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Effectiveness of Internships as Pedagogical Practices in Promoting Employability Skills Amongst Graduating Students in Selected Social Science Degree Programmes in Zambia

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Abstract: To explore their role in enhancing graduate employability, the study investigated the effectiveness of student internships as pedagogical practices in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students in four Social Science Degree programmes of selected universities in Zambia. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 162 participants through the questionnaires and interview guides using a mixed-methods approach. The participants included different actors in the labour industry as critical informants; graduating students taking Social Science Degree Programmes; Lecturers, and Employers. The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed using the SPSS version 24 and Atlas. Ti. Version 8, respectively. This study employed the Human Capability Approach and Human Capital theories. Findings indicated that although internship practices were considered an essential component in the social science degree programmes for skills development, their effectiveness in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students varied from one programme to the other. The findings have implications on how universities and the labour industry could work together to design and implement internship experiences for students in social science degree programmes that are more effective in promoting the acquisition of employability skills in Zambia.

Keywords: *Employability skills, graduating students, internships, pedagogical practices, social science degree programmes.*

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Introduction

Through the exploration of Zambia's enormous natural resources, the Zambian Government has been investing in higher education to develop the critical mass of skills needed to drive the economy. The investments have been made on the need to attain and sustain the goals of fairness, access and participation, quality, and relevance of education (Government of the Republic of Zambia [GRZ], 2017; Ministry of Higher Education [MoHE], 2019a). Zambia aspires to become a middle-income country by the year 2030 (GRZ, 2006). The need to provide quality and accessible higher education is therefore premised on the understanding that acquiring skills and developing practical knowledge relevant to the needs of the labour market can help reduce the high unemployment levels in the country (Zambia Statistical Agency, 2019). This strategy was deemed necessary to root out poverty and inequality (GRZ, 2017). Despite such efforts, the high youth and graduate unemployment rates remain unabated (Mwelwa et al., 2021). This made the discourse on skills development and graduate employability a topical issue in Zambia.

The Zambian Government thus came up with several policy measures (GRZ, 2017; United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2016) to provide quality and relevant higher education to produce graduates with skills responsive to the needs of the country's labour market and enhance their employability. One of the policy interventions had been the introduction of the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) Policy to promote skills development through higher education in the country (UNESCO, 2016). Despite this policy being instrumental in promoting skills development in the higher education sector, its application and impact were limited to TEVET colleges and not universities in Zambia. Consequently, for those graduating from universities, especially in social sciences, questions had been raised on the quality and relevance of the acquired qualifications to the skill needs of the labour market in Zambia, owing to increased skill mismatches (Haddad & Habibi, 2017; Moono & Rankin, 2013).

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One way of overcoming the skills mismatch challenge was introducing and embedding Work Integrated Learning (WIL) activities such as internship practices in the university degree programmes (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). This was premised on the supposition that universities alone cannot transfer employability skills to graduating students without the involvement of the labour market organisations through internship placements and other engagements (Simon, 2016). Through internships, the labour market industries are said to bridge the gap between practice and the theory covered in the university classes. The role of internships as pedagogical practices in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students is well documented (Benavides, et al., 2013; Murphy, 1973; Scott & Richardson, 2011; Silva, et al., 2018). Internships help students acquire and refine their disciplinary and soft (employability) skills (Marsh et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2018). They are one of the ways higher learning institutions and organisations in the labour market can work together to promote the development of employability skills amongst university students. In Zambia, university graduates from social science fields were more than those from other study areas (Simukanga et al., 2020). As such, if the effectiveness of internship practices in the Social Science Degree programmes is not appraised, there is a risk and possibility of blindly traversing the cyclic trajectory of producing ill-equipped graduates for employability. Consequently, this may limit their employment prospects and thereby worsening the unemployment situation in the country.

This article is organised as follows. After the introduction, the aim of the study and sub-research questions are highlighted. This is followed by a literature review relevant to the study and a thorough description of the methodology employed. After that, the results are presented and discussed. Finally, after the conclusion, the study recommendations and limitations are highlighted together with the future research direction.

Aim of the Study

The paper aimed to explore the effectiveness of student internships as pedagogical practices in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students in selected Social Science Degree programmes in Zambia. To achieve this aim, the following sub-questions were answered (i). Were internships a required academic component for students pursuing each of the selected Social Science Degree programmes? (ii). How did students, lecturers, employers, and other stakeholders perceive student internships in promoting employability skills in the selected programmes? (iii). How were the internship practices organised and assessed in the selected Social Science Degree programmes; and (iv) what challenges did the students, universities, and employers encounter in implementing student internship practices in the selected Social Science Degree programmes? The researchers used the answers to these questions to determine the efficacy of student internship practices in increasing employability skills in four Social Science Degree programs in Zambia.

Literature Review

Conceptual Understanding of Internships as pedagogy, Social Sciences, and Employability Skills

Although several WIL practices or approaches can be used to promote experiential learning, such as field work, job shadowing, cooperative education, and work placements, internships appear to be the most common approach embedded in most university degree programmes (Jackson, 2015). An internship refers to supervised training for a specified period as a requirement for a given professional or post-secondary academic qualification (Hartman, 2014; O' Higgins & Pinedo, 2018). Since their inception in the 1930s in the USA, a great deal of knowledge via research has been generated on the viability of internships, standards and guidelines, roles of students, learning institutions, and host organisations in implementing internships (Benavides et al., 2013). Internships generally involve three parties: the student, learning institutions, and the host organisation in which the internship placement is given. Like classroom teaching, internships also require being well organized as pedagogical practices to be effective.

Pedagogy refers to the methods, approaches, or strategies educators use to lead learners in their learning process. Teaching is different from pedagogy in that the latter encompasses both the act and the discourse of learning. Pedagogical strategies thus take into consideration the culture and mechanisms of social control that can influence an individual's learning. Therefore, internships can be considered pedagogical strategies in that they must be a deliberate and conscious activity of one person designed to enhance learning in another. It is about the production of a learning relationship within a given social and cultural environment. In the context of this article, pedagogy has to do with the interactions between students, teachers, and onsite support within a workplace environment and the assigned learning tasks (Shah & Campus, 2021). It should focus on teaching, what the teacher does, and how they relate to the beliefs, theories, policies, and culture of the given setting. As Shah and Campus (2021) put it, pedagogy is more than the teaching technique. It entails a purposive intervention in the individual human development that is deeply saturated within the values and history of the community in which it is located.

Internships are about the act and the discourse of learning. As a pedagogical practice, internships are considered as one of the methods through which every university student can be taught, supported, and mentored to acquire, develop and refine skills and knowledge acquired from the university walls through experiential learning in a real workplace context (Shivoro et al., 2017, 2018). Internships as a pedagogical experience require a student to go through four developmental phases (King & Sweitzer, 2014). These are anticipation, exploration, competence, and culmination. The experiential continuum from anticipation to culmination allows the student to have positive expectations, build on, seek quality, and

reach a stage of the capability to complete given tasks. In this process, the critical tasks to be accomplished may include making an informed commitment, enhancing their capabilities, and accomplishing quality while redefining their professionalism.

The Social Sciences considered in this paper are a category of the study disciplines concerned with understanding society and human relations (Mwelwa et al., 2021). In this paper, the Social Science Degree programmes considered include the Bachelor's Degree in Social Work, Bachelor of Education (Social Studies), Bachelor of Public Administration, and the Bachelor of Development Studies from different public and private universities in Zambia. On the other hand, employability skills, also known as generic or soft skills, are those transferable skills that an individual must possess for them to be employable, in addition to the disciplinary knowledge they may acquire from a study programme (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Network [STEMNET], 2021). Being employable also entails possessing the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to secure a job or employ oneself (Mwelwa et al., 2021; Yorke, 2006). It is about having the capability and identity of being employable.

Literature highlights several generic (employability) skills that are considered critical for university graduates to possess. Employability skills include communication skills, critical thinking (Marsh et al., 2016; Riebe & Jackson, 2014), interpersonal skills, self-discipline, self-management, creativity, and innovativeness (Finch et al., 2013; Gao et al., 2014). Others include self-awareness, self-confidence (Jackson, 2015), entrepreneurship skills (Riebe & Jackson, 2014), use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Osmani et al., 2019), accountability, and problem-solving skills (Gao et al., 2014), amongst others. These skills are indispensable for one's employability (Mwelwa et al., 2021). Possessing the highlighted employability skills can spur graduates to apply their disciplinary knowledge in a given employment setting effectively in line with the cognitive skills of the bloom's taxonomy (Naseem, 2018). Therefore, employability skills are crucial in promoting employability prospects (Pitan, 2016; Zambia Qualifications Authority, 2016).

Role of Internships on Student Employability Skills Development in Degree Programmes

Although there are various pedagogical strategies through which the theoretical knowledge covered by students in a class can be linked to the real world of work, such as project developments and simulations, internships appear to be the most popular. While simulations and other pedagogical strategies are primarily theoretical, internships expose learners to the natural and physical environment where actual work occurs (Prescott et al., 2020). Internships are a form of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) strategy in that a student is likely to acquire new skills and attributes that can help them get, maintain, and succeed on the job (Shivoro et al., 2017). Jackson (2015) argues that the core purpose of WIL is to prepare the undergraduate for entry into the world of work. WIL activities such as internships thus involve combining traditional academic study with student exposure to their chosen professional career in the workplace. Such activities expose students to authentic work experiences to apply their skills and knowledge in the actual work environment.

Through internships, students are helped to see how they can apply theoretical knowledge in different contexts. Internships promote experiential learning (Silva et al., 2018) and can, therefore, be considered the first work experience for students before graduation. The internships are essential in that they help students to clarify their skills, qualities, and attributes. They can also help them decide as to whether they are on the right career path or not.

However, university universities alone cannot quickly develop employability skills without engaging the labour market organisations through the WIL activities (Shivoro et al., 2017). Many universities' internships use a pedagogical practice of placing students in host public and private organisations within the labour market for experiential learning. Internship practices, as industry-based experiences, thus can help students acquire practical skills and experiences while pursuing their study programme (Oliver, 2015). They allow graduates to be work-ready before graduation. WIL activities, therefore, have a significant role to play in promoting graduate employability. Universities should incorporate WIL experiences such as internships in the mainstream curriculum of any degree programmes (Jackson, 2015; Schech et al., 2017). Learners must be exposed to these experiences to appreciate the authentic working contexts in which they can collaborate, regulate themselves, and receive support to acquire prior work experience to promote their employability.

Today, employers demand not only a graduate's knowledge about a job but their ability to do work (Hartman, 2014). This underscores the importance of experiential learning for universities to promote graduate employability. Academic internships in this regard are a vital component of student learning. Literature shows that compared to natural sciences (Anderson, 2015), in the past, social science programmes never required one to undertake academic internships to graduate. However, this has changed. Hartman (2014) emphasises the importance of internship programmes to expose students to their future profession, which helps them understand what is expected of them in their career paths (Hartman, 2014). The goal of the internship programmes must be to help university students with the capacity to link theory and practical knowledge. Internships, therefore, are meant to prepare students for a post-graduation life (Silva et al., 2018). The need for work-ready graduates has enabled many higher learning institutions to realise the importance of internships in promoting employability skills (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2016). As such, since their inception (Benavides et al., 2013), internships have become popular in many university programmes worldwide (Baert et al., 2019; Nunley, et al., 2016; Rastrick, 2018; Saniter et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2018).

Internships have been found to have benefits for students, universities, and the labour market host organisations (Rastrick, 2018). Students get exposed to on-the-job experiences and thereby enhancing their career progression. As for the employers, they benefit from the cheap labour from student interns. Such students also stand a better chance of being recruited when job opportunities arise in such organisations. This makes their school-to-work transition easier (Silva et al., 2018). As for the universities' students who are placed as interns in host organisations act as university brand ambassadors based on their conduct and performance in fostering university-industry partnerships (Simon, 2016).

It is clear from the foregoing that well-implemented internship practices can improve the graduate outcomes in acquiring employability skills. Many studies in the USA, Portugal, Germany, and other countries reveal that students who undergo internships tend to have higher chances of securing employment opportunities compared to those without exposure (Baert et al., 2019; Nunley et al., 2016; Saniter et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2018). However, it must be noted that the effectiveness of any internship experience in improving graduate employability skills depends on how such a programme is designed, developed, and implemented (Benavides et al., 2013). Moreover, depending on how the given programme of study is designed, internships may be mandatory or not in nature (Silva et al., 2018).

Given the above, it is also evident that compared to natural sciences, graduates from Social Science Degree programmes appear to have fewer employment opportunities (Schech et al., 2017). Therefore, to promote employability amongst graduates in social sciences, students internships may be critical for them to develop employability skills and graduate identity (Rastrick, 2018). Promoting internship practice as a WIL experience is meant to create graduates who can link theoretical, practical, and general knowledge. Such experiences are also meant to help graduating students adapt and apply their knowledge to divergent contexts and thereby make them employable upon completing university studies. An internship also acts as one way the labour industry can partner with universities to enhance graduate employability (Hartman, 2014). Through such partnerships, the industry can have its input in the curriculum, thereby making universities aware of what the labour market expects from the interns regarding graduate skills and attributes.

Implementation of Student Internships in Learning Programmes

Benavides, et al. (2013) point out that six essential aspects should be met for an internship experience to be effective. These are duration and time, academic component, placement, supervision, compensation, and evaluation. In terms of duration, there must be a consensus on the timing of internships by the parties involved. Concerning the academic component for which the university has much to say, the student intern must be exposed to meaningful internship activities by the hosting organisation and not merely giving them registry work. This is because the meaningfulness of internship experiences depends on the assigned tasks' breadth and depth. Thirdly, placement opportunities must be made available for interns. This implies that the universities and the host organisations must enter into some form of agreement to make it easier for students to secure placements. Supervision follows this. The student intern in the host organisation must be mentored and appropriately nurtured by those supervising them on site. In terms of compensation, there must be an understanding between the university and host organisation as to whether the intern should be paid or not (O' Higgins & Pinedo, 2018).

Lastly, student internships must involve evaluation or Assessment. A student must be fairly and professionally evaluated by those involved in supervision and Assessment. In terms of the contributions of internship programmes to the overall degree programme, some scholar (Hartman, 2014) points out that internship experiences should contribute nothing more than 40% the total course work. In arriving at this grade, there should be clear interaction between the academic member evaluating the students and the onsite supervisor of the student intern. However, aspects of Assessment in an internship may vary from one institution to another depending on the quality assurance measures.

Other means of assessing the internships involve students keeping a journal or a daily report of their activities. Students are also given opportunities in their learning institutions to share their experiences through internship seminars. According to Benavides, et al. (2013), although most evaluation and assessment processes focus on students alone, there must also be some mechanisms to evaluate the involvement of both the host organisations and the universities to ensure effective implementation of student internships. Internships must therefore be well structured in such a manner that they enhance the learning experiences of students as well as their employability (Sattler & Peters, 2013).

In Zambia, no clear national legal and policy framework existed to guide how internship programmes could specifically be designed, implemented, and managed for students in Social Science Degree programmes, except those pursuing Law and other social sciences. However, some spelled out policy guidelines existed for those in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics programmes such as Health Sciences (HPCZ, 2018) and others. The existing Act on Higher Education also seemed to be silent about the roles of internship programmes in providing university students with practical work experiences to acquire skills for employability (Higher Education Act, 2013). It was, therefore, possible that internship practices may either be present or absent in some Social Science Degree programmes, depending on the given university faculty. This also implies that no law existed to compel public and private labour industry organisations to offer internship programmes to university students in the country. Even the outdated National Apprenticeship Act No. 13 of 1997 did not cater for university students to take part in some form of apprenticeship. The existing national internship guidelines did not also cater to those still pursuing university programmes, it was targeted at graduates only

(MoHE, 2019b). Given the preceding, while literature supports the role of internships in promoting skills development for employability, the effectiveness of the internship practices in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students in the selected Social Science Degree programmes was not clear in the Zambian context, hence the study.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Capability Approach (Robeyns, 2005). Conceptualised by Amartya Sen and improved upon by Martha Nussbaum, the Capability Approach can be used to conceptualise social justice, poverty, inequality, and human development from a general perspective. The Capability Approach is premised on the supposition that society must expand individual opportunities regarding the quality of life and freedom of choice to enhance social justice (Pandolfini & Poli, 2015). People must have the freedoms and opportunities to lead the lives they want and value in absolute terms (Saito, 2003). Researchers used critical characteristics of the Capabilities Approach, such as the Functionings, Capabilities, Social Conversion factors, and Agency (Robeyns, 2005) as a lens through which the extent to which the internship experiences of graduating students in the four Social Science Degree programme afforded them opportunities to acquire competencies, practical knowledge, and attributes necessary to achieve the freedom of being employable was understood. The Capability Approach was thus applied to look at the extent to which graduating students participated in pedagogical practices such as internships to acquire and develop practical skills and knowledge during their programme of study to attain the employability identity (Robertson & Egdell, 2018). In addition to the Capability Approach, the Human Capital theory, which emphasises the acquisition of competencies through avenues such as on-the-job-training (Eide & Showalter, 2010) for individuals to be more productive, was also used to explore the effectiveness of internship practices in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students in the four Social Science Degree programmes of selected universities in Zambia.

Methodology

Research Design

The methodology of this paper draws from a study that adopted a pragmatic approach in which the mixed methods convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) was used to explore the effectiveness of Social Science Degree programmes on skills development and graduate employability in Zambia. In this article, the mixed methods approach was also adopted.

Sample and Data Collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from a sample of 162 participants (*Table 1.0*) in the year 2020. The graduating students from four Social Science Degree programmes, lecturers, and employers from the labour industry organisations, and those termed as key informants were all drawn into the study sample in the quest to explore the effectiveness of student internships in promoting employability skills in Social Science Degree programmes. The key informants were drawn from the academic administrators from universities, the Ministry of Labour, the MoHE and its agencies, the employers' federation, and the mother body of the labour movement in Zambia. Using the simple random sampling technique, 120 students in their final year of the four Social Science Degree programmes were sampled to participate in this study. Students were selected into the sample at an interval of five using class lists as the sampling frame from an estimated population of over 500 students registered in the four Social Science Degree programmes that were considered from the participating universities. Then 12 lecturers were purposively selected to participate in the study because they taught on either of the four selected social science degree programmes. Further, 22 employers were purposively drawn into the study as potential employers of university graduates and were willing to participate by responding to the questionnaire. Lastly, eight key informants were selected purposively into the study due to their positions, knowledge, and value to the issue of employability skills and graduate outcomes.

Table 1. Description of study participants

Respondent Category	Sex		No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
	Male	Female		
Final Year Students	50	70	120	74.1
Employers	11	11	22	13.6
Lecturers	09	03	12	7.4
Key Informants	07	01	08	4.9
Total	77	85	162	100

Qualitative data were collected on the organisation and implementation of student internships from crucial informants from government departments and agencies, labour movement, labor market organisations, and universities. On the other hand, Quantitative data were collected on the importance and presence of internships in the selected four social science degree programmes; the employers, lecturers, students' perceptions on the importance of, and challenges and benefits associated with the implementation of internships, and how internships were organised and assessed. The

qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, while the semi-structured self-administered student, lecturer, and employer questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected were analysed using SPSS version 24 to get descriptive statistics in tables and charts. In addition, a chi-square test of independence was used to examine whether the association between two categorical variables was significant at a 5% significance level. The qualitative data were analysed using Atlas. Ti version 8.0. computer software. With the aid of the qualitative data analysis software, the eight copies of transcribed interviews were thoroughly read through, and the audio recordings were also listened to repeatedly to identify, generate and differentiate the key themes that emerged from the data codes to help answer the main research question. From the qualitative data, themes on the importance of internships, their organisation, and implementation emerged.

Validity and reliability of the findings

To ensure the validity of the question items in the interview guide, the researchers allowed an expert to go through the items and made suggestions to align the questions with the aim and objectives of the study. Both the face and content validity were observed to ensure clarity, readability, and comprehensiveness of the items included in the interview guide.

Past studies informed the questions and statement items in the different sections of the questionnaires on student internships and graduate employability (Finch et al., 2013; Moono & Rankin, 2013; Riebe & Jackson, 2014). In addition, the student questionnaire was piloted on university students who were non-participants in the study sample. The findings from the pilot pre-test informed the corrections that were made to items in the three questionnaires to ensure the clarity and simplicity of the questions therein. This helped the researchers to remove irrelevant questions, and those that had unclear meaning were revised. Consequently, both the interview guides and questionnaires accurately measured the intended constructs on internships and graduate employability.

To ensure that the questionnaires produced similar and reliable results in different contexts, the questionnaire Likert items were exposed to the Alpha Cronbach reliability test in SPSS. The reliability scores for the student, lecturer, and employer questionnaires were .899, .739, and .889, respectively. The alpha Cronbach scores above 0.07 (Creswell, 2014) was an indication that the questionnaires captured the required information and consistently measured what they were intended to measure. As for the qualitative data collected, the reliability of the findings was ensured by considering several aspects. Particular attention was given to the credibility, confirmability, transferability, and applicability of the qualitative results. The researchers confirmed that those who participated as key informants in the study were very knowledgeable about the problem of internships and graduate employability in social sciences. Before the interview sessions, the researchers sought permission from each participant, and the study's intention was made known. Using the semi-structured interview guides, the interviews were recorded and repeatedly replayed to check the emerging themes. The perspectives of the study participants were presented using the rich and thick verbatim. Lastly, the findings were found to be coherent with the aim and the adopted research design.

Ethical issues

All ethical issues such as confidentiality, anonymity, and seeking permission before data collection were adhered to. Research protocols were adhered to in line with the University of South Africa Research Ethics Committee guidelines to ensure scientific rigour and validity of the findings (Bless et al., 2013) under the ethical clearance certificate number 2019/05/15/64027848/18/MC.

Results/ Findings

Presented below were the significant findings that emerged from the study in line with the four sub-research questions set out in the introduction.

- i. *Were internships a required academic component for students pursuing each of the selected Social Science Degree programmes?*

To answer this question, we looked at internship practices in each of the four Social Science Degree programmes. When asked to identify the common WIL activities available in the programme they were teaching on, most lecturers (91.7%) mentioned internships. Case studies (33%) and study tours (33%) were second, and simulations were the least cited (*Figure 1.0*). It was also found that most labour industry organisations (91%) agreed to offer internship placements to students pursuing Social Science Degree programmes compared to 9% of the organisations that offered none.

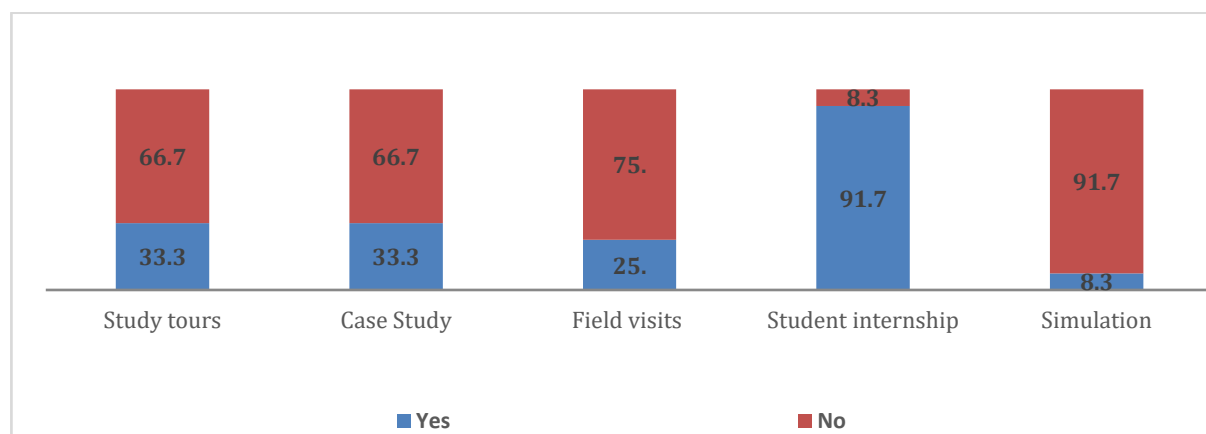


Figure 1. Workplace practices present in the degree programme

It was also established that students engaged in internship practices in all four *social science degree* programmes, as shown in Table 2.0.

Table 2. Results of the chi-square test of independence between programme study, nature of the university, and internships

Characteristics	Internships	
	No	Yes
Programme of study		
Bachelor of Arts in Development Studies	25	75
Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration	57.1	42.9
Bachelor of Education (Social Studies)	50	50
Bachelor of Arts with Social Work	1.3	98.7
p=0.000		
Nature of University		
Public University	6	94
Private University	30	70
p=0.002		

Significance level 0.05

Concerning the association between programmes of study, nature of the university, and internship placements, a chi-square test of independence revealed a significant relationship between the presence of internship practices and the programme of study pursued ($p < 0.05$), as shown in Table 2.0. This implied some form of Internship in each of the given four social science degree programmes. For instance, of the four-degree programmes, most of the students were with a major in Social Work (99%), while the least was in the Bachelor of Public Administration (43%). It was further found that the nature of the university, private or public, had a relationship with the availability of internship practices in the degree programmes on offer. A chi-square test of independence revealed that the association between the availability of work placements and the nature of the university existed ($p < 0.05$) as shown in Table 2.0. This implied that students in public universities were more likely to have an internship placement component in their programme than private ones.

For internships being a requirement in each of the four Social Science Degree programmes, most of the students submitted that internships were a required academic component in their study programmes as shown in Table 3.0. However, the outcome of a chi-square test of independence of the association between the programme of study and internship requirement was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) as shown in Table 3.0. This is because not all students in the four programmes regarded internship placements as a must undertaking for their graduation. As such, internships were not required by every student in some of the four social science degree programmes.

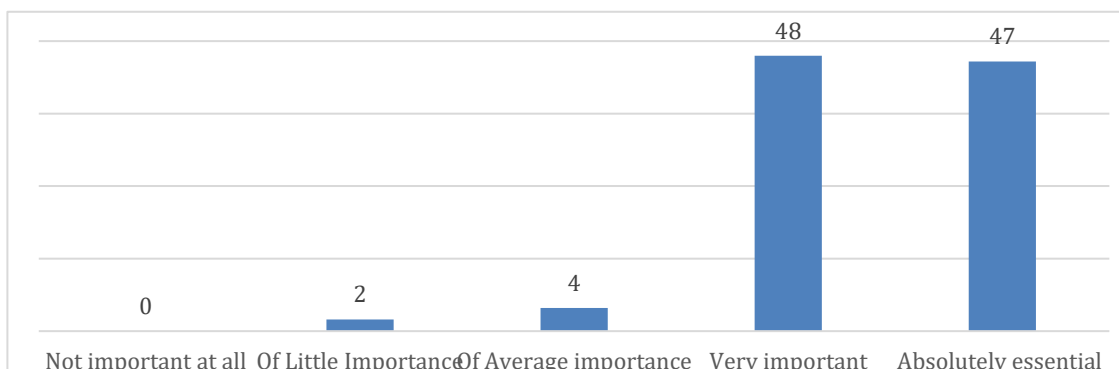
Table 3. Results of the chi-square test of independence between programme of study and requirement for Internship

Programme of study	Requirement for Internship (%)	
	No	Yes
Bachelor of Arts in Development Studies	3.8	96.2
Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration	42.9	57.1
Bachelor of Education (Social Studies)	33.3	66.7
Bachelor of Arts with Social Work	0.0	100.0

p=0.460

- ii. *How did students, lecturers, employers, and other stakeholders perceive student internships in promoting employability skills in the selected Social Science Degree programmes?*

In answering the second sub-research question, the importance of Internships in Social Science Degree Programmes on Employability Skills Development was investigated from the student, lecturer, employers, and other key stakeholders' perspectives.



Source: Field Data, 2020

Figure 2. Student ratings of the relevance of internship practices as a component of their programme

When asked to rate the importance of internships in their Social Science Degree programmes, 47.5% of the students rated internships to be Very Important, while 46.5% of them considered and rated internships to be absolutely essential (Figure 2.0). No student considered internship attachments to be of no importance. A chi-square test of independence (Figure 2.0) carried out between the relevance of internships, and the programme of the study revealed that most students from the Social Work Degree programme considered internships to be essential. In contrast, a few of those studying Public Administration considered them to be crucial as well. Like students, most employers (90.9%) found internships critical for helping students to link practical work to the theoretical knowledge acquired in their programme of study (Figure 3.0). Employers were also of the view that internships promoted experiential learning (59.1%) while making the school-to-work transition easier (50%).

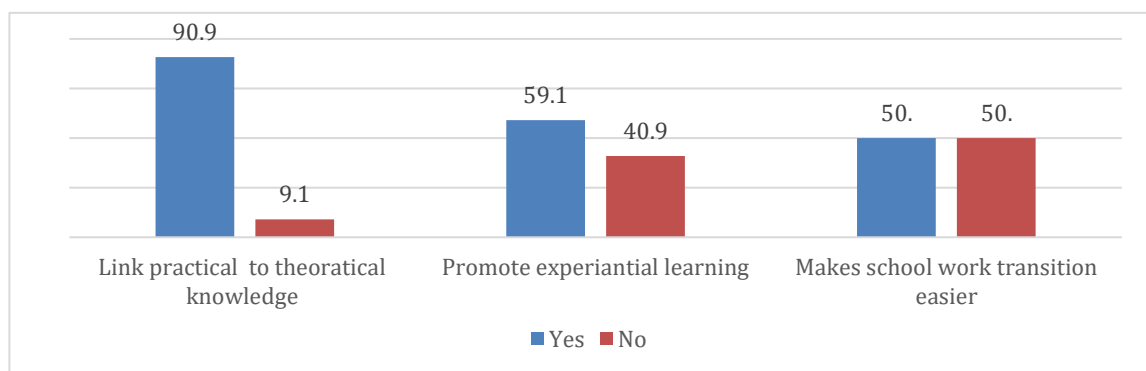


Figure 3. Employers' perception of the role of student Internships

Lastly, lecturers (Figure 4.0) also perceived student internships as being vital in helping their students to link practice to theory (91.7%) and promoting graduate identity (83.3%).

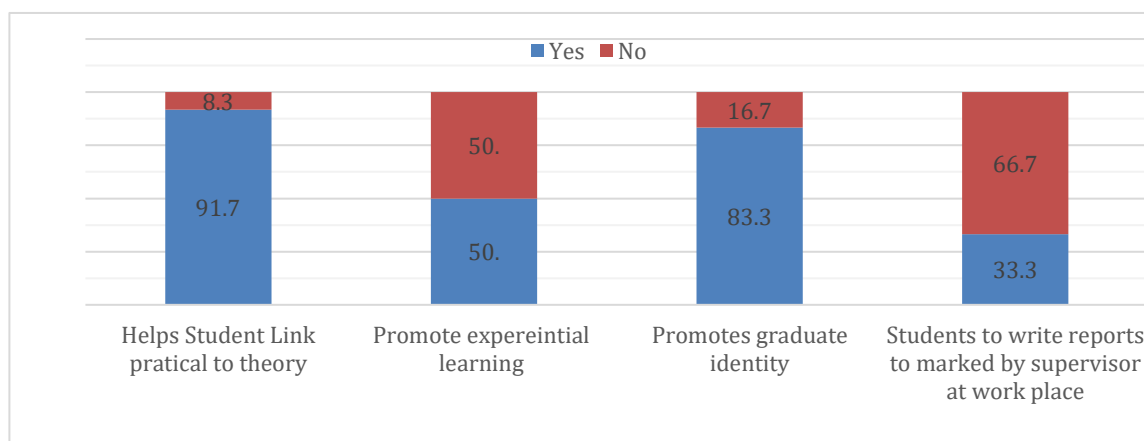


Figure 4. Lecturers' perception of the role of internships

The quantitative results were also supported by the qualitative findings from critical informants who admitted that internships were vital in helping university students acquire employability skills such as interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and others. For example, respondent P#07 explained regarding having internships in the Social Work Degree Programme, that...

"The Internship, the field practicum is an important component of the training programme...Social Work, because you know Social Work is a practice-based profession, students do two field placements, one at second year and the other one as they get into the fourth year, a fourth-year course. And the reason why that is done [is] because.... when they are in the classroom as they are learning theories, they acquire the knowledge, they have the knowledge base, now if that is not linked to the practical aspect of what is happening on the ground, it becomes difficult for the students actually to apply the knowledge and shape their skills. So, it's part of applying the theories to the practical aspect of what they expect in the field once they graduate. So, it helps them in terms of broadening their understanding in terms of reality and theories. So, there is that link between theories and practice. So yes, it serves that application of the theories, and it broadens their knowledge and sharpens their skills because they can learn how to do things." [P#07: Head of Faculty Department]

A similar question was answered by respondent P#05 by saying:

"Generally, I should say attachment is a very critical component for the Training of a development studies student. But that attachment gives them to experience so that when they go into the industry although they are going for the first time, they will have an idea of what happens there and what contributions they will do for the organization." [P#05: Dean of Faculty]

Student internships were thus seen to be a valuable component of any programme of study. The majority of the respondents acknowledged the importance of internships in Social Science Degree programmes.

- iii. *How were the student internship placements organised and assessed in the selected Social Science Degree programmes?*

To answer this question, results are presented on how student internships were organized, focusing on duration and timing, structure and, Assessment.

Length (duration and timing) of Internships

Concerning the duration of the student internship placements in the four Social Science Degree programmes, the study revealed that most internship placements for students lasted for 12 weeks or more (Table 4.0).

Table 4. Results of the chi-square test of independence of the relationship between the programme of study and length of Internship

Programme of study	4-12 weeks	>12 weeks
Bachelor of Arts in Development Studies	6.3	93.8
Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration	25.0	75.0
Bachelor of Education (Social Studies)	0.0	100.0
Bachelor of Arts with Social Work	5.1	94.9

p=0.410

Structure and Organisation of Internships

The qualitative data also revealed that the nature, organisation, assessment, and period of internships were not systematic in the different programmes of study under consideration. For instance, participants from the different institutions that offered the selected Social Science Degree programmes were asked about how the internship programmes were designed and conducted, they gave varied responses.

P#07 responded that their students:

...are given several assignments on case studies if it is a research. They do develop proposals and then focus on programme evaluation, policy evaluation, or project evaluation. So [they] will develop a proposal. Then after developing a proposal under the supervision of the assigned supervisor, they come and analyse it and then present the report and then that depending on the topics or the issues that are handled by the agencies they are attached to. They are attached to different institutions. For those who do the first placement, field practicum is community or rural-based, and the second is urban placements, which means that they are attached to an organisation. But even in the field, community-based, it is about the organisation. So apart from reports or the assignments that they submit, there are also field supervisions, lecturers go to those various places to conduct field supervision. So, they are supervised, they are observed in different organisations. [P#07: Head of Faculty Department]

Another participant (P#06), when asked about how the internship programme was designed for their students, explained that:

Well, what we usually do is... we have a questionnaire when our students go out into these various places to work with the poor-poverty alleviation programmes, we ask those who have agreed to take them to answer this questionnaire to let us know how they have performed, we also involve these organisations in the design of the questionnaires, so that there is ownership on their part. And the results have been quite good. At a certain point, lecturers go there to observe how students are working and confer with those hosting them. [P#06: Dean of Faculty]

Further respondent P#05 also indicated that:

There are two ways or many ways of doing this, but what we do specifically, we ask students to pick places of placement and then they get back to us. Then we will look at what that organisation does and see whether what they will be doing is relevant because one of the reasons for attachment is to test some of the skills acquired in the industry and see how it works for them. We make sure that the attachment is related to what they have undertaken for three years or so. Then after that, we give them documentation as evidence that they are at our institution. And also, we give them two documents, one to fill in details for the organisation. The other one is for the student to document whatever; they do and they give us how they applied whatever they do. And then we also visit them in their attachments and just discuss with their supervisors, just to learn how they worked with our students. Whether there is any new thing our student brought to their industry and what benefit it brought to their organisation. [P#05: Dean of Faculty]

When further asked how students were prepared for work placement, P#05 pointed out that:

"Ok, first of all, we don't just send them there. Internship orientation or briefings are done especially in a particular year that they will be attached. So, what we do is that we hold classes, not credited classes, but classes where we teach them what to do, we teach them how to write reports, and we teach them how to contribute to their organisation. So, when they come back, they bring us a report of what they accomplished. And then we ask them to present to the audience of all students and lecturers, so we want them to tell us what they did and we ask them questions." [P#05: Dean of Faculty]

Assessment and Evaluation of Student Internships

Concerning assessment, the use of several observations by both lecturers and workplace supervisors was also supported by most lecturers (75%) and employers (72.7%) as shown in *Table 5.0*.

Table 5. Comparison of student assessment on Internship by lecturer and employer

Student assessment during Internship	Lecturer (%)		Employer (%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Single observation by both lecturers and workplace supervisors	25	75	27.3	72.3
Several observations by lecturers only	8.3	91.7	4.5	95.5
Several observations by both lecturers and their workplace supervisors	75	25	72.7	27.3
Student reports being marked by their workplace supervisors	33.3	66.7	36.4	63.6

Securing Placement for Student Internships

Through interviews, it was revealed that in most cases, students were responsible for applying for an internship within the host organisation of their interest but relevant to the programme of study. It was only in one programme (Social Work) where it was found that *for what was called the rural* field attachment, the department secured placement for students. Students were, however, required to secure their placement for the urban internship experience, according to the head of the Department, who said:

For the community-based, it is the department that facilitates, but for the urban [one] we give them the opportunity, to say since we know we want you to learn the skills and acquire the skills on how you can apply for this and that within a year also we give them the opportunity to apply but when they don't make it, the department comes on board and facilitates." [P#07: Head of Faculty Department]

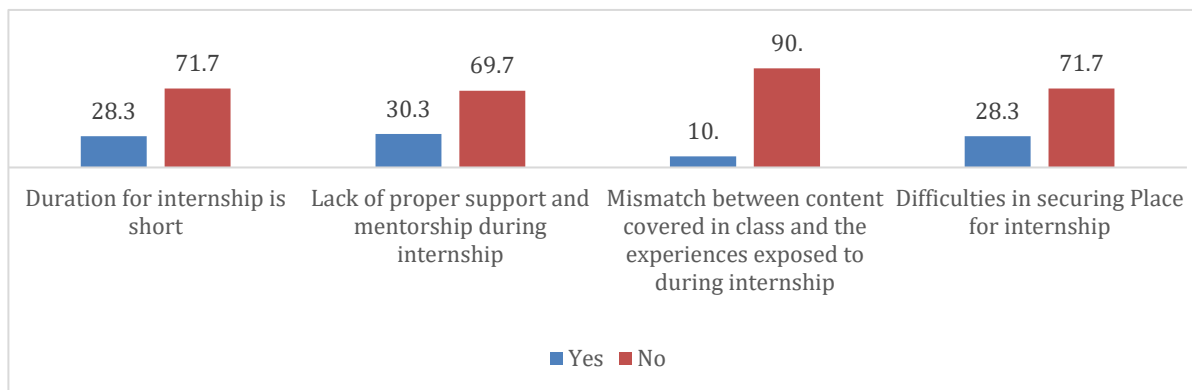
The findings show variations in how the internships were organized and implemented in the four social science degree programmes.

- iv. *What challenges did the students, universities, and, employers encounter in implementing student internships in the selected Social Science Degree programmes?*

The challenges of implementing internship placement practices in the four Social Science Degree programmes were considered from the perspectives of the students, universities, and those who represented the industry employers as below.

The Student Perspective

The study revealed that many students experienced challenges before and during internship placements. Over 70% of those asked responded that they experienced some challenges associated with their Internship (*Figure 5.0*). For instance, 30% of students reported the lack of proper support and mentorship during their internship attachment, and 28% were of the view that the duration of exposure to internships was limited and inadequate for meaningful experiential learning. Others also admitted facing challenges in securing internship placements from host organisations (See *Figure 5.0*).



Source: Field Data, 2020

Figure 5. Challenges faced by students during Internship

The University Perspective

The interview findings from the administrators of the university program also highlighted challenges associated with implementing the student internships in the Social Science Degree programmes. Apart from highlighting the importance of internships and work placements in Social Science Degree programmes at one university, a respondent highlighted the challenges of securing placement for students within the labour industry when they said:

"As a matter of policy, we are supposed to do this. It is very important because it gives them and makes it possible and easier to open doors of opportunities when they eventually graduate. But the challenge again has been that firms, in the public sector, have not been able to accommodate our students at the third and fourth-year level, unless somebody is connected by parents [who] are well known so forth and so on. What we do here we simply prepare these letters. But these letters are not very good, because the experience has been that they don't get it [work placement]. So simply put the idea is good. The notion of the Internship is good but the reality is completely different" [P#05: Dean of Faculty].

The lack of a legal and policy framework that speaks to the current demands of student internships was also highlighted as a challenge in implementing student internships in social sciences. One of the respondents had the following to say:

"We have also had an apprenticeship act ... under the Ministry of Labour. The only problem is that it's an old Act and most of the things have changed so it does not address many things. But the idea of having a framework is that looking forward we want to do ...policy and be able to regulate the Internship." [P#04: Higher Education Department]

Employers also highlighted some challenges associated with student internships in the social science degree programmes.

The Employers' Perspective

Those representing the employers in the labour industry organisation also cited various reasons some organizations were unwilling to offer internships to graduating students in Social Science Degree programmes. For instance, one key informant reiterated the challenges encountered by the industry on taking in students for internships, mainly due to the absence of a policy or framework to guide the process when he said:

"The biggest challenge that they [industry] have been pointing out is that when they do take on interns, they face the challenge of what relationship are they entering into with the intern. There is no law to guide on what relationship, how do they relate to that person? Is that person an employee or not? Are they entitled to employee benefits or not? So that is where the challenge has been and the examples are [many]...." [P#02: Employers Federation]

Finally, the respondent also questioned the effectiveness of the internship practices in social sciences by saying that they were:

"First, unstructured, meaning that there is no guarantee that a person will gain anything even if they are in an internship. Secondly, uncoordinated, everyone is doing whatever they are doing so there's no uniformity. Thirdly, there's that component of rank or just going after money and not going out to gain the experience that they require. So those three components make these programs not be very effective." [P#02: Employer Federation]

The main quantitative and qualitative findings of the study were presented above and are discussed in the subsequent section.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the effectiveness of internships as pedagogical practices in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students from the selected four Social Science Degree programmes in Zambia. The major findings are discussed under the four thematic areas that mirrored the sub-research questions as below.

i. Presence of Internship Practices in Social Science Degree Programmes

The presence of internship practices (*Figure 2.0*) in the four undergraduate degree programmes was an indication that they had an important role to play in the university curricula. The presence of internship practices (*Figure 1.0 and Table 2.0*) as an integral part of the four Social Science degree programmes can be justified to promote employability skills that universities alone could not sufficiently nurture in their students as argued by Gonzalez-Roma et al. (2016), Ismail (2018) and Rastrick, (2018). The presence of internships in the four university programmes further signified the need for labour industry involvement in the process of developing employability skills in university students (Baert et al., 2019; Nunley, et al., 2016). The study also found that different names such as 'Student Attachments', 'Field Experience', 'Community Experience' or "School Teaching Experience" or "Practicum" were used to describe the work-based internship practices in the four programmes. This implies that the internships were likely to bear varying names depending on the programme of study and the intended outcomes. The embedding of any WIL activities in a degree programme is thus meant to help students acquire practical knowledge and skills to be work ready to get a job and keep it, hence the need to establish their presence in the four Social Science degree programmes. This view is supported by the argument that the purpose of higher education is to foster graduate employability (Sin, et al., 2019).

By helping university students acquire the graduate identity after completion of their programmes, internships prevent the production of graduates who are insufficiently prepared for work (Henneberry & Radmehr, 2020). Thereby making their transition to the world of work easier (*Figure 3.0*) by exposing them to some prior work experience. This is in agreement with Jackson (2015) and Silva, et al. (2018) who found WIL Activities such as internship placements to be an integral part of any programme curricula with intentions to promote industry-validated skills in graduates. Therefore, one could argue that internships are a useful pedagogical strategy to help students clarify their theoretical knowledge and advance towards work readiness. Internships are an important pedagogical cornerstone in higher education in that they have to be well organised and processed if they are to bring about meaningful experiential learning (Akomaning, 2019; King & Sweitzer, 2014). It must also be noted that the mere presence of internship practices in a degree programme may not automatically translate into the acquisition of employability skills, as this depends on how well they are designed and executed. However, their presence in the degree programmes could also be the justification of their importance in promoting employability skills development as discussed in the subsequent section.

ii. *Students, Lecturers, Employers, and other Stakeholders' Perspectives on Student Internships Promoting Employability Skills in the Selected Social Science Degree Programmes.*

The study revealed that most students in the four social science degree programmes (*Figure 2.0*), Employers (*Figure 3.0*), and Lecturers (*Figure 4.0*) perceived internships to be very important for graduating students in Social Sciences. Internships were perceived to be the major option through which university students in Social Science Degree Programmes were engaging with the labour industry organisations to acquire and develop employability skills such as critical thinking, communication skills, creativity, and innovativeness, to name but a few, through experiential learning. This is in line with other scholars who found that internships had a positive effect on soft skills such as interpersonal skills, team work and problem-solving skills of graduates to mention a few (Jackson, 2015; Osmani et al., 2019; Routon & Walker, 2019; Silva et al., 2018). More so internships could help graduates acquire and refine their abilities to deal with personal anxieties and stress (Henneberry & Radmehr, 2020). Consequently, the internships make it easier for students to be easily socialised and trained to fit in a new work environment with few difficulties (Ismail, 2018).

It was also found that internships helped to smoothen the transition of graduates from the university to the world of work with fewer difficulties (*Figure 3.0*). Internships provided opportunities for the application of academically acquired knowledge and skills in the real workplace by university students. Internships as a form of WIL thus are a critical pedagogy to the promotion of graduate work readiness (Jackson, 2015). They help graduates to enhance their capabilities to apply acquired practical knowledge to the skills needs of the labour market.

The importance of internships further extends to providing university students with opportunities to get noticed by their potential employers who may end up extending employment invitations to them in the future. Therefore, exposure to internships can aid graduates to acquire some social capital (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2016). They can thus use their agency (Robeyns, 2005) as espoused by the Capability Approach to secure employment opportunities on the premise of their satisfactory interaction and socialisation with potential employers via internships. Thus, internships are meant to help a student obtain a glimpse of the future work expectations in their likely profession by being work-ready (Hartman, 2014; Scott & Richardson, 2011). Ismail (2018) further add that apart from promoting technical and soft skills, internships are an important avenue for networking especially for those contemplating engaging in self-employment.

In appraising the role of internships in socialising graduating students for employability skills development one key informant said the following:

"I think the opportunities that they are being given are benefitting them. Yes, because you know the reality of life is for one to have that exposure and experience what people are going through. So, if institutions can expose these students to what is happening on the ground, I think it is beneficial. So, the training institutions for this period should be focusing on developing these skills. But even an apprenticeship or Internship should also be more like a two-way thing where the industry is identifying to say these are the skills we want. Then even apprenticeships from the learning institutions should be directed in such directions to say ok these are the people we want to absorb and when they are still studying, they can be acquiring such kind of skills." [P#01: Higher Education Regulatory Body]

Given the above, it is worth noting that the importance of internships in promoting employability skills was also well supported within the context of the human capital formation involving skills acquisition during internship attachment by students (Eide & Showalter, 2010). While it was clear from the student, lecturer, and employer, and key informants' perspectives that internships were important in helping students acquire employability skills (Shivoro, et al., 2018), the effectiveness of such student internship experiences as pedagogical practices, in terms of learning outcomes, depended on how well they were organised and implemented as discussed hereunder.

iii. *Organisation and Assessment of student internships in the selected social science degree programmes*

The nature, organisation, and assessment of student internships also came out as an important theme in assessing the effectiveness of internship placements in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students in Social Science Degree programmes in Zambia. We thus took into consideration the timing, structure, and assessment of the internship practices to determine their effectiveness in promoting the acquisition of employability skills in social sciences.

Length of Internship

Although there were some variations in the length of each of the four-degree programmes, there was less evidence to prove that a relationship existed between programme of study and duration of the internship ($p > 0.05$) in determining its effectiveness (see *Table 4.0*). With the exclusion of the Bachelor of Public Administration, most students in the Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Education, and Bachelor of Development Studies admitted to spending more than 12 weeks on internship placement within a labour market host organisation. The length of the internship programmes, therefore, ranged from four to 12 weeks and beyond. Although we did not consider factors that determined the duration of internship placements for graduating students, it was clear that such durations were tied to the university calendars. In most cases, students and host organisations had no control over the length of internships (Benavides, et al., 2013). It was also evident from the study that some employers thought the attachment period was not adequate for students to

get optimal exposure and socialisation to sharpen their employability skills. This is because depending on the nature and size of the host organisation, 12 weeks may either be adequate or less to warrant a meaningful internship experience for a student. This argument is in tandem with Akomaning (2019) and Henneberry and Radmehr (2020) who took it that when an internship takes as long as six months students tend to benefit more from experiential learning. This is true albeit the challenges associated with determining the statistical significance of the length of an internship on its effectiveness.

Organisation and Structure of Internships

The programmes' representatives identified varied perspectives on how the internship components were designed and embedded in the curricular of the degree programmes. Of the four programmes, it was found that only one programme had two internship practices dispersed within the programme. For instance, in the Social Work Degree programme, students attended two internship attachments, the Rural Based Internship, and the Urban Based Internship. This speaks to Benavides, et al. (2013) who found that depending on how a programme of study is designed, some internship placements could take place more than once at different times. For the remainder of the other three programmes, there was only one internship placement. At the time of data collection, some student participants even reported having not attended any internship placement in their programme. Therefore, it was evident that the internship placements for students were structured differently in the four university programmes considered, and their effectiveness therefore varied. The learning outcomes of internships can only be realised if they are well designed. This is in agreement with Makenzie et al. (2015) who hold that when internships are well planned, structured, and organised, the student, university, and industry host organisations, all stand to benefit. Therefore, it is only when internships are well-coordinated, structured, and supervised that they can be referred to as a critical pedagogical component of any degree programme. This however is only achievable with cooperation between higher learning institutions and the labour industry organisations where experiential learning is supposed to occur.

Assessment and Evaluation of Student Internships

Regarding the assessment of students on internship placements, the use of different methods of student assessment was supported by both lecturers and workplace supervisors (*Table 4.0*). Apart from the repeated physical observations, it was also found that other methods of assessing the learning experiences for students during internship placements were used in the four Social Science Degree programmes (Sattler & Peters, 2013). For instance, in the bachelor of Development Studies, students submitted reports or journals detailing their attachment experiences, participated in post-internship experience student oral presentations to lecturers, and were assigned case studies to be reported on after research. Further, for the Bachelor of Public Administration, a questionnaire was designed to be completed by the onsite supervisors to provide an expert evaluation as to whether the student met both the host industry performance and learning expectations as well as those of the university programme they were pursuing. It is also worth noting that while the university faculty members guided the industry host organisations on how the academic component of the internship experience was to be assessed, it was dependent on the latter to decide on what internship activities the student intern was exposed to, and assessed on during the placement period.

The variations in how internship placements were designed and offered reinforced the observation by Hartman (2014) that universities assessed students differently depending on the assessment and quality assurance mechanisms put in place. This observation resonated with what was obtaining in Zambia. Each university had autonomy and independent policies regarding how their internship practices were designed and assessed by the faculties in the given Social Science Degree programmes. There was, however, a need to ensure that student internships as pedagogical practices were designed and embedded within a given programme in a manner that afforded students meaningful experiences that were in line with the predetermined learning outcomes in so far as the acquisition of employability skills and attributes was concerned (Sattler & Peters, 2013).

Variations in how the internships were structured and assessed also signified that their effectiveness as pedagogical methods to help the graduating students develop and refine their employability skills in the four degree programmes varied. It is also common knowledge that academics are more used to assessing disciplinary content in any given programme, however, they may have difficulties in assessing transferable skills of students on internships within the workplace labour industry organisations (Jackson, 2015). Their variations and the lack of a standardised practice on the structure, duration, and assessment methods could point to the fact that such internships were a recent feature in most Social Science Degree programmes (Anderson, 2015). So when it comes to assessment, the focus must be based on clearly defined and targeted outcomes. For instance, if the learning outcome is to teach an intern the problem-solving skill, then such a student must be exposed to various challenging tasks requiring alternative ways of solving them within the given organization. A well-coordinated internship programme is therefore only possible if the universities and labour industry organisations work together. This is more reason why Akomaning (2019) postulated that in terms of assessment, internships can only be effectively assessed if the curriculum was available with clearly described joint expectations between the higher learning institution and the labour industry organisation. This implies that different stakeholders have to come together to design an internship curriculum and not operating in silos.

The status of the internship practices in the four university degree programmes could generally best be summarised by what one respondent said when asked about the helpfulness of internships in promoting the acquisition of employability skills:

"From the time that debate around lack of employability upon graduation of the young people ... [the] discussions have been [about] how do we resolve that issue, and the issue of Internship and placements and attachments came up and even we tried to launch one with Ministry of Labour in 2013, 2014, but the challenge that was there then was that the Law that is there is not covering enough to accommodate that to properly function and the biggest challenge... there is that, of course, these internships and placements do happen but they are unstructured, and ...uncoordinated." [P#02: Employers Federation]

Securing placement for student internship

There were some variations in how students secured internship placements in each of the four Social Science Degree programmes, and in most cases, students had to secure their placements. It was established that the effort of university departments to ensure student internship placements ended at writing the *"To Whom It May Concern Letter."* In some instances, university students even contemplated using such a letter to secure permanent employment after completing their bachelor degrees. It was also found that some students attended internship placements in labour market organisations that were not in line with their programme of study. This contrasts with what Benavides et al. (2013) highlighted that students must be supported to secure the internship placement in organizations that function in line with their programmes of study. Due to the variations regarding how internship programmes for students in the four programmes were conducted, respondents wondered if students were adequately meeting the intended objectives for participating in such internship placements. For example, one respondent expressed dissatisfaction with how some universities had structured their internship programmes when they said:

"Many institutions do them at their own will and in their ways. We have a lot of experience in industry where young people who are...still in university...come through with letters written "to whom it may concern" asking for placements for the vacation and things like that. But all in all, those programmes are not achieving the intended purpose. The reason being ... as I said, they are uncoordinated, and they are unstructured. So sometimes companies just open up to these young people just for the sake of they want to help someone, or the young person knows someone at that company and end up being put in there. And then sometimes you find the young person is desperate... and they use those letters to look for employment not because they want to get experience when they come out of it. So, you find that they end up doing vacation employment or placements in jobs that are not related to what they are studying, which becomes counterproductive because it is not helping, it's not adding to what they are learning." [P#02: Employers Federation]

Given the above, it is noteworthy that the effectiveness of internships in the four undergraduate programmes depended on how well they were designed and organized. Though they may be regarded as a solid basis for promoting graduate employability through exposure to and socialisation within the real workplace, the success of such internships is also premised on how well they are implemented within the context of conditions such as collaboration, placements, duration, and supervision, assessment, and compensation, as outlined by Akomaning (2019) and Benavides et al. (2013).

iv. Challenges Encountered in implementing Student internships in the selected social science degree programmes

The Student Perspective

The challenges faced by most of the students before securing an internship placement, and their experiences during the internship, may point to a lack of clear guidelines and understanding of what may be expected of the student interns, the host organisations, and the universities that require students to undertake internships. This may be common, especially in instances where students are required to secure internship places for themselves, as was the case in almost all four programmes. As evidenced by the study findings (*Figure 5.0*), it may therefore be true that some onsite supervisors were also not very sure of what kind of support student interns needed for skill transfer (Sattler & Peters, 2013). Some organisations also appeared to be very rigid in opening up their doors to student interns from Social Science Degree programmes (*Figure 5.0*). Students were also found to be exposed to limited experiences, and thereby depriving them of exposure to meaningful learning experiences to develop and sharpen their employability skills. This was at variance with what is expected from labour industry organisations if they had a mutual understanding with universities (Benavides et al., 2013).

For internships to be effective, therefore, their design must encompass authentic learning activities that must align with the learning objectives set out at their inception (Naseem, 2018) Students on internships must be given appropriate support during their exposure to authentic workplace learning activities and tasks necessary to develop problem-solving skills and other attributes. This is critical in that exposure of students to routine and less challenging tasks such as registry work throughout their stay in host organisations may render their internship experience boring to learn anything new (Akomaning, 2019; Barnwell, 2016). The need to for students to be exposed to meaning erving experiences was further

complicated by the lack of formal agreements with labour industry organisations for university students to secure placement for internship. Some labour industry organisations, especially private ones, allowed internship placement for university students out of their discretion. Labour industry organisations thus were willing to either take up a social science student intern based on the perceived value for doing so. However, in the absence of a national legal and policy framework on how internships are supposed to be governed, the labour industry organisations may not be mandated to take up university students for internship placements, especially if they saw no benefits from such engagements. This implies that giving students a "To whom it may concern Letter" may not be adequate to warrant them an internship position at a host organisation, except for those with the personal agency (Robeyns, 2005) and, social capital to benefit from their social network of family and friends in the labour market (Menashy, 2014). However, it is also worth noting that in the absence of policy guiding the relationships between universities and labour industry organisations, the latter deserved the right to accept interns or not.

From the four Social Science Degree programmes, securing internship placement was challenging for most students except those taking the Bachelor of Education (social studies) programme. Students pursuing the teacher education programme could quickly secure internship placements in secondary schools. This is due to the long-established practice and the strong relationship that existed between the teacher education institutions and the primary and secondary schools in Zambia and elsewhere. This is in line with Jogan (2019) and Samoei, (2020) who highlighted the presence of such internships in teacher education programmes. This was not the case with students from other non-teacher education programmes in which students did not have specific institutions in the labour market to secure internship placement. The lack of tangible support from the universities to help such students find attachment placements coupled with the lack of adequate support and mentorship in some organisations, left students in situations where they could be best described as "Double-Blind Orphans" and vulnerable to meaningfully develop or acquire employability skills such as problem-solving skills among others. This further takes from the value of an internship.

University and Employers' Perspectives on implementing Student Internships.

The lack of clearly defined rules of engagement was highlighted as a challenge mainly due to the absence of a legal and policy framework to guide how the internships should be conducted by the labour industry organisations and the universities (MoHE, 2019b). The lack of legal and policy frameworks to promote quality internship experiences for university students in the labour industry exposed students to many hurdles in securing internship placement. Even when this was not supposed to be so (Benavides et al., 2013). It was then clear that most labour industry organisations offered internship placements to social sciences students at their discretion, depending on the perceived benefits associated with the presence of such student interns within their organisations.

In response to the lack of policy guidelines for student internships, the Government, through the MoHE in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and ILO, launched the 2019 National Internship Guidelines (MoHE, 2019b, p.1). However, the 2019 National Internship Guidelines did not cure the challenges associated with internships for university students in Zambia (MoHE, 2019b). It was also clear that the National Apprenticeship Act No. 13 of did not also provide for university students to attend apprenticeship attachments. It was meant to cater for students pursuing vocational and technical programmes in colleges and not universities. Apart from its inapplicability to universities, the Apprenticeship Act No.13 of 1997 was described by many as outdated and out of sync with reality and best practices of modern university-industry student internship pedagogical strategies (Benavides, et al., 2013; Silva et al., 2018).

The presence of a legal framework to guide internships was necessary, not only for the benefit of the universities and the labour industry organisations, but also to make it easier for the students to secure internship placements (Shivoro et al., 2018). The need for a national framework to guide the implementation of internships, a form of WIL is well supported (Jackson, 2013, 2016). It is this national framework that must speak to the standards that universities working with the labour industry should develop and adopt to guide the effective implementation of student internship programmes. Such a framework can foster health university-industry collaborations for effective internship experiences and enhance graduate employability in social sciences (Shivoro et al., 2017). This is vital, especially that no single university can manage to sign the memoranda of understanding with all possible host organisations on the labour market in Zambia for students to access and attend internships. Regulations thus were necessary to govern the conduct of internships in universities and the labour industry (Stewart et al., 2018).

It is also possible to assume that for the identified challenges associated with internships to be overcome, universities and the labour industry needed to enter into well-defined partnerships to promote effective internship experiences that work to foster employability skills acquisition by graduating students in Social Science Degree programmes. This entails that university lecturers, as internship coordinators, must work together with industry experts to understand how university-workplace learning must be integrated for meaningful student experiences. Universities also need to establish industrial liaison units to enhance the coordination of internship practices (Akomaning, 2019). Such units must be established for the sole purpose of linking university students to industry. This was lacking in the universities where the four programmes were being offered. Further, it must be noted that internships are a critical component that must find space in every university curriculum to help graduating students acquire employability skills for them to be employable (Sin et al., 2019). Students must be helped to reflect on what they learn, ask self-introspection questions of what, how,

and why they should put into practice what they may have learned in class within the workplace setting (Lamanauskas et al., 2016; Pennbrant et al., 2019). This however, can only be possible if there is some balancing between the learning goals of the interns and those of host organisations which appear to be a challenge for most universities. This is critical and can only be accomplished by involving the labour industry organisations through collaborations that promote well-thought-out and structured internships.

Conclusion

In answering the question of how effective the internships were, as pedagogical practices, in promoting employability skills amongst graduating students in the four Social Science Degree programmes in Zambia, the article has shown that there were variations in how internships were designed, conducted, and assessed in each of the four programmes. Except for the Bachelor of Social Work degree programme, in most cases, students were left with the responsibility to secure an internship placement for themselves in the other programmes. As if that were not enough, the internships were less structured and uncoordinated between the universities that offered the degree programmes and the labour industry organisations where social science students sought internship placements. There was no standardised way of assessing and evaluating student performance during internships. Students were assessed and evaluated differently in different labour industries.

In most cases, universities lacked formal partnerships with labour industry organisations to allow every graduating student easy access to internship placements. The variations in the way internships were structured and organised could have stemmed from the lack of a national legal and policy framework to cater for how the internship programmes were supposed to be conducted, especially on the rules of engagement between the labour industry host organisations on the one hand, and universities, and their students on the other. Therefore, the internship practices in the four Social Science Degree programmes were not very effective in promoting employability skills due to the various factors that constrained them.

Recommendations

One of the paper's recommendations is that there is a need for a legal framework to be put in place to guide how the universities and the labour industry organisations can work together to provide student internship experiences that are meaningful to render them employable. The findings also highlight the need for the Government to turn the *2019 National Internship Guidelines* into a policy that should cater for both university graduates and students still pursuing degree programmes to access and benefit from internship placements in the labour market organisations. Lastly, there is a need to develop systematic methods of assessing and evaluating students' acquisition of employability skills during internship placements. These recommendations are critical because if well designed and implemented, internships as a pedagogical strategy can empower graduating students with employability skills and thus enhance their employability, and consequently reduce graduate unemployment from the social science programmes in the country. Given the above, there is a need for more research to explore how deliberate partnerships between universities offering Social Science Degree programmes, the labour market, and government could be achieved to design, develop and implement effective student internships tailored at promoting meaningful experiential and reflective learning to enhance the acquisition of employability skills for graduate work readiness in Zambia.

Limitations

One limitation of the paper is that the study's findings may not be expressly generalised to all study fields in social sciences. While there are many Social Science Degree programmes on offer in Zambian universities, the article focused on research findings from four study programmes only due to the logistical challenges occasioned by the Corona Virus Disease [COVID-19] restrictions during data collection. It is also important to state that though the acquisition of employability skills through internships may render graduates from the four programmes employable, does not expressly guarantee increased employment opportunities for graduating students as many other factors may influence the availability of such opportunities in the labour market. Lastly, while the analysis of the effectiveness of internships as pedagogical practices in helping graduating students acquire employability skills may not be very comprehensive due to the number of programmes considered, the article has illuminated, from a multi-stakeholder approach, how internships in some social science degree programmes were designed and implemented, and thereby providing insights on how they can be improved upon to enrich student real workplace experiences to acquire employability skills and reduce on the levels of graduate unemployment in the country.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Mwelwa: Conceptualization, design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, drafting the manuscript, and writing.
Mawela: Critical revision of manuscript, editing, reviewing, supervision, and final approval.

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