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A Comprehensive Analysis of Problems Faced by School Students during Internship Programme at Educational Institutions

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Abstract

According to National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), like all other professional programmes, Internship programme is an important part of teacher education programme. In the case of teacher education programmes, Internship programme involves engagement with the students and teachers in schools. This research paper investigates the multifaceted challenges encountered by secondary school students (Grades 9-12) participating in structured internship programmes facilitated by their educational institutions. While such programmes are promoted to enhance career readiness and practical skills, the transition from a controlled academic environment to a professional or semi-professional setting presents unique obstacles for adolescents. Utilizing a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, this study collected quantitative data via a structured survey from 457 students across 28 schools in diverse socio-economic settings, followed by in-depth qualitative interviews with 42 students and 15 internship coordinators. The analysis reveals four primary problem clusters: Systemic and Logistical Issues ($M=4.02$), Psychosocial and Developmental Challenges ($M=3.88$), Mentorship and Guidance Deficits ($M=3.76$), and Academic and Cognitive Dissonance ($M=3.65$). A significant finding was the negative correlation ($r = -0.72$, $p < 0.01$) between the clarity of pre-internship preparation and reported anxiety levels. Furthermore, qualitative data uncovered nuanced themes of "per formative anxiety," "identity negotiation in adult spaces," and the "burden of low expectations." The paper argues that unaddressed, these problems can lead to student disengagement, reinforce socio-economic inequalities, and undermine the pedagogical goals of experiential learning. It concludes with a framework for "Supported Transition Internships," advocating for mandatory mentor training, integrated reflective pedagogy, and systemic alignment between school calendars and internship partners to transform these programmes into genuinely equitable and developmental experiences.

Keywords: School Internships, Experiential Learning, Adolescent Development, Work-Based Learning, Internship Challenges, Educational Transitions.

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1. Introduction

Internship Programme is one lively practice programme for Pre-service teacher education system which enhances the skills and abilities of student teacher to improve the effectiveness of a teacher. A teacher play a major role to up bring the morals and values in a good citizen and to fulfil the aims and objectives made for the wellbeing of the society. A teacher is a responsible citizen of the country which improves all the above skills. Hence, Pre-service and In-service teacher education works as a pillar for future teachers who take up all the responsibilities for the betterment of the education system. Whenever the students introduce to themselves in teaching profession they need to understand the working of pre service

teacher education system. The student teacher apart from theoretical knowledge should perform practical or field work programme which cannot be done without Internship Programme. Internship Programme gave opportunities to student teacher to perform real teaching practice. It is vivacious part of Pre-service teacher education that improves the learners' gaffes by the regular direction of experts and teacher educators for one to two months or seven to eight weeks. An Internship Programme is only one of its kind educational programmes which aims the integration of study to students' on hand experiences. It is also planned for the benefits of young unemployed adolescents all over the world who have done 15-17 years of education. The main purpose

of Internship Programme is to build up and make stronger students skills and abilities to prepare them for the same profession. Internship Programme conducts relation between theory and practice of teaching profession. Without school based practice teaching, teaching profession is meaningless which is made meaningful only by Internship Programme.

The integration of internship programmes into secondary school curricula has become a global educational trend, positioned as a critical intervention to bridge the perceived gap between academic knowledge and 21st-century workforce competencies. Driven by policy frameworks emphasizing "college and career readiness," schools increasingly mandate or strongly encourage students in Grades 9-12 to undertake short-term placements in local businesses, non-profits, or research institutions. Proponents argue these experiences foster skill development, clarify career aspirations, enhance motivation, and provide valuable social capital. "According to Mirza (2012), the Internship Programme is of great importance because it ensures the professional preparation of students in different ways such as understanding of the target profession and future prospects of working conditions in that profession".

However, this push for early exposure often overlooks the complex developmental reality of the adolescent intern. Unlike their undergraduate counterparts, school students navigate internships while undergoing significant cognitive, emotional, and social maturation. They operate within stricter legal and safety constraints, possess less autonomy, and carry the simultaneous burden of a high-stakes academic curriculum. Consequently, the presumed linear benefit of "exposure" is frequently disrupted by a range of unforeseen challenges.

Despite growing prevalence, academic research on internships remains disproportionately focused on higher education. The school-level internship is often treated as a scaled-down version of the undergraduate model, neglecting its unique contextual and developmental parameters. This gap in the literature results in a cycle of poorly structured programmes, where systemic problems remain unarticulated and unaddressed, potentially leading to student stress, negative perceptions of certain careers, and the reinforcement of existing inequalities.

Importance of Internship Programme

- Develop the professional skills and abilities in students.
- Develop cooperation feeling, group working etc. by on hand experiences.
- It provides the real life experiences.
- Build more strong relation between one institutes to other institute.
- Student can understand rules, regulations, norms, culture etc. of other institution where they do their Internship Programme.
- Establish useful and healthy contacts with people working in the same profession.
- It is also gave more valuable exposure in the job profession.
- It helps to understand the aims of teaching profession and future prospects of working conditions.

In spite of all of the above benefits student teacher face so many problems while they go through Internship Programme. To solve the all problems it is necessary in teacher education system to identify their problems, difficulties and limitations etc. that are faced by student teacher during Internship

Programme. There are so many problems and difficulties like psychological, pedagogical, social and so on faced by student teachers. If these problems solved then student teacher could get a smooth environment to practice the lessons

This Study, Therefore, Seeks to Answer the Following Research Questions:

1. What are the primary categories of problems faced by school students during institution-facilitated internship programmes?
2. What is the relative prevalence and perceived severity of these problems?
3. How do factors such as grade level, gender, and type of host organization influence these experiences?
4. What systemic interventions can educational institutions implement to mitigate these challenges?

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this paper provides empirical data and nuanced analysis to move beyond anecdotal accounts, offering a foundation for evidence-based redesign of school internship programmes.

2. Literature Review

The Theoretical Underpinnings of this Research Intersect three Domains: experiential learning theory, adolescent developmental psychology, and the sociology of education.

Experiential Learning and the "Theory-Practice Gap": Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle posits that effective learning requires concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Internships are designed to provide the "concrete experience." However, research on professional internships highlights a recurring "theory-practice gap," where academic knowledge feels disconnected from workplace application (Jackson, 2015). For school students, whose academic knowledge is more foundational, this gap can be a chasm, leading to confusion and a sense of inadequacy if not carefully scaffolded.

Adolescent Development in Workplace Settings: Erikson's stage of *Identity vs. Role Confusion* is central to the adolescent experience. The internship becomes a forced arena for identity exploration within a power-laden, adult-centric environment. Cognitive theories (e.g., Elkind, 1967) on adolescent egocentrism-including the "imaginary audience" (feeling constantly observed)-suggest that the social dynamics of a workplace can be uniquely stressful. Furthermore, their still-developing executive functions (planning, inhibition, emotional regulation) may clash with workplace demands for punctuality, professionalism, and independent problem-solving.

Structural and Equity Concerns: Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is acutely relevant. Students from high socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds often access internships through familial networks, securing placements in prestigious, supportive environments that align with their existing cultural codes. In contrast, students from lower SES backgrounds may be placed through school in less resourced organizations, potentially facing more ambiguous roles and less mentorship, thus potentially reproducing social stratification (Sandoval *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, legal restrictions on tasks for minors can limit meaningful engagement, reducing the internship to passive observation or clerical work-the "busywork trap."

Existing studies on school internships are sparse but point to issues of preparation, supervision, and integration (Hughes, 2019). This study builds on this nascent foundation by

providing large-scale quantitative data paired with rich qualitative insights to map the problem landscape comprehensively.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design was employed. Phase 1 involved quantitative data collection via a survey to identify and quantify the prevalence of problems. Phase 2 utilized qualitative interviews to explore the meanings, contexts, and narratives behind the quantitative trends, allowing for a deeper understanding of the student experience.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Quantitative Sample: 457 students (Grades 9-12) were recruited through a stratified random sampling method from 28 public and private schools across urban (n=18), semi-urban (n=6), and rural (n=4) contexts. All participants had completed a school-facilitated internship of 2-6 weeks within the preceding 8 months. Demographic breakdown: 52% female, 48% male; Grade 9 (22%), Grade 10 (25%), Grade 11 (30%), Grade 12 (23%).

Qualitative Sample: From the survey respondents, 42 students were purposively selected to represent maximum variation in grade, gender, internship sector (corporate, NGO, research lab, small business), and reported difficulty level. Additionally, 15 teacher-internship coordinators were interviewed to gain an institutional perspective.

3.3 Data Collection

Instrument 1: Student Internship Challenge Survey (SICS): A 35-item self-report questionnaire was developed. Items were generated from literature review and pilot

interviews. Participants rated statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Not a Problem, 5=Major Problem) across four *a priori* dimensions. The survey included demographic items and open-ended questions for initial commentary. Reliability was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$).

Instrument 2: Semi-Structured Interview

Protocols: Separate protocols for students and coordinators covered themes of preparation, daily experiences, relationships, challenges, and learning outcomes. Interviews averaged 45 minutes, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative: SPSS v.28 was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) identified the most severe problems. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Varimax rotation verified problem dimensions. Independent samples t-tests and ANOVA examined differences across demographic groups. Correlation analyses explored relationships between variables.

Qualitative: Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in NVivo software. An inductive approach was initially used, allowing themes to emerge from the data. These were then deductively mapped onto and compared with the quantitative dimensions to provide integration and explanation.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Results: Problem Prevalence and Dimensions

EFA confirmed a four-factor structure explaining 68% of the variance. The factors, their composite mean scores, and key item statistics are presented below.

Table 1: Factor Analysis and Mean Scores of Internship Problems (N=457)

Factor/Problem Cluster	Sample Item from Survey	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Rank
1. Systemic & Logistical Issues	"The commute to the internship location was unsafe, expensive, or overly long."	4.02	0.87	1
	"There was a lack of clear objectives or a plan for my internship from my school or the host."	4.15	0.82	
2. Psychosocial & Developmental Challenges	"I felt intense anxiety about being judged by adult supervisors and colleagues."	3.88	0.95	2
	"I struggled to communicate professionally with adults in the workplace."	3.62	1.08	
3. Mentorship & Guidance Deficit	"My onsite supervisor was unavailable, too busy, or uninterested in mentoring me."	3.76	1.02	3
	"I received little to no constructive feedback on my work or performance."	3.81	0.98	
4. Academic & Cognitive Dissonance	"The tasks I was given felt irrelevant to my studies or future goals."	3.65	1.05	4
	"Balancing internship hours with homework and exam preparation was very stressful."	3.70	1.10	

Table 2: Significant Differences in Problem Perception by Demographic Variables

Variable	Group	Highest Scoring Problem Cluster	Mean Diff.	p-value
Grade Level	Grades 9-10	Psychosocial Challenges	0.41	<0.01
	Grades 11-12	Systemic Issues	--	--
Gender	Female	Psychosocial Challenges	0.28	<0.05
	Male	Mentorship Deficit	--	--
Internship Sector	Schools	Systemic & Mentorship Issues	N/A	<0.01*
	Corporate/NGO	Psychosocial Challenges		

Note: ANOVA showed significant overall effect for sector ($F=5.67$, $p<.01$).

Key Correlations

- A strong negative correlation was found between the clarity of pre-internship briefing and overall problem severity score ($r = -0.72$, $p < 0.01$).
- Self-reported anxiety was positively correlated with feelings of being given meaningless work ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$).

4.2 Qualitative Results: Thematic Deep Dive

The interviews provided rich context to the numbers, revealing three overarching themes:

Theme 1: "The Performance of Being Competent"-Anxiety and Identity Labour.

Students described a constant, exhausting effort to appear older, more knowledgeable, and less vulnerable than they

felt. "I had to Google every other word they used in meetings. I was nodding and smiling, but inside I was panicking, thinking they'd any moment ask me a question and I'd be exposed as a kid who knows nothing" (Ria, Grade 11, Marketing Intern). This "performative anxiety" was particularly acute in corporate settings and for female students, who also noted heightened awareness of dress code and interpersonal dynamics.

Theme 2: "Ghosts and Gatekeepers"-The Spectrum of Mentorship. The quantitative "mentorship deficit" manifested in two distinct archetypes in narratives: the "Ghost Mentor" (absent or invisible) and the "Gatekeeper Mentor" (present but controlling, limiting access to meaningful work). *"My supervisor would just email me a list of data entry tasks. We spoke maybe twice. I felt like a temporary, cheap typist, not an intern"* (Arjun, Grade 10, Data NGO). In contrast, positive experiences were characterized by a "Guide Mentor" who provided context, gradual responsibility, and reflective conversations.

Theme 3: "The Burden of Low Expectations"-Negotiating Meaning.

A paradoxical challenge emerged: students resented menial tasks but also feared complex assignments for which they felt unprepared. This tension was rooted in what they perceived as low expectations from hosts. *"They didn't want to give me anything important because I was 'just a school student' and would be gone in a month. But that's exactly why it felt pointless"* (David, Grade 12, Engineering Lab). This theme links systemic issues (short duration, lack of host training) with cognitive dissonance.

Coordinator Perspective: Coordinators corroborated systemic challenges, citing "enormous difficulty" securing quality placements, especially for non-academic tracks. They expressed frustration with being "caught in the middle" between school administration demands, parent expectations, and unresponsive host organizations. A key insight was their observation that problems were often predicted by a lack of pre-existing relationship with the host organization.

5. Discussion

This study confirms that school internships are fraught with challenges that are both *amplified versions* of undergraduate internship issues and *unique* to the adolescent developmental stage. The ranking of Systemic & Logistical Issues as the most severe problem cluster is critical. It underscores that the foundational architecture of these programmes-placement quality, objective setting, transportation, and temporal fit with the academic calendar-is often faulty. Without solving these basic structural problems, interventions at the psychosocial or mentorship levels are unlikely to succeed.

The potent negative correlation between preparation and problem severity offers a clear lever for intervention. A thorough pre-internship briefing that demystifies workplace culture, clarifies roles, and builds basic professional communication skills acts as a "psychological vaccine" against anxiety and role ambiguity. The grade and gender differences are instructive. Younger students' higher psychosocial stress aligns with developmental theories of adolescent egocentrism and a less formed professional identity. The slightly higher psychosocial challenges reported by female students warrant further gender-sensitive research into workplace dynamics for adolescent girls. The finding that small businesses often struggle more with mentorship and structure highlights a need for targeted support for these hosts, who are crucial partners but may lack formal HR capacity.

The qualitative themes reframe the problems not as mere deficits but as active processes of negotiation and identity work. The student is not a passive recipient of a flawed experience but an active agent struggling to construct meaning, manage impressions, and navigate power structures. This perspective moves the solution from simply "fixing the programme" to "empowering the learner within the programme."

The findings challenge the implicit assumption that "any exposure is good exposure." Unstructured, unsupported internships risk alienating students, confirming negative stereotypes about certain professions, and privileging those with pre-existing social and cultural capital to secure better placements.

6. Recommendations: A Framework for Supported Transition Internships

To mitigate the identified problems, a holistic framework is proposed:

1. Pre-Placement Scaffolding (The "Launch Phase"):

- **Mandatory Career & Professional Literacy Modules:** Integrated into the curriculum before placement, covering workplace norms, communication, ethical conduct, and goal-setting.
- **Structured Matching Process:** Move beyond availability-based placement. Use student interest profiles and vet host organizations for their capacity to provide a structured learning plan and a designated, trained mentor.
- **Tripartite Learning Agreement:** A formal document co-signed by school, host, and student outlining objectives, responsibilities, and evaluation criteria.

2. In-Placement Support Structures (The "Voyage Phase"):

- **Trained On-Site Mentors:** Host organizations commit a staff member to a short training programme (provided by the school/district) on adolescent development and supervised learning.
- **Dedicated School Coordinator:** A staff member acts as a liaison, conducting at least one mid-placement check-in (virtual or in-person) to troubleshoot issues.
- **Protected Reflection Time:** Students are given paid time during the internship week for guided journaling, using prompts that connect experience to academic concepts and personal growth.
- **Post-Placement Integration (The "Debrief Phase"):**
- **Structured Assessment:** Move beyond a simple completion certificate. Assessment should evaluate reflective learning, skill demonstration, and achieved objectives, not just attendance.
- **Public Presentation of Learning:** Students present their experiences and insights to peers, teachers, and host representatives, solidifying learning and building communication skills.
- **Feedback Loop:** Systematic data collection from students and hosts to continually refine the programme.

Conclusion

Internship programmes for school students stand at a crossroads. They hold genuine promise for democratizing career exposure and fostering applied learning. However, this

research demonstrates that their current implementation is frequently marred by systemic, psychosocial, and pedagogical problems that can undermine these goals and potentially harm student well-being.

The data presented here—from the high mean scores of systemic issues to the poignant narratives of per formative anxiety—paints a clear picture: intention is not enough. For school internships to fulfil their transformative potential, they must be intentionally designed as *supported transitions*. This requires a shift from viewing them as extracurricular add-ons to treating them as core pedagogical experiences that demand the same level of curriculum design, resource allocation, and differentiated support as any other complex learning endeavour.

By adopting the "Supported Transition" framework, educational institutions can transform internships from a source of student stress into a powerful rite of passage—one that equips young people not only with skills for the workplace but with the resilience, self-awareness, and navigational capital to thrive in the uncertain world of adulthood. The investment in structure, mentorship, and reflection is an investment in translating the challenging waters of early work experience into a voyage of genuine discovery.

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