

Industrial Training Programme: What Matters Most?

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Abstract

This study aims to explore business administration students' expectation and perception towards their industrial training programme. A quantitative research using survey questionnaire was conducted. A total of 96 completed survey questionnaires were received and analysed. Students reported positive feedback on most aspects of the industrial training except for interesting and challenging work and good opportunity for future employment in the same company. The faculty needs to improve certain aspects of the industrial training programme to ensure effective planning and implementation of industrial training programme among business administration students. This study provides practical information on how faculties offering business administration programmes can incorporate industrial training component in the programme structure more effectively.

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INTRODUCTION

Having a degree alone does not guarantee a person's job. Graduates should equip themselves with knowledge, skills and positives attitudes before entering the workforce. In preparing the graduates to enter the real workforce, internship programme or industrial training has been introduced so that students can gain practical work experience which is capable in improving their employability as some recruiters are reluctant to accept students for placement interviews unless they have some internship experience (Coco, 2000).

In Malaysia, industrial training is one of the requirements for all students enrolled in certificate, diploma, and degree programmes (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2010). Industrial training refers to the placement of students in an organisation to carry out supervised practical training in selected industries, whether domestic or overseas, within a stipulated time before they are awarded with a certificate, diploma or bachelor's degree (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2010). Numerous fields of studies have been identified to include the industrial training component as a part of the programme structure including engineering, accounting, pharmacy, computer science, and business and management.

The study objective of this paper is to explore business administration students' expectation and perception towards industrial training programme. This paper is organised in 7 sections. Section 2 describes the industrial training programme for business administration students. This is followed by a description of benefits of industrial training programmes in Section 3 and the review of various literatures on the expectation and perception towards industrial training in Section 4. Research methodology of the study is presented in Section 5. Section 6 discusses results and findings of the study. Finally, based on the findings of this study, Section 7 presents the conclusion and recommendation for further / future research.

2.0 INDUSTRIAL TRAINING FOR BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS

There has been much concern on the quality of Malaysian graduates. Employers in the country generally feel there is a gap in graduate skills, suggesting that universities do not necessarily provide enough opportunities for students to develop the abilities critical to the labour market (Aziz, 2018). More recently, the

Education Minister of Malaysia reported that nearly 60 percent of degree holders and above remain unemployed after one year of graduating (Malaymail, 2019). This situation has led the Government to pay more attention on industrial training programmes as a part of the fields of studies. For instance, all business studies programmes offered by Higher Education Providers (HEPs) in Malaysia are encouraged to incorporate industrial training component in the programme in order to be accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), a statutory body governed by the Ministry of Education that ensures the quality of Malaysia's higher education (MQA, 2014). Business administration students typically undergo their internship in a number of fields ranging from sales and marketing, accounting, finance and administration, business consulting, human resource, and event planning.

Sending students to undergo industrial training is widely used as a learning platform for students to help fill the gap between classroom learning and the practice of business. Different institutions may have different requirements with regards to the length of industrial training, nevertheless, Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia recommended that the duration of the industrial training to be not less than three (3) months or a period set by any professional body of authority that awards the accreditation (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2010). The Ministry also has outlined several objectives of industrial training programmes. Among the objectives of the industrial training programmes are to: expose students to the real world of work; expose students to the latest technologies as well the latest knowledge in the market; expose students to specific practices in their respective field of specialties; enhancing knowledge, skills (especially soft skills) and student experience with organisations; produce competent graduates; improving employment opportunities; and bridging the networking between HEPs and the industry (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2010).

3.0 BENEFITS OF INDUSTRIAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Several authors have reported the benefits of internship to the students, universities, and employers. Cannon and Arnold (1998) opined that internships can provide valuable work experience, foster a sense of professionalism, and even lead to permanent positions for student interns. Schambach and Dirks (2002) reported that motivation of the participating students can

be increased, improve long-term retention of material, and foster a greater sense of personal accomplishment. Also, internships provide an opportunity to the students to work with professionals, thus enables them to explore and crystallise job interests and abilities (Hite and Bellizzi, 2015).

Students are increasingly seeing internship as a less of a vehicle for augmenting their education, and more as a means of gaining a competitive edge in the marketplace for new jobs (Cannon and Arnold, 1998). Nefstead (1982) cited in Ju et al. (1998) found that students had an enhanced positive self-image resulting from their work experiences and an overall positive perception of their internship experiences. It is apparent that an internship is in the best interest of a student. Jaradat (2017) concluded that the internship training is crucial among the students as it is expected to enrich their experiences, knowledge and skills in the personal and professional life.

The importance of internship programmes have been recognised by the university. Internship allows students to gain the skill, knowledge, and theoretical practice they learned in university (Cosentino, 2016). From the internship programme, employers' feedback with regards to the students' performance is helpful for assessment and increased enrollment, as students recognise the competitive advantage the internship provides (Divine et al., 2007). In addition, relationship between the employer and business schools can be strengthened via internship programmes (Divine et al., 2007).

Employers also see enormous value in internship programmes, as these programmes can provide them with inexpensive help, new ideas, and a talent pool from which future full-time employees may be drawn (Cannon and Arnold, 1998). Other than that, management personnel in the organisation will learn personal skill development and discover how they can become leaders to current employees by supervising interns (Sea, 2018). Furthermore, Divine et al. (2007) reported that internship programmes provide the opportunity to the company to evaluate potential long-term employees without long-term commitment.

4.0 STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTION TOWARDS INDUSTRIAL TRAINING

Previous studies have investigated students' expectation and perception towards industrial training. Expectation refers to how people perceive before

experience while how people feel after experience means perception (Lam and Ching, 2007). The difference between perception and expectation would then give the indication of satisfaction level after one's experience. In the context of industrial training programme, the ability to understand the gap or differences may suggest room for improvement in organising and implementing the programme.

Students have high expectation of potential for advancement (Berta, 2003) or expected good prospects for promotion and personal growth before internship (Chan et al., 2002). In a study of internship preferences and experience of 176 college students by Garrett and Bauer (1995), the researchers found that students preferred the functional areas of marketing management, product management, and sales promotion for marketing internships but most often obtained internships in direct marketing, sales promotion and marketing research. The students also preferred paid internships and wanted to receive academic credit for the internship experience. In Lam and Ching's (2007) study, the authors found that students had high expectations of broadening work experience, developing technical skills, and acquiring good opportunities for future career development in the same company before commencing their internship programme and students' perceptions were high for broadening work experience, being able to develop technical skill, and interesting and challenging work after they completed the programme.

In the business administration field, Hite and Bellizzi (1986) examined student expectations regarding internship programs in marketing. Their findings revealed that students viewed internships as valuable learning experiences, for which participants should receive academic credit, be financially compensated, and earn only a pass/fail grade. Students also felt that internships are a more valuable learning experience than case teaching, but that formal training should be provided at the beginning of internships and direct supervision be present throughout.

In terms of student satisfaction, Reganathan et al. (2012) investigated students' perception of the effectiveness of an industrial programme. The authors reported that students in Malaysia rated the industrial internship programme favourably. The study also found that students viewed learning through practical experience during the internship positively. In another study Rothman and Sisman (2016) found that internship proved to be an eye-opening experience that avoided poor person-job fit and costly turnover among those

whose expectations were disconfirmed. Ko (2008) indicates that higher satisfaction in student practicum training will result in higher satisfaction and confidence levels with regards to future careers.

In a more recent study, To and Lung (2020) found that supervisor support was found to strongly and significantly influence internship satisfaction directly and indirectly through perceived social value. Similar findings were found in Beenan (2007), D'Abate et al., (2009), and Jackson et al.'s (2019) studies whereby the authors found that high quality mentoring such as matching interns to the work they are interested in, clarity of tasks, appropriate supervision and feedback and support has been found to be associated with students' satisfaction and internship effectiveness. This study aims to explore business administration students' expectation and perception towards industrial training programme.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Sample

Data were collected through a survey using questionnaires. These questionnaires were distributed to students at a public university located in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia via an online survey tool namely surveymonkey.com. All final year students enrolled in business administration programme were invited to participate. In total, 96 completed survey questionnaires were received for further analysis.

5.2 Industrial training programme structure

The undergraduate students enrolled in business administration programme were required to undergo industrial training for duration of between 20 and 24 weeks. The industrial training programme must be completed in their final semester prior to the completion of their undergraduate study. Students must undergo industrial training at organisations endorsed by the faculty in the fields related to business administration.

The faculty has outlined the following learning outcomes to be achieved at the end of the industrial training programme; enhance competency and competitiveness in the field their respective specialties, associate work experience with knowledge learned in university, apply the theory and academic knowledge learned at work under supervision, improve communication skills effectively as well as gain experience and knowledge that can be utilised to choose the right job after graduation later.

Industrial training programme aimed to prepare students for working in the real world. Students were

expected to gain experiences in skills such as leadership and management skills, critical thinking, communication skills and entrepreneurial skills. Students were briefed on the industrial training programme and were guided by their head of programmes in selecting the industrial training placement. At the end of the programme, industry supervisor and university supervisor assessed the students' performances.

5.3 Data collection and survey instrument

The distribution of survey questionnaire involved two (2) phases; before the industrial training commenced and after the students have completed the industrial training programme. In the first phase, students were asked to provide their expectations towards industrial training variables before they started their industrial training. The survey questionnaire was divided into two (2) main sections. The first section comprised of profile data of students such as gender and the name of the programme enrolled. The second section comprised of questions to determine student expectations towards industrial training based on Lam and Ching's (2007) study. The items were adopted for this study since it seems to cover a good portion of the entire domain. There were 27 industrial training variables adopted from the study and one (1) variable on "Islamic working environment" was added given that majority of the students were expected to undergo their industrial training programme at organisations that related to an Islamic organisation such as Islamic financial institutions. A five-point Likert scale was utilised with "1" for "very low" and "5" for "very high".

In the second phase of data collection, after the students completed the industrial training programme, they were asked to provide their perceptions on the 28 variables on a five-point scale ranging from "1" for "very dissatisfied" to "5" for "very satisfied". Following Lam and Ching's (2007) study, the differences between students' perception and expectation were determined to measure student satisfaction towards industrial training. Positive gap means between perception and expectation indicate satisfaction among the students and vice versa. All descriptive data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

6.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the students. 80.2 per cent were female and 18.2 per cent were male. Such finding is consistent with the faculty's student population whereby more than 70 per cent of the

students were female. 30.2 per cent of students enrolled in Accounting Programme, 29.2 per cent were *Muamalat* Administration students, 14.6 per cent enrolled in Islamic Banking and Finance Programme, 14.6 per cent from Marketing Programme, and 11.5 per cent from Corporate Administration Programme.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Students

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 77 | 80.2 |
| Male | 19 | 19.8 |
| Programme | | |
| Accounting | 29 | 30.2 |
| <i>Muamalat</i> Administration | 28 | 29.2 |
| Islamic Banking and Finance | 14 | 14.6 |
| Marketing | 14 | 14.6 |
| Corporate Administration | 11 | 11.5 |

Table 2 shows the expectation mean (before commencement of industrial training programme), perception mean (after completing industrial training programme), and gap mean (perception – expectation) regarding the industrial training taken by students while Table 3 highlight ranks for each variable based on the mean score for expectation and perception. Before commencement of the industrial training programme, of the 28 variables that represent the various aspects of their learning experience gained during industrial training, students had high expectations on acquiring good opportunity for self-development (mean = 4.0421), interesting and challenging work (mean = 3.9271), and able to develop interest through practice (mean = 3.914). Also, the results show that students had the lowest expectations of high autonomy (mean = 3.3226) and competitive fringe benefits (mean = 3.4409). This shows that students were interested in acquiring practical experience from industrial training and not to earn money. Furthermore, students did not expect sympathetic help from the superiors with problems in workplace (mean = 3.4842) and appreciation and praise from managers (mean = 3.4632). It seems the students understand that they must perform work without expecting anything in return.

Also, as shown in Table 2, after the students completed the industrial training, they perceived that they were able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses (mean = 4.1771), develop good peer relationships (mean = 4.1563), and acquire good opportunity for self-development (mean = 4.1042). It was noted that all the students' perception scores on industrial training were higher than expectation scores, implying that students who underwent industrial training were generally satisfied with the programme, nevertheless, two (2) industrial training variables were found negative; interesting and challenging

work (gap mean = -0.0104) and good opportunity for future employment in the same company (gap mean = -0.0312). Negative mean scores for these two (2) variables indicated that student expectation towards these industrial training aspects could not be met. Students felt that they were not given the opportunities to perform interesting and challenging job duties during the industrial training period and most students did not foresee any job offer from the company after they completed their industrial training.

Although students did not expect appreciation and praise from managers before they started their industrial training, findings from this study show that this aspect had the highest positive gap mean (0.502). Other than that, students had positive gap mean for involving in supervisory task (0.4273), and industrial training programme was good to their resume (0.4203). The latter is particularly important as recruiters rated students whose resumes showed evidence of internship experience higher than they rated students who did not have such experience (Taylor, 1988).

Table 2: Variables expectations, perceptions and gap means

| Variable | Expectation Mean | Perception Mean | Gap Mean |
|--|------------------|-----------------|----------|
| Able to apply theories to work place | 3.6563 | 3.9583 | 0.302 |
| Able to develop interests through practice | 3.914 | 3.9479 | 0.0339 |
| Able to develop technical skill | 3.9043 | 4.0104 | 0.1061 |
| Able to identify self-strengths and weaknesses | 3.8854 | 4.1771 | 0.2917 |
| Acceptable work pressure | 3.5104 | 3.8646 | 0.3542 |
| Appreciation and praise from managers | 3.4632 | 3.9684 | 0.5052 |
| Broad work experience | 3.7789 | 3.9271 | 0.1482 |
| Competitive fringe benefits | 3.4409 | 3.7708 | 0.3299 |
| Competitive training allowances | 3.5532 | 3.5833 | 0.0301 |
| Comprehensive training program | 3.7813 | 3.8542 | 0.0729 |
| Encouraging innovative ideas | 3.6842 | 3.8229 | 0.1387 |
| Feedback from managers | 3.8211 | 4.0104 | 0.1893 |
| Feeling of being a | 3.7368 | 3.9688 | 0.232 |

| Variable | Expectation Mean | Perception Mean | Gap Mean |
|--|------------------|-----------------|----------|
| team member | | | |
| Good coordination between Faculty and employers | 3.6632 | 3.7917 | 0.1285 |
| Good opportunity for future employment in the same company | 3.7604 | 3.7292 | -0.0312 |
| Good opportunity for self-development | 4.0421 | 4.1042 | 0.0621 |
| Good peer relationships | 3.7684 | 4.1563 | 0.3879 |
| Good to my resume | 3.6526 | 4.0729 | 0.4203 |
| Good work environment | 3.8229 | 3.875 | 0.0521 |
| High autonomy | 3.3226 | 3.5417 | 0.2191 |
| High team spirit in the group | 3.8316 | 3.9583 | 0.1267 |
| Interesting and challenging work | 3.9271 | 3.9167 | -0.0104 |
| Involved in supervisory tasks | 3.4894 | 3.9167 | 0.4273 |
| Islamic working environment | 3.6042 | 3.8229 | 0.2187 |
| Reasonable boss | 3.7766 | 3.9271 | 0.1505 |
| Stable work shift | 3.5313 | 3.8854 | 0.3541 |
| Sufficient supervisory support | 3.7158 | 3.875 | 0.1592 |
| Sympathetic help from superior with problems in workplace | 3.4842 | 3.8646 | 0.3804 |

*Gap means = Perception means – Expectation mean

Table 3: Expectation and perception ranking

| Variable | Expectation Mean | Perception Mean | Gap |
|--|------------------|-----------------|---------|
| | Ranking | Ranking | Ranking |
| Able to apply theories to work place | 18 | 10 | 9 |
| Able to develop interests through practice | 3 | 11 | 25 |
| Able to develop technical skill | 4 | 5 | 21 |
| Able to identify self-strengths and weaknesses | 5 | 1 | 10 |
| Acceptable work pressure | 23 | 19 | 6 |
| Appreciation and praise from managers | 26 | 8 | 1 |
| Broad work | 10 | 12 | 17 |

| Variable | Expectation Mean | Perception Mean | Gap |
|--|------------------|-----------------|---------|
| | Ranking | Ranking | Ranking |
| experience | | | |
| Competitive fringe benefits | 27 | 25 | 8 |
| Competitive training allowances | 21 | 27 | 26 |
| Comprehensive training program | 9 | 21 | 22 |
| Encouraging innovative ideas | 16 | 22 | 18 |
| Feedback from managers | 8 | 6 | 14 |
| Feeling of being a team member | 14 | 7 | 11 |
| Good coordination between Faculty and employers | 17 | 24 | 19 |
| Good opportunity for future employment in the same company | 13 | 26 | 28 |
| Good opportunity for self-development | 1 | 3 | 23 |
| Good peer relationships | 12 | 2 | 4 |
| Good to my resume | 19 | 4 | 3 |
| Good work environment | 7 | 17 | 24 |
| High autonomy | 28 | 28 | 12 |
| High team spirit in the group | 6 | 9 | 20 |
| Interesting and challenging work | 2 | 14 | 27 |
| Involved in supervisory tasks | 24 | 15 | 2 |
| Islamic working environment | 20 | 23 | 13 |
| Reasonable boss | 11 | 13 | 16 |
| Stable work shift | 22 | 16 | 7 |
| Sufficient supervisory support | 15 | 18 | 15 |
| Sympathetic help from superior with problems in workplace | 25 | 20 | 5 |

**Rankings of expectation and perception means and gap means are from high to low*

7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This paper studied student expectation and perception towards their industrial training programme. A sample of 96 students responded to a scale consisting of 28 variables to assess student expectation and perception towards industrial training programme. This study revealed that before the commencement of the industrial training programme, students had high

expectations on the following aspects; good opportunity for self-development, interesting and challenging work, and able to develop interests through practice. Once they completed the programme, the students rated high on the ability to identify self-strengths and weaknesses, developing good peer relationships, and acquiring good opportunity for self-development.

Overall, students reported satisfaction on 26 internship variables whereby the perception scores were higher than the expectations. however, two (2) variables were found negative; interesting and challenging work and good opportunity for future employment in the same company. On the other hand, the students got more than what they expected in the form of appreciation and praise from managers, were involved in supervisory task, and felt that industrial training programme was good to their resume.

Although the overall results and findings have shown positive student feedback, there is room for improvement that the faculty can take into consideration to ensure effective planning and implementation of industrial training programme for the business administration undergraduate students. First, findings from this study showed that students were not given interesting and challenging work as they expected. Hence, the industrial training placement should be carefully organized to ensure greater opportunities are given to the interns so that they gain relevant practical experience and knowledge but more importantly they are able to develop interests through industrial training. In addition, organisations in the business sector need to understand the importance of internship; they should also clarify issues such as the industrial training purpose of the students and the expectation of HEPs in terms of industrial training programme.

Secondly, with the help of faculty members, it is crucial for students to select appropriate organisations that are suitable for them so that they are able to see their future employment in the same company. As such, it may also be appropriate to recommend industry representative to be involved in developing and evaluating internship programs. Faculty members could understand the tasks in which students were engaged and could better determine if a particular organisation or company is offering the kind of experience that would not only allow a student to gain skills that will make him/her marketable to future employers, but would also serve as the first step into possible long term employment.

The study faces several limitations, which may restrict the generalization of the results such as the small

sample size. Other studies should be conducted to produce a comparison with another HEP offering similar programme to compare industrial training conditions of the students. Future studies can include responses from industrial supervisors and university lecturers and may include other factors that may contribute to the success of industrial internship programme. Also, qualitative study can be conducted to gain further insights into the experiences that students had while undergoing their industrial training programme. It is believed that with experience, knowledge and skills earned while undergoing industrial training, graduates will be more ready to face the role of employees after graduation.

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