

DESIGNING NEW CONCEPT OF INTERNSHIP IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM: NEW APPROACH TO INCREASE ALUMNI ASSIMILATION IN WORKPLACES

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Abstract

For many years, internship has been viewed as a key point in determining successful of vocational collage's graduates in the workplace. However, in many cases, internship program has been less effective in developing student's knowledge and skills due to several factors such as public policy, interrelationship between vocational collage and the industry, student's capacity and the efficiency of teaching in a vocational collage. To evaluate this issue, Realistic Evaluation (RE) method was carried out to sort out major attributes regarding student's internship by interviewing embedded group of people, in this case student, lecturer and employer. Based on this study, several recommendations are offered to improve current internship program namely careful plan and arrangement prior to student's engagement to the workplaces which is needed to ensure the effectiveness of the program and further this includes in campus preparation. Initial preparation in campus including curriculum and policy to support internship program is discussed along with industry placement arrangement including conceptual methods on student work, mentoring and project reports. Meanwhile, arrangement in the workplace, such as setting a project is expected to help student to learn the implementation of science they have studied in the collage/university.

Keywords: internship, vocational education curriculum, realistic evaluation (RE)

1. Introduction

Internship, according to Brown [1], is a program set by school, college or university through which students learn about an occupation or industry by working for an employer over a specific period of time. This program is the major requirement that should be undergone by students before they graduate from any education schools and collage. An increasing demand in the workplace has made internship program critical to increase competitiveness of a high education graduate, so then they can meet industry's requirements in terms of knowledge and skills needed when they work.

However, some suggested that internship program has been less effective in improving student's competency on their expected job. For many said that public policy not supporting the current internship program, others suggested that students were not given enough preparation before entering any specific workplace. Further, knowledge on what internship meant to be is not generally known by most student and its socialization is sometimes ignored by their academic supervisors. Many students do not think that internship is part of their education program but only a requirement to get the degree, thus many of them finish their internship program without any significant improvement in their knowledge and skills. Yet, these are only one of many problems

that make the current internship program less effective. To put more detail picture on this current situation, Realistic Evaluation (RE) method was carried out to evaluate a set of ideas or opinions on problems regarding internship program. This study was conducted across groups of interests, in this case student, lecturer/academic supervisor and employer. Thus result was put together to design new concept of internship that can help to increase assimilation of graduates in the workplace.

2. Methodology

Realistic Evaluation (RE) is a method which look thoroughly on elements of a program works for whom in which circumstances. The method is a proper way to address social issues which contingent on people attitude or value[2]. This evaluation method is best in addressing program effectiveness. In this case we were trying to draw a picture on the current internship program and find the best way to manage internship so then we can increase assimilation of the graduates in the workplace. The method will focus on the quality of the data obtained from the group not the quantity. As many as 10 students and 5 lecturers of vocational education institution in Makassar and 3 employers were interviewed on their opinion on the current internship program.

3. Results

Results showed that in campus preparation is minimal, there had been no special preparation prior to the departure and on site mentoring by academic supervisors/lecturers is scarce only occurred on specific school's departments. The mechanisms of internship are initiated by both institution and students but students are the most predominant culprits that determine their placement. Some departments have seemed to give assistance on finding a placement in industry but more often students themselves gone to ask permission to do their placement in certain industry. When asked about working contract, many of them said that they have never signed any contract before the internship begins.

During internship program, discussion with academic supervisors/ lecturers has rarely done in the industry; many of the students manage themselves to consult through phone or on-line email with their lecturer in campus. Academic preparation only obtains through lecture in the classrooms and a few self-preparations by students have been done. Some students, however, mention that they read the previous internship reports.

Expected knowledge and skill does not improve as expected. Many students said that they do regular jobs and rarely trusted to involve directly on the main operation process. Project based internship indeed experienced by some students, despite the fact that their access to the factory facilities is limited. Despite this condition, they are still given the opportunity to access factory data from the integrated computer systems. Hence, students do not really experience the atmosphere of working under pressure which is vital for their future. Most of the students however feel that their self-discipline has improved after finishing their internship program.

Furthermore, learning process during this internship program is not limited to those practical knowledge and skill but they also learn how to communicate with others and solving problems. Team work, nevertheless, is only appeared between students from the same campus not between other workers of the industry. The understanding of working condition and the organizational structure in the workplace are well established by most students.

Yet, when the academic supervisors/lecturers and the staff from the industry were asked about the current program, they both suggested it was not prepared well. Local government policy has not been encouraging industry to widely open to students who want to do their internship. Lecturers said that the link between college/university and industry was not well established therefore some industries tend to reluctant to accept student to work with them. Students have been arguing that

they need a close contact person within the industry to be accepted.

4. Discussion

The previous result has pinned point weaknesses in the current in internship program, therefore the following discussion will further describe the issue and propose solutions of those problems.

4.1 Internship and Public Policy

Terms of internship has been regulated in National Law (Undang-Undang) No.13 year 2003 about Worker. In this regulation [3] , Internship has been define as "part of work training which is conducted by an institution under supervision of an instructor or more experienced worker to produce goods and service within a company and aimed to gain specific skills". This definition has not been clearly understood by both students and company when they start the internship program. Student has to involve in daily working activities to be able to achieve certain skills; in fact, more students complained that they were not given enough access to the facilities. The industry itself argues that students have not reached certain level of competency to fully be trusted to handle a job. However, senior worker who has been selected to their supervisor sometimes allowed them to do simple work which is under his supervision. What student can do is observing and learn as much as possible despite the fact that this a bit contradict to verse 8 of Ministry of Labor and Transmigration Regulation No. 22/MEN/IX/2009 which suggest students to get theory as well as practical works [4].

Other than the definition, National Law (Undang-Undang) No.13 year 2003 verse 22 to 23 also notes some important guidelines to be followed by the industry [3]:

1. Industry should provide contract prior to the program which explain right and responsibility students and the company as well as type of the program which students are going to do in the company, this includes period of time of the internship.
2. The students should at least get competency acknowledgement from the company on the of their internship program.

Contract prior to the program is deemed important because within this contract according to regulation posed by Ministry of Labor and Transmigration No. 22/MEN/IX/2009 verse 16 students are entitled to get [4]:

1. Health and protection facilities
2. Health insurance
3. Allowance and transportation fee

Because of this complication sometimes company reluctant to make a contract. Some

students suggested that those facilities are only given by a well established company (big company) whilst the middle or small company tend to neglect it.

Yet another problem regarding the company preference to allow internship, it was said to solely company good will. There is no regulation enforce regarding internship either by national or local government. What have been said in verse 12 of Ministry of Labor and Transmigration Regulation No. 22/MEN/IX/2009 is that the internship program has be approved by local government [4]. The benefit of having internship students in company was assumed insignificant. There is no advantage such tax reduction obtained by the company as those offered by US governments to company which providing intern students on site training [5].

4.2 On Campus Preparation

This internship program is not only conducted by vocational education institutions but also the university alike. Internship programs is now viewed as the final and crucial learning activities of students in which students can put everything that they have learned in campus on the real life action. Knowledge, skills, ability to organize and work in a team, these are all important for the student to pass their internship program. However, the actual conditions of workplaces are demanding students to use their creativity and critical thinking to solve many problems occurred in the industry. Despite of these drawbacks, everything that they are going to learn during their internship program are expected to become their provisions in their actual life careers and this is hopefully help them to develop their professionalisms and integrity toward their future works. In doing so they should manage and prepare to open their minds on upcoming challenges and continually to develop their knowledge and skills even they are not attending any classes anymore. Support from campus and industry alike is crucial. Smith and Betts [6] noted “the effectiveness of work-based learning is directly related to the quality and effectiveness of partnership”.

Partnership between both stakeholders should be established beforehand. This will help university or vocational collage to manage placement of their students. Both vocational education and industry will gain benefit by this cooperation. For university, there would be an improvement in the quality of their graduates; the university would receive input on the ways to plan on campus learning program to meet the company needs. As for the company, it would help from students in identifying and resolving problems. The company will then gain trust from academician and university which can help to provide them future high quality workers [1].

On campus learning program should be managed well. Several attempts can be carried out to such as: (1) providing pre-departure bridging program for students to give them an overview on what they about to experience in the workplace; (2) persuading students to master basic knowledge through “pass-learning” program where they learn some basic concepts related to the fields of the company; (3) persuading students to do an extra reading session where they can learn all about the company and recent improvement in science and technology to help them adjust to the company; (4) giving extra class on communication skills and teamwork to ease their adaptation, and lastly (5) stimulating students critical thinking throughout learning process in the classrooms.

In addition, curriculum should be adjusted to meet local company’s needs. For instance, if one region has many cement industry, the university should provide at least one subject regarding analysis, processing or management of such industry. Therefore, intern students can comply with the company demands. Within the curriculum, the university/collage should regulate student’s final project by providing academic supervisor or lecturer (mentor) who in charge in helping student to finish their projects. Project proposal should be made prior to the engagement with the company and has been review by the lecturer or mentor.

Guideline in writing this project should also be prepared so then student know what to write. It is best for the industry to allocate one mentor per industry. However, this is less effective because of limitation on human resource in campus. However, from the interview, students has proposed to have the mentor to visit them once in time on the regular basis so they can consult directly not via telephone or email as happen currently.

4.3 On Site Company Arrangements

On company arrangements may regard as project based learning. In line what has been managed previously in campus, students should establish a project regarding company’s problems, difficulties and potential improvements. This problem solving project is expected to help student to be more focus on certain problems within the company. The project will be conducted under supervision of a senior worker and a lecturer. The worker will help them in data collection while lecturer helps with the way to solve the problems. The students itself should think critically, reading through reports and textbooks to find solution. In addition, during the internship students should go through every division to learn working environment and help them to adjust well later in their actual workplace.

4.4 Assessment of Learning Outcome

Work based learning or internship should manage to deliver the following key educational criteria, according to Smith and Betts [6],

- Explicit learning outcome
- Formal assessment process
- Identification and delivery of standards
- Recognition through the awarding of credit or certifications.

Explicit learning outcomes includes improvement in knowledge and skills, theory application, problem solving, team working, effective communication, time managements and managing to work under pressure[7]. Theory application and improvement of knowledge are measurable items which are assessable through seminar or project examination in campus. Skills, nevertheless, is difficult since university should what is called competency assessment site (*TempatUjiKompetensi*) where students will be evaluated based on standardize competency. As this could be difficult to implement, recognition from a company proved by certificate is enough as an authentic prove.

5. Conclusion

Internship is a crucial learning activity for students because it provides them with an insight condition of the workplace. The internship program is an ultimate learning process where students learn to implement what they have learned in campus in the actual life. This work based learning however needs to be improved to increase its effectiveness in helping students to receive early work offer or employment. First, the internship regulation should be well understood and implements. Second, on campus preparation should take place to prepare student prior to their engagement to the company. Preparation can be either theoretical and skills including soft-skills such as communication, and teamwork. Third, on company arrangement is basically setting up a project where students learn to focus their attention on certain aspect of the company. Finally, the assessment can be both in form of seminar or competency assessment. With this attempts the proper internship program are expected to give students enough provisions to become a professional workers who meet company expectations.

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