

# Effectiveness of student internship



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Introduction. The purpose of this study is to describe an internship program targeted at adolescents and aimed at addressing the competences needed. This study involved three main stakeholders: scholars, educators and employers engaged in the internship program. The intent is to gain a better understanding of how each group works together to equip scholars with the relevant college and career readiness competences and meet employer competences needs. Examining the experiences of scholars, employers and educators engaged in internships will reveal how such programs can enhance college and career readiness among scholars and address employer competences needs. Developing a rich descriptions of the structure and organization of the program establish the context for the internship and provided insights into the challenges and opportunities of those engaged in the program.

This proposal will use a qualitative case study method (Creswell, 2013, Yin, 2009, Merriam, 1998) to explore internships and to guide the data collection, analysis and the reporting of the study. Components addressed in this section will be: (a) research design; (b) data collection and analysis; (c) ethical considerations to ensure validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Qualitative studies provide richness and holism to the analysis of the phenomenon under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and since such studies occur in natural settings, researchers can examine a phenomenon within its context. A qualitative method enables the researcher to understand the meaning and purpose that individuals ascribe to their activities, (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) by finding out intangible factors and contextualizing the participants' experiences. Also, qualitative research affords the researcher

an opportunity to understand an issue or phenomenon that cannot be easily quantified (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative method is suited for exploring the phenomenon of internships within the context of the program which is geared towards equipping adolescents with industry-relevant competences and addressing employer competences needs. Conducting a case study on internships within the context of a local organization and examining this intersection of employers, scholars, and educators will enabled the researcher gain a holistic understanding of their experiences. It will also allowed the researcher to delve into the complexities and subtleties of the phenomenon and provide an opportunity to explore policy, knowledge and practice as they relate to internship programs. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as, “ a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” Qualitative research is further discussed by Merriam (2009), “ researchers are fascinated in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, meaning they attribute to their experiences”. A qualitative case study method is determined to be the best method to get the information needed to answer the research question and sub-questions. Qualitative research allows the researcher to study participants in their natural setting in order to “ make sense of or to interpret a phenomena in terms of the meanings the people bring to them”, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

## Audience

Purposeful sampling will be to select the participants for this study. In purposeful sampling, the “ researcher selects individuals and a site to study because they can purposefully inform the understanding of the research

problem and central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013). This study will be conducted as a single instrumental and embedded case study and focused on a high school internship programs in a local school district in a western part of North Carolina in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the United States during the 2016-2017 scholastic year.

Several participants will be included in this study. The participants in the study will agree to take part on the condition that their identities would be protected. Thus, pseudonyms will be assigned to each of them to help maintain confidentiality. The following paragraphs will include the three units of analysis (the employer, the scholars and the educators) and provide a summarized biography of each participant.

Three units of analysis will be examined. Unit of Analysis 1: The scholars (teens’) internship program within the organization. Unit of Analysis 2: Educators high school setting. Unit Analysis 3: Employers involved in the internship program.

Examination of Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Frameworks. It is beneficial for consumers of research to understand the philosophical assumptions of the researcher in relation to reality (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the values that underpin the research process (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2010). Beliefs about the world and what reality is (ontology) are influenced by factors such as worldview which determine the kinds of questions why answers are sought. These factors determine what is being reality (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011).

My ontological belief is that reality is known through my participation with the different participants in the internship program as each participant would present multiple realities based on their views, experiences, worldviews, and contexts. Thus, when studying individuals, it is considerable to understand that reality is subjective as seen through many views, and my intent as the researcher should be to report the multiple views of participants as presented. Creswell (2013) explained that epistemological beliefs help the researcher determine what counts as knowledge. This knowledge is gained by getting close to the participants to understand their views and experiences. My epistemological stance required that I conduct my research in the participants' environments to gain a holistic understanding of internship and how the participants' contexts and experiences bore upon the phenomenon. By getting close to the participants and listening to them with an open mind, I understood their knowledge claims. My choice of research method enabled me to study an internship within the context of an organization to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

From an axiological standpoint, qualitative research is value laden as researchers bring their values and biases to bear on a study and how findings are interpreted (Creswell 2013; Glesne, 2011). Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom (2001) thus encouraged researchers to adopt an open stance and be receptive to information about the phenomenon under study as it is presented as this allows researchers to see things in a new way. In view of that, my duty as a researcher required that I maintain an open stance and make myself available to what I was studying and be willing to listen and

understand what I was being told with no judgment on my part. It is considerable that I suspended my assumptions and be open to learning from participants and not make any assumptions about what my participants knew or did. Through my extensive review and my experiences with the concept of internships, I will monitor my assumptions and biases and separate them from the data being presented by my participants. I had to be cognizant of how my previous knowledge about internships could influence my interpretation of the data. To prevent this from happening, I endeavored to jot down my feelings and perceptions about the information I received. Besides, gaining more insights into the phenomenon, adopting an open stance enabled me to identify dissenting views and report such evidence in this study, enriching the study with information that could be beneficial to the different stakeholders fascinated in internships.

The social constructivist or interpretivist framework (Creswell 2013) guided the interpretation of the study. Through this viewpoint, I strove to co-construct the meaning of the world where the participants lived and worked. Given the varied factors that influence the success of internships, it is considerable to uncover the complexity of views that each of the participants held as their views would be informed by the context in which they worked, the resources available to them, and the cultural, economic and political environments in which participants found themselves. It is through my interaction with the participants I could explore and describe the role of internships in enhancing college and career readiness competences and to address employer competences needs. As a result, the knowledge I gained and my findings were co-created with my participants. Due to the value-

laden nature of research, my background and values could influence the interpretations I make throughout the study. Thus, to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in my research, my values and role as a researcher and what influenced my interest to this topic and research is discussed in the next subsection.

### My Role as a Researcher

My interest in internship programs for high school scholars stems from my readings and scholarly work as a graduate student that focused on workforce development and the need to address the competences gaps in the labor market. My interest is initially stimulated during my new position as a career development coordinator with Career and Technical Education.

The notion of internship is personal as I raised in Parkton, North Carolina. In the educational system, attainment of a college degree is seen as the only path to success. However, the educational system and available resources privilege only a few scholars who are able to achieve a college degree. A large population of the scholars neither has a college degree nor gains any employable competences after high school. Although introducing technical vocational education and training systems allows for internship training in the secondary school system, there are minimal partnerships with core industries that can help scholars and drive the economy. Therefore, there is little realization of the economic that enjoys these programs since most of the training is for low impact industries resulting in low wages and with little interest to scholars. As compared to countries with well-established internship systems where public policy, education, industry and scholar

interest are aligned to benefit all stakeholders, these elements do not integrate well in a place like Parkton, NC.

I hope that this research will shed better understanding of how such elements integrate and can be refined and adapted to meet different contexts. Most of the literature I reviewed showed a need to focus on high schools to attract scholars into internships. I realized through scholarly readings and experiences that the concept of internship had been an ongoing initiative in the United States for many years. However, with the push for college and higher education, the focus of training individuals to enter the labor market had shifted to formal schooling over the years. Despite the rise in formal schooling, changes in educational policies aimed towards a better educated workforce to meet the needs of the 21st century labor market do not show how the perpetual competences' gap among labor market candidates can be fully addressed. This is evident from the concerns expressed by employers that a large proportion of American scholars graduating from high school enter the labor market with no knowledge of relevant competences-scholastic, technical or career-related-to succeed (Stone & Lewis, 2012). As stakeholders seek to address the problem of competences gaps, internship programs have re-emerged as a possible career pathway, despite their controversial implementations in the past which had resulted in varying degrees of success or failure. The problem with the internship system in the United States is that programs are arbitrary and discrete, with the averaging internship participant age about 27 years when they enter the programs. Also, many young adults stumble into internships



to last resort, only to find out that those internships offered a stable and consistent career through the acquisition of industry-relevant competences.

This topic is considerable because in the communities where I have lived, many kids were left behind when they failed to pursue the traditional scholastic route. I also believe such programs, when well thought out and coordinated, may offer a possible way out and a means to advancement in people's lives. On a personal level, I enjoy the scholastic stimulation of engaging and sharing my ideas and research which can impact society. It is my belief that when supported with the right resources and vested stakeholders, internships can offer our young people a sense of purpose and meaning. They also provide several professional and personal benefits to those stakeholders who pursue them such as the organizations that sponsor and hire these Internships.

## Instruments

**Data Collection Procedures.** In this study, the data will be collected primarily through interviews with participants and supplemented with observations and document review. Interviewing participants is an ideal and considerable tool since it allows the researcher to gain insights into the feelings and thoughts that are not readily observed and are usually the most considerable tool in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

An interview protocol will be developed using semi-structured interviews to aid in organizing ideas and ensuring that vital questions were not missed.

Individual, face- to- face interviews will be attempted and additional

information will be gathered through emails and phone conversations. The participants will be interviewed at different times and in different locations.

Data collection will involve a series of interrelated activities that adds depth and breadth to a study by producing the best answers needed to answer a research question (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). In this study, the data will be collected primarily through interviews with participants and supplemented with observations and documents' review.

The interviews with the scholars will occur in their school instead of the worksite. With the consent of the principal and the scholars, the interviews with the interns will be scheduled during school period when they had elective classes such as aiding or study competences to not interfere with their core courses. The interview questions to the scholars will focus on their experiences as interns, lessons learned and their plans in relation to the program. The internships will provide insight into their perceptions of the program and the benefits and challenges involved. Interviews with the educators will be conducted at their respective schools and in the district coordinator's office. The interview questions that will be posed to the educators will provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of the partnership program with the employer organization. Interviews with participants from the employer group will be conducted within the organization. Interview questions will focus on the reasons for starting the program, their experiences, challenges and opportunities in developing and implementing the program and overall goals of the program.

At the beginning of each interview, I will explain the purpose of the study and the interview, reiterated how long the interviews will take and explained to participants their rights. The interviews will be structured to last only one hour. Creswell, 2013 suggested that a researcher use “ open ended, general and focused questions that are aimed at understanding the central phenomenon of a study”. Most of the interview questions will be open-ended to generate rich information from participants. Probing statements and questions such as “ Tell me more,” “ Can you explain further?” or “ You had mentioned that” and “ Can you elaborate on that?” will be used to elicit further information or clarify points made by participants. Each of the interviews will be recorded, transcribed and stored on a password-protected computer and an external hard drive. Creswell (2013) noted that the use of multiple sources of data is helpful in providing “ corroborative evidence for validating the accuracy of a study”.

Additional data will be collected through observations that I will conduct at the organization while the interns are at work. Data from observations typically include activities, actions and behaviors, while data from documents can include records, correspondence and official publications, photographs and other physical artifacts (Patton, 2002). During this time, I will observe activities, behavior and other observable experiences among the participants as they performed their daily routines. In addition, documents such as training manuals, internships’ handbooks and other materials will be analyzed to uncover more insights that would supplement interview data. I will also use field notes and journals to record insights and feelings useful in helping me understand and interpret my findings.

An considerable part of the data collection process will involve developing a timeline so that the process would run smoothly. Due to the participants' schedules, data will be collected over a three-month period. After identifying gatekeepers at the research site, I will meet with each of them to explain the purpose of the study and sought their approval to use their organizations as study sites. Once approval from the local school district has been received, letters of consent will be sent to each of the participants. Parental consent will be sought from parents of the scholars who are under 18 years of age. The signed letters of consent will be collected prior to the interviews.

Due to the emergent design of a qualitative study, I will to remain flexible and adaptable to changing the method. Sales and Folkman (2000) explained that “ flexibility and tolerance are considerable attributes at the planning stage”; therefore, when researchers are “ inflexibly wedded to a particular design” that can hinder them from designing a plan that is scientifically and ethically sound, “ it can cause major ethical violations as researchers”. This principle of flexibility was applied when adjustments were needed to accommodate the schedules of participants and when the inclusion of other participants was suggested.

Once the interviews are completed, the data will be transcribed and folders will be created for each of the participants and labelled. A contact summary form will reflect on each interview and summarize the key points and trends identified in a particular interview. The next step in the analysis process will involve a review of the data to get a sense of it. This will enable the researcher to review pertinent information and to understand how each participant's answers provided information to the research question. The

data will then describe and be interpreted by forming categories that best represented the data. Creswell (2013) noted that this critical phase involves building detailed descriptions by describing what is seen and interpreting the data in light of the views or the perspectives in the literature.

The next step involved coding the data by condensing the text and providing codes based on evidence from the database, a process that required appropriately describing the information collected. After identifying the themes in the data, the next step involved interpreting the data by “abstracting the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2013). Throughout the interpretation process, meanings will be attributed to the themes by grouping the information and relating those groups to the study questions and linking them to literature.

Research Design. Case studies are appropriate when one is studying a contemporary, real life situation bounded in time and location (Creswell, 2013; Yin 2009). Yin (2009) noted that a case study design permits the researcher to interview the participants of the phenomenon under study (in this case, the internship programs) and observe first-hand the participants as involved in the study. Case studies involve rich, contextual descriptions that allow the researchers to study internal and external factors that influence a phenomenon. Although case studies are typically not generalizable, the value of case studies is that they provide a deeper and richer understanding of a phenomenon, suggest complexities for further investigations or refine theory, and help to establish the limits of generalizability (Yin, 2009). When done well, the case study can provide a vicarious experience that can support and action for a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). By using a <https://assignbuster.com/effectiveness-of-student-internship/>

case study method, the hope is that this study will provide detailed information on how internships can be developed and advanced as a pedagogical method that enhance the competences needed by adolescents as they transition into adulthood and meet employer competences needs.

Single Case Study. Multiple case studies are deemed preferable to single case studies because comparison from other examples provides valuable knowledge to the audience and are perceived to be more rigorous. However, Yin (2009) affirmed that a single case study is an appropriate design when the aim of the researcher is to describe an unusual case “ that deviates from everyday occurrences as the findings may reveal insights about a process or a program and provide value for large number of people beyond those impacted by the particular case”. Yin (2009) explained that focusing on a single case offers readers and the researcher the opportunity to draw out the uniqueness of the case by providing a comprehensive understanding of all stakeholders impacted by the phenomenon.

Regarding the current study, the study of a single internship program enabled the researcher to uncover the complexities of the program and understand how each of the stakeholders contributed to the goals of the study. In a similar vein, Stake (2000) alleged that when researchers focus on comparisons of multiple cases, “ uniqueness and complexities can be glossed over, because when readers are presented with other cases to compare with, they often focus on one case as readers and rarely learn much from other compared cases” Yin (2009) suggested that subunits can be incorporated into the unit of analysis to create an embedded single case study design or to enhance the rigor of a single case study design. Thus, in <https://assignbuster.com/effectiveness-of-student-internship/>

the current study, the internship program within the using organization was identified as the unit of analysis. Embedded within the case was the taking part high school scholars and the district educational personnel. Although an embedded design adds richness and rigor, it is not without pitfalls. Yin (2009) noted that to ensure an embedded design's trustworthiness, the researcher will need to tie the results of each of the subunits to the larger unit of analysis so the original phenomenon of interest (in this case, the internship program) remains the target of the study.

Data Analysis. Qualitative studies produce volumes of data and to avoid getting lost in a sea of data, the data collection and data analysis process should be interwoven. This helps the researchers in managing the data and provides opportunities to identify gaps in their data collection (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Once the interviews are completed, the data will be transcribed and folders for each of the participants created and labeled. A contact summary form will be used to reflect and summarize the key points and trends identified in a particular interview. The next step in the analysis process will involve a review of the data to get a sense of them. Yin (2009) referred to this process as “ playing with your data”. The goal here is to immerse myself in the data to understand what was going on before proceeding to the next steps. This will enabled me to review pertinent information and to understand how each participant's answers provided information to the research question. After exploring the database to get a grasp on the data, I will inscribe and interpret the data by forming categories that best represented the data. Creswell (2013) noted that this critical phase involves building detailed descriptions by describing what is

seen and interpreting the data in light of the views or the perspectives in the literature.

The next step will involve coding the data by condensing the text and providing codes based on evidence from the data. Coding is an essential step in the analysis as it helps the researcher identify the major themes in the data and allows the emergent nature of qualitative research to evolve (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). During this process, I will choose codes that appropriately described the information gleaned. After identifying the themes in the data, the next step involved interpreting the data by “abstracting the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2013). Throughout the interpretation process, I will attribute meanings to the themes by grouping the information and relating those groups to the study questions and linking them to literature.

The tentative findings will be discussed with chair. The findings will then be further refined, and a draft report will be sent to the chair for their review and feedback. The data will then be presented in a table format to illustrate the different levels of abstraction (Creswell, 2013) and to outline how I arrived at the conclusion and results of the interpretation. The final report of the case study will then be included in a detailed description of the internship program and its context. Providing a history of the program will help to organize the data and provide the reader with a context within which the research study was conducted. It concluded with a description of the experiences of the stakeholders (employer, scholars and educators) and how those experiences influenced the implementation and operation of the program. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that using interpretive and

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material sources in qualitative research makes the world visible to readers by “ turning the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews and memorandums to self”. Interviewed participants will tell their personal stories and will be encouraged to explain the actions and activities that occurred as the program evolved. Many of the findings will be told through the voices of the participants. Thus, direct quotes from the participants will be incorporated into the final report to reflect their voices.

Methods for Verifications (Ethical Considerations). This section outlines steps that will be taken to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Once the case was identified, I will connect with gatekeepers of the organizations involved to explain the purpose of the study and to gain access to the participants for the study. Prior to collecting data, approval was sought from Gardner Webb University. Approval will also be sought from the educational district office since the study included scholars from the district who are considered a protected group. To gain approval to begin the study, I will develop a consent form for participants and an assent form for the parents of internships under the age of 18. The form will describe the purpose of the study, its benefits to the participants, how much time would be spent collecting data and how the findings would be used. Participants will be notified of their rights to end their involvement in the study and measures that would be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Due to my obligation as a researcher to protect the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms will be used.

To gain an in-depth understanding of internships, their structure and organizations and the experiences of those living the phenomenon, it is

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considerable to spend a substantial amount of time in the field interviewing and observing the participants. While this is a necessary step, I have to be respectful of the participants' time and make sure our meetings or interactions are completed at their convenience so as not to disrupt their lives. The prolonged engagement in the field was necessary to build trust with the study participants and to understand the nuances of the phenomenon. It helped me to identify issues salient to the study.

To corroborate the findings and to ensure that researchers gains comprehensive information, Yin (2009) advised that researchers use diverse data gathering tools such as interview, observations, archival records and physical evidence where available. The process of triangulation is an ethical expectation that enables the researcher to illuminate a theme or perspective while ensuring the rigor and validity of the study (Creswell, 2013).

Since the dissertation process is a solo process, it is considerable that I have debriefings and review sessions with my dissertation chair and peers who could provide an aim perspective and reveal any blind spots by asking me questions about my conclusions and assumptions. I will schedule meetings with my chair to provide him progress updates and to seek feedback from him.

Data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer and on an external hard drive. To maintain confidentiality, I will ensured that the information received from interviews is not shared with others without the consent of the participants. Although this kind of research posed no considerable risk to participants due to my questions and the characteristics

of participants, I realized that no research study is void of risks, and thus, it is considerable to respect the research sites. Also, the participants' time is respected to not inconvenience stakeholders.

Once the major themes were developed in the analysis phase, the information is shared with participants to judge if I had ascribed the correct meanings to the data and if there are any discrepancies in interpreting the data. This member checking process was vital in determining the credibility of the research study (Creswell, 2013). To impact the targeted audience and to allow them to draw conclusions from the study, the final report includes rich descriptions of the participants and the contexts of the study (Stake, 2000) and direct quotes from the participants which provided a rich, vicarious experience to the target audience.

### Limitations

This case study provides an in-depth description of one internship program. The study focused on one program could be perceived as a limitation. Although the findings may apply to other organizations, generalizations of the findings to other contexts such as an established program or another industry may have severe limitations. A comparative case would provide additional insights and boost the findings of the study.

### Summary

The researcher of this study adopted a qualitative method to describe a school-industry partnership that offered internship training to scholars. In the following chapter, the results will be presented using thick, rich descriptions.

The findings illuminate practices that enhance internship programs and provide an understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by stakeholders.