



Importance of Internship Programs as a Strategy to Impart Experiential Learning on Graduate

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Abstract

Orientation: Internship programs is a training programs designed to equip students and graduates with work experience and skills. Internship programs has been implemented in various fields and has proved to be effective also in public administration. **Research purpose:** The study proposes using internship programs as a strategy to provide experiential learning to graduates in the Limpopo Department of Education. **Motivation for the study:** There is a need to understand the role internship programs plays in graduate's careers, as it will inform the policy makers in the Department to influence a planning strategy for effective internship programs. **Research approach/design and method:** The study used a Mixed Method Approach, which included both qualitative and quantitative methods. A convergent parallel design was used, allowing data to be collected using both methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The study's participants include officials and interns from the Limpopo Department of Education's head office in Polokwane. The sample consists of 190 respondents. Data were gathered through a structured closed-ended questionnaire and open-ended interview questions. Data were analysed thematically and descriptive statistics. **Main findings:** Results indicate that 47% of respondents believe internship programs are crucial for the Department in facilitating experiential learning for graduates. The Study also found that interns can gain skills and experience that will help them land a job at the end of internship programs. **Practical implications/managerial implications:** The study concludes that effective internships require strategic department planning, as they significantly shape future skilled and competent employees. **Contribution/add value:** The study adds value to enhance the value of Public Administration in policy making by generating and disseminating new knowledge and ideas about internship programs.

Keywords: *Internship; Internship Programs; Experiential; Experiential Learning; Education*

Introduction

The apartheid system controlled everything that happened in South Africa, including education skill development, where people lived, allocation of jobs, and levels of income (Pelani, 2014). According to The African Capacity Building Foundation (2017), the apartheid era also contributed to inequities in access to government programs, resulting in most of the black populace not accessing government support to address youth unemployment. Maake-Malatjie (2022) states that historically, the apartheid government and colonialism disadvantaged black South Africans, preventing them from obtaining a meaningful education and acquiring the skills required to thrive in a changing economy. The National Skills Development Plan, 2030 (2019) concurs that in South Africa, most of the challenges pertaining to education and skills deficit were substantially inherited from the apartheid system. The Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), 2012 makes it a priority to address scarce and critical skills through programs that are designed to address such skills needs, and which includes work-based learning.

Januszewsku and Grzeszczak (2021) define internship as a program that creates a real work environment wherein students can develop the knowledge and skills acquired with hands-on experience. Shury et al, (2017) state that graduate internships were relatively rare and appear to have been taken up by a limited group but were the most successful in terms of offering desirable employment at the end of the experience and were especially likely to lead to professional position. Motene (2017) concurs that internship offer graduates with the chance to build professional relationships by networking within a field and creating an important support structure. Brewer (2013) indicates that internships, and work-study programs are all examples of teaching both technical and core skills in the workplace in a manner that achieves optimal authenticity.

Al-Qubati (2021) attests that recent graduates lack knowledge, practical skills, and experience which are mandatory requirements demanded by employers for recruitment. Maake-Malatjie (2022) argues that, while the government and other private stakeholders have tried to establish ways for internships to be provided to train graduates and prepare them for work, this has not been enough to overcome mismatched skills, inequality, a high unemployment rate, and a lack of skills in some professions. Skills mismatch and lack of employment opportunities for young people around the world constitute serious challenges (National Planning Commission, 2017). The National Planning Commission (2017) further claims that skills mismatch is the lack of adequate general skills in literacy and numeracy, technical skills, or soft skills or insufficient entrepreneurial skills. According to DHET (2024), lack of skills can be the results of rapid technological advancement, and changes in the labour market as well as lack of investment in training and education in South Africa.

Mgaiwa (2021) notes that due to the competition created by the mismatch between available jobs and the number of graduates entering the job market, students face increasing pressure to improve their academic credentials to add more value to their skills and be more employable and competitive. Tan and Umemoto (2021) argue that for years, internship has been used globally as a platform for training and educating future graduates in various disciplines. Maaravi, et al, (2021) note that currently most internships are based on the traditional approach of professional individuals or organisations teaching inexperienced and often young people by involving them in actual work. The Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa (2020) reports that data for graduates without internship in 2019 were collected, of these graduates, some had graduated in 2017 and a year later were still without internship or employment. Although internships are offered the National School of Government (NSG) acknowledges that they must be ramped up in all sectors because the current system lasts one to two years before being released. There should be a way to harness their skills and create a link aimed at employing them when vacancies become available. This will play a crucial role in ensuring that graduates secure internship or employment.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Experimental Learning Theory (ELT) as developed by Kolb (1984), Kong (2021) state that the experiential learning theory is a method of learning that involves giving learners more authority and responsibility, as well as directly involving them in their learning process within the learning environment. The reason is to have an adequate understanding of the relationship between the theory and practice for graduates. This theory is relevant as it opens a room for new ideas and knowledge and conclusions on the importance of internship programs as a form of experiential learning on graduates in the Limpopo Department of Education. Makhadi and Diederichs (2021) cite Experiential Learning Theory as a process in which knowledge is produced by transforming experience. According to Higley and Hayes (2020), Experiential Learning Theory is a pedagogical practice that places students in direct contact with the material being studied. The experiential learning theory emphasises a four-stage learning cycle that includes concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalisation and testing implications of new concepts in new situations. Campbell et al, (2021) assert that experiential learning programs not only give students the opportunity to develop the aforementioned soft skills through actual experience applying them in the workplace, but also enable students to gain hands-on experience in their chosen field and teach students to articulate the connection between classroom learning and workplace competencies.

Eisenstein et al, (2021) assert that experiential learning class activities are guided by principles in which graduates reflect and share their personal experiences and tasks at their placement departments through small group activities, discussions, and presentations. Cool et al, (2020) affirm that experiential learning provides opportunities, wherein students develop skills, understanding, and values in practical, real-world contexts and can take one or more of many different forms. Hyden and Osborn (2020) assert that Experiential Learning Theory provides an instructional foundation from which awareness of the various components of career development can be enhanced. Leary and Sherlock (2020) provide that experiential learning is correlated with an increased likelihood of attending graduate school, graduation rates, employment outcomes, and acquisition of skills that are relevant to career success, including communication skills, self-confidence, appreciation for community, and professional growth.

Contextualisation of Internship Program

According to the Department of Public Service and Administration (R1.9 Dear author, spell out in full please) (2006), an internship program in the public sector is a planned, organised, and managed program that offers graduates work experience for a set amount of time, usually between three and twelve months. Stewart et al, (2021) provide that in a highly competitive job market of today, internships may be taken to fulfil course requirements for education or training programs, or they may be made available to job seekers who are unemployed by employment service providers as a part of active labour-market programs. (R2.5 Grammar: difficult to follow the line of argument.) Due to high unemployment rate, internship programs are crucial in curbing lack of job opportunities to graduates. Shaketange et al, (2017) acknowledge that internship is a practice-based learning that bridges a gap between universities and the workplace. Recent graduates requires at least a year experience to acquire job in many organisation, therefore, internship program provide them with practical learning experience. (R2.6 Citations in this section are not critically analysed and integrated into cohesive arguments.) Blanchard et al, (2012) indicate that internships involve work in a professional setting under the supervision and monitoring of professional practising. In working closely with appointed mentors intern are able to learn how the professional world operates, helping them broaden their horizon. However, Mabiza et al, (2017) postulate that graduate internship creates an opportunity to gain work experience in a professional environment to enhance academic and professional knowledge.

The International Labour Organisation (2021) explains that in some nations, these agreements are typically or primarily understood to be forms of work experience completed after completing higher or technical education, as opposed to placements that may form part of educational programs. Moeinzadeh et al, (2021) simply point that internships can be considered as activities that facilitate learning in the real environment. In essence, internship programs when implemented effectively plays a role in creating and opening doors of future employability of graduates.

Anjum (2020:1) argues that graduates face many challenges when they enter professional life; they have to adjust themselves according to the professional environment by implementing their conceptual knowledge in the new world of work. For that reason, Yaakob et al, (2018) affirm that internship is expected to improve graduate confidence in workplace and knowledge transfer across the context of organisational participation. Parishai and Khooroshi (2016) believe that an internship is considered an opportunity for students to be familiar with the work environment and not only enhances for future but also gives interns wider choice in their tasks. Graduates are able to overcome the new challenges that comes with being in a professional work industry, through team work, and improve their communication skills.

The growth of student participation in internships, a growing number of organisations now use internships as a core component of their graduate recruitment and selection strategy (National Association of College and Employers (NACE), (2018). Hasti et al, (2019) also share that internship is an opportunity that employers offer to students interested in gaining work experience in particular industries. According to the University of Colorado-Boulder (2015) graduates who have interned with a company demonstrate the need for less job orientation and training, have reduced turnover rates, are more loyal, and progress faster and further than graduates who did not participate. In addition, Minnesota State (2017) states that new graduates who have participated in an internship experience are also more likely to receive a job offer than their peers who did not. It is clear that internship are vital for graduates as a way to explore the work experience.

The findings from a study by Lantu et al, (2022) indicate that student learning experiences suggest that qualities of start-ups such as a creative work environment, egalitarian work culture, and dynamic workflow flexibility can boost professional and moral values. Kiriri (2019) asserts that an internship is a type of experiential education that combines classroom knowledge and theory with real-world application and skill development in a work environment. Schnoes et al, (2018) are of the view that giving the opportunity to students to complete internships, before or after graduation, will allow for the greatest number of students to gain valuable experience. This valuable experience will help them to find jobs in their field of study and career development.

Internship Programs in South Africa

The internships in public service is established for unemployed South African graduates from institutions of higher learning who have completed their degrees or diplomas. Unemployed graduates who have not been exposed to work experience related to the field of their study. The DPSA (2006) state that in South Africa internship programs is a practical program to assist with the continuous development of people for future appointment in the labour market. Some of the internship include, the EPWP internship which to a large extent is being implemented as planned in line with the Memorandum of Understanding (Development Works Changemakers, 2019).

The Department of Labour, which administers the *Skills Development Act Levies, 1999* established the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which pay grants to employers to fund internships. Ijeoma (2013) asserts that SETAs are seen as a means of improving the skills of the South African workplace, and the establishment of employment equity plan by corporate organisations, which will compass the organisations affirmative action plan. Marock et al, (2008) argue that The Sector

Education and Training Authorities have made a huge contribution since their establishment, however, there are also some challenges. Such as, implementation, underdeveloped capacity, effectiveness and efficiency, lack of effective management and functioning of monitoring and evaluation. The Limpopo Department of Education (2021) reports that 52 055 positions were generated and filled by eligible youngsters between the ages of 18 and 35 through the internship program in line with the Basic Education Employment Initiative.

The Importance of Internship Programs

National Planning Commission (2017) posits that an internship program is vital to ensure that young people, who have completed matric, skills development, college and university degree programs are able to access workplace experience to enhance their work readiness and networks. Ramakrishnan et al, (2018) contend the main aim of the internship is to offer a planned switch from a student character in a classroom to an employee character in an employment market. Therefore, an internship builds a strong bridge between the Higher Education Institutions and the employment world. Janin et al, (2019) confirm that the provision of quality education coupled with the internship program at a tertiary level is important to the development and any career. Delcours et al, (2018) contend that students with internship experience find employment quicker when compared to those who did not participate in an internship program. Jeske and Linehan (2020) affirm that internships increase skills development, particularly in relation to their communication, thinking, and ability about problems in the department.

The International Labour Organisation (2021) asserts that apart from providing a solution to youth unemployment, quality internships can benefit jobseekers and workers of all ages who, due to changes in the labour market or job requirements, find themselves in need of retraining or up skilling. Peltola (2018) believes that experientially based curricular innovations provides students with a way to apply classroom concepts to the workplace as the word intern found its way into public relations syllabi across the nation. Ismail (2018) posits that in addition, students learned to apply their knowledge and skills in a real-life situation. When student learning from real-life situations is effectively and authentically assessed by educators, the benefits escalate to the creation of value-adding and character-building of future-fit graduates, ready for the workplace (Govender & Wait, 2017).

Internship programs give young adults who have gained theoretical knowledge from higher education institutions the opportunity to enhance these skills through vocational or practical training in the workplace, thereby increasing their chances of securing employment (Department of Trade and Industry, 2019). The Methodist University (2018) attests that internships offer students the chance to gain useful practical experience, establish contacts in the professional fields they are considering for career paths, and give employers the chance to mentor and assess talent.

Efua et al, (2016) contend that for university graduates looking to gain a competitive edge in the job market, an internship programme is an ideal way to gain the edge over other students as this gives students a preview of an industry and reduces the likelihood of unmet expectations. Thus, internship experiences following graduation serve as a means of transitioning to the labour market. Hempel and Pantelic (2020) attest that internships represent optional or compulsory training programme during studies typically in upper-secondary or tertiary or upon their completion with the aim of gathering documented practical experience and improving employability. Menezes et al, (2021) support by indicating that internships are valuable to help students connect what they have learned in the classroom to the real world.

Most studies confirm that people who have participated in an internship are likely to graduate and secure employment. Greater Knysna Municipality (2019) is of the same idea that the purpose of an internship program allows interns to convert acquired theoretical knowledge into activities related to

professional practice, and to apply newly acquired practical knowledge and skills, under the supervision of mentors.

The Importance of Policy for Internship Programs

Policy plays a vital role for the department and interns as it lays down the duties and responsibilities of interns and supervisors. It also provides a clear picture for the department and interns on the way in which internship programs ought to be implemented. Thornhill et al, (2017) perceive policy as a formal and publicly known decision of governments that come about through predetermined channels of a particular administration. Arney and Krygsman (2022) write that policy states how the policy makers understand and problematise the problem they are attempting to solve. Ashman et al, (2021) posit that the policy focus on internships as a mechanism for improving graduate employability distracts from its potential role as a mechanism for improving the participation of rural and regional students in higher education. According to the National Treasury (2014) on the commencement of the internship programs the Department must make available to the intern, and all interested parties formal written policies and procedures that govern the following:

- Recruitment and the qualifications required;
- Administrative and financial arrangements;
- Intern performance evaluation, feedback, retention and termination decisions;
- Level of work achievement required for interns to be considered competent and to complete the internship program; and
- Due process and grievance procedures for interns.

The Greater Knysna Municipality (2019) states that the importance of policy is to provide a framework to guide the management of internship and experimental training programs in the organisation. Itano-Boase et al, (2021) provide that mandating diversity and inclusion and having formal institutional strategies, policies and plans can provide much-needed transparency and demonstrate a clear commitment and fair access to internships.

Cameron (2020) stresses that department staff need a base level of legal literacy, the degree to which host organisation staff are aware of the legal rights and obligations relating to the internship programs under the organisation policy, in the internship agreement and when designing the internship programs. Quilliam and Bourke (2021) recommend that internship partners may need to pay greater attention to the policy framework surrounding internship opportunities. Ministry of Health in the Republic of Kenya (2020) provides that the policy will guide the establishment of new training and internship sites, creating an opportunity to capture newly qualified graduates from local and international institutions and thus create a pool of competent professionals who can be drawn upon to improve the ratio.

South African Legislative Framework Guiding the Internship Programs

Section 16 (b) of the Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No.97 of 1998) provides that Sector Education and Training Authority may establish learnership to provide practical work experience of a specified nature and duration. The *Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No.97 of 1998)* have a positively influence job sustainability, as training and develop workers' capabilities and empowers them. The primary aim of the *Skills Development Levies Act, 1999 (Act No.9 of 1999)* is to provide an institutional framework for implementing national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce. The internship programs are implemented in line with the objectives of the legislations to address the challenges of skills shortage. The goal of National Skills Development Strategy III is to encourage and actively support the integration of workplace training with theoretical learning, as well as to ease the transition from school, college, or university, or even periods of unemployment, to sustain employment and in-work progression. The research into the impact of training

during NSDS III indicates that, internships have increased in number and those who participate have been generally successful in attaining employment at the end of the internship. The National Skills Development Plan, 2030 aims to ensure that South Africa has adequate, appropriate, and high-quality skills that contribute to economic growth, job creation, and social development by 2030.

Methodology

The study used the Pragmatic paradigm, Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) define a pragmatic paradigm as a philosophical and epistemological framework for interrogating and evaluating ideas and beliefs in terms of their practical functioning. Mixed Research Method (MRM), approach was used to conduct the study. Dawadi et al, (2021) assert that mixed-method research is a principled complementary research method to the traditional quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

Data Collection

Institutional approval from the Limpopo Department of education to recruitment respondents for the study. The study used a structured closed-ended questionnaires to discover the responses that are spontaneous and avoid bias that may result from suggesting responses to respondents. The reason for using open-ended interview was to permit the participants to provide more opinions and ideas, giving more data diversity. The researcher conducted interviews with a total of ten (10) participants and the other respondents were given questionnaires both paper based and email, totaled to 180. Data was collected simultaneously through questionnaires and face to face interview with participants simultaneously, as the study used two separate sample size to collect qualitative and quantitative data. A sample size for qualitative data was 10 participants, while for quantitative data was 180 respondents. The participants were recruited through face to face in the Department, others telephone calls and emails for their availability. The aspect of consent was obtained from the participants.

Data Analysis

Data collected through questionnaires was analysed through International Business Machine (IBM): Statistical and Product Service Solutions (SPSS 25.0) computer software. Data collected through questionnaires was analysed using descriptive statistics. Data was presented through graphs, tables, percentages and frequencies followed by analysis and interpretation. The study used thematic analysis to analyse data collected through interviews from a group's personal experiences. The study used Atlas.Ti to analyse thematic data. The study followed Braun and Clarke steps when analysing data: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and producing the report. The researcher applied opinions based on data analysis. Data were organised and prepared as collected from the participants. In the second step, the researcher read through all the data collected from the respondents. In the third step, data were detailed with a coding process. In the fifth step, the data were interrelated into themes to convey the findings of the analysis. The data were interpreted to see if the literature contradicts other researchers' findings.

The study was conducted in the Limpopo Department of Education Head office in Polokwane. The Department is responsible for improving the delivery of quality education, including early childhood development. The study was only conducted in the Head office to avoid contact with participants and also that it would be time consuming to use all the districts in collecting data within the Department. As it was during the period of Covid 19, social distancing and wearing as face masks was adhered to avoid contact with respondents and participants, and for some participants the use of phone call and email was applied. The LDoE has a Head office situated in Polokwane, the heart of Limpopo Province. The Head office consists of 4 branches headed by Deputy Director Generals, 12 Chief Directorates headed by Chief Directors, and 33 Directorates headed by Directors. The ten (10) Districts are headed by Directors.

The population target consists of +-901 of employees in the Limpopo Department of Education Head office in Polokwane (Annual Report, Limpopo Department of Education for 2019/2020:26) in the Provincial office in Polokwane.

Table 1: Sample.

Sample Group	Sample Size
Executive & senior management	20
Middle Management	25
Junior Management	20
Operational Staff	25
Mentors	30
Graduate Interns	59
Learnership Students	11
Total	190

The study comprised of selected participants and respondents namely: a sample which includes members of the Executive Management, Senior Management, Middle Management, Junior Management, Operational Staff, Mentors, learnership and Graduate Interns in the LDoE Head office. Data was collected around 2022-09-05 for a period of three (3) months at the time the approval to collect data was received. The study consisted of selected respondents and personnel. Purposive sampling was used to hand pick participants who holds a minimum of degree qualification as well as more than three years' experience working at the LDoE, and are experts in their fields, mostly those in the Executive Management, Senior Management, Middle Management, including graduate's interns for interview one (1) from each category and three (3) graduate interns.

Simple random sampling was used to ensure that all respondents have the chance of being in the study, it included the respondents from all the sampled category Executive Management, Senior Management, Middle Management, Junior Management, Operational Staff, Mentors, learnership and Graduate Interns. This sample group was given questionnaires to complete. The data was collected simultaneously through interviews and questionnaires.

The above sample shows a total of 190 participants, the sample was divided into two parts whereby, 180 respondents were used to collect quantitative data using questionnaires, while 10 participants were used in collecting qualitative data through interviews. Structured close-ended questionnaire and open-ended interview questions were used as data collection instruments. The reason for structured questionnaire was to provide clear instructions and easy for respondents to understand and answer accurately. The reason for interviews was to gain in-depth experiences of the respondents regarding the importance of internship programs as form of experiential learning for graduates.

The target number of respondents was achieved because all the respondents were available to provide the answers. The respondents were required to complete a questionnaire, which consisted of five

closed-ended questionnaires. This section provides an analysis of the respondents' views and perceptions regarding internship programs as a strategy to provide experiential learning on graduates in the Limpopo Department of Education. The pilot study was conducted with five participants, whereby, interview was conducted with two and three were administered with questionnaires to test data collection method and instrument carefully from a representative and adequate sample size to ensure reliability and validity of tools.

Results

The importance of internship programs as a form of experiential learning in the workplace at the Limpopo Department of Education.

Table 2: Response Rate

Number of participants	Actual	Responses
180	180	180

Demographics of the Respondents

Table 2 reports on the Overall, 180 respondents completed the questionnaires of whom 54.4% were male (n=98/180) and 45.5% were females (n=82/180) the response rate was 100% (180/180). The respondents came from different sections/units in the Department. The age of respondents varied from less than 30 to 61-above, of which 33% were less than 30 years (n=59/180) while 17% (n=30/180) were between 31-4-, followed by 22% (n=40/180) who were between 41-50%, while 19% (n=35/180) were between 51-60 and lastly 9% (n=16/180) were 61 and above.

Of 180 respondents who took part in the study, 11% (n=20/180) were drawn from the LDoE's executive and senior management, while 14% (n=25/180) of the middle management were chosen to participate in the study. The next category comprised of 11% (n=20/180) of junior executives. The following category were gathered from 11% (n=20/180) of the LDoE's operational staff. It was followed by the mentors 14% (n=25/180) were included in the study to gather more information. Furthermore, because the study is primarily focused on interns, 33% (n=59/180) were included in the study. In addition, students on learnerships were included in the study, accounting for 6% (n=11/180). As a result, the study had a maximum of 33% (59/180) interns participate in the study.

Forty-four percent (n=79/180) of respondents showed Sepedi as their first language, followed by 28% (n=50/180) who indicated Tshivenda as their language, while 22% (n=40/180) were Xitsonga speaking, while the last 6% (n=11/180) spoke none of the above.

The study also wanted to find out the qualifications that respondents have acquired, the results indicates that 8% (n=15/180) had grade 12, followed by 27% (n=49/180) holds diploma/degree, while 28% (n=50/180) held a B.Tech/Honours degree. The other respondents of 17% (n=30/180) revealed that they had M.Tech/Master's degree, and lastly 28% (n=50/180) had D.Tech/Doctrate.

The importance of internship programs as a form of experiential learning in the workplace at the Limpopo Department of Education.

Internship Programs

All Responses

Table 3 Responses

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Not Sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Internship program is a strategy For imparting experiential learning	63	35	85	47	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Graduates are prepared through internship programs for Professional world.	61	34	84	47	28	15	7	4	0	0	100
The Department of Education uses Internship Programs to offer Unemployed youth with job opportunities.	77	43	75	42	28	15	0	0	0	0	100
Skills can be obtained during internship Programs	99	55	81	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
To bridge a theory from class to work-place training internship programs are vital.	79	44	81	45	20	11	0	0	0	0	100

Table 3 reports on the importance of internship programs as a form of experiential learning in the workplace at the Limpopo Department of Education. The respondents agreed with the statement that internship programs is important for providing experiential learning for graduates, (33% and 47%) and interns are taking active part in their internship program, and the last respondents were not sure which was indicated by (18%). It could be that some respondents do not have enough information and knowledge regarding internship programs. Respondents also shows that internship programs and experiential learning as a means of providing graduates with work experience, skills, and job creation is significant to graduates. This is in line with the views of Kiriri (2019:260) that internship provides experiential education that combines classroom knowledge and theory with real-world application and skill development in a work environment.

Respondents stressed that the graduates are prepared through internship programs for professional world, which is indicated by (34% and 47%) agreed. The results also indicates the responses of those who disagreed that there graduates are prepared through internship programs (4%). Respondents expressed their concern that they were not sure of the existence of the policy in place (15%). This could be that some respondents may not be working closely with interns, and some mentors did not bother to let interns go through the policy, which makes them unaware. The findings indicate that graduates who participate in internship programs stand a better chance of getting a job as internship prepares them for the professional

world. It is also revealed that internships are perceived as an opportunity in seeking level-entry jobs. This is supported by the study of Motene (2017:2) indicating that internship offers graduates with the chance to build professional relationships by networking within a field and creating an important support structure.

In addition, the Department of Education uses internship programs to offer unemployed youth with job opportunities of which (43% and 42%) agreed, however, only (15%) were not sure, this could be because some interns are typically given less important tasks as compared to full-time employees. However, arguable so, the results further indicate that there is a difference between unemployed youth who are given internship programs and those who remain unemployed after graduation. Internships have facilitated entry to the labour market for unemployed people through offering internships to unemployed graduates. Results indicate that unemployed youth who are given internship programs and those who are given periodic job opportunities. As intended by the National Development Plan, 2030 that internships have facilitated entry to the labour market for unemployed people through Sector Education Training Authority.

The results further reveal that respondents agree that skills can be obtained during internship programs (55% and 45%) which assist them in looking for jobs in the future. According to the findings, there is a positive relationship between skill acquisition and participation in internship programs. One possible explanation is that when graduates participate in internship programs, they gain workplace skills. One possible explanation is that when graduates participate in internship programs, they gain workplace skills. This can also be derived from the findings of Jeske and Linehan (2020:245) that internships increase skills development, particularly in relation to their communication, thinking, and ability about problems in the department.

The results further show that respondents agreed that to bridge a theory from class to work-place training internship programs are vital, (44% and 45%) the remaining respondents were of the view that they were not sure (11%). The findings show that classroom theory and internship programs as a means of preparing graduates for workplace learning is vital. This relates with the study of Shaketange et al., (2017:2258) as stated that internship is a practice-based learning that bridges a gap between universities and the workplace.

Data Collected from the Interviews

Participants were asked questions which were followed by their explanations during the interview. Their responses were grouped into themes to find the similarities.

Summary of Themes

Explanation from Interviews

Theme: The importance of internship program Research findings revealed that internships play an important role in providing graduates with the necessary experience and skills for the workplace. The study found that interns can gain skills and experience that will help them land a job at the end of their internship programs.

Theme: Current status of internship programs. The results revealed that the current situation is favourable because the interns are gaining skills and experience that will benefit them in the future. On the one hand, the Department currently has 300+ interns appointed for a two-year period that will end on March 31, 2023.

Theme: Skills are obtained during internship. It thus therefore offers graduate an opportunity to gain skills and prepare them for the working industry. It was indicated that internships offers communication skills, such as interpersonal, relationships, productivity, performance management and computer skills.

Theme: Internships a bridge to workplace training. The study revealed that internships is imperative as it bridges a gap between the graduation and professional world. It was also indicated that internship programs serve as an experiential learning in the sense that it enables graduates find themselves academically and gain the knowledge that enables them to be employed in the departments.

Internships offer unemployed graduates with job findings shows that internships in the Limpopo Department of Education plays a role through reducing the rate of unemployed youth. It was further stated that it also provides the stipends to improve lives of interns and their dependents.

Ethical Consideration

The study ensure the confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of the participants. The researcher observed all the ethical consideration, including informed consent. Participants had the right to withdraw from participating in the study without any penalties. The study was conducted with due respect of ethical guidelines, through obtaining Ethical certificate from the University of Venda Research Committee, (ref no: FMCL/22/PDN/07/1008).

Data Availability

Data that support the findings of this study was obtained from interviews and questionnaires from the participants and are available on request from the author Ngobeni T.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position and is the product of professional research.

Discussion of the Findings

Most respondents were of the view that internship programs is important and a strategy that can be used to impart as a form or experiential learning to graduates. The findings indicate that there is a clear link between graduates who participate in internship programs and their preparation to enter the work industry. The study also revealed that there 300+ interns appointed in the Limpopo Department of Education, this shows that the Department recognizes the importance of implementing internship programs. The findings indicate a link between internship programs and experiential learning as a means of providing graduates with work experience. Based on the data presented there is a link between unemployed youth who are given internship programs and those who are given periodic job opportunities.

Most respondents reported that that internship programs play an important role in providing students with the necessary experience and skills for the workplace. This can be linked to the findings Vikas (2023:12) of internships have a significant positive impact on students' professional development, including the acquisition of practical skills, and gain hands-on experience, and explore potential career paths. The study found that interns can gain skills and experience that will help them land a job at the end of their internship programs. This is in line with the findings of Carignani et al, (2023) that support that internships improved interns' career planning skills and helped them get their first jobs. It was also discovered that internships provide a stipend to the intern, which helps them earn money for a set period. On the other hand, the findings revealed that graduate interns can gain experiential learning during their

internships based on the theory they learned in class. Arthur and Koomson (2023) findings support that internships offered trainees the opportunity to put into practice the theory learnt in school.

The participants stated that graduates can gain knowledge and experience in their field of study and professional development is facilitated. Arthur and Koomson (2023) found that internships have the potential to facilitate professional networking and knowledge sharing. It was also revealed that internships are an effective way to learn how to communicate effectively. Internships are a way in which graduates find a job. Interns work independently, but under the supervision of their supervisor or mentor, who monitors and evaluates their work progress. The study revealed that the crucial part of internships at the Department is viewed in the sense that every financial year, which runs from the 1 of April of the current year to the 31 of March the following year, the Department advertise internship programs and employ interns to help them impart experiential learning and skills to newly graduates.

According to the research findings, internships, are also effective mechanisms for reducing the number of unemployed graduates. This correlates with the findings of Thetsane (2023) that internships have been widely researched and accepted as an important mechanism for employment establishment for graduates. It is believed that the importance of internships in the department can be seen because it advertises internships for graduates to apply for, as well as prepares graduates for the professional working world. Finally, interns can gain knowledge of the Department as well as practical aspects of their qualifications to supplement their theoretical knowledge. It can be said that the Higher Education Institution plays a vital role in the implementation of internships, and should be strategic about it.

Limitation of the study

The most important limitation that the researcher faced was access to the documents regarding the internship programs in the Limpopo Department of Education, they were very few publications. However, that did not affect the actual follow-through with the study, as I relied on what was available. The researcher discovered that it was initially difficult to obtain approval to collect data in the LDoE due to the procedures that must be followed to be approved. Some research participants took too long to return the questionnaire, and others were preoccupied with work, which resulted in cancelling the appointments at the last minute. All the appointments were eventually successful, and the data was discovered. Because of the study area's location, it was even more difficult for the researcher in terms of finances and transportation.

Recommendations

Internships have been found to play an important role in providing students with experience and skills; therefore, the LDoE should implement internships that are designed to develop skills that are in demand and provide experience for future jobs. The researcher recommended that to impart experiential learning means that the learning objectives must be linked to the learning activities. This will help interns with their future career paths. Based on the experience, it is critical to have a system in place that effectively provides interns with the necessary work experience to prepare them for the professional world. As the internship programs also curb the graduate unemployed for a short period, the department should consider placing a number of interns on vacant posts, so they do not become unemployed after internship. Because skills are generally transferable, mentors must be skilled to transfer high-demand skills to their interns. The department should develop strategies that focus on skill development and assist interns in obtaining entry-level jobs following their internship. Internships must be set up in a way that they address the issue of practical learning which is preparation for permanent employment.

To ensure that the role internships play are visible can be seen when the graduate interns are able to do the tasks at hand on their own as taught or mentored. This will be reflected through the skills they

have and the experience they display after the internship. In terms of intern stipends, the stipend should be a reasonable amount that allows interns to pay rent, accommodation, and food as some interns travel away from home. The Limpopo Department of Education should conduct a feasible study to gain a better understanding of experiential learning and its impact on the future workforce. It is recommended that the Department create an environment in which interns can communicate with one another, which can also be accomplished through teamwork. The mentor should create tasks that allow interns to complete them independently, evaluate and provide feedback on their performance, as well as to encourage them.

As the number of unemployed graduates rises, the department should increase the number of interns it hires during that two-year period. The method of absorbing internships should be applied. Interns should be directly involved in the real world of work, be viewed as a valuable asset to the department, and be able to learn more and be better prepared for the professional world. Interns should be placed in units that correspond to their college/university qualifications so that they can put the theory they learned in class into practice. To ensure that it plays the intended role, the LDoE should master how to implement it successfully. The LDoE should encourage the HR department to develop strategies that invest in the future of internships. Policymakers should develop policies that specifically target the improvement of effective internship programs.

Conclusions

The study sought to examine the importance of internship programs as a strategy to impart experiential learning in the Limpopo Department of Education. The pragmatic paradigm was used in this study with 180 respondents and 10 participants sampled totaled to 190, whereby data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. It is vital to provide graduates with internship programs, as it will aid in job opportunities, work experience, skills development, such as communication. The study's objective has been met. To successfully respond to the research problems that piqued the researcher's interest, appropriate research objectives were established and met, but there is still room for future research. The objectives established aided and guided the study in reaching an informed and appropriate conclusion and making recommendations.

The study's objectives were met because the recommendations provided are based on the findings and literature. They make recommendations on how to implement internships more effectively when the results are shared with stakeholders. The study's recommendations may assist the Limpopo Department of Education, the University of Venda, and any other interested parties in addressing the challenges encountered when implementing internship programs as well as promoting graduate employability. Based on this research it is evident that the internship programs plays a vital role in shaping the future experienced, skilled and competent employees. The Department should receive enough funding, resources, and mentors as part of effective internships.

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Competing Interests

The author(s) declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's Contributions

T is a PHD student supervised by E and M.M, and the articles id based on the PHD work of T.

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Ethical Consideration

The study ensure the confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of the participants. The researcher observed all the ethical consideration, including informed consent. Participants had the right to withdraw from participating in the study without any penalties. The study was conducted with due respect of ethical guidelines, through obtaining Ethical certificate from the University Research Committee, (ref no: FMCL/22/PDN/07/1008.

Data Availability

Data that support the findings of this study was obtained from interviews and questionnaires from the participants and are available on request from the author.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position and is the product of professional research.

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