



Internship programs and their influence on career development: A study of college students

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Abstract

To narrow the gap between academia and industry, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduced significant educational reforms in India. As part of this initiative, an internship was made mandatory for all UG and PG students as a requirement for obtaining their degree. It helps to fill the gap between theoretical learning in the classroom and practical application in the workplace. The results showed that the internship has a positive impact on employability skills and career development. The study emphasizes that while internships are highly beneficial, their success largely depends on proper structuring, supervision, and alignment with academic goals. It recommends that institutions and organizations collaborate more effectively to design meaningful internship experiences that maximize learning outcomes and better prepare students for future employment. This paper tries to evaluate the effectiveness of internship programs and explore the strategies to enhance their impact and relevance. The institution and affiliated organizations may benefit from the results of the study.

Keywords: Internship, Employability, Task clarity

Introduction

An internship is a short-term work opportunity typically offered to students or recent graduates to help them apply their theoretical learning in practice. It serves as a bridge between academic study and real-world professional experience by providing exposure to workplace environments in fields related to a student's academic background or career goals. As a key component of experiential learning, internships allow individuals to gain hands-on experience under the guidance of a supervisor or mentor who introduces them to actual job responsibilities. Depending on company policies and industry norms, internships may be either paid or unpaid. Internships play a crucial role in developing students' technical abilities, soft skills, and professional competencies—often having a deeper impact than traditional classroom education. They provide chances to investigate other positions, develop networks, look for mentoring, and gain access to potential career paths. Internships improve students' employability and raise their chances of landing better jobs. Internships are regarded as a crucial educational resource that bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application in work environments. Therefore, assessing different facets of internships is essential to guaranteeing students a worthwhile educational experience. Internships have long been required in several professional schools, including engineering, law, medicine, and chartered accounting. In contrast, many traditional degree programs, such as B.A., B.Com., or B.Sc., did not need them in the past. With the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, internships of sixty to

one hundred and twenty hours have been made mandatory across undergraduate courses. This policy emphasizes practical learning and skill-building to make education more holistic and employment-focused. Colleges and universities are encouraged to collaborate with industries, NGOs, and local businesses to provide students with real-world learning opportunities. Under NEP 2020, internships have been integrated into degree programs to ensure that students gain hands-on experience as part of their academic journey. The National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) and the Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Program (CCFUP), guided by the UGC, have outlined formal rules for these internships. Closing the gap between education and employability, developing skills, promoting career exploration, and encouraging entrepreneurial thinking are the main goals. Industries that frequently spend a lot of money training recent graduates also profit from internships. Internship programs assist in lessening the need for intensive post-recruitment training by exposing students to real-world employment while they are in school. As a result, including internships in academic programs benefits both companies and students, improving the link between education and the labor market.

Statement of the problem

An internship is seen as the first step in developing a career. It offers hands-on education. Due to NEP 2020's inclusion of internships in the curriculum, students are now required to acquire practical skills. Even while internship programs are widely used in undergraduate courses, it is still unclear how

well they improve students' employability, job preparedness, and practical skills. The form, length, and quality of many internship programs vary, which may have an effect on students' entire educational experience and professional growth. In order to better prepare undergraduates for the profession, this study aims to determine how well internship programs bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application.

Objectives

- To examine the effectiveness of internship programs in enhancing the career development and practical skills of college students.
- To identify the challenges faced by the students during the internship.

Review of literature

In order to increase their chances of being employed, interns who sought a job offer were more likely to emphasize their accomplishments and create positive impressions. The inclination of interns to apply for full-time positions was positively impacted by companies' tendency to be more open to innovative ideas. However, mentorship from supervisors did not affect interns' decision to apply after graduation if they had already made up their minds before the internship not to seek employment with the host company. Liden, R. C., and Zhao, H. (2011)^[2].

As a springboard to full-time professional positions, internships are organized, early-career experiences that combine academic study with real-world employment. Internships, formerly known as experiential learning or apprenticeships, have long been an important component of professional training, with roots dating back to the Middle Ages and maybe much earlier. They are frequently hailed as a contemporary educational development. Mrvica, A., and Sides, C. (2017)^[3].

Student-teachers can put their theoretical knowledge to use in actual classroom situations through a full internship. Additionally, it helps aspiring educators choose, plan, organize, and carry out relevant educational activities. Singh, V., and Sinha, S. (2023)^[5]. In general, students had a favorable opinion of learning through hands-on experience during the internship. The effectiveness of the industrial internship program was also shown to be significantly influenced by elements pertaining to the organizers' operational and administrative efforts, as well as the host company's participation. Ambri Bin Abdul Karim, Z., Renganathan, S., and Su Li, C. (2012)^[6]. During their internships, students reported several beneficial learning experiences, such as the chance to network with professionals in the field, adjust to workplace culture, develop self-confidence, solve problems, hone social skills, and find inspiration for future academic and professional objectives. They gave the curriculum a low rating; nevertheless, in categories like encouraging creativity, collaboration, managerial abilities, research and project creation, and the drive for lifelong learning. Students reported discontent with the internship's general framework, even if they valued the

practical job experience, transportation, meals, and respectable stipends offered. In particular, they believed that the organization's many departments needed thorough training. Many proposed making the internship last a full year instead of only six months. To successfully address issues that both students and host firms face, the report also suggests improving communication between universities and internship providers. Perera, N., and Karunaratne, K. (2019)^[7].

Most people thought the internship was very successful in helping students acquire employability skills and change their perspectives on their future employment. The results of the study demonstrated that accessible internship placements and well-organized academic internship programs are crucial elements for developing fruitful internship experiences that are advantageous to employers and students alike. M. Bawica (2021)^[9]. Students who pursue higher education get the fundamental information and abilities required for their career advancement. As students transition from school to the workforce, these skills are put to use, allowing them to make valuable contributions to businesses.

Research methodology

Data collection

Primary data has been collected from 105 college students with the help of a structured questionnaire. And the secondary data has been collected from journals, books, theses, and research articles.

Research design

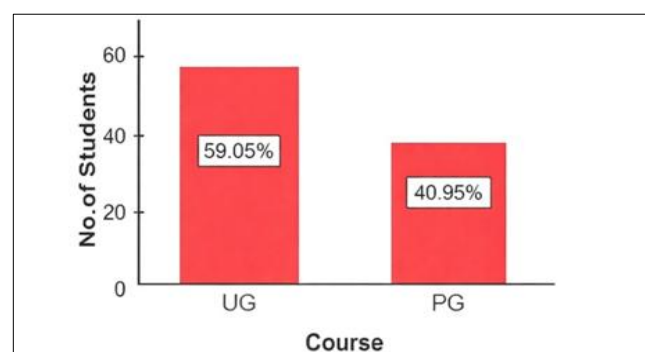
The present study is analytical and descriptive in nature.

Sample design

Students currently doing UG and PG courses are taken into consideration only.

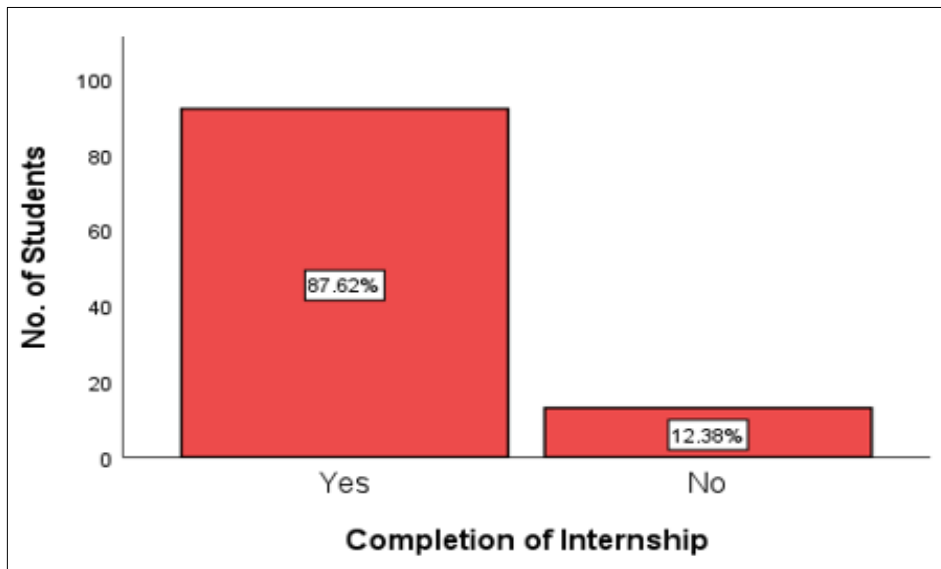
1. Data analysis and interpretation

1.1 Total 105 responses



The above bar chart represents the distribution of respondents according to their course. It can be observed that 59.05% of the respondents belong to Undergraduate (UG) courses, while 40.95% belong to Postgraduate (PG) courses. This indicates that most of the respondents participating in the study are UG students. The higher participation of UG students suggests that undergraduate students form a larger proportion of the sample compared to postgraduate students in the study of internship programs.

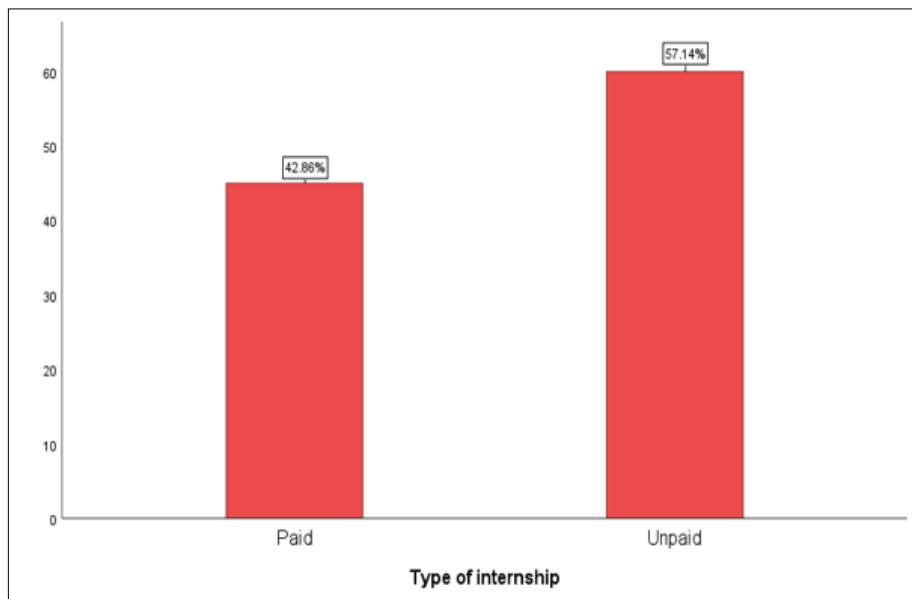
1.2 Total 105 responses



The bar chart shows the completion of internships among students. According to the data, 87.62% of students have completed their internship, while only 12.38% have not completed it. This indicates that a very large majority of students successfully finish their internships.

The difference between the two groups is significant, showing that internship completion is common among students. Overall, the chart suggests that most students can complete their internship requirements successfully.

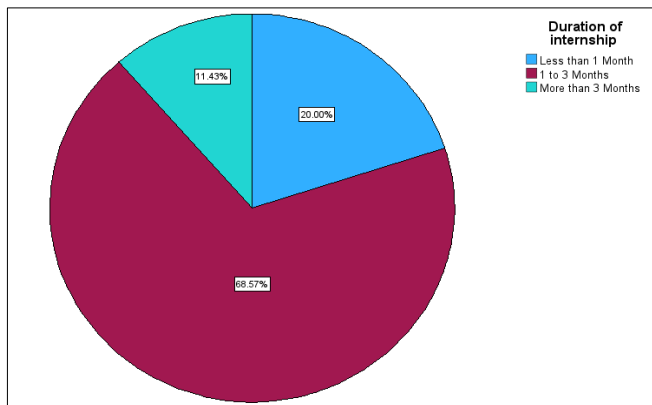
1.3 Total 105 responses



The bar chart shows the distribution of paid and unpaid internships. According to the data, 42.86% of the internships are paid, while 57.14% are unpaid. This indicates that unpaid internships are more common than paid ones. The difference between the two categories is about 14.28%, showing that a larger proportion of students are engaged in unpaid internships.

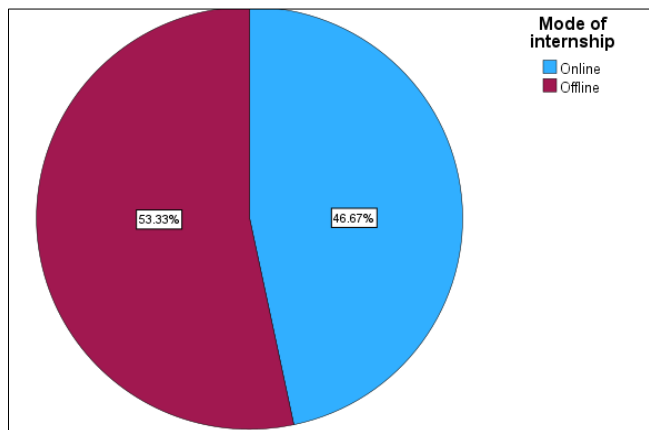
Overall, the chart suggests that although paid internships exist, most internship opportunities in the dataset do not provide financial compensation.

1.4 Total 105 responses



The above pie chart shows the duration of internships undertaken by the respondents. It can be observed that most students (68.57%) completed their internship for a duration of 1 to 3 months, which indicates that most internship programs are designed for a short-term period. About 20% of the students reported that their internship lasted for less than 1 month, while only 11.43% of the respondents undertook internships for more than 3 months. This indicates that medium-term internships of 1 to 3 months are the most common among the students.

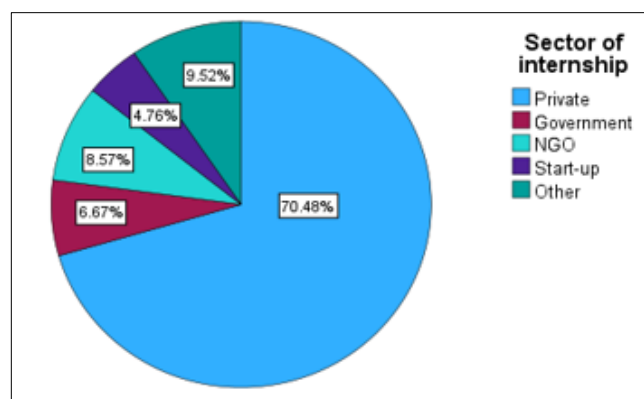
1.5 Total 105 responses



The pie chart shows the mode of internship among students, categorized as online and offline. According to the data, 46.67% of students completed their internships online, while 53.33% completed them offline. This indicates that offline internships are slightly more common than online ones. The difference between the two modes is small, showing that both

online and offline internships are widely chosen by students. Overall, the chart suggests that although digital opportunities exist, a slightly higher number of students prefer or participate in offline internships.

1.6 Total 105 responses



This pie chart shows the sector of internships among students. Most students completed their internships in the private sector (70.48%), which is significantly higher than in any other sector. A smaller percentage of students worked in other sectors (9.52%) and NGOs (8.57%). Internships in the government sector accounted for 6.67%, while start-ups had the lowest share at 4.76%. Overall, the chart indicates that most students prefer or get opportunities in the private sector, while comparatively fewer students gain internship experience in government, start-up, or NGO sectors.

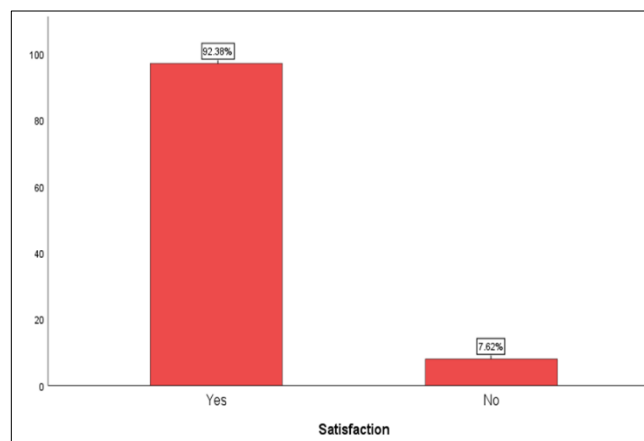
2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
▪ The internship increased my confidence in my career choice	105	3.85	.841
▪ The internship improved my employability skills	105	3.81	.810
▪ The internship helped me gain clarity about my future career	105	3.88	.793
▪ The internship improved my communication skills	105	4.04	.784
▪ The internship helped me develop new technical skills	105	4.02	.707
▪ The tasks assigned were meaningful and relevant	105	3.97	.627
▪ I was given adequate responsibilities during the internship	105	3.82	.647
▪ My college provided proper guidance before the internship	105	3.35	1.118
▪ There was good coordination between my college and the organization	105	3.58	.928
Valid N (listwise)	105		

The descriptive statistics reveal that the internship had an overall positive impact on the respondents, with all mean scores above 3.5, indicating general agreement among the 105 participants. The highest mean score was observed for improvement in communication skills (Mean = 4.04, SD = 0.784), followed closely by the development of new technical skills (Mean = 4.02, SD = 0.707), suggesting that internships are particularly effective in enhancing both soft and technical competencies. Additionally, respondents agreed that the tasks assigned were meaningful and relevant (Mean = 3.97, SD = 0.627) and that the internship helped them gain clarity about their future career (Mean = 3.88, SD = 0.793). Confidence in career choice (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.841) and adequate responsibilities during the internship (Mean = 3.82, SD = 0.647) also received positive responses. However, comparatively lower mean scores were observed for employability skills (Mean = 3.81, SD = 0.810), coordination between college and organization (Mean = 3.58, SD = 0.928), and especially college guidance before the internship (Mean = 3.35, SD = 1.118), which also showed the highest variability, indicating mixed opinions among respondents. Overall, the relatively low standard deviations for most variables suggest consistency in responses, while the findings highlight that although internships are effective in skill development and career clarity, there is scope for improvement in institutional

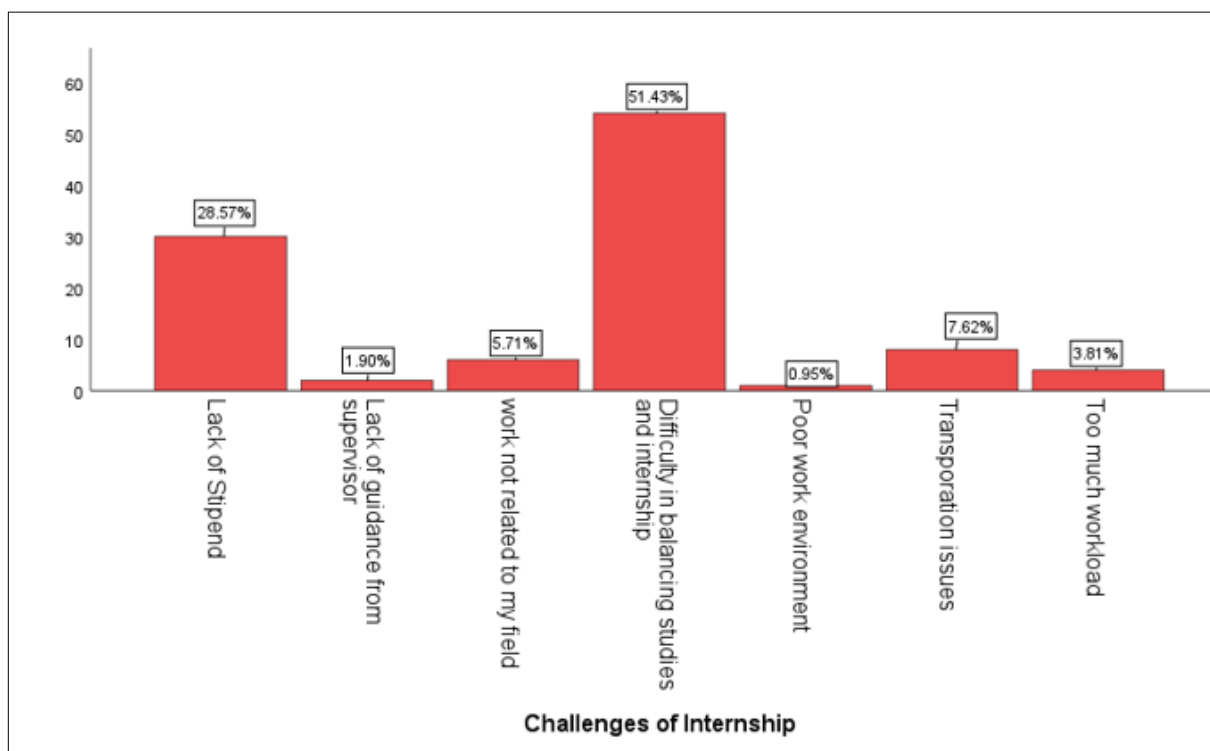
support and coordination.

3.1 Total 105 responses



The above bar chart shows the satisfaction level of the students. The chart shows that 92.38% students are satisfied with their internship programs, while only 7.62% are not satisfied. It was found that most of the students have great satisfaction with the internship.

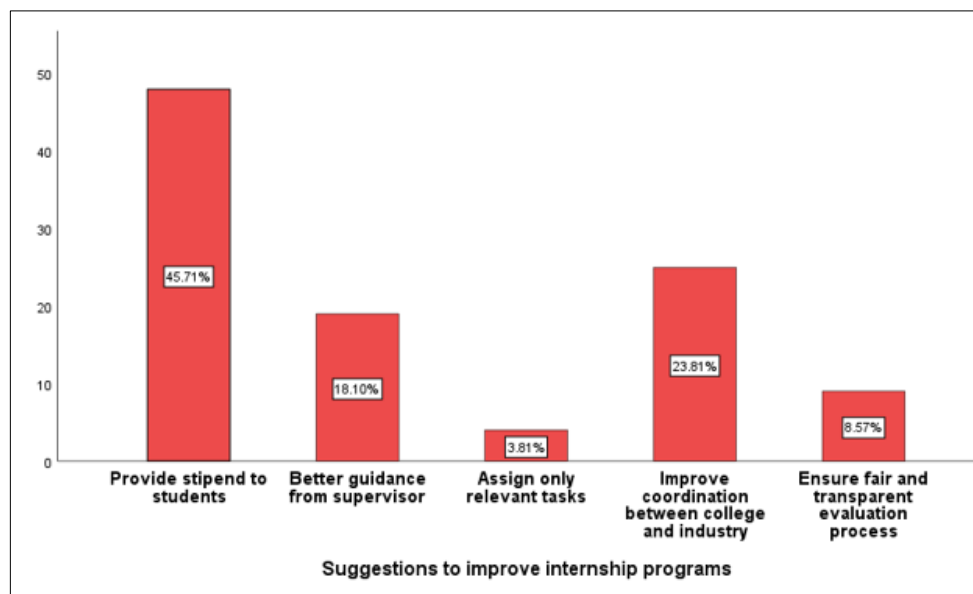
3.2 Total 105 responses



The bar chart shows the challenges faced by students during their internships. The most common challenge is difficulty in balancing studies and internship (51.43%), indicating that many students struggle to manage both academic responsibilities and internship work at the same time. The second major challenge is a lack of stipend (28.57%), showing that a significant number of students are concerned about unpaid work. Other challenges include transportation issues

(7.62%) and work not related to the student’s field (5.71%). A smaller percentage of students reported too much workload (3.81%), lack of guidance from supervisors (1.90%), and poor work environment (0.95%). Overall, the chart suggests that time management and financial concerns are the greatest difficulties students face during internships.

3.1 Total 105 responses



The data shows that the most preferred suggestion to improve internship programs is providing a stipend to students, with the highest percentage of 45.71%, indicating that financial support is a major concern among respondents. This is followed by improving coordination between college and industry (23.81%), highlighting the need for better collaboration. Better guidance from supervisors (18.10%) is also considered important by a notable proportion of respondents. On the other hand, fewer respondents emphasized ensuring fair and transparent evaluation (8.57%), while assigning only relevant tasks received the least attention (3.81%). Overall, the findings suggest that monetary benefits and institutional coordination are the key areas where improvements are most needed.

Conclusion

In this descriptive study, the effects of internship programs on the employability readiness of 105 intern students was evaluated. Internship programs play a significant role in enhancing the overall development of college students. Internship programs have an overall positive impact on the students. The internships are effective in skill development, but there is a scope for improvement in institutional support and coordination. Time management and financial concerns are the main hardships students face during their internship. Financial benefits and institutional coordination are the main areas where improvements are most needed. Institutions should focus on strengthening industry collaboration and ensuring equal opportunities for students to maximize the benefits. By doing so, an internship can enhance employability and prepare students for successful professional careers. The study also implies that the effectiveness of internship programs depends on factors such as quality of training, mentorship, and relevance to the student's field of study. Therefore, educational institutions should focus on strengthening collaborations with organizations and ensuring structured internship experiences. Internship programs serve as an essential component of higher education, contributing not only to skill development but also to holistic student growth and employability. The current study

has various statistical, sampling, and questionnaire limitations. Future researchers could consider other variables and develop a more comprehensive questionnaire to assess the internship programs completely.

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