



Reflections on Mainstreaming Internship in University Curricula with specific reference to the Experience of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Makerere University

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Abstract. Makerere University mainstreamed field based learning (internship) into all its undergraduate study programmes. Initially internship was conducted only in professional courses like Education, Social Work and Law. However, due to criticism that the University was producing graduates who are not in touch with the realities in the workplace, the University rethought its approach and now requires all second year undergraduate students to undergo internship. Although this change presented several opportunities, mainstreaming internship across a multiplicity of study programmes also presented numerous challenges. This paper provides an ethnographic reflection of three of the university's academics (involved in the supervision of students' internship) on these challenges. It also discusses their lessons from participating in the implementation of the internship programme.

Keywords: Internship; Curriculum innovation; Higher education reform.

1 Introduction

There seems to be a general opinion that a gap really exists between the quality of graduates produced and what the market demands (Bukaliya, 2012). That is why two years ago, Makerere University introduced internship programs in all her undergraduate study programs. Since 2010 and for three consecutive academic years, Makerere University has sent out students for internship as part of its strategic plan to produce well-prepared and equipped graduates who can meet the demands of the market place as elaborated in the field attachment policy (Makerere University 2007). Despite the

implementation challenges that are associated with a new policy shift, internship as a practice has been taking roots in several ways, both within Makerere and in other universities.

The roles that internships have taken are increasingly getting more important in education over the last few years. Internship plays a significant part in the lives of the students ranging from gaining experience and obtaining career-related direction to networking with other students from various institutions as they attend training at the organization providing the internship. The host institutions offering internship programs have also benefitted through increased cooperation and building networks with the universities.

Internship also caters for other nomenclature such as industrial training, field attachment, and school practice among others. It involves an equivalent of at least eight weeks of fulltime, academically relevant, practical experience in the students' field of professional interest. This takes place at the end of second semester for second year students.

For students of Humanities and Social Sciences, internship is undertaken in Non-governmental organisations, cultural institutions, historical sites, archaeological excavations, government ministries and departments, hospitals, media houses, theatres among many others. The internship is fundamental for students' learning experiences because it enables them to establish a practical connection between their academic theories and the marketplace and professional world. Most of the students joining higher education in tertiary institutions in Uganda are usually fresh from high school, having attained an advanced certificate in secondary education, without any work experience. They join university and within three to four years they complete and are sent out for employment, yet in many cases without having a prior exposure to the world of work. In the recent past, stakeholders have complained that much as the graduates were academically excellent, in many cases they were not able to execute the duties assigned to them, due to the lack of relevant skills.

Therefore, Makerere responded by putting in place a Field Attachment policy, which requires students to go out after second year to have a hands-on experience in the workplace. Internship aims at the following objectives:

- Providing students with an opportunity to have a hands-on experience with work
- Enabling students to experience and learn how to deal with the challenges, methods, constraints and procedures in professional life.
- Giving students a chance to experience the distinction between abstract academic theory and concrete daily practice

This paper analyses the experience of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS), one of the colleges in the university, in mainstreaming internship within the University's curriculum. In doing so it touches on various

issues such as internship and time, costing, supervision, assessment and evaluation of the internship process.

2 Methodology

This paper was written utilising a cross section of sources. This included reviewing relevant documents, students' reports, assessment of agency supervisors' reports and discussions with students to gauge their expectations regarding the internship process. Further data was collected through the actual supervision process over the last two years. These were used as organisers along which our reflections regarding the internships process has been categorised and presented. Data analysis was done using content and thematic analysis, paying attention to key issues raised in direct interviews and consultations as well as feedback that the various departments and schools received from the stakeholders.

3 The Internship Process

Placing students in agencies across the country is a very complex administrative and academic process. Considering that Internship in Makerere University college of humanities and social sciences (except other fieldwork-oriented programme such as social work, mass communication, development studies) is a second year phenomenon, the pre-placement period covers the period between reporting and registration of second year students, preparation of students (specialised lectures), visit and reconnaissance of agencies and briefing of academic staff regarding the supervision process.

The preparation of students should ideally be strategic and done well in advanced of the students' placement. Similarly visits, to the agencies to continue to engage the training institution (field) and bring them on board new partner to ensure that students are fully placed in agencies which have activities and appreciates the philosophy and spirit of the internship, the welfare of the students and any other issue which would enhance the success of the training and the accomplishment of the internship placement objectives. As we will discuss later in the discussion section, we shall show that while the Makerere university guidelines for internship are very elaborate and provide important steps that could ensure a very smooth placement, their actual implementation during the last two years was beset by administrative, contextual and other difficulties which could have presented difficulties in ensuring a smooth internship experience.

3.1 Duration and Timing of Internship

The current internship design allows for internship period of a minimum of 8 weeks per year. While the fieldwork manual (Makerere University 2007) unequivocally says the period should last for not less than 8 weeks, most departments have not been able to officially recommend a period exceeding 8 weeks due to the timing of semesters and the time third year students are expected to report back to the University. When Makerere was still under the terms system (1999 and before) some course like Social work were placing students for a maximum of 10 weeks during the long vacation (block placement) and a further concurrent fieldwork practice lasting from October to April of the academic year ending in June. Such an arrangement is however only feasible for certain courses. For the general student who never did internship as a direct professional requirement of the course, the current objective is to expose them to the world of work and make them relevant to their communities and Ugandan society in general.

3.2 Posting Students

This includes the actual allocations of the students to field agencies, making sure that as much as possible students are matched to their organisation of interest. Student placement is ideally supposed to be done by the Internship coordinator who does the actual visits to the agencies. He/she matches specific agencies according to their relevance to the courses and the student's interest. As stated in the Makerere Field attachment guidelines (Makerere University 2007), the criteria that the coordinators use to select suitable sites include:

- Availability of suitable field supervisors:
- Availability of supportive facilities for learning for the student
- Availability of on-going activities to provide learning experiences to the student(s)
- Gender needs
- Health and safety of the site

It is important to note that the student's placement is complete by the beginning of semester two. The coordinator then draws a list of all second year interns, the places where each student is going, their telephone contacts and the contacts of the agency contact persons. The list is displayed for the students to ascertain the accuracy of information as well as make changes where necessary. After the student's placement is confirmed and by the last few weeks of the semester, students are given briefings about the procedural matters and processes of internship by the student.

3.3 Students' Record Keeping

The students are expected to keep a weekly and daily record of all activities that they have engaged in. This daily journal/log book entry will serve specific purposes. **1.** Train students with the importance of record keeping, **2.** Generate accountability for time taken in the field, and **3.** provides a training framework for discipline and the importance of knowledge generation and institutional memory preservation.

The daily journal recording is done in a pre-arranged framework clearly bringing out the activities participated in, how that activity is relevant to the students learning and theories learnt in class and the lesson that the student has learnt in the process of carrying out the activity. Assessment of students' record keeping and their daily journal entries indicated that the majority of students had understood the utilisation of the reporting format and had adhered to it very well. However the section requiring application of the courses to practice and relatedness to the courses still gave some students difficulties, showing that many of the students either do not know the relevant social science theories or are not able to relate them to the work situation they had been exposed to.

3.4 Supervision of Students on Internship

Supervision is a very important component of internship and it takes two dimensions: supervision by the host agency; and supervision by the academic supervisor. In our experience of coordinating internship, we consider supervision to be a central and critical element of the programme. It ought to be done efficiently if students are to benefit from their time at any place of work. Reflecting on CHUSS supervision culture, it suffices to say that, it is dynamic because of the broad range of courses that are offered and the big numbers of students. Practically, each school prepares the lists of students that are distributed to academic supervisors who then go to various places to meet the students and evaluate whether some learning is taking place as the students put into practice what they have learnt so far. While at work, the students are assigned supervisors commonly referred to as 'host supervisors' who follow the internee on a regular basis to ensure that the expected work is done, work ethos, and in general to provide feedback to both the students and the academic supervisor. This interaction is very useful for assessing the students' progress as well as evaluating the relevancy of what is taught in class and what is done or expected in real-life situations of work.

Supervision is one of the most rewarding components of internship because through it the tripartite encounter takes place namely: the student, the host and the academic supervisor. In the learning context, it is a rewarding process

where the student receives feedback from both the field supervisor and the academic supervisor. This therefore, calls for carefully observation, handling, processing and communication so that the student benefits from it and is able to reflect on what he has been told. The field supervisor is the expert at work, the academic supervisor comes in handy to cross-check, offer clarity where it is needed and to align what is happening in the field to what the university expects of the students.

The Makerere University internship guidelines require that supervision is done at two distinct levels; the on-site level day-to-day supervision by the field supervisor and the academic supervisor from the university. The purpose of the internship supervision is to permit the student reflect on the practical experience gained in the field. It provides an opportunity for the student to describe what he/she has done, what he/she has learned, and to place the experiences within the context of the organization, the community and the Makerere University programs. The student is expected to reflect creatively about his/her contribution to the profession and the professional value of the placement.

4 Challenges involved in Internship

The process of placement for students of humanities and social sciences has not been easy for the last three consecutive years. Placement involves identification of potential and actual places of work that are relevant for training and learning. Ideally the process has to be managed by faculty coordinators of internship to enable students obtain places relevant for their disciplines. This is an engaging process but also heavily demanding in the example of CHUSS where student numbers are big but also variant in disciplines. Not only that but also other universities across the country release students for internship at the same time (mainly June to August) and so there is gross competition for attachment. Given that, the process requires serious networking, teamwork and early planning with appropriate facilitation

Implementation of the internship programme took four different stages beginning with the *organization of the field attachment, placement of the students, and supervision of interns during the field attachment work and the evaluation*. Previous studies also show that internship periods were criticized for being too short and even with Makerere; the majority of interns think that the most appropriate internship period should be more than the two months offered for internships. Mihail (2006) also found in his study that most of the interns preferred to have internship periods ranging from six to nine months instead of three months. This is a trend which shows that students prefer longer

internship period because it is only then when they can learn something sufficient and crystallize their field experiences.

At another level, internships are also negatively looked on as bringing into the workplace disagreement among workers in a range of ways. Internships sometimes dislodge paid workers and allow companies to dodge liabilities through the non-payment of intern labour. Interns accept the post with no pay because the duration of the internship is counted as a course unit being offered at the university. Such drawbacks can be understood at the different stages of the internship process. These different stages all carry different types as well as magnitude of drawbacks.

4.1 The Organization Stage

This stage begins with the registration of students for the field attachment exercise. As earlier stated, it involves the second year (Majors) in every subject. The registration process is abnormally very slow as many students do not take it serious. The registration is very important as it enables the coordinator to know the exact number of students he/she should budget for. This is also done to enable the coordinator know how many academic supervisors may be required for the supervision process. However, the students do not respond in time making the whole process sluggish.

Some students who are not very regular in class are often times ill informed about the requirements for internship hence may not even register for the paper. This complicates the exercise in a number of ways. First, the university bursar requires this list for funds to be disbursed to facilitate placement of students and when they do not register, the coordinator operates far below the actual number of students. Secondly, when funds are released for the students to go for the field attachment work, such students are not paid because their bio-data has not been captured and sent to the bursar. So when they are finally registered and the list sent, their moneys are processed late and they either receive it towards the end of the programme or fail to get it completely.

In 2012/2013 alone, 13 students of sociology and anthropology did not register in time and were not even placed. They reported at the time of departure for field attachment. Again it raised a number of drawbacks; finding places for them at the very last minute called for a lot of effort on the coordinator. With their lists sent very late to the bursar, they got paid money well after the attachment was concluded, and it meant that money for their supervision was never remitted because by that time requisitions had already been done and sent to the college.

The excessively long bureaucracy that Makerere University instituted for requisition and gaining access to funding is another obstacle which impedes the smooth running of the programme. The amount of time required for a

coordinator at the department to requisition and get funds is quite long. This has become a big impediment to the implementation of the program, for instance, whereas placement would be done in semester one, the funds are only available by mid semester two when all the universities around the country has placed their students. It was therefore quite a difficult task procuring placement for all our students.

4.2 Student Placement Phase

This phase entails the coordinator traversing the country looking for suitable places where the students can be placed to work. As mentioned earlier, the bureaucracy at the university creates complications for effective implementation of this process. Usually by the time the coordinators travel to the places (February ó March), other universities have already placed their students in the same organizations. It therefore becomes very difficult for coordinators to place the students.

Impediments are also faced in terms of inadequate funding for placement. The money released for this exercise is tagged on the number of students majoring in a given subject, hence even where one had a large number of students the money may not be enough for the coordinators to traverse the entire country to place the students in organizations that are relevant to their courses.

In the guidelines for field attachment it is stated that memorandum of understanding would be signed with organizations that take Makerere students for field attachment. However, there are very few MoUs that have been signed and it makes placement rely entirely on the coordinators own contacts and ability to negotiate with managers and directors in the participating organizations.

4.3 Supervision of Interns

The other challenge of internship is *supervision*. As indicated in the previous section is very important if internship is to be deemed beneficial at all. It is problematic in the sense that some organisations may not have enough staff to ably follow up the students. In the same scenario, some organisations have tight and very busy schedules that the supervision is irregular and lacking in rigour for an effective outcome. In another sense supervision is complicated by a gap in the planning period where the ideal would have been that before students reach their internship locations they already know both the field supervisors and faculty supervisors. So that preliminary arrangements can be made with regard to the exercise. The other problematic dimension of supervision is on the practicalities of faculty supervisors going to the various places to supervise the

students, some are hard to reach places, and others are not well profiled, so it is hard to establish the quality of staff that may be eligible for supervision of university students.

Obstacles during the supervision of interns begin with the bureaucracy that leads to the usually long delays in the release of funds for the exercise. In some cases, like it was the case in 2012/2013, some students were put on a one month internship while others started in the second month. There were difficulties with supervising the students who took part in the first month as funds were released after their period was gone.

There are students who worked in very remote areas where telephone network was very poor or not available and supervisors found it very difficult to get in touch with the students. Communication is a very vital element of the process of internship evaluation and when it fails it adversely affects the exercise. In addition, some parts of the country have very poor road infrastructure; for instance driving from Jinja to Kamuli on a very bad road surface is very problematic. Cases of such poor road network were reported in several areas including; Kabarole, Karamoja region, and Masindi. Such pitfalls affect the supervision process and impede the entire program.

Supervisors also complained of limited time they have to spend with the students. Many supervisors feel they should be able to observe the student practically engage in the work they are doing. However, that would involve the supervisors spending longer periods in the field and the university does not provide funding for that stay. Additionally, whereas the guidelines clearly stipulate that supervision will be done at least three times, supervisors are only sent once. This fact makes it easy for the students to leave their work places when the supervisors have already visited them.

The other practical challenge is the integration of internship in the curriculum. First of all CHUSS is multidisciplinary. For several departments internship is seen as an add-on, it is still not clear how many hours and therefore credit units it should be allocated. Moreover, at the places of work, the faculty is not in complete control of the workload given. For example some students on internship reported different schedules of work; whereas some worked Monday to Friday, others only reported for work three times a week. This remains challenging and also begs the question of quality assurance in the sense that how does faculty tell with absolute precision that the tasks/assignments or job description given to the interns are exactly what they are suited for? This in many ways is answered during report writing but even then, one needs to be provided with as much evidence as possible to be able to evaluate the success of the exercise and how it contributes to the overall performance of the students.

Comprehension of the program is still problematic to some students who are not very regular in class. The students find difficulties in relating what they are

doing in the organizations with the courses they have learnt at the university. Students perceive internship as a program that only relates to the courses they study in semester two of second year. Cases of students who have even forgotten what they studied in first year were quite common. In addition, though few, there are cases of students who did not work at all. They only report after learning that university supervisors have visited their work places. This indiscipline is largely reported of students who worked outside Kampala.

Evaluation of field attachment is done at two major levels; the on-site evaluation and academic evaluation. At on-site level, the supervisor appointed by the university is a person with practical experience based at the organization, while the academic evaluation is done by a qualified (Assistant Lecturer and above) academic staff.

There are several hiccups these evaluations face. There are cases where the on-site supervisors are less academically educated than the student. Some forms of derogatory relationship were found to exist between the student and the supervisor. This is a very delicate part of the process and when detected, the student is usually withdrawn, cautioned and placed elsewhere for the training. But that cannot be a panacea for such frictions; the students need to be socialized into accepting that established authority must be respected.

Makerere students are generally disciplined and know how to acquaint themselves with other people; so many of them end up as friends of their on-site supervisors who evaluate the student very high, for instance many students are awarded marks as high as 98% or 99%. There also exist situations where students work under direct supervision of their relatives or friends. The university has not set up a system to check for this anomaly. The remedy would be to allow the coordinators to fully take charge of placing the students. Again, that remedy cannot work because the amount of money that the students are given to go for internship is so little, therefore, they are allowed to go where they can manage to cater for their wellbeing. This lacklustre and lukewarm attitude with which Makerere University treats the program is undermining the progress of the internship.

The role of the cooperating institution where a field supervisor acts as a kind of mentor to the intern is very significant in making the internship program successful. The guidance and counsel given by the field supervisor is of the greatest importance in helping the intern's activities to be fulfilled. On-site supervisors complain that several of Makerere students could not write good reports. This is exhibited in either the weekly progress reports that the organization asks them to write or in the final academic report that they submit to the university. The students writing skills are generally poor and they do not even show knowledge of communication skills. Evidently, there is need for the University to place courses in communication skills in the curriculum to train

good and effective workers. The poor report writing is also apparent in the internship reports that the student presents at the end of the training.

The academic supervision that involves the academic supervisor travelling to the students' place of work is a very good idea. But the minimal facilitation and motivation that the university extends to these academics is demoralising. Every private sponsored student is charged 65,000 shillings for supervision. This amount of money is so little and the university does not supplement the contribution of the students yet these are university programs. The places where the supervisors go are so far stretching all over the country with some particularly far off from Kampala. For instance the supervisors find it very cumbersome to travel to Kaabong, Kotido and Moroto because despite being far from Kampala, the roads are almost impassable.

The marking of internship reports also leaves a lot to be desired. The university has not designed any standardized marking guide that supervisors can use to mark the reports. This leaves markers with the option of relying on impression to award marks. Just as the supervision tools are standardized, there would be a standardized marking guide for the internship reports.

Generally internship at the Makerere School of Social Sciences is implemented at the school level. However, with the collegiate system that Makerere University adopted, an increase in layers of bureaucracy curtails the smooth running of the program. The school being the academic unit where implementation is done would be most suitable for the disbursement of funds and supervision of activities related to internship. The college, therefore largely appears as a level that interferes with this process since it is neither an academic nor implementation unit but only administrative.

In terms of funding, the money for running the program is very small. There is need for more funding to cater for signing of MoUs, placements and increased supervision. The supervision of students is supposed to be done three times in the period of two months, but currently this is not the case. In many cases, the students leave the field immediately the supervisors visit them, because they know the supervisor will not return to the organization. The departments only send supervisors once to visit the student; therefore it leaves a lot to be desired.

Funding for the students is very minimal. Whereas the students pay this money, the amount refunded to them is too little to sustain the student for the two months period they spend in the field. The university appears to rely entirely on the students' contribution to run the program although it is in the mainstream university curriculum. The role and contribution of government and or the university is quite absent in this very important university program.

In several situations, students go to organizations of their choice for different reasons and not because they fall within their courses demands. The organizations where the students go for internships need to be ascertained by

the coordinators for their relevance to the courses before they are placed. This may involve the coordinator travelling to the organization to make an on-spot check, something that is not usually done at Makerere University.

In the field, the student is subject to supervision by an on-site supervisor who is not trained by the university on what the program is testing. These supervisors even evaluate and award marks to the student without proper and guidelines given to them. While some information is proved through the student pack, there is need for the on-site supervisors to be given a short term course on internship to acquaint them with the rudiments and requirements of internship to ascertain excellent quality university training.

5 Lessons Learnt

Our Reflections so far on the internship process and discussion with field supervisors as well as academic staff suggests a number of lessons which could help to improve the internship experience for all stakeholders: students, staff, University and host institutions.

Holding discussions with the interns before the commencement of the internship and talking about their/university/agency expectations, activities, areas of skills and knowledge development found in the courses they have studied. In these discussions, the coordinator also discusses activities, tasks and experiences and reviews progress, discussing successes and determining additional growth for the intern.

Early planning and especially with regard to placement arrangements, this is very important for the smooth running of other subsequent practicalities including supervision allocation. The success of the exercise lies much in how well planned it is, bearing in mind that the activities spring one from the other. Timely preparations right from the organization stage to the supervision makes the program to run smoothly. The time for internship is rather short and everything ought to be done as scheduled in the program. So, planning in good time has been an important lesson for CHUSS, given that the college has many students distributed throughout the country. This argument implies that as a unit last minute decisions ought to be avoided to enable all the stakeholders to operate within a clear framework spelling out all detailed arrangements. For example how many students a given institution will host, where will they reside for the eight weeks, do some of our students need special care? How does the host deal with such? It is apparently clear that a well prepared internship programme will undoubtedly enhance efficiency and effectiveness as well as stimulate the morale of the parties involved.

Effective communication and information flow to all stakeholders is paramount, in the sense that, participants will know what to do at a given time and what to expect. This is helpful for effective coordination because all responsible persons will in effect know and have control over what should be done. Internship is profoundly a people oriented activity which demands effective communication for it to succeed. Engaging all stakeholders at every stage (planning, execution and evaluation, etc), reporting and giving feedback in time is an important lesson because each party involved in internship has got expectations and a thorough discussion is necessary so that these expectations are shared out and treated with caution and a balance established to enhance a mutually acceptable work relationship which is beneficial to all the stakeholders. One way CHUSS has done this by inviting host supervisors and administrators to come and share as well as exchange ideas of how the programme could best be managed. This has had a rewarding impact on the relationship between the college and the host institutions.

Joint supervision as done in the School of Social Sciences makes the exercise less costly and effective. It is one sure way through which every student can be reached and the supervisor can relatively spend a little more time with the interns.

Good instruction to students at the preparation stage reduces the errors that students make during internship. For instance, recording daily experiences in the log book has been a problem to the students who missed out on the instructions. There is need to include internship in the university time table so that lectures on internship are mainstreamed in the curricular.

There is need for the university to source for adequate funding for internship. The students' contribution alone is not enough to cater for their welfare as well as fund the placement and supervision processes.

Evaluations at the end of the internship is good as it helps the units to adjust where things seem to go wrong and tailor the program to suit the needs of the learners and the employers.

Frequent consultations with strategic partners at the agency level with the university internship coordinators improves on the communication and general wellbeing of the student.

Another important lesson that has been learnt is the need to agree on standard format of internship training report writing, to be able to have a comparable report.

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