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TRAINING FOR TOMORROW: HOW INDUSTRY 4.0 SHAPES GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH INDUSTRIAL TRAINING

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The rapid development of Industry 4.0 has increased the need for graduates to acquire academic qualifications as well as relevant technical, interpersonal, and employability skills. Industrial training or internships provide an important link between higher education and the

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labour market by allowing students to gain practical work experience and enabling employers to identify potential talent. However, limited research has directly examined both the value and challenges of internship programmes from the perspectives of students and employers within the Malaysian context. Specifically, this study examines the value and challenges of internship programmes from the perspectives of student interns and employers. A qualitative research design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with ten participants, comprising five employer representatives from the education, investment, services, manufacturing, and retail sectors and five business students who had completed their industrial training. The interview data were thematically analysed and organised according to employer and student perspectives. From the employers' perspective, internships provided value through talent selection, generation of fresh ideas, and strengthening the leadership capacity of permanent employees. From the student perspective, internships contributed to a deeper understanding of real business operations, improved time management, and the development of professional networks. However, both groups identified three major challenges: adapting to workplace culture, unclear job scope, and ineffective communication between interns and permanent employees. The findings highlight the importance of well-structured internship programmes involving clear responsibilities, effective supervision, and communication between universities, students, and employers to strengthen graduate employability.

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Introduction

The social changes that have occurred in the workforce in Malaysia were due to an increase in levels of education, that makes employers change the criteria for choosing the employees. According to Li and Zhang (2010), employers tend to select graduates who have achieved excellent academic results; however, in addition to academic qualifications, employers increasingly seek graduates with relevant abilities and skills, including spiritual and entrepreneurial skills. Industries, regardless of sector, require workers who are capable of performing their duties and equipped with a range of essential skills. Industries also expect educational institutions to prepare graduates who meet these expectations. However, greater attention needs to be given to employability skills that are rarely emphasised by academics, such as management, teamwork, and problem-solving skills (Yahya Buntat, 2004). Rosa (2000), in a study of 10 organisations in Europe, identified three skills required by organisations through gap analysis. The three skills that were needed are technical skills, conceptual skills

and human skills. For decades, employers have expressed concerns, directly and indirectly, about the mismatch between the skills employers require and those provided by universities.

Malaysia is now focusing on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), with technology emphasised as a key catalyst for economic growth. In this context, Malaysia needs skilled workers with educational backgrounds that emphasise technical and vocational competencies. The 2030 transformation process indicates that, if Malaysia is to achieve its goals, including its investment plans and various strategic initiatives, it needs to focus on education because human capital can influence economic progress and strengthen socioeconomic development. One important aspect that can help reduce the unemployment rate is the preparation of students for industrial training programmes. Through such programmes, trainees can familiarise themselves with the appropriate methods and practices of organisations. Industrial training can also help trainees (undergraduates) identify their weaknesses and potential, thereby reducing the gap between their current capabilities and workplace expectations.

To ensure that students receive relevant and effective training, it is important to select a practical training placement that is relevant to their field of study. Students tend to prefer institutions that provide challenging and meaningful work because such experiences can increase their knowledge of the real-world working environment and help them develop additional skills required in the workplace. However, students may become uninterested, bored, or less enthusiastic when they are given limited or irrelevant job scopes. This can reduce the positive impact of industrial training. Previous studies have shown that exposure to real work environments through industrial training can enhance students' knowledge and technical and human skills. Industrial training can also provide students with opportunities to develop discipline, complete work tasks in a structured and systematic manner, and learn to collaborate with others (Zainudin et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2025; Caglar et al., 2026). From the employers' perspective, graduates' employability skills can help employers overcome industry challenges and effectively address issues that may arise (Rohanai et al., 2020). Employers also expect students to possess communication, teamwork, creativity, and critical-thinking skills, in addition to the skills required for the Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0 (Ismail and Hassan, 2019). Given the challenges of the contemporary working environment, employers seek graduates who possess not only technical skills but also the ability to multitask and demonstrate responsibility in carrying out various tasks (Juhdi et al., 2010).

Employers have stated that employees need to understand, at minimum, the procedures for operating machines, including computers and programming systems. However, not all graduates in Malaysia possess the critical-thinking skills necessary to demonstrate strong problem-solving abilities (Azmi et al., 2018). Malaysian graduates are perceived by employers as reliable and capable performers, but they often lack the required work experience and confidence in their skills (Ali et al., 2025; Caglar et al., 2026). Clearly, both qualifications and work experience are important for employability in the modern labour market, which is characterised by job scarcity (Presti et al., 2023). While internships are primarily designed to provide graduates with work experience (Pianda et al., 2024), some internship programmes also play a critical role in enhancing graduate employability. This study therefore addresses the important issue of the value and challenges of internships in relation to graduate employability. In Malaysia, numerous studies have analysed graduate unemployment (Saleh & Wahab, 2025), while others have focused specifically on strategies to address graduate unemployment (Zainudin et al., 2024). Although an adequate body of knowledge exists in this field, limited

studies have addressed the role of internships in employability, particularly among fresh graduates in Malaysia. Therefore, this study has a specific focus on fresh graduates as its target population. Unlike previous studies that have focused on graduate unemployment, this study is based on the notion that young or fresh graduates are particularly vulnerable in the labour market and that the influence of internships on their employability should be explored. The purpose of this paper is to explore the value and challenges of internships in relation to the employability of fresh graduates in Malaysia. It argues that properly designed internships can facilitate the transition of fresh graduates from higher learning institutions to the working world.

It is clear that graduates' employability is influenced by the quality of lecturers, graduate competencies, university curricula, and employer-related factors. Although limited studies have examined the relationship between graduate employability and internships, this represents a gap that the present study seeks to address by examining graduate employability in relation to internships (Saleh & Wahab, 2025; Zainudin et al., 2024; Mseleku, 2024; Azmi et al., 2018; Puad & Desa, 2020). Therefore, this research has two objectives:

- To study the graduates' employability with the value and challenges of an internship.
- To identify the value and challenges of internships from the perspectives of student interns and employers.

The study of graduate employability is important for individuals, educational institutions, employers, and society, as it helps to identify skill gaps, improve educational curricula, enhance workforce competitiveness, and contribute to economic growth. Research on employability highlights the critical role of soft skills such as communication and teamwork, often prioritized over academics by employers, and the need for educational systems to foster these transferable skills to bridge the gap between education and the rapidly evolving demands of the 4IR job market.

Literature Review

Even though graduates' employability depends on various factors, the researchers only focus on two aspects: quality of the graduates and employers' perspective. Focusing on these two aspects will make the research emphasize on two important criteria: graduates and employers.

Graduates' Employability

There is extensive literature on the definition of graduate employability from both employers' and workers' perspectives. For example, Law (2018) connected graduate employability with graduates' attributes. Another comprehensive definition was provided by Lubna et al. (2017), who conducted research over five years (2010–2015) on graduate employability and identified two clear themes: first, skills, characteristics, and values related to graduate employability; and second, student interns' perceptions and awareness of employability and marketability. From another perspective, Bhola and Dhanawade (2013) stated that research on employability should consider both employers and graduates. Their research contributed to another definition of employability, finding that both employers and workers view employability as an individual's capability to obtain and sustain employment (Bhola & Dhanawade, 2013; Sumanisiri et al., 2015; Senadheera & Wisenthige, 2026).

Studies conducted by Rowe and Zeqwaard (2017) and Azmi et al. (2018) defined employability as graduates' preparedness to enter the workforce, become self-employed, or become entrepreneurs. Lakshmi and Siddhartha (2019) described employability as a competency that enables individuals to achieve organisational objectives and align their skills with employer expectations. Romgens et al. (2019) defined employability as competency development across various dimensions acquired at school or in the workplace. This research describes employability as graduates' ability to align their knowledge, skills, and attitudes with potential jobs and employers. Wafi et al. (2022) added that soft skills need to be taught in academic settings, whether at degree or diploma level. Wafi et al. (2022) also stated that the skills students learn during their academic experience may not be sufficient to secure employment after graduation; in the context of the real workforce, they need skills that are beneficial for future employment. Valdez et al. (2025), Aung and Asavinasu (2025), Mseleku (2024), and Bisschoff and Massyn (2024) explained that employability depends substantially on graduates' soft skills.

Quality of Graduates

Researchers and industry practitioners have discussed and debated the quality of graduates in detail. Dafou (2009) stated that organisations seek graduates who possess good technical skills, work experience, a good personality, and self-motivation to work despite problems and challenges. This view was supported by Auta and Onwisuru (2022) and Sothshangane and Ohioha (2022). Finch et al. (2013) stated that soft skills are among the effective measures used to assess candidates during selection. Dicker et al. (2018) claimed that personality is significant in determining graduate quality and employability.

Azmi et al. (2018) stressed that candidates' personalities are important factors in graduate employability, in addition to self-management and teamwork. Hossain et al. (2018) identified attributes that had significant relationships with graduate employability, including responsibility, selflessness, positivity, and reciprocity. Although many studies support the relationship between graduate quality and graduate employability, in certain cultures, social background may be considered more important than graduate quality. For example, in China, employability and marketability were not significantly related to graduates' skills but were influenced by social background and networking relationships (Chan, 2012).

Employers need workers who are equipped with technological skills, language proficiency, the ability to communicate effectively in a third language, time-management skills, analytical skills, problem-solving skills, leadership skills, communication skills, and creative, innovative, and reflective skills (Caglar et al., 2026; Ali et al., 2025; Saleh & Wahab, 2025; Zainuddin, 2024; Rahman et al., 2022; Rido, 2020; Bhola & Dhanawade, 2013; Azmi et al., 2018). Olich and Pyiki (2019) and Lakshmi and Siddhartha (2019) stressed that good competencies are essential, while graduates who can effectively apply their human capital represent an asset to organisations. In this study, graduate quality is classified in terms of attributes, attitudes, competencies, and soft skills.

Employers' Factors

The employers' factor refers to the role of employers as the creators of the job and as selectors of the candidates that are suitable for the human capital for their organisations. Even though Puad & Desa (2020) highlighted that there is a mismatch between the job creators and the job

seekers for graduates. Azmi et al. (2018) also found a mismatch between the number of fresh graduates and the job opportunities offered in the market, which helps explain the low level of graduate employability and the mismatch between their graduates' qualifications and the jobs offered.

Chan (2012) stated that there is no relationship between employer-related factors and graduate employability because other factors, such as graduates' backgrounds, may be more dominant. The International Labour Conference (ILC) 2009, which involved governments, employers' delegations, and workers from ILC member countries, highlighted the roles of employers and governments in addressing employability issues and introduced the "Global Job Fact". One purpose of the conference was to prepare individuals for employment (Ali et al., 2023). Therefore, employers seek solutions to match jobs with candidates' qualifications. Bhola and Dhanawade (2013) supported this view and found a correlation between employer-related factors and graduate employability.

Basically, skills in the workplace are important. Gibb et al. (2011) stated that candidates may have difficulty securing employment because of a lack of communication skills when interacting with prospective employers. Stone et al. (2013) noted that effective workplace communication depends on messages being received and delivered accurately and is important across different workplace cultures. The ability to communicate ideas and messages clearly is also important because poor communication can create difficulties for graduates when negotiating salary scales. In addition, Hossain et al. (2018) found that employers practised discrimination against graduates, including offering lower salaries than those offered to foreign workers. When this occurs, graduates may have no choice but to accept low-paid work or decline the offer. Bassah and Noor (2023) found that employer readiness is a key factor in graduate employability. Ali et al. (2023) stated that there is a gap between employers' expectations and graduates' actual potential. In general, employers perceive graduates as lacking the ability to think critically, make decisions, and solve problems; consequently, graduates may miss employment opportunities. One role that employers can play is to develop human capital by creating an environment in which workers can learn, apply innovative ideas, acquire new competencies, and develop their skills, attitudes, and behaviours (Vlachopoulos and Tsitiridou, 2026). Therefore, employee development can be fostered through knowledge sharing between employers and employees, which is considered important (Dachner et al., 2019; Vlachopoulos and Tsitiridou, 2026). In this research, employer-related factors are translated into job demand, salary scale, and the employer's ability to provide on-the-job and off-the-job training.

Universities are also under pressure to improve the employability of graduates, as some of the fresh graduates cannot find employment within six months of completing their studies (Ali et al., 2023). These institutions have therefore invested considerably in university internship programmes. This is achieved through curricula in which final-year students undertake internships in companies of their choice. According to Mseleku (2024), internship programmes, in which students' theoretical knowledge is coupled with practical work experience, are crucial for ensuring graduate employability. The results of this study suggest that study programmes incorporating internships significantly improve graduate employability (Mseleku, 2024; Valdez et al., 2025). Similarly, a study conducted by Presti et al. (2023) showed that partnerships between universities and firms in providing internships facilitate the transition of students from university to the labour market. These results underscore the importance of

integrating experiential learning into university curricula, as also demonstrated in other studies (Mseleku, 2024; Presti et al., 2023; Valdez et al., 2025). In Malaysia, internships are increasingly recognised by universities as opportunities for students to acquire practical skills and learn about the world of work (Zainudin et al., 2024). Furthermore, Ali et al. (2025) indicated the role of internships in providing employability skills to graduates. Internships not only provide value to students but also challenge them to move beyond their usual practices. Based on the available literature, providing practical skills to students is crucial for their employability.

The Human Capital Theory of Employability

Human capital theory has been extensively applied to the study of graduate employability (Azmi et al., 2018; Ma'dan et al., 2018). This theory focuses on individuals' intangible capabilities and strengths. The intangible assets of individuals can be viewed as components of human capital, including knowledge, habits, social attributes, and personality, which add economic value to individuals and organisations. Human capital theory explains how education can improve workers' productivity and efficiency. There are three important aspects of this theory. First, the new generation needs to be exposed to knowledge accumulated by previous generations. Second, the new generation needs to learn how to use this knowledge to develop new products, processes, or methods. Third, individuals need to be encouraged to develop new ideas, products, processes, and methods through creative approaches (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2006). Hamat and Nordin (2012) identified education and training as important aspects of human capital development.

However, human capital theory has limitations because it is linear in nature and cannot fully explain complex phenomena. Therefore, it cannot adequately explain how education improves productivity, why salaries become imbalanced, or the role of status (Ma'dan et al., 2019). The theory states that assets or qualities that cannot be listed in company accounts in monetary form can be classified as economic value in terms of experience and workers' capabilities, including education, training, wisdom, skills, health, and other attributes that are valued by employers, such as loyalty and time management (Ma'dan et al., 2019; Hamat & Nordin, 2012). In the context of graduate employability, universities can prepare strong human capital through dynamic curricula that produce highly skilled graduates with positive attributes and competencies, thereby helping employers make employment decisions and offer reasonable starting salaries. In conclusion, graduates, firms, and countries can add value to organisations and strengthen economic capacity.

Employment Trends in Industry 4.0

Industry 4.0 is constructed based on nine pillars comprising of big data and analysis, autonomous robots, simulation, vertical and horizontal system integration, Internet of Things, cloud computing, augmented reality, and cyber security (Rahmat, et al, 2022). The challenges arising from this transformation also create opportunities for new business models, job creation, and the development of skills aligned with the technological revolution. Fresh graduates must have basic knowledge of digital technologies while also possessing innovative ideas that can create value. The employment landscape in Industry 4.0 is expected to increasingly involve digital platforms, technological augmentation, and rapid technological evolution. These developments will drive innovation and increase value, thereby creating

competitive advantages. To gain a competitive advantage, organisations need to strengthen their internal capabilities, including human capital and resources. Therefore, organisations seeking talent that can create business value through creativity and contributions to innovative ideas are more likely to achieve successful and sustainable growth (Rahmat et al., 2022). Fresh graduates must also possess skills that positively influence employers' hiring decisions.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore graduate employability and the value and challenges of internship programmes from the perspectives of employers and student interns. Before the interviews were conducted, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on the research objectives and previous literature. The interview protocol was validated by two experts in human resource management and graduate employability to ensure the relevance and clarity of the questions. After confirming of their participation, the interview protocol was provided to the respondents prior to the interviews.

The participants consisted of representatives from various industries and business students who had completed their internship programmes at the university. The employer participants represented different private-sector industries, while the student participants had undertaken industrial training as part of their university programme. The interview questions were developed with reference to the interview module used by Wafi et al. (2022).

The interview questions focused on graduate employability and the value and challenges of internship programmes. From the employers' perspective, five areas were explored: (1) the contribution of internships to graduate employability, (2) factors contributing to successful internship programmes, (3) the value of internships to employers, (4) challenges associated with internship programmes, and (5) areas requiring improvement in internship programmes in the context of Industry 4.0. Similarly, five areas were explored from the student interns' perspective: (1) the contribution of internships to graduate employability, (2) factors contributing to successful internships, (3) the value of internships to student interns, (4) challenges faced during internships, and (5) areas requiring improvement from the student interns' perspective in the context of Industry 4.0.

A total of ten participants were involved in the study, comprising five employer representatives and five student interns. The employer participants represented the education, investment, services, manufacturing, and retail sectors, while the student participants had completed their industrial training in these respective sectors. The participants were coded as E1–E5 for employers and SFG1–SFG5 for student interns to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Following the interviews, the responses were transcribed, and the transcripts were returned to the participants for validation. Each of the ten participants was given the opportunity to review the transcript and confirm whether it accurately reflected their responses. After the transcripts had been validated, the interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. The researchers manually reviewed the transcripts, identified recurring ideas and patterns, and grouped similar responses into categories. These categories were subsequently organised into broader themes reflecting the value and challenges of internship programmes from the perspectives of employers and students. The themes were then compared across the two participant groups to identify areas of similarity and difference. The findings were subsequently organised according

to the identified themes and supported by relevant participant quotations (Bassah & Noor, 2023; Ali et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2025).

Findings and Analysis

This study identified three themes for each group of respondents that dominated the findings on graduate employability and the value and challenges of internships, as agreed upon by both employers and student interns. The employers were coded as E1–E5, while the student interns were coded as SFG1–SFG5. Different themes emerged for the two groups. For employers, the themes were talent selection, fresh ideas, and strengthening the leadership quality of permanent workers. For student interns, the themes were a deeper understanding of real business operations, time management, and building professional networks. The respondents' profiles are presented below:

Code Name	Firm	Sector	Designation	Private/Public Company
E1	A	Education	Officer	Private
E2	B	Investment	Manager	Private
E3	C	Services	Officer	Private
E4	D	Manufacturing	Supervisor	Private
E5	E	Retailing	Executive	Private
SFG1	A	Education	Intern	Private
SFG2	B	Investment	Intern	Private
SFG3	C	Services	Intern	Private
SFG4	D	Manufacturing	Intern	Private
SFG5	E	Retailing	Intern	Private

Value of Internship

Talent Selection

This study found that internship programmes provide value to employers by enabling them to identify new talent. When employers offer internship placements to final-year students, they can evaluate how interns perform their tasks and how well they fit within the organisation's working arrangements and environment. This was expressed by an employer from Company A, E1:

“The value for the company in terms of internship is the company can spot new talent and could have talent selection from various application for internship request from the universities. Apart from that, the new intern could also help current project which doesn't need permanent placement.”

His view is similar to what E2 had expressed.

“Internships allow employers to assess potential talent for future recruitment. Employers also get to spot future talents early. At the same time, it’s a way for companies to give back and support student development.”

Having Fresh Ideas

The employers stated that one of the benefits of having interns is the opportunity to gain fresh ideas from them, as expressed by E1:

“One of the benefits of having an intern in this organization is that they could bring out fresh ideas and suggested new ways in handling problems.” This opinion was strongly agreed by E3:

“Having an intern is good as we could have some fresh ideas from them. If people said that the intern could give fresh ideas, I definitely strongly agreed by the statement.” The view was also shared by E5 though his statement was just brief.

“Intern or students who did practical training could give some fresh ideas to the management.”
Strengthening Permanent Workers’ Leadership Quality

Another value that intern brought to the company according to the employers, was the opportunity for permanent workers to develop their leadership skills, as expressed by E3:

“The presence of interns encourages existing staff to step into mentoring roles, indirectly strengthening internal leadership capacity. Hosting interns also helps build positive relationships with universities and reinforces the employer’s brand as a contributor to talent development.” His opinion was echoed by E4:

“The new intern who seemed eager to learn anything new sometimes brings positive vibe to the company. When the staff saw that the intern having difficulty in handling their jobs, the staff will help and somehow strengthening their leadership quality when handling jobs with the interns”

Based on the findings above, internships provide value to companies and employers in terms of identifying future talent, generating fresh ideas in the company, and in some cases, strengthening the leadership quality of permanent workers when they work with interns.

For future graduates, internships also provided value in terms of developing a deeper understanding of real business operations, improving time management, and building professional networks. This was expressed by SFG1:

Deeper Understanding of How Real Business Operates

“The internship gives interns a deeper understanding of real business operations, enhances soft and technical skills, and helps identify personal strengths and areas for improvement. It

acts as a stepping stone between university learning and full-time employment". Her opinion was shared by her peer, SFG 2 who said

"Internship allowed me to discover what kind of job I really enjoy. It taught me how real business really operates and made me understand better of real job and understand deeper too. These are things that can't be learned just from books or during lectures"

Time Management

SFG2 also stated that the internship provided value by helping her appreciate the importance of managing time for work, leisure, and personal activities. She said:

Internship had taught me to value the time as it taught me how to manage time, deal with customers, and work as part of a team, not solving the problems alone". Her view is shared by her friend, SFG3:

"Internships allow students to develop essential workplace skills such as time management, problem-solving, and professionalism. Building time management skills is really a good thing for me as I became aware of not wasting my time doing nothing and really appreciate the 24 hours God give us."

Building Professional Networks

Another value of internships for student interns is the opportunity to use their time during the internship to build professional networks. This view was expressed by SFG4:

"The value that the internship gives to the intern is the internships allow students to explore their career interests, build professional networks, and develop essential workplace skills such as professionalism". Her words is echoed by her peers, SFG5:

"The great value that internship gives is given the intern the working experience and building up networking professionally. In this new era, building up networking sometimes is far more important than to have good academic results. In some ways, it also boosted up confident level and develop soft skills for the intern".

Based on the findings above, internships are critical for future graduates in building professional networks. Networking is an important factor contributing to graduate employment in this borderless era, in which information is readily accessible. Furthermore, internships can provide value to future graduates by developing their time-management skills and deepening their understanding of how real work and business operations function.

Challenges of Internship

This study identified three themes that dominated the findings on graduate employability and the challenges of internships, as agreed upon by both employers and student interns. The themes were, first, adapting to the workplace culture; second, unclear job scope; and third, ineffective communication between interns and permanent workers.

Adapting to Workplace Culture

Both employers and student interns, both agreed that the most challenging aspect of internships was adapting to workplace culture, as expressed by E2:

“The most challenging aspect of internship is adapting to workplace culture as it can be difficult for some students to adapt to new culture and having a new routine.” This statement was agreed by E4 who said

“New environment sometimes challenged one mood. For intern, some working culture might be different from the environment they used to when they are in university. Some students showed that adapting to new working culture is some kind of challenging aspect to them.” This view is also shared by SFG 1:

“Common challenges include adapting to a fast-paced environment or new working culture that is different from the time they spend in university, Interns may also face limited decision-making authority or lack of exposure to various tasks given by their superior”. Her opinion is also agreed by her friend, SFG 2:

“One of the challenges I faced was adapting to a real working schedule or adapting to new working culture and learning new systems quickly. At first, I was nervous dealing with customers and making mistakes, but over time I gained confidence and doing the right things and doing things right”. SFG 3 also made similar comment on challenges of internship.

“One of the main challenges during an internship is adapting to a new work environment or new working culture, which can be overwhelming for students who are unfamiliar with professional settings. Interns often need time to understand workplace culture, systems, and expectations”

Unclear Job Scope

One of the challenges faced by interns during their internships, as agreed upon by both employers and student interns, was having an unclear job scope. As expressed by E1:

“Having an intern could bring positive impact to the company but if they are unclear of their job scope because university never told them what are their task and responsibility they need to handle during their internship and the company also is afraid to give them clear job scope as the company is afraid of meddling with their university curriculum, the intern will suffer as they don't know what to do when they have unclear job scope”. The statement was also agreed by E3:

“Common challenges include unclear job scopes, and this will lead to lack of supervision, limited hands-on tasks, and mismatch between interns' skills and job requirements.”. This statement was also agreed by SFG 3:

“Another common challenge is unclear job scope as balancing workload and expectations can be difficult, as interns may struggle to manage multiple tasks while trying to meet the standards

set by their supervisors. This can lead to stress, especially when they are still learning how to prioritize and work efficiently". SFG4 also echoed the same statement as she said;

"Some challenges are unclear tasks or unclear job scope, lack of guidance, system issues, and adjusting to the work environment. Sometimes interns are given tasks beyond their knowledge and need to finish their task faster with limited knowledge they have".

Ineffective Communication

Another challenge faced by interns during their internships was ineffective communication between them and permanent workers in the organisation, as stated by E5:

"One of the challenges that I witnessed is communication between intern and the permanent workers as intern have difficulties expressing their opinion on certain issues and having difficulties in communicating with the workers there". The statement was agreed by SFG5:

"Perhaps one of the challenges during the internship is having ineffective communication between me and the permanent workers. As we are new to each other, our communication often stuck maybe due to different generation and different view on certain issues, I still find ways to communicate effectively with the permanent workers, but they often look down on us, generation Z".

Based on the findings above, internships present challenges, as both employers and student interns agreed on three themes that dominated the challenges during internships: first, adapting to a new workplace culture; second, unclear job scope; and lastly, ineffective communication between interns and permanent workers.

Discussion

This study employed a qualitative approach because it was exploratory in nature. The findings identified the value and challenges of internship programmes from the perspectives of student interns and employers. From the employers' perspective, the first value of internship programmes was talent selection, as internships provide companies with opportunities to identify potential talent for future recruitment. Second, interns can contribute fresh ideas and suggestions that may benefit the organisation. Third, the presence of interns can provide opportunities for permanent employees to develop and exercise their leadership and mentoring skills when supervising interns.

From the perspective of student interns, internships provided several benefits. First, internships gave students a deeper understanding of how real business operations work. Second, internships helped students develop time-management skills. Finally, internships provided opportunities for students to build professional networks that may support their future careers. Regarding the challenges of internships, both employers and student interns agreed on three themes. First, interns face the challenge of adapting to a new workplace culture. Second, an unclear job scope can make completing tasks difficult. Finally, ineffective communication between interns and permanent workers can add to the challenges experienced during internships.

Based on human capital theory, graduates may enhance their employability through successful internship experiences. For the first and second objectives, the values for both employers and student interns have been outlined, as have the challenges identified by both groups. Therefore, it can be concluded that the first and second objectives have been achieved.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that internship programmes provide reciprocal value to both employers and student interns while also presenting several challenges that may influence the effectiveness of workplace learning. Employers benefit from opportunities to identify potential talent, obtain fresh ideas, and develop the leadership capacity of permanent employees. Student interns, meanwhile, gain a deeper understanding of real business operations, develop time-management skills, and establish professional networks. However, both groups identified adapting to workplace culture, unclear job scope, and ineffective communication as key challenges. These findings suggest that internship effectiveness depends not only on students' participation but also on the quality of programme design, supervision, communication, and coordination between universities and employers. Therefore, universities and industry partners should strengthen the structure and management of internship programmes to ensure that workplace experiences contribute meaningfully to graduate employability.

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