

An Evaluation of the Internship Program at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat

Talal S. Amer¹ & Omer H. Ismail²

¹ College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman
omerhi@squ.edu.om

² College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman

Abstract: *This paper intends to evaluate the internship program offered by Instructional and Learning Technologies Department (ILT) in the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, from both interns and supervisors perspectives. A questionnaire was developed and administered to collect data needed for the study. A sample of 29 field supervisors and 65 interns who were on the Internship program were randomly selected to participate in the study. Findings and results showed that, apart from other recommendations, the most important ones are: distribution of interns to training institutes should be based on their interest, more attention should be given to the development of skills in areas of management and technical report writing, and financial incentives should be paid to supervisors and students as well.*

Keywords: *Internship, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Internship program has become a very important component in educational programs in the past decade since they present students with many advantages. Such advantages include but not limited to, gaining experience, obtaining career-related track, and networking with other expertise from various institutions which provide the internship. Tackett *et al* (2001). The benefits extend to both the students and the university on one hand and training institutions (employers) on the other hand. As Scholtz (2006) mentioned, internships bridge the gap between the academic world and the world of work.

According to Stretch and Harp (1991), *an internship is “a supervised off-campus working and learning experience, which earns academic credit. Internships give students opportunities to apply and extend the theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom to practical experiences, while also allowing them opportunities to view and evaluate careers to which their academic interests may lead. Ideal internships establish positive contacts with prospective employers and are key to building professional networks for students”.*

Bukaliya (2012) pointed out that internships are therefore any carefully monitored piece of work or service experience in which an individual has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what she or he is learning throughout the experience or duration of attachment.

Fletcher (1990) stated that internship experiences “enhance students’ self-confidence, values and attitudes and leads to an increase in student independence, social maturity and interpersonal skills”. Weible (2010) defines an intern as: “someone working in a temporary position with an emphasis on education rather than employment”.

Beard (1998) emphasized that the internships contribute significantly and positively towards enhancing the knowledge base and motivational level, and develops the student professionally before entry into the marketplace.

In addition, employers also benefit from the internships. Employers benefit from best selection of future employees, having skilled, part-time help who bring new ideas to the workplace and fulfill social responsibilities Weible (2010).

Hendrikse (2013) indicated that the benefits of completing an internship include gaining valuable work experience, having an edge in the job market, an opportunity to decide if this is the right career choice and it is a valuable way to build confidence and gain experience.

Sultan Qaboos University, established in 1986, is the first and the largest government university in the Sultanate of Oman. The Instructional and Learning Technologies Department (ILT) was established in 2005 and offers a Bachelor's degree program in Education (B.Ed.) in Instructional and Learning Technologies. The primary purpose of this program is to meet the potential needs of IT teachers & Learning Resource Centers (LRCs) specialists at both basic education and general education levels.

The internship is a significant and major component of the Instructional and Learning Technologies program. The main objectives of the internship are to provide a structured platform to undergraduate students so that they can be exposed to the full spectrum of their designated profession, and also to develop their working skills. To be eligible for registration in the internship program, students must have successfully completed a minimum of 85 credit hours. A general supervisor from the ILT department and co supervisors from the training institution co-supervise the participants.

The programme comprises 8-weeks long training during the summer of every year at selected recipient institutions. To offer students a broad experience, the department assigns students, under the supervision of one of its academic staff member, to internship institutions in Oman and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Since its inception in the summer of 2008, 184 students have benefited from the program, and the number of training institutions has reached 33, 31 institutions in Oman and two in the UAE.

Participants are evaluated based on their performance and reports from the general supervisor and another report from the training institution supervisor. As the final result of the course/program, the participants get a pass or a fail grade.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Evaluation and assessment of the internship program is of a great importance for future development and assurance of the quality of its graduates. In addition, such evaluation can assist the institutions determine the extent to which the programs are achieving their stated goals and objectives. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate the internship offered to students of the B.Ed. program in Educational and Learning Technologies department at the College of Education, SQU. It focuses on the views of the interns and supervisors on the objectives of the internship, the quality of its content and the implementation process itself.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main questions this study seeks to answer are as follows:

1. To what extent are the stated objectives of the internship program achievable?
2. What is the quality of the program content from the respondents' perspectives?
3. What is the degree of satisfaction among respondents about program implementation procedures?
4. What recommendations can be made to improve the program in the future?

4. METHODS

Data Collection Tools

Two questionnaires, one for the trainees and the other for the trainers, were designed and developed by the researchers. Each questionnaire comprises of 31 statements divided into five sections. The statements in Section 1 were related to the objectives of the internship program, section two to the content of the program, section 3 to the supervision, section four to the implementation and section 5 to the program improvement. A Likert Scale was used and the weightings were: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UN), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Validity and Reliability

The judgmental validity of the questionnaire was established by the review undertaken by the researchers and the academic staff of the College of Education at SQU. For the reliability measurement, Cronbach's alpha equation was calculated. The reliability figure that emerged was 0.88 which is considered appropriate for the study.

Results and discussion

In order to answer the research questions of this study, the data collected was analyzed. Table (1) below shows responses related to question 1, which is:

To what extent are the stated objectives of the internship program clear and achievable?

Table 1. Respondents view point on objectives of the internship program

Statements	SA	A	UN	D	S D	Average	Degree of Confidence
Program objectives are clear	32	51	8	3		4.1915	Large
	34.0%	54.3%	8.5%	3.2%			
Program objectives are achievable	44	43	6			4.3830	V. Large
	46.8%	45.7%	6.4%	1.1%			

Table (1) above shows that the program objective is clear (average 4.192); are achievable and the average of responses stands at 4.383. This indicates that the interns probably receive needed information about the program and its objectives prior to the start of internship. In addition, the follow-up of the Department and the field supervisors ensures that the stated objectives are clear and successfully achievable.

Analysis of responses related to question 2 which is about the quality of the internship is presented in table 2 below.

Table 2. Respondents view point on the quality of the internship program

Statements	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Average	Degree of confidence
I was aware of the internship content	44	33	12	5		4.2340	Large
	46.8%	35.1%	12.8%	5.3%			
the internship content was clear	36	44	13	1		4.2234	Large
	38.3%	46.8%	13.8%	1.1%			
the internship included variety of experiences	39	49	6			4.3511	V. Large
	41.5%	52.1%	6.4%				
the internship content is related to my area of specialization	29	42	16	6	1	3.9787	Large
	30.9%	44.7%	17.0%	6.4%	1.1%		
I attended workshops during the internship	31	40	18	4	1	4.0213	Large
	33.0%	42.6%	19.1%	4.3%	1.1%		
The content suits my needs	28	51	11	4		4.0957	Large
	29.8%	54.3%	11.7%	4.3%			
The content was logically organized	19	46	23	6		3.8298	Large
	20.2%	48.9%	24.5%	6.4%			
The content was easy to deal with	22	46	23	3		3.9255	Large
	23.4%	48.9%	24.5%	3.2%			
I had the opportunity to reflect upon the content	28	44	17	4	1	4.0000	Large
	29.8%	46.8%	18.1%	4.3%	1.1%		

As table 2 indicates, the respondents regard the program as of high quality. The variety of experiences gained through the program is rated very high (average of 4.35). Other statements such as relevance and organization of the program content are also rated highly. This could also be attributed to the standards for selecting training institutions. SQU internship supervisor focuses on selecting institutions that provide clear, comprehensive and diversified training opportunity for the students. At the same time if and when an institution fails to successfully implement the internship program and meet the needs of the interns, it will no longer be on the training institutions list.

With regard to question 3 which is about degree of satisfaction among respondents about the procedures for implementing the program, tables 3, 4 and 5 below shows the responses of participants.

Table 3. Respondents view point on supervisors

Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Average	Degree of confidence
There are different communication channel with the supervisor	47	40	5	2	47	4.4043	V. Large
	50.0%	42.6%	5.3%	2.1%			
The supervisor solved problems I faced during internship	37	47	10			4.2872	Large
	39.4%	50.0%	10.6%				
The number of the supervisor visit were enough	33	46	14	1		4.1809	Large
	35.1%	48.9%	14.9%	1.1%			
The supervisor provided me with needed information	46	32	11	5		4.2660	Large
	48.9%	34.0%	11.7%	5.3%			
The supervisor provided me with feedback	37	36	18	3		4.1383	Large
	39.4%	38.3%	19.1%	3.2%			

Table 3 shows that there is a very high degree of satisfaction with the means of communication and the ways supervisors use to contact students (average of 4.4). Also, there is a high degree of satisfaction with the role of supervisors in solving problems, number of visits, provision of information and feedback. This confidence with the supervisors can be attributed to a number of reasons such as the ease of communication with interns and the efforts supervisors put in to provide solutions for difficulties trainees might face.

Table 4. Respondents view point on work environment

Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Average	Degree of confidence
Work environment is well organized	44	37	11	2		4.3085	V. Large
	46.8%	39.4%	11.7%	2.1%			
Training experiences are diversified	40	47	6	1		4.3298	V. Large
	42.6%	50.0%	6.4%	1.1%			
Training institutions know well our training needs	30	46	13	5		4.0745	Large
	31.9%	48.9%	13.8%	5.3%			
Training institutions followed the internship plans	37	42	13	1	1	4.2021	Large
	39.4%	44.7%	13.8%	1.1%	1.1%		
Training institutions provided alternative solutions when needed	32	45	13	3	1	4.1064	Large
	34.0%	47.9%	13.8%	3.2%	1.1%		
Training institutions made all training requirements available	27	51	11	5		4.0638	Large
	28.7%	54.3%	11.7%	5.3%			
Training institutions employees were cooperative	59	30	4	1		4.5638	V. Large
	62.8%	31.9%	4.3%	1.1%			
	45.7%	37.2%	12.8%	3.2%	1.1%		
Overall, the training environment was appropriate and positive	49	37	6	2		4.4149	V. Large
	52.1%	39.4%	6.4%	2.1%			

Table 4 above shows that there is a very high degree of satisfaction with work environment (average of 4.4). These is probably due to the fact that the training institutions provide diversified experiences, meet the expectations of interns and rewards them financially, provide all training requirements and give sufficient break. In addition, some institutions give the interns the opportunity to practice administrative tasks which develop self-confidence and loyalty

Table 5. Respondents view point on program timing

Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Average	Degree of Confidence
The time for implementation of internship was suitable	41	34	13	6		4.1702	Large
	43.6%	36.2%	13.8%	6.4%			
The period of implementation of the program is sufficient	33	41	14	6		4.0745	Large
	35.1%	43.6%	14.9%	6.4%			
Daily working hours were appropriate	39	44	2	9		4.2021	Large
	41.5%	46.8%	2.1%	9.6%			
Time allowed for daily break was enough Statement	44	47	3				V. Large
	46.8%	50.0%	3.2%				

Table 5 shows that there is a high degree of satisfaction with time frame of the internship (average of 4.17). This is because the internship program is offered in the summer, during which students do not register for any other course. Thus, the interns are free of any other academic commitments. In addition, interns' interest is taken into consideration when his/her daily working hours are fixed.

Question 4: What recommendations can be made to improve the program in the future?

Based on the participants' responses, following recommendations can be made:

1. Placement of interns in training institutions should be made according to their own choices.
2. More participation of interns in the development of the internship program should be considered.
3. Evaluation of interns' performance in the internship should follow the other university courses grading system, not only pass/fail.
4. Attention should be given to the development of skills in areas of management and technical report writing.
5. Financial incentives should be paid to all supervisors and interns. Currently, the decision is left to the training institutions and some of them pay and some others do not pay.
6. Provide Interns with transportation to and from training institutions.
7. Develop a web site at which all information about the internship can be made available.

5. CONCLUSION

The ILT department at SQU offers a well-established internship as part of its Bachelor degree program in education (B.Ed.) in Instructional and Learning Technologies. The findings, of this research study, indicate that the internship program plays a significant role in developing the interns' skills and makes them better prepared for future career. Clear and achievable objectives, experienced site-supervisors, orientation, continuous evaluation and feedback throughout the internship period are major factors for successful internship program.

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Dr. Talal S. Amer is Assistant Professor in the Department of Instructional & Learning Technology at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman.

He earned his Ph.D. in Educational Technology from Al Azhar University in Egypt. His areas of research interest include internship programs and effectiveness and the use of technology in schools.



Dr. Omer H. Ismail is Assistant Professor currently is Dean for Postgraduate Studies & Scientific Research at the College of education, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. He graduated from Pennsylvania State University, USA, with a Ph.D. in Educational Administration and taught in universities in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Sultanate of Oman. His research interest include Educational administration, policies and planning strategies; politics of educational decision making; admission, registration and advisory services in educational institutions; educational

reforms; the role of education in socio-economic development; and the role of foreign donors – and the NGOs – in educational development.