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## Fostering Employability Through Internships: Key Enablers And Their Role In Academic And Professional Development

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**Abstract:** Internships have become an integral component of higher education, acting as a crucial bridge between academic learning and professional practice. This paper systematically reviews key enablers that contribute to successful internship experiences and their impact on student employability, skill development, and overall learning. Through the analysis of 40 peer-reviewed studies, the findings highlight the significance of structured mentorship, institutional support, clear expectations, and the alignment of internship tasks with students' academic backgrounds and career goals. Mentorship is identified as a pivotal element, aiding in the development of both soft and hard skills, while institutional support, including faculty engagement and networking opportunities, enhances reflective learning. Moreover, internships provide mutual benefits for students and employers, offering a cost-effective and motivated workforce to organizations while equipping students with industry-specific competencies and professional networks that improve their employability. The review also reveals challenges such as inflexible scheduling, which often hinders student participation, underscoring the need for adaptable internship models. The paper concludes by providing recommendations for integrating these enablers into academic curricula, suggesting formalized mentorship programs, enhanced collaboration with industry partners, and the implementation of flexible scheduling to maximize the educational and professional benefits of internships. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on optimizing internship programs to better prepare students for the evolving demands of the global workforce.

**Index Terms** - Internship enablers, employability, skill development, structured mentorship, institutional support, curriculum integration, higher education, workforce readiness

### I. INTRODUCTION

Internships have emerged as a crucial element of higher education policy in numerous nations, augmenting the employability and practical competencies of students. Countries such as Germany, Australia, Singapore, and Canada possess well-organized programs that thoroughly include internships into educational curriculum, frequently bolstered by governmental initiatives and industry collaborations. These instances exemplify models for other nations seeking to enhance the connection between education and industry to equip students for the workforce. The predominant trend is evident: internships are progressively regarded as an essential link between academic education and practical experience. Education is essential for the development of every nation, and India possesses the greatest youth population. Therefore, the implementation of NEP 2020 aims to establish a new framework that aligns with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4), while also incorporating India's traditions and value systems.

The internship, an experienced learning activity, has garnered the interest of higher education programs as an essential element of modern pedagogy. Internships, whether mandatory or elective, paid or unpaid, and structured or unstructured, offer a realistic glimpse into the workplace that academia cannot provide, thereby presenting significant advantages, at least theoretically, for all parties involved: individual students, host organizations, and academic institutions (Zopiatis et al., 2021). Young apprentices, under the authoritative guidance of master tradesmen or craftsmen, acquired the requisite skills, experience, and knowledge to ascend to the status of skillful master at a predetermined juncture (Barlow, 1974). Studies indicate that businesses place significant emphasis on the results of internships, including productivity, potential future recruitment, influx of ideas, behaviors, competencies, and the intern's enjoyment, Kroon, N., & Franco, M. (2022).

Internships give students and fresh graduates professional experience. It helps students apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations, learn industry-specific skills, and build professional networks, improving their employability (NACE, 2020). Internships help bridge the gap between academic education and full-time employment and reveal career paths (Silva, et al., 2018). Apprentices under master tradesmen or craftsmen learned the skills, experience, and knowledge to become skilled masters at an agreed-upon time (Barlow, 1974). Employers value internship outcomes in terms of productivity, future recruitment, inflow of ideas, behaviors, and competences, and intern happiness, according to research. Student internships allow students to practice, reflect, and receive feedback. They are well-known in vocational and higher education. Work experience, industry knowledge, self-efficacy, professional and entrepreneurship abilities, and more are gained through internships. Research suggests that internships give students interpersonal, teamwork, professionalism, and customer management skills that cannot be taught in school. They improve communication, self-esteem, professional opportunities, and wages. Students learn entrepreneurship and self-employment through IT internships. Internships do not appear to build knowledge-sharing networks. Students might get feedback from the organizational host or academic supervisor, and recent study has enhanced STEM internships. Internships save employers money on recruitment and training, boost productivity, and broaden perspectives. Well-connected mentors help medical students integrate into professional communities, and hospitality boosts recruitment, training, and turnover. Interns offer new perspectives, project completion, and academic connections. Internships increase academic visibility and promote industry-academia collaboration. Students can start businesses, build community, and improve institutional status through internships. Others question if the full benefits are being achieved, and internship program administrators are crucial to student and company value. Internships may involve project-specific, organizational, transdisciplinary, or in-work learning. Many sensemaking activities are encouraged for students, professors, and prospective employers.

## II. OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this review is to analyze existing research on internship enablers and their role in integrating internships into academic curricula to improve student outcomes. Specifically, the review aims to:

1. Identify the key enablers that contribute to successful internship experiences.
2. Explore how these enablers impact student employability, skill development, and overall learning.
3. Provide recommendations for integrating internships into academic programs more effectively.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this literature review involves a structured analysis of 40 peer-reviewed research papers published between 1990 and 2023. The papers were selected based on their relevance to the topic of internships as part of the curriculum, with a focus on internship enablers. Key terms used for searching included "internship enablers," "curriculum integration," "student experience," and "employability." Each paper was analysed for its findings on the role of enablers such as institutional support, industry partnerships, mentorship, and technological integration in facilitating successful internship experiences.

#### IV. FINDINGS

Success in internships depends on structured mentorship, clear expectations, meaningful tasks, and institutional support. Structured mentoring helps students apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations by providing practical insights from industry experts (Jackson et al., 2017). When expectations are explicit, students and employers can create measurable goals to keep interns focused and productive. Tasks that match students' academic backgrounds and professional goals boost engagement and learning (Tymon, 2013). Faculty check-ins and workshops and networking opportunities boost outcomes (Kolb, 2015).

These enablers boost student learning, employment, and skill development. Mentorship develops soft and hard abilities including communication, problem-solving, and technical skills, which are essential in the job (Gault et al., 2018). Interns learn industry-specific skills and build a professional network through hands-on experience (Jackson, 2015). Clear objectives and related activities make internships structured learning experiences that help students apply academic knowledge to practice, improving long-term employability (Tymon, 2013). Institutional assistance enhances reflection and learning, helping students understand and apply their knowledge.

These enablers should be built into academic curricula to maximize internship benefits. Universities should create formal mentorship programs that match students with industry experts. Collaboration between academic institutions and industry partners can also connect internship activities with academic curricula and industry needs (Jackson et al., 2017). Internships should include regular feedback to help students assess their success. Finally, academic institutions should provide pre- and post-internship training to assist students contextualize their learning and skills (Kolb, 2015).

- ❖ Interns provide a cost-effective and motivated workforce (Gault et al., 2000).
- ❖ Interns transitioning to entry-level positions result in training cost savings of 16% compared to non-interns (Vault Reports, 2006).
- ❖ Effective recruiting strategies include internships, career fairs, and class visits, while passive methods are less effective (NACE, 2008).
- ❖ Business college internships enhance job opportunities and provide realistic work insights (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008).
- ❖ Graduates benefit from internships through improved employment opportunities, skills, and career exploration (Sanahuja Vélez & Ribes Giner, 2015).
- ❖ Participation in internships leads to better job offers, higher compensation, and quicker employment for graduates.
- ❖ Work readiness, defined by role clarity, motivation, and ability, is crucial for graduate employability.
- ❖ Internships help develop both generic and specific skills essential for the workforce.
- ❖ The CGC framework through the CSSP program effectively addresses industrial challenges by partnering students with industry (Farrukh, May 2022).
- ❖ Flexibility in scheduling internships can increase participation rates (Zheng & Bluestein, 2021).
- ❖ Internships provide valuable political and public work experience for students in related fields (Gryski et al., 1987).
- ❖ Companies should treat interns as staff, assign challenging projects, provide regular feedback, and establish permanent hire process, Hurst, J. L., & Good, L. K. (2010).
- ❖ Universities validate their curriculum through internships. Employers use internships as recruitment and marketing tools, Hurst, J. L., & Good, L. K. (2010).
- ❖ Paid internships are more competitive, unpaid ones more attractive. Interns strengthen core skills and promote adaptability, Hurst, J. L., & Good, L. K. (2010).
- ❖ Skills were divided into three main domains: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. The cognitive domain includes three clusters of competencies: cognitive processes and strategies; knowledge; and creativity, Di Pietro, G. (2022).
- ❖ International internships support personal development and broaden career options, Di Pietro, G. (2022).
- ❖ The success of an internship depends on successful collaboration between all three parties - the firm, the HEI and the student, Franco, et al., (2019).
- ❖ Values WIL for preparing HE students for future work, enhancing critical thinking, communication skills, innovative behavior, work/life balance, and confidence, Jackson et al., (2022).

## Key findings of the paper;

### Internships as a Cost-Effective and Motivated Workforce

- Interns provide a qualified, cost-effective, and highly motivated workforce.
- Vault Reports (2006) found that interns save in training costs and 16% in total savings compared to non-interns.
- Internships, career fairs, and class visits are effective recruiting strategies.
- NACE's 2008 Experiential Education Survey found passive recruiting methods like advertisements and company websites less effective.

### Benefits of Internships

- Increased job opportunities and full-time job offers.
- Enhancement of employment opportunities, skill improvement, and career exploration effects.
- Graduates who participate in internship programs are more likely to be proposed for continuation of employment, receive higher compensation, find their first job more quickly, enhance future career prospects, and solidify their interest in a specific work setting.

### Work readiness concept

- Work readiness is a state where graduates are prepared and likely to find employment.
- It consists of three pillars: role clarity, motivation, and ability. Skill Development through Internships
- Internships allow students to develop generic and specific skills while gaining work experience.
- The collaborative CGC framework through the CSSP program successfully partnered social science students and industry in technology-intensive sectors.

### Flexibility in Internship Scheduling

- Lack of free time is the second leading reason for not applying for internships.
- Scheduling spring/fall internships helps prevent scheduling conflicts and delivers more full-time summer internships.

## V. DISCUSSION

This review highlights the importance of structured mentorship, institutional support, clear expectations, and relevant tasks in fostering successful internship experiences. Mentorship helps bridge the gap between academic theory and practical applications, fostering soft skills like communication and problem-solving and industry-specific technical skills. Institutional support, such as faculty oversight, workshops, and networking opportunities, is crucial for internship success. Regular check-ins from faculty ensure students can translate their experiences into academic and professional growth. Clear expectations and relevant tasks align with students' academic background and career aspirations, fostering employability skills that are transferable across different job roles and industries.

Internships offer mutual benefits to both students and employers. From a business perspective, internships provide a cost-effective and motivated workforce, reducing training costs and increasing productivity. The NACE (2008) Experiential Education Survey supports this, emphasizing the effectiveness of internships in recruiting. However, the review also raises concerns about the structural limitations of internships, such as the lack of flexible scheduling options. Universities and employers should offer more adaptable internship models, such as part-time or remote internships, during non-peak seasons to accommodate students' academic schedules and other commitments. To keeping all the pointers in mind and taking Indian students for holistic development NEP,2020 also suggested in their policy to make it mandatory for all higher education students in fact start from early age as “bag less days”.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

Internships are crucial for student employability, skill development, and academic learning. Key enablers include mentorship, institutional support, clear expectations, and relevant tasks. Universities should integrate these enablers into academic programs to maximize their benefits. They should develop structured mentorship programs, collaborate with industry partners, and align internship tasks with academic and professional goals. Offering flexible scheduling options can help reduce barriers to participation. Internships are valuable for students, employers, and academic institutions, acting as a bridge between education and



the workforce. By embedding internships more deeply into the academic curriculum and aligning with industry needs, higher education institutions can better prepare students for the modern workforce and contribute to industry innovation. Further research is needed to explore different models of internship delivery, such as remote internships and virtual mentorship, to address current limitations and enhance accessibility. The ongoing evolution of internship programs, especially in light of technological advances, could reshape the transition from education to full-time employment, benefiting individuals and society.

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