

Perceived Learning Effectiveness of Online and Traditional Internship of Bachelor of Public Administration Students

Christian A. Fernando
Charmine C. Samson
Lemer Roy C. Sanchez

Internships play a vital role in shaping students' professional competence, providing them with real-world exposure, and enhancing the skills necessary for employment. They bridge the gap between theoretical learning in the classroom and its practical application in the workplace. Through internships, students develop discipline, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and an understanding of the organizational environment—elements crucial for future employment. However, in the past three years, the global pandemic brought by COVID-19 drastically altered the landscape of higher education, including internship programs. Educational institutions, including Pangasinan State University (PSU), were forced to shift from traditional face-to-face learning environments to virtual modes of instruction and internship implementation.

This study was therefore conducted to determine the learning effectiveness of both online and traditional internships among the Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA) student-trainees of Pangasinan State University – Lingayen Campus, particularly from the batches of 2019 and 2022. It aimed to examine how these two different internship modalities contributed to students' learning experiences and skill development. Moreover, it sought to identify whether there was a significant difference in the perceived learning effectiveness between online and traditional internships, as well as to assess the seriousness of problems encountered by the student-trainees during their internship engagements.

To achieve these objectives, the researchers adopted a quantitative research design and employed total population sampling to purposively collect data related to the learning effectiveness of online and traditional internship programs. This method was chosen because it allowed the researchers to include the entire population of BPA student-trainees from the two specified batches, thereby ensuring a comprehensive representation of experiences. The total population consisted of 148 student-trainees, with 68 from batch 2019, who underwent traditional internships, and 80 from batch 2022, who participated in online internship programs.

A survey questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering instrument. To accommodate both accessibility and convenience, the researchers administered the survey through Google Forms, ensuring that the respondents could easily participate regardless of location. Because the questionnaire was newly developed and not adapted from an existing instrument, the researchers ensured its content validity and reliability through expert validation. The validation process involved five (5) experts in the field of internship programs and academic management, including the OJT Campus Coordinator, the OJT University Director, and three instructors handling internship subjects.

In addition, a pilot testing or dry-run was conducted among five BPA student-trainees from batch 2020 of PSU-Lingayen Campus, who were not part of the actual study population. The purpose of the pilot test was to ensure clarity of questions, coherence of content, and appropriateness of format. Feedback from the dry-run participants helped improve the structure and content of the final questionnaire.

After data collection, the responses were tabulated and analyzed using frequency, percentage, and mean to describe the data. To determine whether a significant difference existed between the learning effectiveness of online and traditional internships, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed. This non-parametric test was appropriate for comparing two independent groups that may not follow a normal distribution.

The findings of the study revealed that both online and traditional internships were perceived as very highly effective by the student-trainees. Respondents from both batches expressed that their respective internship modalities enabled them to acquire substantial knowledge, improve communication and leadership skills, and develop work ethics and professionalism.

Despite the shift from physical to virtual internships due to pandemic restrictions, the data showed that the students were still able to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The results of the Mann-Whitney U Test confirmed that there was no significant difference between the perceived learning effectiveness of online and traditional internships across the four major dimensions of evaluation: knowledge and skills acquisition, work attitude and ethics, adaptability and communication, and overall learning experience. This means that both modalities—though delivered through different platforms—were effective in providing meaningful internship experiences to the students.

However, when it came to problems encountered, the level of seriousness varied slightly between the two modalities. For both types of internships, respondents rated the encountered problems as slightly serious, implying that while challenges were present, they were not severe enough to hinder learning. Yet, online internship participants reported experiencing more difficulties compared to those in traditional settings. The most frequently cited problems in online internships were poor and unstable internet connectivity, technological interruptions, and distractions caused by household activities and social media. These factors affected concentration and the timely completion of assigned tasks.

On the other hand, traditional internship participants cited issues related to transportation costs, limited exposure to certain office operations, and occasional miscommunication with supervisors. Nevertheless, these challenges were generally manageable and did not significantly affect their overall learning experiences.

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that both online and traditional internship programs implemented by the Pangasinan State University – Lingayen Campus for BPA students were highly effective in enhancing student learning and professional development. The lack of a statistically significant difference in perceived learning effectiveness indicates that online internship programs, when properly managed and supported, can serve as a viable alternative to traditional face-to-face internships. This is particularly relevant in situations where physical presence in partner institutions is limited, such as during pandemics or emergencies.

However, while both types of internships were successful, the effectiveness of the online internship largely depended on technological readiness, internet stability, and the students' ability to manage distractions in a home-based learning environment. The findings emphasize the need for continuous monitoring, support systems, and innovative strategies to address these limitations.

In light of the conclusions, the researchers propose several recommendations aimed at improving both online and traditional internship programs: (1) Training and Seminars on Employability Enhancement: The university should organize regular training sessions and seminars that focus on employability skills such as communication, critical thinking, and workplace ethics. This will help prepare students to transition smoothly from academic settings to professional environments, (2) Knowledge Retention and Performance Assessment.

It is recommended that additional assessment activities, such as post-internship reflection papers, oral presentations, and peer evaluations, be implemented to reinforce learning and ensure knowledge retention among student-trainees, and (3) Technological Support and Resource Assistance: For online internships, the university should provide access to stable internet connections and digital tools or collaborate with local agencies to ensure that students can effectively perform their internship tasks without interruptions caused by technological limitations.

Strategic Placement and Partner Agency Coordination: To optimize learning outcomes, students should be strategically placed in agencies or institutions that align closely with their field of specialization. In cases where issues arise, the university may consider relocating interns to alternative partner agencies to provide a safer and more conducive environment for learning. **And Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:** Regular monitoring and feedback sessions should be conducted between university supervisors, host institutions, and interns to ensure that the objectives of the internship are met and to promptly address any problems encountered during the program.

By implementing these recommendations, Pangasinan State University can further enhance the quality and effectiveness of its internship programs, ensuring that both online and traditional modalities continue to equip students with the skills and competencies necessary for their future careers.