

Internships and Campus Recruitment Training as Predictors of Employability: Evidence from Indian Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Graduates' employability is a growing concern for Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) because of the continued mismatch between the preparedness of graduates and the expectations of the industry. As part of their institutional interventions to rectify this issue, internships and Campus Recruitment Training (CRT) are growing in importance as the two major employability-related interventions. This research study aims to identify how internships and CRT can predict an HEI graduate's employability in India. The study constructs employability as a multi-dimensional construct. The five components of employability identified in this study are as follows: technical skills; communication skills; professional skills; skills for adaptation in the work environment; and skills for job awareness. The quantitative research design was implemented by interviewing graduates, employers, and conducting a Regression Analysis to determine whether or not internships or CRT predicted employability, based on the information from the three stakeholder groups. The results indicate that internships and CRT have a statistically significant and positive relationship to graduate employability, with internships being a stronger predictor than CRT. The study emphasised the critical importance of experiential learning, as well as the role of internship programs and CRT in helping to develop job-relevant skills, enhance interview performance and improve soft skills. The study contributes to the employability literature by providing empirical data from an Indian Higher Education Institution setting, an area of research that is largely unexamined. Based on the study results, the study provides important implications for HEIs and employers, suggesting the need to embed internship and CRT into the academic curriculum as core components of the educational experience. The study also provides recommendations for policies to enhance the employability of graduates through collaboration between HEIs and employers and to utilise an outcome-based education system to help improve graduate employability levels.

Keywords: Campus Recruitment Training; Employability; Graduate Employability; Higher Education; Indian Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from a college graduate to a job seeker on the job market today is an overwhelming experience for graduates who are preparing to enter the workforce. Through Campus Recruitment Training graduates are given an opportunity to establish reliable connections between themselves and the employer, while providing students with the skills and abilities necessary to secure their desired career (Kandati, S. C., & Govindaraj, M. (2023). Although these programs are successful in many ways, they are also faced with the same set of challenges that affect other areas of campus recruitment training, as they rely on several interconnected factors. This study aims to identify the many variables that influence the effectiveness of campus recruitment training and their subsequent contributions to student success in the workforce. As we enter into a time of change in educational modalities and rapidly changing technology demands in many industries, understanding the impact of these variables is crucial. Examining the interrelated nature of these dynamics may serve to improve future training programs in providing students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to prepare them for a highly competitive job market. Employers want graduates who are creative, entrepreneurial, innovative, flexible, and adaptable, and beyond having their degree, want graduates with a wealth of skills applicable across a variety of industries (Nivetha, P).

An internship offers an initial opportunity for students to learn about employment opportunities through experiences in which they engage in activities relevant to the jobs they are seeking. This opportunity is critical to being employed by any employer and it allows students to gain essential job skills and knowledge such as interpersonal skills, communication skills, teamwork skills, etc. Because internships link academic training to job experiences, internship programs continue to serve an important function in professional preparation for students. As a result of their internship experience, students can observe current business practices, apply what they learned in class to the workplace, and gain insight into the type of workplace and culture within their chosen profession (Chern, D., 2018). Internships also facilitate the transference of academic lessons into an actual work environment where students have the opportunity to perform work-related tasks and receive feedback from experienced employees. However, as internships become increasingly popular, many students and businesses continue to have differing expectations of what an internship should accomplish which may limit the success of internship programs.

To maximize benefit to students and employers, internship programs must be designed around organisation, intent and support. The rise of alternative employment has led to major changes in the way young people enter the workforce. Szewczak et al. (2006) state that internship programs have evolved over time and are now being used in many developing nations, giving young people an opportunity to find work before they have finished their education, which is a much greater opportunity compared to what was available before.

Internship programs within education (i.e., teacher education) serve as an important bridge between theory and reality in the field of education and enable teacher candidates to gain experiences relating to their academic study of teaching. Parveen and Mirza (2012) demonstrate that student-teachers are able to apply their academic training to a classroom setting by implementing lesson plans and managing classrooms under the supervision of experienced teachers. Accordingly, students receive support and direction from their mentors and can receive feedback on their implementation of classroom activities.

Parveen and Mirza further discuss the limitations of internship programs, including inconsistencies in supervision practices, insufficient resources for training, and short internship duration, which negatively impact a candidate's ability to acquire the necessary skills to be a successful teacher. Finally, the authors advocate for better collaboration between training institutions and school partners, improved planning, and increased duration of internships in order to optimize the effectiveness of internship programs for teacher candidates.

Research Questions:

1. Explain the relationship between internships and campus recruitment training on employability/job readiness
2. Which components (duration, intensity, industry linkage) have the greatest impact?
3. Does internship experience mediate the relationship between institutional support and employability outcomes?

Objectives:

To evaluate the effectiveness of internship and recruitment training programs.

To assess their predictive power on employability confidence and outcomes.

To design a structured Employability Training Model for HEIs.

Hypothesis

H1: Internships positively impact a learner's Employability Status.

H2: Campus Recruitment/Internship Training positively impacts the status of learners' employability.

H3: Employability confidence impacts positively and greatly affects Employability Outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a Quantitative Research strategy, wherein the primary purpose of this study is to measure the influence of Internships and Employability Training Programs on the Employability Confidence and Outcomes of Undergraduate Students. The study is Descriptive (for understanding the current state) and Explanatory (to test the relationship between the Variables).

Population and Sample

The target group for this study will be Undergraduate Students from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who have participated in Internship and Placement Training Programs. As these undergraduates have already participated in Employability-related activity, they will be a valid source of data regarding the effect of these types of interventions.

Population: Undergraduate Students who are currently enrolled in Management and Similar Programs.

Sampling Method: Purposive Sampling is utilised as the research aims to obtain participants who have completed both the Internship and Training Programs.

Sample Size: It is estimated that a sample of 200 to 400 respondents would be necessary for reliable statistical results, particularly when performing Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling.

Data Collection Tools

This study used a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data from students at Indian Higher Education Institutions; this was an appropriate tool for achieving the objectives of the research by providing systematic data about the perceptions and experiences of student respondents regarding internships, campus recruitment training, and employability. Questionnaires are effective in obtaining standardized information from large populations in a short period of time and in allowing statistical analyses of the responses.

The instrument used in this study was composed of different sections, which corresponded to the different variables measured in this research. The first section provided demographic data on student respondents (e.g., gender, level of study, discipline, and type of institution), which helped to establish the demographic background of student respondents in this study. The second section examined the intern experience by providing data on several aspects of internship experiences such as: exposure to the work environment, intern duration, the relevance of an intern experience to a student academic program and perceived learning outcomes from the intern experience. The third section looked at Campus Recruitment Training (CRT) and measured the level of training provided in those areas, including: aptitude, communication, preparation for group discussion, interview preparation, and career skills. Finally, the last section assessed employability and included measures of job readiness, confidence, technical skills, problem-solving and preparedness for employment.

The five-point Likert scale was employed to allow subjects to rate their perception on a categorical scale with seven response choices ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The Likert-type questionnaire allowed for quantification of subjective perceptions and facilitated the use of inferential statistical procedures for analysis, such as regression analyses. Content validity for the items in this instrument was established through an extensive literature review and a panel of experts familiar with the content under study reviewed the questions to determine their relevance, clarity and adequacy of the items. Five pilot studies of the instrument were conducted before final collection of the sample size to evaluate the reliability and the level of comprehension of the items and incorporate changes from the pilot studies based on the feedback and suggestions from participants in the pilot studies. In general, this structured questionnaire provided researchers with a reliable and effective means of collecting data from the sample in a systematic manner to measure the internships, campus recruitment training and employability variables, and offers a sound empirical basis for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing.

Measurement of Variables

In this study, internships and campus recruitment training were independent variables and employability was the dependent variable. Internship related items included industry experience, practical skills learning and application of academic knowledge. Campus recruitment training items included aptitude growth, developing communication skills, interview prep and readiness for placement. The indicators used to measure the employability of respondents included job readiness, confidence, adequate skills for the job and overall job conditions before getting employed.

The items on the questionnaire were developed from an extensive literature review to provide evidence of appropriate content validity through professional guidance from academics who reviewed them for clarity and appropriateness. A pilot study was conducted prior to conducting the main survey to verify the reliability of the measurement instrument. Reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha. All values were within the acceptable range for establishing internal consistency of the measurement scales used to measure the constructs.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data was gathered, organized into predetermined categories, and analysed using statistical software packages. Descriptive statistics were used to present data in Table and Figure format, giving viewers a visual representation of the participant's demographic profile and general responses. Inferential statistics (multiple regressions) were utilized to determine the relationship between internship participation and campus-based recruitment training on employability. Using an alpha level of 0.05 for statistical significance, the hypotheses were accepted or denied based on their respective p-values.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Professional apprenticeships, which started with The Trade Guilds of Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, are where internships got their start. Young apprentices were taken on by master craftsmen and tradesmen, who employed them during their growing-up years until they graduated as trained persons and began receiving a wage. A lot of the time, apprentices decided to stick with the trainers who taught them. This guild system eventually gave way to growing modernisation, and the formal professional education system developed. The primary purpose of apprenticeship is to monitor, train, and help in filling the skill gaps (Reginald Bray's 1911 book). The internship was initially intended to be a predoctoral experience in which the intern spent a full year fully immersed in the activities of a clinical care setting. It was designed to be different from a practicum or clerkship in a number of respects. Above all, it was a year-long, full-time engagement in clinical service activities. It would be conducted at a training facility outside of the student's PhD degree program in a multidisciplinary context. For students who have just finished school and have little practical experience, internships are frequently the career path. This is a great method to learn about the company's daily activities and operations without having to commit to a career there. Role of Internships in Enhancing Employability. The internship program offers young people the chance to improve their employability and help them get a good job. Participation in the internship program may provide work experience that enhances employability skills, but it's not the only way. Both students and company representatives highlighted a number of beneficial results BaronPuda, M. (2017). Internships can assist students acquire a core set of skills that are currently deemed necessary for the global market while they are still in college. These skills include improved self-confidence, increased self-motivation, and communication and time management abilities. The student internship programme is a widely used technique by many academics and professional bodies in order to blend students' theoretical knowledge with the real-life working experiences (Karunaratne, K., & Perera, N. (2019). Many researchers have constructed the impact of internship programmes on student career development and job advancement. Literature provides very clear evidence that many of the researchers have studied and explored the importance of industrial internship programmes ((Gill and Lashine, 2003).

Impact of Internships on Graduate Employment Outcomes

Internships have been always considered as a critical aspect for enhancing graduate employment opportunities by reducing the gap between academic achievements and job market requirements. Internship has always been a

student's best route for stepping into the professional arena and to professional competencies that improve their employability prospects. Empirical studies suggest that graduates with internships exhibit better employability, job opportunities and superior job positions when compared to those with less such exposure (Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010). Internships also enhance students to showcase their job readiness and professional competence to employers, which is an easy transition from education to employment (Silva et al., 2018). Internships help develop candidate credentials from the employer's perspective. Positively influence graduates' employment readiness through internships, which can improve the likelihood of hiring them (Nunley et al., 2016)

Internship–Employment Linkage

Extensive research has been conducted regarding the relationship between internships and future job placements in the employability literature. Internship opportunities typically serve as a source of recruitment for organisations since they enable an organisation to evaluate a candidate's performance prior to hiring them permanently. Based on research conducted by Knouse, Tanner, & Harris (1999), undergraduate students that have completed an internship may be likely to receive superior job offers from that organisation or potentially other organisations within the same industry. In addition to the importance of developing skills through internships, students also develop networks that can help them acquire job opportunities (Jackson, 2016). Finally, internships that have been properly structured and supervised, as well as being integrated into the academic curriculum, have a much stronger relationship with employment opportunities than internships that were less structured, supervised, and related to the academic curriculum. (Binder et al., 2015)

Campus Recruitment Training (CRT): Concept and Components

Campus Recruitment Training, also called CRT, is a set of institutional programs aimed to bridge between your educational experience and your future job experience. CRT was developed and created in an effort to increase the competency of students who would be entering the job market upon graduation (Rao & Reddy, 2019). CRT is designed to assist students with developing competencies and skills that were often not addressed through traditional academic programs, and to provide some degree of integration between the skills and competencies that have been developed by graduates and the expectations that prospective employers have of their employees.

Typically, the components of a CRT training program include training in quantitative aptitude, logical reasoning, verbal skills, communication, group discussions (GD), preparation for interviews, preparation of a resume and professional etiquette. Quantitative aptitude training helps to develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, and the GD and communication modules help you to develop the clarity to express yourself as well as the ability to work well in a group and to persuade others. Interview training is designed to help you present yourself well, be confident and have good behavioural skills, which are critical during the recruitment process (Kumar & Hazarika, 2020). CRT acts as a bridge between your academic preparation and the expectations of the industry, and helps you to convert your theoretical knowledge into skills and competencies that are relevant to being employable. By preparing students for the recruitment process and providing a simulated workplace, CRT allows students to transition to the professional world more easily than if they had not received CRT training, and thus decreases the education-to-employment gap (Jackson, 2016).

Skill Enhancement through CRT

The development of both individual's soft (interpersonal) skills and individual's technical skills has been increased by the use of Career Research Training (CRT) methodology. A study conducted by Rao (2018) found a link between systematic participation in CRT and enhanced ability in communication, analytical reasoning, and professionalism, three indicators of an individual's employability potential.

In addition to the development of an individual's skill set, the use of CRT increases an individual's placement readiness through building confidence in one's abilities, preparation for interviews, and knowledge of recruitment processes. The ability of an individual to be able to perform effectively at campus placement events and make a successful transition from campus to work are increased when using CRT methodology (Sharma & Sharma, 2021).

Many empirical studies have shown a statistically significant positive relationship between an individual's participation in CRT activities and their success rate of obtaining employment through campus placement

activities. As a result, many institutions that utilize formalized CRT frameworks report a greater number of students who have found employment through campus placement and improved levels of satisfaction from employers. thus, supporting the assertion that CRT is an effective form of increasing employability (Singh & Misra, 2020).

Internships and Campus Recruitment Training as Predictors of Employability Combined Influence of Internships and CRT

CRT and internships work together to improve employability by providing two different types of learning experiences: experiential learning through real-world experience and job readiness through skill-building and knowledge (Binder et al., 2015). The experiential learning aspect of internship programs gives an individual the opportunity to gain valuable industry-specific skills, knowledge, and an introduction to the workplace. Furthermore, the structure provided by CRT will help develop job-seeking skills while building a strong foundation for success in both short-term and long-term positions (Saniter et al. (2019)). The modelling of both internship and CRT as predictors of employability shows that they explain a substantial portion of the variability associated with an individual's employability. Therefore, they should be considered significant independent variables within the Employability framework (Nunley et al., 2016).

Employability in the Indian Higher Education Context

The growing number of Indian graduations is a significant concern when it comes to graduate employability. The primary reason for this concern is because of poor skills matching and limited exposure to industry-related experience. According to the India Skills Report (2023), only a small percentage of graduates possess the necessary skills needed to become a viable employee in India. Employers in India are requesting that job candidates possess a high degree of problem-solving skills, possess good communication skills, and possess high levels of adaptability and work readiness. Unfortunately, most traditional curriculum programs have focused on providing students with theoretical knowledge rather than practical, hands-on learning experiences, resulting in a growing gap between potential candidate skill levels and employer expectations (World Bank, 2019). Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) can play a major role in increasing candidate employability through curriculum change, working with industry partners to develop real-life internship opportunities and through developing competency-based recruitment and training programs. The use of outcome-based learning and industry-based learning is gaining prominence as a key strategy for increasing candidate employability (UGC, 2020). Research conducted in India has demonstrated that there is a significant correlation between candidate employability and the development of relevant skills, as well as performance at an organization during the internship. Gokuladas (2010) found that, when it comes to employability outcomes, employers value soft skills as being far more important than academic scores. Gupta and Sharma (2020) also showed that structured internship programs significantly increase the likelihood that a graduate will receive an appropriate job placement after their graduation from an Indian higher education institution. Research from other countries supports the findings of these studies by indicating that work-integrated learning programs and internships provide a significant level of support to assist graduates in finding employment (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). All of these studies provide compelling empirical evidence that internships and CRT represent a strategic pathway to employability for graduates of Indian higher education institutions.

Campus Recruitment Training (CRT) and Graduate Employability

Campus Recruitment Training (CRT) has been established as a strategic institutional initiative that aims to influence the development of employability of undergraduates by identifying and assessing the mismatch between the skills required by employers and the outcomes of academic programmes. The main components of CRT are aptitude development, communication skills, GDs and interview preparation, and when aligned with current recruitment processes, these elements play a key role in helping students secure jobs with employers. The CRT modules are designed to improve cognitive and non-cognitive competencies, which are becoming increasingly important to employers (Knight & Yorke, 2004; Harvey, 2001). The body of empirical evidence continues to grow that CRT is effective in improving graduate employability and placement outcomes through various forms of quantitative research using regression and structural equation modelling (SEM) identified CRT as a significant predictor of employability and placements for graduates. Furthermore, the research in higher education institutions demonstrates that graduates who have participated in structured CRT programmes scored higher in terms of

employability and had a greater number of job placements than non-participating graduates, and feedback from employers indicates that CRT graduates have better workplace readiness, adaptability and professionalism (Sharma & Sharma, 2020; Singh & Singh, 2021). These findings support CRT as a means by which institutions can effectively enhance the employability of their graduates. CRT serves to facilitate the transition from theoretical learning to practical application of job-related skills through the identification and assessment of skill gaps or compatibility between the academic and industry contexts. Academic programmes focus on conceptual understanding, whereas CRT provides students with the opportunity to develop their skills through practical applications of skills such as problem-solving, communication, and adaptability. Through mock recruitment, CRT provides students with exposure to the expectations of organisations and the organisational culture in which they will be employed, thereby assisting them in making the transition from study to work (Bridgstock, 2009; Lowden et al., 2011).

Research shows that developing skilled students through the use of CRT can positively affect their development across many skill areas. Specifically, students who complete CRT programs demonstrate improvements in analytical reasoning, verbal communication and interpersonal effectiveness as a result of the use of CRT. Through the use of aptitude training students improve their ability to perform numerical, verbal and logical reasoning. In addition, the use of communication-based modules helps students increase clarity, confidence and professional articulation. Furthermore, CRT programs allow students to gain leadership, teamwork and decisionmaking skills through CRTs as a result of participation in group discussions (GD) and interviews during job interviews. All of these skills and competencies represent the key dimensions of employability and provide a foundation for long-term career success for graduate students (Yorke, 2006; Finch et al., 2013).

CRT provides students with increased levels of placement preparedness as it helps to alleviate performance anxiety and build self-efficacy. Students develop these characteristics through repeated participation in recruitment simulations, as well as through structured feedback following the completion of those simulations. Research shows that CRT participants report being more ready for interviews, better presenting themselves during interview processes, and perceiving their employability as enhanced compared to non-participants. The confidence gained through CRT participation has been identified as the most significant link between skill development and successful employment outcomes (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Tomlinson, 2017).

Industry exposure via internships improves the work readiness of students by exposing them to the culture of their organisation, the norms of professionals, and an environment where they solve problems in real time. Work readiness includes the ability to perform technically, communicate, adapt, work together, and demonstrate professional behaviours. Previous research indicates that students with industry exposure demonstrated increased levels of confidence, self-efficacy, and job preparedness upon graduation (Ferns, Russell & Smith, 2016). This experience allows students to apply what they have learned in theory and prepares them to perform at or above the expectations employers have. In relation to higher education, industry blended learning is increasingly observed as a strategic tool to augment the orientation of graduate readiness in conformity with labour market demands (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). Empirical evidence supports the role of internships in enhancing employability and employment outcomes. An analysis by Siedler and Sonnenberg (2019) found that internships majorly improve post-graduation employment probabilities. Similarly, Baert et al. (2021) highlighted that internship participation increases employability by improving hard and soft skills required by employers. Research in emerging economies, mentioned that internships contribute to skill development, job awareness, and success in placement, preferably when combined with institutional employability initiatives such as campus recruitment training (Gupta & Sharma, 2020).

Research Gap Identified from Literature

• Gaps in combined analysis of internships and CRT

A clear gap is the limited number of studies that simultaneously examine internships and CRT within a unified framework. Existing work often evaluates employability determinants broadly (skills, institutional support) or focuses on training/placement activities, but integrated models comparing or combining internship exposure and CRT intensity remain underdeveloped in Indian HEI contexts. This is important because internships build workplace exposure and applied competence, while CRT focuses on recruitment-oriented readiness; their effects may be complementary or interactive rather than independent.

• Lack of predictive/empirical models

Another important gap is the scarcity of predictive (model-based) evidence that tests (a) internships and CRT as joint predictors, (b) their direct and indirect effects on employability, and (c) mediation through constructs like confidence/career preparedness. While some Indian studies propose employability models and others test placement-support mechanisms, comparatively fewer build SEM/regression path models that estimate effect sizes and predict

Therefore, the literature justifies a study that develops and validates a predictive model (regression/SEM) where internships and CRT are tested as key antecedents of employability, with potential mediators (career preparedness, self-efficacy) and institutional controls (placement cell support, curriculum–industry alignment).

Justification for the present study

Internship programs are widely recognized as a crucial phase in teacher education because they allow student-teachers to apply pedagogical knowledge in real classroom situations. According to Parveen and Mirza (2012), internships help prospective teachers practice lesson planning, interact with students, and develop confidence in classroom management. The study reported that regular feedback and support from school supervisors play an important role in improving teaching performance. However, it also pointed out challenges such as limited time for practice, lack of teaching resources, and weak coordination between universities and schools, which sometimes reduce the overall impact of the internship experience. The authors advocate that internship duration should be extended and that improved communication/guide systems for interns should be established to provide a stronger foundation for the professional development of student teachers. Prior research has indicated that internships are beneficial to students and the organizations in which they intern. Student benefits include an increase in their professional skill sets, improvement in confidence levels, opportunity to begin to identify their career interests, and an increase in their employability after graduation. Employer benefits include an opportunity to evaluate the future employee, decreased costs associated with recruiting, and exposure to new ideas and perspectives (Chern, 2018). In addition to benefits to students and employers, literature indicates that there are challenges to the completion of internships, such as unclear expectations, lack of structured guidance and inconsistent supervision, which can inhibit internship learning outcomes. Studies have been conducted that identify those well-designed internships, with meaningful tasks, a substantial degree of feedback and a mentoring relationship, and the ability to observe professionals at work, are most likely to result in positive outcomes (Chern, D. (2018).

The relationship between Internship Programs and employability is evident from evidence that shows students' participating in an Internship Program would use their knowledge gained within a classroom/laboratory setting on a practical level (applicable). The relationship between practical experience within the academic environment allows students to have confidence (in an intern's ability to contribute) and develop workplace communication competence and professionalism (competence). An example of how practical experience combined with academic knowledge contributes to a student's success in the workforce, and/or successful careers. By using the aforementioned combination of practical experience with theoretical knowledge gained at an educational institution, a student will be ready to face any type of job-related challenge when entering the workforce. If the educational institution's Internship Program is designed well and implemented effectively, this allows organizations to identify potential future employees, thus minimizing time and resources spent on training (Chern, D. (2018). A well-designed training program (Internship) develops a newly developed associate-level Graduate Engineer's employability potential. Evidence produced indicates that if a student participates in a training program, the student's skill level after participation will improve. Hence, if a student participates in an Intern Position that provides the student with practical experience during the term of the internship and there is an additional continuous use of that Practical Experience after completion of the internship, this will promote the overall development of the student as well as promote the Government of India's goals of developing a "Skilled India". To facilitate this, there must be adequate and properly designed Training Opportunities available to create and prepare graduates to enter careers within the service industry and Software Firms, and other skill-based industries.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The accountability for enhancing Graduate employability is evenly distributed among both (HEI's and industry). In the past research, it has been demonstrated that Employability is not only about acquiring a job, but also involves

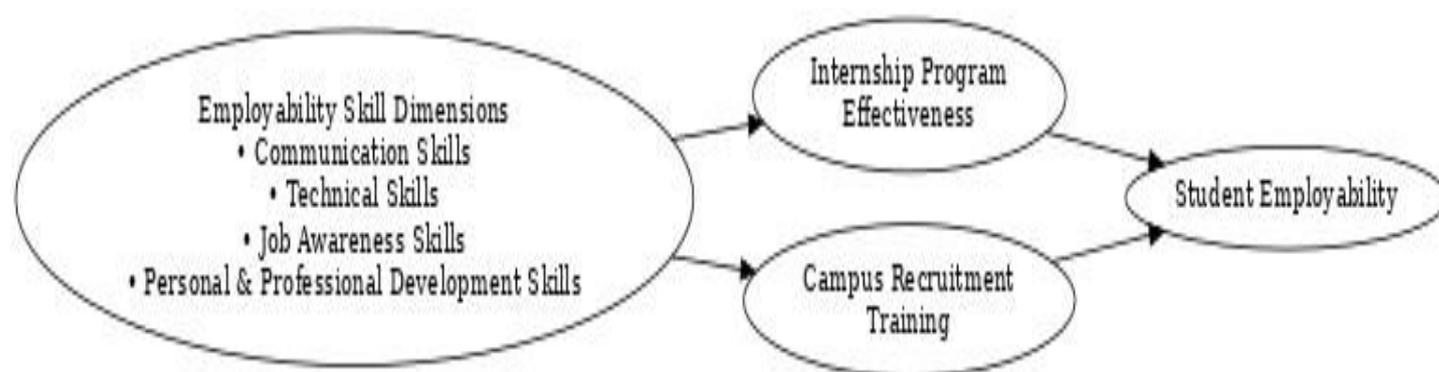
the ability to have acquired skills, knowledge and a sense of belief in oneself and adaptive nature to adapt within changing working environments (Yorke & Knight, 2006). The goal of this particular research is to evaluate two primary Institutional Interventions which includes Internship Programs and Recruitment/Employability Training Programs as being instrumental in developing employability skills.

According to the Kolb (1984) theory of experiential learning, practical experiences generate meaningful learning opportunities; this means there is a stronger link between theory (academic) and practice (workplace). The successful implementation of internships also allows students to experience the industry, develop social networking skills, and hone their problem-solving capabilities (Patrick et al. 2008; Silva et al. 2018). These activities are beneficial in establishing a clear understanding of the required roles and increasing the students' level of self-efficacy.

Campus recruitment training and internship programs (placement) provide complementary education through training (i.e., soft skills, communication, career preparation, interview competency, resume building) that has been linked to Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth's (2004) Employability Competency Model, which focuses on the importance of three areas of employability competencies: adaptability, occupational identity, and human capital.

Employability Confidence is the central variable that links institutional intervention to graduate success. Employability Confidence is a concept in Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994) that shows that people who have high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in job search behaviours and exhibit similar behaviour when they are looking for new jobs. Graduate students who have confidence in their job readiness act more proactively in applying for jobs, present better during interviews, and have an easier time moving into a business environment (Mantz & Tomlinson, 2020).

Higher levels of Employability Confidence correlate with positive Employability Outcomes, such as an increased rate of job placement, more adaptability to different workplace settings, and superior performance in the workplace during the first several months of employment (Clarke, 2018). Understanding how internships and other experiential training opportunities contribute to developing confidence and developing Employability Outcomes serves as the basis for developing a Structured Employability Training Model for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to help provide a systematic and replicable way to improve Graduate Employability levels.



Source: Prepared by Author

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Description of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study is grounded in the human capital and employability skill development perspectives. It proposes that a set of core skill dimensions—Communication Skills, Technical Skills, Job Awareness Skills, and Personal and Professional Development Skills—serve as key independent variables influencing students' employability outcomes.

These skill dimensions are hypothesized to have both direct and indirect effects on Student Employability. The indirect effects operate through two important mediating variables: Internship Program Effectiveness and Campus Recruitment Training. Internship Program Effectiveness reflects the extent to which internship experiences

enhance practical exposure, industry readiness, and skill application. Campus Recruitment Training represents institutional initiatives aimed at preparing students for placement processes, including aptitude training, interview preparation, and career guidance. The framework assumes that students possessing stronger employability-related skills are more likely to benefit from effective internship programs and campus recruitment initiatives, which in turn positively influence overall employability. Thus, Internship Program Effectiveness and Campus Recruitment Training act as mechanisms through which employability skills are translated into employment readiness and outcomes.

Increased emphasis has been placed on providing opportunities through experiential and structured skill development to increase employability through Higher Education. As such, most of the Work Integrated Learning opportunities available to students are Internships, which provide students with opportunities to perform actual job-related tasks while working in the workplace, and interact with professionals in their field, as well as provide students with an understanding of what it means to be a professional and to integrate their knowledge from classroom-based learning into effective performance in their roles as professionals. Research shows that when an internship is both meaningful and well-supported, this experience provides students with greater professional awareness, task confidence, and role clarity (Jackson, 2019). In addition, other Institutions provide training to their students regarding employability or recruitment readiness through training and education programs that help students build their soft skills, communication skills, interview preparation skills, and career presentation (Suman & Tiwari, 2020). This training helps students fill in the gaps between the skills that are required to be employable and those that are usually required of an individual who has just graduated from university, while working in the same labour market that they will be entering after their education.

The framework outlines the concept that employability training effectiveness and internship program effectiveness are two independent variables while employability confidence has a mediating effect between learning experiences and transition to employment. The framework suggests that students gain practical experiences and skills through these types of trainings, which enhance employability confidence and increase the probability of successful employability outcomes such as better placement results, easier adjustment to job roles, and

greater success at finding jobs (Rao & Sharma, 2021). Therefore, the model indicates that structured experiential learning combined with targeted training interventions improve employability outcomes by building employability confidence and preparing students for the labour force.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Internship

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F (Sig.)	B (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
V1	0.19	0.03	0.02	0.72	3.43	0.69	4.93	< 0.05
V2	0.23	0.05	-0.00	0.52	4.55	0.67	6.75	< 0.05
V3	0.19	0.03	-0.02	0.72	3.43	0.69	4.93	< 0.05
V4	0.27	0.07	0.01	0.29	3.95	0.59	6.68	< 0.05

V1: Communication skills V2: Technical skills; V3: Job Awareness Skills; V4: Personal and Professional Development skills

Four dimensions were used to examine the relationship between internship-related skill development and the dependent variable using regression analysis: (1) Communication Skills; (2) Technical Skills; (3) Job Awareness Skills; and, (4) Personal and Professional Development Skills. The overall model indicates that there is a strong relationship between internship outcomes and the dependent variable due to the high Multiple Correlation Coefficient (R = 0.72). The Coefficient of Determination (R²) indicates that internship-related skill dimensions account for 52 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. This means that internships play an important role in developing student outcomes. The level of significance associated with the F-statistic (p < 0.05) indicates that the model is correctly formulated and that internship-related skill dimensions make a significant contribution to the dependent variable. The analysis indicates that communication skills developed in the course of an

internship will positively influence the effectiveness of one's profession through the manner of workplace interactions. Technical skills developed through an internship will also be positively associated with this relationship. Job Awareness Skills will likely lead to greater understanding of job roles, organizational expectations, and recruitment processes. The Personal and Professional Development Skills dimension of skill development has the greatest influence on student characteristics/attributes, because internships will encourage professionalism, adaptability, and self-confidence in students. Therefore, the results of this analysis suggest that internships are a significant non-compliance variable, due to the contribution made by multiple pathways of complementary skills as opposed to one isolated factor.

Campus Recruitment Training

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F (Sig.)	B (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
V1	0.31	0.10	0.04	0.102	3.58	0.65	5.47	< 0.001
V2	0.32	0.10	0.04	0.10	3.37	0.69	4.85	< 0.001
V3	0.33	0.11	0.05	0.07	3.53	0.70	5.03	< 0.001
V4	0.21	0.04	-0.01	0.62	2.72	0.67	4.02	< 0.001

V1: Communication skills; V2: Technical skills; V3: Job Awareness Skills; V4: Personal and Professional Development skills

Regression Analyses demonstrate that the dimensions of skills (individually and collectively) significantly affect the dependent variable statistically. Thus, the overall model is statistically significant (as measured by the F statistic; $p < 0.005$), since the combination of the four dimensions of skills are statistically significant in predicting variations in the outcome variable. Therefore, the model must be well specified, and the four selected predictors are relevant to predicting employability-related outcomes.

Information from the Individual Regression Coefficients indicates that V1, Communication Skills, is the most critical dimension in determining the dependent variable. Because of the positive coefficient and high t-value, students' ability to communicate their ideas clearly, effectively, and in a professional environment significantly improves the positive contribution to the dependent variable; therefore, there is significant support for the role of communication competency in achieving success during the employment process.

Theoretical Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study can be meaningfully explained through established employability and experiential learning theories, particularly Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and employability competency frameworks. Kolb's model conceptualises learning as a continuous cycle involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. In the Indian higher education context, internships function as the primary source of concrete experience by exposing students to real organisational environments, workplace norms, and job-related tasks. Students engage in reflective observation through informal feedback from supervisors, peer interactions, and institutional mentoring, which enables them to evaluate their performance and identify skill gaps.

However, the results also suggest that while Indian internships provide substantial experiential exposure, reflective and conceptual components are often implicit rather than formally structured. This partial enactment of Kolb's learning cycle may explain why internships strongly predict employability outcomes but vary in effectiveness across institutions. Introducing structured reflection mechanisms—such as supervised internship reviews, reflective journals, and faculty-guided debriefing sessions—could strengthen the learning cycle and enhance skill transfer from the workplace to long-term employability outcomes. Thus, the study highlights the need for context-specific adaptations of experiential learning models to suit the operational realities of Indian higher education institutions.

Interpretation of Campus Recruitment Training Outcomes

The statistically significant relationship between campus recruitment training and employability observed in this study aligns with research that views recruitment training as a mechanism for improving job readiness and

placement performance. At the same time, earlier studies have reported mixed or moderate effects of campus recruitment training on employability, particularly when such training is delivered in isolation or limited to short-term coaching interventions. The findings of the present study help explain these inconsistencies by highlighting the how and why behind the observed relationships.

Campus recruitment training appears to be most effective when it is aligned with actual recruitment processes and delivered as a continuous institutional intervention rather than a one-time placement exercise. In the studied institutions, training modules focusing on communication skills, interview preparation, aptitude development, and professional self-presentation enhanced students' confidence and reduced anxiety associated with recruitment situations. This improvement in self-efficacy explains how recruitment training translates into employability outcomes, even when its direct impact on technical skill development may be limited. Therefore, campus recruitment training contributes to employability not merely by imparting skills, but by enabling students to effectively demonstrate their capabilities during selection processes.

Integrated Explanation of Internship and CRT Effects

The study further demonstrates that employability development is not driven by isolated initiatives but emerges from the interaction of experiential exposure and structured preparation. Internships enable students to acquire job-relevant skills and workplace awareness, while campus recruitment training equips them with the ability to articulate and present these skills effectively to employers. This complementary relationship explains why internships emerged as a stronger predictor of employability, while campus recruitment training played a supportive yet significant role. Together, these interventions reduce the mismatch between academic preparation and employer expectations, particularly within the Indian labour market context.

CONCLUSION

This study offers factual proof that student employability in Indian higher education institutions is significantly predicted by internships and campus recruiting training. The results highlight the vital role that institution-led experiential learning programs play in bridging the gap between academic preparation and the demands of the labour market. Internships and recruitment-focused training not only enhance employability outcomes but also function as structured mechanisms through which students acquire, apply, and refine job-relevant competencies.

The findings show that internships significantly improve employability by enhancing critical skill domains such as technical proficiency, job awareness, communication skills, and professional and personal growth. Participating in an internship allows students to move from theoretical knowledge to practical application, acquiring real-world experience that matches their academic learning with industry expectations and professional goals. Graduates' work preparedness, adaptability, and professional confidence are all enhanced by this hands-on experience.

In a similar vein, campus recruitment training becomes a crucial institutional intervention that equips students to meet the demands of the cutthroat job market. In addition to building self-efficacy and confidence, this type of training equips students with aptitude, interview preparedness, self-presentation skills, and career awareness. The study also shows that employability is the consequence of an integrated and complementary collection of activities rather than a single initiative. Internships and campus recruiting training work together to produce employability-focused results by fusing experiential learning with focused skill development. While recruiting training tackles the skill gaps that frequently occur between graduate capabilities and employer requirements, internships play a crucial role as a bridge between academic institutions and the corporate world. Based on these results, the study comes to the conclusion that Indian higher education institutions need to take a comprehensive and integrated strategy to improve employability. In order to guarantee that graduates have the skills, self-assurance, and industry preparedness necessary for a successful workforce entry, universities and colleges should place a high priority on offering high-quality internships in addition to thorough campus recruitment training frameworks. Improving graduate employability and coordinating higher education outcomes with national employment and skill development goals require such an approach.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The use of purposive sampling restricts the generalisability of the findings to all higher education institutions or academic disciplines.

In addition, the reliance on self-reported responses may introduce response bias, as participants could overestimate their skill levels or employability readiness. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to draw causal conclusions, as relationships were examined at a single point in time. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, incorporating employer assessments of graduate employability, and using mixed-method approaches to capture deeper insights into employability development.

Study Implications

The findings of this study imply that enhancing graduate employability in Indian higher education requires a purposeful integration of experiential learning and institutional training initiatives. Internships and campus recruitment training should not be treated as supplementary activities but as core components of academic programs that systematically develop communication, technical, job awareness, and professional skills. Higher education institutions are encouraged to strengthen industry collaboration, embed structured internship experiences within curricula, and institutionalize continuous recruitment-oriented training to better align graduate competencies with labour market expectations. Such an integrated approach can reduce skill mismatches, improve workforce readiness, and support national employability and skill development objectives.

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