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Impact of Perceived Value of Internship on the Employability Skills of Students at University Level

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Abstract

Internships are a great opportunity for university students to engage in job-relevant activities and enhance their chances of employability. The purpose of thecurrent study was to explore the relationship betweenthe perceived value of internships and the employability skills of the students. The target population for this quantitative study comprisedgraduate level students fromthe government universities of Lahore, Pakistan. This study used a cross-sectional survey design. Its sample was based on 291 students selected through convenience sampling from fouruniversities in Lahore. The data wascollected through a self-administered andclosed-ended questionnaire.Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed using the Pearson correlation coefficient, independent sample t-test,and one-way ANOVA test. The results of the correlation betweenthe perceived value of internship and employability skills showeda significant positive correlation between them ($p<0.001$).The independent sample t-testshowed that the students with higher CGPA performed better in the workplace as compared to the students with lower CGPA.The results of One-wayANOVA test indicated that the students of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Information Technology(IT) performed better in terms of acquiring employability skills as compared to the banking, finance, and marketing students.These skills are essential for job employment.It is recommended that future research studies should be conducted in other areas of experiential learning. These studieswould help to emphasizethe importance of internshipsin relationto employability skills that are directly linked to the students'job opportunities.

Keywords:employability skills, internship, job-relevant activities, graduate students

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Introduction

An internship is the first orientation of a student into the marketplace where they engage themselves in job-relevant activities. It plays a vital role to get employment opportunity in any organization.It also provides opportunities related to job skills and knowledge, such as interpersonal skills, communication skills, and team working skills, etc. (Washor,2015).Some people consider university degreesas ameans to sell big dreams, in which students' role is that of a customer (Raza et al.,2021). Students join universities for several reasonsfor instance, to get a degree or professional training with a focus on experiential learning. Therefore, most researchers agree that experiential education plays a vital role to get employment opportunities in any organization (Bunce & Bennett, 2021). An internship providesthe first orientation forstudents to apply academic knowledge to the real-world problems through engagement in job-relevant activities (To & Lung, 2020).It provides opportunities to learn real-life tasks, such as collaboration, effective communication, problem-solving abilities, and organizational know-how (Griffin&Coelhoso,2018). Internship comprises an array of several learning experiences, such as academic learning, cooperative learning, applied practicum, and community service learning (Bae et al., 2022).

The value of internship has been highlighted by previous studies conducted elsewhere, underscoring the value-additionthat internship brings,besides the employability skills. It enables the students to observe professional techniques and problems that are not taught in the classroom, giving them a better understanding of the business world (Anjum, 2020). Studies have also shown that the experiential education enhances students' experience (Jung, 2017; Yaakob et al., 2018). However, several research studies reported that most of the students agreed that experiential education is the foundation of a solid career opportunity (Jackson, 2018). Moreover, university education is the only way that engages students in professional development activities. Furthermore, Zehrand Korte (2020) suggested that the university students who are involved in cooperative learning and work-related education programs would obtain skills that are essential to an employer. An internship provides internees with a glimpse of the criteria of the workplace as to where they are in the position. When internees experience the criteria of an organization, they obtain the professional training associated with that career (Jianning& Lee, 2019).

According to O'Connor andBodicoat (2017), the history of internship programs may be retrieved from the late 1970s and 80s when the internship programs began to increase and college faculty membersheard about its benefits from colleagues at other colleges (Hora et al., 2020). Higher education institutions took the lead to provide productive internship programs to the students by adding course credit for internships (Lei & Yin, 2019). StarksandBower (2021) argued that the internship experience may give one student an "advantage" over other students who graduated and did not participate in experiential education or community service-learning activities. However, most university students reported that they appreciate to ensure their degree with work-related experience that helps them to align with future employability skills (Nogueira et al., 2021).

Government officials suggested that a curriculum, based on collaborative education helps to improve the aptitude of students to obtain socio-economic status in society. Hsu (2022) highlighted employment assistance for students as a challenge that needed appropriate attention. This is because of the nondirective professional choices for students that may drift into irrelevant disciplines of their education or vocational preparation. Such a drift was defined as a "regrettable financial loss" (Luk& Chan, 2020). Cunningham (2019) suggested that professional courses need to be made compulsory for degree completion.Moreover, the universities of all disciplines and grades must provide guidance on internship benefits to their students. However, JanuszewskiandGrzeszczak(2021) stated that professional training became more prevalent as many educational institutions considered to answer this call.

Students who participate in work-related activities possessimproved transferrable skills and confidence in soft skills, such as communication skills, time management, teamwork, etc., which enhance their chances of employment. Students who receive vocational training have enhanced work values and beliefs (Fontana et al., 2020). According to Yusupov(2021)internship increases the employability of students. Moreover, they gain a better understanding of the learning terminology and cultural competency associated with the profession (Luk& Chan, 2021). Moreover, in another study, graduated students who experienced internship practice suggested that the chances of employability were

enhanced through the knowledge gained at work (Ferreras-Garcia et al., 2019).

There are several gaps in literature that thecurrent study aimed to address.Particularly, in light of the findings there is a need to examine additional predictors that contradict each other based on internship and employability factors. Firstly, studies exploring the effects of internship and employability factors based on final CGPA (Cumulative Grade point average) and gender showed inconsistent findings. Secondly, the difference between internship and employability regarding student interest groups, such as in Human Resource Management (HRM), Information Technology (IT), Banking &Finance (B&F), and Marketing was rarely explored in the research. Thirdly, previous research studies that investigated internships and their effect on employability were based on limited datasets. These datasets represented one area of interest, such as Banking & Finance or Information Technology (IT). Considering the existing gaps in literature, thecurrent paper focused to determine the effect between internship and employability It also attempted to identify the effect with a possible full range of factors, such as demographic variables, final CGPA (Cumulative Grade point average), and interest group with one area of expertise (HRM, IT, Marketing, and B&F).

Objectives

The current study aimed to investigate the use of perceived value ofinternship and employability skills.It may provide a solid base for the effective system of possibilities of different career services at graduate level. It was followed by the objectives stated below:

1. To study theperceived value of employability skillstowards internship attitude.
2. To explore the students' perception towards employability skills on the basis of demographic variables. Toexamine the association between studentsperceived value of internship with their perceptions concerning the employability skills.. To compare the differences in the employability by internship attitudes among students of BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration), and MBA (Master of Business Administration).

Hypotheses

1. There is a significant difference in employability skills by students' gender.
2. There is a significant difference in employability skills by students' CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average).
3. There is a significant difference in employability skillsby students' area of specialization, such as HRM, IT, B&F, and Marketing.
4. There is a significant difference in employability skills bythe perceived value of internship attitudes among students of BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration).
5. There is a significant difference in employability skills by the perceived value of internship attitudes among students of MBA (Master of Business Administration).

Research Methodology

Sampling and Research Design

Thecurrent study followeda cross-sectional survey design. A quantitative research approach was used as it was convenient for the researchers to collect data using the questionnaire instrumentand produce a quantitative model to test the hypotheses. The population of the study was based on the students of graduate level,that is, BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration), and MBA (Master of Business Administration). The data was collected from the students who completed their internship in the government universities of Lahore city, Pakistan. A convenience sampling technique was used with the purpose to approach many participants quickly, and efficiently. A total of 291 students were selected from four government Universities in Lahore city, Pakistan.

Instrument

In order to collect information about the perceived value of internship attitudes among students and employability skills, a self-developed instrument was administered. Close-ended five-point Likert-type scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree) was used. After theliterature review, the description and indicators of internship and employability were extracted. Similarly, the statements against indicators were generated. The questionnaire consisted of 38 statements, divided into three

parts. The first part of the questionnaire was related to demographic variables, such as gender, CGPA (Cumulative Grade point average), and area of specialization. The second part was based onthe perceived value of internship attitudes (18 statements), whereas the third part was about employability skills which contained (20 statements). The research questionnaire was valid according to experts' opinions in order to ensure content and face validity. The reliability coefficient α=.859 for the internship scale, and 0.809 for employability skills scale.

Table 1

Alpha Reliability Coefficientfor Perceived Value of Internship Scaleand Employability Skills Scale

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	No. of Items
The perceived value of the Internship	0.859	18
Employability skills	0.809	20
Sample	50	

Ethical Consideration

The researchers used a formal consent letter that consisted of the study design, required time, purposes of research, and clear statements on the rights to participate or withdraw from the study. They ensured the study participants that the collected data would be used for research purposes only and would be kept confidential.

Data Collection Procedure

The data wasself-collected by observing ethical considerations, such as informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality. The researchers prepared 300 copies of the questionnaire and handed them over to each respondent individually. They explained the purpose and significance of the research and also provided the relevant instructions to fill out the questionnaire.The return rate was 97%.

Measures

Thirty-eight items were measured on a Likert scale in two separate sections (i) the perceived value of internship attitudes (18 statements) and (ii) the employability skills contained (20 statements). The individual

items of the scale were recorded on the Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The independent variables included demographic variables,that is gender, CGPA area of specialization,and the perceived value of an internship.

Data Analysis

All the collected data was tabulated and interpreted. A codebook was prepared with assigning codes for each section and statement understudy for calculation. To examine the effectof internship attitude on the employability skills of the students,the correlation was calculated. An independent sample t-test was used to determine the difference between internships based on gender and the final CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) of graduate students. A one-way ANOVA test wasperformed to identify the differences among the student's areas of specialization in subgroups for instance,Human Resource Management, Information Technology, Banking &Finance, and Marketing. Descriptive statisticswas performed to provide context forinferential analysis.

Results

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of the study participants by gender, Internship duration, CGPA, and area of specialization. The percentage of femaleparticipants was 67% and the percentage of male participants was 33%. Whereas, 56% of the respondents were for 3 months or less and 44% were for more than 3 months to 6 monthsof internship experience. However, 82.5% of the respondents acquired their internship with a CGPA “range 2+ to 3” and 17.5% had their internship with a CGPA “range 3+ to4”. The percentage of CGPA “range 3+ to4” respondents was higher as compared to the respondents with a CGPA “range 2+ to 3”. For the category “area of specialization”, most of the participants had a degree in B&F (36.8%) and HRM (38.5%), as compared to IT and marketing.

Table 2

DescriptiveStatistics on the Students’Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	95	33
Female	196	67

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
CGPA		
Range 2+ TO 3	51	17.5
Range 3+ TO 4	240	82.5
Area of Specialization		
Human Resource Management	112	38.5
Information Technology	41	14.1
Banking &Finance	107	36.8
Marketing	31	10.7

Note. CGPA = Cumulative Grade point average

Table 3comprisesdescriptive statistical analysis which showsthat the mean score for the internship and employability scale was 7.63. The mean of employability score was 8.16, indicating the extent to which students/interns acquired employability skills, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, team working, career focus, personal qualities, problem-solving, job acquisition skills, and decision-making skills.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics on the Perceived Value of Internship and EmployabilitySkills

Variables	*M*	*SD*	PIM
The perceived value of the Internship	7.63	1.669	0.42
Employability skills	8.16	1.681	0.40

Note. *N* = 291. PIM = per item mean

Table 4 presents the percentage distribution of the study participants by level of agreement to statements about items on the perceived value of internship and employability skills. The table shows that the statement “an internship is a valuable opportunity to work and learn” was ranked the highest (Strongly Agree/Agree=86%).While the statement“My supervisor gave me feedback about my performance daily” was ranked the least (StronglyAgree/Agree=60%). The interns who believed that internship improved their abilitiesmeant that internship was positive for them as compared to those who stronglydisagreed/disagreed with this reasoning (Strongly Agree/Agree=81%; stronglydisagreed/disagreed= 6%).

Table 4

Percentage of Study Participants by Level of Agreement to Statements about the Perceived Value of Internship and Employability Skills

Perceived Value of Internship	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree/ Agree
In my internship, my university courses gave me the skills needed to perform well on the job.	13%	15%	72%
I possess a general understanding of the professional field.	10%	18%	72%
In my internship, I treated it like a real job.	11%	20%	69%
An internship is a valuable opportunity to work and learn.	7%	7%	86%
An internship is a potential learning opportunity.	4%	12%	84%
I often volunteered for tasks.	10%	21%	69%
I knew the potential challenges of a certain job as a result of the internship.	8%	19%	73%
The job required me to use several complex or high-level skills.	11%	18%	72%
The job was quite simple and repetitive.	19%	25%	55%
My supervisor provided assignments that allowed me to develop and strengthen new skills.	15%	13%	72%
My supervisor gave me feedback about my performance daily.	18%	22%	60%
My supervisor gave me helpful advice about improving my performance when I need it.	11%	20%	69%
My supervisor gave me the autonomy to work independently.	18%	21%	62%
I was given a clear plan about how to do the assignments	11%	20%	69%
I was given a clear plan about what assignments I had to do.	11%	18%	71%
The internship gave me a direction for the preparation for real independent life.	12%	15%	74%
An internship is to fill the gap between the academic and business environment.	8%	14%	78%
I acquire first-hand experience in applying theoretical knowledge to solve real-world problems	9%	19%	73%

Employability Skills	Strongly Disagree /Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree/ Agree
The internship has contributed to my career advancement.	8%	12%	80%
The internship provided me with opportunities for increased responsibilities at work.	8%	16%	77%
The internship enhanced my ability to transition into my employer's organization.	7%	16%	77%
The internship has provided me with an advantage in securing employment after graduation.	11%	21%	68%
The internship improved my ability to function effectively within teams	12%	14%	74%
The internship improved my ability to identify, analyze, and solve technical problems.	6%	13%	81%
I know my values well enough to make a career decision at the end of the internship.	9%	15%	76%
The internship improved my ability to communicate effectively	7%	13%	80%
The internship increased my understanding of professional responsibilities.	8%	17%	75%
The internship increased my understanding of social responsibilities	10%	16%	75%
The internship increased my understanding of ethical responsibilities	10%	20%	70%
The internship increased my confidence in my capabilities in doing my job tasks.	10%	14%	76%
The internship developed my interpersonal skills.	7%	17%	76%
The internship developed my ability to have good relationships with others	7%	19%	74%
The internship contributed to my overall career development.	6%	14%	80%
The internship increased my respect for diversity and understanding of cultural differences.	9%	13%	78%
I get knowledge about the job expectation.	10%	18%	72%
Based on my internship, I would recommend that students at universities obtain internship experience before seeking a job.	8%	15%	76%
The internship was positive for me.	6%	13%	81%
I received different job opportunities after the completion of an internship	8%	13%	78%

Independent Sample t-test

Table 5 indicates that there is a slightly significant difference in the mean scores of internship respondents of male and female students (Female=3.65, Male =3.18) and p =.000<0.05. It is concluded that female students gained slightly more valuable insight to learn as a result of internships as compared to male students. A t-test was applied to the data to determine whether the higher CGPA respondent was significantly different from the lower CGPA respondent. Table 7 shows a significant difference in the mean scores of higher CGPA students and lower CGPA students (CGPA (2+to 3)=3.50,CGPA (3+to 4)=3.84and p = .010<0.05. It shows that the students having higher CGPA perform better in the workplace as compared to the students with lower CGPA.

Table 5

Comparison of the Perceived Value of Internship Score by Gender

Variables	*N*	Mean	*df*	*t*-value	Sig.
Male	95	3.18	289	-.355	.000
Female	196	3.65			
CGPA (2+to 3)	51	3.50	289	-3.786	.010
CGPA (3+to 4)	240	3.84			

Table 6 presents the independent sample t-test.The results show that there is a slightly significant difference in the mean scores of male and female students (Female=3.75, Male=3.26) and p=.014. It shows that female students possess more employability skills related to a particular job after doing an internship than their male counterparts. Therefore, it was concluded that the female interns acquired more employability skills as compared to male students.

Table 6

Comparison in Employability Skills Scores by Gender

Variables	*N*	Mean	*df*	*t*-value	Sig.
Male	95	3.26	288	-.1.497	.014
Female	196	3.75			

One-Way ANOVA Test

The results of the one-way ANOVA test compared the mean area of specialization by student's characteristic. (Table 7) shows that the mean employability skillsdiffered significantly by area of specialization. The highest mean employability skills score was observed for participants with the areas of specialization HRM (M = 82.64, SD = 10.74).While the students with an area of specialization with IT had the lowest mean employability skills score (M = 70.51, SD = 16.01).

Table 7

Comparison of employability skills by Students' Areas of Specialization (HRM, IT, B&F, and Marketing)

Area of specialization	*N*	*M*	95% CI		*p*-Value
			Lower	Upper	
HRM	112	82.6429	80.631	84.653	0.000
IT	41	70.5122	65.457	75.567	
B &F	107	81.5421	79.136	83.947	
Marketing	31	78.3871	73.097	83.676	

Note. HRM = Human Resource Management, IT = Information Technology, B&F = Banking and Finance

Table 8 indicated that there was statistically significant difference at the (p < .05) level in employability skills score for the area of specialization groups of students F (3,290) = 9.997, p = .000.

Table 8

Comparison in Employability Skills Scores by area of specialization

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4806.463	3	1602.154	9.997	.000
Within Groups	45997.874	287	160.271		
Total	50804.337	290			

The multiple comparison analysis for the mean of employability skills scale by the independent variables with>2 subgroups is presented in Table 9. The post-hoc comparison (using the Tukey test) showsthat the mean difference in employability skills is significant for Human Resource Management (HRM) vs. Information Technology (IT). It indicated that the employability skills mean for HRM was significantly higher as compared to IT (Mean Difference, 12.13*, p =0.001).

Table 9

Post-hoc Comparisons of Mean Employability Skills for Independent Variables with >2 categories in the Area of Specialization, such as HRM, IT, B&F, and Marketing

Subgroups		Mean Difference	95% CI		p-Value
			Lower	Upper	
HRM	IT	12.13	6.1591	18.1022	0.000
	B&F	1.10	-3.3217	5.5233	0.918
	Marketing	4.25	-2.3836	10.8951	0.349
IT	HRM	-12.13	-18.1022	-6.1591	0.000
	B & F	-11.03	-17.0387	-5.0210	0.000
	Marketing	-7.87490	-15.6613	-0.0885	0.046
B &F	HRM	-1.10	-5.5233	3.3217	0.918
	IT	11.03	5.0210	17.0387	0.000
	Marketing	3.15	-3.5179	9.8278	0.614
Marketing	HRM	-4.25	-10.8951	2.3836	0.349
	IT	7.87	0.0885	15.6613	0.046
	B &F	-3.15	-9.8278	3.5179	0.614

Note. HRM = Human Resource Management, IT = Information Technology, B&F = Banking and Finance

Discussion and Conclusion

Internship is a short-term learning experience in which students learn about their knowledge and skills to attain employment opportunities after its completion (Chen& Gosling,2018). It includes various determinants, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, team working, career

focus, personal qualities, problem-solving, job acquisition skills, and decision-making skills (Alawamleh&Mahadin,2022).

Internship is generally considered as an active engagement that enables the students to learn about their professional field and provides them with real-life tasks (Kapareliotis et al.,2019). It provides students with the opportunity to apply and develop their knowledge, skills, and attributes while functioning as a professional (Ebneretet al., 2021). The major purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between internship and employability skills among students of four different programs, such as HRM, IT, Banking &Finance, and Marketing. Furthermore, on the basis of gender and CGPA, the difference in mean scores on employability skills and the internship was measured (Muñoz García & González Monteagudo,2020).

The perceived value ofthe internship variable indicated the value of internship which was measured by six determinants of internship, such as academic preparedness, positive attitude, self-initiative, challenging job, the effectiveness of supervision, and task clarity (Sihombing, 2021). The employability skills' variable indicated the extent to which students/interns acquire employability skills, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, team working, career focus, personal qualities, problem-solving, job acquisition skills, and decision-making skills (Blau& Goldberg,2021).

According to the findings, a moderate positive correlation between the perceived value of internship and the employability skills of the interns/students was indicated. It showed that an internship is beneficial for students in order to gain practical experiences and get employability skills in the workplace (Sumedrea&Tecau, 2016).The perceived value of an internship correlates with the employability skills of the students. Supported by the results, it was found that the variables co-related with each other. It may be inferred from this finding that an internship carries all the potential training opportunities for the students which are likely needed to perform future job roles (Baron-Puda, 2017).

Another finding indicated a difference in gender in internships, which showed a slightly significant difference between female respondents and male respondents. The results showed that the female respondents actively participated in internships.Moreover, theywere excited to gain practical

experience to get knowledge and skills related to the area of the study as compared to the male respondents. It implied that female students took more benefit from the opportunity of an internship than their counterparts (Chen et al., 2021).

The difference in CGPA on the perceived value of internship showed that the students with higher CGPA performed better in the workplace as compared to the students with lower CGPA(Predovic& Jones,2021). Internships require students to be well prepared in terms of completion of a certain level of course work and attainment of a minimum CGPA (Xu et al., 2021).Research results also showed that the students with higher CGPAs were more likely to do an internship as compared to those with lower CGPAs. It means a higher CGPA is said to be an indicator of better performance in the workplace (Gashaw, 2019).

An important difference by gender in employability skills showed a slightly significant difference between female and male respondents. The results showed that the female respondents acquire more employability skills, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, team working skills, etc. for the attainment of a job as compared to the male respondents (Yi, 2018). It implies that the employability skills may be equally increased among students regardless of their gender as male and female students require same set of employability skills to excel professionally (AlGhamdi, 2019).

According to the findings of the current study, in the areas (HRM and IT) students attained more employability skills, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, team working, etc. as compared to (Banking &Finance and Marketing) students (Hu et al., 2022). The results showed that (HRM and IT) students performed better in terms of getting employability skills which are essential for job employment.They know the value of those skills in a business environment as compared to the (Banking &Finance and Marketing) students. Through these results, the need for relevant field skills was ultimately emphasized (Bradshawet al., 2018).

A convenience sampling technique was used for the current study, and all the participants were from the district Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. It was restricted in its approach to accessing the participants beyond the Lahore district, Punjab, Pakistan. A broader range of participants in terms of

ethnicity and race would greatly increase the population validity of the research. A cross-sectional research design was used to collect the data from university interns.Whereas, the data could be scrutinized with more longitudinal analysis instead of a "one-time" assessment measure. However, in the current study, a closed-ended questionnaire was used in which the participants were restricted to report their experiences from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This limitation is especially important to be considered by using qualitative research to explore more factors in depth through interviews from a diverse set of demographics.

Recommendations

In light of the study findings, the essence of the perceived value of an internship is highlighted to develop employability skills among students. The set of skills required to perform job roles is dependent on the nature of each specified field which is why the features of internships also vary (Karunaratne&Perera, 2019). It may be suggested that the institutes should plan a practical portion of programs commensurated with the theoretical knowledge in order to minimize the gap between theory and practice. Internships are a source of providing orientation towards workplaces. Therefore, all the students should be encouraged to maximize their participation apart from the characteristics, such as gender, achievement score, program, etc.

Future research

The employability skills developed or polished by internships may be studied more explicitly across different programs in order to enhance the quality, duration, and mechanism of internships.

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