Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Practicum (Internship) Among Masters of Personnel Psychology (MPP) Students of the University of Ibadan

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceptions of Master in Personnel Psychology (MPP) students of the University of Ibadan, who had partaken in practicum on the benefits and challenges of practicum. Study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Three (3) research questions were raised and answered in the study. A total of forty (40) MPP students who were participants in the study, responded to a researcher-developed instrument, the "Personnel Psychology Practicum Assessment Scale (PPPAS)" (r =0.95) used to collect data. The instrument was divided into four sections of A, B, C and D, with a total of 20 items. Each item was assigned a value of 2: Agree; and 1: Disagree. Data were analysed using simple percentages. The results revealed that all respondents agreed that internship had a lot of benefits for students. Findings also revealed that participants agreed that they faced a lot of challenges during their internship. Respondents also registered their suggestions on how the challenges faced by student interns could be overcome to make the internship more effective, among which is that little financial rewards be paid to interns. It is recommended from the study findings, among others, that the university should be actively involved in assisting students in getting their internship placement, that aappropriate arrangement should be made by the practicum committee to ensure that students are posted to organisations where they are most needed, and that there is need for organisations accepting the interns to pay the interns a small token for the duration of their stay.

Key Words: Practicum, MPP Students, Perception, Benefits of Practicum, Challenges of Practicum,

Introduction

The Master's Degree in Personnel Psychology (MPP) of the Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Ibadan, is designed to prepare high level manpower for the human resource departments of the various modern organisations. The MPP degree programme is designed with an in-built 6 months Industrial Training period (practicum),when these personnel psychology trainees are expected to go and have practical

experiences in the use of psychology in personnel management (Counselling Practicum Handbook, 2017). Practicums (also called internships) are designed to provide these personnel psychology trainees with practical work experiences. Practicum emphasizes the importance of learning by doing, as it enables them to transfer their knowledge to actual work. The practicum exercise is closely monitored and supervised on regular bases by lecturers from the home department in the University of Ibadan.

According to Moore (2014), a gap really exists between the quality of graduates produced and what the market demands. To erase the noticeable gap of incompetence in our graduates, practicums are designed to provide the students with smooth transitions from the academic world to the working environments. Zakaria (2013) noted that internships are supervised work experiences whereby students leave their institutions and get engaged in work related programmes, during which period they are closely supervised by experienced job incumbents. As reported by Udoh and George (2014), the practicum is a period of closely supervised field work experience during which theoretical skills, techniques and organisational strategies are practised in a selected and approved setting. Studentsare required to go into the practicum exercise with fundamental skills learnt in the course of their classroom interactions, then the practicum provides them the opportunity to demonstrate these skills under close supervision in real-life settings.

The practicum thus provides a platform for students (interns) to put their acquired knowledge into practice in real-life scenarios and therefore gain experience for future practice (Min, 2013). Close supervision by experts during the exercise allows personnel psychology trainees the opportunity to evaluate themselves in terms of professional direction within the field as they evolve their professional identity. According to Jekayinfa (2012), practicum exercise also affords the interns the opportunity to access and use existing assessment instruments such as intelligence tests, aptitude tests, personality inventories, and other relevant assessment instruments and techniques. Emerole and Muraina (2015) added that practicum will also allow the interns to acquire experience in applying the ethical code that guide personnel psychology practice.

While the personnel psychology trainees are doing their Industrial Attachment

programme, they must attend punctually and regularly to all activities and roles assigned to them by the organisation. The students are also expected to be exposed to new experiences and experiments (Counselling Practicum Handbook, 2017). Each student is expected to have practical experiences which should make many of the theories of Personnel Psychology and Management meaningful. In short, the students are expected to have rich experiences in all managerial activities designed to ensure a highly coordinated and integrated human resource system that can achieve both organisational needs and the needs of those working in it.

As stipulated in the Counselling Practicum Handbook (2017), organisations hosting the interns are expected to create conducive learning environments for the students on Industrial Attachment. This may be initiated by empathetic welcome, choice of a coordinator or mentor with whom the student can relate and who should answer all questions which may agitate the student's mind due to strangeness of the working environment. The host establishment is expected to clearly set out the goals to be achieved with the student and specific time frames. The host establishment is expected to set out explicit performance contract for the student on Industrial Attachment with inputs from the student and other related human resource or organisation staff. The purpose of this contract is to outline responsibilities of the student and the establishment's coordinator or mentor who will be supervising the student including appropriate time frames. This performance contract should be studied and signed by both the student and the coordinator or mentor before the student begins serious work. The host establishment is expected to deliberately plan transfer of experiences of personnel management.

Studies (Jekayinfa, 2012; Min, 2013; Zakaria, 213;Moore, 2014; Udoh and George, 2014; Emerole & Muraina, 2015) have examined the importance and benefits accruing from internship to the individual students though, none has focused on the challenges these students faced in the process of learning by doing in organisations that are predominantly different from the university environment they are used to. For this reason, there is the need to investigate the various challenges faced by these students in their efforts to learn outside their domains.

Benefits of internships

Internship programmes are perceived as a valuable way to acquire broad competencies where the practical knowledge obtained supports and complements the theoretical studies learned in the classrooms (Mihail, 2006). The internships have been seen to be beneficial to the students through training and teamwork assignments at the workplace. Internship enables the internee to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality (Lam and Ching, 2007). The importance of internship has also been established as research studies (Mounce, Mauldin & Braun, 2004; Bukaliya, 2012; Zakaria, 2013) have shown improved subsequent academic performance as a result of student participation in internship. The internship programme contributes significantly and positively towards enhancing the knowledge base and motivational level of students, as the best outside classroom learning activities are through an internship attachment (Chen, Hu, Wang & Chen, 2011). Further benefits include improvements in career-related direction, gaining practical experience (Bukaliya, 2012), improved marketability of graduates (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Habil & Jayne, 2015), interpersonal skills (Nwanekezi, Okoli & Mezieobi, 2011) and understanding of the theories of classroom learning (Cook *et al.,* 2004; Habil & Jayne, 2015).Danner(2014) state that internship is the best way for students to explore the suitability of a particular job.

According to Osei-Owusu, Effah, Sam and Agyeman (2013), internships have taken on an increasingly important role in education over the past decade since they present students with many advantages, ranging from gaining experience and obtaining career-related direction to networking with other students from various institutions at the organisation providing the internship. Employers have not been left out of the benefits as internships can provide them with inexpensive help, new ideas and potential future employees (Rothman, 2007; Osei-Owusuet al., 2013). The benefits have, therefore, accrued to the tripartite stakeholders: the students, parent institutions and employers (Cook *et al.,* 2004; Lam and Ching, 2007).

Mihail (2006) noted that interns have successfully developed their personal skills, particularly relating to information technology, time management, communication skills, teamwork, specialist knowledge and ability to prioritize tasks.

According to Osei-Owusuet al (2013), internship may pave the way for permanent employment upon graduation as well as providing an in-depth understanding of actual business practice. Students hope to receive monetary rewards and be treated as regular employees (Zakaria, 2013). Bukaliya (2012) found that the internship has successfully enhanced the interns' understanding of content in their areas of study.

Challenges faced in Internships

Challenges facing personnel psychology trainees on practicum show up in various forms. For some students, the practicum can fall short of expectations. Interns often indicate they have many fears and worries about their initial experiences (Udoh & George, 2014). Anxiety, if excessive, can impede the skills development of a practicum student and impair his or her functioning. Also, applying theory to practice during practicum period can be a daunting task (Rebekah & Bradley, 2013). Emerole and Muraina (2015) noted that unless structures are in place to promote reflection and evaluation, practicum can become an experience of uncritical practice that can work against the quality of training. According to Misigo (2014), students in Malaysia were unable to master the aspect of undergoing practicum, thereby were not effective on the job market after graduation.

Most students were confused on who should arrange the internships. This is because some of them had problems securing placements initially. Asked who should be responsible for arranging their internship placement, the majority of interns felt their faculties should work for their placement (Bukaliya, 2012; Oral, 2012).Mihail (2006) also found in his study that most of the interns preferred to have internship periods ranging from six to nine months instead of three months. This indicated that interns are willing to have a longer internship period and believe that they can learn more within a six-month period. Keengwe and Adjei-Boateng (2012) remark that the short amount of time an internship lasts really never lets the student becomes a fully functional employee because there is not so much to take in for them.

According to Okobia, Augustine and Osagie (2013), internships bring about discord among workers in a variety of ways. This is sometimes so since internships displace paid workers and allow companies to dodge liabilities through the non-payment of intern labour. Interns accept the post at no price to

survive the duration of the internship. According to Rothman (2007) and Osei-Owusu, et al (2013), at times complaints have been raised against employers for treating the interns as cheap labour.

Supervision of interns has been cited as being problematic. Qualified staff to supervise the interns has been in short supply (Bukaliya, 2012; Gault et al., 2000). Universities should be responsible to ensure that internships are offering meaningful learning experiences for their students. According to Bukaliya (2012), students feel that there should be careful examination of feedback from employers and interns followed by the modification of the internship programme accordingly.

Statement of the Problem

Personnel psychology trainee students of University of Ibadan are required to participate in practicum as a requirement for the MPP degree. To the trainees, there are challenges that may significantly affect their ability to derive maximum benefits from the exercises. These challenges appear to hamper the optimum realization of the objectives in the professional growth of these students. Much of the researches on practicum has focused on supervisors' perception of practicum and very little attention on students' perceptions of benefits and challenges during their engagement while on practicum. Past researches have totally neglected the perception of interns who had gone through the exercise and should be in the best position to suggest modalities towards improvement. It is this knowledge gap that this study filled. Therefore, the study investigated the views of the personnel psychology trainee son\ industrial attachment regarding the benefits of internship, the challenges faced by personnel psychology trainees, and the opinions on how to make the exercise better and more beneficial. The objective of this study was to find out students' views on benefits, challenges faced and how the programme could be improved.

Research Questions

Three research questions were raised for this study:

1. What is the perception of MPP students on the benefits of internship?
2. What is the perception of MPP students on the challenges faced during internship?
3. What are the perceived measures to overcome the challenges?

Methods

The study employed the survey research design. It involved collection of data from Master in Personnel Psychology (MPP) students who participated in mandatory industrial attachment programme (internship) on their views on benefits and challenges they faced during practicum exercises. The researcher used the random sampling technique in selecting forty (40) MPP students over three sessions of 2016/2017, 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 for the study. The instrument used for the study was "Personnel Psychology Practicum Assessment Scale (PPPAS)". There are four sections of the scale, A, B,C and D. Section A obtained respondent's personal information, Section B (10 items) assessed respondents' views on the benefits of internship to the MPP programme, Section C (10 items) assessed respondents' views on the challenges they faced during the internship programme, while Section D was for the respondents to freely express their views on how the challenges faced by student interns can be overcome in order to make the internship more effective. The reliability co-efficient was determined to be 0.86. Each item was assigned a value of 2: Agree; and 1: Disagree. The instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 which indicated a high content validity and a test-retest reliability of (r =0.95).The instrument administered were retrieved and the data collected were analysed using simple percentages.

Results

Table 1: Respondents` Views on the Benefits of Internship

S/N	Items	Agree	Disagree
1	Internships provide interns with hands-on practical experience and exposure.	40 (100%)	0 (0%)
2	Internships assist the intern to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality	38 (95%)	2 (5%)
3	Internships contribute significantly and positively towards enhancing the knowledge base	40 (100%)	0 (0%)
4	Interns benefit through career-related direction	35 (87.5%)	5 (12.5%)
5	Internships boost motivational levels of students	37 (92.5%)	3 (7.5%)
6	Internships help to improve the marketability of graduates	40 (100%)	0 (0%)
7	Internships help the understanding of the theories learnt in classroom settings	38 (95%)	2 (5%)
8	Internships enhance student`s learning and understanding of issues relevant to a particular area of study	40 (100%)	0 (0%)
9	The internee gains interpersonal skills in the real work situation	38 (95%)	2 (5%)
10	Internships are of no benefit at all to students on industrial attachment	0 (0%)	40 (100%)

Table 2: Respondents` Views on the Challenges Faced with the Internship

S/N	Items	Agree	Disagree
1	Interns were treated like full time staff, as if supervisors forget that we are new to the field.	38 (95%)	2 (5%)
2	Instead of learning, interns provide cheap labour in the organisations they were attached to.	35 (87.5%)	5 (12.5%)
3	Interns were at times treated with contempt by organisational staff.	37 (92.5%)	3 (7.5%)
4	Internships exercise creates a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement and apprehension in the personnel psychologist trainees resulting in many self-defeating thoughts	35 (87.5%)	5 (12.5%)
5	Some of organisations for the attachment lack qualified mentors; there was little or no learning for us as we were more knowledgeable that the regular employees	38 (95%)	2 (5%)
6	There is often no enough supervision from the parent institution.	38 (95%)	2 (5%)
7	Interns were at times resented and isolated by full time staff because of being perceived as being more knowledgeable	30 (75%)	10 (25%)
8	Some organisational units do not have among their staff holders of such a higher degree.	38 (95%)	2 (5%)
9	There is often some kind of poor relationship between interns and workers in the personnel unit of the host organizations	35 (87.5%)	5 (12.5%)
10	Too much workload or responsibility for interns in organisations posted to	35 (87.5%)	5 (12.5%)

Table 3: Summary of Respondents'` views on how the Challenges faced by Student Interns can be Overcome in order to make the Internship more Effective

S/N	Items
1	Increasing the duration of internship.
2	There be the formation of better working environment for interns during internship.
3	Institution should arrange internships with organisations rather than the individual intern to go it alone; university should be responsible for arranging internship placement.
4	The periods of internships should be well timed.
5	Internships should be well monitored by both employers and the institution.
6	The number of times supervisors come around for monitoring of student interns be increased
7	Institution should accredit and recommend suitable companies for internships.
8	Proper and appropriate documentation should be prepared to check on whole internship process.
9	In order to make the documentation more authentic there was need for follow up by Programme Coordinators through calling the interns` supervisor of further verification.
10	Government intervention could ensure legislation be put in place to make it mandatory for interns to be paid.

Discussions

Research Question 1: What is the perception of MPP students on the benefits of internship? Results as reflected in Table 1 have shown that all the participants (100%) agreed that internships provide interns with hands-on practical experience and exposure, internships contribute significantly and positively towards enhancing the knowledge base and that internships help to improve the marketability of graduates. This finding has shown that internship has been viewed by MPP students who participated in industrial attachment to be of many benefits. This is in line with an earlier finding of Jekayinfa (2012) who reported that practicum exercise affords the interns the opportunity to access and use existing assessment instruments among other benefits. This was also supported by Emerole and Muraina (2015) reporting that practicum allow the interns to acquire experience in applying the ethical code that guide personnel psychology practice. In actual sense, internship programmes are perceived as a valuable way to acquire broad competencies where the practical knowledge obtained supports and complements the theoretical studies learned in the classrooms, as opined by Mihail (2006). The internships have been seen to be beneficial to the students through training and teamwork assignments at the workplace. Report from Lam and Ching (2007) also indicate that internship enables the internee to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality. Further benefits include improvements in career-related direction, gaining practical experience (Lubbers, 2001), improved marketability of graduates (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Habil & Jayne, 2015), interpersonal skills (Nwanekezi, Okoli & Mezieobi, 2011) and understanding of the theories of classroom learning (Cook *et al.,* 2004; Habil & Jayne, 2015).All reports have supported this finding of this study. Adding to the authenticity of the finding in this study, Keengwe and Adjei-Boateng (2012) added that internship is the best way for students to explore the suitability of a particular job. Osei-Owusu, et al., (2013) also stamped this with his earlier report that internship may pave the way for permanent employment upon graduation as well as providing an in-depth understanding of actual business practice.

Research Question 2: What is the perception of MPP students on the challenges faced during internship? Results in Table 2 have shown that the interns acknowledged that there were many and varying challenges during internship. Report also shows that some 35

(87.5%) of the respondents agreed that internships exercise creates a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement and apprehension in the personnel psychologist trainees resulting in many self-defeating thoughts. This appears to be a major challenge impeding against success of the programme. It is in line with this, Misigo (2014) had earlier reported that students in Malaysia were unable to master the aspect of undergoing practicum, thereby were not effective on the job market after graduation. This finding similar to an earlier finding of Udoh and George (2014) that interns often have many fears and worries about their initial experiences, and this can impede the skills development of a practicum student and impair his or her functioning. Rebekah and Bradley (2013) also added their submission by reporting that it is a daunting task for these interns to apply theory to practice during practicum period. Finding also shows that Some 35 (87.5%) respondents also have agreed that there is often some kind of poor relationship between interns and workers in the personnel unit of the host organisations. This could be justified by the submission of Okobia, Augustine and Osagie (2013) that internships bring about discord among workers in a variety of ways. This is sometimes so since internships displace paid workers and allow companies to dodge liabilities through the non-payment of intern labour. Interns accept the post at no price to survive the duration of the internship. Also shown by the finding is that same 35 (87.5%) of the respondents have agreed that instead of learning, interns provide cheap labour in the organisations they were attached to. This goes in the same direction with an earlier finding of Rothman (2007) and Osei-Owusu, et al (2013) that at times complaints have been raised against employers for treating the interns as cheap labour.

Research Question 3: What are the perceived measures to overcome the challenges? To answer this question, Table 3 have actually summarised the views of respondents on how the challenges faced by student interns can be overcome in order to make the internship more effective. Their views and opinions tally with and supported by earlier assertions. Bukaliya (2012) had reported that students felt that there should be careful examination of feedback from employers and interns followed by the modification of the internship programme accordingly. This is because feedback will make it possible to identify lapses and be able to channel corrections in the same direction. Another of the suggestions is that the placement for internship be handled by the home university. Students do not want to go through any form of stress like

searching for internship placements. This tallies with the report of Bukaliya (2012) and Oral (2012) that the majority of interns felt their faculties should work for their placement. Summary of their suggestions on how the challenges faced by student interns can be overcome in order to make the internship more effective also indicate that interns wanted formidable structure to be put in place so that the exercise is flawless. This is in line with an earlier submission of Emerole and Muraina (2015) when they had noted that unless structures are in place to promote reflection and evaluation, practicum can become an experience of uncritical practice that can work against the quality of training.

Conclusions

Drawing from the above findings, it is concluded that:

Master in Personnel Psychology (MPP) students who partook in practicum were in general agreement that internships were beneficial in as far as they provide interns with hands-on practical experience and exposure, helped boost motivational levels of interns and helped them to understand theories learnt in classroom and enhanced their learning and understanding of issues. These student interns went through a lot of challenges in their efforts to fulfil a fundamental requirement for their training. The challenges among the personnel psychologist-trainees include that interns find difficulties sometimes in getting placements for their internship and this has been exacerbated by the fact that placements were sought by the individual student. Interns reported that at the places of internship, supervision could not be said to be comprehensive and effective. Interns are at the mercy of unscrupulous employers who regard them as staff to be assigned full responsibilities and duties normally prescribed to full time job incumbents. Interns added that because not many organisations' units were endowed with qualified staff that can effectively and efficiently contribute to meaningful and successful student internship, they were treated like full time staff and instead of learning they were providing cheap labour in the organisations they were attached to. Personnel psychology interns registered their opinions on the remedies towards eradication of the challenges being faced by interns during the internship programme.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

The university should be actively involved in assisting students in getting organisations where they can undertake their internship. Credible organisations

should be approached by the university to offer placements for the interns and there should be an audit of these organisations to establish their levels of willingness to participate. Appropriate arrangement should be made by the practicum committee to ensure that trainees are posted to organisations where they are most needed. There is need for good relationship between the students and the human resources department of the host organisation so as to enable the students receive beneficial mentorship. There could be an arrangement where organisations accepting the interns pay the interns a small token for the duration of their stay. Legislation should be enacted to protect interns against exploitation by unscrupulous employers. Internship should aim at improving the quality of mentorship and supervision during the practicum exercise in order to ensure that the students are able to meet the objectives of the practicum exercise, and that the practicum exercise should be properly organized. Supervision of interns should improve with more visits to the sites of internship, and those programmes supervisors who do not visit interns should re-visit their regulations and make site visits to their interns.

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