

Perspectives of University Graduates about benefits of National Internship Program & the Perceived Impact of its Discontinuation

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the benefits or otherwise of National Internship Programme of Pakistan as perceived by the graduates of Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan. Another area of investigation was to ascertain the impact of discontinuation of the Programme. The findings of this research indicated that National Internship Programme has been successful in terms of providing professional knowledge, hands on experience, financial support, exposure to the main stream job market as well as employment opportunities to the internees. The Program changed the perception of the students' altogether, which were now beginning to appreciate all the possible benefits resulting from the programme. The discontinuation of the National Internship programme has been seen as a step that will not only put a stop to all the benefits that were being derived by the internees but it will also be a contributing factor towards lack of professional development, less financial independence and increased levels of un-employment for the fresh graduates. The study strongly recommends allocating additional

resources to fund similar internship programs, improving program flexibility and further encouraging student participation.

Keywords: National Internship Programme, Graduates, Benefits, Discontinuation

INTRODUCTION

The concept of offering *Internships* originated in United States of America in the early 70s. It aimed at providing real life work experience to fresh graduates which can prove helpful in their career development. (John C. Daresh, 2001).

Internship is often used, generically, to refer to any temporary work experience, in a for-profit or nonprofit setting, with the dual purpose of learning while working (Green, 1997).

In her book, *Handbook of Research on Leadership Education*, Michelle Young mentioned three internship designs; (a) full time, job embedded internships (b) detached internships (c) course embedded field experience in lieu of an internship. In this article we are concerned with full-time, job embedded internship because this is the type which has been adopted in *The National Internship Programme* in Pakistan.

National Internship Programme was introduced in Pakistan for the first time in 2008. It aimed at providing opportunities to the fresh graduate for practical experience in the fields of their interest. Due to the unemployment dilemma in Pakistan, fresh graduates seldom get employment immediately after the completion of their studies. This programme aimed to provide opportunity to the fresh graduates not only to gain practical experience but also provided them financial assistance.

Main Features

The *National Internship Program* was designed for the benefit of educated youth of Federal Region (ICT, FATA, GILGIT BALTISTAN and AJK) who have completed sixteen years of education from recognized universities or degree awarding institutions.

The duration of internship was one year.

The interns were entitled to a monthly stipend of Rupees ten thousand (all inclusive) during the course of internship.

Enumerable studies have been done to judge the effectiveness of the Internship Programmes worldwide. In a recent survey, May 1993 graduates of San Francisco State University cited internships as a key factor in helping them land full time jobs (Brougham and Casella). Fifty six percent of respondents reported the skills and work behaviors they developed as interns and volunteers were critical factors in attracting employers.

Three thousand U.S.A. employers surveyed by the National Center on the educational Quality of workforce, in conjunction with the Bureau of the Census, U.S.A. also listed student internships and other work experiences as important criteria for selecting entry-level hires (EQW National Employer Survey, 1995) this 1995 study indicated that employers show a definite preference for job candidates whose resumes reflect related skills and hands-on knowledge in their fields. (Green, 1997)

Internship programmes may provide a pool for recruiting full time employees. Interns that show successful on the job performance are usually preferred for a full time job later on.

Researchers continue to study the impact of internships in terms of how they relate to education in the class room, professional success, and satisfaction following graduation. (Patricia L.

Linn, 2004). Research done on the impact of internship programmes in America show that the number of graduates involved in the internship programmes has gradually increased. (Patricia L. Linn, 2004)

In 1985, only 1 out of 36 college graduates participated in the internship programmes. In 1995, that number increased to 1 out of 3 graduates participating in an internship programme. (Filipezak, 1998)

Samer Hamadeh, co-author of the *Internship Bible* and President of Vault Reports, a publishing company in New York, conducted a research showing that former interns contribute up to one third of the new employees hired right out of college. (cited in Filipezak, 1998)

Ryan and Krapels (1997) reported that the number of internships available to students has grown by 37% over the past five years.

A research cited in Eyer (1993) has mentioned that assessment of learning has been limited to students' impressions. Students claim to learn more in the field than the classroom.

A survey conducted in Alm (1996), indicated that 95% of Deans of Schools believed that internships complement academic programmes and provide learning experience that cannot be gained elsewhere.

According to Ryan and Cassidy (1996) students seldom report dissatisfaction with well managed internships. It also helps the students in exploring their career interests.

Arnold and Cannon (1998) found that students without internship experience reported that participating in full time internship can be beneficial because formal on-site training is provided, and it will lead to a full time job. Students without this hands-on experience realize that they are at disadvantage when compared to individuals with internship experience. (Patricia L. Linn, 2004)

Hite and Bellizzi (1986) conducted a study to examine the student expectations regarding internship programmes in marketing. Their research was based on data collected from a sample of 441 college students who responded to 24 items regarding various aspects of internship programmes. Their findings revealed that students viewed internship programmes as a valuable learning experience, for which participants should receive academic credit, be financially compensated and earn only a pass/fail grade. (J. Andrew Cannon, 2010)

One cannot deny the overall positive impact of these programmes. Not only the internees but the institutions offering these programmes have experienced its positive impact. With high hopes and expectations, this programme was offered by the Government of Pakistan in 2008.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study aimed to highlight the benefits of The National Internship Programme in Pakistan as experienced by the fresh Graduates of Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan. The researcher has, along with the team members, not only attempted to point out all the benefits derived but the impact of the discontinuation of the above mentioned programme has also been discussed in detail. The study also attempted to know whether there existed any difference of views among the male and female students of Gomal University with respect to the benefits of The Internship Programme.

The population comprised of all the graduates of Gomal University. Out of the twenty departments of the University, eight students (four females and four males) were selected from each department and faculty. Thus a total of 160 students were selected through random sampling technique. Structured questionnaires were used as instrument for data collection which was built on a three point Likert scale ranging from 'agree', 'uncertain' and 'disagree'. The instrument consisted of thirty items related to the problem. Cronbach's alpha was used for checking the reliability of the measuring scale which remained 0.837. The researcher

administered the questionnaire with the help of co-researchers. Collected data were entered in the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for its statistical analysis, whereas in addition to the descriptive analysis of the data, mean score, standard deviations. Independent sample *t*-test was applied for comparison of the views of male and female graduates about the benefits of the Internship Programme.

THE STUDY ATTEMPTED TO GET ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Do the graduates of Gomal University consider the *National Internship Programme* beneficial?

Is this programme a source of financial support, professional development, skill improvement, social adjustment and helps in increasing the employment levels in the country?

Do the Gomal University graduates think that the discontinuation of the *National Internship Programme* will have negative impact on their careers?

Is there any difference in views of male and female graduates of Gomal University about the benefits of the Programme?

Table 1: Responses of internees (in percentage) with respect to the benefits of *The National Internship Programme*

	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree	
	Frequenc y	%age	Frequen cy	%age	Frequenc y	%ag e
Source of financial support	151	94.38	3	1.87	6	3.75
Source of professional growth	114	71.25	41	25.62	5	3.12
Helpful in social adjustment	120	70	31	18.75	10	6.25
Source of practical experience	119	74.38	21	13.12	20	12.5
Making up for personnel shortage	110	68.75	36	22.5	14	8.75
Improving professional skills	114	71.25	25	15.62	19	11.87
Reducing unemployment	113	70.62	32	20	15	9.37

Table 1 shows the responses of the internees about the benefits of the internship programme as a source of financial support, professional growth and practical experience, helpful in improving the professional skill of the internees, and the main factor in reducing unemployment.

This table showed that, 151 students agreed, 3 students were uncertain and only 6 students disagreed when asked if the internship programme provided financial assistance to the students showing a percentage of 94.38, to 1.87 and 3.75 respectively.

114 students consider this programme to be a source of professional development where as 41 students showed uncertainty and 5 students disagreed showing a percentage of 71.25, 25.62 and 3.12 respectively.

In response to the enquiry about the effectiveness of the programme in improving the social adjustment levels, the response showed that 120 agreed, 31 were uncertain and 10 students disagreed showing a percentage of 70, 18.75 and 6.25 respectively.

119 students consider this programme to be a source of practical experience where as 21 students showed uncertainty and 20 students disagreed showing a percentage of 74.38, 13.12 and 12.5 respectively.

In response to the enquiry about the effectiveness of the programme in making up for personnel shortage, the response showed that 110 agreed, 36 were uncertain and 14 students disagreed percentage of which is 68.75, 22.5 and 8.75.

When asked about the effectiveness of the programme in improving professional skills, 114 had a positive stance where as 25 uncertain and 19 were disagreed showing a percentage response of 71.25, 15.62 and 11.87 respectively.

113 student agreed that the internship programme resulted in decreasing unemployment level in the country 32 were uncertain and 15 disagreed percentage of which is calculated to be 70.62, 20 and 9.37.

Table 2: Responses of interneers (in percentage) with respect to the effects of discontinuation of *National Internship Programme*

	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree	
	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
Decreased professional growth	98	61.25	30	18.75	30	18.75
Weakened economic position of the students	111	69.38	33	20.62	13	8.12
Discontinuation of provision of skilled man power	109	68.12	36	22.5	15	9.37
Increased unemployment rate	104	65	35	21.87	23	14.37

Table 2 shows responses of the interneers about the effects of discontinuation of the internship programme.

In response to the first question about the resulting decreased professional growth of the interneers, 98 students agreed, 30 were uncertain and 30 replied negatively, which gives 61.25, 18.75 and 18.75 percentage respectively.

111 respondents agreed that discontinuation of the programmed has resulted in weakening the financial position of the students, 33 were uncertain and 13 disagreed showing a percentage of 69.38, 20.62 and 8.12

Responding to the inquiry whether the discontinuation of the programme has hampered the provision of skilled manpower, 109 agreed, 36 were uncertain and 15 disagreed percentages of which are 68.12, 22.5 and 9.37 respectively.

Similarly, 104 respondents agreed that unemployment will result due to the discontinuation of the programme, 35 were uncertain and 23 disagreed showing percentage of 65, 21.87 and 14.37 respectively.

Table 3: Results of t-test showing comparative views of male and female students about benefits of *National Internship Program*

S. #	RESPONDENTS	N	MEAN	S.D	CALCULATED VALUE	TABULATED VALUED	α
1	Male Students	83	21.33	3.643	1.032	1.645	0.05
2	Female Students	77	20.66	4.465			

The above table shows that Mean, Standard Deviation for male and female students are 21.33, 3.643 and 20.66, 4.465 respectively. The calculated t-value 1.032 less than the tabulated t-value 1.645 at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is no difference between views of male and female master level students about benefits of National Internship Program.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of data reveals that more than 60 percent of the respondents agree to the fact that the National Internship Programme not only provides benefits to the internees but it is also a very useful tool for the institutions involved, to identify fresh talented professionals who can prove an asset for them. Looking closely upon the information provided about the benefits of the internship program it was found that the programme being a source of financial support is ranked on the highest level by 94.38% respondents. In a developing country like Pakistan, where chances of getting employment for fresh graduates is very low, continuous monthly remuneration of Rs 10,000 for one year is more than one can ask for. Chances of getting acquainted with real life job environment, getting to know professionals from the related fields can prove to be the first step in climbing the career ladder for most of the fresh graduates, that's why it has been favoured by 75% of the respondents. Similarly 71.25 % respondents believe that Internship programmes can be a source of professional growth. Getting a chance to work in actual circumstances is far more beneficial than learning theoretical knowledge within the classroom. It enables an internee to be aware of the real life challenges which he will face once he actually enters the labor force of the country. It also enables the internee to learn new skill, attitudes, and behavioral patterns that can prove helpful for him in future. The internship programme is also a source of providing skilled manpower to the existing pool of professionals in the country. It helps in addressing the unemployment problem to some extent by teaching all the required skills to the internees. Thus contributing towards high employment levels and making up for personnel shortage in various fields. Reduction of unemployment and making up for personnel shortage are considered to be the benefits of the internship programme by 70.62 and 68.75% respondents, respectively.

A close look at responses of the internees about the impact of the discontinuation of the internship programme shows corresponding results. More than 60% of the respondents agree that the discontinuation of the programme has resulted in nullifying the benefits that had previously been experienced. Discontinuation has resulted in the stoppage of the remuneration given to the internee which is perceived to be the top most negative effect with 69.38% respondents agreeing to it. The constant flow of professionals and skilled personnel has also stopped. As skilled and trained personnel are considered to be the back bone of the economy, this has been considered to be a blow to the already weakened economy of Pakistan. Increased unemployment rate, increases the number of dependents in a country, willing workers who fail to find jobs due to lack of practical training and professional experience become frustrated and may indulge in undesirable activities. Thus increased unemployment rate, to be one of the side effects of the discontinuation of National Internship Programme is agreed upon by 65% of respondents.

It is, thus, concluded from the discussion above that National Internship Programme had proved to be a fruitful effort by the Government of Pakistan. This Programme brought benefits for young graduates were not previously introduced in any supportive programme. Internships are not a new phenomenon in Pakistan. It has been practiced by many multinational companies and large businesses but involvement of such a large number of graduates from all over the country has been a new idea. Government involvement made this programme more effective and reliable. Its positive effects have been evident in more than one field and the benefits have

been applauded on more than one occasion by experts and professionals. The fact that more than 65% respondents considered it a useful effort is evidence in itself.

However, the discontinuation of the National Internship Programme has put a halt to all these efforts. The dream for ensuring a stable economy with the help of skilled, competent and professionally loyal experts may not be possible now. It is feared that all the efforts may go down the drain if measures are not only to restart the National Internship Programme but also to ensure introducing similar programmes on the national scale in future.

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