

The best outside classroom learning activities are through an internship attachment (Burnett, 2003). Several studies have reported the benefits of internship programmes in conventional colleges and universities on the rationale in offering attachments as part of the academic programme, to the conventional student who at most is graduating out of high school he/she benefits through gaining experience and exposure. Further benefits include improvements in career-related direction, gaining practical experience (Lubbers, 2001), improved marketability of graduates (Swift and Kent, 1999; Hymon-Parker, 1998), interpersonal skills (Beard and Morton, 1999) and understanding of the theories of classroom learning (Cook *et al*, 2004; Hymon-Parker, 1998). However, unlike the conventional student intern, the ODL intern is at times already an experienced employee and has already made up his/her mind on a career choice. To further cement this view, <http://polisci.osu.edu/ugrads/internship.pdf> and Scott (1992) state that internship is the best way for students to explore the suitability of a particular job. It follows therefore that the benefits accruing to conventional students may not apply to the ODL student.

In a study by Nevett (1985), students argued that attachments bridged the gap between the theory of the classroom and the world of practice. Internship programmes are perceived as a valuable way to acquire broad competencies where the practical knowledge obtained supports and complements the theoretical studies learned in the classrooms (Mihail, 2006). According to Knechel and Snowball (1987), internship attachments were found to enhance students' performance in their courses. But with some of the internship programmes coming at the end of the final semester (for example in the Master of Science degree in counselling at the ZOU), internships of such nature would not contribute much to their academic attainment.

However, other interesting benefits general to both conventional and ODL interns are provided by various researchers. The internships have been seen to be beneficial in socialising the student through training and teamwork assignments at the workplace (Lubbers, 2008). Mihail (2006) noted that interns have successfully developed their personal skills, particularly relating to information technology, time management, communication skills, teamwork, specialist knowledge and ability to prioritize tasks. According to Cannon and Arnold (1998), internship may pave the way for permanent employment upon graduation as well as providing an in-depth understanding of actual business practice. Students hope to receive monetary rewards and be treated as regular employees (<http://polisci.osu.edu/ugrads/internship.pdf>, Hall *et al.*, 1995). Knechel and Snowball (1987) found that the internship has successfully enhanced the interns' understanding of content in their areas of study.

Challenges faced in internships

Most students in previous studies felt confused on who should arrange the internships (Gault *et al.*, 2000). Asked who should be responsible for arranging their internship placement, the majority of interns feel faculty should work for their placement (Tackett *et al.*, 2001; Maskooki *et al.*, 1998).

Previous research studies also show that internship periods were too short and the majority of interns think that the most appropriate internship period should be six months (Oliver, 2010; Mihail, 2006). Mihail (2006) also found in his study that most of the interns preferred to have internship periods ranging from six to nine months instead of three months. This indicated that interns are willing to have a longer internship period and believe that they can learn more within a six month period. Oliver (2010) remarks that the short amount of time an internship lasts really never lets the student become a fully functional employee because there is not so much to take in for them.

According to some, internships bring about discord among workers in a variety of ways. Perlin (2011) says this is sometimes so since internships displace paid workers and allow companies to dodge liabilities through the non payment of intern labour. Interns accept the post at no price to survive the duration of the internship. According to Rothman (2007) and Cannon and Arnold (1998) at times complaints have been raised against employers for treating the interns as cheap labour.

Supervision of interns has been cited as being problematic. Qualified staff to supervise the interns has been in short supply (Tackett *et al.*, 2001; Gault *et al.*, 2000). Universities should be responsible to ensure that internships are offering meaningful learning experiences for their students. According to Tackett *et al.* (2001), students feel that there should be careful examination of feedback from employers and interns followed by the modification of the internship programme accordingly.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted the mixed methods approach. Both quantitative and qualitative paradigms were employed in the process of data gathering and analysis. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from the respondents.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population for the present study consisted of a total of 150 students who been identified to have just gone through the internship programme during the January to June 2011 semester, 75 were made it into the sample. These were sampled through the stratified random sampling technique in order to accord each of the faculties proportional representation. The respondents were drawn from the Zimbabwe Open University's four faculties of Arts and education, Applied Social Sciences, Science and Technology and Commerce and Law. After placing the students into strata, according to faculties, respondents were drawn through simple random sampling. Owing to the manageable student numbers, the lottery method was adopted to pick upon the respondents.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

A total of identified 150 Zimbabwe Open University students who were involved in internships during the January to June 2011 semester only 75 were part of the sample. These were drawn form the faculty of Arts and Education, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science and Technology. From the total sample, all the 75 questionnaires were returned owing to the follow ups to retrieve all the instruments distributed to the respondents. Departments that took part in the present study were the Education (Diploma in Education-Primary and Bachelor of Education-Secondary), Health Science, Physical Education, Counselling and Psychology.

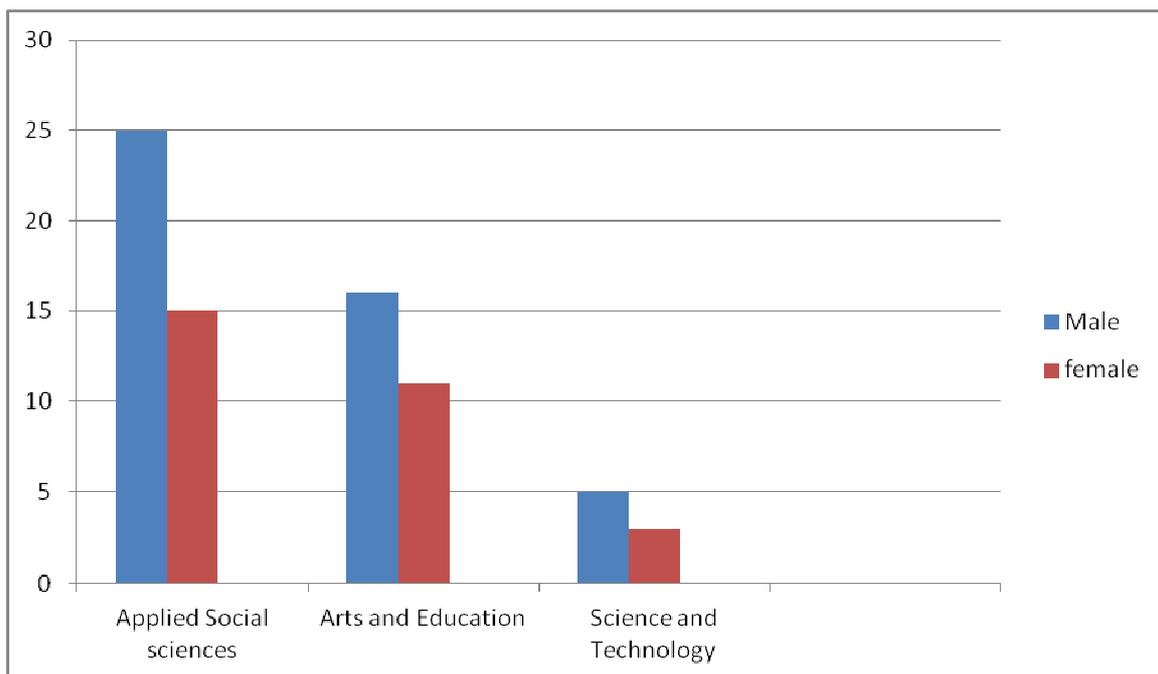


Fig 1: Distribution of interns by faculty by sex

Results from Fig 1 show that the majority of the interns were male who accounted for 49(61%) of the population. Only 29(39%) of the interns were female with the majority of the women interns coming from the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences. The majority of the interns was from the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and did their internships in health centres and organisations dealing with humanitarian aid and HIV/AIDS mitigation.

Table 1: Respondents' views on the benefits of the internship by faculty by sex

Benefits accruing to the students from undertaking internships	FACULTY					
	Applied Social Sciences		Arts and Education		Science and Technology	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
1. Internships provide interns with hands-on practical experience and exposure.	25	33	27	36	5	7
2. They assist the intern to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality	20	27	27	36	7	9
3. Internships contribute significantly and positively towards enhancing the knowledge base	28	37	27	36	4	5
4. Interns benefit through career-related direction	10	13	25	33	3	4
5. They boost motivational levels of students	21	28	23	31	3	4
6. Internships help to improve the marketability of graduates	11	15	3	4	1	1
7. Internships help the understanding of the theories learnt in classroom settings	25	33	27	36	7	9
8. Internships enhance student's learning and understanding of issues relevant to a particular area of study	29	39	25	33	8	11
9. The internee gains interpersonal skills in the real work situation	18	24	24	32	3	4
10. Internships are of no benefit at all to an ODL student	8	11	0	0	0	0

Responses from across faculties are in general agreement that internships provide interns with hands-on practical experience and exposure. The majority, 57(76%) felt the internships were of benefit through the experience and exposure gained by the students. This finding is in agreement with those by Gault *et al.* (2000), Mounce *et al* (2004) and Beard and Morton (1999) where interns responded that they experienced greater exposure to a variety of experiences on the job.

Another majority of 54(72%) also felt that internships assisted the interns to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality. These findings concur with those by Nevett (1985) in which students argued that attachments bridged the gap between the theory of the classroom and the world of practice. Furco (1996) and Lam and Ching (2007) concur with these findings when they remark that internships assist the internee to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality Such exposure would likely make the students require little or no induction upon taking up full time jobs.

All the students from the Faculty of Arts and Education subscribed to this perception. Interns remarked in interviews that they were likely to benefit from the internship programme if thorough arrangements were being made by the university and the various departments. When it came to the view that internships contribute significantly and positively towards enhancing the knowledge base, 59(78%) agreed to the assertion and most of these respondents were from the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Arts and Education. This finding replicates those by English and Koeppen (1993) and Knechel and Snowball (1987), which suggest that an internship programme is able to improve the academic performance of interns. The student teachers learn

while on the job for a long time and most likely they are exposed to vast tracts of knowledge by the experienced teachers they work and interact with on a daily basis.

Of the 75(100%) respondents, 38(50%) felt that interns benefited through career-related direction. Of these, 25(33%) were from the Arts and Education faculty, who by virtue of the nature of their diploma programme, have to stay on teaching practice for the duration of the course, that is, three years. They thus benefited from their lengthy stay on teaching practice through interaction with the qualified and experienced teachers who assisted them on mapping their career aspirations. This benefit was also established in studies by Beard and Morton (1999) and Gault *et al.* (2000). However, Cook *et al.* (2004) and Lam and Ching (2007) found that interns do not perceive the internship experience as an important element regarding career choice for students. This is probably due to the fact that most would have already made their career choice decisions and internships would be the first step into the chosen career.

That internships boost motivational levels of interns was a perception subscribed to by another majority of 47(63%) of the student interns. The Faculty of Arts and Education had the majority of 23(31%) while only 3(4%) came from the Faculty of Science and Technology.

On the efficacy of internships to help improve the marketability of graduates, only 15(20%) agreed to this. Only 3(4%) respondents from the Arts and Education faculty agreed. This is in contrast with the findings elsewhere (Swift and Kent, 1999; Hyman-Parker, 1998) and according to Cannon and Arnold (1998), internship may pave the way for permanent employment upon graduation as well as providing an in-depth understanding of actual business practice. The result is not surprising given the fact that in Zimbabwe, the student teachers are already guaranteed a teaching vacancy with the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture soon after graduation. Besides, most of the students at the Zimbabwe Open University are already in employment and their furthering of qualifications is due to their desire to position themselves comfortably at their place of work.

According to 59(78%) respondents, internships helped them to understand theories learnt in classroom settings while 62(83%) indicated that internships enhanced their learning and understanding of issues relevant to their particular areas of study. Mihail (2006) and Knechel and Snowball (1987) concur.

Since internships are programmes meant to marry theory and practice, it is the period during which the interns actually put into practice whatever will have been exposed to them in classroom. They explore and experiment on the learnt material.

The majority of the interns were of the opinion that they gained interpersonal skills in the real work situation. This is probably so in situations whereby they interact and communicate on issues that may need group approaches (Lubbers, 2008; Mihail (2006). Bearing in mind that conflicts are always in existence in organisations, the interns are therefore exposed to situations which assist them to develop the interpersonal skills for use in their present and future organisations.

A minority of 8(11%) of the respondents remarked that internships were of no benefit at all to an ODL student. All these were from the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences. They probably had problems with whole process of the internship programmes. This finding is similar with the finding in Lam and Ching's (2007) study, which indicated that student's expectations before and after the internship were unmet. Students do not benefit from the internship attachment in obtaining the relevant knowledge and practical experience to assist them to better adapt to their future working environment. This might indicate that students are not being treated as regular employees and, thus, are not being given appropriate or specific tasks to expose them to a proper job setting and experience. As highlighted by Lam and Ching, the majority may be attached to small firms which may not expose them to the more meaningful job experiences.

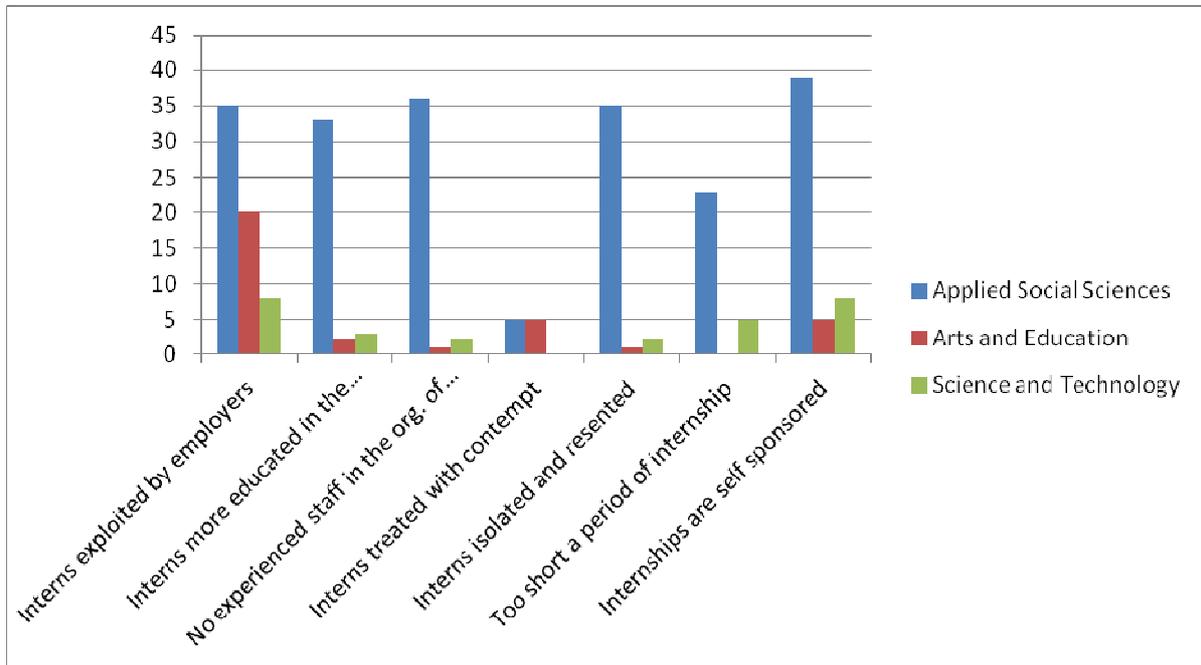


Fig 2: Respondents' views on the challenges faced with the internship programme by faculty by sex.

A number of challenges hampering the smooth flow of internships at the Zimbabwe Open University were identified by the interns. An overwhelming majority of 63(85%) interns indicated that they were treated like full time staff. Instead of learning they were providing cheap labour in the organisations they were attached to. Another overwhelming majority felt interns were the most educated persons in the organisation of attachment. The majority of institutions used for the attachment lack qualified mentors. This therefore means there was little or no learning for them as they were more knowledgeable than the regular employees they were to learn from. No wonder one student remarked that there was poor performance in internships in the Bachelor of Science in Physical Education and Sport. However, this is an area needing further investigation. The response from the Applied Social Science Masters' degree in Counselling could be justified in the sense that most organisations do not have among their staff holders of such a higher degree. Under such circumstances, therefore, students were the most educated as they undertook the internship in their final semester.

A majority of 36(48%) respondents from the Applied Social Sciences acknowledged that there were no experienced staff in most organisations where they were attached (Tackett et al., 2001; Gault et al., 2000). A minority from across faculties, that is 5(7%) from social sciences and the same number from Arts and Education remarked that interns were at times treated with contempt by organisational staff.

Thirty-five (47%) of the respondents indicated that interns were at times resented and isolated by full time staff because of being perceived as being more knowledgeable. Only 1(1%) and 2(3%) from Arts and education and Science and technology respectively agreed to the view. However, findings elsewhere by Rothman (2007) and Cannon and Arnold (1998) show that interns were welcome as these were wanted as cheap labour by some unscrupulous employers.

On the view that the internship duration was too short a period of time for effective internship, some 23(31%) from the Applied Social Sciences agreed while respondents from Arts and Education, who are on teaching practice for the duration of their programme felt the period was adequate. Findings by Oliver (2010) and Mihail (2006), show that interns complained about short periods of internships. Only 5(7%) from Science and Technology felt the duration was short. Oliver (2010) remarks that the short amount of time an internship lasts really never lets the student become a fully functional employee because there is not so much to take in for them.

Due to the fact that internships are self-sponsored 39(57%) of the students felt this was to the disadvantage of the student intern while a minority from the two other faculties felt the same. Students hope to receive monetary rewards and be treated as regular employees (<http://polisci.osu.edu/ugrads/internship.pdf>, Hall *et al.*, 1995).

Interviews also brought to surface the problem of getting places for teaching practice for students from the Faculty of Arts and Education. Twenty-seven (36%) encountered problems in getting temporary teaching posts. One student indicated that he had spent most the semester looking for a teaching post to enable him to do his teaching practice.

General remarks also came through from students doing their Bachelor of Science degree in Physical education and Sport. The majority indicated in interviews that job changes seriously affected their internship programmes. At initial enrolment as a student, one was employed as a temporary teacher and after the expiration of his contract which was not renewed; he joined a farm as a general hand. Going back to the teaching field for internship became a problem. On one hand the current employer would not release the employees for more than a week and on the other, the schools could not accommodate the prospective internee.

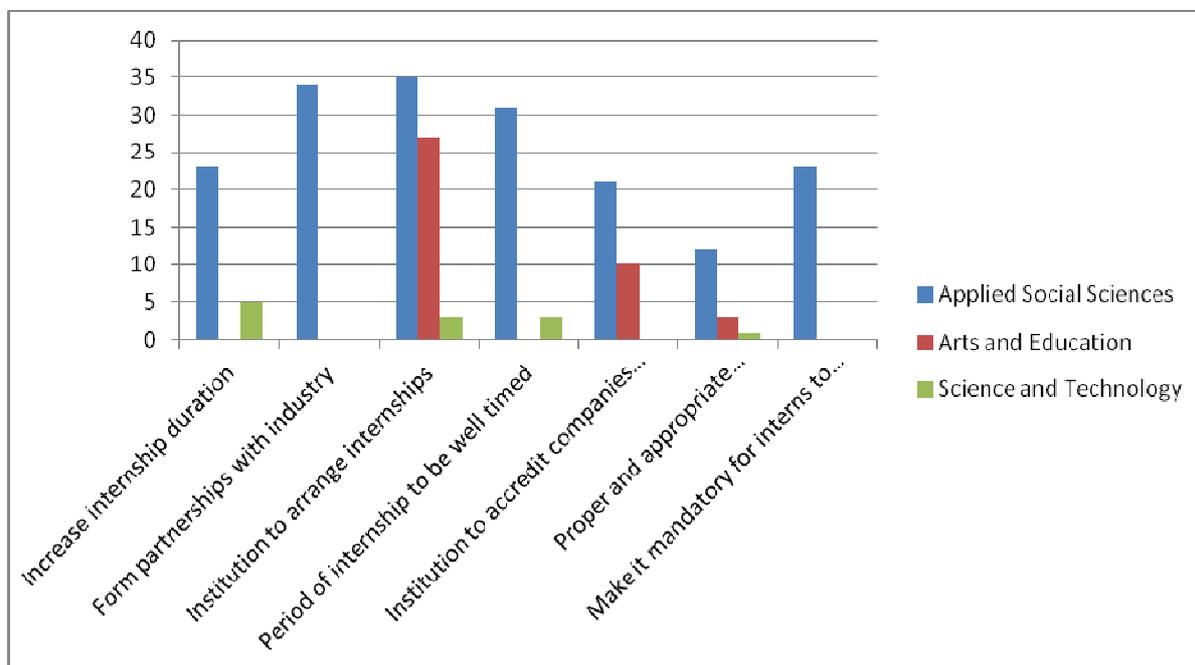


Fig 3: Interns' views on the remedies to the challenges by faculty by sex

The interns were asked to provide remedies on the best way to improve the internship programme at the Zimbabwe Open University. Some 23(31%) from Applied Social Sciences suggested increasing the duration of internship. Mihail (2006) also found in his study that most of the interns preferred to have internship periods ranging from six to nine months instead of three months. However, only 5(7%) from Science and Technology agreed while all respondents from Arts and Education thought it was not an issue at all.

Thirty-four (45%) from the Applied Social Sciences suggested that there be the formation of partnerships between the university and industry to have interns paid during internship. This could have been a result of the interns feeling that they were being exploited for nothing in return.

Because the interns felt that getting places for their attachment, 35 (47%) from Applied Social Sciences and 27 (36%) from Arts and Education advocated for the institution to arrange internships with organisations rather than the individual intern to go it alone.

Thirty-one (41%) respondents from the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences remarked that periods of internships should be well timed. The same sentiments were also shared by a minority of 3(4%) from the Faculty of Science and Technology.

Internships should be well monitored by both employers and the institution according to 33(44%) of the respondents from the Applied Social sciences while only 5(7%) from the Arts and Education thought the same. However, the students on teaching practice from the education department are supervised at least once per semester. This could appear to be inadequate to some of the students. The monitoring of student interns was not a problem in the Faculty of Science and Technology.

In order to gain maximum benefit from internships, 21(28%) respondents from Applied Social Sciences suggested that the institution should accredit and recommend suitable companies for internships. Ten (13%) from Arts and Education concurred, with none from Science and Technology agreeing to the suggestion.

According to 12(16%) respondents from the Faculty of Applied Sciences, proper and appropriate documentation should be prepared to check on whole internship process. Only 3(4%) from the Arts and Education thought likewise. Interview results show that those from the Applied Social Sciences felt documentation submitted to the department upon completion of the internship programme were prone to being tampered with by the students. One interview stated that in order to make the documentation more authentic there was need for follow up by Programme Coordinators through calling the interns' supervisor of further verification. A sizeable number of interviews from across faculties also lamented lack of supervision from the parent institution.

Twenty-three interns all from the Applied Social Sciences advocated for the government intervention to ensure that some piece of legislation was put in place to make it mandatory for interns to be paid. Those from the Education department found no problem on the issue of paying interns because once recruited for temporary teaching, the students were assured of getting a monthly salary, something not being done to interns from other faculties.

Interns were asked in interviews the processing of the internship programme. A majority of 46 (60%) felt the university was leaving the burden to the students to look for their own organisations for internships. Asked who should be responsible for arranging their internship placement, the majority of interns feel faculty should work for their placement (Tackett *et al*, 2001; Maskooki *et al*, 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from the above findings it is, therefore, concluded that:

1. Responses from across faculties are in general agreement that internships are beneficial in as far as they provide interns with hands-on practical experience and exposure.
2. The internship programme was beneficial in that it helped boost motivational levels of interns and internships helped them to understand theories learnt in classroom and enhanced their learning and understanding of issues relevant to their particular areas of study.
3. Due to the fact that in some organisations, interns were the most qualified personnel, they were treated like full time staff and instead of learning they were providing cheap labour in the organisations they were attached to.
4. Students generally resent internships due to the fact that internships are self-sponsored and they feel this is a disadvantage to them.
5. Students on internship find problems in getting organisations where they can undertake their internship and this has been exacerbated by the fact that internships at ZOU are arranged by the individual student.
6. Interns felt that the duration of the internship programme was short. Only a semester was set aside for the internship during which student interns also had some coursework on other courses on offer.
7. Not many organisations are endowed with qualified staff that can effectively and efficiently contribute to meaningful and successful student internship and that ZOU staff did not make site visits to the places of internship, for some programmes especially in the Social Sciences, supervision could not be said to be effective.
8. Interns are at the mercy of unscrupulous employers who regard them as staff to be assigned full responsibilities and duties normally prescribed to full time job incumbents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations can be drawn from the findings of the study. It is recommended that:

1. The university should be actively involved in assisting students in getting organisations where they can enroll for their internship.
2. The internship duration should be increased.
3. Credible organisations should be approached by the university to offer places for the interns and there should be an audit of these organisations to establish the levels of personnel qualifications.
4. Organisations accepting the interns should offer to pay the interns a small token and funds permit these should be paid for the duration of their stay.
5. Legislation should be enacted to protect interns against exploitation by unscrupulous employers.
6. Supervision of interns should improve with more visits to the sites of internship and those programmes where Programmes Coordinators do not visit interns should re-visit their regulations and make site visits to their interns.



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