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## **Impact of Internships on Students' Career Development and Employability**

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<b>Peer Review Information</b>	<b>Abstract</b>
<p><i>Submission: 25 Jan 2026</i></p> <p><i>Revision: 12 Feb 2026</i></p> <p><i>Acceptance: 26 Feb 2026</i></p> <p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p><i>Internship, Career Development, Employability, Experiential Learning, Skill Enhancement, Higher Education</i></p>	<p>In the contemporary competitive labour market, academic qualifications alone are insufficient to ensure successful employment outcomes. Employers increasingly seek graduates who possess practical exposure, transferable skills, and workplace readiness. Internships have therefore become a critical component of higher education, offering students experiential learning opportunities that complement classroom instruction. The present study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the impact of internships on students' career development and employability among South Chennai college students. Data were collected from 108 respondents who had completed at least one internship. The study analyses students' perceptions regarding skill enhancement, career clarity, professional confidence, job readiness, and challenges encountered during internships. Percentage analysis was used to interpret the findings. The results reveal that internships significantly enhance communication skills, technical knowledge, adaptability, and professional awareness. However, certain structural challenges such as lack of mentorship, academic pressure, and unpaid roles were also identified. The study concludes that internships positively contribute to employability and career preparedness, though institutional mechanisms must be strengthened to optimize learning outcomes.</p>

### **Introduction**

The transformation of global labour markets has significantly changed the expectations placed on graduates, with employers increasingly seeking candidates who possess both academic competence and practical experience.

Rapid technological advancements, globalization, and growing competition have made employability skills more critical than ever. In response, higher education institutions have integrated experiential learning components, particularly internships, to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and workplace practice.

In India, especially in metropolitan regions such as Chennai, collaboration between industries and

educational institutions has expanded internship opportunities for students. Although participation has become common, the actual impact of internships on career development and employability requires systematic examination. Therefore, this study adopts a descriptive approach to analyse how internships contribute to students' professional growth, career clarity, and employability outcomes.

### **Research Problem**

Despite the recognized benefits of internships, there is still limited understanding of their actual impact on career development and employability, particularly regarding quality, mentorship, and alignment with career goals. This study therefore

examines how internships contribute to career readiness, identifies key factors that make them effective, explores challenges faced by interns, and evaluates the role of institutions and organizations in providing meaningful internship opportunities.

### Review of Literature

Internships are supported by various theoretical perspectives that connect experiential learning with career outcomes.

Gary Becker (1964), through Human Capital Theory, emphasized that investment in education and training increases an individual's productivity and earning potential. Internships function as an investment in skill acquisition, thereby enhancing labour market value.

**Waqar, A. (2024)** concluded that internship programs have several benefits for students and significantly impact career development. These programs enhance students' practical knowledge while boosting their personal and professional skills, ultimately improving workplace performance.

**Ghoraishi Khorasgani, M. S. (2022)** found a positive and significant relationship between internships and individual/professional development, as well as skill enhancement.

Albert Bandura (1977) proposed that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and social interaction. Internship environments enable students to observe experienced professionals and adopt workplace norms and behaviours.

Mark Savickas (2005) explained that career development is shaped by experiences and adaptability. Internship exposure allows students to test career interests and refine professional identity.

Peter Yorke (2004) highlighted that employability involves skills, self-belief, and reflective ability. Internships contribute to these components by offering real-world learning experiences.

Empirical studies consistently show that internship participation improves communication skills, teamwork ability, confidence, and job readiness. However, literature also reports concerns regarding exploitation, lack of meaningful tasks, and inadequate supervision.

Overall, existing research suggests a positive relationship between internships and employability, though outcomes depend on quality and relevance.

### Need for the Study

- Whether internships genuinely enhance employability

- Whether students gain career clarity
- What challenges they encounter
- How institutions can improve internship frameworks

### Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the role of internships in students' career development.
- To identify skills developed through internships.
- To examine students' perceptions of employability enhancement.
- To understand challenges faced during internships.
- To suggest measures for improving internship effectiveness.

### Theoretical framework

These theories offer insight into the dynamics of practical learning, skill acquisition, career exploration, and ultimate career success. Four significant theoretical perspectives that inform this study are discussed in this chapter:

- **Human Capital Theory** – Discusses how internships advance skill acquisition and professional development, enhancing students' value in the labour market.
- **Social Learning Theory** – Emphasizes the importance of observational learning and mentorship in internships.
- **Career Construction Theory** – Focuses on how students construct their careers from internship experiences.
- **Employability Skills Model** – Suggests the critical skills that students acquire from internships, enhancing job preparedness.

### Research Methodology

#### 1. Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design. Descriptive research aims to systematically describe characteristics, perceptions, and trends within a specific group without establishing causal relationships.

#### 2. Sample Size

The study was conducted among 108 students from various colleges in South Chennai who completed at least one internship.

#### 3. Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was used to select respondents based on accessibility.

#### 4. Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire.

#### 5. Tools for Analysis

Percentage analysis was used to summarize and interpret the distribution of responses. The Chi-

square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was applied to examine the association between selected categorical variables. Hypotheses were tested at a 5% level of significance.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

**1. Demographic Profile**

The majority of respondents belonged to the 21-23 age group. Students from commerce, management, arts, and science streams participated. Both male and female students were represented.

**2. Nature of Internship**

- Most students completed one internship.
- A significant number of internships were unpaid.
- The majority were conducted in-person.
- Primary motivation was gaining experience rather than financial benefit.

**3. Skill Development**

Students reported improvement in:

- Communication skills
- Technical knowledge
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Leadership qualities
- Time management
- Problem-solving skills

Communication skills were the most frequently reported benefit, indicating the importance of workplace interaction.

**4. Career Clarity**

A majority of students agreed that internships helped them:

- Understand industry expectations
- Identify strengths and weaknesses
- Clarify long-term career goals

- Build professional confidence

Students who found internships aligned with their academic specialization reported higher career clarity.

**5. Employability Perception**

Most respondents believed that internship experience:

- Strengthened their resume
- Increased confidence during interviews
- Improved job readiness
- Enhanced professional networking

Some students received job offers or recommendations from internship organizations.

**6. Challenges Faced**

Despite positive outcomes, several issues were identified:

- Academic workload conflicts
- Lack of structured mentoring
- Limited practical exposure in some cases
- Unpaid roles causing financial constraints

These findings indicate a need for better coordination between institutions and organizations

**7. Hypothesis**

**Q:** How relevant was your internship experience to your career goals? \* How much do you agree that your internship(s) contributed to your career development?

**Null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>):** Internships do not have a significant impact on the career development of South Chennai college students.

**Alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>):** Internships have a significant impact on the career development of South Chennai college students.

**Chi-Square Test**

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.178	8	0.001
Likelihood Ratio	30.208	8	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	16.003	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	108	-	-

**Inference:** This shows a significant association between internship relevance and perceived career development ( $\chi^2 = 27.178, p = 0.001$ ). Since  $p < 0.05$ , the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that internships significantly influence the career development of South Chennai college students.

**Q:** Do you believe your internship improved your job prospects? \* Have you received a job offer or referral from your internship?

**Null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>):** Internships do not significantly influence students' employability after graduation.

**Alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>):** Internships significantly enhance students' employability after graduation

**Chi-Square Test**

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.453	8	0.013
Likelihood Ratio	20.337	8	0.009
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.942	1	0.026
N of Valid Cases	108	-	-

**Inference:** This shows a significant association between internship impact on job prospects and receipt of job offers or referrals ( $\chi^2 = 19.453$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming that internships enhance employability.

**Findings**

The findings of this study suggest that internships play a significant role in shaping students' career development and employability. The improvement in professional skills supports the principles of Human Capital Theory, as students enhance their productivity through practical training. Observational learning and adaptation to workplace norms align with Social Learning Theory. Internship experiences contribute to professional identity formation, supporting Career Construction Theory.

**Suggestions****1. For Educational Institutions**

- Establish structured internship guidelines.
- Provide pre-internship orientation programs.
- Monitor internship quality through feedback mechanisms.
- Integrate reflective learning reports.

**2. For Organizations**

- Assign meaningful tasks to interns.
- Provide mentorship and regular feedback.
- Ensure ethical treatment and fair working conditions.

**3. For Students**

- Choose internships aligned with career goals.
- Actively engage in networking.
- Seek feedback to improve performance.

**Limitation and Future Research**

The study was limited to 108 respondents and employed convenience sampling, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. It focused exclusively on colleges in South Chennai and relied on self-reported perceptions, which may introduce response bias. Future research could address these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples, comparing paid and unpaid internships, conducting longitudinal

studies to examine long-term career outcomes, and adopting mixed-method approaches for deeper and more comprehensive analysis.

**Conclusion**

Internships have become an essential component of higher education in preparing students for professional life. This descriptive study finds that internship participation positively influences career development and employability among South Chennai college students by enhancing communication skills, technical competence, confidence, and career clarity. While internships improve job readiness and resume value, challenges such as limited supervision and academic pressure indicate the need for stronger institutional support. Overall, internships should be viewed as strategic career development tools supported by effective collaboration between institutions and organizations.

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