

Perceptions of Logistics Students on Internship Programme: The Case of Private Higher Institution in Malaysia

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Abstract

This article examines the effects of knowledge, skills, and talent on logistics internship programme within the context of Malaysian private higher education institutions. Despite extensive research on voluminous literature on logistics internships, there is very little empirical research that has examined this scope of study. The proposed research framework and hypotheses were developed with the intention of examining this relationship. Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to explore the relationship between knowledge, skills, talent and logistics internship programme. The results revealed that talent was positively and significantly associated with logistics internship programme ($\beta = .503, p < .001$). The findings are considered to have made a significant contribution to the literature, by using the Malaysian logistics undergraduate students which enhances our understanding on the need to have a significant learning outcome for logistics internship programme.

Key words: Logistics internship programme; Knowledge; Skills; Talent

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INTRODUCTION

The objectives of internship are to create an opportunity to learn about a profession; and to generate values as well as substance in skills for students (Beck & Halim, 2008). In higher education institutions (HEIs), the logistics internship programme (LIP) is part of the curriculum for students undertaking logistics courses. LIP provides opportunities for logistics students to gain experience in actual and on-the-job training in logistics operation. Through LIP, students are exposed to real-life working environment of the workplace; and thus influence the students' ability to understand logistics operation from theoretical aspects learned in classrooms into its practical aspect.

According to Knemeyer and Murphy (2002), there appears to be little question concerning the growing importance of meaningful internship experience for HEI students. Internships provide greater opportunities to learn about an occupation and an individual's career self-concept (Sargent & Domberger, 2007). Nowadays, internships undertaken "for credit" are part of the recognized program of study at many universities whereby work terms, summer employment, co-op education and internships overall contribute to the students' ability to put that all important work experience on their resume (Dodge & McKeough, 2003).

The benefits of internship not only provide a meaningful context, but also activities that are interactive and call upon real world knowledge, skills, and experiences (Wasonga & Murphy, 2006). Besides that, Hegarty and Johnston (2008) recounted the value of co-operative education in enhancing student self-confidence,

self-concept and social skills, practical knowledge, employment opportunities and developing skills to support theoretical training.

A research by Divine, Linrud, Miller and Wilson (2007) suggested that internship may act as a tool to reduce theory-practical gap. Andrew and Higson (2008) examined student benefits from internship in Europe. Internship requirement was found to be the most important factor for the success of career services, followed by faculty industry experience and quality of student preparation for job/internship interviews (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). It was evident from the study that the Europe graduates obtained a valuable learning opportunity during which theoretical skills could be applied to 'real-life' employment.

HEIs are actively seeking effective approaches to improve benefits gain from the internship programme (Andrew & Higson, 2008; Beck & Halim, 2008). Despite this trend, logistics firms are still facing difficulties on logistics graduates who are unable to apply knowledge gained into working environment setting (Keller & Ozment, 2009; Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002). Furthermore, research on the perception of Malaysian undergraduate students in a logistics programme has yielded low in literature (Dazmin & Halim, 2011; Sariwati & Shatina, 2010). Therefore, the requirement for LIP is becoming an essential component of educational preparation for logistics programme.

From the above problem statement, it can be seen that the main objective of this research is to find out the learning outcomes gained by logistics students after they have done their LIP. This study is to find out the benefits in terms of skills, knowledge and talent gained by logistics students through LIP. The following research question is addressed in this research paper: to what extent that skills, knowledge and talent can be acquired from undergoing LIP?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Skills Obtained

Acquiring and developing skills help students in job searching endeavours (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). In relation to employability, skills attribute to students level of confidence when they apply for a job (Warraich & Ameen, 2011). This will benefit themselves, the workforce, the community, and the macro-economy as a whole. Wellman (2010) emphasized that employability skills should enable an individual to perform his job better.

In their study, Keller and Ozment (2009) had identified seven skills which are perceived as important to logisticians. These are teamwork, written communication, oral communication, prioritizing, seeing the "big" picture, problem solving and decision making. Others have emphasized the needs for students to acquire skills on

analytical ability, computer applications, creative thinking, decision making, and task-related attributes (Bennett & Wright, 2010; Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010).

Apart from that, through LIP, logistics students are able to procure valuable job-related skills (Keller & Ozment, 2009). This is because the LIP is designed to aid logistics students enhance their chances of work placement upon graduation into the logistics industry (Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002).

Knowledge Obtained

Wasonga and Murphy (2006) believed that organizations can achieve successful and innovative status when they have skilful and expert workers. These workers are able to create new knowledge, disseminate it through the organization, and embody it in products, services and systems. Through knowledge, workers are able to process, connect and use it in work-setting (Hynie *et al.*, 2011).

Logistics students acquire knowledge when they have undergone LIP. During their LIP, experience learned from internship companies allows them to gain new knowledge and to develop a link between theory and practical concepts (Knemeyer & Murphy, 2001). This view is supported by Hynie *et al.* (2011) and Bennett and Wright (2010) that knowledge obtained from internship allow students to become more marketable and valuable in the industry. As such, according to Cook, Gibson and Williams (2008), LIP is able to provide knowledge to logistics students and thus perform as a bridge for better recruitment to logistics firms.

Talent Created

Significant factor that contributes to the shortage of qualified talent logisticians is because of less logistics graduates but high demand of this group from the industry (Gibson & Cook, 2001). As a result of that, employers are now promoting internship programmes in order to create talent and later prepare these talented candidates to work in their firms (Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010). It is however not an easy task due to inability to find the right candidates (Phillips & Roper, 2009).

Through training, education and learning practices, talent is created in order to handle the best way of getting the job done (Watson, 2008). Watson further elaborated that talented workers can contribute to productivity in services industry organizations. In a related literature, firms experience hiccups in their operations when talented workers resign (Phillips & Roper, 2009). Phillips and Roper suggested that attractive tangible and intangible remunerations can be used to retain these talented workers.

In logistics operations, Reinecke, Spiller and Ungerman (2007) have identified three dimensions related to talent. These dimensions of talent are capabilities, logistician roles, and business planning. Logistics industry in China, for example, is still facing shortage of talent and this issue has raised much attention among academicians,

practitioners and the Government (Zhao, Flynn & Roth, 2007). In fact, Zhou, Min, Xu and Cao (2008) observed that investment in talent management for third-party logistics (3PLs) firms has a significant impact on the operational efficiency.

Logistics Internship Programme (LIP)

An empirical research involving logistics students suggested that they perceived skills development as more important compare to earning academic credit and money (Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002). On the contrary, HEIs still rank LIP as “secondary area” in their logistics curriculum (Wu, 2007). By emphasizing LIP in their logistics curriculum, HEIs can contribute to a high level of satisfaction among logistics students (Goffnett, Cook, Williams & Gibson, 2012). This will further give students a chance to experience the culture of logistics working environment. In addition to that, an aggregate analysis of the responses suggested female graduates in a logistics programme gain benefits through LIP (Knemeyer, Murphy & Poist, 1999).

A study was also conducted to determine the association between position in logistics firms and LIP (Gibson & Cook, 2001). This study revealed that the LIP is used as a performance tool to measure individual’s capabilities prior to the offering of full-time job to potential logistics graduates by logistic firms. Meanwhile, Keller and Ozment (2009) believed that LIP is an effective tool for logistics firms to obtain productivity and workforce competency. For example, logistics graduates can develop manager skills during their internship programme at a logistics firm. In another study, Knemeyer and Murphy (2002) compared responses from logistics firms employing interns and logistics students. Their study showed that LIP does help logistics students in developing on-the-job skills.

The above review indicates that through LIP, skills, knowledge and talent are developed. This study chooses to examine the relationship between skills, knowledge, talent and LIP based on the perceptions of logistics students. The nature of this relationship has been ignored in past research (Gibson & Cook, 2001; Goffnett *et al.*, 2012; Keller & Ozment, 2009; Wu, 2007; Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002; Knemeyer *et al.*, 1999). Thus, the need for further research in this area is important.

In conjunction with skills, knowledge and talent, the following hypotheses are developed:

- H1: Skills obtained have a positive effect on LIP;
- H2: Knowledge obtained has a positive effect on LIP; and
- H3: Talent created has a positive effect on LIP.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted by a self-administered questionnaire. Each of the respondents was presented

with a set of questionnaire containing a list of items associated with skills, knowledge, talent and LIP. The respondents were asked to choose the items that relates to them on a five-point scale with 5 being “Strongly Agree” and 1 “Strongly Disagree”. The instrument consists of 17 statements. Firstly, 5 items measure LIP component (Goffnett *et al.*, 2012; Keller & Ozment, 2009; Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002) Secondly, 4 items measure skills obtained from internship (Bennett & Wright, 2010; Gault *et al.*, 2010; Keller & Ozment, 2009). Thirdly, 4 items measure knowledge obtained from internship (Bennett & Wright, 2010; Cook *et al.*, 2008; Hynie *et al.*, 2011; Knemeyer & Murphy, 2001), and lastly, 4 items measure talent created (Philip & Roper, 2009; Reinecke *et al.*, 2007; Watson, 2008; Zhou *et al.*, 2008). The instrument also contained demographic questions covering gender, nationality, level of education, and year of study.

The viability of the questionnaire was established by a pilot study carried out on 4 post graduate students and 4 academic staff. Their feedbacks were used to verify the content of the questionnaire developed for this survey. A total of 178 logistics students were selected from a list of a private HEI in Klang Valley, Malaysia to participate in the study, using convenient sampling. 123 responded to the invitation, giving a response rate of 69 percent.

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 18 was used to determine the psychometric properties of questionnaire data, to measure correlations between variables and to test research hypotheses.

Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviations, reliability coefficients and intercorrelations were computed to understand the variability and interdependence of the variables (skills, knowledge, talent and LIP). The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression (Beenen & Mrousseau, 2010). The hierarchical regression was selected as the method in this study because it meets the assumptions required to ensure validity of its significant test (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Given the gender, nationality, level of education and year of study may influence LIP, these variables were controlled in the statistical analyses.

RESULTS

Based on the data collected, the demographic profile of respondents was constructed. There were 84 (68.3%) male and 39 (31.7%) female respondents. Out of this group of respondents, 113 were Malaysian (91.9%). In terms of education level, 106 (86.2%) of the sample were in logistics degree programme and the remainder 17 (13.8%) were in diploma programme. Most of the respondents were in their third year of study (70; 56.9%), while 47 (38.2%) were in their second year of study, and the remainder 6 (4.9%) were first year students.

Reliability of the instrument was assessed to determine internal consistency. The Cronbach Alpha scores of the

measures ranged from 0.74 to 0.83, meeting the basic requirement of at least 0.7 as recommended by Nunnally (1978). This indicates a high level of reliability.

The correlation matrix in Table 1 indicates correlation coefficients between the three independent variables which are measured by using multiple item scales. The correlation coefficient indicates the strength of the association between the variables. There are significant correlations between all the independent variables except the correlation between knowledge and talent. The highest correlation ($r = .58$) is between knowledge and talent. The Pearson's r between each pair of independent variables should not exceed .9; otherwise these independent variables may indicate multicollinearity (Farrar & Glauber, 1967).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Matrix for Independent Variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Skills	4.10	.52	1			
Knowledge	4.22	.31	.21*	1		
Talent	4.17	.52	.58**	.13	1	
LIP	3.53	.53	.34**	.30	.52**	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In this study, research hypotheses were tested using a multiple hierarchical regression analysis. According to Hofmann (1997) and Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010), in a multiple hierarchical regression analysis, a set of independent variables (or predictor variables) is weighted to form the regression equation or model and later is used to explain its relative contribution toward a dependent variable. This analysis described the relationship between independent and dependent variables in two steps. Firstly, respondents' demographical characteristics (gender, nationality, level of education, and year of study) were entered into "Step 1" as a controlling variable. Secondly, variables of skills, knowledge, and talent were entered into "Step 2" as a predictor variable. The summary of the result of analysis is shown in Table 2.

From Table 2, it can be seen that four control variables explained 3.6 percent of the variation in LIP (R^2 change is .036 and this is not significant). None of the control variables were indicated to demonstrate a significant impact on LIP in "Step 1". The addition of independent variables (skills, knowledge and talent) "Step 1" resulted in a substantial increase in R^2 of .285 and this increase was highly significant ($p < .001$). The total proportion of explained variance in this analysis is .285. The Durbin-Watson of 2.261 falls between the acceptable range ($1.5 < D < 2.5$) indicating no autocorrelation problem in the data. Therefore, it shows that the error term is independent.

Table 2
Summary of Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Skills, Knowledge and Talent with LIP

	Step 1			Step 2		
	Standardized coefficients beta	t	Sig.	Standardized coefficients beta	t	Sig.
Controlling variables						
gender ^a	-.062	-0.677	.499	-.082	-1.025	.308
Nationality ^b	.102	1.105	.272	.036	0.431	.667
Level of education ^c	-.063	-0.659	.511	-.013	-0.150	.881
Year of study	-.144	-1.511	.133	.023	0.260	.795
Response variables						
Skills				.050	0.494	.622
Knowledge				-.048	-0.579	.564
Talent				.503	4.932	.000**
R	.190			.534		
R ²	.036			.285		
Adjusted R ²	.003			.242		
F	1.105			6.560		
Sig. F change	.357			.000		
R ² change	.036			.249		
F change	1.105			13.370		
Durbin-Watson = 2.261						

Note: Significant correlations = ** $p < .001$ (2-tailed); Dummy coded ^a female = 0, male = 1; ^b international = 0, Malaysian = 1; ^c degree = 0, diploma = 1

Table 3
Collinearity Statistics -- Values for Tolerance and Variation Inflation Factors (VIF)

	Step 1		Step 2	
	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF
Controlling variables				
Gender	.976	1.024	.966	1.036
Nationality	.966	1.035	.895	1.117
Level of education	.890	1.124	.866	1.155
Year of study	.899	1.113	.797	1.254
Response variables				
Skills			.612	1.634
Knowledge			.908	1.101
Talent			.597	1.675

Furthermore, the results indicate no problem in multicollinearity (Table 3). The multicollinearity statistics indicate tolerance values for skills, knowledge and talent are greater than .1 while the Variation Inflation Factors (VIF) are lesser than 10 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The histogram and normal P-P plot of standardized residual indicate normality of the error term while the scatter plot indicates consistent variance of error.

The results also indicate that only talent ($\beta = .503, p < .001$) is positively associated with LIP. It can be concluded that this element of talent is directly contributed in LIP. Thus, hypothesis H3 was supported. On the other hand, elements of skills and knowledge are not significantly associated with LIP (skills: $\beta = .05, p > .001$; knowledge: $\beta = -.048, p > .001$). Therefore, hypotheses H1 and H2 were rejected.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this research is to find out the learning outcomes gained by logistics students after they have done their LIP. This study is to find out the benefits in terms of skills, knowledge and talent gained by the logistics students through LIP. The results indicated that where talent is perceived as dominant variable, there is a strong association with learning outcome from LIP. The results corroborate previous findings about the key role of internship in developing talent in logistics as well as supply chain management (Cook, 2009; Cook, Gibson & Williams, 2008; Gerken, Rienties, Giesbers & Könings, 2012). Therefore, LIP should demonstrate the element of talent as its learning outcome whenever logistics students perform their internship. Both stakeholders, HEIs which offers logistics programmes and logistics firms that collaborate with HEIs to offer a place for internship programmes, are expected to design LIP's curriculum involving talent element.

The benefits of LIP have given raise to more attention and demand in the Malaysian market. This has driven most of the HEIs in Malaysia to provide LIP for their logistics students. Employers from logistics companies are also willing to cooperate with the HEIs to recruit and provide training to logistics students during the internship programme every year. As a result, employers will be able to seek talented logistics students and recruit them with the promise of attractive remuneration.

The findings also indicated that skills and knowledge were found to demonstrate insignificant effects on LIP. Previous studies had indicated that these two independent variables indirectly affect their dependent variables (Dazmin, 2011; Power, 2005; Soo, 2009; Srivastaya, Bartol & Locke, 2006). However, the above findings indicated a contrast from the previous studies. Other previous studies had also stressed the importance of knowledge and skills as contributors to internship (Bennet & Wright, 2010; Cook *et al.*, 2008; Hynie *et al.*, 2011; Keller & Ozment, 2009; Knemeyer & Murphy, 2001).

From this study, it is clear that both knowledge and skills perform has indirect effect on LIP. On the other hand, talent has a direct effect on LIP. The results thus propose a model based on talent has a direct impact on LIP; while knowledge and skills perform has indirect

impact on LIP. These findings are important for the advancement of research literature in that they contribute empirical evidence of association between knowledge, skills, talent and LIP in the case of Malaysia. This study also supports the findings from previous studies which had found that talent is the dominant learning outcome from LIP (Zhao *et al.*, 2008).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are limitations that must be considered in future research pertaining to this issue. Firstly, the survey results were derived from convenient sampling which may carries the element of bias in the results. The results gathered may generally be limited, although this study was the first one aimed at developing an instrument for measuring the relationship between knowledge, skills, talent and LIP within the context of the Malaysian HEIs and the Malaysian logistics industry. Future research may be needed to collect data using probability sampling. In addition to that, the increase of sample sizes and repetitive studies must be considered for instrument's validity purposes.

Secondly, the findings were based on the use of self-reported survey data, which may contribute to response bias. Finally, a cross-sectional analysis cannot confirm the direction of causality implied in this research model. Therefore, it is necessary to be cautious in providing conclusions regarding causality. For the two points above, a longitudinal study is strongly recommended. It is also proposed that future research be conducted in a large scale with data collection from public and private HEIs in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper reports on an exploratory study of the relationship between knowledge, skills, talent and LIP based on Malaysian HEI. This study endeavors to make both theoretical and practical contribution to the literature. It also contains several implications for further research. The findings enhance our understanding of the relationship of these factors (independent variables: knowledge, skills, and talent; independent variable: LIP) in order to enhance effective learning outcome on LIP. The findings stressed the need to focus more on curriculum development in the LIP for talent. The findings could also prescribe potential practical implications for HEIs in developing LIP that is consistent with talent needs by logistics firms. Hence, when logistics students undergone their internship at logistics firms, their might be able to develop an element of talent throughout the internship process. This in turn provides high market value for these students when they hunt for job in the logistics industry.

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