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STUDENT INTERNSHIP CHALLENGES DURING COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 epidemic has had unexpected and unanticipated effects on how people live, work, and play. This pandemic had brought a number of negative impacts on our health and well-being, as well as our social and economic standards, politics, culture, and education. A majority of affected countries have implemented a lockdown in order to flatten the infection curve. The government of Malaysia has issued a Movement Control Order (MCO) requiring the closure of all non-essential sectors, including educational institutions.

At institutions of higher learning, all regular physical teaching and learning, as well as other co-curricular activities, have been temporarily suspended. Students are being confronted with a new standard of virtual or online teaching and learning methods. Most final-year Bachelor's Degree students are required to participate in industrial training for 6 months or longer, depending on their programme requirements. However, the few implementations of MCO had caused an impact on student enrolment into internship programmes both before and during their internship.

As a student, finding an internship or employment might be a challenging task. Adding a pandemic and a damaged economy to the mix makes things much worse. Students are not the only ones who are struggling to find opportunities as a result of the pandemic. The difficulties of working remotely, and for some, in person, is one of the apparent challenges COVID-19 faced for many organisations (Kenoun, 2020). These limitations have influenced the experiences of those who are new to the internship and job markets.

Employers from both the commercial and public sectors were still excited about and supportive of the internship programme from January to early March 2020. Some companies, however, elected to opt out of the programme after the World Health Organization (WHO) announced on March 11, 2020 that the COVID-19 crisis had progressed into a full-fledged pandemic (Wong, 2020).

CHALLENGES BEFORE PLACEMENT

One of the difficulties the students encountered was finding a place to undergo industrial training because most businesses were unable to operate while the Movement Control Order was in effect. Students also faced difficulty finding suitable companies near their homes because most of the companies engaged strive to save money by not hiring students for industrial training. As they do not want to jeopardize their safety as a result of the epidemic, students' hunt for companies near their respective living zones often becomes futile.

Furthermore, students must find a location that is appropriate for the subject of their study. The majority of major companies in the industry take a long time to respond to student applications. Due to a lack of available positions, some of the suitable businesses were forced to stop accepting student applications.

In order to select an appropriate student, most companies employ online platforms. Students must apply either through email or the company's website. Some students experience difficulties in meeting the company's appearance expectations. Students must be well-prepared and targeted in their approach if they want to make a strong first impression, as well as ready to deliver a relevant personal introduction during the interview process via online platform.

CHALLENGES DURING INTERNSHIP

Students who have secured a place and undergone industry training confront a variety of hurdles. Due to the implementation of movement restriction orders, the company does not operate physically and all transactions are completed online. Since the bulk of the workforce is expected to work from home, students must learn to work independently, manage their time properly, and acquire skills and knowledge in a non-traditional workplace.

During the COVID 19 outbreak, however, student internships were less able to provide opportunities for strengthening student abilities in terms of dependability, ability to work independently, and ability to acquire new information. This suggests that, due to the pandemic's limits, students had difficulty in absorbing new knowledge at work. (Mediawati et al., 2020). Most students had never seen social distancing requirements or mask-wearing before the pandemic, which makes it difficult for them to get to know coworkers and assimilate into a new work environment (Kenoun, 2020).

Besides, students also need to confront challenges in terms of learning corporate culture and teamwork. As they are compelled to work from home, their learning gets limited. They are also unable to interact with other members of staff as they could prior to the outbreak (Wong, 2020). Even though internships and jobs are different before the epidemic in terms of what they entail, students must continue to strive to create connections despite the new challenges.

There are some students who face challenges when they are asked to work from home during their industrial training period. This is because they do not have adequate facilities at home to complete the assignments. Some people do not have reliable internet access, and others do not have the necessary computer equipment or gadgets to complete tasks.

Students were concerned that if the pandemic prolonged, their employers might terminate their internships early, disrupting their learning and causing them to fall short of the required internship length for the module. The host company has urged students to discontinue their internships in some cases; nevertheless, most students have been given the option to continue their internships online or virtually.

Given the lack of personal and on-site involvement, students expressed concerns about how employers monitor or evaluate their work performance. However, at the end of the industrial training period, most companies give students a fair and transparent evaluation based on their relatively good student achievement, despite the many challenges faced by both parties during the period.

This writing is based on feedback from students who have completed or are currently completing industrial training. In addition, at the end of the training period, the industry shares some information via feedback forms.

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