

## **An Evaluation of Internship Programme in Improving Graduate Skills and Marketability Among Arabic Language students in IIUM from the Perspective of Malaysian Job Market**

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### **Abstract**

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The requirement of employability in the job market initiated universities to conduct internship training as part of study plan. There is a need to train the students with the important knowledge and skills related to the workplace and their gained knowledge. This study attempts to investigate the performance of internship training programme in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Methodologically, this study was conducted to congregate the opinions and experience about internship programme among Arabic language and literature students. The participants were purposively selected from 57 students who have completed their three months internship either in the public or private sector from June to September 2015 by using an online survey and open-ended questionnaires. General findings from this study show that internship training has essentially improved their soft skills and increased their work-place literacy and well-being. Despite the poor perception of Arabic language in the mutual graduate employability as well as its practicality aspects and job market by the industry, Arabic language and literature students are well accepted in both private and public sectors to undertake their internship training as reported in this paper. In conclusion, internship training is crucial, particularly among Arabic language and literature students as it enriches their experiences, knowledge and skills both in the personal and social life. It also increased their level of confidence to explore their future opportunity in the Malaysian job market including setting up their own businesses through entrepreneurship knowledge and skill.

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**Keywords:** Internship, Arabic language, soft skills, graduate employment, job market.

### **1. Introduction**

Internship plays an important role in preparing students for the real life world especially in the working experience environment and activities that are necessary for students with regards to their first hand skill development and knowledge which are not obtained during the regular classroom (Bisoux, 2007; Posner, 2008). Thus, internship is a course that commonly undertaken by undergraduate students in many universities in the world. Students are required to go through the practical course as part of the requirement of their academic degree. The need to conduct internship training at the undergraduate level is to provide them opportunity in improving their academic knowledge and enhancing their soft skills as well as acquiring extra skills that are highly needed in the workplace after their graduation.

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A formal learning environment will never be able to provide students with the complexities, problem analysis and solving involved in the real world of workplace (D'Abate et al., 2009). In Malaysia in particular, it has become crucial nowadays for most of the industry players in the job market to seek potential workers within 1-3 years of working experience which are difficult for a fresh graduate to compete with others who are more experienced. With the ever changing landscape of the Malaysian economy, Malaysian universities nowadays are facing a tremendous challenge to prepare students with theoretical knowledge and practical skills, along with soft skills required by the industries. In IIUM, industrial training or internship has been highly recommended to students' in their final year of study in order to increase employment capability among IIUM graduates based on IIUM Tracer Study (Rohaiza et. al., 2013).

The internship training programme in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is conducted among the third and final year students in three months from June until September every year. The IIUM Tracer Study 2013 reported that almost three-fifths of the IIUM graduates (59.8%) completed their industrial training or internship by three months (Saodah, 2013). Based on Abdul-Karim (2009), internship periods vary from one institution to the other and he concluded that 8 months internship programmes were a success compared to other periods. The objectives of introducing internship are to develop students' ability to apply academic knowledge and theories at workplace, develop students' soft skills and familiarize students with the actual environment of workplace setting and experience. At the same time, the department aims to make Arabic language and literature students relevant in job market by exploring and connecting various partners and networks in the Malaysian industry and job market. Students are expected to be able of finding job opportunity after graduation in the fields of education, translation, mass media, entrepreneurship, and many more. Furthermore, the new policy of Higher Education Ministry of Malaysia is preparing the graduates to be job creators and not limited as job seekers only. This training is also part and parcel of the department's responsibility to furnish students in facing the real workplace experience once they have completed their studies in the university.

## **Literature Review**

Internship is a platform for students in the academic world to integrate theoretical knowledge with real working environments and put them into practice. It is important for them to apply theoretical knowledge previously acquired in the classroom (Bakar. et. al., 2010) and (Idrus. et. al., 2010). As such, they need to take part in a supervised and planned work in the real-world specialized settings (Muhamad et. al., 2009) and (Alexei et. al., 2013). By having this internship programme, the students will have practical skills that can boost their understanding of issues which are significant to a particular work (Hughes, 1998 & Furco, 1996) and enhance employability, provide the students with real expectations of interns, furnish satisfaction of the internship experience and giving internship prerequisites as predictors of internship success (Knouse and Fontenot, 2008). Thus, internship provides a unique opportunity for undergraduates to learn about the roles and tasks relevant to their fields of study. Furthermore, the need to conduct internship programmes is a must for all students regardless of gender due to several studies conducted by Muhamad et. al. (2009), Mohd Jaffri et. al., (2011) and Warinda (2013) which indicated that there is no significant differences between genders who were undertaking this internship trainings. It means that the internship is important for both of male and female graduates. In the health professions education, the internship is conducted through integration of service learning into this education is an increasingly important increasing trends in health care services delivery shift from acute care to community-based settings (Cauley et. al. 2001).

Based on IIUM Tracer Study 2013 among the first degree and postgraduate students, more than two-thirds of the first degree graduates (66.9%) and almost one in ten of the postgraduates (7.9%) went for their industrial training even though it was not mandatory for the postgraduates and some undergraduate academic programmes.

For the undergraduate students in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), they are free to choose between academic writing and internship in their undergraduate study plan (Saodah, 2013). In general, all IIUM students' graduates reported that the university has a strong influence on their life. Among the items that assessed perceived influence among the Islamic Revealed Knowledge (IRK) students were 'develop self-confidence' (89%), 'ability to be independence' (89.8%) and 'ready to face the working world and challenges' (88%) as mentioned by Aznan and Rohaiza (2013).

However, there is no exact report for the Arabic language and literature students because they are included in the Islamic Revealed Knowledge (IRK) reports which consist of Quran and Sunnah, Usuluddin, Fiqh and Usul-Fiqh as well as Arabic language and literature programmes. For the employment status for Islamic Revealed Knowledge (IRK) first degree graduates in 2013, 36.6% of them were employed full-time, 18.8% were employed part-time, 28.9% were unemployed and 16.5% were unknown (Mariam Adawiyah & Mohd Yazid, 2013). This data shows that there is a need for enhancing the students especially in IIUM for experiencing more internship and industrial training programmes in order to make them well-prepared for the Malaysian job market and industry.

### Research Objectives

The research objectives of this paper are shown as listed:

- 1- To identify the students' satisfaction in enhancing their knowledge and soft skills in the job market.
- 2- To gather the students' feedback in enhancing their knowledge and soft skills at the workplace.
- 3- To explore the comments and suggestions by the students in improving internship programme in an Arabic language department.

### Research Methodology

A mixed method survey was employed to collect the data for this study. The respondents for this study were selected from 57 students known as interns who have completed their three-month internship from July to September 2015 either in the public or private sectors. A questionnaire was distributed to measure the interns' self-assessment of their knowledge and skills after the internship training programme in order to investigate their workplace knowledge and experiences (Nurazzura, et. al, 2014). The questionnaire was sent through an online link through a WhatsApp group as well posted in a Facebook social media group page. The survey contained four parts: demographic background, satisfaction level of interns in the internship programme and interns' overall comments and suggestions on internship programme in among Arabic language and literature students towards employability opportunity in Malaysian job market for improvement in the future. For part two, a Likert scale of 5-point was used to measure the interns' responses with 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*. All descriptive data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and the open-ended responses were reported in the thematic table after the comments or suggestions by students were analysed and concluded accordingly.

### Results and Findings

The results and findings of this study are reported in three main categories which are demographic background, satisfaction level of interns in the internship programme and overall comments/suggestions on internship programme among Arabic language and literature students towards employability opportunity in Malaysian job market for future improvement in the future. The details are as shown below:

#### a) Demographic Background

- 1- Gender:

Table 1: Gender

Gender	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	5	8.8
Female	51	89.5
Missing	1	1.8
TOTAL	57	100

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents are female with 89.8%, while the rest are 5 male undergraduate students (8.8%).

## 2- Year of study:

*Table 2: Year of Study*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Frequency (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	8	14.0
4 <sup>th</sup> year	48	84.2
Missing	1	1.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>

In Table 2, the final year students indicates the highest percentage of participants in the previous internship training programme with 84.2%, while the rest are still in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of their studies (14%).

## 3- Nationality:

*Table 3: Nationality*

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Malaysian	55	96.5
Non-Malaysian	2	3.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>

Almost all of internship trainees who have participated in the programme are Malaysian (96.5%), while only 2 of them are non-Malaysians (3.5%) based on Table 3.

## 4- Place of Internship:

*Table 4: Nature of Internship*

<b>Place</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Education	25	43.9
Book and editing industry	8	14.0
Translation	11	19.3
Tourism and customer services	1	1.8
Business and entrepreneurship	1	1.8
Broadcasting and mass media	6	10.5
Others	3	5.4
Missing	2	3.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 presents the distribution of internship places which have been selected by the interns. It is very obvious that most of them were involved in education (43.9%), book industries (24.5) and translation (19.3%), while the others went to various places and companies.

**b) Satisfaction level of interns in the internship programme:**

*Table 5: Learner's Satisfaction of Internship Programme in Improving Employability Skill*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Capable of in using theoretical and instrumental knowledge.	3.75	0.81
Believed that academic study and work place expectations differ hugely.	3.93	0.82
Believed that every organization has a position for them.	3.93	0.70
Believed that internship programme prepared them for job market.	4.21	0.77
Socially comfortable in communicating with anyone.	3.98	0.88
Analyzed information before making decision.	3.93	0.68
Believed in teamwork.	4.32	0.66
Acknowledged and recognized colleagues' abilities.	4.16	0.62
Believed that my knowledge (Arabic) can be applicable in workplace.	3.95	0.85
Need for extra knowledge and skills for employment in the job market.	4.04	0.68
Believed that academic learning helped them in internship period.	3.91	0.76
Comfortable at their workplace.	4.04	0.89
Became more disciplined in time management.	4.12	0.71
Overcame Arabic language communication skill through this programme.	3.67	0.87
Still in need of English during internship programme	3.65	1.13
Believe that academic assignments are relevant.	3.33	0.91
Agreed that internship has prepared the interns for the public sector only.	2.75	1.15
Agreed that internship has prepared the interns for the private or non-profit sector only.	2.86	1.16
Agreed that internship has prepared the interns for both of public and private or non-profit sectors.	3.96	0.68
Gained experience to set up their own business in the future.	3.74	0.81

Based on previous survey in Table 5, six (6) items were reported to have high scores of more than 3.5 which are related to their good perception towards internship programme in preparing them for job market, improving their knowledge and teamwork, enhancing their soft skills, increasing more confident and discipline personality, preparing them well for both of public and private or non-profit sectors as well as gaining experience to set up their own business in the future. The only items that show low mean score below 3.0 are related to the agreement of interns who were not agreed that internship training has prepared them for the private/non-profit or public sectors only. It means that the interns agree that internship training is good in preparing them for the job market regardless of public or private sectors or companies.

**c) Overall comments and suggestions by interns towards employability opportunity in Malaysian job market for future improvement.**

The respondents were asked to provide their comments and suggestions in an open-ended questionnaire with regards to the internship programme in among Arabic language and literature students towards employability opportunity in Malaysian job market for improvement in the future. The feedback is as important as the descriptive results and findings due to its in-depth responses and explanation by the respondents. They are analysed and grouped accordingly based on specific themes as shown in Table 6:

Table 6: Open-ended Responses for Comments and Suggestions

Main Theme	Comments and suggestions
Practicality	Good for student to practise their skills. Enhance knowledge and skills
Needed skills	Provide communication and computer skills in academic programmes before internship training Furnish the students with more computer literacy and skills Need of extra skills such as communication, writing news report, customer service among students
Prior knowledge	Student must take the course of Arabic for occupational purpose before internship programme Expose the students more to Arabic writing training
Support	Need to find financial support during internship training Visit to internship place by every appointed supervisor Need to review academic courses related to writing skill Improve the selection of internship places by the department Adding academic courses that are related to speaking skills such as public speaking, debate, acting etc.
Management of internship	Make it longer during normal semester Improve the observation procedures of internship programme

The comments and suggestion from previous open-ended questionnaire indicated the positive and negative feedbacks by students from an internship programme among Arabic language and literature students towards employability opportunity in Malaysian job market. The responses are concluded in the main themes of practicality, needed skills, prior knowledge, support and management of internship.

### Conclusion

This paper studied the evaluation of an internship training programme which has been conducted among Arabic language and literature students in the year of 2015 for future improvement. Although the overall results and findings have shown positive feedback of learners, the academic department as well the Kulliyah in IIUM should be aware of continuous aspects of improvement as mentioned by the students in order to ensure effective planning and implementation of internship programme among Arabic language and literature undergraduate students.

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