

The Impact of Undergraduate Internships on Employability - An Empirical Study

Marwa Muhammad Hassouna ^{a,*} · Zeinab Abas Zaazou ^b

^a Faculty of Commercial Studies and Business Administration, National Egyptian E-Learning University, Egypt

^b Faculty of Management Sciences, MSA University, Egypt

* *Corresponding author*: mhassona@eelu.edu.eg

Abstract

This study aims to reveal the benefits of internships for students and their impact on interns' employability and personal growth. Primary data were collected from the final and pre-final year management students at MSA University using a mixed methods approach, including qualitative and quantitative data through self-administered closed-ended questionnaires. A total of 284 questionnaires were distributed among the four majors, with participants selected through convenience sampling. T-test and ANOVA were utilized to test research hypotheses, both of which were accepted, indicating that undergraduate internships impact employability and personal growth. This research formulates effective strategies and curricula that promote internship programs. By integrating practical experiences with theoretical learning, business students can graduate with comprehensive skills. The study also provides implications for companies to design and implement impactful internship programs that can assist companies in reducing recruitment and training costs.

Keywords

Internships, Employability, Interns' Personal growth, Convenience sampling, Mixed research approach.

Article history

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1. Introduction

Transitioning from a student to a professional can be a challenging experience, as students must adapt to a new environment and apply their theoretical knowledge in a practical setting. Business students often rely on their theoretical business knowledge when starting their first jobs. However, participation in academic internship programs enables students to better implement their concepts in the workplace. According to James (2018), these programs serve as a bridge between theory and practice, facilitating the engagement of students in supervised and scheduled work that can improve their personal skills, professional growth, and experience. Today, the importance of internships is widely recognized by educational institutes, students, and business recruiters. Furthermore, internship programs provide opportunities for educational institutes to upgrade their curricula, as well as for students to gain practical work experience.

Internships are beneficial for gaining practical experience, learning teamwork, enhancing resumes, establishing personal and professional relationships, as well as earning substantial income. Furthermore, companies benefit from internship programs through acquiring valuable employees and competent job applicants. Internships enable students to receive training during their internship, thereby reducing employers' supervision and training costs by providing them with pre-trained employees. The significance of internships lies in their ability to deliver short-term practical experience to students, consequently supporting their entry into the job market during or after their undergraduate programs.

The primary objective of this study is to assess the benefits of internship programs for undergraduate business students in terms of their future career development, their professional and personal growth, the enhancement of professional and personal skills following completion of their internship period, as well as the provision of job opportunities for undergraduates. In addition, the study aims to examine the advantages of internship programs for employers and universities. To address these objectives, the main research questions are as follows:

1. Do Internships impact undergraduates' job opportunities?
2. Do Internships impact undergraduates' talents and abilities, and increase their self-confidence?

This study is divided into three sections: the first section comprises the introduction and the literature review, the second section discusses the research approach and main findings, and the final section encompasses the conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Internship Definition

Internships or immersion programs refer to educational experiences that involve students actively participating in specific roles or professions, and present practical

application and career-oriented learning opportunities. Internships are primarily designed to support undergraduate and graduate students, as well as those changing careers, with hands-on exposure to their chosen field of study or a new career, either in a paid or unpaid environment (Galbraith & Mondal, 2020). This experience enhances formal learning through acquiring practical knowledge and skills within recognized Host Training Establishments (HTF). During internships, students become thoroughly immersed in the culture and daily operations of their chosen field, as these programs typically involve on-the-job training and constitute a form of traineeship

Essentially, a college internship is a form of experiential learning that occurs outside the classroom, combining theoretical knowledge with on-the-job training, thereby offering hands-on experience crucial for developing skills and knowledge that cannot be acquired within traditional academic settings (Bawica, 2021).

On the contrary, traineeships are short-term periods of work practice periods within a company, public organization, or non-profit entity. They equip individuals with training and experience in a particular field or career area prior to transitioning into regular employment (Adeosun et al., 2022).

2.2. Internships Benefits

Internships confer numerous benefits for students, employers and educational institutions as follows:

2.2.1 For Students

According to Margaryan et al. (2022), internships are widely recognized for providing valuable benefits to students. These benefits include the development of work-relevant skills, specific knowledge related to their future occupations, a clearer sense of self-identity, and the opportunity to confirm or redirect their career goals. Many skills acquired during internships are considered general and transferable, thereby applicable across various work settings (Busby, 2003). Furthermore, internships provide students with an opportunity to gain work experience and develop both general and specific skills. This experience enables students to explore their interests and preferences, assisting them in making more informed decisions when selecting courses for their remaining studies. The attributes acquired through internships, including enhanced employability skills, high-order thinking skills, interpersonal and teamwork skills, as well as personal characteristics and attitudes (Kapareliotis et al., 2019), can yield positive outcomes during the transition into the labor market and contribute to early career success.

According to Bender (2020), internships presents the opportunity for students to acquire discipline-specific knowledge and develop significant skills such as professionalism, communication, and interpersonal abilities. In addition to technical skills, employers are increasingly focusing on soft skills, such as attitude and work ethics. A comprehensive undergraduate education should encompass both broad knowledge and disciplinary skills, in addition to prioritizing integrative learning,

knowledge of human culture and the world, intellectual and practical skills, as well as personal and social responsibility. Moreover, undergraduates seek internships to aid in the career planning process before securing a full-time job. To facilitate career exploration and prepare students for the workforce, universities often incorporate both compulsory and voluntary internships into their curricula (Millard, 2020). Thus, internships serve as an effective mechanism for preparing students for the job market, since these programs have become increasingly prevalent across undergraduate and graduate curricula, with a growing number of students opting to participate (Karakiraz et al., 2021). As a result, interns may attain the status of permanent employees at the same internship organization if they satisfy the employers' expectation (Millard, 2020).

2.2.2 For Employers

According to Bist et al. (2020), employers actively pursue graduates who demonstrated proactivity and possessed skills such as analysis, critique, synthesis, and communication. Graduates capable of adapting to the workplace culture and effectively utilize their abilities and skills to contribute value to the organization were greatly regarded. Additionally, critical thinking has been regarded by employers as crucial for fostering innovation and leading change.

In general, employers emphasize the significance of graduates possessing a combination of technical skills and broader competencies to enhance their employability. These competencies encompass both cognitive abilities and personal attributes, assisting graduates in contributing effectively to their organizations, and adapt to the dynamic demands of the workplace.

Employers frequently cite two primary reasons for utilizing interns: the availability of additional labor capacity and the opportunity to assess potential future employees. Hiring interns as full-time employees after graduation can lead to cost savings in recruitment and selection processes. Furthermore, employers encounter reduced risks since they are already familiar with the interns' performance during their internship period. Following their hiring, former interns require less training and adapt more quickly to the work environment compared to new employees without prior internship experience. Assuming that interns performed well during their internships, they are expected to possess sufficient knowledge and skills to contribute effectively to the company. Moreover, interns may exhibit greater loyalty and remain with the company for a longer duration compared to non-intern hires (Mohaidin et al., 2017)

2.2.3 For Educational Institutions

The primary objective of colleges is to prepare students for the workforce. Internships provide students with an opportunity to apply their newly acquired skills in practical employment. This experience can offer an innovative perspective, allowing students to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the business, the particular organizational culture of their chosen site, and their selected field of study. Moreover, assigning the student workplace-related duties, projects, and networking opportunities promotes the optimal utilization of this time (Galbraith & Mondal, 2020).

In accordance with Hou (2018), the effectiveness of the triangular network, including students, educational institutions, and industry, ensures a successful internship program and benefit the three primary stakeholders. Internships represent a triangular collaboration involving students, schools, and industry. They also support students in participating in practical environments, and gaining experiential knowledge to build a solid foundation for their future career development. Furthermore, internships enhance students' problem-solving abilities, their social and professional skills, as well as their professional relationships, all of which increase their employability upon graduation. Conversely, industry reinforces its connection with academic institutions, adopting fresh ideas while reducing hiring costs. Moreover, they gain access to a source of cost-effective and qualified labor, and provide workplace training to mitigate uncertainty when hiring potential talented individuals in the future.

2.3. Common Internship Types

There are many types of internships as follows:

- Paid internships are prevalent in professional fields and aim to expand an intern's perception of both academic studies and practical application within the company. Interns are expected to contribute ideas and knowledge from their educational pursuits to enhance the company's operations (Stewart, A., 2023).
- Unpaid internships typically exist in non-profit charities and think tanks, where positions often rely on volunteers. State laws and enforcement agencies may impose specific requirements on unpaid internship programs, leading to their compliance with the Minimum Wage Act. To be appropriately classified as an unpaid internship, a program must adhere to certain criteria (The Internship Experience at the University of Mississippi, 2022).
- Credit Internships offer academic credit and have become popular among students. These internships allow participants to earn academic credit by completing coursework while simultaneously acquiring practical experience through the internship (Harken, N. et al, 2022).
- Summer Internships typically last between eight and twelve weeks, and can be either full-time or part-time. These internships are the most popular type among students, since they present a realistic preview regarding working in a particular job or career field, enabling interns to establish regular work habits and acquire valuable knowledge and skills (Career Center, Credit Internships, 2023).
- Service internships represent a type of experiential education that involves completing community service work to achieve specific learning objectives. Service learning requires that both the recipient and provider of the service benefit from the experience and are equally transformed by it (Rehling, L. 2000).
- Online Internships include remote internships, virtual internships, tele-working, and telecommuting, which all refer to the same concept: completing an internship virtually from one's laptop without commuting (Hora et al., 2020).

- Micro-internships, unlike traditional internships, can occur throughout the year, typically involving 5 to 40 hours of work, with project deadlines extending from one week to one month after the start (Parker Dewey, 2020).

2.4. Challenges of Internship Programs

According to Margaryan (2022), outcomes attributed to internships may be influenced by other types of practical work experience, posing a potential risk. This view suggests that the skills or benefits obtained during internships might intersect with those acquired through alternative work experiences, which could result in confusion or misattribution when evaluating the specific contributions of internships. Furthermore, the requirement to complete a specific firm internship could impact students' decision, potentially leading them to ignore other valuable forms of work experience which might serve as substitutes for or complements to firm internships. To investigate the impact of mandatory internships on graduation probabilities, additional data from official institutions in Egypt would be necessary to provide insights into the correlation between mandatory internships and the likelihood of successfully completing a degree program. The relevant information gathered from these institutions can assist researchers in examining the relationship between internships and graduation rates, thereby presenting a more thorough comprehension of the subject matter.

Bawadi et al. (2023) identified various challenges that may confront students during their internship. These challenges encompass difficulties with essential skills such as time management, self-motivation, digital literacy, and remote communication. Furthermore, the quality of the learning experience can be influenced by several factors, including the level of supervision, mentorship, as well as the availability of resources and feedback. For instance, students working from home during remote internships may encounter distractions or limited access to a conducive work environment, impacting their productivity and focus. Moreover, unfamiliarity with virtual collaboration tools may hinder their performance in virtual internships, as they might struggle to establish a strong professional presence, build relationships with supervisors and colleagues, or fully immerse themselves in the organizational culture.

To address these challenges, universities, employers, and students should all collaborate to provide comprehensive support, including training programs, mentorship, clear communication channels, and access to essential resources. Effective management of these challenges can lead to a more successful and enriching virtual internship experience for students.

Consequently, significant investments of time and money are required from internship directors for developing an internship program, securing funding, conducting a search, and providing the continuous support necessary for the program's growth. Additionally, internships are sometimes pursued to achieve academic goals, such as raising academic funding and investment in the university, rather than enhancing experiential learning.

2.5. The Impact Undergraduate Internships on Employability

In accordance with Vincent and Chiwandire (2019), employability refers to an employee's capability to secure and sustain current employment as well as future employment. Academic discourse on employability explores an individual's aptitude to identify job opportunities and achieve employment stability, emphasizing personal attributes such as knowledge, skills, and qualities. Rather than being limited to a singular skill, employability encompasses various facets, including knowledge, technology, life perspective, values, and competitiveness, which are crucial elements for determining the students' employment prospects.

The enhancement of students' awareness regarding employment, the cultivation of their professional and practical skills, in addition to the augmentation of their overall appeal to employers, are achieved through skills training. Internship programs significantly enhance students' employability by developing both "soft" and "hard" skills. Specifically, they improve emotional stability, tolerance for pressure, and adaptability to change, which are associated with "soft" skills, and support the acquisition of formal and technical, which constitute "hard" skills.

Chen et al. (2023) as well as Arthur and Koomson (2023) argued that internships serve as a valuable bridge for students transitioning from the academic setting to the professional realm. These programs contribute significantly to the enhancement of students' interpersonal, communication, and problem-solving skills, thereby elevating their employability and job prospects. By integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience, internships considerably participate in promoting students' professional confidence and establishing a tangible link between the classroom and the workplace. In contrast to the lecture theatre, which may not fully equip students with the complexity and problem-solving skills essential for the real world, practical experimentation in internships becomes indispensable.

Numerous past studies identified various factors linked to students' achievements during their university years as primary indicators of their future employability. These factors encompass academic literacy and cross-cultural communication. To address the employment challenges encountered by college students, the Chinese government has instituted several policies aimed at encouraging universities to establish the Internship Promotion Programme (IPP). This initiative is designed to mobilize enterprises to provide high-quality internship positions and assist in the overall effectiveness and quality of internships. Findings from previous research confirm the significance of internships in improving students' employability (Chen & Gan, 2021).

2.6. Employability Dimensions

To comprehensively understand employability, it is essential to explore several dimensions that contribute to an individual's success in the professional realm. The first dimension, human capital aspect, pertains to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to fulfill the performance expectations within a specific occupation or professional field, a concept explicitly conveyed by several authors. The second

dimension, reflection, addresses awareness of an individual's role in the work context, which involves recognizing personal goals, values, interests, expectations, motivations, as well as strengths and weaknesses. The third dimension, flexibility, a fundamental element in most frameworks, denotes the willingness and capability to actively or passively develop and adapt to fluctuating environments. Social capital, the fourth dimension, refers to being embedded in pertinent social networks and possessing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to cultivate relevant work-related relationships. The fifth dimension, balance, is not explicitly incorporated in existing frameworks; however, its reintroduction is proposed as an explicit dimension. Work-life Balance, in this context, is defined as the ability to reconcile opposing interests of employers while balancing the competing demands of work, career, and personal interests as an employee. This dimension additionally encompasses finding equilibrium between the interests of employers and employees (Römgens et al., 2020).

2.7. Signaling Theory of Employability

Signaling theory addresses the manner in which participants in the labor market respond to incomplete information regarding the productive capacity of job entrants and their potential organizational fit. With regard to initial employability development, signaling theory is pertinent for comprehending how employers and graduates convey and interpret employability signals. The theory highlights the imperfect information that both parties possess during the recruitment and selection processes, emphasizing their reliance on various indicators or signals to communicate information. Our analysis examines the signaling process between employers and graduates, each providing distinct information to the interaction. This communication aims to mitigate information disparities, enabling both parties to assess the likelihood of a favorable match between the graduate's attributes and the employer's employment opportunities and priorities (Spence, 1973).

In conclusion, Internships provide students with valuable work-related experience and facilitate the selection of flexible, experienced, and highly qualified candidates for companies. Consequently, internship programs offer substantial benefits for students, educational institutions, and employers. Considering the emerging innovation and technological advancement, developing the skills and competencies required for students to navigate the modern world of work is crucial, with internship programs aiding undergraduates in enhancing their skills and abilities while promoting their personal growth. To achieve these outcomes, it is necessary to reform Egypt's educational system through improving instructional methods, developing curricula, supporting research involvement, and providing practical training opportunities for students. Therefore, internship programs serve as a bridge between theoretical classroom concepts and real-world workplace experiences, effectively training students and equipping them to excel in an ever-progressing real world.

3. Research Hypotheses

Following a thorough review of the literature, the research hypotheses were formulated as follows:

H1: Undergraduate internships have an impact on employability.

H2: Undergraduate internships have an impact on interns' personal growth.

3.1. Research Approach and Methods

Researchers utilized both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative component relied primarily on secondary data such as journals, articles, and other sources. In addition, the study incorporated a literature review and exploratory research through interviewing two experts in the field and surveying a sample of 40 undergraduates of Faculty of Management Sciences.

Regarding the quantitative component, the study gathered primary data from the final year and pre-final year management faculty students at MSA University through questionnaires including self-administered closed-ended questions. Data collection occurred in May and June 2023. In total, 284 questionnaires were distributed among students from four majors (Economics, Accounting, Marketing, and Management Information Systems). The study was structured as follows:

Part I: The descriptive technique analysis of the study consisted of percentage and frequency analysis of the participants' demographic characteristics and central tendency measurement of their responses. The statistical technique comprised scale analysis, including reliability and validity tests.

Part II: Hypotheses testing, using the inferential statistical methods, was conducted through T-test and ANOVA.

3.2. The Qualitative Approach: Exploratory Research

Exploratory research was conducted to gain an initial understanding of the research problem and explore potential challenges, opportunities, or new areas of investigation, rather than to provide conclusive evidence or definitive answers.

The Qualitative research sample consisted of 40 undergraduates from the Faculty of Management Sciences at MSA University, aged between 18 and 20 years old, mainly from the 300 and 400 levels. The sample included 17 females and 23 males who were engaged in internship programs. In addition, two experts were consulted: one female, Dr. Hala El Marsafy, Director of the Graduates and Field Training Unit at MSA University, in addition to one male, Mr. Mohamed Abdullah, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the International Organization for E-Tourism Industry (IOETI).

3.3. Exploratory Research Findings

Interview questions are stated in Appendix A (see p. 29).

3.3.1 MSA Undergraduates Interview Findings.

The questions addressed to the undergraduates focused on their internship experiences, including what they learned, how internships might help them attain their future career goals and increase their job opportunities, the knowledge and skills acquired through internships, in addition to their motivation for participating in internship programs. All undergraduates confirmed that they had previously applied for an internship when asked about their past internship applications.

Concerning the reasons for the students' application for an internship and its perceived significance, 10 out of 40 undergraduates indicated that internships present valuable insights into the work environment, and provide on-the-job training that supports their academic studies, and enhance their overall experience. Conversely, 30 out of 40 undergraduates reported that their application was primarily due to the university requirement, and the current emerging companies' demand for prior experience and graduates who have completed internship programs.

When participants were asked about the knowledge and skills acquired during internships, only 13 undergraduates out of 40 confirmed acquiring substantial knowledge, including experience, work ethics, and skills in interacting with co-workers and clients. In addition, they gained insight into project logistics, and some participants enhanced their presentation and personal skills. However, 27 out of 40 participants believed that internships were not valuable except for acquiring some basic skills such as Microsoft office usage, file organization, and the habit of waking up early.

Regarding how internships might prepare them for their future career, the majority of students, 15 out of 40, reported that most internships provide significant future career experience through involving them in real-world work environments. Moreover, they noted that companies prioritize prior experience and knowledge gained from internships over what is learned in university. Therefore, internships were considered crucial, since they help them attain their future goals. However, 25 out of 40 undergraduates believed that internships did not adequately prepare them for their career goals despite the experience they acquired.

With respect to internship certificates, 28 out of 40 undergraduates reported that the current opportunities of getting a good job are influenced by the skills and knowledge written in CVs rather than the actual experience gained in real-world work environments. They added that internships certificates are required by most universities and serves as a brief trial of working experience to initiate their career. In contrast, 12 out of 40 undergraduates preferred the benefits of training over obtaining a certificate, since they believe that the advantages gained from internship or training programs will better assist them in achieving their desired career goals. These committed students may apply for up to two internships per year to gain exposure to the work environment, motivated by their passion rather than university requirement.

When participants were asked to evaluate the whole internship program, the majority, 32 undergraduates, indicated several concerns. First, there is a lack of collaboration between corporate and academic supervisors. Second, despite the specific tasks assigned to students by training companies, there is a limited supportive atmosphere for students to express their preferences. Additionally, firms often fail to provide comprehensive feedback to both interns and their academic supervisors. Students also questioned the ability of companies to increase their opportunities through various experiences, and the ability of internships to assess their job suitability. Finally, they asserted that excelling in interviews and passing pre-employment tests are more crucial than the internship experience itself.

For the remaining participants, 8 undergraduates, they believed that companies offer internship opportunities to assess practical skills and potentially identify suitable candidates for vacant positions within the organization. In addition, they are convinced that these companies will promote their opportunities through providing diverse experiences, as recruiters prefer graduates with prior training experience.

Upon reviewing the undergraduates' responses, 20 out of 40 revealed that their primary focus is on the company's brand name rather than the quality of the training program offered by the workplace, as recruiters tend to prioritize the companies' commercial names where students have interned over the knowledge or skills students gained. Both recruiters and undergraduates believe that the company's brand name influences recruitment decisions. Conversely, the remaining 20 undergraduates noted the wide variety of internship programs concerning quality and content; therefore, they are pursuing programs that align with their major.

When asked about recruiters' perceptions regarding graduates past experiences, all undergraduates participants confirmed recruiters' positive perception of job candidates with previous experiences, compared to those candidates without past work experiences.

Regarding the skills and knowledge acquired through internships, 20 participants agreed that internships significantly enhance their confidence and communication skills. They added that that internships train them to manage pressure. In contrast, the remaining 20 participants asserted the inadequacy of internship programs in significantly developing their personal skills and self-confidence.

Upon inquiring about the type of personal skills provided by internships, 14 participants confirmed gaining self-confidence, communication skills, teamwork abilities, social relations, problem-solving skills, time management, and ability to work under pressure. Conversely, 16 participants held an entirely different view, disputing the impact of internship on the mentioned areas.

3.3.2 The Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the International Organization for e-Tourism Industry (IOETI)

The researchers conducted an interview with Mr. Mohamed Abdullah, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the International Organization for e-Tourism Industry (IOETI). This non-profit organization aims to support all stakeholders

involved in the e-tourism industry in the Middle East. Three years ago, IOETI signed a protocol with MSA University, which entailed offering free internships and job opportunities to students from MSA faculties upon their graduation.

The interview with Mr. Abdullah focused primarily on their selection process, including the desired skills, abilities, and knowledge they seek in candidates. It also addressed the level of dedication demonstrated by interns, the perceived value of internship experience for job candidates, the personal skills gained through internships, as well as the benefits that internships provide for their organization, the university, and the students. Furthermore, the discussion explored the availability of soft skills training and job offers for interns after their internship.

For the company's internship process, Mr. Abdullah stated that initially, IOETI receives CVs from the Director of Graduates and the Field Training Unit at MSA University. These CVs undergo an initial screening, focusing on high academic achievement in relevant fields. The HR department subsequently interviews the candidates who pass the initial screening, assessing their personal and cultural fit, as well as their suitability for the internship position. Candidates with strong language skills, excellent communication abilities, and a personal affinity for the tourism and hotel service industry, are prioritized.

According to Mr. Abdullah, some candidates approach the internship opportunity seriousness and a strong desire to acquire knowledge, information, and new skills. However, he confirmed that this attitude is not universally shared among all candidates. Mr. Abdullah firmly asserted that internships provide significant benefits to their organization, the university, and the students. For IOETI, candidates contribute to organizations through effective problem-solving, the generation of creative ideas, and the provision of networking opportunities that benefit the organization. Additionally, interns represent a cost-effective workforce for both current and future employment demands.

From the university's perspective, institutions that offer mandatory internships are considered unique; they attract high levels of referrals from both parents and students and maintain a strong position within the education sector. Regarding students, Mr. Abdullah emphasized the significance of internships for undergraduates, as they provide exposure to real-life situations and aid in the development of skills required for interacting with customers, co-workers, and managers. Moreover, internships enhance students' overall skills and knowledge, effectively preparing them for the job market.

Mr. Abdullah contends that participating in internships at various companies significantly advances an undergraduate's academic career and encourages students to exceed expectations in developing their skills and acquiring real-life experience. Furthermore, internships enable students to manage their time efficiently while addressing assigned tasks and promote teamwork and collaboration. Mr. Abdullah highlighted that IOETI provides candidates with not only technical skills but also soft and digital skills. Successful and proactive candidates are subsequently employed by IOETI following their graduation.

In conclusion, Mr. Abdullah maintained that undergraduates with internship experience are more experienced and qualified, since internships facilitate the exploration of new job opportunities and serve as a cost-effective source of employment. Finally, he asserted that internships provide MSA University with a competitive edge in the market.

3.3.3 The Director of Graduates and Field Training Unit at MSA University Interview Findings

Regarding the university's internship and training programs, Dr. Hala El Marsafy, Director of Graduates and Field Training Unit at MSA University, explained that students are required to complete two obligatory non-credit field training periods to be eligible for graduation; one in the first period of their second academic year and another in their third academic year, each lasting three weeks. These programs were accredited in September 2016; therefore, all students enrolled in the Faculty of Management Sciences from the academic year 2022-2023 are obliged to successfully complete these field experience courses before graduation.

Dr. El Marsafy identified a primary three-dimensional objective of internships, which aims to provide practical experience through work in public or private companies, and comprises the following three key aspects:

- 1) Student-related objectives: They are achieved through combining academic knowledge with practical experience, assisting in resume preparation to improve job prospects, developing employability skills, initiating career paths, establishing a network of business contacts, and potentially securing permanent employment.
- 2) Employer-related objectives: They involve providing a pool of potential candidates, matching candidates to company needs, reducing hiring costs, and contributing to the community.
- 3) Faculty-related objectives: These objectives include enriching course discussions through the practical insights contributed by students who actively engage in their learning.

Regarding students' role in the internship program, Dr. El Marsafy emphasized the importance of analyzing their skills, strengths, and weaknesses to select a suitable training experience that aligns with their personality and skills, and promotes their job opportunities after graduation. Students may find field training opportunities through personal contacts, the Career Placement Center (CPC), or the graduate unit of the faculty. Students must prepare a professional resume, apply via the Field Training Registration Form on the faculty website, and upon completing their internship, submit the Student Evaluation of Field Training Experience form. Furthermore, supervisors must complete the Field Training Supervisor Evaluation Form and the Field Training Hours Form.

Dr. El Marsafy reported that the evaluation of the training programs involves analyzing submitted forms of trainers and supervisors, in addition to students'

attendance records. The Faculty of Management Sciences assesses the training experience against predefined objectives and certifies course completion. This evaluation process helps improve future training programs and update courses based on job market trends, ensuring graduates possess relevant employability skills.

According to the results of this analysis, the faculty will evaluate the student's training experience in light of the previously stated training objectives. Then, the faculty will certify that the student has passed the course. The evaluation of the training program will enable the faculty to improve future training programs and update courses with relevant information from the job market. This will help the faculty provide graduates with high employability skills and a realistic understanding of job requirements. In this context, Dr. El Marsafy proudly noted, "Our top students can serve as ambassadors in the job market, thereby enhancing the faculty's reputation and strengthening the brand of our graduates."

With regard to the benefits of MSA University's internship program, Dr. El Marsafy confirmed that it involves a mutually beneficial collaboration that provides advantages for all parties involved, as it has resulted in an expansion of networking partners. She reported that all contacts are shared with the Career Placement Center at MSA to extend invitations for the university's annual employment fair. Furthermore, the feedback from internships regarding students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes contributes to the development of the curriculum, with program updates occurring every four years to ensure alignment with industry requirements. MSA University invites guest speakers from these internship employers to provide students with insights on the industry to the students. Consequently, the internship programs substantially enhance the employability of MSA University students, rendering them highly in demand in the job market.

According to the experts' interview results, not all candidates approach the internship opportunity with the seriousness required to acquire knowledge, information, and new skills. Experts assert that internships offer multiple benefits for organizations, universities, and students. Many job candidates contribute added value to training companies and their respective universities by solving problems, offering creative ideas, and providing networking opportunities that benefit the organization. Furthermore, internships develop students' skills and knowledge, preparing them effectively for the job market. The educational expert emphasized the significance of enriching the course discussions with innovative practical insights introduced by students.

Regarding the undergraduates' interview results, a distinct perspective emerged, since the majority perceived the internship programs as a mandatory requirement for graduation. Moreover, a significant number of students referred to the inadequacy of internships in providing the expected knowledge and skills or preparing them for future employment.

Researchers expect the following quantitative study to present further clarification on the overall internship matter and its benefits to all stakeholders. Hence, both the qualitative and quantitative studies complete each other, providing a more holistic

perspective on the benefits of internship programs for undergraduates, educational entities, and training companies.

3.4. The Quantitative Approach: Statistical Analysis for Testing Research Hypotheses

3.4.1 Research Population and Sampling Size and Type.

The study population comprised 829 final and pre-final year students from the four departments of Faculty of Management Sciences. The population included 38 students from the Economics department, 287 students from the Accounting department, 374 from the Marketing and International Business department, and 130 students from the Management and Information Systems department.

The research sample comprised 284 students from the four faculty departments. The employed sample method was a non-judgmental convenience sampling technique.

3.4.2 Participants Demographics

The results indicate that the 284 respondents were aged between 21 and 23 years old. Among them, 49.5% were male and 50.5% were female. Regarding the distribution of respondents across programs, 38 students, 4.6%, were enrolled in the Economics program, 287 students, 34.6%, were from the Accounting program, 374 students, 45.1%, were from the Marketing and International Business section, and 130 students, 15.7% were in Management Information Systems. All participants had completed an internship program for at least three weeks during two consecutive summers of pre-final and final university years.

3.4.3 Research Reliability and Validity

To assess reliability of the questionnaire statements, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was employed. This coefficient varies between zero (indicating no reliability) and one (indicating maximum reliability). The validity of the questionnaire was determined by calculating the validity coefficient as the square root of the reliability coefficient. For hypothesis one, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.982, and the validity coefficient was 0.99. For hypothesis two, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.996, and validity coefficient was 0.997 as shown in statistical Table 1.

Table (1) The Reliability and Validity Coefficient for the Research Statements

Research Statements	Number of paragraphs	Reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alpha)	Validity coefficient
Hypothesis one statements	5	0.982	0.99
Hypothesis two statements	5	0.996	0.997

3.4.4 Testing Research Hypothesis

The researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics to test the following research hypothesis:

H1: Undergraduate internships have an impact on employability.

H2: Undergraduate internships have impact on interns' personal growth.

3.4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics Results of the Statements of Hypothesis One and Two. The grand mean of Hypothesis one is 4.65, with a standard deviation of less than 1, referring to the homogeneity and consistency in the statements. The general coefficient of variation assesses the relative variability of the measurements. The coefficient variation is considered acceptable within the range of 0 to 0.50. The results revealed that the general coefficient variation for the statements of Hypothesis Two is 13.14%, confirming the validity of the sample data, as shown in, Statistical Table 2.

Table (2) Descriptive Statistics Results of the Statements of Hypothesis One

Paragraph	Levels [Frequency / Percent]					MEAN	Standard deviation	Coeff. of variative	Rank
	Totally Disagree	Disagre	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree				
Internships have granted me many job opportunities	0	2	12	70	200	4.65	0.60	12.82%	3
	0%	1%	4%	25%	70%				
Internships added new experiences to me.	0	2	12	86	184	4.59	0.61	13.22%	4
	0%	1%	4%	30%	65%				
Internships helped me to understand theoretical curriculum	1	1	12	48	222	4.72	0.59	12.51%	2
	0%	0%	4%	17%	78%				
Internships expanded my knowledge	0	2	12	58	212	4.69	0.58	12.44%	1
	0%	1%	4%	20%	75%				
Internships helped me to understand my job tasks	1	1	12	74	196	4.63	0.62	13.33%	5
	0%	0%	4%	26%	69%				
Grand mean	1	1	12	67	203	4.65	0.61	13.14%	

Table (3): Descriptive Statistics Results of the Statements of Hypothesis Two

Paragraph	Levels [Frequency / Percent]					MEAN	Standard deviation	Coeff. of variation	Rank
	Totally Disagree	Disagre	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree				
My self-confidence increased after my internship	0	2	12	49	221	4.72	0.57	12.12%	3
	0%	1%	4%	17%	78%				
I gained many theoretical and practical skills after my internship.	0	2	12	45	225	4.74	0.57	11.97%	2
	0%	1%	4%	16%	79%				
I gained experience in public relations after internship	0	2	12	44	226	4.74	0.57	11.93%	1
	0%	1%	4%	15%	80%				
Internship helped me to better understand the theoretical curricula I studied at the university.	0	2	13	47	222	4.72	0.58	12.25%	5
	0%	1%	5%	17%	78%				
Internship earned me a special ability to deal well with crises.	0	2	12	52	218	4.71	0.58	12.23%	4
	0%	1%	4%	18%	77%				
Grand mean	0	2	12	47	223	4.73	0.57	12.04%	

The grand mean for Hypothesis Two is 4.73, with a standard deviation of less than 1, referring to homogeneity and consistency in the statements. The general coefficient of variation assesses the relative variability of the measurements. The acceptable range for the coefficient of variation is from 0 to 0.50. Our results revealed that the coefficient of variation for the statements of Hypothesis Two is 12.04%, which confirms the validity of the sample data, as detailed in , Statistical Table 3.

3.4.4.2 Inferential Statistics Results for Hypotheses One and Two.

The t-test and ANOVA were used to analyze research hypotheses across different department within the Faculty of Management at MSA University. The analysis revealed the following results:

3.2.4.2.1 T-Test of the Whole Sample of Hypotheses One and Two

Researchers utilized T-test and found out that the average opinion of the whole sample of both hypotheses is greater than 3 and the test results were as follows:

As we see in table 4 & 5 the mean of H1 is 4.656 and of H2 is 4.727, also the standard deviation is less than 1, which proves homogeneous and consistency of the statements of H1 & H2. The significance level of both hypotheses is 0.000, which means that the difference between the average of male and average of female is equal to 0, meaning that there is an agreement between the opinions of male and females which proves homogeneity of participants opinions.

Table (4): T-Test of the whole sample of the First Hypothesis

Dimensions	Mean	Std. Deviation	T. test	
			t	Sig
first Hypothesis	4.656	0.579	48.213	0.000

Table (5): T-Test of the whole sample of the Second Hypothesis

Dimensions	Mean	Std. Deviation	T. test	
			t	Sig
Second Hypothesis	4.727	0.566	51.421	0.000

3.2.4.2.2 One-way ANOVA Test for Hypothesis One & Two

The researchers used a one-way ANOVA test to find out whether there is a significant difference in the average opinions between the categories that make up the sample items according to the department variable. This test revealed that the value of the significance level for H1 is sig = 0.989 greater than 5%. This means that there are no significant differences between the average opinions of each of the four categories according to the Department variable. As for H2, the value of the significance level is sig = 0.981 greater than 5%. This means that there are no significant differences between the average opinions of each of the four categories according to department variable. To conclude, the averages of opinion in the first and second hypothesis, are greater than 3. Also, the value of the coefficient of variation is 13.14% & 12.04% respectively, which confirms the validity of the sample data. As such, H1 and H2 are accepted as proven in Table 6.

Table (6): One-way ANOVA Test for Hypothesis One & Two

Dimensions	MEAN				F. test	
	Economics	Accounting	Marketing	Management Information Systems	F	Sig
H1: Internships increase undergraduates' job opportunities.	4.676	4.662	4.643	4.654	0.041	.989
H2: Internships refine undergraduates' talents and abilities and increase their self-confidence.	4.749	4.734	4.709	4.729	.058	.981

To summarize, the averages of opinion in the first and second hypothesis, are greater than 3. Moreover, the value of the coefficient of variation is 13.14% for H1 and 12.04% for H2, respectively, which confirms the validity of the sample data. Therefore, H1 and H2 are accepted.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

There is an explicit contradiction between the undergraduates' exploratory research results and the statistical research findings. During the interviews with 40 undergraduates from the Faculty of Management Sciences, the majority reported that the primary reason for their application to internship programs was to fulfil a university requirement. They added that companies now require prior experience and prefer graduates who have completed internship programs. Many participants conveyed the view that internships are ineffectual, noting that they acquired little beyond fundamental Microsoft office skills, file organization, and adaptation to early work hours.

Furthermore, most participants primarily focused on the company's brand name rather than the quality of the training program offered by the workplace. They believed that recruiters prioritize the companies' commercial names where students have completed their internship programs over the acquired knowledge or skills. Additionally, many participants questioned the effectiveness of internships in determining their suitability for job positions, emphasizing that excelling in interviews and passing pre-employment tests are more essential than the internship experience itself.

In contrast, a minority of participants confirmed the role of internships in providing insights into the work environment and training in work-related projects. They regarded internships as a means to acquire valuable experience, instill work ethics, and learn to interact with colleagues and clients while effectively managing critical problems. In addition, they acknowledge the role of internships in promoting creative thinking, idea generation, and innovation. Overall, internships are considered a means for preparing for future employment through developing personal abilities and

skills, including self-confidence, communication skills, teamwork, social interactions, problem-solving abilities, time management, and resilience under pressure.

With respect to the perspectives of companies and experts, internships are very beneficial for both employers and students. Employers can develop a cost-effective workforce on a temporary basis, providing them with the opportunity to select the most suitable candidates for future employment. Companies seek fresh graduates with prior experience and knowledge gained from internships, as such experience helps them attain their future goals and improves their opportunities of securing a desirable job. Therefore, employers can identify their future employees among interns, who can also assist the companies in overcoming staff shortages. Furthermore, job candidates who participate in internships add value to the company through solving problems, contributing innovative ideas, and creating networking opportunities. Therefore, interns serve as a cost-effective workforce, fulfilling both immediate and future employment requirements.

Based on the perspectives of the university training and HR departments, internships fulfill three main objectives: integrating students' academic knowledge with practical experience, assisting students in creating effective resumes that promote their prospects in the competitive job market, and equipping them with the required practical employability skills. Moreover, internships serve as a preliminary stage for students in their chosen career paths, enabling them to constitute professional networks, and potentially secure permanent employment at their training sites after graduation. Additionally, internships enrich classroom discussions through introducing new practical ideas contributed by students.

4.1. Researchers' Comments on the Discussion of the Results

The qualitative research findings concerning undergraduates contradict with the statistical results. This contradiction can be explained through the fact that in fields such as social sciences, medicine, and agriculture, the conventional standard for rejecting a hypothesis is the $p < 0.05$ criterion. However, it is essential to recognize that this threshold is as arbitrary as any other. A p -value exceeding, for instance, 0.001, typically does not provide conclusive resolution. We are addressing the possibility that the data might represent a statistical anomaly, similar to obtaining ten consecutive heads with a fair coin, rather than asserting that the data itself is inherently "incorrect." Moreover, opting not to reject the null hypothesis requires a prudent evaluation of the alternative hypothesis. Despite the presence of both null and alternative hypotheses, the testing process essentially concentrates on scrutinizing a singular hypothesis. The international non-symmetry in hypothesis testing, designed to maintain objectivity, emphasizes the distinctiveness of the approach.

In accordance with these considerations, researchers strongly advise educational experts and training companies to prioritize and thoroughly analyze undergraduates' feedback post the training sessions. This feedback is vital for developing effective corrective action, and maximizing the benefits of training programs. Direct interview

with students, as opposed to relying solely on empirical studies, yield more accurate findings and valuable insights.

However, the present study is subject to various limitations, notably concerning the internship program developed for this research, which remains in its initial stages and exhibits several inadequacies. Additional limitations encompass insufficient research or detailed insights into the training companies and their operational processes. In addition, resource constraints and a limited sample size further contribute to the study's limitations.

Comparative studies could be conducted to evaluate the benefits of mandatory internships versus self-selecting internships for interns and employers.

5. Recommendations, Suggested Action Plan, and Policy Implications

5.1. Recommendations

- Educational institutions and training companies should significantly consider the synergy between exploratory and statistical research when examining the findings of both studies. This approach presents a more comprehensive insight and mitigates bias, as exploratory research is prone to subjectivity, while statistical research introduces objectivity. In essence, this synergy ensures that the strength of each method addresses the limitations of the other.
- All parties must recognize the existence of the gap and collaborate to address it.
- Educators should develop learning outcomes that emphasize practical application and problem-solving, align course structures with assessment practices, and incorporate real-world experiences.
- Through fostering collaboration among educators, students, and employers, as well as adopting a holistic approach, internships can facilitate the transfer of knowledge from theoretical settings to practical application.
- Providing interns with proper feedback is crucial. It enables them to perceive their strengths and weaknesses, learn from their experiences, and implement the necessary improvements. In addition, feedback allows academic supervisors to assess intern progress and provide guidance.
- It is crucial for educational institutions and academic faculty members to acknowledge the value of internship programs and actively promote their integration into the curriculum. This involves establishing formal partnerships with industry organizations, creating clear guidelines for internships, and encouraging students to participate in relevant internship opportunities.
- Employers should clearly define the qualifications required for their internship programs to attract the right candidates.
- Employers should provide interns with feedback on their performance and offer them experience and recommendation letters when needed.
- Governments can establish rules and regulations to promote social corporate responsibility between universities and companies.

5.2. Suggested Action Plan

- 1) Define the problem: The explicit contradiction between the exploratory research results from undergraduates and the statistical research findings. The exploratory study revealed that many undergraduates do not perceive the benefits of internship programs, whereas the statistical results suggest otherwise.
- 2) Collect and analyze the data: Based on the collected data from both qualitative and quantitative studies, researchers concluded that in the realms of social sciences, medicine, and agriculture, the commonly used criterion for rejecting a hypothesis is $p < 0.05$. However, this threshold as arbitrary as any alternative and a p-value above 0.001 typically does not provide conclusive results. The potential for the data to be a statistical anomaly, must be considered, which resembles achieving ten consecutive heads with a fair coin, rather than presuming it is fundamentally "incorrect." Furthermore, the decision not to reject the null hypothesis necessitates a rigorous examination of the alternative hypothesis. Regardless the presence of both null and alternative hypotheses, the testing process primarily focuses on evaluating one hypothesis at a time. The international non-symmetry in hypothesis testing, underscores the uniqueness of this approach.
- 3) Write the solutions:
 - Educational experts and training companies are advised to exert substantial efforts in exploring and analyzing undergraduates' feedback post the training sessions, which is an essential practice for developing corrective action plans and optimizing the benefits of the training programs. Compared to solely relying on empirical studies, direct interviews with students offer more accurate insights.
 - Addressing the theory-practice gap in internship programs requires a multi-faceted approach that involves active collaboration, practical course design, reflection on professional identity, exposure to professional work settings, and a holistic perspective.
 - Establishing formal partnerships with industry organizations, creating clear guidelines for internships, and encouraging students to participate in relevant internship opportunities are essential measures.
- 4) Implement solutions:

Implementing solutions involves executing the action plan developed in the previous section.
- 5) Monitor and evaluate:

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the action plan systematically are significant for promptly addressing any necessary corrective actions, thereby avoiding the waste of time, effort, and money.

5.3. Policy Implications

Internship programs serve as a bridge between academic knowledge and the practical realities of the workplace, offering students hands-on experience that equips them to navigate the dynamic job market of the modern era. This study aims to support and inspire business students in Egypt, encouraging them to prioritize gaining practical knowledge from real-world work experiences. This approach can enhance their readiness for securing initial employment and advancing in future careers.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can be instrumental in guiding business schools to formulate effective strategies and curricula that emphasize and promote internship programs. By integrating practical experiences with theoretical learning, business students can graduate with a more comprehensive skill set. The study further provides insights for companies on developing and implementing impactful internship programs that create a conducive environment for training and learning. Consequently, this strategy aids companies in reducing recruitment and training costs associated with new employees.

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Appendix A

Interviews Questions addressed to experts and undergraduates

Experts Questions: Mr. Mohammed Abdallah a board trustee of international Organization for e-Tourism Industry (IOETI) and dr. Hala El Marsafy the director of Graduates and Feld Training Unit at MSA University

1. How do you filter your applicants?
2. What are the skills and knowledge that you look for while hiring?
3. Do you think that internships are actually beneficial?
4. Do you believe that undergraduates with internship experience are better candidates than those without? And why?
5. Do you believe that undergraduates have a will to a large scope of learning and look forward to the internship experience?
6. Do you believe internships (who take it seriously) add personal skills to undergraduates?
7. Do you think internships help in time management and teamwork for undergraduates?
8. Do you usually hire candidates with previous internship experiences?
9. How do you perceive undergraduates with internships?

Undergraduates Questions:

1. Why did you apply for an internship? Why it's important?
2. Did you gain any cognitive and/or practical skills during internships? If yes, what specifically did you learn?
3. When searching for an internship do you focus more on the training programs the companies offer or by brand name? And why?
4. Did internships prepare you for your future career?
5. What are the driving forces that urged you to participate in an internship?
6. Do you think applying for internship will boost your job opportunities?
7. Do you believe internships will positively change recruiters' perceptions towards job candidates?
8. In your opinion, does internship improve your self-confidence and communication skills?