

INTERNSHIP PROGRAMMES AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS ACQUISITION AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of internship programs on employability skills among public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria. Drawing on data from 400 graduates, the study found that internships significantly enhance employability skills, with supervision quality, industry collaboration, and program structure being critical success factors. ANOVA results confirmed the statistically significant improvements in specific skill domains. The study concludes that well-structured, industry-aligned internship programs with effective supervision can bridge the gap between academic training and labor market expectations. It recommends targeted policy and institutional interventions to improve internship accessibility, quality, and relevance across Nigerian public universities.

Keywords: Internship programs, employability skills, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, graduate employability

Introduction

In today's competitive job market, the employability of university graduates is a pressing concern for educational institutions, employers, and policymakers. Employability encompasses a range of skills, knowledge, and attributes that enable graduates to secure and maintain employment, adapt to workplace changes, and contribute effectively within their roles. Internship programs have emerged as a pivotal component in higher education, offering students practical experience and enhancing their employability skills. Internships provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, develop professional competencies, and build networks within their chosen industries. Recent studies have highlighted the positive impact of internships on students' employability. For instance, Shaheen et al. (2022) found that internships significantly enhance students' job-relevant skills and increase their chances of employment post-graduation. Similarly, Muhammad and Ali (2022) reported that internship programs help students develop practical skills that improve their preparedness for employment.

Moreover, the structure and quality of internship programs play a crucial role in their effectiveness. Programs that are well-designed and aligned with students' career objectives tend to yield better outcomes in terms of skill development and employability. González-Rodríguez et al. (2022) emphasized that university-enterprise cooperation in internship programs enhances students' practical experience and industry connections, thereby improving their employability prospects. Despite the recognised benefits, challenges remain in ensuring that all students have access to quality internship experiences. Factors such as socioeconomic background, availability of opportunities, and institutional support can influence the extent to which students benefit from internships. Addressing these challenges is essential to maximize the potential of internships in enhancing employability skills among public university graduates.

Statement of the Problem

The gap between academic learning and labor market demands is a persistent challenge, particularly in Nigeria. Public university graduates often face difficulties in securing employment due to a lack of relevant skills, practical experience, and industry readiness. Reports from recent studies indicate that Nigerian employers frequently cite skill gaps among graduates as a major factor contributing to high youth unemployment (World Bank, 2021; Adekunle et al., 2022). Internship programs are widely recognized as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, enabling students to gain workplace experience and develop competencies such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. However, the effectiveness of internship programs in Nigerian public universities has not been extensively examined. Anecdotal evidence suggests variability in the quality and accessibility of internships, with many students facing challenges such as poor program structure, lack of supervision, and limited opportunities in relevant industries. These inadequacies hinder the ability of graduates to translate their academic learning into employable skills. In Lagos State, a hub of economic activity in Nigeria, the potential of internships to enhance employability is immense. However, systematic research investigating the influence of internship programs on employability skills development among public university graduates in the state is limited. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how internship experiences contribute to skill development and employability outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of internship programs on the development of employability skills among public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study aims to:

- i. Assess the extent to which internship programs influence graduates' employability skills.
- ii. Identify the specific skills developed during internships.
- iii. Evaluate the challenges and opportunities associated with internship programs in public universities.

Research Questions

- i. What is the influence of internship programs on the employability skills of public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria?
- ii. What specific skills are developed during internship programs in Lagos State public universities?
- iii. What challenges and opportunities influence the effectiveness of internship programs in Lagos State public universities?

Hypotheses

- H₁:** Internship programs have no significant positive influence on the development of employability skills among public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria.
- H₂:** Specific employability skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, are not significantly developed through internship programs.
- H₃:** The effectiveness of internship programs is not significantly influenced by the quality of supervision, industry collaboration, and program structure.

Literature Review

The increasing emphasis on employability skills has led to a growing recognition of the role of internships in bridging the gap between education and the labor market. Internships, as experiential learning opportunities, allow

students to gain practical knowledge, develop essential skills, and build professional networks (Shaheen et al., 2022). This section reviews relevant literature on employability skills, the significance of internship programs, and their influence on public university graduates, with a focus on Lagos State, Nigeria.

Concept of Employability Skills

Employability skills refer to a set of attributes, competencies, and experiences that enable individuals to gain and retain employment and adapt to workplace changes (Yorke, 2006). These skills include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and technical proficiency. Scholars such as Tymon (2013) and Andrews and Higson (2008) argue that employability skills are not solely technical but also encompass soft skills critical to career success. In the Nigerian context, Okolie et al. (2022) emphasize the growing need for universities to align educational outcomes with labor market demands, particularly in light of high youth unemployment rates.

Internship Programs and Their Significance

Internship programs are structured work experiences integrated into academic curricula, designed to provide students with exposure to real-world job settings. They serve as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application, helping students develop job-ready skills (González-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Studies have highlighted that internships benefit both students and employers. For instance, Wye and Lim (2022) note that students who participate in internships have a higher likelihood of employment upon graduation. Employers also gain access to a pipeline of potential employees with prior training and experience. In the context of Nigerian public universities, internships are often part of industrial training (IT) programs, mandated by bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC). These programs are particularly critical in Lagos State, where diverse industries provide opportunities for practical learning (Adekunle et al., 2022). However, the success of these programs depends on factors such as supervision, program structure, and industry collaboration.

Impact of Internship Programs on Employability Skills

Several studies have examined the impact of internships on employability skills development. Shaheen et al. (2022) found that internships significantly improve communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills among graduates in developing countries. Similarly, Muhamad et al. (2022) observed that internships contribute to the development of adaptability and self-confidence, enabling graduates to navigate complex workplace environments. Research specific to Nigeria highlights the transformative role of internships in addressing employability challenges. Okoro and Obasi (2021) reported that Nigerian graduates who completed internships were better equipped to meet employer expectations, particularly in industries requiring technical and analytical skills. However, challenges such as inadequate supervision, limited industry collaboration, and inequitable access to internship opportunities hinder the overall impact of these programs (Adekunle et al., 2022).

Challenges and Opportunities in Lagos State

Lagos State, as Nigeria's economic hub, presents unique opportunities and challenges for internship programs. The state's diverse industries, ranging from technology to manufacturing, provide a conducive environment for internships. However, the effectiveness of these programs is influenced by systemic issues such as limited capacity in hosting organizations, lack of standardized program structures, and socioeconomic barriers faced by students (Okolie et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among universities, industries, and policymakers to ensure equitable access and quality supervision.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the Human Capital Theory, which posits that education and training increase individual productivity and employability (Becker, 1964). Internships, as a form of experiential learning, enhance human capital by equipping students with job-specific skills and practical knowledge. The theory supports the notion that structured internship programs contribute to economic growth by improving workforce readiness.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to explore the influence of internship programs on the development of employability skills among public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria. The design was chosen to allow for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data from a large sample, providing insights into the relationships between variables and testing the stated hypotheses. The study targeted public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria, specifically those from Lagos State University (LASU) and the University of Lagos (UNILAG) who had participated in internship programs during their undergraduate studies. Using a stratified random sampling technique, 400 graduates were selected to ensure representation across different faculties and fields of study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, divided into three sections:

1. Demographic Information: Age, gender, field of study, and year of graduation.
2. Internship Program Characteristics: Duration, supervision quality, and industry relevance.
3. Employability Skills Development: Likert-scale items measuring skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability (e.g., "The internship program improved my ability to work collaboratively").

The instrument was validated through expert review and pilot testing with 50 graduates. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. The questionnaire was administered both online and in person. Respondents were informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality. Data collection lasted four weeks. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to summarize responses and inferential statistics (linear regression and ANOVA) to test the hypotheses. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 27 was used for analysis.

Result

Table 1: (H1: Influence of Internship Programs on Employability Skills)

Predictor Variable	B	Standard Error (SE)	T	p-value
Internship Program	0.62	0.08	7.75	< 0.001
Constant	1.23	0.21	5.86	< 0.001

The analysis presented in Table 1 indicates that internship programs exert a statistically significant positive influence on the development of employability skills among public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.62$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 7.75$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrates a strong and precise relationship, suggesting that a one-unit increase in the quality or level of participation in internship programs is associated with a 62% improvement in employability skills. Furthermore, the constant term ($\beta = 1.23$, $SE = 0.21$, $t =$

5.86, $p < 0.001$) represents the baseline employability skill level in the absence of internship engagement, reinforcing the substantial contribution of internships to graduate preparedness for the labour market.

Table 2: ANOVA Results (H2: Specific Skills Development through Internship Programs)

Skills	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square (MS)	f	p-value
Communication	23.41	3	7.80	24.87	< 0.001
Teamwork	18.54	3	6.18	19.45	< 0.001
Problem-Solving	22.67	3	7.56	21.32	< 0.001

Table 2 show results of a one-way ANOVA indicate that internship programs have a statistically significant positive effect on the development of key employability skills; communication (SS = 23.41, MS = 7.80, $F = 24.87$, $p < 0.001$), teamwork (SS = 18.54, MS = 6.18, $F = 19.45$, $p < 0.001$), and problem-solving (SS = 22.67, MS = 7.56, $F = 21.32$, $p < 0.001$) among public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria, thereby affirming the role of structured internship experiences in fostering graduates' readiness for the labour market.

Table 3: (H3: factors Influencing Internship Program Effectiveness)

Predictor variable	B	Standard Error (ES)	T	p-value
Supervision Quality	0.45	0.07	6.43	< 0.001
Industry Collaboration	0.37	0.06	6.17	< 0.001
Program Structure	0.32	0.08	4.00	< 0.001
Constant	0.98	0.24	4.08	< 0.001

Table 3 reveals multiple regression analysis that supervision quality ($\beta = 0.45$, SE = 0.07, $t = 6.43$, $p < 0.001$), industry collaboration ($\beta = 0.37$, SE = 0.06, $t = 6.17$, $p < 0.001$), and program structure ($\beta = 0.32$, SE = 0.08, $t = 4.00$, $p < 0.001$) are significant predictors of the effectiveness of internship programs in enhancing employability skills among public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria, with supervision quality emerging as the strongest contributor, while the constant term ($\beta = 0.98$, SE = 0.24, $t = 4.08$, $p < 0.001$) indicates a baseline level of effectiveness in the absence of these factors, implying that additional unexamined variables may also influence skill development outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of internship programs in fostering employability skills among public university graduates in Lagos State, Nigeria. Key factors contributing to the effectiveness of these programs include supervision quality, industry collaboration, and program structure. Supervision quality emerged as the most significant factor, emphasizing the importance of regular guidance and mentorship in bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical applications. Industry collaboration ensures that internships are relevant to market needs, while a well-structured program provides a clear framework for skill acquisition. These results underscore the importance of designing internships that are not only experiential but also aligned with labor market demands. By focusing on these key elements, internship programs can significantly enhance graduates' employability, preparing them to meet the challenges of a competitive global workforce.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the effectiveness of internship programs:

- Internship programs should have clear learning objectives, a diverse range of tasks, and adequate durations to maximize learning outcomes.

- ii. Universities should train supervisors to provide personalised guidance, constructive feedback, and consistent mentorship.
- iii. Employers should be involved in the planning and evaluation of internships to ensure alignment with industry standards.
- iv. Institutions should implement standardised frameworks to monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of internship experiences.
- v. Efforts should be made to provide internship opportunities to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, to ensure equal access to employability skills development.
- vi. Internship programs should be designed to focus on the development of specific skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are critical for employability.

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