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# ACCOUNTING STUDENTS' EVALUATION OF INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES FROM A SKILLS PERSPECTIVE

**Togara Warinda**

*Faculty of Commerce, Department of Accountancy, University of Zimbabwe, Mount Pleasant Harare, Zimbabwe*

## ABSTRACT

*The University of Zimbabwe formally introduced internship into the Bachelor of Accountancy degree programme in 2003. The effect of the internship programme on the accounting students has not been studied. Internships are a popular method of experiential learning where students come face to face with the real world of work and its complexities, something that cannot be replicated in the four walls of the classroom. All parties involved benefit that is the student, the university and the employer. The study sought to evaluate the internship experiences of undergraduate accounting students with regard to career, soft skills, incentives and functional and technical skills. Ninety-three students took part in the survey. Students' expectations were only met in one out of twenty situations probed that is, as far as exposure to information systems. Despite this students generally agreed that they benefited from the internship experiences. Significant differences on certain items due to location and institution of placement were observed. To this end the study recommended that key areas to be covered during internship should be indentified and communicated to institutions where accounting students would be attached.*

**Keywords:** Internship, Accounting, Soft skill, Technical and functional skills, Career, Incentive.

## INTRODUCTION

Internships play a pivotal role in preparing students for the business world. It is generally agreed that practical experiential activities are necessary to give students first hand skill development and knowledge which they cannot get within the confines of the classroom (Bisoux, 2007; Posner, 2008). The classroom environment can and will never be able to provide students with the complexities, problem analysis and solving involved in the real world (D'Abate *et al.*, 2009). The growing popularity of internships is therefore not surprising as they fill in an apparent gap in the quest for real world education for students.

On the job training and learning has its early roots around 600BC in Greek, Roman, Chinese, and Vedie communities. Interns would learn a craft as an entry into skilled fields (Sides and Mrvica, 2007). The process entailed learning the skills needed to create a product or perform a service and conduct business (Walker II, 2011). During the middle ages serfs and indentured people bought their freedom through apprenticeships in crafts and trade professions thus helping in the rise of the middle class (Walker II, 2011). In the United States of America internships were seen as militating against their new found democracy and also that they could not provide requisite knowledge and thinking skills that were required in the modern industry (Walker II, 2011).

The 20th century saw a refocus on internships in which students paired classroom learning with workplace application to increase student learning and performance (Walker II, 2011). Herman Schneider an engineering professor is regarded as the pioneer of internships in the United States of America, which he kick started with a group of 27 electrical engineering students in 1906 at the University of Cincinnati (Driscoll, 2006). Business internships at the same university started in 1919 and in 1929 internships became mandatory (University of Cincinnati., 2012) All the three parties involved in an internship programme benefit from it one way or the other. The students for instance benefit from gaining experience as well as obtaining career-related direction and networking (Beard and Morton, 1999). From the employers' perspective students on internship are often an inexpensive help, a vibrant source for new ideas and potential future employees (Lam and Ching, 2006). Universities and colleges also benefit from the interface with industry, and use the feedback to continually strive to produce students who are 'fit for the market'. Thus internships offer "win-win opportunities" for all those involved (Divine *et al.*, 2007).

Way back in 1952 the American Accounting Association "acknowledged the benefit of a period of practical experience incorporated into the academic preparation of an accountant" (Schmutte, 1986). The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) requires accountants-to-be to have at least three years of practical training (International Federation of Accountants, 2008: IES #5). Where the academic training period consists of internship such experience is also recognised provided that it cannot account for more than 1 year of the required practical training (International Federation of Accountants, 2008: IES#5). There are significant variations in the ways in which internships are implemented the world over (Coco, 2000). The said variations can be in the form of length of period of internship; structured on unstructured; with or without credits among others. At the University of Zimbabwe internship was formally introduced into the Bachelor of Accountancy Honours programme when it changed from a 3 year to a 4 year programme in 2003. The Faculty of Commerce had however run an internship programme in late 1980s that was funded by industry. The internship programme ran during the long vacation between December and March. This was not compulsory and no credits were given. As with all donor driven programmes the internship initiative died a natural death when the donor withdrew. Also worth mentioning is the Bachelor of Technology in Management degree programme which was initially run at Harare and Bulawayo Polytechnics which was later transferred to University of Zimbabwe in the late 1980s. The

programme had a compulsory 1 year industrial attachment within the four year programme. When the programme was discontinued, the University of Zimbabwe continued with its 3 year programme which had no compulsory internships. Even then the second state university to be established, the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) had a compulsory 1 year internship in their commercial degree programmes.

It follows that the internship programme for the Bachelor of Accountancy degree programme at the University of Zimbabwe is still in its infancy compared to NUST and the rest of the world. The overarching aim of this paper therefore was to examine the perceptions of accounting students on selected issues relating to internship before and after attachment. Areas of interest were careers; soft skills; incentives and functional and technical skills. The specific objectives were thus:

- To examine perceptions of accounting students on and after attachment with regard to careers; soft skills; incentives and functional or technical skills to identify whether a gap existed in their perceptions ; and
- To investigate whether the above perceptions were significantly affected by gender and institution of internship, location and duration.

The above were looked at within the overall objectives of the University of Zimbabwe Faculty of Commerce internship programme objectives some of which are:

Objective 1.1

" To afford students an opportunity to test their theoretical tools and constructs learnt during their first two years of the degree programme with the realities of running business organisations in Zimbabwe and worldwide."

Objective 1.3

"To afford students an opportunity to develop hands on experience in the world of business and its intricacies." (Faculty of Commerce: Industrial Attachment and Professional Experience Information Booklet: 2)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Furco (1996) internship entails engaging students in service activities for the purpose of providing them with hands on experience that enhances their understanding of issues relevant to their area of study. Internship is also considered as "supervised work experiences' where students are closely supervised (McMahon and Quinn, 1995). A more revealing definition is given by the University of Wisconsin-Stout. (2008):

> "…Internships are conducted under the direction (direct or indirect) of an instructor and are designed to provide 'real life' or 'on the job' experiences for the students with the opportunity to critique and refine skills through contact with the instructor and with an on-site supervisor…"

In addition an internship may be paid or unpaid and is usually for a specified time period in instances where credits are given.

Internships offered to undergraduates provide a smooth transition from the academic world to the working environment (Muhamad *et al.*, 2009). Besides providing this safe landing, internships bridge the gap between academic learning and the practical reality (Lam and Ching, 2006). A number of studies confirm the assertion that internships are the best outside classroom learning activities (Hall *et al.*, 1995; Burnett, 2003; Mihail, 2006).

Objectives of internship are many and varied. Some of the common objectives include giving extra knowledge to students in the related areas of their studies; developing and enhancing the requisite skills for effective interpersonal and group work relations; personnel growth, maturity and independence (Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011). The University of Zimbabwe has eight objectives which include:

- " To afford students the opportunity to test their theoretical tools and constructs learnt during their first two years of the degree programme with realities of running business organisations in Zimbabwe and worldwide."
- "To afford students an opportunity to develop hands on experience in the world of business and its intricacies."
- "To create partnerships between the University of Zimbabwe and both the private and public sector enterprises."
- "To seek industry's evaluation of our degree programmes in terms of relevance to industry and commerce." (Faculty of Commerce, Industrial Attachment and Professional Experience, Information Booklet : 2)

Thus the overarching objective is to ensure that students are exposed to the real world of work and in the process providing feedback to institutions on the relevance or otherwise of the curriculum. Internships as it were link academic programmes to the business world (Herget, 2009). A number of benefits accrue to students from internship. First and foremost students get relevant practical experience (Mounce *et al.*, 2004). The learning experience complements and supports the theoretical studies learnt in classrooms (Mihail, 2006). Students learn specific job skills not taught in traditional business programmes (Garavan and Murphy, 2001). The work environment helps the student to understand the concept of professionalism hence the "transitioning from student to professional" (Tovey, 2001). The practical experience leads to permanently gained knowledge (Celik, 2005). In the training of accounting students IFAC advocates the integration of formal education and practical experience during or after general education ( IFAC, 2008: IES#5). Internships are thus an important aspect in the training of accounting students, as they learn about work in a guided and mentored environment (Divine *et al.*, 2007). Another often cited benefit is the understanding of the business applications of classroom learning (Cook *et al.*, 2004). From the student's perspective internship is seen as a bridge between the theory of the classroom and the world of practice (Nevett, 1985; Divine *et al.*, 2007). Students are afforded the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge gained through formal learning in a structured environment (Swindle and Bailey, 1984) which cannot be replicated in a normal classroom setting (Beard, 1998; Beard, 2007).

Internship is considered active and learning by doing whereas classroom learning is relatively passive (Tinto, 1997). So students on internship will be "learning how to learn in the workplace" (Cord *et al.*, 2010).

Perhaps more than anything else internships help students in preparing for their careers. In a study by Gerken *et al.* (2012) career preparation topped the list in terms of frequency on the perceived functions of internship. Career awareness of students is enhanced, more so since they work in a career related or professional environment. The experience gained during internship affords students the chance to evaluate, reflect upon and try a career field (Scott, 1992; Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011). Schmutte (1986) argues that internships assist students to clarify career objectives before graduating as well as additional input to allow informed career decisions before graduation. This view is shared by other researchers (see for example (Brooks *et al.*, 1995; Taylor, 1998). Hursch and Borzak (1979) study suggests that internships result in students having a greater sense of responsibility and career development. An apt summary of the importance of practical experience gained by students is given by Sides and Mrvica (2007) as follows: "Not until would be professionals begin to live the occupational life they have chosen do they really start to understand how their formal knowledge is applied." Another factor closely related to careers is the enhancement of resumes (Divine *et al.*, 2006) thus increasing the chances of early employment of former interns. Some interns often get permanent employment with organisations they were attached to during internship (Cannon and Arnold, 1998). The mere fact that students have to apply and be interviewed provides them with job search skills, which are useful after graduation.

Internships expose students to new technology and their skills in that area are enhanced (Mihail, 2006; Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011). Cognitive psychology has established that prior experiences are able to enhance the performance in fairly complex learning and problem solving tasks (Britton and Tesser, 1982). It is also argued that when individuals apply their work experience to a subsequent learning environment they can better analyse and question the theory (Ricks *et al.*, 1989). Internships thus serve as a learning condition that fosters and sustains the work and school environments. Students take a deeper understanding of the discipline back to the classroom. Studies by (English and Koeppen, 1993) and Knechel and Snowball (1987) found that internships enhanced students' performance in accounting and auditing courses. Internships thus create relevance for past and future classroom learning (Beard, 1998; Perry, 1999). Interpersonal and communication skills are improved by the internship experience. These skills are part of the five skills that are required of professional accountants (IFAC, 2008: IES#3). Several studies have shown that after internship students demonstrate enhanced communication skills (Beard, 1998; Burnett, 2003; Wesley and Bickle, 2005; Mihail, 2006). Divine *et al.* (2006) in their 5 year study found that of the five factors they probed communication was the first in key areas of improvement resulting from internship among participating students. Other studies have shown that internship socialises students through teamwork, assignments and meetings with clients and fellow employees and various events hosted by the organisation during the period of internship (Lubbers *et al.*, 2007/08). In addition students

believed that internships helped them to learn to work with a variety of people in different work environments (Cook *et al.*, 2004). The same experience helped students become more mature (Cook *et al.*, 2004).

Other skills honed through internships are problem solving (Burnett, 2003); self confidence (Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011); networking (Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011; Gerken *et al.*, 2012). Increased job satisfaction and motivation were also noted (Bernstein, 1976; Gerken *et al.*, 2012) among student that underwent internship. Institutions of learning, that is universities and colleges also benefit from internships. Internships strengthen ties between the institution and the corporate world (Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011; Gerken *et al.*, 2012). Institutions get feedback which enables them to ensure that their programmes remain relevant to the ever changing needs of the workplace (Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011; Walker II, 2011). Another rarely mentioned benefit is that " …business schools generate tuition income with minimal commitment from staff" (Campell, 2003). Often mutually beneficial relations are nurtured between the university and the organisation employing the interns which relations can lead to financial support in the form of scholarships equipment and grants (Divine *et al.*, 2007).

Employers often use students on internship as inexpensive labour during peak periods (Divine *et al.*, 2007). However more than anything else they use this opportunity as a talent identification exercise for future employees. Employers evaluate potential long term employees without long term commitments (Divine *et al.*, 2007). Strong ties with the institutions of learning are created and in the process also increasing a positive image in the community (Beard, 1998; Beard, 2007). Gault *et al.* (2010) argue that organisations that eventually hire former interns into full time employees save between US$6,200 to US$15,000 per person in recruitment and training costs. Internships therefore offer organisations substantial cost savings as well as relatively stable workforce arising from greater job stability of former interns (Richards, 1984). Internships offer win-win opportunities for all parties involved (Divine *et al.*, 2007). Each of the parties has expectations, but this paper sought to examine the expectations and perceptions of undergraduate accounting students at the University of Zimbabwe, with regard to career; functional and technical skills; soft skills and incentives.

## The Current Study

During the second week of the first semester in 2012 the survey instrument was distributed to Bachelor of Accounting students who had completed their internship attachment (third academic year). During the period about 112 students were on industrial attachment. The questionnaire was completed during lecture time by students present. The questionnaire was based on that used by Muhamad *et al.* (2009) in their study. No pilot testing was done since the questionnaire had been used in similar studies and administered to similar respondents (for example (Moore *et al.*, 2006; Abdul-Karim, 2009). As earlier on indicated the questionnaire sought to capture the perceptions of accounting students on selected issues before and after internship. It consisted of three parts, part

A, B, and C. Part A and B had 20 questions each covering student expectations before and perceptions after internship respectively. The questions were premised on four dimensions: career, soft skills, incentives, and knowledge-practical/technical competence. More questions were devoted to the knowledge –practical/technical competence, on courses covered in the second year such as auditing, financial accounting, cost accounting, information systems and corporate finance. Part C of the questionnaire covered demographics. For sections A and B respondents were asked to give their opinion on a seven point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On the particular day the questionnaire was administered 102 undergraduate accounting students attended the lecture on Professional Values, Ethics and Attitudes (AC423) a fourth year course. The course has no perquisites and thus all forth years who were on internship registered for the course. This was the first time the course was being offered and hence there were no students repeating the course. Of the returned questionnaires 9 were unusable leaving 93 usable questionnaires. Usable questionnaires were thus 91% of the questionnaires received and 83% of the 112 students on internship during the 2011/12 academic year, the percentages were deemed adequate for further analysis.

The majority of the respondents (64 or 69%) were males, with females constituting the remainder (21 or 31%) as reflected in Table 1. The figures are reflective of the general pattern in the Bachelor of Accountancy gender statistics were females are in most instances are about a third of students in the programme. This is somewhat different from the student sample in Muhamad *et al.* (2009) study were the majority were females (79.5%) (See also (Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011). The huge difference may be due to socio- cultural factors, aspects outside the scope of the current study. Most of the students (76 or 82%) did their internship in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe where incidentally the University of Zimbabwe is located. In a similar study by Muhamad *et al.* (2009) about 67% of the accounting students were attached in Kuala Lumpur/ Selangor the capital city of Malaysia and location of the University of Malaya. The rest of the students (18%) were dotted around the country (Table 1).The internship model followed by the University of Zimbabwe, University of Malaya and similarly that of University of Sultan-Zaind Abidin allow students to choose any institution related to their studies. Parastatals were the biggest employer of accounting internship students with 19 (20%), followed by manufacturing concerns with 17 (18%) (Table 1). Third placed were accounting/auditing firms and others such as mining concerns with 16 (17%) each. This is in stake contrast to 81.4% of accounting interns employed in accounting firms in Muhamad *et al.* (2009). This may be explained by different states of the economies in the two studies, that is Zimbabwe and Malaysia. Malaysia being one of the Asian economic tigers has consistently registered positive economic growth over a considerable period of time compared to Zimbabwe. At the University of Zimbabwe students should be attached for a minimum of 30 weeks continuously and the Faculty of Commerce expects at most 12 months (University of Zimbabwe).

Most students (74 or 80%) were on internships for periods exceeding 8 months, followed by those who did 8 months (12 or 13%). Only seven students (8%) were attached for periods between 6 and 7 months (Table 1).

Internship periods vary from one institution to the other. In a study on internship Abdul-Karim (2009), concluded that 8 months internship programmes were a success compared to other periods. Table 2 shows the means before and after attachment and the corresponding *t* values after carrying out a paired sample *t*-test. The means for all the statements except number 8 show that the expectations of students were not met as reflected by the before internship means that are higher than the after internship means. This finding is consistent with research findings by Lam and Ching (2006) and Muhamad *et al.* (2009). This is however expected as expectations are dynamic and invariably tend to be higher than perceptions. Though a gap exists it is not significant as shown by the *t*-values. In this study students' expectations were met in statement number 8 having means of 5.9785 before and 6.1613 after internship. This is also confirmed by a *t*-value of -0.426 which is less than the *p*-value of 0.05. This shows that students enhanced their knowledge in information systems during the internships. If statement number 16 on technology is considered then internship did not expose the students to anything new as far as technology is concerned. This may be explained by the fact that the University of Zimbabwe had relatively well equipped computer laboratories and also had a facility to enable students get subsidised notebooks.

Turning now to the specific dimensions probed questions 1; 2; 19; and 20 on section A and section B looked at expectations and perceptions of students before and after attachment with regard to career. Students' expectations were not met as far as this dimension is concerned, but still there were no significant differences as shown by the values in Table 2, where all the *t*-values were above $\alpha = 0.05$. It is worth noting that the numbers of students whose responses were in the agree to strongly disagree were 95.7%; 90.3%; 79.6%; and 84.9% for statements 1; 2; 19; and 20 respectively. There was also a slight increase on the students who were in the affirmative on statement 1, from 89.2% before to 95.7% though the mean was low. This confirms earlier findings that internships played a critical role in the career path of students on internships (Schmutte, 1986; Lubbers, 2000; Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011). Further analysis was done to show whether or not the dimension was affected by other factors, such as gender, institution of placement; location and period. Eta squared values were used for the purpose, interpreted thus: 0.0099- small effect; 0.0588-medium effect and 0.1379-large effect. As in previous studies gender did not cause significant variations (Muhamad *et al.*, 2009; Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011) even when one way ANOVA was done. It was found out that students attached in manufacturing concerns had their expectations exceeded on statement 1 and 2 with means of 6.2353 and 6.0588 before and 6.3529 and 6.1176 after respectively. A similar trend obtained in banking and finance (mean expectation-6.1429; mean perception-6.4286) and non-governmental organisations (mean expectation-5.8333; mean perception-6.3333) on question 1. Students who did their internships in retail organisations had their expectations exceeded on statements 2 (mean before-6.3636; mean after-6.4545) and 20

(mean before-5.5455; mean after-6.0909). *Eta* squared values for career related questions with regard to institution of placement ranged from 0.037 to 0.069 before and 0.029 to 0.079 after. This shows a medium effect of institution of placement on the career related satisfaction aspects of the attached students.

No significant differences were noted on the career related questions with regard to geographical location of the institution of placement. Only in Mutare were students' expectations exceeded on statement number 20 (mean before-6.333; mean after-7.000). The association between the career dimension and location as measured by *eta* squared was of small effect (range 0.012 to 0.050). On questions 1, 2, and 3 *eta* squared values (before) were between 0.008 and 0,009 signifying a small effect in duration of attachment and the meeting of students' expectations. Perceptions of students on the same questions however showed a small to medium effect on statements 1 and 2, with eta squared values of 0.018 and 0.034 respectively. Eta squared values for statements 19 and 20 were 0.067 and 0.084 respectively thus showing a moderate effect. A significant difference was noted on statement 20 on perceptions as shown in the one way ANOVA result:

$$F(3.89) = 2.707,\ p = 0.050\ MS_{error} = 1.901\ \alpha = 0.05$$

Students attached for more than 8 months had a higher mean perception (5.8649) than those attached for 8 months (5.8333) . It is worth noting that 74 students (80%) had internship periods exceeding 8 months. To some extent therefore the duration of the internship period has an effect on perceptions of students on their future careers though somewhat less defined.

Internships play an important part in improving students' technical and functional skills. These consist of general skills as well skills specific to the accounting profession (IFAC, 2008: IES#3). Questions 3 to 11 and 16 on parts A and B of the survey instrument probed the students' expectations and perceptions with regard to technical and functional skills. Table 2 shows that expectations were exceeded by perceptions on statement number 8 "The internship experiences will/helped me to enhance knowledge in information systems" as discussed above. Only 43% of the students (mean after, 3.9247) agreed that internship experience had enhanced their knowledge of Corporate Finance. Other questions with lower mean values after Corporate Finance were: statement number 4 (internal auditing-mean after, 4.6129); statement number 5 (external auditing-mean after, 4.6452); and statement 7 (cost accounting and control-mean after, 4.7419). The statements have means lying within the undecided (4) and agree (5) range with responses in the agree to strongly agree ranging from 51.60% to 60%. The result shows that the internship experience did not give the students expected benefits as far as the dimension is concerned, this similar to Muhamad *et al.* (2009) finding. While expected benefits did not materialise students were in general agreement that internship had helped them get practical experience (Lubbers, 2000; Mihail, 2006) on various facets of accountancy with the exception of Corporate Finance. Further analysis on the means to ascertain the effect of gender did not reveal significant differences as in prior studies (Muhamad *et al.*, 2009; Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011) except for statement B5 on perceptions. The result of the one way ANOVA was:

$$F(1,91) = 5.371,\ p = 0.023,\ MS_{error} = 3.624,\ \alpha = 0.05$$

There was a significant difference on perceptions between male and female students on the statement "The internship experience helped me to enhance knowledge in external auditing". Males were affirmative (mean 4.9531) and females were largely undecided or neutral (mean 3.9655). The number of male and female students who did their internships in accounting/auditing firms was 9 and 7 respectively (14% and 24%). While this finding may be disturbing it may be explained by differences between employers, who may expose students to different tasks.

It was interesting to note that there were significant differences on the technical and functional skills on statements A4; A5; A6; A7; A9 and B7 based on the institution that the student did the attachment. For example statement A4 "The internship experience will help me to enhance knowledge in internal auditing" yielded the following result:

$$F(7,85) = 2.218,\ p = 0.040,\ MS_{error}\ 2.042,\ \alpha = 0.05$$

Students who were in local government and non-governmental organisations had higher mean values 7.000 and 6.000 respectively, and the lowest mean was for those in other sectors (4.2500).Means of the other institutions of attachment were; accounting 4.6875; manufacturing 5.2941; retail 5.2727; and parastals 5.7368. The significance of these expectations would have been more revealing had the students responded to the questionnaire before attachment. Turning to statement B7 on perceptions the one way ANOVA was:

$$F(7,85) = 2.413,\ p = 0.027,\ MS_{error}\ 3.158,\ \alpha = 0.05$$

Students who did their internship in accounting/auditing organisations, and non-governmental organisations did not enhance their knowledge in cost accounting and control (means, 3.5625 and 3.6667). Greatest beneficiaries (in descending order) were: local government, 6.000; manufacturing, 5.6471; retail, 5.4545; banking and finance, 5.2857; parastals, 4.7895; and other, 4.500. Therefore it is clear that internship does not necessarily result in the technical/functional skills being improved equally across the various accounting disciplines in the different institutions.

Functional/technical skills were also analysed from the location of the place of internship. Significant differences were noted on statements A4; A9; B6; and B9. Perceptions are more revealing compared to expectations as earlier discussed. The one way ANOVA result for statement B6 "The internship experience helped me to enhance knowledge in financial accounting and reporting" was:

$$F(5.87) = 2.612,\ p = 0.030,\ MS_{error}\ 2.310,\ \alpha = 0.05$$

The result shows that students attached out of Harare in places such as Masvingo (6.3333); other (6.1667); and Bulawayo (6.000) enhanced their knowledge in financial accounting and reporting compared to those in Gweru (1.000), Mutare (4.3333) and Harare (5.4474). Finally Corporate Finance had:

$$F(5.87) = 2.926,\ p = 0.017,\ MS_{error}\ 3.016,\ \alpha = 0.05$$

Only students in Masvingo benefited from their internship experience compared to other places (6.6667). Students in Gweru (1.000) and Mutare (2.3333) did not benefit at all , while those in Harare (3,8289) were not that sure. Students attached out of the capital city tended to benefit more

in other technical and functional skills particularly financial accounting and corporate finance. Internship has been found to enhance the soft skills of students (Beard and Morton, 1999). Accountants are required to have personal and interpersonal skills among others (IFAC, 2008: IES#3). To this end therefore questions A12 to15 and B12 to B15 probed soft skills before and after internship. Paired means analysis did not show any significant variances (Table 2). Similarly expectations of students were not met as in other studies (Muhamad *et al.*, 2009). The means ranged from 5.6882 to 6.1935, meaning students generally agreed that internship experience significantly improved their soft skills. Communication skills were the most improved soft skill (mean, 6.1935). One way ANOVA did not show any significant differences on gender, institution of placement; and duration of internship. Significant differences on location were noted on statement B12 and B14 whose one way ANOVA results are shown below:

#12 $F(5,87) = 2.455, p = 0.039, MS_{error} 1.027, \alpha = 0.05$

#14 $F(5,87) = 2.520, p = 0.035, MS_{error} 0.960, \alpha = 0.05$

Problem solving skills were mostly enhanced for students who did their internship in Bulawayo (6.5000), Mutare and Masvingo (6.3333) with the least in Gweru (3.0000). Harare and other locations were not so bad with means of 5.6316 and 5.6667 respectively. Internship experience helped students in Masvingo and Mutare (mean, 6.3333 each) mostly to develop their personal skills, followed by Bulawayo (6.2500) and Harare (6.1184) and least was Gweru (3.0000). As in technical and functional skills it would seem that those out of the capital city Harare tended to benefit more.

The final dimension presented is monetary and non-monetary incentives probed in questions A17; A18; B17; and B18. Internships provided networking (Gerken *et al.*, 2012) and money earning opportunities to students although this was not the primary motivator (Gault *et al.*, 2010). Like in other dimensions students' expectations were not met. This finding is similar to that of Muhamad *et al.* (2009). There were no significant variations along gender, location and duration of internship. Differences were observed on the opportunity to earn some money, which had the following one way ANOVA result:

$F(7.85) = 2.637, p = 0.016, MS\ error\ 3.182, \alpha = 0.05$

Those students who did their internship in banking and finance (3.000); non-governmental organisations (3.3333) and retail (3.4545) generally felt that they did not get the opportunity to earn money followed by those in accounting/auditing firms (4.3750). Students in the remaining institutions were affirmative (4.8125 to 7.000). While students earned money this was not a major driving more so that the University of Zimbabwe did not consider it compulsory.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above results and consequent conclusions and recommendations have to considered in light of some of the limitations of the study. First and foremost the sample size was considerably smaller compared to similar studies (Muhamad *et al.*, 2009; Mohd Jaffri *et al.*, 2011). However like in

other studies student expectations were not met in most of the items. In this study the only expectation met was that to do with information systems. Gender was not significant on most items, though this study observed a significant gender difference on knowledge on external auditing. The institution of internship was the source of significant variations on questions to do with technical and functional skills with respect to cost accounting and control where accounting/auditing and non-governmental organisations fared badly in providing students with valuable hands on experience. Thus in this study it is concluded that the mentioned sectors did not provide students with adequate hands-on experience. Location accounted for significant variations on students' technical and functional skills with respect to financial accounting and reporting and corporate finance. Students in Masvingo and Bulawayo tended to be well exposed in the two areas compared to those in Harare and other locations.

In addition soft skills were affected by location with regard to problem solving and interpersonal skills. Students who were well exposed in the identified areas were those in Bulawayo, Masvingo, Mutare and Harare (in descending order). The above differences show that accounting students do not get the same kind of uniform skills during the attachment period. It may also mean that the areas of emphasis vary from one organisation to the other. That said, the type, size, location of the various organisations have a bearing on the skills that students get *ceteris paribus.* It is therefore recommended that the university through the department of accountancy should come up with key areas that students should be exposed to during internship in consultation with the relevant stakeholders. Such a programme should also indicate tentative duration per key area. One obvious disadvantage is where students are attached to a specialised division or are seen as relief staff but these should be exceptions. Academic supervisors should encourage employers to expose students to the identified key areas. The number of visits should be at least two, at vantage points during the duration of the attachment. A more detailed study on the effect of location, and type of institution on the expectations and perceptions of students on the internship programme is necessary. Such a study should involve more universities.

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**Table-1.** Demographic Profiles for Bachelor of Accountancy Students

| | **Male** | **Female** | **Total** | **Percentage %** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Institution of placement** | **Frequency** | **Frequency** | | |
| Accounting/auditing | 9 | 7 | 16 | 16 |
| Manufacturing | 11 | 6 | 17 | 18 |
| Retail/trading | 9 | 2 | 11 | 12 |
| Parastatals | 13 | 6 | 19 | 20 |
| Local government | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Non-governmental organisations | 4 | 2 | 6 | 6 |
| Banking and Finance | 6 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Other | 12 | 4 | 16 | 17 |
| **Duration of internship** | | | | |
| 6 months | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 7 months | 5 | 1 | 6 | 6 |
| 8 months | 10 | 2 | 12 | 13 |
| Over 8 months | 49 | 25 | 74 | 80 |
| **Location** | | | | |
| Harare | 53 | 23 | 76 | 82 |
| Bulawayo | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Gweru | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Mutare | 3 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Masvingo | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Other | 4 | 2 | 6 | 6 |
| **Total interns 93** | | | | |

**Table-2.** Perceptions of Interns before and after Internship

| No | | Mean (before | Mean (after) | Std Dev | T value ($p<0.05$) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The internship experience is able /had prepared me to be a better employee in the future. | 6.2366 | 6.1613 | 1.03480 | .702 |
| 2 | The internship experience provides/has provided me with relevant knowledge and practical experience to assist me in adapting myself to my future working environment. | 6.1505 | 6.0645 | 1.03898 | .798 |
| 3 | The internship experience will help/helped me to relate the theories learnt in the classroom to the work environment. | 5.7742 | 5.1613 | 1.29409 | 4.567 |
| 4 | The internship experience will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in internal auditing. | 5.1720 | 4.6129 | 1.62496 | 3.318 |
| 5 | The internship experience will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in external auditing | 5.0430 | 4.6452 | 2.00618 | 1.912 |
| 6 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in financial accounting and reporting. | 5.9462 | 5.4624 | 1.63928 | 2.847 |
| 7 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in cost accounting and control. | 5.3763 | 4.7419 | 1.86376 | 3.283 |
| 8 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in information systems. | 5.9785 | 6.1613 | 4.14138 | -.426 |
| 9 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance | 4.6129 | 3.9247 | 1.85319 | 3.581 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | knowledge in corporate finance. | | | | |
| 10 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance my ability to prepare financial statements. | 5.8710 | 5.7634 | 6.5582 | 0.158 |
| 11 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to have a better understanding in interpreting and evaluating financial statements. | 5.7849 | 5.3333 | 1.36347 | 3.194 |
| 12 | The internship experiences will help/helped to develop my problem solving skill. | 5.7957 | 5.6882 | 1.22884 | 0.844 |
| 13 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to develop my communication skill. | 6.2688 | 6.1935 | 1.05539 | 0.688 |
| 14 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to develop my interpersonal skill | 6.1935 | 6.0645 | 1.02391 | 1.215 |
| 15 | The internship experiences will help/helped me to improve my personal confidence and self esteem. | 6.3656 | 6.0968 | 1.03356 | 2.508 |
| 16 | The internship experience is able/had given me the exposure to the latest technology adopted in the workplace. | 6.1935 | 5.7957 | 1.23482 | 3.107 |
| 17 | The internship attachment is able to/had given me the opportunity to build up rapport and networking with people in the industry and business area. | 6.1720 | 5,8280 | 1.34726 | 2.463 |
| 18 | The internship attachment is able to/had given me the opportunity to earn some money. | 5.0968 | 4.4946 | 1.97341 | 2.943 |
| 19 | The internship attachment will provide/had provided me with the necessary job experience that can improve my chances to get a good job upon graduation. | 6.0000 | 5.5484 | 1.56397 | 2.785 |
| 20 | The internship attachment will provide/had provided me with the necessary information and experiences to choose the right career path upon graduation | 6.2151 | 5.8397 | 1.52454 | 2.381 |