



The Role of Onsite and Virtual Internships in Enhancing Employability among HR Graduates in Bangalore

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of onsite and virtual internships on the employability of graduates in the field of Human Resources (HR) in Bangalore, India. The descriptive study involved a sample of 156 HR graduates from various universities in Bangalore who had completed either onsite or virtual internships. Employment capabilities were evaluated in fields like collaboration, industry-specific expertise, interpersonal communication, computer skills, adaptability in unfamiliar surroundings, written expression, critical thinking, problem-solving, planning, decision-making, numerical proficiency, and language aptitude. The results revealed significant disparities in developing these skills between the two internship modalities, with onsite internships consistently surpassing virtual internships. Furthermore, the study revealed a positive correlation between internship experiences and the advancement of employability skills, underscoring the crucial role of internships in shaping the career prospects of HR graduates. The findings carry important implications for HR programs and employers, emphasizing the necessity to enhance internship experiences and enrich skill development opportunities to meet the demands of a competitive job market.

Keywords: Employability, HR, Internship, Onsite, Virtual

Introduction

The importance of the study is rooted in the dynamic shifts within the internship landscape and the need to provide evidence-based insights that can guide HRDM graduates, educational institutions, employers, and policymakers in making informed decisions about internship programs. Several compelling factors underscore the significance of this research. The global landscape of internships has evolved significantly in response to changing circumstances, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted traditional

in-person internship models. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveyed in 2020 revealed that 63% of employers offered virtual internships, a substantial increase from the 39% reported in 2019. Impressively, 97% of employers found virtual internships to meet or exceed their expectations, indicating a growing preference for this mode of engagement among employers and students alike. This study's primary objectives are twofold: first, to identify the factors that impact the effectiveness of both onsite and virtual internships in enhancing HR graduates' employability; second, to scrutinize the relationship between onsite and virtual internships and the acquisition of valuable work experience. Moreover, the study aims to pinpoint each modality's key advantages and challenges.

By offering a comparative analysis of the two internship formats, this research sheds light on their contributions to developing critical employability skills among HR graduates and elevating their job prospects. Case studies further emphasize the need for a comparative approach. For instance, a study conducted by McKinsey & Company found that the pandemic forced organizations worldwide to adapt to remote work rapidly, showcasing the potential for virtual internships. Yet, there are inherent differences between onsite and virtual internships that merit investigation. Onsite internships provide physical immersion in a workplace environment, offering direct observation and mentorship opportunities, which can be pivotal for skill development and networking. In contrast, virtual internships offer flexibility and accessibility but may lack the immersive experience of traditional settings. The insights derived from this study are poised to be of immense interest to educators, employers, and policymakers committed to elevating the quality of internship programs and bolstering the career prospects of HR graduates.

Review of Literature

Concept of Onsite Internships

Onsite internships are experiential learning opportunities that allow students to gain work experience and apply the skills they have learned in their field of study or career goals (McHugh, 2022). These internships are structured and supervised, providing students with guided mentoring and structured learning (Jones, 2015). The success of onsite internships relies on the collaboration between the student intern, the university intern coordinator, and the internship site supervisor (Manickam, 2015). Onsite internships are valuable for students as they provide them with the opportunity to improve their social and professional networks, determine their career paths, and gain experiential learning competencies (Parker, 2016). Employers play a crucial role in assessing the performance of interns during their internship period, providing feedback that can be used to improve students' preparation for future internships and employment (Mahajan, 2022). Onsite internships are considered a high-impact practice in college curricula and co-curricular, fostering engagement, persistence, and learning among undergraduate students.

Onsite Internship and Graduate Employability

Onsite internships have been found to have a positive impact on graduate employability (Saidani, 2022). Participating in internships increases the overall employability of young adults, with a slightly greater impact on male college graduates. However, the type of internship, whether paid or unpaid, also plays a role in employability outcomes. Paid internships are generally of a higher level and more beneficial in the labor market compared to unpaid internships (Choe, 2023). Unpaid internships, in fact, can lead to lower pay in the short to medium term (Alessandro, 2023). Additionally, the development of employability during internships is influenced by factors such as job crafting, organizational support, and socialization tactics. Overall, onsite internships provide valuable experiential learning opportunities for students to enhance their skills and networks, leading to improved employability prospects after graduation.

Concept of Virtual Internship

Virtual internships are supervised opportunities for students to apply their academic knowledge through interactive technologies. They have emerged as an important area of research and provide benefits such as flexibility, support, and the development of transferable skills and confidence for underrepresented student groups (O'Shea, 2023). Virtual internships also offer a solution to the limitations of physical location and other obstacles, allowing students to connect with the industry regardless of their location (Kristen, 2023). In the field of teacher education, virtual internships have been found to be effective in developing teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) and fostering complex professional thinking (Raihan, 2020). Additionally, virtual internships can create a sense of belonging and foster the development of STEM skills and knowledge among students from underrepresented backgrounds (Bayer, 2022). Overall, virtual internships provide opportunities for students to gain work experience, develop skills, and enhance their employability in various fields.

Virtual Internship and Graduate Employability

Virtual internships have emerged as an alternative option for students to gain practical experience and enhance their employability (Willy, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of virtual internships as universities shifted to online learning and work-integrated learning faced challenges (O'Shea, 2023). Research has shown that virtual internships can be practical in providing flexible and supportive opportunities for students to develop transferable skills and confidence (Kristen, 2023). Stakeholders, including academics, students, and employers, perceive online internships as valid, flexible, and linked to skill development, potentially enhancing student employability (Amy, 2021). Online internships are particularly beneficial for non-traditional students who may have limited options due to work and family obligations (Dana, 2016). Recommendations to enhance the virtual internship experience include regular communication between students and organizations, virtual immersion in the organization, and additional support for interns. Overall, virtual internships have the potential to contribute to graduate employability by providing practical experience and skill development opportunities in a digital world.

Onsite vs. Virtual Internship

Onsite internships offer natural networking, mentorship, and communication opportunities, but they may lack flexibility and accessibility for students who live far away or have other responsibilities (O'Shea, 2023). Virtual internships, on the other hand, provide flexibility for interns' schedules and accessibility for those who cannot afford transportation or have other constraints (Metzger, 2022). They also allow for remote collaboration and the use of technology-based platforms for communication and collaborative workspaces (Werner, 2021). However, virtual internships may require more preparation and clear communication to ensure project success (Ramos, 2023). They can also present challenges such as difficulties in understanding materials, internet interruptions, and technical problems (Ravi, 2019). Despite these challenges, virtual internships have been found to provide valuable learning experiences, including the opportunity to interact with industry leaders and gain relevant skills and knowledge. Some students recommend a face-to-face modality for internships in the future.

Research Gap

The literature review highlights several areas where research gaps exist in the context of onsite and virtual internships and their impact on graduate employability. There is a need for more in-depth exploration into the comparative impact of onsite and virtual internships on employability. While the existing studies suggest that both modalities contribute to employability, the nuanced differences in the skills and experiences gained from each type of internship still need to be explored. Moreover, much of the existing research on

internships is generalized and needs more specificity, making it essential to conduct research with particular sample groups, such as HR students. HR students have unique academic and career trajectories, and the skills and knowledge they gain from internships may vary significantly from those in other disciplines. Another critical research gap lies in the skills developed through onsite and virtual internships. While it is acknowledged that internships enhance employability, a more granular examination of the skills acquired in each modality is essential. Such an analysis could offer a comprehensive picture of the competencies that HR graduates gain from their internships, allowing for targeted educational and professional development strategies.

Research Objectives

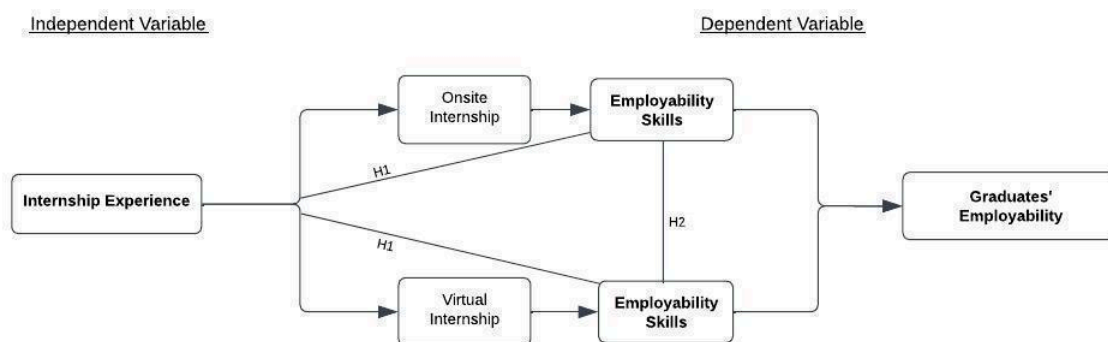
1. To identify the employability skills developed by HR graduates who completed onsite internships.
2. To identify the employability skills developed by HR graduates who completed virtual internships.
3. To compare the levels of employability skills developed by HR graduates through onsite and virtual internships.
4. To identify the relationship between internships and employability skills.

Hypothesis

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, depicted in Figure 1, elucidates the correlation among the study variables, the independent variable (internship experience), and the dependent variable (graduates' employability), which is assessed based on the employability skills acquired during the internship.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study



According to the conceptual framework, graduates who have participated in internship programs will have better employability skills. As a result, the more experience and skills graduates obtain, the more likely they are to get employed.

Research Hypothesis

Based on a review of the literature on the benefits of internship programs for increasing graduates' employability, hypotheses have been developed to address the research's issue. The following hypothesis has been developed:

H1. There is a significant relationship between internship experience and the employability skills of HR graduates.

H2. There is a significant difference between the employability skills of HR graduates who did onsite internships and those who completed virtual internships.

Research Methodology

The research at hand delves into the critical exploration of the effects of different internship modalities on the employability of Human Resource Development and Management (HR) graduates in Bangalore, India. To ensure clarity and precision in the study, it is imperative to establish operational definitions, particularly in defining the terms "onsite internship" and "virtual internship." An "onsite internship" is operationalized as a structured experiential learning opportunity situated within a professional HR setting, where HR students apply theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom to practical tasks. In contrast, a "virtual internship" is defined as a remote work experience conducted through the utilization of online communication technologies, enabling HR students to engage in various tasks contributing to their professional development, all from the comfort of their chosen location.

The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey design. This approach is well-suited for the collection and interpretation of data from a sample of HR students. By employing a descriptive survey design, the research aims to comprehensively examine the relationships between various variables, ultimately revealing trends and patterns within the target population. The sampling technique administered is convenient sampling. This method revolves around the selection of subjects based on their accessibility and availability. Here, HR students who fulfill the inclusion criteria, which stipulate their participation in either onsite or virtual internships within the HR field during their academic journey, are selected to partake in the study. The individual HR student who has completed the specified internships becomes the sampling unit, embodying the essence of this research's focus.

The primary tool for data collection is a semi-structured questionnaire aptly named the "Career Benefits of Internship Experience Questionnaire." It consists of a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions, all strategically formulated to address a spectrum of aspects related to internship experiences, the development of employability skills, and the perceived significance of these skills in the context of employment. The questionnaire comprises 47 questions, divided into three sections. In an ever-evolving job market where practical experience is increasingly vital, the research findings hold the potential to benefit HR students, educational institutions, and employers alike, shedding light on the significance of internship experiences in shaping graduate employability and career prospects.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Demographic analysis

PARTICULARS	ITEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
University graduated from	Christ University, Bangalore	109	69.87
	St. Joseph College, Bangalore	27	17.31
	Jain University, Bangalore	10	6.41
	Kristu Jayanti College, Bangalore	10	6.41
Gender	Female	101	64.74
	Male	55	35.26
Age distribution	Between 24 and 29	78	50
	Between 18 and 23	72	46.15
	Between 30 and 40	6	3.85

Internship source	Through university	56	35.89
	Personal Relations	56	35.89
	Online	44	28.21
Major	MSW	73	46.79
	MBA	49	31.41
	MA	34	21.79
Mode of Internship	Onsite	79	50.64
	Virtual	77	49.36

Table 1: Demographic details of the study

The demographic details provide key insights into the characteristics of the research participants. Most graduates (109) are from Christ University, with smaller numbers from other institutions. The study primarily includes female participants (101) and those in the 24-29 age group (78). Internship sources are evenly divided between university-based and personal connections, with a significant number acquired online. The majority of participants major in MSW (73), followed by MBA (49) and MA (34). There is an equal representation of onsite and virtual internships, a total of 78 each, highlighting a balanced mix of internship experiences among the respondents. These demographic details are essential for understanding the sample composition and interpreting the research findings.

The difference in employability skills developed by HR graduates who completed onsite and virtual internships.

Skills	Onsite Mean	Virtual Mean	Mann-Whitney U Statistic	P-value
Teamwork	4.71	3.6	1263	<0.001*
Sector-specific	4.46	3.32	958	<0.001
Communication	4.77	3.56	1084	<0.001
Computer	4.33	3.64	1903	<0.001
Ability to adapt & act in new environments	4.56	3.61	1436	<0.001
Good reading/writing	4.37	3.51	1657	<0.001
Analytical & problem-solving	4.58	3.6	1274	<0.001
Planning & organizational	4.65	3.6	1316	<0.001
Decision-making	4.71	3.56	1087	<0.001
Good with numbers	4.41	3.34	1296	<0.001
Language	4.68	3.71	1267	<0.001

Table 2: Employability skills developed through onsite and virtual internships

Result: Onsite internships consistently yield higher mean scores in employability skills across various dimensions, including teamwork, sector-specific knowledge, communication, computer proficiency, adaptability in new environments, writing, problem-solving, planning, decision-making, and numeracy. These differences are statistically significant, as indicated by the Mann-Whitney U statistics and p-values, all of which are less than 0.001. In contrast, while still contributing to skill development, virtual internships generally result in lower mean scores in these same skill dimensions.

Descriptive statistics and analysis

Descriptives			
	Mode of Internship	Internship Experience	Employability Skills
N	Onsite	79	79
	Virtual	77	77
Missing	Onsite	0	0
	Virtual	0	0
Mean	Onsite	4.52	4.57
	Virtual	3.32	3.54
Median	Onsite	4.65	4.73
	Virtual	3.35	3.64
Standard deviation	Onsite	0.548	0.504
	Virtual	0.702	0.923
Minimum	Onsite	1	2.82
	Virtual	1	1.09
Maximum	Onsite	5	5
	Virtual	4.76	5

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the study

Result: When considering employability skills, it is evident that, on average, students who participated in onsite internships tend to report higher scores, with a mean score of 4.52, compared to those who undertook virtual internships, who report a slightly lower mean score of 3.32. Similarly, the median scores for onsite internships are also higher than those for virtual internships, suggesting that onsite interns generally report more positive employability skill development. However, it is important to note the variability in the data, as reflected by the standard deviations. Virtual internships exhibit greater variation in employability skills scores, indicated by a higher standard deviation of 0.923, compared to the 0.504 standard deviation for onsite internships. When examining the range of scores, onsite internships show a narrower range of employability skills scores, ranging from a minimum of 2.82 to a maximum of 5. In contrast, virtual internships encompass a broader range, with scores ranging from a minimum of 1.09 to a maximum of 5. These statistics suggest that while onsite internships tend to result in higher mean and median employability skills scores, virtual internships exhibit greater variability and can result in scores that span a wider spectrum.

Correlation Matrix

The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to check for the normality of the data. The P value was < 0.05 indicating that the data is not normally disturbed. Hence, non-parametric analysis was used.

Correlation Matrix			
		Internship Experience	Employability Skills
Internship Experience	Spearman's rho	—	
	df	—	

	p-value	—		
	N	—		
Employability Skills	Spearman's rho	0.644	***	—
	df	154		—
	p-value	< .001		—
	N	156		—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3: Correlation matrix for internship experience and employability skills

Result: The Spearman correlation analysis shows a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between employability skills and internship experience among the participants. The Spearman's rho correlation coefficient is 0.644, and the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant correlation. This suggests that as internship experience increases, employability skills also tend to increase, with a strong positive association between the two variables.

Findings

The research findings demonstrate significant disparities in the development of employability skills between onsite and virtual internships among HR graduates in Bangalore. Onsite internships consistently outperform virtual internships, displaying higher mean (4.52) and median scores (4.65) across a wide range of crucial employability skills, such as teamwork, sector-specific knowledge, communication, computer proficiency, adaptability in new environments, writing, problem-solving, planning, decision-making, numeracy, and language proficiency. These disparities highlight the effectiveness of in-person, hands-on learning experiences in nurturing a comprehensive set of employability skills, thus emphasizing the value of onsite internships.

Additionally, the data highlights a robust positive association between internship experience and the development of employability skills (Spearman's rho correlation coefficient is 0.644, p -value < 0.001). As the duration and depth of HR graduates' internship experiences increase, their employability skills tend to improve, underscoring the pivotal role of internships in enhancing the employability of these graduates in Bangalore. These findings not only underscore the significance of high-quality internship opportunities but also suggest that HR programs and employers should concentrate on expanding and enriching internship experiences to further enhance the development of skills and employability of HR graduates.

Discussion

The research findings highlight the significant differences in the development of employability skills between onsite and virtual internships among HR graduates in Bangalore, aligning with previous studies. As observed in various dimensions of employability skills, such as teamwork, sector-specific knowledge, communication, computer proficiency, adaptability in new environments, writing, problem-solving, planning, decision-making, numeracy, and language proficiency, these differences indicate the distinct impact of the internship modality on skill acquisition. Saidani (2022) emphasized that onsite internships tend to provide students with a conducive environment for building professional networks, exploring career pathways, and gaining experiential learning competencies. The findings also align with the concept of high-impact practices in college curricula, which emphasizes the role of onsite internships in fostering engagement, persistence, and learning among undergraduate students, as mentioned in the literature review.

Onsite internships, characterized by hands-on experiences and face-to-face interactions, have been found to be more effective in cultivating a wider range of employability skills. The literature review supports this by

highlighting the advantages of onsite internships in fostering not only technical skills but also essential soft skills, such as teamwork and communication (Jones, 2015). Parker (2016) also emphasized the value of onsite internships in enhancing social and professional networks. This aligns with the findings of the present study, where onsite internships demonstrated superior skill development in various dimensions. In contrast, virtual internships, while offering flexibility and accessibility, showed a broader range of outcomes with a noticeable variability in the development of employability skills, which is consistent with the challenges associated with virtual work discussed by O'Shea (2023).

The positive correlation between internship experiences and employability skills emphasizes the importance of high-quality internships in enhancing the career prospects of HR graduates. Choe (2023) previously acknowledged the greater impact of internships on employability when the internships have a longer duration. This finding highlights the need for HR programs and employers to focus on enriching internship experiences, as advocated in the literature. The research contributes to our understanding of the impact of internships on employability and provides practical insights for HR programs and employers aiming to enhance the skill development and employability of graduates in a dynamic and competitive job market.

Hypotheses Testing

	Internship Experience	Employability Skills
Internship Experience	—	
Employability Skills	0.477 ***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4: Correlation matrix for internship experience and employability skills

H1. There is a significant relationship between internships and the employability skills of HR graduates.

The correlation matrix shows a strong and significant positive correlation ($r = 0.477$, $p < .001$) between internship experience and employability skills among HRDM graduates, indicating that as internship experience increases, so does the development of employability skills. Hence, H1 is retained.

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Internship Experience	Onsite	79	76.8	79	9.32	1.049
	Virtual	77	56.4	57	11.9	1.36
Employability Skills	Onsite	79	50.2	52	5.54	0.623
	Virtual	77	38.9	40	10.2	1.16

Table 5: Group descriptives for two modalities of internship

H2. There is a significant difference between the employability skills of graduates who did onsite internships and those who completed virtual internships.

The group descriptives show a significant difference in employability skills between HR graduates who completed onsite internships (mean = 50.2) and those who undertook virtual internships (mean = 38.9). Graduates who completed onsite internships have a higher mean value compared to those who completed

virtual internships indicating better employability skill development for onsite interns. Hence, H2 is retained.

Conclusion

The discoveries of this research hold numerous significant ramifications for HR graduates as well as the institutions and organizations involved in their education and career advancement. The notable disparities in the development of employability skills between physical and virtual internships highlight the crucial role of hands-on, in-person learning experiences in fostering a wide array of essential skills. These disparities align with the existing body of literature, which has emphasized the value of physical internships in enhancing employability. The positive correlation between the duration and depth of internship experiences and the development of employability skills further emphasizes the necessity for HR programs and employers to prioritize expanding and enriching internship opportunities. With this objective in mind, educational institutions should contemplate strengthening their internship programs by advocating for physical experiences and offering additional support for virtual internships to ensure that students acquire a comprehensive skill set and valuable professional networks. Employers should recognize the crucial role of internships in molding the employability of HR graduates as well as collaborate with educational institutions to provide crafted internships that align with industry needs and expectations. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the significance of internships in graduate employability, presenting practical insights for stakeholders to enhance the career prospects of HR graduates in a competitive job market.

Limitations of the Study

This research does come with certain limitations that must be acknowledged for a comprehensive understanding of its scope. Firstly, the study's reliance on a relatively small sample size raises concerns about its statistical power and the extent to which the findings can be generalized. With a limited number of participants, there is a risk that the results might not fully capture the diversity and variability within the broader population of HR students. The use of convenient sampling, while practical, introduces sample bias. This non-random selection of subjects can compromise the study's representativeness, and the insights derived from such a sample might not adequately reflect the diversity within the entire population of HR students. The geographical limitation of this research to Bangalore is another important consideration. Bangalore's unique characteristics in terms of HR education and employment opportunities might not align with those of other cities or countries, making it essential to be cautious when applying the research's findings in a more global or diverse context. The study's exclusive focus on HR students narrows the scope of the research and restricts the generalizability of its results to graduates from other academic disciplines.

Implication of the Research

The present research has laid a solid foundation for future investigations in the field of internships and employability among HR graduates. To expand the scope of research in this area, one promising avenue is to conduct a longitudinal study that tracks the long-term career trajectories of HR graduates who have participated in various types of internships. Such a study could assess not only the immediate impacts of internships on employability but also their enduring effects on career advancement, job satisfaction, and overall professional development. By examining whether the benefits of internships persist or evolve over time, researchers can offer valuable insights into the sustainability of these experiential learning opportunities in shaping HR graduates' careers.

Additionally, exploring the role of mentorship and support systems during internships could be a fruitful area for future research. Investigating the influence of mentorship on employability outcomes, including the development of specific skills and the cultivation of professional networks, would provide a deeper

understanding of the components that contribute to successful internship experiences. Furthermore, examining how HR graduates perceive and value mentorship within the context of their internships can shed light on the extent to which mentorship enhances their employability. Research in this direction could inform internship program design and help educational institutions and employers tailor their support systems to maximize the impact of internships on HR graduates' employability and career development.

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