

An Evaluation of students' performance in Summer Internship Program: Supervisors' Perspective

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Abstract:

The current study aims to evaluate the performance of students who are participating in summer internship program for three months from the perspective of local and international private companies in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. An analytical Descriptive method was applied and Mix method was employed through questionnaire and interview to collect the data. The population consists of all the supervisors in (64) private companies who are doing their business in KRG, as well as the sampling includes (185) supervisors. In general, the results survey show that students have the ability to learn more practically, work with different background, dependability on themselves, commitment with their job and time, having a positive attitude to work as well as satisfied with their internship experience. On the other hand, the result from the interview illustrates that most traits that helps the student's advancement are work seriously and respect the laws and instructions of the company, as well as adhere to working hours. In addition, it has been mentioned that most of students have improved their interpersonal skills in terms of communication, teamwork, make decision, Time management, solving problems and Leadership. The value of the current study can be recognized as this study was conducted in in the various (local and international) companies with different sectors such as (Telecommunication, construction, Healthcare, universities, foods, Bank). In addition, this is considered to be the second study which is accompanied in term of summer internship program in Kurdistan as well as Iraq after the study of Abdulla *et al.*, 2019. Moreover, this study benefits both companies and universities at the same time.

Keywords: Summer ininternship program, Ability to learn ,Dependability, career development, Quality of Work, soft skills.

Introduction

Over the last decade there has been a growing debate about the program of Internship in the university in order to prepare the students with a high performance for the labor market with the skillful manpower. The transmission from university to marketplace has become a vital and sometimes daunting phase for fresh graduated. Many students are faced with a variety of career-related tasks which can determine the success of their future (Ocampo et al., 2018). Internship

program is considered to be a process that provides students good experience as well as enabling them to transform classroom knowledge into practice during the program. Therefore, there has been a growing debate about the internship program in many universities around the world.

The competitive nature in the labor market makes students in various colleges showing their skills, talents and brands themselves to stand out from their peers. Internships summer program can be exploited as an opportunity for students to go into the marketplace with a competitive advantage. Many scholars have suggested that preparing graduates theoretically for the marketplace cannot be achieved well without training practically in a relevant field in order to implement what they learned in their classes for three to six months accordingly (Abdulla *et al.*, 2019). The hands-on internship provides interns a valuable experience which cannot be conveyed through lectures (Francis & Alagas, 2017). Additionally, Gault and his colleagues have identified that internship program can be realized as a bridge to link the theory and practice by taking part in supervised and planned work (Gault *et al.*, 2010).

Internship program has become a chance not only for the students, graduates and alumni to find the place in market, meanwhile it truly has become an opportunity for the employers to catch the more applicable and skilled students during the period of internship program. Jones (2017)¹ has mentioned that internship program nowadays is used as a strategic talent pipeline from many companies in order to determine and investigate potential candidates as well as hiring them. According to Ruslan and his colleagues (2008), an internship is a short duration of work activities in the company that is not more than six months implemented by universities due to the requirement for students' graduation. While (Hora *et al.*, 2019) suggest that Internship is based on the notion that they enable students to encourage their valuable professional knowledge and skills, provide opportunity for students to translate academic knowledge to real-world situations, and supply companies with a steady stream of new talent.

Problem statement

Recently, public, and private universities in Kurdistan region of Iraq have started implementing internship program. Local and international organizations at the same time are trying to find students having skills such as soft skills, knowledge, talents as well as they need individuals who well-educated, skilled, enthusiastic, and committed workforce in order to hiring them into full-time positions after graduation. Therefore, gaining the feedback from the companies about the students' performance, knowledge and skills would on of the most important issue that universities is looking for in order to realize the factors that students must have in their class as well as in the marketplace. Anjum, 2020 has mentioned that feedback is a vital element in upgrading and maintaining the

performance as well as needed from both the corporate supervisor and the educational institution at the same time. Therefore, it should be provided by company and academic supervisor to check the intern's progress. However, (Tonot and Othman, 2021) have argued that the performance of students in the practical training program is still questionable. Therefore, there main research question can be asked as **“what are the perspective of employers about the performance of the student in the 3 months internship program?”**

The purpose of the paper

Public and private universities offer an internship program for the students every summer, as well as it is essential for them to explore the effectiveness and performance for their students. One way of determining this would be obtaining companies' feedback regarding to their candidates in the internship program. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to investigate the opinion of supervisors in companies of the students' performance in the summer internship programme for three months, to determine the main skills, competence, and experiences that they have got during this program.

Literature review

Nowadays, the main aim of companies is to find the fresh employees having the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and others characteristics (KASOs). Internship program can be seen as the opportunity for employers to find interns having (KSAOs). Some researchers have agreed that the program of internship can be mostly viewed as win-win propositions for both students and employers. For instance, internship may be recognised as a program that offers an outstanding source for selecting and hiring new and fresh employees (Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002).

Internship program has many benefits for each of students, universities, employers, stakeholders, and community. (Ruslan et al., 2020) pinpointed that internship program brings a lot of opportunities to help, guide and prepare students with realistic potentials of their desired future careers after implementing the internship placement. According to Miller & Gonzalez (2016), it is likely from the internship program to prepare students to gain awareness and valuable experiences that enables them to be effective in their profession in terms of their specialty, job ethics and essential laws. From the perspective of employers, internship program is useful to host interns in order to prepare the potential workforce with avoiding the cost of hiring employees. Mello (2006) argues that internship program is considered to be the effective ways to secure the process of employment in the industry. Therefore, it can be said that internship practices play a significant role in the training students getting the job after their graduation.

Furthermore, there are some advantages of internship program such as increasing job skills and knowledge, growing personal and social efficacy, gain experience, applying lecture hall theories into practice (Maertz& Marks, 2014). In addition, it improves self-confidence, the interpersonal and communication skills of the interns during their internship program (Gerken *et al.*, 2012: 11). Francis and Alagas (2017) suggested that internship practice for students from hospitality and tourism programmes can increase their confidence and encourage their intents of working as well as learn new concepts in the hospitality industry. Internships are outstanding source of students learning teamwork, for enhancing resumes, improve self-confidence, develop personal and professional relationships, chance to connect with potential employers, and learn administrative operations (Seyitoğlu and Yirik, 2020).

On the other hand, there are also some drawbacks for internship program. For example, a recent study has discovered that employers without financial compensation exploit students when they hire interns (Abdulla *et al.*, 2019). Job characteristics, organizational environment, and contextual factors can be seen as a determination of the internship program (Ruslan *et al.*, 2019). In addition, the main disadvantages of internships for the companies are that they have to deliver guidance, wide support, training and feedback to the interns at every stage in order to make them effective for the organizations (Anjum, 2020). While Hora and his colleagues have mentioned that financial issue would be another barrier of internship participation, and they found that the students are unable to participate in an unpaid internship without parental financial support. (Hora *et al.*, 2019).

Many scholars have discussed the perspectives of the internship program from employers. In the study of Holyoak (2013), this was about the perspective of the supervisors in their six to eight months internship program using interview tools to collect the data from six supervisors. She has found that learning is a key component in the interviewees' accounts, as well as not all students proceeded in the way they assumed, and not all the supervisors perceived the expected learning in their interns. At the same time, Anjum has investigated in his study that business students in universities in Pakistan through internship programs have improved their professional skills, knowledge, and capabilities (Anjum, 2020). However, Aggett and Busby (2011) in their specific study, which was conducted on Tourism, Hospitality in one of British university discovered that a number of issues and suggestions are made for initiatives that emphasize the value of the opportunity and encourage students to consider their career development.

Another study found that the factors lead to satisfy employers with internship experiences and then hiring an intern for a full-time position after the assignment: are performance clear tasks, challenging assignments, exposure to different parts of the business, and respectful treatment (Maertz Jr *et al.*, 2013). While, the study of (Amer and Ismail, 2014) which aims 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 29 supervisors perspectives, has showed that the most important recommendation for the university is that the distribution of interns should be based on their interest, and more attention should be given to the development of skills in areas of management and technical report writing. In addition, the findings of the study by (Tonor and Othman) also point out that during internship program the most of the students performed well would be relied on interview with organizations' supervisor for evaluation and it suggested that the students need to improve on work quality, communication skills and technical skills.

Once reviewing some research measuring Supervisors' Perspective about student's performance in the internship program, it can be said that most of them were specifically conducted on different field as well as different environment. Therefore, our study focused on the evaluation of student's performance in summer internship program, which is offered by the collaboration between all the universities in Kurdistan region and the Deputy Prime Minister office, from the perspective of private sectors in Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Methodology

This study is a quantitative research, but in order to better comprehend strengths and weaknesses of internship programs in KRG, some qualitative research elements were also utilized. In current study, a survey using questionnaires was applied to collect the data. These questionnaires were distributed to managers who supervise the students during three-month internship program in (64) private companies who are doing their business in KRG. In total, 185 questionnaires were returned fully completed from a total of 212 questionnaires.

The questionnaires evaluated students' performance based on some criteria such as (relations to others, judgment, ability to learn, attitudes towards work, dependability, quality of work, attendance, punctuality). An analytical Descriptive method was applied and Mix method was employed through questionnaire and interview to collect the data. In term of the interview, semi structured interview applied in order to evaluate the performance of the students. The statistical tools which were used to analyse the data, were (frequency, Mean, Materiality, correlation coefficient and regression).

Population and sampling procedures

The population consists of all the supervisors in (64) private companies who are doing their business in KRG, as well as the sample of the study consisted of (185) supervisors.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formed according to current study:

- The viewpoints of respondents working in the private companies in Iraqi Kurdistan Region differ towards describing the variables of the current study.”
- there is significant role of Quality of work in overall performance in the researched private companies.
- all the respondents in the private companies in Iraqi Kurdistan Region satisfying with hiring all the students in their organization.

Findings and analysis

Table 1. Frequency of relations to others

variable	weight	terms	Freq	%	Arithmetic mean
Relations to others	5	exceptionally well accepted	27	14.6	3.481081
	4	works well with others	75	40.5	
	3	Gets along satisfactorily	53	28.6	
	2	Has some difficulty working with others	20	10.8	
	1	Works very poorly with others	10	5.41	

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

It can be seen from Table 1 that the highest frequency of terms belonging to *relations to others* is 75 which is “works well with others” with the percentage of 40.5% following by the item with frequency of 53 “Gets along satisfactorily” with the percentage of 28.6% and the least Frequency of *relations to others* is “Works very poorly with others” with 10 frequency and 5.41% rate. Only 14.6% of total sample are “exceptionally well accepted” according to their evaluators with Frequency of 27; and only 10.8% of the total participants “has some difficulty working with others” with frequency of 20.

Table 2. Frequency of Judgment

variable	weight	terms	Freq	%	Arithmetic mean
	5	Exceptionally mature	12	6.49	3.194595

Judgment	4	Above average in making decisions	62	33.5
	3	Usually makes the right decisions	72	38.9
	2	Often use poor judgment	28	15.1
	1	Consistently uses bad judgment	11	5.95

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

Table 2 exhibits the Judgment terms frequency. It appears that the highest frequency is 72 with the percentage of 38.9% for the term “Usually makes the right decisions”. Following by the term “Above average in making decisions” with frequency of 62 and the percentage of 33.5%. The term “Consistently uses bad judgment” gained least Frequency, which is 11, with percentage 5.95% rate. Followed by the second least frequent term “Exceptionally mature” which is 12 with only 6.49%.

Table 3. Frequency of terms of Liability to learn.

Variable	Weight	Terms	Freq	%	Arithmetic Mean
Liability To Learn	5	learns very quickly	22	11.9	2.816216
	4	learns readily	32	17.3	
	3	average in learning	70	37.8	
	2	rather slow to learn	11	5.95	
	1	very slow to learn	51	27.6	

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

Table 3 represents the frequency and percentage of terms belonging to “*liability to learn*” variable. It seems that the highest frequency is 70 for the term “average in learning” with the percentage of 37.8% and the lowest frequency is 11 for the term “rather slow to learn” with percentage rate 5.95%. Only 11.9% of total sample are “learns very quickly” according to their evaluators with Frequency of 22; and 27.6% of the total participants “very slow to learn” with frequency of 51.

Table 4. Frequency of attitude: application to work

Variable	Weight	Terms	Freq.	%	Arithmetic mean
Attitude: Application To Work	5	outstanding in enthusiasm	37	20	3.394595
	4	very interested	77	41.6	
	3	average in interest and diligence	27	14.6	
	2	somewhat indifferent	12	6.49	
	1	definitely not interested	30	16.2	

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

Table 4 shows the Frequency rate of terms related to “attitude: application to work “. It appears that 41.6% of the participants are “very interested” according to their supervisors with 77 frequency. On the other hand, the term “definitely not interested” gained 16.2% rate among the participants with frequency 30. It is also clear that only 20% of the participants are “outstanding in enthusiasm” with 37 Frequency. The lowest frequency is for the term “somewhat indifferent” with the percentage rate 6.49%.

Table 5. Frequency of dependability

Variable	Weight	Terms	Freq.	%	Arithmetic Mean
Dependability	5	completely dependable	39	21.1	3.594595
	4	above average in dependability	79	42.7	
	3	usually dependable	34	18.4	
	2	sometimes neglected	18	9.73	
	1	unreliable	16	8.65	

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS)program

Table 5 exhibits the dependability of the participants according to the five terms presented. The highest number of participants were “above average in dependability” with frequency 79 and 42.7% rate. Followed by the term “completely dependable “with frequency of 39 and the percentage of 21.1%. While the results show that only 8.65% of participants were “unreliable”, with frequency of 16, the evaluators rated 9.73% of the participants as “sometimes neglected” with frequency of 18.

Table 6. Frequency of relations to others

variable	weight	terms	Freq.	%	Arithmetic mean
Quality of Work	5	excellent	41	22.2	3.711957
	4	very good	84	45.4	
	3	average	33	17.8	
	2	below average	17	9.19	
	1	very poor	9	4.86	

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

According to Table 6, the lowest number of the participants' *quality of work* were “very poor” with frequency 9 and percentage rate of 4.86%. Although the highest percentage of the participants were ranked as “very good regarding the quality of work, still the second highest frequency is for those whom described as excellent, with frequency of 41 and percentage rate of 22.2%. On the contrary, the “average” and below average” terms gained 17.8% and 9.19% rates respectively.

Table 7. Frequency of overall performance

variable	weight	terms	Freq.	%
overall performance	5	excellent	25	13.5
	4	very good	108	58.4
	3	average	22	11.9
	2	below average	17	9.19
	1	very poor	12	6.49

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

Table 7 presents the overall performance terms' percentage and Frequency. The highest frequency from the table is 108 which represent “very good” participants in their overall performance, with the percentage of 58.4%. On the other side, only 6.49% of the participants overall performance were ranked as “very poor” with frequency of 12, following by the “below average” participants in their

overall performance with frequency of 17 and percentage rate of 9.19%. it is likely that the “excellent” participants were not the majority, although their Frequency is higher than “average” participants, with percentage rate of 13.5% for the former and 11.9% rate for the latter.

Table 8. Weighted average of the variables.

Variables	Weighted mean	Level
Relations to others	3.481081	Above average
judgment	3.194595	Above average
Liability to learn	2.816216	Below average
attitude: application to work	3.394595	Above average
dependability	3.594595	Above average
Quality of Work	3.711957	Above average
overall performance	3.296216	Above average

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

Table 8 exhibits the weighted mean of each evaluation criteria used by the participants’ supervisors.

The only variable below average of the scales, which is calculated by $\{(1+2+3+4+5)/5=3\}$, is “Liability to learn” to gain 2.816 according to the supervisors of the participants evaluation. Followed by the second lowest weighted mean, “Judgment” is slightly above average with weighted mean value 3.194. On the other side, the highest weighted mean value is 3.594 for “dependability” of the participants according to their supervisors’ evaluation. Then, the variable “Relations to others” is above average with value of 3.48, followed by “attitude: application to work” with above average value 3.394 too. Based on the results from the above tables, the first hypothesis which state “The viewpoints of respondents working in the private companies in Iraqi Kurdistan Region differ towards describing the variables of the current study.” Is accepted.

Table 9. Correlation and coefficient of determination

Variable	Weighted mean	P-value
Quality of Work	3.691892	-
overall performance	3.616216	-
R	0.94	0.008
R ²	0.88	0.006

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS)program

Table 9 shows the weighted mean of two main variables “Quality of work” and “overall performance” with the correlation and coefficient of determination between them. It appears that both variables have above average weighted mean with 3.69 and 3.61 respectively. Table 9 also represents the correlation between them, with (r=0.94) which is considered as a strong correlation between the variables. Coefficient of determination indicates that %88 of “overall performance” variance is interpreted by “quality of work” according to the supervisors of participants. **Therefore, the third hypothesis which state that “there is significant role of Quality of work in overall performance in the researched private companies” is accepted.**

Table 10. Frequency of commitment

Commitment	state	Freq	%
attendance	regular	173	93.5
	irregular	12	6.49
punctuality	regular	176	95.1
	irregular	10	5.41

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

Table 10 express that %93.5 of the participants has regular commitment in in terms of attendance and %95.1 of them are regularly punctual. Only %6.49 have irregular attendance and only %5.41 have irregular punctuality.

Table 11. Frequency hiring and discussion.

hiring and discussion	state	Freq	%
Would you hire this student in your organization?	yes	142	76.8
	no	43	23.2
Have you discussed this report with the student?	yes	116	62.7
	no	69	37.3

Source: prepared by the researchers based on the outcomes of (SPSS) program

According to table 11, only %23.2 of the supervisors were answered with “no” when they were asked if they would hire the student they had supervised in their organization, while the majority with percentage %76.8 answered with “yes” to the same question. It seems that %62.7 of the supervisors have discussed the report with the student while %37.3 of them not. **Based on the results, the third hypothesis which stated that” all the supervisors in the private companies in Iraqi Kurdistan Region satisfying with hiring all the students in their organization” is rejected?**

Conclusion and recommendation

The current study aims to evaluate the students who are participating in summer internship program for three months from the perspective of local and international private companies in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In general, the results of the survey using questionnaire demonstrate that not all the students have the ability to learn and very interested according to their supervisors in their internship experience. In addition, the outcomes illustrate that internship program realize that the level of “Relations to others, judgment, Attitude: application to work and dependability” from the point view of managers are average. The findings, of this research, indicate that the internship program in KRG plays a significant role in developing the interns’ skills and makes them better prepared for future career. The overall results depict that internship programs have an impact on the professional growth and there is significant role of Quality of work in overall performance in the researched private companies.

This study has recommended that the internship program should be more maintained by the universities as well students. The university should focus more on enhancing the skill and knowledge of the students as well as motivating them applying their KSA in the marketplace.

Ethical consideration

The researchers were keen to emphasize the neutrality of the questionnaire by not interfering with the answers of the respondents and giving them the freedom and sufficient time to answer its paragraphs.

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