

From Realizable Dreams to Sustainable Reality: An Empirical Study on the Relationship between Internship Experience and Future Career Prospects among Business Students

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to establish the relationship between Internship Experience and Future Career Prospects among Business Students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. Using a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional survey design, data was gathered from 100 alumni. Using an open-ended questionnaire, Mbarara University of Science and Technology business students' internship experiences and future career prospects were surveyed quantitatively. In addition, a conventional linear regression analysis was performed. The study's findings demonstrated that among the Mbarara University of Science and Technology's business students, internship experience had a strong positive and significant influence on their future career prospects. The study relates to the ongoing discussion about how business students' internship experience influences their chances for future employment.

Keywords: *Internship Experience, Future Career Prospects and Business Students.*

1. Introduction

In Business schools nowadays, internships are considered essential parts of higher education and are no longer considered an accident (Beard & Wilson, 2013). Although there is no official definition for the term, internships are typically believed to be short, practical work experiences, where students receive training and experience in a particular industry or career area of their interest (Zopiatis, 2018). The idea behind the focus placed on internships as credit units in university curricula is that learning should be grounded not just in lecture-based pedagogies but also in practical experience gained in a real-world work environment. According to the principle of experiential learning, learning is the process by which knowledge is formed by transforming experiences (Kolb, 1984). In this regard, understanding and transformation of experience combine to produce knowledge. Besides, through real-world experience and reflective practice, the learner acquires new knowledge. Internships enable students to access a supportive and useful learning environment that allows them to explore the real world. Furthermore, by exposing students to both the positive and negative parts of the workplace, internships aid in their understanding of the realities of professional dedication.

Insightful information regarding one's potential for the desired career may also be provided by the evaluation of one's strengths and weaknesses that professionals in the industry can provide. A two-way screening procedure that evaluates the appropriateness of both the students and the industry experts is often what makes internships unique. The student's resume's experience is enhanced through an internship, and this helps in overcoming entry-level challenges, thus making the priceless work experience serve as a springboard for a career (Schwartz, 2010). Moreover, internships enable students to learn beyond what they would have learned in a traditional classroom setting, by giving them a sense of the overall professional environment and fostering their ability to communicate and interact with others (Cheong, 2014). It is believed that students exposed to internships receive job offers earlier than others and have better career preparation (Gault, 2017). Consequently, it was imperative to examine the association between internship experience and future career prospects among Business students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. It is believed that internships are essential for giving students real-world experiences, in addition to their academic studies.

Students also receive practical work experience and learn how to apply theoretical concepts to real-world issues. Moreover, academic preparation, remuneration, on-the-job challenges, autonomy, and the working environment are the key aspects of internship experience that, according to empirical studies, are crucial indicators of interns' future career prospects. However, research on the internship landscape for Business students in Uganda is scanty. It is strongly believed that developing a deeper understanding of how internship experience influences future career prospects among Business students at Mbarara University of Science and

Technology would be a cornerstone of enhancing students' chances for future employment. Consequently, the study's conclusion will help Ugandan universities and those in comparable environments to better coordinate their internship programs to increase students' employability.

2. Empirical Literature Review

Internship experience is considered a key driver of future career prospects as it enables students to learn beyond what they would have learned in a traditional classroom setting, thus shaping their overall professional environment and future career prospects (Cheong, 2014). The study results support the findings by Jawabri (2017), which indicate that internship experience and job prospects among UAE business students are positively and significantly correlated. According to that study, internships are seen to be crucial in helping students supplement their academic coursework with real-world work experience. Similarly, Sadia (2020) found that internship programs had a favorable and noteworthy effect on Pakistani Business students' professional and personal growth. Also, (Gault, 2017) argues that students who have undergone internships receive job offers earlier than others and have better career preparation. These revelations are confirmed by the study by Galbraith and Mondal (2021) where internships are considered drivers of career connections and networking opportunities; where students who succeed with internships are offered 1st full-time jobs with the same organization. Thus, effective internships lead to better career transition decisions among students as it helps them to realize their choice of major and subsequent career choices in the future (Galbraith and Mondal, 2021). Likewise, by embarking on internships, the student's career choices are shaped by obtaining a better idea about the skills required for the jobs (Galbraith and Mondal, 2021).

Subsequently, Baert et al. (2021) argue that students with internship experience obtain invitations to job interviews than those without such experience. Therefore, employers attach more value to students with internship experience than to students without such labor market experience (Baert et al., 2021). Whereas the above studies are in support of internship experience as a key influencer of the student's future career prospects, the study by Karakirazi, Ustunday, Koratas & Ozdemir (2021) revealed contradictory findings, thus, suggesting an ongoing debate. The aforementioned study makes the case that most students attempt to complete internships that align with their career ambitions since they already have predetermined professional goals regarding the field in which they want to work. Because some students' professional ambitions remain the same following their internship experience, the study found a negative and significant impact on their career prospects. Thus, the current study is aimed at contributing to the ongoing debate on the association between internship experience and future career prospects among Business students. The following hypothesis was developed based on the examined empirical studies on the internship experience and future career prospects among Business students:

Ho1: *There is no statistically significant relationship between Internship Experiences and Future Career Prospects among Business Students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology.*

3. Methodology

A cross-sectional research design was used to examine the relationship between the study variables under investigation (Pallant, 2020). Also, a quantitative research approach was adopted to test the study hypothesis (Field, 2009). The sample size of one hundred alumni was chosen by applying the 1973 Taro Yamen formula, which governs sample selection. Additionally, the closed-ended questionnaires were used to gather data from the alumni by utilizing a simple random sampling strategy. The study variables' strength and direction of relationship were determined by standard linear regression analysis, as shown by R-squared and R, respectively (see Table 2). Internship experience items were measured in terms of academic preparedness, compensation, working environment, self-initiative and on-the-job challenges (Jawabri, 2017; Huang, 2019). Also, the questionnaire's five-point Likert scale was used to anchor all the categories related to the internship experience, which was consistent with a study by Kamukama and Natamba (2013) that used the same scales: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Undecided; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree. Data was analyzed using both inferential and descriptive analysis techniques. To list the demographic characteristics of the respondents, frequency distribution analysis was one of the descriptive methodologies used. Furthermore, the type and degree of the association between different aspects of the internship experience and future career prospects were ascertained by inferential statistics analysis.

4. Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Distribution by Demographic Characteristics of Business Students

Category	Item	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	77	53.1
	Female	68	46.9
Age	Below 30 years	137	94.5
	30-34 years	6	4.1
	34-38 years	1	0.7
	Above 38 years	1	0.7
Course	BBA	40	27.6
	BSAF	38	26.2
	ECO	9	6.2
	BPSM	58	40
Nature	Paid	18	12.4
	Unpaid	127	87.6
Duration	1 week	3	2.1
	2 weeks	2	1.4
	3 weeks	2	1.4
	4 weeks	15	10.3
	6 weeks	123	84.8
Location	Central	8	5.5
	Northern	4	2.8
	Western	126	86.9
	Eastern	7	4.8
	Total	145	100

Source: Primary data, 2023.

Based on the demographic characteristics results exhibited in Table 1, the majority of the respondents (53.1%) were male, implying a fair gender balance. Additionally, the biggest number of the respondents (94.5%) were 30 years and below, implying that they were in their youthful period. Also, a bigger portion of the respondents were of Bachelor of Science in Procurement and Supply Chain Management (40%), followed by BBA (27.6%).

Regression Analysis Results: Standard linear regression analysis was performed using the model of best fit to determine the direction and intensity of the association between internship experience and future career prospects. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Regression Analysis Results

		Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B				
1	(Constant)	1.004	0.37		1.225	0.006
	Internship Experience	0.327	0.089	0.272	3.665	0.000
R	.610a					
R Square	0.372					
Adjusted R Square	0.363					
F	42.11					
Sig.	.000b					

a. Dependent Variable: Future Career Prospects

Table 2 of the study's findings shows a substantial, positive, and significant link between internship experience and future career prospects among business students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology ($R = 0.610$, $p = 0.000$). This implies that a greater proportion of internship experience is related to future career prospects. Thus, the hypothesis that states that there is no statistically *significant* association between internship experience and future career prospects among business students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology Uganda, H01, is hereby rejected. Besides, 36.3% of the variation in future career prospects is explained by internship experience, while 63.7% of the variation is explained by additional variables that this study did not examine. Furthermore, according to the beta coefficient ($B = 0.272$), for each unit of internship experience, future career prospects among business students increase significantly by 0.272 units. Consequently, the overall model fitness was significant since its significant level (0.000) was less than 0.05 (Pallant, 2020).

Discussion: Table 2 presents the study's findings, which show a strong, positive correlation between internship experience and future career prospects among business students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology ($R = 0.610$, $p = 0.000$), consequently, contrary to hypothesis H01. Additionally, the beta coefficient ($B = 0.272$) indicates that internship experience has a substantial impact on the variation in the future career prospects among business students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. Besides, the study findings imply that 36.3% of the variation in the future career prospects was as a result of internship experience. The study results conform with empirical studies by scholars (Jawabri, 2017; (Gault, 2017); Galbraith and Mondal, 2021) that indicated a positive and significant link between internship experience and future career prospects. The study findings suggest that when there is an effective working environment, academic preparedness, compensation, self-initiative and on-the-job experience, we expect better future career prospects among business students.

Managerial Implication: According to the study's conclusion, management must implement a successful internship program if it hopes to improve students' prospects for future employment. The Universities should ensure that an effective working environment, academic preparedness, compensation, self-initiative and on-the-job experience are put into place.

Theoretical Implication: The study's findings are consistent with the empirical literature regarding the benefits of internship experience. Furthermore, while numerous empirical studies have been carried out to ascertain the correlation between internship experience and future career prospects among business students (Jawabri, 2017; Gault, 2017; Sadia, 2020), no single empirical study has been done to determine the relationship between internship experience and future career prospects among business students in Uganda, and more specifically among business students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. As a result, this effort has closed the empirical gap. The experiential learning theory, which Kolb proposed in 1984 and contends that experience is the source of knowledge, is valued in this study. The same theory further proposes that through the combination of grasping and transforming the experience, knowledge is generated, thus in

support of internship experience. It is believed that self-reflection by students empowers them to take charge of their learning and enables them to make connections to launch their academic journey.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The current study focused on examining the link between internship experience and future career prospects among business students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. The direction of internship experience's influence on future career prospects was hypothesized based on the empirical literature assessment, which examined internship experience as a driver of future career prospects. The study hypothesis leads to the conclusion that among Mbarara University of Science and Technology's business students, internship experience has a strong, positive, and significant impact on future job prospects. It is clear that implementing successful internship programs could improve business students' chances of finding employment in the future. Management should put into place effective internship experience mechanisms to enhance the future career prospects of students. This could be through putting into place an effective working environment, academic preparedness, compensation, self-initiative and on-the-job experience, as these are considered key drivers of internship experience.

Areas for Future Research: This study focused on business students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. A similar study could be conducted among students of engineering and agriculture where industrial training takes center stage. This would ease the understanding of how industrial training experience has shaped the future career prospects of engineering and agriculture students and in the Ugandan context.

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