

A framework for internship programmes in South Africa ¹

Alice Lubega and Cecile Schultz

Cranefield College of Project and Programme Management
Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

The plight of unemployed graduates in South Africa cannot be overemphasised. Rand Water's recent adverts seeking qualified, unemployed graduates for the Graduate Internship Programmes, attracted a big number of applicants trying to get into the work environment. This scenario highlights the challenge of graduate unemployment in South Africa which raises concerns about the functionality of the higher education system and the employability of the graduates it produces. The purpose of this study is to present insight into graduates' self-reported learning outcomes after completion of the Graduate Internship program which has been developed into a framework for implementing effective internship programmes to ensure the successful transition of graduates from the academic environment to the workplace. A qualitative research method was used to investigate the problem of graduate employability and an interview guide was used to collect data from 'graduates' on how the internship program enabled their employment. The unique contribution of this research is a proposed framework for implementing effective graduate internship programmes to enhance the project management processes thereof at Rand Water.

Keywords: Graduate employability, Graduate internship, Graduate internship programme, Intern, Internship, Mentoring

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment signifies one of the main challenges worldwide that the majority of countries are currently faced with (Jubane 2020, 1). Jubane (2020, 13) points out that youth unemployment is very high in South Africa, "which has resulted in a decline in the national Gross Domestic Product because labour resources are idle". Rand Water as the principal water utility in the country has pronounced its intent to take part in skills and capacity development by embarking on a Graduate Internship Program financed under

¹ How to cite this paper: Lubega, A. and Schultz, C. (2022). A framework for internship programmes in South Africa; *PM World Journal*, Vol. XI, Issue VII, July.

National Treasury's Infrastructure Skills Development Grant (ISDG), to assist municipalities with capacity and infrastructure-support related projects" (Rand Water 2015, 152). The mandate of the programme concerns the training and development of unemployed graduates to generate skills in the fields of artisans, engineers, process controllers and scientists for local Water Service Authorities (Rand Water 2015, 152).

Research findings show that the essential prerequisite to addressing youth unemployment in South Africa is the economic growth in a variety of sectors that creates jobs for different skills (De Lannoy, et al. 2020, 127). De Lannoy, et al. (2020, 127) add that economic growth "alone will not address the fact that too many young people from poor backgrounds will continue to be excluded from the South African labour market". The high costs of job search, a lack of cultural and social capital, spatial segregation and poverty represent additional obstacles experienced by young people in their effort to access the labour market (De Lannoy, et al. 2020, 127). Jubane (2020, 13) recommend designing programmes that concentrate on equipping the unemployed youth with the expertise needed by employers in the labour market.

Media, public discussions, and published research studies discuss the rising levels of graduate unemployment in the South African labour market raising concern about the functionality of the higher education system and the employability of the graduates that it produces. According to Statistics South Africa, the official unemployment rate was 46,3% in Quarter 1 2021 among youth (15-34 years) and among university graduates, the rate was 9,3% (Statistics South Africa 2021, 1).

The graduate unemployment problem has been categorised as one of the socio-economic issues affecting South Africa (Cloete 2015) and while graduates have difficulty in finding jobs in their qualification disciplines, organisations are suffering from a lack of skills in different fields, but are unwilling to employ inexperienced graduates (Greyling 2015). In order to bridge this gap, human resource development strategies such as internship programmes have been implemented for graduates to gain the required experience to compete in the marketplace (Anjum 2020).

2. Problem investigated

South Africa is faced with frequent service delivery protests and one of the underlying causes is the absence of a skilled workforce to deliver a range of services in the municipalities. Many municipalities struggle to deliver, operate, maintain, and service infrastructure cost-effectively and sustainably, which results in component failure and

rapid deterioration of assets leading to regular prolonged disruptions in service delivery and even total disrepair in some municipalities (National Treasury, 2020; Morudu 2017:3).

The key contributor to poor asset management practices is the lack of critical technical and built environment skills (Watermeyer & Phillips 2020, 9). The problem is generally greater in rural areas, but also affects some urban municipalities (cities). This challenge has been exacerbated by the loss of technical skills due to global competition and the skills age gap between those nearing retirement or retired and those who recently qualified from academic institutions or recently joined the workplace.

Graduates struggle to find employment and this prevents them from gaining relevant work experience which, in turn, presents limited opportunities for professional registration within their fields. The scarcity of professionals, especially in the built environment, contributes significantly to the declining infrastructure as well as the incapacity to develop and maintain the existing infrastructure, which impacts service delivery in local municipalities (National Treasury, 2020; Watermeyer & Phillips 2020). Lack of Professionals, especially in the built environment, contributes significantly to the declining infrastructure as well as the incapacity to develop and maintain the existing infrastructure, which impacts service delivery in local municipalities (National Treasury, 2020; Watermeyer & Phillips 2020).

The researchers concur that internship programmes are a platform to bridge the gap between the education and labour systems by providing the requisite work experience to improve the graduates' employability (Cloete 2015).

3. Research objectives

The purpose of this research was to develop a framework for internship programmes in South Africa. To do so, the following objectives were investigated:

- To identify how the internship programme adds value to enhancing employability.
- To identify competencies learned from the internship programme that enhance employability.
- To establish the key opportunities experienced during the internship programme.
- To establish the key barriers and challenges experienced during the internship programme.
- To establish how the internship programme improved the personal development of the graduates.

4. Literature review

South Africa is faced with a major problem of unemployment, especially among women and the youth. The unemployment rate rose to 34.4% in the second quarter of 2021 from 32.6% in the previous period. It was the highest jobless rate since comparable data began in 2008, amidst the worsening COVID-19 pandemic crisis and stringent lockdown restrictions. The number of unemployed persons increased by 584 thousand to 7.8 million, employment fell by 54 thousand to 14.9 million and the number of people in the labour force increased by 530 thousand to 22.8 million (Statistics South Africa 2021b).

The expanded definition of unemployment, including people who have stopped looking for work, was at 44.4%, up from 43.2% in the prior period. The youth unemployment rate, measuring jobseekers between 15 and 24 years old, hit a new record high of 64.4% of which, 9.3% accounts for unemployed graduates (Statistics South Africa 2021b).

The economy is not the only reason behind graduate unemployment. The mismatch between what and how students are taught at tertiary institutions compared to the practical skills and knowledge that employers seek in the 21st century is another case in point (Hooley 2017; Edayi 2016; Magagula 2017). There is, therefore, a need to alleviate the high levels of unemployment among graduates and provide them with opportunities to gain practical work experience and make them employable (De Lannoy, Graham, et al., 2018; Blackmore, et al. 2016). One of the ways that employers opt to solve graduate unemployment and improve graduate employability is to optimise graduates' successful transition from higher education into the organisation through graduate internship programmes (Anjum 2020). The key themes of this research are discussed below.

4.1 The value of internship programmes

Graduate internship programmes are described as focused training interventions where interns are provided with an opportunity to learn from the various areas of expertise of an employer (Galbraith & Mondal 2020). Internship programmes are introduced to provide students with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience and to facilitate a smooth transition from the academic world to the working setting (Mohaidin, et al. 2017, 1). Anjum (2020, 6-7) notes that the internship programmes combine classroom knowledge with workplace reality to provide graduates with experience and empower them to assert themselves in the modern and dynamic employment market.

The findings of a study on the employers' insight into internship programmes suggest that an "intern must have a very good demonstrable initiative in performing work given,

analytical skills and accept feedback” (Mohaidin, et al. 2017, 6). Internship programmes assist businesses “to offer effective training and learning environment to their interns” and “reduce their recruitment and training costs to the new employees” (Anjum 2020, 7). The internship programme has a positive effect by providing the necessary skills to interns and graduates (Mabeba 2019, 26). In addition, the internship programmes offer many prospects such as networking with potential businesses, developing skills, preparing for future employment and providing full-time employees (Mabeba 2019, 26). Internship programmes with specific characteristics, especially supervisor support and mentoring, and the link to academic programmes can increase internship satisfaction and perceived value for the career development of students (Hora, Parrott & Her 2020, 250).

The three participant groups who derive value from any successful internship program are the institution, the graduate, and the employer (Ismail 2018; Anjum 2020). All parties must align to programme goals and objectives as well as fulfil their individual responsibilities diligently in order to reap the potential benefits of internships (Ismail 2018; Anjum 2020).

For the graduate- Internships are a bridge between the theory of the classroom and practice in the workplace which allows for better transfer of classroom training into an actual working environment (Anjum 2020). The main benefit is the improvement of transferable skills by enabling the transfer of knowledge acquired academically to divergent work contexts and the ability to constantly adapt to these contexts to create new, work-related knowledge as well as increase the understanding of discipline-related content whilst preparing graduates to enter the vocational world (Anjum 2020).

Anjum (2020) further states that internships provide graduates with an opportunity to improve their personal, professional and social skills that enable the application of theoretical knowledge in the workplace through supervised and planned work settings in the real world in addition to promoting career prospects due to the experience gained by hands-on performance of job tasks and spending time with professionals in the graduate’s desired career area. Internships also help to develop work values, focus on making wise career choices, gain direct access to job sources and even impress potential employers, all of which improve future job opportunities and soften the reality shock that often accompanies the transition from the academic environment to the world of work (Ismail 2018).

Research confirms the value and validity that internships bring to both the graduate and employer (Galbraith & Mondal 2020, 6). A study on internships and employment opportunities after graduation found that “graduates with internship experience are more

likely to be invited to a job interview compared to students without this experience” (Baert, et al. 2019, 20). The results of this study confirm “that the positive relationship between internship experience and labour success is more than just a correlational one” (Baert, et al. 2019, 20). However, Galbraith and Mondal (2020, 6) point out that internships still represent learning tools and are not a guarantee of work success. They contend that internships position the intern as a top entrant for available full-time job opportunities, providing them with experiential learning and skills development that are paramount in the world of work.

For the employer- Internship programmes are a cost-efficient way to ensure a steady stream of talented young employees for the organisation, without having to budget large amounts for staffing and compensation thereby enabling compensation efficiencies as hiring an intern for a full-time position after the assignment can lead to savings in the areas of recruitment and selection (Maertz, Stoeberl & Marks 2014:123-142). Furthermore, Internship programmes also play a secondary public relations/recruiting role because a successful intern is likely to endorse a particular company to friends and career counsellors. (Maertz, Stoeberl & Marks 2014:123-142; Ismail, 2018).

Interns are often well-suited to help with value-added emergent projects that would not otherwise be done, at a much lower labour cost while simultaneously allowing full-time employees to focus on more immediate priorities (Maertz, Stoeberl & Marks 2014:123-142). Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks (2014:123-142), aver that interns who demonstrate work proficiency during the internship may be knowledgeable and competent enough to contribute relatively quickly after being recruited for a permanent post. Interns represent an opportunity to engage bright and energetic people to inject new talent into the organisation and provide a way for the organisation to create quality, loyal employees for the future in addition to showcasing the organisation (Rangan & Natarajathinam 2014: 1-7).

Opportunity stacking illustrates “how one opportunity to gain internship experience can be a springboard to opportunities for more internship experience, and possibly lead to further opportunities to gain employment” (Wright & Mulvey 2021, 349). Opportunity stacking exemplifies the potential for an accumulation of benefits over time as graduates build their curriculum vitae using internship involvement in preparation for the graduate labour market (Wright & Mulvey 2021, 350). According to Wright and Mulvey (2021, 352), the stacking of internships enables graduates to accumulate specialized experience that provides access to internships in leading firms and career development opportunities.

For the institution- Internships play a role in experiential and vocational learning (Leary & Sherlock 2020). Such learning is more difficult to deliver in the classroom and thus, typically less available through formal university courses. This is explicitly recognised in the formation of an internship programme for academic credit (Maertz, Stoeberl & Marks 2014:125-142).

Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks (2014:125-142) further assert that an internship provides educational institutions with an opportunity for the requisite formal assessment accreditation and improves the classroom curriculum in terms of preparing graduates for employment. This benefit could be reinforced by sound research that shows favourable statistics on how many internships lead to full-time job offers prior to graduation and could be an effective marketing strategy for the institution (Maertz, Stoeberl & Marks 2014:125-142; Leary & Sherlock 2020).

Through marketing mechanisms, institutions can also build close relationships with employers resulting in additional positive outcomes for the institution in terms of funding such as named chairs or centres, or as a source for advisory board members, potentially more job interviews/offers to students and co-sponsorship of events ((Maertz, Stoeberl & Marks 2014).

A concurrent reduction of the graduate labour market, the prevailing climate of the standardization of higher education and an increasing neo-liberal emphasis on students to advance their employability makes the conversion to employment complex (O'Connor & Bodicoat 2016, 10). Research supports the necessity to enhance employer involvement, experience and employment-based training in study programmes (Silva, et al. 2016, 16). The results of this research reveal that study programmes that incorporate internships tend to increase graduate employment (Silva, et al. 2016, 16). Silva, et al. (2016, 16) suggest that internship learning experience makes the difference in consideration of the graduate employment and the way internship experiences are organized alongside study programmes.

4.2 Employability competencies

As the world is changing from the industrial age to the information and communication age, also referred to as the knowledge-based economy (Pitan, 2015) having a good degree is not sufficient to guarantee employment for new graduates, it is also crucial for them to acquire a range of general employability and flexibility skills so that they can adjust to new modes of production organisation innate to the globalisation of the economy (Anjum 2020). Graduates must develop and display employability skills required by the

industry in addition to their academic skills to be more prepared for the transition into the labour market (Anjum 2020).

According to (Budyono, et al., 2020), employability refers to a range of specific, employment-related skills or attributes (hard and soft skills) relevant to acquiring and succeeding in employment. Employability generally relates to a set of skills and/or attributes that are necessary for any graduate to move into the employment market, find and retain a job and develop his/her career. Budyono, et al., (2020) aver that the 'employability assets' of graduates comprise knowledge (what they know), skills (what they do with what they know) and attitudes (how they do it).

Jackson (2015) suggests the employability model which includes soft skills or transferable skills such as imagination/creativity; adaptability/flexibility/initiative; willingness to learn; working independent /autonomy; teamwork; ability to manage others/leadership; ability to work under pressure; communication/oral and written; numeracy/ability to work with numbers; attention to detail; time management; taking responsibility /making decisions; planning, coordinating and organising ability; and ability to use new technologies to operationalise the employability construct (Jackson 2015:350-367).

4.3 Key opportunities of internships

According to Anjum (2020), internships enable the link to theory and practice by taking part in supervised and scheduled work. These internship programs enable the transition from being a graduate to a professional in addition to improving graduates' personal skills as well as polishing their professional growth and experience. Key opportunities gained from Internship programmes include but are not limited to:

4.3.1 Professional development

Professional development refers to all training, certification and education designed to teach workers individual skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to improve their performance on the job in their respective line of work to earn or maintain professional credentials through academic degrees, formal coursework, attending conferences, or informal learning opportunities situated in practice (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017). Internships enable professional development for graduates to develop industry-related knowledge and skills that are transferable to any professional work setting as well as good personal qualities, working habits and appreciable confidence level required for professional success (Anjum 2020).

4.3.2 Professional registration

Professional registration is a status awarded to an individual by a licensed body which represents the respective Council that provides independent recognition of professional achievements and maintains the standards required to join the global community of professionals based on knowledge, competence and commitment to professionalism (SAQA 2018). During the period of training and development, the intern undergoes a structured training programme and works with and under the supervision of qualified professionals to coach and mentor them to gain experience and develop the professional competencies required for professional registration.

4.3.3 Practical experience

Internships are an excellent source of practical experience which cannot be fully simulated in the classroom (Anjum 2020; Hawse 2018) learning teamwork, building personal and professional relationships which are vital for graduates' personal and professional development as well as building strong connections with the organisations. Anjum (2020) states that the practicality of knowledge depends upon what graduates already know and how they associate their information with the situations they face in the real world of the work.

4.3.4 World of work

Previous studies have proved that internship programs improve the academic and professional performance of graduates (Hawse 2018; Anjum 2020; Ismail 2018) and prepare them to cope with the challenges of the work environment (Maertz et al., 2014). Internship programs provide an opportunity for graduates to experience integrating conceptual knowledge and training from the classroom to the real work settings and an impact on the professional growth and success of graduates as the first introduction to the world of work (Anjum 2020; Cheong, et al., 2014).

4.3.5 Networking

Internships help graduates directly build a professional network for their first job (Anjum 2020; Ismail 2018; Cheong et al, 2014). To achieve success from an internship, appropriate feedback from both the corporate supervisor and the institutional supervisor is a vital element in upgrading and maintaining the performance and professional development or refinement of learning goals to ensure the intern's progress (Anjum 2020).

4.3.6 Employment

Corporates usually favour job applicants with work experience and practical knowledge. Therefore, they sometimes have an eye on their interns and select them as their future employees (Anjum 2020). Interns assimilate faster to their new roles; have shorter learning curves than external hires; provide part-time help and application of the latest strategies/techniques in the field, bringing innovative ideas to the workplace to the benefit of the organisation thus, companies also save their hiring and training costs as well as (Anjum 2020).

4.3.7 Employability

Internship opportunities enable graduates to receive high-quality job offers sooner and thus improve their employability (Anjum 2020). Internships enable graduates to acquire skills, which cannot be learned in the classroom environment, while employers obtain access to low-cost labour and reduced recruitment costs (Maertz, Stoeberl, & Marks 2014). Interns develop interpersonal skills, team-working skills, professionalism and customer management experience as well as improve their communication, confidence and self-efficacy, skills that employers seek in employees. Those with internship experience are more likely to find jobs and earn more (Ismail 2018).

4.3.8 Personal development

Personal development includes activities that improve self-awareness or self-knowledge, build or renew identity or self-esteem, develop strengths or talents, identify or improve potential, facilitate employability or human capital and enhance the quality of life (Zainudeen 2020). The concept is not limited to self-help but includes formal and informal activities for developing others through roles such as those of a teacher or mentor, either through a personal competency or a professional service. In the context of institutions such as the Graduate Internship programme, personal development refers to the methods, programs, tools, techniques, and assessment systems offered to support positive adult development at the individual level in the organisation (Zainudeen 2020).

Work-related learning in the form of internship programs is key for graduates' personal and professional development as well as building strong networks with the leading business organisations. Most of the research work until recently has focused on the advancement of graduates' knowledge and the advantages of an internship program after its completion (Ismail 2018). However, there is limited research work on how

internship programs assist in the professional and personal growth and skills of graduates.

Anjum (2020) believes that a successful internship programme can be achieved through proper recognition of internship plans and relevant industry participants, picking out motivational graduate interns, internship program evaluation, monitoring and feedback, which tie up both professional and personal development.

5. Research methodology

The methodology deployed by the researchers in this study was a qualitative approach aimed at extracting information and consisted of a literature review and semi-structured individual interviews with the intention of exploring, understanding and explaining the nature of a phenomenon which, in this study, was that of graduate unemployment. The fundamental nature of this research was to explore, listen and understand the perceptions, views and experiences of former graduates in terms of how the internship programme assisted them in acquiring competencies that enabled them to become employable. The rationale for the adoption of a qualitative approach was that the data transcribed from the interviews would provide a rich source of data on the perceptions, views and experiences of these former graduates.

This research study was based on a phenomenological paradigm. Phenomenological paradigms are associated with qualitative, subjectivist, humanistic and interpretive approaches. A phenomenological approach is a form of a qualitative study which highlights experiences as, lived or perceived by the actors in the situation (Gill 2020).

The target population for this study was the 136 former graduates who participated in the internship programme at Rand Water in South Africa to gain work experience. The selection method used in this study was non-probability sampling - judgement sampling. Judgement sampling (also called purposive sampling) requires the researchers to use their personal judgement to select cases that they consider best in answering the research questions to meet the research objectives. Inclusion criteria are characteristics that the prospective subjects must meet if they are to be included in the study. There were four criteria used for inclusion in this study. The 13 graduates included in this study, were former graduates who had participated in the internship programme and applied for jobs after the programme, they were invited for interviews, were successful in the interviews and obtained permanent employment based on how they presented themselves during the interviews. Exclusion criteria are those characteristics that disqualify prospective subjects from inclusion in the study. The 124 graduates excluded

from the study are those who did not take the initiative to seek employment. Although they are currently employed, they received assistance to find employment as part of the programme initiative, so they lack the actual experience of what is required to be successful in an employment interview.

This study employed semi-structured face-to-face interviews which is one the most common methods of data collection used in qualitative research. A pilot interview was conducted as a pre-test to test the recording machine in preparation for the complete study. The findings of the pilot interview also indicated that the six semi-structured questions in the interview guide extracted the desired information with a minor rephrasing of the questions. To address confidentiality, pseudonyms were used and the participants were referred to as P1, P2 and so on. During data analysis, coding was used to identify relevant themes and categories.

6. Trustworthiness of the data

Credibility can be established through activities such as peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, negative case analysis, referential adequacy and member checks (Loh 2013, 5).

Peer debriefing: This refers to exposing the researchers' analysis and conclusion to a colleague or other peer continuously for the development of both design and analysis of the study (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 308-309; Lietz & Zayas 2010, 198). The researchers closely liaised with her supervisor regarding data collection and analysis. Continuous supervision enabled the researchers to present the research process and procedure in a way that would enable other researchers to collect data similarly thereby, adding to the dependability of the study (Jensen 2012, 209). According to Lietz and Zayas (2010, 196), peer debriefing can help to promote reflexivity, allowing researchers to become more sensitised to the effects of their socio-political position.

Prolonged involvement: The researchers stayed in the field until data saturation occurred. Semi-structured interviews were carried out until data saturation occurred when the researchers experienced that the value of information obtained from the graduates was rich and adequate (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 301-304; Wiersma & Jurs 2005, 214).

Triangulation: This refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon and assure the validity of the research (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 305-307; Johnson & Waterfield 2004, 125). The researchers conducted a literature review to become conversant with the content of the phenomenon

under exploration and collected data using semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth information from the perceptions, views and experiences of graduates from the Internship programme who obtained employment after the programme.

Multiple coding: Multiple coding involves the cross-checking of coding strategies and the interpretation of data by independent researchers (Barbour 2001, 1116). Coding collaboratively enables multiple ways of analysing and interpreting data together (Saldana 2009, 27). The researchers invited two independent co-coders to crosscheck coding strategies and the interpretation of data to improve the rigour of the research.

7. Data analysis and findings

7.1 Participants' overview

The demographic profile of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' demographic information

Intervi ewee	Age	Gender	Highest Qualification	Year Compl eted	Field of study	Department
P1	36	Male	BTech Mechanical Engineering	2019	Mechanical Engineering	Maintenance
P2	32	Male	Bachelor's degree	2015	Water & Sanitation	Operations
P3	30	Male	National Diploma	2018	Mechanical Engineering	Capital Projects
P4	35	Female	BTech Water Care	2015	Water Care	Operations
P5	26	Female	Fitter & Turner trade certificate	2016	Mechanical Engineering	Maintenance
P6	35	Female	BSc Water & Sanitation	2015	Process Control	Operations
P7	36	Male	N5 Electrical Engineering	2016	Electrical Engineering	Maintenance
P8	27	Male	National Diploma	2016	Electrical Engineering	Maintenance
P9	29	Female	Environmental Science (Hons)	2015	Environmental Science	Operations/ Scientific Services
P10	31	Female	BSc Degree	2015	Process Control	Operations
P11	29	Male	National Diploma	2018	Electrical Engineering	Maintenance

P12	31	Male	BSc Water & Sanitation	2014	Process Control	Operations
P13	32	Female	Environmental Science (Hons)	2015	Environmental Science	Operations

Source: Authors' own developed table

7.2 Themes and categories

Table 2 presents a summary of all the participants' inputs.

Table 2: Themes and categories of the research data

Themes	Categories	Participants
Value add of the internship programme	Interacting with others	1,2,6,7,8,9
	Internship Programme Structure and design	3,4,8
	Practical and technical skills	1,3,4,6,7,8,10,13
	Exposure to standards and best practice	1,9,11,13
	Relevant experience	1,2,3,4,5,7,8,12,13
	Exposure to the world of work	2,4,5,6,7,10
	Soft skills	2,3,4,5,11,12,13
	Well trained graduates	2,5,6,8,12
	Employable/prepared for the interview	2,3,4,5,8,10,13
Employability competencies	Teamwork	5,6,7,13
	Problem solving	1,4,5,7,10
	Presentation skills	4,5,10,13
	Emotional Intelligence	1,2,4,5,11
	Adaptability	5,6,7
	Communication Skills	1,4,5,7,8,11
	Creativity	1,7,8,11
	Planning and Organising	1,7,8
Opportunities derived from the programme	Working independently	2,6,11,12,13
	Professional development and exposure	4,5,6,12,13
	Professional Registration	2,4,6,11,12,13
	Attending and presenting at conferences	4,5,6,8,12,13
	Exposure to the world of work	1,9,10,12,13
	Employment	2,4,5,7,9,10,12

	Excellent programme management	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,12
	Diversity and Inclusion	1,5,7,8,9
Barriers/Challenges of the programme	Programme Structure and design	3,4,12,13
	Inadequate work placement sites	3,5,6,7,11,12
	Restrictive environment	3,4,9
	Late appointment of mentors	1,5,7
	Lack of qualified supervisors	1
	Poor group dynamics	10
Personal development	Self-management	4,7,8,12,13
	Self-discipline	2,7,8,12
	Self-awareness and self-confidence	1,2,3,4,5,7,12
	Ownership/Initiative	7,11,13
	Independence	2,4,6,11,12,13
	Creativity	1,5,7,10

Source: Authors' own developed table

The literature review and the findings of this study were integrated into developing a framework for internship programmes. Figure 1 represents the framework for internship programmes that will enhance graduate employability. The framework was designed and based on the themes and categories that emerged primarily from the research interview data.



Figure 1: A framework for internship programmes
 Source: Authors' own developed figure

8. Conclusions and recommendations

The unique contribution of this research is a proposed framework for implementing effective internship programmes to enhance the project management processes at Rand Water. Recommendations are, therefore, made to improve the internship programmes in South Africa:

- Before placing graduates in the workplace, the availability of qualified supervision must be emphasised. The supervisors must be trained to coach and transfer skills without fear of losing their jobs to the interns they are training.
- The internship environment should encourage expansive environments that foster learning at work and the integration of personal and organisational development rather than restrictive environments that stifle learning.
- Mentors should be appointed at the beginning of the programme to set clear targets for monitoring and evaluation of the graduates for the duration of the internship programme.
- Graduate internship programmes are aimed at empowering diverse people and groups, therefore group dynamics must be monitored and managed to enable a proper learning environment.
- Graduate internship programmes should integrate the academic knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting, with well-documented learning objectives and targeted goals for the interns to achieve personal and organisational development.

REFERENCES

Anjum, S., 2020. Impact of Internship Programmes and Personal Development of Business Students: A Case Study from Pakistan. *Future Business Journal*, pp. 1-13.

Baert, S. et al., 2019. Student Internships and Employment Opportunities after Graduation: A Field Experiment. *IZA Institute of Labour Economics*, pp. 1-31.

Barbour, R. S., 2001. Checklists for Improving Rigour in Qualitative Research: A Case of the Tail Wagging the Dog. *BMJ Clinical Research*, pp. 1115-1117.

Blackmore, P., Bulaitis, Z. H., Jackman, A. H. & Tan, E., 2016. *Employability in Higher Education: A Review of Practice and Strategies Around the World*, London: Pearson.

Budiyono, N. F., Akhyar, M. & Wiranto, 2020. The employability skills needed to face the demands of work in the future: Systemic literature review. *Open Engineering*, Volume 10, pp. 595-603.

Cheong, A. L. H., Yahya, N. b., Shen, Q. L. & Yen, A. Y., 2014. Internship Experience: An in-depth interview among interns at a Business School of a Malaysian Institution. *Procedia-Science and Behavioural Science*, Volume 123, pp. 333-343.

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E. & Gardner, M., 2017. Effective teacher Professional Development. *Learning Policy Institute*, pp. 1-76.

De Lannoy, A., Graham, L., Patel, L. & Leibbrandt, M., 2018. *What Drives Youth Unemployment and What Interventions Help? A Systematic Overview of the Evidence and a Theory of Change*, Cape Town: Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit.

Edayi, J., 2016. *Constraints to Graduate Employment in the City of Johannesburg, South Africa*, Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.

Galbraith, D. & Mondal, S., 2020. The Potential Power of Internships and the Impact on Career Preparation. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, pp. 1-9.

Hawse, S., 2018. *Professional development for early-career engineers*. s.l.:s.n.

Hooley, T., 2017. Climbing the employability mountain. *Graduate Market Trends*, pp. 10-11.

Hooley, T., 2017. Climbing the Employability Mountain. *Graduate Market Trends*, pp. 10-11.

Hora, M., Parrott, E. & Her, P. A., 2020. Problematizing College Internships: Exploring Issues with Access, Programme Design and Developmental Outcomes. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, pp. 235-252.

Ismail, Z., 2018. *Benefits of Internships for Intern and Host organisation*, Birmingham UK: K4D.

Jackson, D., 2015. Employability skill development in Work -Integrated Learning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(2), pp. 350-367.

Jensen, K. B., 2012. *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*. Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Johnson, R. & Waterfield, J., 2004. Making Words Count: The Value of Qualitative Research. *Physiotherapy Research International*, pp. 121-131.

Jubane, M., 2020. *Strategies for Reducing Youth Unemployment in South Africa*, Rochester: ELSEVIER.

Leary, M. P. & Sherlock, L. A., 2020. Service learning or Internship: A mixed-methods evaluation of experiential learning pedagogies. *Education Research International*, pp. 1-9.

Lietz, C. A. & Zayas, L. E., 2010. Evaluating Qualitative Research for Social Work Practitioners. *Advances in Social Work*, pp. 188-202.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G., 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.

Loh, J., 2013. Inquiry into Issues of Trustworthiness and Quality in Narrative Studies: A Perspective. *Qualitative Report*, pp. 1-15.

Mabebe, S. J., 2019. *The Impact of Internship Programme on Skills Development in the South African Public Institutions: Are Internship Programmes Still Relevant*. Johannesburg, IPADA Conference, pp. 21-28.

Maertz Jr, C. P., Stoeberl, P. A. & Marks, J., 2014. Building Successful Internships: Lessons from the Research for Interns, Schools, and Employers. *The Career Development International*, pp. 123-142.

Magagula, B., 2017. *An Exploration into the Social Support Systems of Unemployed Graduates*, Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Maluleka, R., 2021. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS): Q2, 2021*, Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Mohaidin, N. J., Supar, M., Ibrahim, M. A. & Sidik, M. H. J., 2017. Employers' Perception of Internship Programme. *SHS Web of Conferences*, pp. 1-7.

Morudu, H. D., 2017. Service Delivery Protests in South African Municipalities: An Exploration Using Principal Regression and 2013 Data. *Cogent Social Sciences*, pp. 1-15.

O'Connor, H. & Bodicoat, M., 2016. Exploitation or Opportunity? Student Perceptions of Internships in Enhancing Employability Skills. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, pp. 1-12.

Pitan, O. S., 2015. An assessment of generic skills demands in five sectors of Nigeria's labour market. *Public and Municipal Finance*, 4(1), pp. 28-36.

Rand Water, 2015. *Integrated Annual Report 2014-15*, Johannesburg: Rand Water.

Rangan, S. & Natarajarathinam, M., 2014. *How to structure an internship that is great for the intern and manager*. s.l., 360° of Engineering Education, pp. 1-7.

Saldana, J., 2009. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

SAQA, 2018. *saqa.org.za*. [Online] Available at:
https://www.saqa.org.za/sites/default/files/2019-11/28Mar18_AMENDED%20professional%20bodies%20policy.pdf
[Accessed 27 January 2022].

Silva, P. et al., 2016. The Million-Dollar Question: Can Internships Boost Employment?. *Studies in Higher Education*, pp. 2-21.

Statistics South Africa, 2021a. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) - Q1:2021*. [Online] Available at:
<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Media%20release%20QLFS%20Q1%202021.pdf>
[Accessed 11 December 2021].

Statistics South Africa, 2021b. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 2, 2021*, Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Watermeyer, D. & Phillips, S., 2020. *Public Infrastructure Delivery Construction Sector Dynamism in the South African Economy*, Pretoria: s.n.

Wiersma, E. W. & Jurs, S. G., 2005. *Research Methods in Education: An Introduction*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Wright, E. & Mulvey, B., 2021. Internships and the Graduate Labour Market: How Upper Middle-Class Students 'Get Ahead'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, pp. 339-356.

Zainudeen, M., 2020. A practical guide for self-development. pp. 1-75.

About the Authors



Alice Lubega

South Africa



Alice Lubega is a Project Manager at Rand Water in South Africa and has been in the Academic environment for 11 years managing Graduate Development programmes at Rand Water Academy. The Programme is aimed at developing graduates across different disciplines to create a pool of professionally registered individuals to assist in the maintenance and operation of services in the Municipalities and is currently busy with a project to get the Academy accredited for Engineering Development Programmes. She is registered as a Chartered HR practitioner with the South African Board of People Practices, an accredited Skills Development Facilitator, Assessor and Moderator. She specializes in Project Management and Human Resource Management. She holds a Masters in Programme and Project Management (Cranfield) and Honors BCOM, Business Management. She can be contacted via email at allylubega@gmail.com



Cecile Schultz

South Africa



Cecile Schultz is a professor at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in South Africa and has been an academic for the last 24 years. She is also part-time involved with Cranfield College. She specialises in the future of human resource management,

strategic human resource management and future work. She obtained funding from the National Research Foundation in South Africa to conduct research about the future of HR. She is a member of the South African Board of People Practices and is a registered psychometrist at the Health Professions Council of South Africa. She has currently initiated a niche research area about the future of work and the alleviation of poverty within the Faculty of Management Sciences at TUT. Her passion for community development is illustrated in her involvement in the work readiness training sessions at the People Upliftment Programme (POPUP) since 2006. Her ORCID ID is <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7048-7892>. She can be contacted via email at profschultz@cranefield.ac.za.