



Internship programs evaluation report: *A look at program's
fidelity and beneficiary satisfaction*

Final Report

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Executive summary

SASSETA has been running internships to empower youth and instil valuable skills. However, the impact of these internships has not been greatly studied. Even though millions have been spent on internships, their actual value and effectiveness have yet to be understood. Therefore, this study examined the impact of an internship programme on post-work placement within the safety and security sector. To accomplish this, a qualitative research approach was employed, where semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method for SASSETA-funded interns, employers and SASSETA representatives.

Findings

Intern perspectives:

Interviews from interns generated themes such as Insufficient stipend amount, lack of support, roles not aligned with qualifications, delay in payment of the stipend, internship duration too short and unrealistic workload for interns. These were some of the themes (which incorporated the challenges experienced by interns during the program. Even though interns felt the benefits of the internship were good, these issues sometimes contributed negatively to their experience.

Employers' perspectives:

From the employer's side, there were concerns about the work ethic of interns, their attitude, and their ability to manage time effectively. Employers felt that some interns did not exhibit positive behaviour, which did not contribute positively to their development. There was also the notion that interns did not do enough to manage time. Rather than complain that the internship duration was too short, employers felt that the better usage and management of time could have helped interns better understand workplace dynamics.

Possible solutions:

- Frequent Communication and follow-up sessions are necessary to ensure interns complete the programme and SASSETA is aware of the issues interns face. This will for better planning.
- Another intervention could be setting up a dedicated hotline for intern-related queries. When interns are placed, they will be given a hotline to call whenever they have issues. This will ensure seamless integration and cooperation between SASSETA and the interns.
- Developing a dedicated employer's email would be noble. Employers will send their issues via this email, and a dedicated team from SASSETA will be responsible for attending to any issues that might arise.
- Team leaders could also be an option amongst interns. One intern could be selected as a team leader and give SASSETA monthly reports on the progress, challenges, and any other operational challenges they may have.

SASSETA representatives acknowledged that challenges exist; however, they noted that the internship program has enormous potential for skills and knowledge development. Interns and employers also supported this. Therefore, this study notes that the internship program is both beneficial to the intern and the employer, albeit challenges in administering these internship programs remains and need to be addressed.

List of acronyms

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NSDP	National Skills Development Plan
PPP	Public Private Partnership
SASSETA	Safety and Security Services SETA
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SSP	Sector Skills Plan
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WIL	Work-Integrated Learning

Table of Contents

Executive summary	ii
List of acronyms	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background.....	1
1.3 Purpose of the evaluation.....	2
1.4. Evaluation objectives and scope.....	2
1.5 Evaluation questions.....	2
1.6 The significance of the study.....	3
1.7 Structure of the report.....	3
Chapter 2: Understanding internships: A reflection on the scope and challenges	4
2.1 Introduction.....	4
2.2 Internships and stakeholders in South Africa: An overview.....	4
2.3 Legislative Framework.....	5
2.3.1 White paper on Post Education and Training.....	6
2.3.2 Sector Skills Plan (SSP).....	7
2.3.3 The National Skills Accord.....	8
2.3.4 National Skills Development Plan (2030).....	9
2.3.5 Locating the NSDP within an Integrated PSET System.....	10
2.3.6 Contributing to the country's socio-economic development objectives.....	10
2.3.6.1 <i>Advancing an equitable and integrated system</i>	10
2.3.6.2 <i>Greater inclusivity and collaboration will be promoted. The NSDP promotes</i>	10
2.3.6.3 <i>Focusing on a support system for learners and employers: The NSDP seeks</i>	11
2.3.7 The National Development Plan (NDP).....	11
2.4 Graduate unemployment and the socio-economic conundrum in South Africa.....	11
2.5 Impact of Internship on post graduate employability.....	16
2.5 Future of internships in South Africa: <i>The quest for experience</i>	17
2.6 Internship programmes at a global and African level.....	18
Chapter 3: Evaluation approach and methodology	20
3.1 Introduction.....	20
3.2 Methodological approach.....	20
3.2.1 Evaluation design.....	21
3.2.2 Target population and sampling methods.....	21
3.2.3 Sample size.....	22
3.2.4 Data collection.....	22
3.2.5 Data analysis.....	23
3.3 Ethical consideration.....	23
Chapter 4: Data presentation	24
4.1 Introduction.....	24
4.2 Demographic data.....	24
4.3 Narrative data analysis: <i>Thematic review</i>	25
4.4 Conclusion.....	41
Chapter 5: Evaluation discussion	42
5.1 Introduction.....	42
5.2 Overview of findings.....	42
5.3 Findings versus literature review.....	45
5.4 Challenges of creating an intern/employer productive and effective relationship.....	49
5.5 Employer perceptions.....	51
5.6 Conclusion.....	52
Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations	53
6.1 Introduction.....	53
6.2 Summary of the study.....	53

6.3 Summary of findings.....	54
6.3.1 Theme 1: Insufficient stipend amount	54
6.3.2 Theme 2: Lack of support.....	55
6.3.3 Theme 3: Roles not aligned with qualifications.	55
6.3.4. Delay in payment of stipend	55
6.3.5 Internship to short.....	56
6.3.6 Unrealistic workload for interns	56
6.4 Conclusions to research questions	56
6.5 Conclusions to research questions (<i>Employers</i>).....	59
6.6 Conclusions to research questions (<i>SASSETA</i>)	60
6.7 Recommendations.....	61
6.8. Conclusion.....	61
References	62

List of Tables

Table 3-1: Types of Internships	13
Table 3-2: Advantages and disadvantages of a formal internship (student perspective)	14
Table 3-3: Advantages and disadvantages internship for the employer (Graduate perspective)	15

List of Figures

Figure 3-1: A framework for internship programmes.....	16
Figure 3-2: Important challenges of Africa	19
Figure 4-1: Gender characteristics	24
Figure 4-2: Race characteristics.....	24
Figure 4-3: Age.....	25
Figure 4-4: Geographics of the participants	25
Figure 4-5: Lack of Support	27
Figure 5-1: Internship as a catalyst for one’s future development (desired outcome)	43
Figure 5-2: Time factor in an internship programme	43
Figure 5-3: Area of specialisation vs reality.....	44
Figure 5-4: Stipend and participation concerns.....	45
Figure 5-5: Positives of an Internship	45
Figure 5-6: Major challenges faced by interns	47
Figure 5-7: An ideal intern/employer operational framework based on the data	49
Figure 5-8: Work ethic and success in the workplace	51
Figure 5-9: Benefits of time management	52
Figure 6-1: Past SASSETA learners employed.....	58
Figure 6-2: Past SASSETA learners in and outside their qualification at the time of data collection	58

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Higher education institutions have a limitation that was identified by Kruss (2004) who maintained that they do not offer adequate 'soft skills' such as problem solving, communications, entrepreneurship, good citizenship, managerial skills and leadership skills. Kruss (2004) argued that these are the most important skills required for the purpose of being employable and improving service delivery and the improvement of the quality of life of the general population.

Kruss (2004) stated that higher education programmes are not relevant for the development of individual participants in the areas of workplace experiences and operational practices, and that most graduates, upon leaving higher education institutions, are not well prepared with the general and specialised high-level skills required by their labour market.

In this context, internship programs becomes very crucial in building and nurturing some of these skills. Internships programs can be use an important instruments to unlock both demand and supply skills in the labour market. The background and motivation for the study, the evaluation questions, the objectives of the study, the paradigm perspective and the evaluation design will be discussed. As part of the evaluation design, the evaluation approach and the evaluation method will be discussed. The chapter will then be concluded with the layout of the study.

1.2 Background

Unemployment is one of the most pressing issues facing South Africa today. One of the causes of unemployment is skills mismatch between the demand and the supply of skills in the labour market. Therefore, most graduates complete their studies without necessary skills required in the labour market. It could be argued that, the quality of education and skills acquired by graduates does not match the scarce skills required in the labour market. SETAs play a crucial role in promoting skills development in terms of the Skills Development Act of 1998 and the implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS).

Furthermore, SASSETA plays an important role in implementing internship programmes to develop the skills of graduates and to respond to the skills needs of the labour market. Internships programmes are work experience based programmes that seek to expose graduates to the world of work. In addition, internship programmes targets unemployed graduates and provide them with opportunities that will help them gain practical experience in their field of study.

The internship programmes differ in nature and how they conducted. However, the role of the internships remains to bridge the gap between the education system and what is required in the labour market. The internships programs last over 6 to 12 months and they assist graduates in applying their theoretical knowledge in the real world gaining practical experience. In this context, internship programs becomes very crucial in building and nurturing some of these skills. Internships

programs can be use an important instruments to unlock both demand and supply skills in the labour market. This study examines the impact of internship programme post-work placement within the safety and security sector in South Africa. As the country seeks to improve its economic fortunes, internships have become a way to instil skills in young people to ensure they can get experiential learning with the hope of using those skills towards the country's development.

Through funding, training and support, the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) are crucial partners. However, despite this, one must reflect on how effective these SETA-funded internships are to ensure resources are being used effectively. With the above, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of SASSETA-funded internships.

1.3 Purpose of the evaluation

The evaluation purpose is to contribute strengthening internship management and delivery of the results. The study will explore and document critical features, trends and challenges of learners on an internship programme funded by SASSETA between 2018 to 2021.

This evaluation study will assist SETA in improving its internship programme interventions and enable learners to be adequately prepared for work in line with industry requirements and the extent to which project design and implementation facilitated attainment of its goals.

1.4. Evaluation objectives and scope

The objective of this evaluation is to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of the internship program's implementation in relation to its overall objectives and expected results as defined in the project document and, more particularly, to attempt to document some of its preliminary results and impact.

The evaluation specific objectives are to:

- (i). Evaluate the performance of internship programs activities and the extent to which its intended results were achieved.
- (ii). Assess good and bad lessons learned, and
- (iii). Provide practical recommendations to improve the internship management performance to deliver sustainable outcomes.

1.5 Evaluation questions

In the course of the evaluation, the following questions will be asked to help answer the objectives of this study.

- (a) Do you think internships equip you with the skills to make yourself employable post the internship period? What expectations did you have when applying/joining the programme? Where all the expectations met?
- (b) Were you given the necessary resources the during the internship period? If not, please explain. If yes, were they effective in helping you perform your tasks?

- (c) An enabling environment is vital to ensure interns succeed. During your internship, how would you describe your operating environment?
- (d) As an intern, what challenges have you encountered in your participation in the internship programme and how did you mitigate them?
- (e) Had the programme developed you enough to allow your career to flourish after it? Please explain in detail.
- (f) If you had another opportunity to participate in this internship again, would you agree? If yes or no, please explain.
- (g) Are you currently employed at the time of answering this questionnaire?
- (h) If yes, is your current employment in line with your qualification?
- (i) If no, roughly how many interviews have you attended, and what do you think is the reason for being unsuccessful?
- (j) How long after completing your internship did it take for you to find suitable employment?
- (k) If you could, what would you change in the programme to make more beneficial to other interns in the future?

1.6 The significance of the study

Internship programs support career-pathing, enable greater flexibility and mobility, and increase exposure and inclusion (boost employment prospect) within the labour market. Analysing and evaluating the program fidelity and beneficiary satisfaction of the program may help focus future interventions in strengthening SASSETA's internship programs.

The beneficiary led (or participant) evaluations of programs its provide some important aspect of SASSETA's accountability and helps to strengthen the future similar program fidelity. Furthermore, program evaluation ascertain the quality of delivery to which the program has been delivered in a manner likely to have effect on its goals and objectives.

According to Jagannathan (2013), an effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process is an important strategic intervention to reduce the barriers to skills programs, by comparison of actual programme impacts against strategic plans, and asks the question whether the programme has indeed achieved what it intended to achieve (Shapiro, 2001).

1.7 Structure of the report

The report is ordered as follows: Chapter 1 gives introduction and background of the study. Chapter 2 discusses relevant literature. Chapter 3 present the evaluation approach and methodology adopted. Chapter 4 present and discuss the main findings. Chapter 5 concludes.

Chapter 2

Understanding internships: A reflection on the scope and challenges

2.1 Introduction

This literature review examines the conundrum of graduate unemployment and its socio-economic implications. It also discusses the impact of internships on the graduate/learner after the internship period. The future of internships in South Africa is also addressed, and finally, internships from a global overview are discussed. Departing, it becomes vital to define the term internship. There are many definitions of internships, and while these may differ, they all agree that internships are associated with skills development and the attainment of work experience.

Cambridge Dictionary (2023) defines internships as when someone works for a company or organisation to get experience in a particular type of work. For Zhang (2020), an internship is when a student or new graduate gets practical experience in a job. Overall, internships are vital to ensure that experience and skills can be imparted to the learner.

2.2 Internships and stakeholders in South Africa: An overview

Zhang (2020) reflects internships, from an experience point of view, allow one to try a few things out without committing. However, Ismail (2018) notes that as vital as they are, they should be taken in conjunction with the organisation, which is vital in imparting the skills and experience needed to ensure interns succeed in the workplace.

From experience and a skills point of view, internships are vital. However, their actual impact can only be observed after the internship. That is, the accurate measure of an internship should be the impact the skills and experience gained have on the graduate/learner and their ability to use these to obtain permanent employment.

From a public sector perspective, the government remains an essential stakeholder in consolidating internships as an avenue for one to acquire relevant skills and experience. The South African government implemented work-integrated initiatives through its various departments and other agencies to impart experiences and skills to students and graduates (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2006). From learnerships to internships, these are vital to developing adequate human capital.

One of the most essential structures supporting the need to consolidate work-integrated initiatives is the SETA (Sector Education and Training Authority), which provides skills development and training to people employed or seeking employment in their sectors. They are tasked with developing skills development plans in response to the skills needs in their sectors. They then ensure that training in their sectors is of appropriate quality and at the skill levels needed. They also play a role in ensuring that people learn skills that employers and communities need (National Skills Authority, 2015).

The functions and responsibilities of SETAs are set out in Chapter 3, section 10, the Skills Development Act, 1998 and realized the need to address the skills deficient in post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa has 21 SETAs, all managing and creating learnerships, skills-based programmes and internships in their respective sector (National Skills Authority, 2015). The importance of SETA was further reinforced by Higher Education, Science and Technology Minister Dr Blade Nzimande, who asserted that in the 2021/22 financial year, SETA spent a projected R1 billion (Cloete, 2022).

The Minister of Higher Education and Training revealed that SETAs combined placed 44 619 unemployed individuals into learnerships, of which over 34 710 were young people below the age of 35 and over 25 550 were females at the cost of about R1 billion (Cloete, 2022).

A study titled: Final Report on The Internship Baseline Study” found a greater need for monitoring and evaluation across the board regarding internships. The study also revealed that higher education institutions are conscious of the need to align their job readiness programmes with the demands of the marketplace. However, there is a greater need for post-training support for learners, especially networking opportunities (Koyana, 2013). BusinessTech (2019) also reflects that another challenge in South Africa is that some companies seem to be redefining what an internship is.

The new definition sounds much like an underpaid junior-level job, further consolidating the argument that internships are sometimes exploitative. In the Final report on the internship baseline study, participants were asked what they disliked about being an intern; participants replied that doing work that was not related to their studies/interests, not being able to use all of their skills, the tasks were tedious and repetitive, and the stipend was too low (Koyana, 2013).

A study by Koma (2010) found that an internship programme's implementation phase plays a crucial part in ensuring the effective delivery of the programme, thus the importance of continuously evaluating implementation processes to ensure effectiveness. In South Africa, internships holistically play a vital role in skills development as they allow graduates to see what is happening in the field of work (Mabeba, 2021). Despite this, Mabeba (2019) reveals several challenges of internships in South Africa. Firstly, the inexperience of interns and poor English writing skills is a massive challenge for the programme. This is because interns are still new and find it challenging to prepare weekly reports.

Secondly, interns are tormented by the amount of stipend they receive, and the fact that an internship does guarantee them permanent employment adds to the stress (Mabeba, 2019). Therefore, some interns find it fit to resign before the internship ends. This has given rise to debates and arguments about how South Africa can or should address the graduate unemployment dilemma and whether work-integrated initiatives have been effective. Integrating several legislations has been seen as vital in addressing this perceived disadvantage. These, in brief, are explained below.

2.3 Legislative Framework

After the end of apartheid, the post-1994 government introduced policies and acts that would equip and capacitate South Africans (Gumede, 2014). This section will focus on the South African

legislative framework for skill development. It begins with the White Paper on Post-Education and Training, the Sector Skills Plan (SSP), the National Skills Accord, the National Skills Development Plan of 2030, and the Skills Development Levies Act of 1999.

2.3.1 White paper on Post Education and Training

The expansion of higher education in South Africa in the last decade has resulted in the necessity of keeping up with the development of the economy, technology, and society. This expansion has drawn attention to the school-work transition and the percentage of graduates who are genuinely employable after finishing their studies. Thus, within the discourse, a series of questions have come up. These questions have served as a foundation for understanding this dilemma better.

1. What happens to the graduates after the finalization of their studies?
2. What differentiates those who can find work after graduation from those who cannot?

Is it the field of studies, the prestige of the institution, the work experience (e.g., internships, volunteer work), the social-demographic background, or all of these together?

- And if they do find it, is their job congruent with their level and field of education?

These are questions that are constantly sought to be answered from the perspective of graduates and employers.

The South African government understood this and has taken steps to address this issue via legislation. At this point, the white paper becomes essential. The white paper aims to set out strategies to:

- expand the current provision of education and training in South Africa,
- improve its quality,
- integrate the different strands of the post-school system and
- set out modalities for ways in which employers can participate in the creation of a skilled labour force.

The Green Paper noted that, despite the advances made since the advent of democracy, the education system continues to replicate past divisions. The institutional landscape is reminiscent of apartheid, with disadvantaged institutions, especially those in rural areas of the former bantustans, still disadvantaged in infrastructure, teaching facilities, and staffing (Akoojee, 2016).

Therefore, the white paper argued that expansion is needed in terms of the available places and the types of education and training. There should be more significant differentiation and diversity among our institutions to provide for the wide variety of needs of both students and employers. The system must be expanded to cater to the needs of those in unemployment, education, or training (Maringe & Osman, 2016). To cater for the needs of an economy that must enhance its skills, there is a need for high-level research and innovation, elements needed by a modern economy. Therefore, the main policy objectives are:

- A post-school system that can assist in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic South Africa
- A single, coordinated post-school education and training system.
- Expanded access, improved quality and increased diversity of provision.
- Stronger and more cooperative relationships between education and training institutions and the workplace
- A post-school education and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens, employers in both public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives. (Council on Higher Education, 2014)

Arguably, the goals of the White paper on Post Education and Training resonate with the National Development Plan (2030) (Chapter 9), which states that higher education (HE) is the primary driver of the knowledge system, which then links to economic development. The National Development Plan (NDP) positions education, training, and innovation as central to the overall NDP goals (Awuah & Kizerbo, 2019). These areas contribute to productivity, which enhances economic growth. While not a solution to all problems, education, training, and innovation are needed to solve challenges, to develop competitively, and to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality.

2.3.2 Sector Skills Plan (SSP)

A Sector Skills Plan (SSP) serves as a comprehensive document outlining the skills demand and supply resulting in the skills gaps in a sector. This skills gap (scarce or critical skills) informs the development of PIVOTAL Interventions to address skills needs in different sectors. The key objective of the Sector Skills Plan (SSP) is to identify the skills priority focus areas by investigating the sector's economic and labour market performance and the extent of skills mismatches to identify scarce occupations and critical skills required in the banking Sector (LGSETA, 2021/2022).

These, in turn, inform the Key programmes to the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA), which allocates discretionary grants to address and reduce the skills gap. Skills planning underpinned by relevant research is imperative for analysing and developing appropriate and relevant interventions to address identified skills priorities. The SSP provides the foundational information for decision-making. It informs the development of the Strategic Plan (SP) and Annual Performance Plan (APP) to ensure that interventions addressing the needs defined by interrogating national priorities and drivers of change are met (LGSETA, 2021/2022). With the context of internships, for example, each of the 21 SETAs may have different priorities in terms of skills development.

For example, the BANKSETA may need skills development around Technology, Digitization and Analytics or Core banking products/services, whereas another sector may need different forms of skills development. The SSP is intertwined with the Skills Development Act of 1998 (LGSETA, 2021/2022). This act is essential in the quest to equip South Africans with relevant skills for development. Two crucial elements of the act, namely, the National Skills Authority (NSA) and Sector

Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), come to the fore. Having explained the importance of SETAs in the introduction, The National Skills Authority is a statutory body established in 1999 in Chapter 2 of the Skills Development Act 1998. The strategic objectives of the NSA are as follows:

- Align the role of the NSA with SDA and White Paper for Post-school Education and Training mandate.
- Strengthen the capacity of the NSA and Secretariat (development of business case)
- Provide advice on the National Skills Development Policies to the Minister and make inputs /participate in other DHET-related policy development processes (NSDS, Seta landscape)
- Review Skills development legislative framework to support integration of education and training and the national priorities of government (inclusive of the NSF framework)
- Develop the capacity of skills development stakeholders and system (establish a Turin-like centre)
- Commission and initiate research, development and innovation to promote beneficiation and business enterprise development opportunities.
- Promote skills development and profile the work of the NSA through communication marketing.
- Support post-school education and training to realize national priorities. (LGSETA, 2021/2022).

2.3.3 The National Skills Accord

The National Skills Accord consists of representatives from business, organised labour, the community and government in an agreed partnership to achieve the new growth plan target of five million new jobs by 2020. The parties concerned have identified eight key areas, which are as follows: Expand the level of training using existing facilities to the fullest.

Make internship and placement opportunities available within the workplace.

- To set guidelines of ratios of trainees: artisans as well as across the technical vocations, in order to improve the level of training.
- To improve training funding and the use of funds available for training and incentives for companies to train.
- To use annual targets for training in state-owned enterprises.
- To improve Seta governance and financial management as well as stakeholder involvement.
- To align training to the New Growth Path and improve Sector Skills Plans.
- To improve the role and performance of colleges. (Rogers, 2021).

The National Skills Accord objectives support the argument by Nick (2021) that even though the job is essential for economic growth, in many countries in the global south, governments no longer have the capacity to create jobs. In South Africa, jobs are vital to ensure economic growth because there is no way the economy can be stable without job creation. Therefore, the importance of job creation in South Africa should be considered a collective responsibility.

The National Skills Accord resonates with the Skills Development Act of 1998. The Act emphasises providing opportunities for those in the South African workforce to gain recognised occupational qualifications. The Act also aims to provide financing for skills development and to provide for and regulate employment services. The National Skills Accord, together with the government, recognises the importance of cooperation in the quest for job creation and economic growth,

In order to fund the learnerships and skills programmes provided for under the Skills Development Act (SDA), the South African government introduced the Skills Development Levies Act (SDLA) to implement a skills development levy which must be paid in respect of employees (Nick, 2021). This is another way to consolidate skills among the population in the quest for development.

2.3.4 National Skills Development Plan (2030)

The NSDP seeks to ensure that South Africa has adequate, appropriate, high-quality skills contributing to economic growth, employment creation and social development. The National Skills Development Policy provides the vision and direction for skills development over the coming years, setting out the significant commitments and critical reforms the government will implement in partnership with industry, workers and civil society.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2017) Report: Getting Skills Right in South Africa has acknowledged that, notwithstanding the efforts of the South African Government and a range of private sector stakeholders to tackle skills imbalances, some challenges remain. The report also suggests that the educational system could be improved, especially in developing basic and technical skills, specifically focusing on historically disadvantaged individuals (FP&M Seta, 2020/2021).

The report adds that more training options are needed for the employed and unemployed and that this training should be relevant for participants' improved employability and career progress. The NSDP derives from the broader government plan, namely the National Development Plan (NDP), which aims to put in place the framework whereby we 'build the capabilities our citizens to make our future work'. The NDP notes that "several challenges require attention, including a critical shortage of skills, a complex intergovernmental system, high levels of corruption, weak lines of accountability, inadequate legislative oversight and a long history of blurring the lines between party and state" (FP&M Seta, 2020/2021).

These are difficult issues, requiring honest reflection, careful planning and decisive leadership." The NDP and the New Growth Path (NGP), albeit in different ways, emphasise the importance of skills development. While the achievement of the objectives of the NDP requires progress on a broad front, three priorities stand out:

- (i). Raising employment through faster economic growth
- (ii). Improving the quality of education, skills development, and innovation; and

- (iii). Building the capability of the state to play a developmental, transformative role. (FP&M Seta, 2020/2021).

There are specific outcomes of NDSP which underpin the need for skills development such as

- (a) Identify and increase production of occupations in high demand.
- (b) Linking education and the workplace
- (c) Improving the level of skills in the South African workforce
- (d) Increase access to occupationally directed programmes.
- (e) Support the growth of the public college institutional type as a key provider of skills required for socio-economic development.
 - Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges
 - Community Education and Training Colleges
- (f) Encourage and support worker-initiated training.
- (g) Support career development services (FP&M Seta, 2020/2021)

2.3.5 Locating the NSDP within an Integrated PSET System

The NSDP promotes greater integration within the post-school education and training system, focusing on the coordination of planning, funding, monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the system with a focus on skills levy institutions.

2.3.6 Contributing to the country's socio-economic development objectives

The NSDP contributes to strategies and priorities of various sectors of the economy, with an emphasis on inclusive growth and employment generation as set out in the NDP, the NGP, the Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) and other key government policy documents.

2.3.6.1 Advancing an equitable and integrated system

The NSDP supports the transformational and redress imperatives in SA through a strong focus on addressing equity in relation, amongst others, to class, gender, race, youth, geography and disability. The NSDP seeks to ensure that skills development interventions reach those already employed and provide opportunities for new entrants to the labour market to gain work experience.

2.3.6.2 Greater inclusivity and collaboration will be promoted. The NSDP promotes

- Collaboration through partnerships within the public sector as well as between the public and private sectors to support effective skills development.
- A focus on quality education and training provision and articulation between programme and qualification offerings to ensure effective learning-to-work pathways.

2.3.6.3 Focusing on a support system for learners and employers: The NSDP seeks

- To ensure prospective learners and the public know when and how to apply for programmes and have access to a simplified process.
- To improve efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making, planning, allocation of funds, implementation, and quality assurance.

2.3.7 The National Development Plan (NDP)

Even though the National Development Plan aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030, fundamentally, the NSDP is critical to enabling government and social partners to contribute towards economic growth, employment creation, and social development. The entire post-school system has been the focus of a significant and radical improvement in the quality of education and training. The NDP calls for such an improvement in the quality of education and training to enhance the capabilities of our people so that they are active participants in developing the country's potential (Education, 2013).

The vision implicit in this is that by growing the economy faster, more people will be drawn into and will create work, thereby raising living standards for all, particularly for people experiencing poverty. This vision informs the NSDP and proposes that an understanding and determination of the demands of the labour market and national priorities must be interpreted into appropriate interventions from education and training institutions.

2.4 Graduate unemployment and the socio-economic conundrum in South Africa

The preceding deliberation underpinned the importance of legislation on skills development in South Africa. However, within the context of higher education, structural challenges persist. While South Africa can be applauded for its increased investments in higher education and its accessibility, one needs to note that such investments do not mean everyone who graduates from higher education institutions will be employed (Mulaisi, 2022). This has allowed the government to improve job market access for fresh graduates and, more importantly, eliminate the experience requirement for entry-level jobs.

There is an increased need for policy reflections on how graduates can get the much-needed experience, be integrated into the workplace, and be imparted with skills that reflect market needs. Within these arguments, essential concepts such as learnerships, apprenticeships, internships and work-integrated learning (explained later) have become essential in alleviating graduate unemployment (Kanyane et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, rushing to implement processes associated with such concepts requires addressing the root causes of graduate unemployment. Factors such as lack of experience, lack of soft skills, poor quality of education and a mismatch between what higher education produces and what the market needs are significant causes of graduate unemployment (de Rhee & Joy, 2012). It is argued that what universities produce and what the market needs have become significant points of

contention in the context of graduate unemployment in South Africa. While arguments have noted that Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses have become vital and needed in a Fourth Industrial Revolution environment, social science disciplines have become increasingly important, especially in policy formulation to address social issues. Therefore, it is crucial for the government, in conjunction with the private sector, to explore options for how to equip graduates (from different disciplines) with skills and experience that reflect the societal and economic needs of the country.

One should criticise the observation that many jobs in South Africa (even entry-level positions) require extensive experience that graduates do not have. However, apart from heavily relying on the government, students studying could also play an active role by getting experience. While at university, this could be via seeking part-time jobs during academic recess (Alie, 2022). This would help them acquire the skills they need so that when they graduate, they are employable and have the skills and competency needed to enter the workplace.

Unemployment has severe socio-economic implications. It contributes to a lack of economic growth, increases dependency on the government and, from a higher education perspective, contributes to a waste of resources. While arguments have maintained the need to do away with experience for entry-level jobs, it is vital to note that employers seek skillful individuals who understand job intricacies and will fit into the corporate culture or the organisation (Bilan et al., 2020). Hence, companies may sometimes feel that employing inexperienced graduates may be risky.

While the Department of Higher Education and Training is aiming to increase the number of students completing university with a qualification from 232,000 in 2023/2024 to 249,509 graduates in 2025/2026 (Cloete, 2023), there is an urgent need to ensure that graduates can put their skills to use, this can be done if they can secure employment. One of the most vital intervention strategies by the government to address graduate unemployment (by imparting skills and experience) has been the implementation of internships. While this intervention may not address the problem in the short term, it in the long term aims to equip students and graduates with the experience they need to prepare them for the place of work (Anjum, 2020).

However, to ensure internships achieve their mandates, one must understand how internships can be implemented effectively, what monitoring and evaluation processes are involved, and how they contribute to securing employment during the internship period. One of the biggest criticisms around internships is their temporary nature. While they equip graduates with skills and experience, the period is short for a graduate to get a holistic view of the work processes. Hence, some argue that the current time frames of the internship should be extended.

Table 3-1: Types of Internships

Internship programme	Explanation
Graduate Internship programme	Candidates who have completed studies at higher education level but are still unemployed
Pre-service training (Student internship or Work Integrated Learning)	The current students undergoing practical learning in workplaces
Candidacy Development Support Programme	Participation in a structured professional development programme linked with registration to a Council or professional body

Source: Pietersen & Malatjie (2022)

The above table reflects the types of internships primarily observable in South Africa. Nonetheless, it becomes essential to reflect that while most of the above disadvantages and advantages around internships focus on the graduate (i.e, graduates from universities and colleges), however learners in high school, especially those in matric (Grade 12) have also been encouraged partake in internships or learnerships.

Edge (2020) notes that learnerships are perfect for Grade 12 school-leaving students. They help the learner better understand the workplace and its dynamics and better help them prepare for post-schooling careers (Edge, 2020). On the other hand, learners who are enrolled in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, in most cases, have a work-integrated learning component embedded in their course. For example, if a course is three years, the learner may undertake 18 months of classroom-based teaching (theory-based) and another 18 months in a working environment (Siebritz, 2022).

This has been observed within trade-related qualifications where practical-based learning has been vital in supplementing the theoretical aspects. For Tvet colleges, learner placement is essential; Murdoch University (2023) notes that job placement ensures students develop the ability to integrate their learning through academic and work-related activities. Apart from internships and learnerships, job shadowing has become another essential element in the learning process. Within the context of high school learners, Faro (2021) notes that it can make a huge, positive impact on their future career paths if they spend a few days of their long winter holidays job-shadowing.

Moreover, Job shadowing makes a real difference when it comes time for students to plan their career choices. It assists them in making a final decision about what they want to do one day. Great Learning team (2021) asserts that on-the-job training has also seen an increase in support; various approaches to on-the-job training, such as job rotation, coaching, mentoring, job instruction and apprenticeship training, have become vital in human capital development.

As a result, there have been arguments that the government should focus on developing and expanding TVET colleges as they play a vital role in consolidating an integrated learning environment. Such arguments are supported by Lushaba (2023), who reflects an even greater need for experienced and qualified artisans to carry out national development plans, leading to government funding and supporting artisan training. Skills such as millwrights, toolmakers, fitters and turners,

carpenters and joiners, welders, instrument technicians and plumbers are in short supply. Seat's Software (2023) notes that work-integrated learning can be time and resource-heavy considering their administrative requirements, lack of effective feedback and support, and poor student performance and emotional distress are other noticeable challenges. Even though TVET are seen as vital in trade-related skills development, areas such as medical, public governance and international relations studies and law courses are still confined to universities. Therefore, the government has dramatically emphasised job experience initiatives over the years to ensure fresh graduates acquire relevant experience. Internships present a unique opportunity for graduates to acquire the much-needed experience to stand out in the market when it is time for them to seek employment.

Table 3-2: Advantages and disadvantages of a formal internship (student perspective)

Advantages of a formal internship	Disadvantages of a formal internship for employer
Practical experience	Students may not complete their degree
Exposure to industry	Time consuming
Helps one decide which field to enter into the workplace	Difficult to find the right fit for the internship
Job opportunities and networking	Increased need for monitoring and supervision

Source: Jay (2011).

While internships or work-integrated learning approaches may be seen as practical, they require cooperation and support from other related stakeholders. While interns may see this as an opportunity to gain experiences, networking and potential jobs after their internship, the internship process is equally essential for the host (the employer). However, inadequate planning or a rushed implementation process may have adverse effects. Learners may not complete their degree/training due to issues which may have been avoided if due diligence had been given. It may also be time-consuming and require additional resources, impacting the overall process, hence the importance of planning and effectively implementing a work-integrated learning programme.

In South Africa, there are various initiatives the government has prioritised over the years to ensure graduates acquire much-needed work-related experience, such as learnerships, apprenticeships, internships and work-integrated learning. Learnerships are structured programmes combining work-based learning with directive theoretical learning. It involves an employer providing individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to work in a specific field (Revolution Media, 2023).

Apprenticeships are also another form of work-based learning that is designed to provide individuals with experience and skills in order for them to become focused explicitly on a specific trade. Internships are another form of work-based approach, usually a term position designed to provide individuals with an opportunity to gain experience in a specific field (Revolution Media, 2023). Finally, work-integrated learning combines classroom instruction with practical, hands-on experience in a workplace setting. It is designed to allow students to apply the skills and knowledge they have learned in the classroom in a real-world setting and to gain valuable work experience before they enter the workforce. For employers, internships can have both advantages and disadvantages.

Table 3-3: Advantages and disadvantages internship for the employer (Graduate perspective)

Advantages of a formal internship for employer	Disadvantages of a formal internship for employer
Stipends instead of salaries	Resources, time and money spent
Young and motivated enthusiastic	Chaos if programme not run correctly
Staff recruitment	Existing employees would have to sacrifice time and productivity to train interns
Employers can meet and assess figure graduates, without having to commit to permanent work	Students can leave after internship; employer has then trained the student for another company
Cooperate social responsibility	

Source: Jay (2011)

For the employers, interns can be vital as they may bring innovation and new ideas and add to one's workforce to ensure more productivity. However, internships can only be supportive if they are supported and given the necessary resources to function. However, for the employer, if internships are not planned effectively, they can waste resources, which means students do not get the necessary skills and experience to prepare them for the workplace better.

Despite these advantages and disadvantages, internships are recognised. They are the best mechanisms to stimulate job creation and an effective means to promote the inclusion of unemployed, inexperienced youth into the formal economy. However, there have been arguments around government-sponsored internships in South Africa. Critics argue that interns in government-sponsored internships work for permanent employees, leading to increased debates around the exploitation of interns (Issac, 2019).

There have also been arguments around the lack of support and mentoring, which limits their understanding of the workplace holistically, thus questioning the effectiveness of internships. Secondly, there have been arguments that internships should be longer and equip a graduate with a holistic view of the workplace and the skills and experience needed to make a meaningful impact.

As a result, once the internship period is over and they are not absorbed, interns struggle to find employment because of various issues such as the duration of the internship programme, its failure to give the interns a holistic view of the workplace, lack of mentoring and networking opportunities and interns performing tasks not associated with their field of study (Mseleku, 2022). Internship programmes should ensure that the skills and experiences imparted to the graduate speak to the realities of the country's labour market to position the intern for post-internship employment.

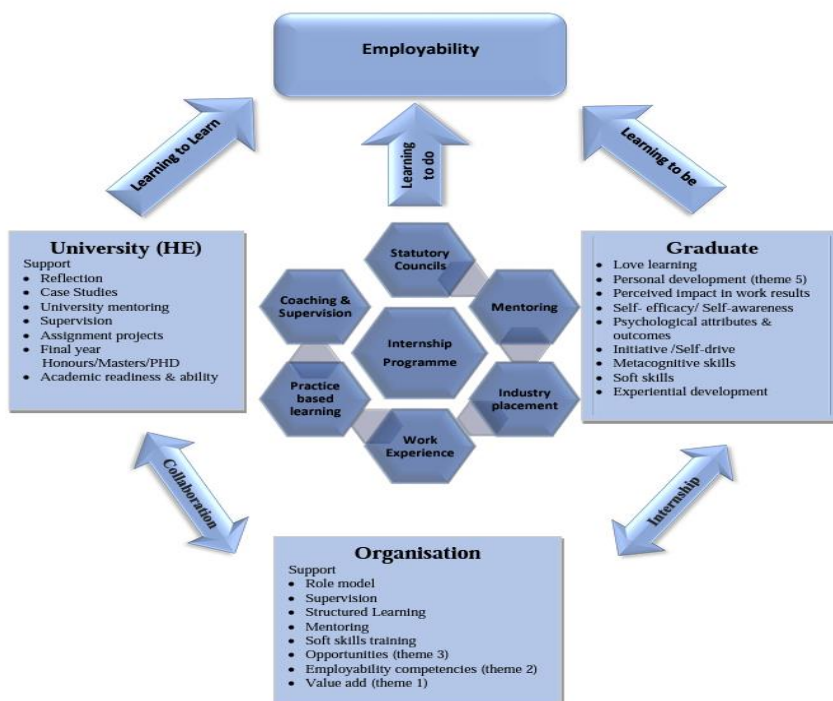
However, no matter the alignment of internship programmes and the labour market, the growth in the job market depends on the country's economic development. Ever since the 2008 financial crisis, the growth of South Africa's economy has been shallow (Rena & Msoni, 2014). Before the crisis, the economy averaged 5.5% economic growth every year. After the crisis, growth has been around 1.5 to 1%, signalling a struggling economy. Therefore, it is challenging for many graduates, even those who finish their internship programmes, to find employment in an economy that is not growing, further putting pressure on the government to intervene and stimulate the economy to ensure jobs can be created.

Even though internships are an effective mitigating strategy for graduate unemployment, without continued support and mentoring, interns are likely to see internships as a need to earn rather than a process where valuable experience can be attained.

2.5 Impact of Internship on post graduate employability

Mahlakoana (2022) agrees that the internship programmes were not serving the purpose they were created for, with departments unable to absorb interns with many returning to the unemployment pool. Young people between the ages of 25 and 34 make up 42.1% of the overall unemployment rate in the country, with those between 15 and 24 at 63.9%, and graduates in the age group at 32.6% (Statistics South Africa, 2022). While criticisms against internships persist, internships are essential and contribute to attaining skills and experience.

Figure 3-1: A framework for internship programmes



Source: Lubega & Schultz (2022)

The above illustration provides an overview of how the internship process should be developed and the importance of different role players. To ensure the best possible outcomes for employers and graduates, all stakeholders must play a role through essential elements such as monitoring and support. From an organisational perspective, interns need a learning culture and soft skills. Higher education institutions need to instill valuable teachings that reflect market demands. However, to positively understand the impact of internships, one must look at their long-term impact.

That is, while internships allow businesses to increase staff quality and improve long-term career prospects for participants, one needs to understand how many interns can obtain permanent employment after the internship. Understanding this will likely give one a better understanding of their impact and where they should be improved, consolidating the importance of monitoring and

evaluation. From a business perspective, businesses can grow their talent pool by enlisting top-performing interns into the company's team once the internship has ended (Wills, 2018). Therefore, many scholars argue that internships are a win for all in most cases. There are various benefits for interns, which in most cases are overlooked and impact significantly on the learner, such as job experience, access to a variety of opportunities, mentorship, help in guiding career goals and creating a professional work network and good references for one's Curriculum Vitae.

2.5 Future of internships in South Africa: *The quest for experience*

It becomes difficult to predict the future trends of internships in South Africa. The preceding discussions touched on numerous issues that must be considered to ensure that government-sponsored internships can contribute to inclusive socio-economic development. Skills and experience imparted to graduates need to reflect the country's realities.

Secondly, it is fundamental to ensure that government-sponsored internships help train and equip interns with much-needed experience. This argument stems from the notion that one of the criticisms of government-sponsored internships in South Africa is that interns do the work meant to be done by permanently employed personnel, depriving them of the mentorship and networking opportunities they need for long-term development.

Thirdly, it becomes fundamental to understand the developmental progress of interns once the programme has ended, thus increasing the need for robust monitoring and evaluation procedures. This is vital as internships are short; therefore, one must understand whether the skills and experiences imparted to interns have helped them secure permanent employment. This helps understand whether internship programmes work, so one can constantly revise them based on current realities.

Fourthly, ensuring that private or public internships reflect the labour market's needs becomes vital. One of the most fundamental problems in South Africa today is the mismatch between what universities are producing and what the market wants. Therefore, this calls for close observation of whether the current curriculum in higher education reflects the market's needs. The failure to do this will mean higher education institutions are producing graduates with the right qualifications but are not needed in the market, contributing to the waste of resources.

Going forward, increased engagement with stakeholders based on the ever-changing socio-economic environment is vital to ensure that skills imparted to interns are meaningful and relevant to the employment environment. There is a need to capacitate the employer and consider the challenges employers face when hosting interns. Therefore, from a stakeholder perspective, mitigating employers' challenges will ensure they impart the skills interns need post-internship. The graduate unemployment rate in South Africa is holding back inclusive socio-economic development, and it is vital to ensure that interventions such as learnerships, apprenticeships, internships and work-integrated learning speak to the country's needs.

2.6 Internship programmes at a global and African level

Internship programmes are not only based in South Africa but globally. Understanding internships globally helps understand, comprehend, compare, and analyse their role and impact in South Africa. According to Mseleku (2022), many international internship programmes are available globally. Adeosun, Shittu, & Owolabi (2022) note that at the international level, for instance, there is the “United Nations Internship Programme” that intends to offer internship opportunities for graduates all over the world, such as interns work in different UN agencies to acquire practical experience in different fields, such as international relations, development, human rights and many more. Besides the United Nations Internship Programme,

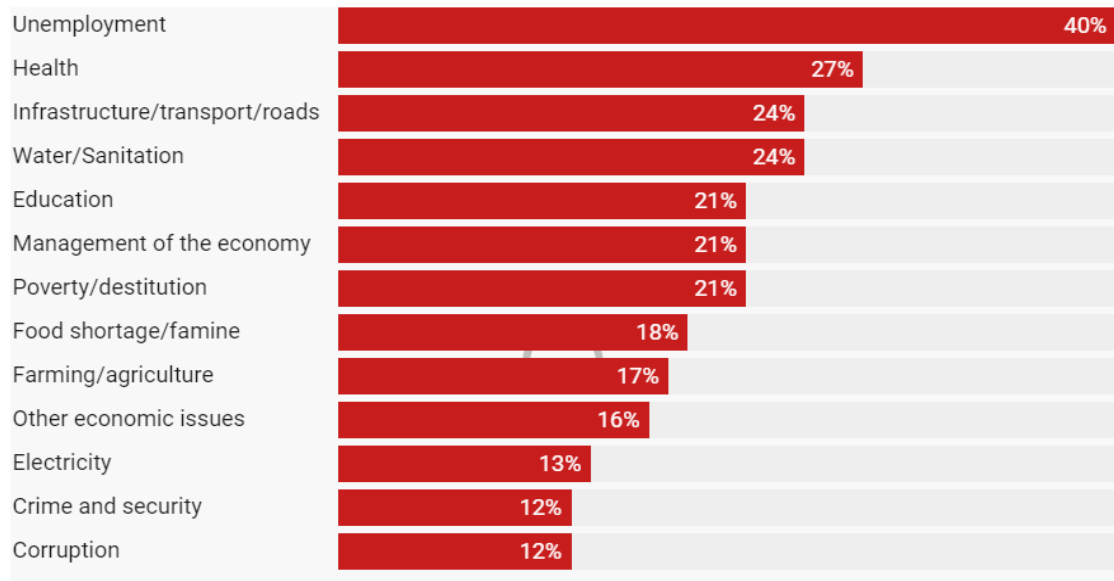
The World Bank Group also offers internship programmes that intend to provide experiential learning to young professionals (Ulku & Georgieva, 2022). Moreover, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) Internship Programme provides internship programmes to young graduates. Google Internship Programme is another strategy to provide young people with opportunities to develop their skills in software engineering, product management, user experience design and marketing (Akubilo, 2023). The interns work with others but are assigned a well-experienced professional as a mentor. On the other hand, a Microsoft Internship Programme gives internships to young graduates to work on cutting-edge technology and projects (Akubilo, 2023).

The Microsoft internship provides skills in software development, data science, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence (Pittenger, 2021). Other relevant internships are the European Space Agency (ESA) Young Graduate Trainee Programme. This organisation primarily trains young graduates in engineering, science, and computer science. Lastly, another organisation that focuses on developing skills amongst young people is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Internship Programme. It is based on developing skills in disaster management, health, and communication (Mawaddah et al., 2023). Different organisations offer two types of internships (see Figure 1) at the international level. Such internships are paid and unpaid.

One of the most significant African problems in Africa is the lack of job opportunities, poverty, and inequality. The history of Africa also contributes to the current challenges. The provision of job opportunities is crucial for African graduates to be able to address the social problems they face. However, they need more experience to be employed (Filomena, 2023). Likewise, internships are essential for African development and economic growth as they are critical in training and equipping graduates with experience. (Baliwulira, 2023).

Shi (2023) further states that it helps to bridge the gap between education and employment. In Africa, internship programmes are offered with different intentions. For instance, skills development internships allow young people and graduates to gain hands-on experience in their field of interest (Piper & Wilairat, 2022). Offering practical skills helps them be exposed to relevant skills and knowledge and increases their employability during the internship. Through internships, African graduates can obtain industry-specific competencies usually lacking in a traditional academic setting.

Figure 3-2: Important challenges of Africa



Source: Disrupt Development (2021).

Despite African countries facing numerous challenges, the lack of job opportunities is number one (figure 2). This further emphasises that having an internship programme to help African graduates have the necessary skills gives them more employment opportunities. In many African countries, there needs to be more connection between the skills obtained in the institution of higher learning and the job market requirements. Internships have emerged to close the gap between the knowledge and skills obtained through formal education and the requirements needed in the job market (Goulart et al., 2022).

In the African continent, it offers a platform for young people to build professional networks and create relationships with other experienced young people who are professionals. Networking opportunities can lead to future job offers or connections that prove invaluable for career advancement. In entrepreneurship and innovation, internships can expose graduates to entrepreneurial environments that can help them obtain skills based on startups, incubators, or technology hubs (Goulart et al., 2022). Furthermore, such interns can learn and understand the possibilities for businesses to fail and to be successful.

Chapter 3

Evaluation approach and methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a methodological approach employed to conduct this evaluation study. The evaluation of SASSETA internship programs was guided by the logical evaluation framework and focused on the concepts of program fidelity and student satisfaction. The principle of the evaluative framework played a significant role in determining the suitable methodological approach and design employed in this study. This chapter present the evaluation design and methodological approach.

3.2 Methodological approach

The evaluation will be based on a mixed methods approach, to establish a robust evidence base. This will be informed by the evaluation matrix and will combine an in-depth document review as well as key informant interviews. The evaluation will use purposive sampling rather than a random sampling approach. In terms of methodology, the study is based on three types of data that allows to analyse and interpret the SASSETA's internship programs that were implement between 2018 and 2021.

The study adopts a qualitative research approach; the rationale for adopting this approach was that this research sought to construct meaning out of the experiences of the selected participants on the effectiveness of internship programmes funded by SASSETA. Internships are meant to consolidate skills development and, more importantly, prepare one for possible employment. Cloete (2015) expounds that the rise in educated unemployment in South Africa is a big concern, as young people view education as useless and not crucial to their development. Thus, there have been many interventions aimed at addressing this problem, and one of these has been the internship approach.

The evaluators have a broad understanding of the role of internships and their overall developmental requirements. There is a need to understand the attitudes and perceptions of those at the frontlines of these programmes. Hence, the evaluation approach chosen will allow the study to gain a deeper insights and understanding on the thoughts and concerns of the participants on SASSETA internship programs. Bloomberg & Volpe (2008), argue that qualitative research should be presented systematically for ease of reference and must explicitly explain how the research was conducted.

In qualitative research, one of the methods to collect data is the use of interviews; similarly, data was collected using interviews in this research. Asenahabi (2019) also notes that qualitative studies use a descriptive approach, similar to the approach utilised in this research. Taking into consideration the background of the study, its setting, sampling methods and data collection, the researcher concluded that these factors, together with the research approach adopted, were sufficient in helping the researcher realise the objectives of the study.

Interviews become vital in understanding this probe further; hence in the researcher's view, the fundamental assumptions and key features that distinguish what it means to proceed from a

qualitative stance fit well within the context of this study. Additionally, looking at the title and objectives of the study, they align with features such as (a) understanding the processes by which events and actions take place, (b) developing contextual understanding, (c) facilitating interactivity between researcher and participants, (d) adopting an interpretive stance.

The study examines the impact of internship programme post work placement within the safety and security sector. The evaluation questions, as outlined above, seek to solicit information from participants with considerable knowledge and experience on the perceived effectiveness of these programmes. The evaluative framework is employed as a tool that helps to present a systematic and clear overview of the evaluation methodology and process.

The evaluative framework is a more practical, non-prescriptive tool designed with the intention of summarizing and organize crucial elements of the programme evaluation. The elements (inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, ad impact) of the evaluative framework play a huge role in contextualizing the evaluation process. These elements have been used as a driving force for planning and assessing the state and fidelity of internship programs. This has been achieved by adhering to the following outlined design and methodological approaches.

3.2.1 Evaluation design

The evaluation will be based on a mixed methods approach, to establish and triangulate evidence. It is mainly based on the primary data, but secondary data is also used. The study is positioned to the exploratory evaluation design to provide a qualitative evaluation of the subject with the aim to understand the perceptions of stakeholders and beneficiaries of the internship programs for the period from 2018 to 2021. The exploratory evaluation design has been used based on its flexibility to study an evaluative research study from the qualitative point of view using interview schedules.

This study relied extensively on the principles of the qualitative approach. This research approach was based on the fact that it helped the researcher to determine more detailed opinions and experiences of participants regarding their participation in the strategic partnership with SASSETA. The qualitative approach has further helped the researcher to comprehend very well the meaning of the participants' actions.

According to Corbin, Strauss, and Strauss (2014), this research approach has the essential strength of giving a evaluators the ability to discover the internal experiences of participants and also determine the extent to which the meaning is being shaped. In the context of this study, the qualitative research approach ensured that the process of data collection is more detailed and subjective.

3.2.2 Target population and sampling methods

The target population of this study comprised Learners whom SASSETA placed to partake in its funded internship, employers who are supposed to provide the learners with the training, and SASSETA project managers. This population was sampled using the non-probability sampling

method. This was an essential method of data sampling since purposive sampling was used as a subjective method. Hence, purposive sampling was used to sample participants from various stakeholders who participated in the internship programs between 2018 to 2021. This group of participants was purposively sampled since they fit a particular profile. These key subject matter experts were sampled using purposive because the researcher has prior knowledge about the purpose of this study and the responsibility entitled to these participants, which makes them a suitable population to be sampled.

3.2.3 Sample size

Mason (2010) says that in conducting a qualitative study, it is optional to have a large number of participants. This is because sampling in qualitative research intends to obtain information that is valuable to understand the depth, complexity, context, or variation around the particular phenomenon instead of representing the population as it usually occurs in quantitative research (Mason, 2010).

The total number of institutions of higher education that were available in the existing database was one hundred and fifty (150) for the period 2018 to 2023. As a result, stakeholders were recruited to participate in this study by sending an email invite asking them to confirm their participation. As a result, it was seventy one (71) participants who confirmed their participation.

3.2.4 Data collection

The study relied extensively on the use of interviews for the purpose of collecting data. The interview questions were more in-depth in nature as the evaluator's interest has been in gaining in-depth perceptions of participants on the subject at hand. In-depth interviews are regarded as the most flexible instrument for data collection since they consist of open-ended questions, which can be modified and altered depending on the nature of responses from the participants.

In qualitative research, data collection involves selecting and producing visual or linguistic material to understand phenomena. Data can be collected from primary sources or secondary sources. This study conducted semi-structured interviews and a documentation analysis under which a literature review was undertaken. From the interviews, 75 former interns participated in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the relevant data, and online surveys were also used to supplement interviews.

Based on the above justification for sampling, it was vital in helping this study answer its underlying questions. The documentation analysis was undertaken to understand historical reflections on the perceived effectiveness of internships. The study also relied on theoretical information and secondary data to collect relevant information.

The study employed textual analysis of the available literature relevant to unemployment in South Africa, the role of internships as an intervention approach and their perceived effectiveness. The secondary data will be also used such as books, newspaper articles, journals, reliable internet

sources, government policy documentation, speeches and legislation that is available and relevant to the study. As a result, all participants have an opportunity to express their experiences in depth using their own words. To protect the participants, evaluators explained the objectives, procedures and data protection to the participants and always sought their consent before collecting data. The evaluators rechecked the completion to get accurate and completed questionnaires for the analysis.

3.2.5 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis was achieved through the use of content analysis. This is an analysis tool that helps to analyse data, which is in the form of text, interview records, books, websites, and so forth to regulate the frequency of a particular phenomenon. The content analysis was used to analyse and categorise qualitative data on the bases of themes derived from the objectives of the study that was conducted through interviews that were guided by in-depth interview questions.

Moreover, the content analysis allowed a researcher to read the interviews carefully, and afterward, the researcher was able to identify and formulate several topics. Hence, the researcher was able to identify specific notions and trends of ideas that occurred with particular participants. In addition, Nkuna (2016) is of the view that this method of data analysis grants an opportunity for objective analysis of transcribed substantial data and can also identify the meaning of text data.

3.3 Ethical consideration

Respondents are protected from any form of harm in any research involving people. Privacy and anonymity of participants were observed. Participants were notified that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time of the study without any form of sanctions. The interview schedule included consent information that the participants read. If they were willing to participate in the study, they signed the consent section and proceeded to answer questions. Information obtained from respondents will be kept safe and used for this study only.

Informed consent was used to protect the rights of respondents by letting them know the purpose of the study. The voluntary participation of respondents was considered, as the respondents were granted a right to withdraw from their participation at any time if they felt like withdrawing. For confidentiality, the evaluators ensured that other people did not gain access to the confidential information shared by participants during the data collection process. It was further ensured that other people do not have access to the confidential information shared by participants during the data collection process. The next chapter is based on the presentation, interpretation, and analysis of the main findings.

Chapter 4

Data presentation

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the results of the data analysis exercise, the data is presented in terms of the themes that was developed in line with the data. Themes were divided in to two groups (interns and host employers) based on the characteristics of the data. The following themes were based on the data collected from the learners in order to categories the analysis; accordingly, insufficient stipend amount, lack of support, roles not aligned with qualifications, delays in payment of stipend, internship to short and unrealistic workload for interns.

4.2 Demographic data

Figure 4-1: Gender characteristics

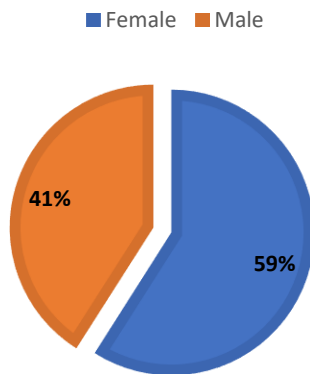


Figure 4-1, gives a breakdown of the gender characteristics in this study. From the above, females were more represented than males. From the data collection, females were more optimistic about the skills they gained than males.

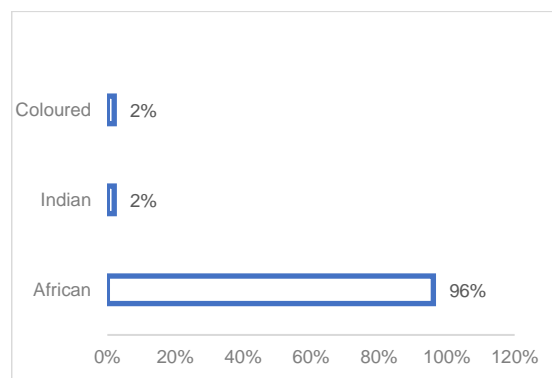
While this cannot be seen as abnormal, Perhaps the hunger for growth and development in females is greater than in males.

Source: Authors calculations (2023)

Figure 4-2, gives a breakdown of the race characteristics in this study. there were more Black South Africans represented than any other race.

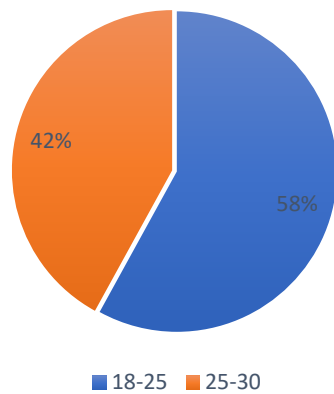
However, this is not surprising given that as of 2022, South Africa's population increased and counted approximately 60.6 million inhabitants, of which the majority (roughly 49.1 million) were Black Africans. Hence, those seeking employment in large numbers are likely to be black South Africans

Figure 4-2: Race characteristics



Source: Authors calculations (2023)

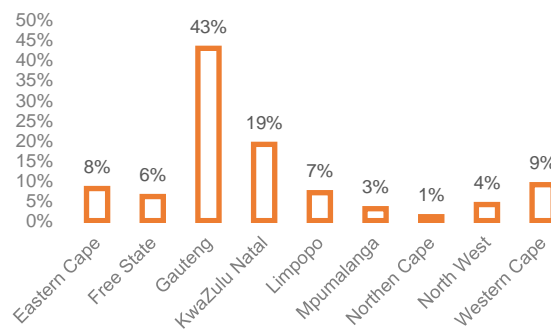
Figure 4-3: Age



Source: Authors calculations (2023)

Figure 4-4, gives a breakdown of the geographic location in terms of where the participants comes from. Even though some provinces are more representative than others, participating in SASSETA interns reflects the diversity and provincial representation of interns.

Figure 4-4: Geographics of the participants



Source: Authors calculations (2023)

4.3 Narrative data analysis: *Thematic review*

Theme 1: Insufficient stipend amount

The participant's responses were primarily concerned about interns' financial constraints in the workplace because of the insufficient stipend amount. The insufficient stipend amount can distract the intern from participating fully in their allocated work. For example,

"Honestly, I am not happy at all about the stipend I receive here. It is disheartening because the stipend cannot cover all my monthly needs like transport, food and other needs" (P 13 & P74).

Working in this internship has been a great experience, but the stipend is limited to rent and groceries. Hence, I am worried because I have to support them at home with the little, I receive" (P 13).

Based on the study's findings, it shows that participants are not happy about the stipend they receive. It is further shown that the stipend they receive cannot cover all their monthly cost, which are transport, food, and other needs. The findings also show that some had to support home despite their needs. The findings of the study link with the literature arguments of Perlin (2012), who reveals that the interns receive a stipend which is too low.

"I sometimes feel like I am spending more in this internship than I was expecting. Firstly, I must rent, transport myself from where I stay to work, and eat. The money is not enough at all" (P2 & P66)

"I am grateful to work in this internship programme, but the stipend I receive is minimal, hence, it is tough for me to survive since I have to be asking for money every month while I am working" (P10)

Based on the study's findings, some participants feel they are spending more on this internship than earning more. Even though the participants are grateful to partake in the internship programme, the received stipend is disappointing. Likewise, the findings of the study link with that of the literature (Gwija et al., 2014), which has shown how Insufficient stipend amounts or unpaid internships can exacerbate financial insecurity among young people.

Underpaid internships can contribute to income inequality and hinder access to opportunities for individuals who cannot afford to work for little to no compensation. The findings of the study also reveal that some of the participants do the part-time job for them so survive because the stipend is just not enough.

"I must do some part-time job for me to survive. For that reason, I find myself stretched thin between work." (P8)

"I am currently stressed with finances. If I had a better job, I would resign for something better. There is a lot of work here, but the money is not enough". (P 17 & 62)

The study's findings show that some interns must get a part-time job to survive. Moreover, some participants would resign if they could secure a better job.

Participants 42, 46 & 33 argued that:

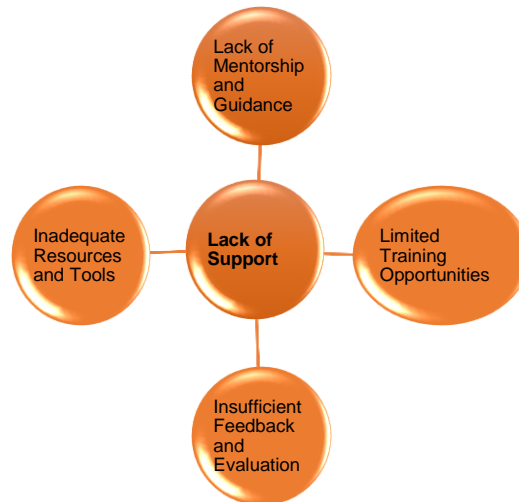
I experienced financial challenges and sometimes felt discouraged from putting my full potential into my duties. I felt the stipend was too low to cover the day-to-day operational expenses of being an intern. What made it worse was the delay in payment. The stipend was already low. The delay in payment made it worse. An increase to R5500 would suffice to address this issue (P42, 46 & 33).

The stipend was too low for me because I took part in the internship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of my family members were laid off, and my stipend became the only source of income. That is when I realised the stipend was low and needed to be increased based on the current situation (P68, 71 & 75).

Theme 2: Lack of support

In this section, the study's findings show that interns lack four types of support. Firstly, there is a lack of support in mentorship and guidance. Secondly, there is a lack of support in training and opportunities. Thirdly, there is Insufficient feedback and evaluation. Lastly, there is inadequate resources and tools.

Figure 4-5: Lack of Support



Interns "feel" that they are not adequately supported. From the study's sample (33) participants revealed that they don't get support in mentorship and guidance on what have to be done in the place of work. For example,

"While I was still an intern, I discovered a lack of mentorship programme and guidance in the workplace. As a result, I had many questions which I was eager to know, but it was challenging to find someone willing to help me".

Based on some responses from participants, there was a lack of mentorship and guidance in the workplace. In essence, for some, as quantified above, increased mentorship and guidance would have considerably helped them grow in the workplace. However, Boini, Colin and Grzebyk (2017) show that the managers in the workplace are responsible for ensuring that the employed intern receives a mentor who will guide them and help them access training opportunities.

"The problem I faced was not having access to training opportunities. I strongly believe that an intern should have access to training opportunities just like the other employees" (P3 & 58).

Furthermore, participant 59 & 33 further reflected that:

Not really. The internship programme does not offer many other development programmes or courses. The programme did not assist me in gaining valuable experience because we were employed during COVID-19 (2020) for a year. During that period, we had to stay home for a while, doing nothing as we used desktops.

During the internship, I was hoping it would flourish, but honestly, it did not flourish at all. I am still applying for posts and have not even been considered for one, so I am back to square one as others are, and what makes it painful is that they don't have the experience I have.

The study findings display that the interns yearn to be treated like other employees (who may be permanent or on long-term contracts). While understanding that the internship may be short, participants felt they should be entitled to training to enhance their skills. Furthermore, there was the view that feedback on tasks was limited, hindering their growth.

"Feedback is crucial for professional growth, but I often received minimal feedback or evaluation on my work as an intern. This lack of constructive criticism made it difficult to gauge my progress and improve." (P 28)

Based on the study's findings, feedback is crucial for professional growth, but interns received limited feedback and evaluation of their performance. This makes it difficult for them to judge if their actions are correct. Furthermore, the study's finding shows that the interns provided limited working tools.

"I encountered situations where I lacked access to essential resources and tools to complete my tasks. It's challenging to excel as an intern when you don't have the necessary support in terms of equipment and software." (P 19)

The study's findings show that interns face difficulties in the workplace if they are not provided with adequate resources. The lack of equipment and software can affect the productivity of the interns. The literature (Kim & Park, 2013) shows that if the interns are not provided with the necessary resources, it can cause frustration and affect their performance.

Participants P48, 44 & 65 also communicated that:

There was a lack of support because the programme was not monitored effectively by SASSETA. They only come once or twice during the internship programme, so they need to meet with interns monthly to ensure that we are exposed to all the work we ought to be exposed to.

Adding to this reflection, participants 69, 63 & 43 added that growth and development will become realisable with support.

No, where I was placed had no developmental opportunities, and there was no support at all. Moreover, some of my intern colleagues were placed in under-resourced places and were not given exposure. Therefore, we were forced to go around the organisation seeking workplace exposure. Moreover, the internship did not assist me with any skills, and none of my expectations were met. Most of my time during the internship was spent on administration, making copies and filling. (P69, 63 & 43)

Theme 3: Roles not aligned with qualifications.

This theme shows that the work the interns are employed to do and their qualifications are not linked. For example:

"Interns are often brought into organisations with certain qualifications and skills, but they might find themselves doing tasks that don't fully utilise their expertise. This can be frustrating for the interns as it might not make the best use of their potential". (P 22)

Another reflection came from participants 37, 40 & 41 who narrated that:

There was a great deal of lack of support because we only focused on one part of human resources: recruitment and selection. Moreover, maybe after getting another internship, I will gain more experience to be employable. As for this internship, not enough was available in my career field.

The study's findings show that interns are brought into organisations with a particular set of qualifications and skills. However, they might find themselves doing tasks that don't fully utilise their expertise. The findings further show that this can be frustrating for interns as it might not make the

best use of their potential. Furthermore, although some interns are happy about being employed as interns, they are unhappy that their qualifications do not match the allocated work.

*"I appreciate the opportunity to intern at this company, but I must admit that the job responsibilities I was given did not align with the technical skills and knowledge I have from my coursework. I was hoping for a more hands-on experience in my field, which was not the case."
(P4)*

Based on the study's findings, interns are happy to be employed, but the most important thing is that sometimes the work allocated does not match their qualifications, and that's a challenge to them.

Participants 73, 64 & 52 noted that:

As an intern, I was placed in a department where only one senior management and no exposure to work was given to me. As a result, I performed secretary duties (meeting bookings/organising for Directors and assisting senior management with making copies, which did not award me any exposure to the accounting field. We were then rotated to different divisions. Unfortunately, the directorate I was allocated to had no practical qualifications aligned with work(P, 73, 64 & 52).

Moreover, participant P50, 36 & 67 further reflected that:

I am unsure about that, as my duties during the internship and my current employment are unrelated. SAPS mainly analysed crime, and I mainly responded to incidents in my current job. No - I had to discard that whole experience and study further as it did not assist. I did not have anything valuable that I have learned from the department apart from taking minutes in meetings and performing all secretarial duties. No, I only gained experience only on basics such as making copies, welcoming guests, answering phone calls, typing, Collection of pay sheets, Collection of signals, etc. (P 50, 36 & 67)

Theme 4: Delay in payment of stipend

From the data analysis, it became clear that most participants were unhappy about the delay in stipends. Delays were frequent and caused great financial stress, which hindered their effective concentration at work. The lack of communication from SASSETA is the main reason behind the frequent delays on payments. For most participants, people never wanted to take full accountability for this. Another frustration was that where interns were placed, the employer was not liable for their stipends. Hence, when they inquired, employers would tell interns to contact SASSETA, which they felt was another administration burden.

The responses from the participants are narrated below:

"I do understand why pay us so little, on top of that delay in payment and no one tells us anything, it is frustrating really" (P1)

I do not think they understand we have needs. Just because were desperate for a job does not mean they should treat us like this. (P28, 23, 11).

The above reflection points to one issue: there was generally uneasiness among interns driven by the delay in payment. Even though internships are vital, it is necessary to research the policy implementation of internships and the experiences of graduate interns in public service based on all relevant policies. To this end, the efficacy of the internship programme could be determined. The policy should always be reflective and consider interns' needs to ensure

seamless integration and, more importantly, ensure that it can impact the intern with the required skills. This was supported by participants 16, 09 and 15, who narrated that:

“There needs to be a policy stating when interns are paid. This will help one better plan because when you budget, you think you will get paid at the end of the month. When month end comes, and you have no money, all your plans go to waste. So SASSETA must ensure that even before they advertise an internship programme, they have all their processes in line to avoid interns’ frustration”. (P16, 09 & 15)

However, Participants 33 and 22 had different reflections on this issue they argued that:

‘SASSETA is a SETA. They do not generate money independently; rather, they depend on the government for financial support. Hence, they cannot be blamed for delays due to government bureaucracy. (P33 & 22)

Participant 02 and 26 echoed this narrative albeit with a different approach. They note that:

‘Even though SETAs depended on the state for support, when hosting an internship programme, you need to take full responsibility to ensure it succeeds. The only issue at times was the lack of communication from SASSETA. (P2 & 3)

Participants 5 and 7 were of the view that maybe the hosting agencies should pay stipends to avoid delay.

Maybe it would be better and economically viable for SASSETA to transfer the stipend payment to the hosting employer’s next time. Administratively, too, it would be better for SASSETA as the workload will be reduced. (P5 & 7)

Participant 3 also notes that communication at the beginning of the internship would resolve many challenges they may come across down the line.

If, at the beginning, we are told that our stipends might sometimes be paid late, we would make alternative plans to cope with this delay. It is the lack of communication that affects everything. (P3)

Further highlighting the lack of communication from SASSETA, Participants 6, 7 and 17 lamented how they had not received their certificates.

We completed the programme; however, we have still not heard anything about certificates. Do you know anything about this? The Participants cried foul about why they were not told what was happening. (P6, 7 & 17)

From the interviews, it became clear that the delay in payment was giving rise to other related challenges, which greatly affected the intern's focus, dedication to work and responsiveness. The issue around the delayed stipend was a major challenge many participants faced. To further supplement the argument above, participants 45, 32 and 31 noted that:

Late payments or not being paid for some months was the biggest challenge. SASSETA made it so difficult for us to finish our 12-month contract. There was a time when we had to stay home because we did not have money to travel to work. And the lack of communication from SASSETA was deplorable. Whenever we wanted to know why we were not paid or received a stipend, they did not even answer the phone or tell us the person responsible for our stipend was on leave. Like, really? That was terrible. We did not have any plan to resolve it other than to wait for them to pay us and continue as if nothing had happened. (P 45, 32 & 31)

Late payment of stipends was detrimental to the focus and survivability of internship as whole. For example, a similar situation in Kenya saw medical interns hit the streets of

Nairobi yesterday and demanded payment of their four months' delayed salary. At the core was the delayed in payment of stipends. This was negative as colleagues who have to choose between food and fare, rent and decent clothing (Kebaso, 2023). The above sentiment was supported by participants 70, and 56 who argued that:

There were not many challenges other than the delays of stipends which led to having to struggles to get money to get to work sometimes. (P70 & 56)

Participants, 35 and 47 further voiced their concerns their frustration at the delay in stipend. their reflections are captured below:

We informed our supervisors about the delayed stipend. They decided to do free access train cards for transport, which I felt was demoralising. This was frustrating, I will not lie. It happened often and led us to send SASSETA a formal complaint to resolve this issue. (P 34 & 47)

As a result, this theme had two sub-themes that further narrated interns' feelings, perceptions and attitudes concerning the delay in payment.

Sub theme 1: Cannot satisfy needs.

There was the general view that apart from being late at times, the stipend, looking at today's socio-economic trajectory in South Africa, simply cannot satisfy one's needs. Various reasons were given for this, such as:

- (a) Cost of travelling,
- (b) Cost of food,
- (c) Personal care,
- (d) Taking care of the family.

The above were concerns raised by interns. The general view was that a R7000 stipend would go a long way in addressing the challenges above. The reflections of Participants on these issues are narrated below.

In a month, travelling to and from work costs me R1600 alone. After that, I need to take care of my family and myself. Hence, the stipend is not sustainable at all. However, we I am thankful that I had an income. (P22, 14)

Participants 11 and 7 were also worried about the stipend amount and narrated that:

Well of course, we appreciate the support we get from SASSETA. However, increasing the stipend a bit to reflect the rising cost of living in SA would help (P11 & 7).

The cost of living in South Africa is rising, and Participants 3,19 and 23 felt this warranted an adjustment of stipends.

Every day, when you wake up in SA, everything has gone up, yet salaries remain the same. A slight increase in the stipend would, therefore, make up for this increase in the cost of living. I think some government departments or agencies should look at it carefully. (P3, 19 & 23)

However, despite the assertions arguing for an increase in the stipend amount, some had a different view while acknowledging the need for increasing the stipend. Participants 3, 7, 18 and 23 felt that SASSETA, works on a budget given to it. Hence it may be unreasonable to demand an increase in the stipend as this might have operational repercussions.

Yes, we need money, but they have a budget to work with. This needs to be done from a national point of view and not only SASSETA. (P3, 7, 18 and 23)

The above discussion was premised on the need to survive, hence the argument that the stipend needs to be increased. These reflections are supported by a study by Mabeba (2019) titled “The impact of internship programme on skills development in the South African public institutions: Are internships still relevant”, which found that in general, internships have an impact on skills development even though some interns are not necessarily satisfied with the monthly stipend as the money is too little. While others claim not to be satisfied with the nature of duties, they are expected to perform during work hours, as some tasks do not add value to skills development.

Participants 4 and 9 reflect that while internships should be about money rather than experience, money is central to it.

Yes, we should not look at internships as a job but as an experience-gaining venture that aims to give us skills. However, money is vital in the process. For example, money is critical to making it to work on time for those who use public transport. (P 4 & 9)

From the above, it becomes clear that the delay in paying stipends leads to various operational challenges for the interns. The above discussion reflects a similar pattern concerning the perceptions, attitudes, and narratives of the Participants regarding the delay in payment. It also shows that success in an internship programme hinges on numerous issues.

Participants 37, 40 & 41 also communicated that:

I took part in the internship when the pandemic was here. This put pressure on one's finances, during this time prices of goods increased dramatically and the stipend was little to cover this increased cost. Therefore, the stipend became futile. Moreover, because family members lost jobs, our stipends became the sole income in the household (P37, 40 & 41).

Sub theme 2: Increases the possibility of one being in debt

Another sub-theme came from the data and spoke directly to the central theme. Narratives under this theme reflect that the delay in stipend payment is likely to push one into debt, especially those renting, who use public transport and those who depend on stipend for survival. Participants captured that the delay in payment leaves them with little if no choice but to make alternative plans, which in most cases involved borrowing money from close relatives, friends and loan sharks.

Participant 35, 51 & 55 reflected that:

I had to go into debt when we were not paid. I needed money to buy food, taxi fare and rent, and I was forced to ask my cousins and brothers for support. When that stipend was paid eventually, I had to pay them their money, and I was left with nothing. (P35, 51 & 55)

Participant 27 echoed the above by stating that:

Budgeting means one knows money is coming month end. When no money comes, you are forced to make an alternative plan that usually involves borrowing. (P27)

Participant 11, 57, 60 & 15 stated that:

A taxi needs money, renting needs money, you as a person need money, and debt becomes the only option when you are not paid. The problem I encountered was that SASSETA was not paying us on time. Sometimes, I struggled with transport fees. I had to borrow from other people. Late payment: we started our internship in April but got paid in June, plus there was no specific date for payment. (P 11 & 15, 57 & 60)

From the above, one specific problem is that delay in payment means Participants had to go into debt to cover daily survival needs. This puts them at a significant disadvantage because when they eventually get paid, they service debt, which means it's a vicious cycle of debt to debt every month.

Participant 27 argued that only:

If they paid us on time, we would have never been in debt. Because we need experience, we need to be at work every day. How do they think we survive? Participants 20 and 21 noted that we were going to loan sharks. Yes, they charge exorbitant interest, but we don't have a choice because if we don't go there, we will have no money for work. (P27)

Participants 15 and 16 echoed the above sentiments and noted that:

Everyone at home depends on you. In black society, even if you're an intern, they think you're employed and get paid money, so they depend on you, which further adds stress. (P15 and 16)

So, I hope they fix it in the future because it causes so many unnecessary delays and financial stress which makes you end up not even coping at the workplace. So, I hope they fix it in the future because it causes so many unnecessary delays and financial stress, making you end up not coping at the workplace. The reflections above explore how late payment of stipends, its associated challenges from an intern's point of view and its effect.

It is vital to note that some interns depend wholly on the stipend for their survivability. Some use it for home support, rent, transportation and personal care. Even though the internship programme Participants highly appreciate it, based on their assertions, one cannot hide the mere disappointment of the late payment of stipends and the implications it has for them.

The words of participants 38, 39 and 49 are captured below:

Stipend was my biggest challenge. I'd go months without being paid. I had to pay rent and buy food. Going to work with all those being unpaid frustrated me as the stipend was the only source of income. My manager/mentor would share her lunch with me, and one of the employees who stayed in the same area would give me a lift. Then, I'd pay him the day SASSETA decided to pay us. Late/delayed payments of stipends rents are due on the 1st of every month, so receiving stipends on the 7th remains a challenge that must be addressed. (P 38, 39 & 49).

More worryingly, Participants found themselves in debt just because they had to cover their everyday living expenses due to a delay in payment. Even though some sentiments feel the need to increase the stipend, Participants generally appreciated the opportunity.

Theme 5: Internship duration too short

From the above discussions, another important theme that came up was the period of the internship. It is essential to ensure that internship programmes clearly state the role interns are supposed to

play and that of the host employer. This goes a long way in giving interns the skills they need to market themselves for potential permanent employment after the internship ends. However, various reflections concerning the duration of the internship came afore. Participants questioned the possibility of imparting skills they needed in such a short space of time.

This assertion displayed feelings of unease, uncertainty, and a need for policy change to increase the internship programme duration. Participants 6, 18, 20 and 15 argued that:

It is impossible to expect an intern to grasp vital workplace elements such as communication skills, teamwork, negotiation, conflict management, ethics, and professionalism in one year. These skills need a long time to impart, especially because interns are fresh graduates who've never been exposed to the world of work. (R6, 18, 20 & 15)

There needs to be an increase in the internship duration as this becomes the bedrock in the quest to impart various skills and knowledge to the interns. Participants 5, 28 and 12 contended that:

It is challenging to quickly understand the fundamentals of the workplace in such a short time. Understanding workplace ethos, dynamics, and overall organisation functioning for the Participants needs time, especially essential elements such as good governance, cooperate culture and people management. (P 5, 28 & 12)

There was the feeling that the internship duration made it impossible for one to understand workplace dynamics. Hence, extending this to 24 months would be ideal in this case. Participants 13 and 7 further discuss the need to become an expert in one's field.

It is essential to ensure that you become an expert in your field, and an internship programme is key in providing this learning platform early. However, it's restricted because of its short duration. (P13 & 7)

Participant 12 further laments the duration of the internship and states that:

When you start to understand how workplace dynamics operate, the internship ends, leaving you with the bitter taste of wanting more, knowing you're unlikely to get what you want. Perhaps an extension of the intention to 24 months or 18 months we'll close this gap. (P12)

Participants 8 and 9 further queried why SASSETA internships. Is there a specific rule that makes them one year, or maybe it is based on the budget because more time is needed to exposé interns as much as possible in the workplace.

There is a need to extend the duration to reflect societal concerns, which, in this case, is the short of the internship. (P8 & 9)

Participant 3 three echoed that above and notes that:

Maximizing skills attainment by interns' time is vital, and there is a need to increase internship duration to ensure skills can be gained in a clam working environment.

Participants 1 and 3 further noted that:

One gets limited time in training development, which means just when interns are starting to get the necessary skills, the internship programme ends, so there's a need to revisit the duration. (P 1 & 3)

There was great sentiment that extending the internship period would allow one a more significant opportunity to learn and ensure that skills are imparted. However, when the programme is short, one cannot learn how they would want, hence the cries from Participants on the need to extend the

duration of the internship. Participant 6 argued that SASSETA could even reduce the intake and increase the duration if issues around budget are a concern.

They can just reduce the people number they take but increase the duration. This will ensure an effective learning process.

Participants 18 and 13 argue that the need to increase the internship duration is not to say that no effective growth or learning takes place. However maybe:

A rotational arrangement where interns rotate within SASEETA host partners will also be important in addressing a holistic exposure to skills development. (P 18 & 13)

Participant 10 questioned whether SASSETA can extend his internship programme.

SASSETA operates on a budget and can't go beyond that budget. So, we just have to do with the 12 months.

Participants 17 and 18 argued that internships are not permanent jobs. One must not look at them as permanent jobs but as avenues for attaining skills. Participant 5 noted that:

There is a need to revisit the duration of the internship programme, albeit considering the available resources. (P5)

Further responding to this, participants 54, 72 & 61 reflected that:

Internships do equip us to be employable. However, entry-level job requirements are between 2-3 years of experience. Therefore, we are still unemployable after the 12-month internship. My expectations were met when I was placed in the public protector's office. However, I hoped we could get a 2-year contract to understand the workspace dynamics better. In the future, the internship duration should be extended.

Theme 6: Unrealistic workload for interns

The fundamental aspects of an internship programme are skills development, critical thinking and knowledge attainment and, most importantly, networking. Internships are, hence, vital avenues for development. For interns, the process needs to be supported by an environment which is characterised by the availability of resources, human support, mentoring and exposure to workplace dynamics to accelerate their growth.

In such a setting, the internship programmes become a two-way beneficial process for the intern and the host employer. Nevertheless, it becomes essential to reflect that not all internships play a vital role in imparting interns with skills. Various challenges drive this. The analysis identified various issues raised by Participants. They argued that these require urgent intervention to maximise one's participation in an internship programme. Participants 18, 6 and 5 stated:

There was a lack of proper guidance. At times, nobody told us what to do. They saw us as mere additional tools of support. It became a bit difficult to understand why I was here. There should be a clear directive about what we are here to do. (P18, 6 & 5)

Participant 15 noted that:

Because interns are seen as people who are desperate for skills and experience, often times they are looked down upon by senior employees and not given the amount of support. This lack of proper guidance removes the element interns need. (P15)

There was the reflection with interns present, senior staff to take the back seat and allow their job to be done by interns.

They just sit there and watch you. They end up giving you instructions, because they know you're an intern who needs the experience and the money. (P23)

Participant 20 & 29 supports this notion by arguing that:

We need to ensure the hosting employer clearly spells out our tasks. We must know what is expected from us rather than being seen as supplementary labourers. (P20 & 29)

Participant 21 & 28 explained that:

I was told to do many things, some not even aligned with my qualifications; at that point, I never really cared. All I needed was the money and the experience; this has to be addressed urgently. (P21 & 28)

Participants 2, 3, 15 and 16 decried how they spent hours working for permanent staff sitting in their offices and doing nothing.

They sat and watched us do their work; it was like they knew that as long as interns were here, we had their backs, which was unfair. (P2, 3, 25 & 16)

Participants 7, 9, 15 and 18 also claimed they sometimes had no resources.

I did not have a laptop, and at times I had to use someone else's laptop, and if they were working, I couldn't use it. This lack of resources makes you feel useless. It makes you seem like you have nothing to do. You end up sitting and doing nothing, which is a bad reflection on yourself, but what can you do if you don't have the resources? (P7, 9, 15 & 18)

Participants 13 and 14 echoed this and stressed that:

You can't work without resources, and resources are vital currently. A laptop is important; sometimes you want to speak but fear being victimisation. (P13 & 14)

However, the sentiments around the lack of resources weren't reflected throughout. Participants 17 and 18 contended:

They learned a lot, had resources, and had the best line managers. I keep in touch with him and tell him he should remember me if there are opportunities. I gained the skills I needed, and that was great. (P17 & 18)

There was also the observation that interns need to be told initially what to expect; this will help them integrate and avoid any challenges that might arise.

Interns need to be given direction; they must not just take interns just for the sake of taking interns just because you have money. Taking interns is key to helping them grow, hence the need to place them in the right places where they would be given adequate support. Nevertheless, this was not the case, but I couldn't just leave. (P28 & 27).

Participants 3, 4 and 13 noted that:

Sometimes, we'd just go there and figure out what to do, but we tend to just go with the flow because we need the money. However, if possible, it would be nice if SASSETA would place us in places where we can have opportunities for permanent employment. So there is a need for SASSETA to maximise its placement strategy so that when we can learn as much as we can

This reflection notes that going forward, it is crucial interventions can be developed and implemented. This is essential to ensure that the interns get the support to stand a chance to use skills gained to seek permanent employment.

An employers perspective

However, from the above, it becomes essential for one to note that employers should also have a say in how they perceive the availability of interns in their respective organisations. While the study would have preferred to collect data from as many possible employers as possible, only four participated. The themes below emanated from the conversation with employers.

- (a) Work ethic and attitude
- (b) Time management and going the extra mile.
- (c) Permanent employment
- (d) Long term effectiveness

Theme 7: Work ethic and attitude

Work ethics are a set of values intrinsic to each individual based on discipline, hard work, good habits, diligence, and character. Work ethics set an intern apart on any team across any industry. Work ethic is why an intern breaks away from the pack and begins to differentiate themselves. For Abdullah et al. (2019), the connectivity between work ethics and life skills during the internship helps develop work knowledge, good work ethics, personal growth, and enhance work skills and life skills. In any organisation, having the right mix of interns with the right work ethic can be beneficial in terms of work effectiveness, cost reduction, and other operational activities.

Employer 3 reasoned that even though internships may be short-term, interns should make use of the time and learn as much as they can. This, however, requires a good work ethic, something he did not observe.

Yes, some were good, but some did not want to work. It was as if they were not eager to learn, and their work ethic let them down (E1)

Employers 1 and 2 complained that the interns exhibited a poor attitude. The employer noted that for people who seek permanent employment after an internship, a lousy attitude simply does not help their case.

The right attitude helps you as an intern because the employer sees your potential. Hence, in a professional working environment, you need to display a positive attitude. This shows an employer you are committed, dedicated and determined, possibly increasing full-time employment after the internship ends. This is what some interns lacked. (E1,2)

However, employer 3 had a different view and noted that at times, because interns are new, they are afraid to seem forward. In a workplace where interns lack mentorship, this may complicate their overall integration, making them look lazy and have a poor work ethic.

Well, it depends on where the intern is. I mean, I had pretty good guys who excelled because they had the support they needed, so it comes down to support. I mean, with the proper support, interns will prosper (E3).

Excellent communication skills, a positive attitude and adaptability are all qualities of a good intern. Developing these skills and characteristics can enable one to stand out to a future employer and potentially increase your chances of obtaining post-internship employment.

This was revealed by Employer 4:

A good intern displays enthusiasm along with a sincere and professional attitude. Being new to the field, they are not expected to have faultless knowledge, but employers like working with individuals who are eager to learn, who are not afraid to ask questions, soak up as much as you can and offer a helping hand to other employees. These are vital elements of positioning an intern for further reemployment. While I did not have interns who exhibited a poor work ethic or negative attitude, I did support them to ensure their development. I think in the end it worked as it had a positive effect on their development. (E4)

Theme 8: Time management and going the extra mile.

The question: Some argue that a 12-month internship is too short of imparting the necessary skills and experience in an intern, and what is your take on this prompted the frequent mention of the word time management came afore.

Student Desk (2021) notes that one of the most important things someone can gain from an internship is newfound knowledge. This can include knowing how to fulfil tasks relevant to your desired career path and sharpening the skills that one already possesses. However, at the centre of this happening is effective time management and going the extra mile.

Employers 3 and 4 contended that interns must understand the importance of time management and its effects on their reputation. Being on time and managing it well means one is not only on time but also has enough time to learn new things within the organisation; thus, E3, 4 debunked the notion that a 12-month internship is too short.

Time management is one of the most important skills you can have in the workplace. Even though deadlines are essential, making time to work is equally essential, and internships need to learn about this going forward. Apart from that, internships are designed with structure and cost in mind. That is, they are supposed to run for a certain period. Therefore, to maximise their learning spaces, they must go the extra mile. To impress, it works in one's favour to go the extra mile because one can never know what doors may open in the future. (E,3,4).

Time management for interns is crucial; as argued by Ross (2022), the benefits of managing time are simple. Good time management allows the intern to accomplish more significant results in a shorter period, which leads to more time freedom, helps one focus better, allows one to be more productive, lowers one stress and gives one more time to learn the most about an organisation and helps one grow personally. For Employers 1 and 2, interns whom their employers remember are the ones who go the extra mile.

Interns went the extra mile. They asked for tasks and were willing to be rotated to other divisions to maximise their learning. The view that internships are short arguably emanates from the notion that when interns are fully integrated into the workplace, they begin to enjoy working. However, when they understand workplace dynamics, the contract ends, which affects their appreciation for the internship.

Moreover, arriving late at work was also blamed on the late payment of stipends. For interns, the late payment of stipends meant they had to borrow money to come to work. At times, they could not find the money on time, resulting in them arriving late. Even though they understood how badly this reflected on them concerning time management, they argued that there was nothing they could do. Finally, interns worked to maximise their learning by offering to be mentored by different people.

Theme 9: Permanent employment

The question: Were there any interns given permanent employment after the internship period? If yes, how many, if not any, reasons? Deliberations on the above subject line were short as employers (all 4) argued about one element: funds. That is, all employers noted that they were hardworking interns whom they would have liked to employ permanently, but there was no budget for them to do so; hence, they had to let them go.

E1: I felt terrible, but there was nothing I could do. I simply had no budget to extend their stay; perhaps we could arrange with the SASSETA to extend their stay.

E2: They were very hardworking, and I felt sad letting them go.

E3: SASSETA paid them, not us, so we did not have a budget to absorb them, unfortunately.

E4: I had no choice; next time hopefully, we could do things better.

Theme 10: Long term effectiveness

The questions:

- (a) What are your perceptions of the SASSETA-funded internship programme as an employer?*
- (b) What other interventions do you think are essential in imparting graduates with skills and experience besides internships?*
- (c) Does the supervisor who was managing the interns have formal mentorship or leader training?*
- (d) Other than funding, is there any other assistance / aid that you think SASSETA should provide to employers to make the internship programs more successful?*
- (e) Would you be willing to apply to host interns again in the near future?*

Answers from Employers for questions 1, 2,3 4 and 5 are summarized below:

Internships were seen as a positive process. It allowed us employers to have extra people on deck, which made our operational processes much more accessible and simplified. However, it also helped us impart vital skills to the interns with the hope that these skills can go a long way in helping them obtain permanent employment. Therefore, we hope that going forward, these partnerships can evolve for us to better make a broader impact on imparting skills to graduates as this contributes towards socio-economic development.

Interventions such as job rotation in different divisions or departments could be a solution; apart from that, rotating interns from one mentor to another mentor for them to get a holistic understanding of doing things can be considered. There was a concerted effort to allocate skilled mentees to interns to try and help them gain valuable skills. This was important to ensure the intern could get the best experience from this program. Understanding workplace dynamics such as negotiation and conflict management are essential issues in today's workspace, and the allocation of skills mentees was meant to ensure interns understand.

Funding from SASSETA is essential as it allows us to pay the intern. But increased communication through monitoring and evaluation is vital as some struggle to cope and may fear talking to the employer. It is, therefore, essential for increased communication. Based on our experience, employing interns in the future is something we would like to have through extending our partnerships with SASSETA as all parties' benefit in the process.

SASSETA's perspective

The late or delay payment in stipend as reflected by past interns also came up in the interview with the SASSETA representative. For SASSETA payment of stipend manually is one of the biggest operational challenges of the internship program. From the interview, there was an urgent need to establish different ways or methods to pay stipends seamlessly. This will ensure a reduction in complaints and also ensure internally ensure the management and running of the of the internship is no hampered by such by the internship program is not bottleneck by such challenges, thus allowing interns to focus on the job at hand.

Interns also argued that the lack of absorption or permanent employment after the internship ends is a big challenge for them. SASSETA argued that it is up to the employer to decide if that wish to employ the interns after, this also has to take into consideration capacity and budget. This resonated greatly with that employers as they argue that while they would have wished to hire intern on permanent basis, the lack of budget was a issues. Finally. SASSETA noted that over the years, internships have been effective as they equipped the students with the necessary skills to work and gave them a holistic overview of the workplace environment. This helped make them understand how to conduct one in a professional environment.

Late stipend payments

The late or delayed payment of stipends, as reflected by past interns, also came up in the interview with the SASSETA representative. For SASSETA, payment of stipend manually is one of the biggest operational challenges of the internship program. From the interview, there was an urgent need to establish different ways or methods to pay stipends seamlessly. This will ensure a reduction in complaints and ensure that internally, the management and running of the internship programme are not hampered by such bottlenecks, thus allowing interns to focus on the job at hand.

Permanent employment

Interns also argued that the lack of absorption or permanent employment after the internship ends is a big challenge. This was also picked up in the interview. However, SASSETA argued that it is up to the employer to decide whether to employ the interns afterwards. This also has to take into consideration capacity and budget. This resonated greatly with the statements by employers that while they would have wished to hire interns permanently, the lack of budget was an issue.

Effectiveness of internships

Finally, SASSETA noted that over the years, internships have been practical as they equipped the interns with the necessary skills to work and gave them a holistic overview of the workplace environment. This helped them understand how to conduct one in a professional environment.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the data analysis undertaken through a thematic content analysis, through which six themes emerged. These themes were different to some extent interrelated and largely explained the narratives, opinions, and thoughts around the perceptions and narratives of former participants in the internship programme offered by SASSETA.

Narratives differed as some supported internships while some dwelled on what they perceived as a combination of challenges that hindered their effective participation in the internship programme. There were suggestions that the internship programme impacted their career development in terms of networking making, connections, and consolidation of one understanding the workplace is a holistic organisational system; nevertheless, internships are not devoid of challenges as challenges categorise every process, and there were arguments that the challenges above need to be addressed going forward.

Reflection from employers was also presented. Important issues such as having a positive work ethic and attitude, ensuring time management and going the extra mile have become essential in today's highly competitive internship environment. Even though employers may want to employ interns long-term, the right mix of these traits is essential. SASSETA noted that the delay in stipend payment was a huge problem; however, it is working on finding a more convenient way of paying them to minimise disruptions. While permanent employment after the internship would be ideal, that depends on the employers and issues like capacity and budget might be barriers to realising such. SASSETA feels internships are effective, as over the years, they have equipped interns with the skills needed for one to be work-ready.

Chapter 5

Evaluation discussion

5.1 Introduction

The study analysed the data collected from the 88 participants through semi-structured interviews and online surveys. However, the data collected from the 88 was not admissible. That is, questions answered Yes or No were not taken into consideration. Moreover, questions that did not generate new knowledge were also excluded. From the total sample, 75 responses (combining in-depth interviews and the online survey) were considered in the analysis process.

Six themes were generated to address the study's primary aim and research questions. Among the generated themes are: insufficient stipend amount, lack of support, roles not aligned with qualifications, delay in stipend payment, short internship periods, and unrealistic workload for interns. Starting with the first one, which is the *insufficient stipend amount*, preliminary findings show that participants are not happy about the monthly stipend.

It was further shown that their stipend could only cover some of their monthly costs, such as transport, food, and other needs. Moving on to the next theme, the lack of support, the study shows that interns lack four types of support. Firstly, there is a lack of support in mentorship and guidance. Secondly, there is a lack of support for training and opportunities. Thirdly, there is insufficient feedback and evaluation. Lastly, there are inadequate resources and tools.

5.2 Overview of findings

The data analysis process conducted for the study produced six themes and 2 and sub-themes listed below:

Theme 1: Insufficient stipend amount

Theme 2: Lack of support

Theme 3: Roles not aligned with qualifications.

Theme 4: Delay in payment of stipend

Subtheme 1: Cannot satisfy needs.

- (i). *Cost of travelling,*
- (ii). *Cost of food,*
- (iii). *Personal care,*
- (iv). *Taking care of the family.*

Sub theme 2: Increases the possibility of one being in debt.

Theme 5: Internship too short

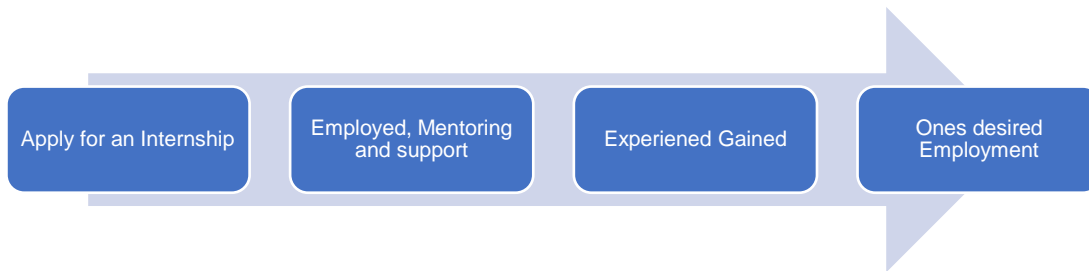
Theme 6: Unrealistic workload for interns

An employer's perspective

- (a) *Work ethic and attitude*
- (b) *Time management and going the extra mile.*
- (c) *Permanent employment*
- (d) *long term effectiveness*

From interviews with interns, the data analysis showed that while there are six identified themes, four major themes are significantly reflected in the data analysis. The first view is that internships are good. While the notion that one may not be permanently employed after the internship is there. Generally, the data reflected that internships as a pathway to helping one obtain permanent employment could be seen as positive for one's development. Themes from employers are also discussed. The first viewpoint is diagrammatic below:

Figure 5-1: Internship as a catalyst for one's future development (desired outcome)

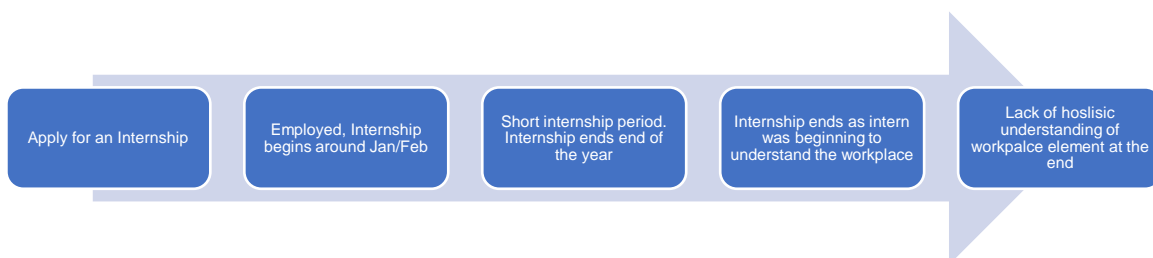


Therefore, it becomes vital to support the notion by Chappell (2023), who notes that internships give an intern hands-on practice and experience in a professional environment. Upon the opportunity of an internship, a person will earn skills they would not be able to without that placement and knowledge not just from work but from one's colleagues. Interns will understand how the workplace is navigated and the social aspects of it, which can't be done from home or online.

From the above diagram, it becomes clear that although there are challenges with internships, generally, participants saw it as an excellent opportunity to gain skills, experiences, and a general understanding of the workplace. However, Chappell (2023) argues that there is a need to look at internships from two perspectives: a positive one, as displayed in the diagram above, and perhaps a negative one.

From the data, there were arguments that while one needs to appreciate the skills and experience gained from internships, there were arguments for the need to extend its duration. The second view dwells on the duration of the internship and argues that it is impossible to expect one to get a holistic view of the workplace in one year. Holders of this view believe that the critical phase in developing skills in an internship programme needs time. Some viewed extending the internship period would benefit both the employer and the intern. The second view is diagrammatically represented below.

Figure 5-2: Time factor in an internship programme

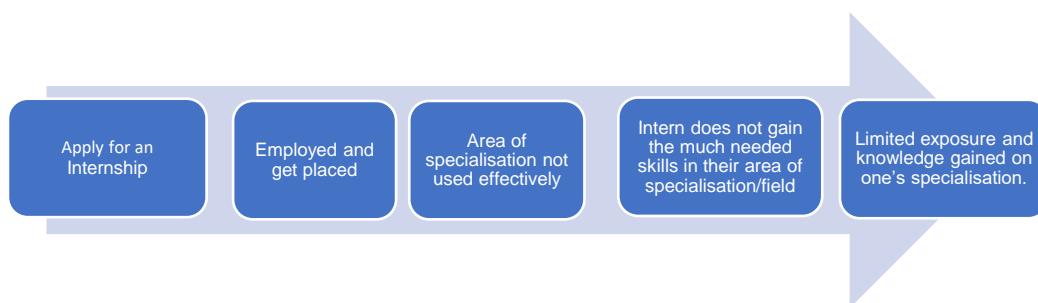


As noted above, the duration of the internship programme has become a matter of concern for participants. From the data, participants felt that when they understood the demands of the internship and workplace functions, the internship programme was already ending. While interns understand to a great extent that budgetary issues may be the factor, it was argued that other training avenues could be examined to end their stay. There was also the view that interns are unlikely to be permanently employed after the internship; ensuring they can get as much exposure and support as possible during this period is essential.

The third view of the study is that when interns are placed, it is essential to ensure that they are placed in organisations that will use their theoretical skills to ensure their development. From the data, there were arguments that interns are sometimes misused by senior staff and not given the support and mentoring they need. Jeske and Linehan (2020) argue that mentors are essential in clarifying communication and reducing uncertainty and ambiguity.

Ultimately, the knowledge that interns need to gain by participating in an internship programme becomes futile with sustained mentorship. When interns are not trained in their areas of specialization, it limits what they can learn and hinders their development. The third view is diagrammatically represented below:

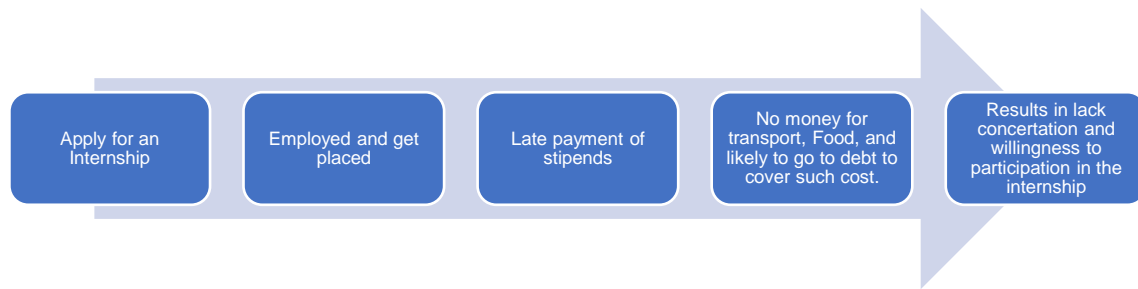
Figure 5-3: Area of specialisation vs reality



Under this view, the term brain waste comes into operation. Brain waste describes a situation with skill downgrading, where an individual is working in a job that requires a skill level lower than the one he/she has acquired (Reitz, 2001). In other words, brain waste arises when a skilled individual incurs education costs. However, he/she does not reap the benefits of human capital acquisition, i.e., a skilled graduate ends up working in a job that does not match their skills.

Ismial (2018) argues that the correct use of interns in the workplace can address issues such as brain drain, efficiency in the workplace, and support for overburdened staff. The data revealed that there was more to be done to ensure interns are given the much-needed support and that organisations also give them the support they need. The last and final view captured in the data was the need to ensure consistency in the payment of stipends. There was concern that going for months without getting paid would affect the concentration levels of interns, eventually leading to them being demoralised. The fourth view is diagrammatically represented below:

Figure 5-4: Stipend and participation concerns



The above deliberation points to one crucial factor: the lack of consistency in paying stipends has created unhappiness, uncertainty, and confusion. There was concern that the inability to pay stipends promptly contributed to interns getting into debt as they tried to cover the expenses they would have otherwise covered if they got paid. This was the general view that until SASSETA improved in the payment of the stipends, interns would likely not be able to finish the internship, contributing to the loss of resources for the employing partner.

5.3 Findings versus literature review

Internships are undoubtedly important. They contribute to the development of the intern through experience and skills acquisition. To recap, the literature reflected on the importance of internships. It explained how internships can benefit both the employee and the intern. However, the internship challenges were also reflected and how these hinder or prevent the intern from effective learning.

There were discussions about the impact of internships on postgraduate employability. This essential discussion should consolidate the notion that internships must produce people with skills and knowledge and play a role in future knowledge generation and dissemination. From the literature, the diagram below attempts to reconcile the literature arguments around internships.

Figure 5-5: Positives of an Internship



From the literature, the Great Learning Team (2021) asserts that on-the-job training has also seen an increase in support; various approaches to on-the-job training, such as job rotation, coaching,

mentoring, job instruction, and apprenticeship training, have become vital in human capital development. From the data analysis, it became observable that participants appreciated the associated benefits of internships. Participants expressed support for internship programmes as support-based for skills development, exposure to the working environment and workplace processes, career development through interaction with colleagues at a senior level and gaining vital skills such as teamwork and communication through mentoring support.

There was also the notion that there was likely to be an increase in the post-employability of an intern once the programme ended. Finally, interns supported the networking opportunities they received from the internship programme. Various scholars in the literature supported these sentiments. A study titled “Challenges of Clinical Nursing Training Through Internship Approach”:

A qualitative study noted that internship programmes have some benefits for students (by engaging in real clinical situations), workplaces, and the staff (assigning some clinical tasks to students). It also initiates creativity and adaptability, a significant opportunity to learn skills, increases analytical power, and yields job experience. Furthermore, internship programmes for nursing students improve the readiness for accepting roles and enhance individual and professional abilities, self-development, and work commitment. (Ahmadi et al., 2020).

For the Forbes Human Resources Council (2022), internships are vital as they help gain exposure, allow you to learn and make mistakes, develop better professional skills, create a balance between experience and potential, put you in the position for long-term success, give a perspective of real life, the chance to work with a great mentor, discover new talents and passions, build great relationships, soak in the mentorship and are a great way to network with professionals. Considering the above, the job market pays more attention to work experience than paper qualifications. For a successful internship programme, three parties must be directly involved: interns or students, employing organisations or employers, and training institutions (Khalil, 2015). All these three parties’ benefit from the internship programme in one way or another.

In Drydakis’ (2016) opinion, internships offer “win-win opportunities” for all participants. From the employers’ perspective, students on internship are often an inexpensive help, a vibrant source for new ideas, and potential future employees upon successfully metamorphosing into experienced candidates. For students, an internship enables them to acquire soft skills, such as communication abilities, interpersonal skills, professionalism, computer skills, customer management skills, language skills, emotional empathy, time management, teamwork, self-discipline, and leadership traits, which employers highly rate.

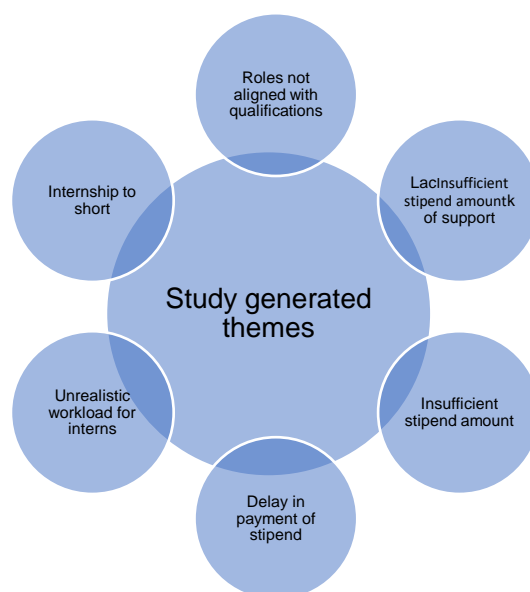
Moreover, internship aids students to improve their self-efficacy and confidence. Towson University (2021) argues that students also benefit from the “real world” experience they can gain, which gives them professional experiences to remain competitive when seeking employment after graduation. The data analysis supported the above reflection. Participants were happy to take part in the internship programme. From positives such as gaining experience, networking, and obtaining a

stipend, there were feelings of hope that after the internship programme, they would have the much-needed experience and skills that are needed in a tough labour market in South Africa. These were seen as positive values associated with the internship process. Thus, reflections remarkably coincided with current literature on internships as a catalyst and self-development. However, the literature did not reflect an all-positive aspect concerning internships. The preceding section talked in detail about the associated benefits of internships, how they contribute to the intern's development, and how they also benefit the employer.

One needs to look broadly to better reflect and understand the dynamics that make internships successful and those that do not. Ideally, internships should be free of challenges that make the process futile. They should embody the need to ensure collective development and skills transfer to ensure the highest possible opportunity for the learner to be employed after the internship programme. However, despite their natural differences, one must reflect that no process is without challenges. Several challenges exist within the context of internships, aligning with the data collected.

Jain (2022) argues that from a general point of view, internal workplace challenges such as not enough work for one to perform, more work beyond one's scope, one's work being unappreciated, the challenges of adapting to a new office culture, and challenges of adapting to a fast-paced environment are usually some of the standard forms of challenges new interns face. However, these challenges, for Loreto (2022), are mainly operational and can be addressed with communication and a clear indication of what one needs to do. From the data coupled with the literature review, the below chapter challenges stood (this, however, is not to say these were the only ones). The diagram below identifies these challenges.

Figure 5-6: Major challenges faced by interns



Source: Authors (2023)

Jeske Linehan (2020) argues that interns play a crucial role at many organisations; however, to be able to play these roles, there is a need to ensure that these roles are clearly laid out and explained effectively to avoid confusion. The most essential element is trying to get the best out of the intern; this is vital to ensure the intern performs optimally and effectively. However, if the role of the interns is not clearly defined and when they are merely taken as people who are here to get experience, this gives rise to confusion and misunderstanding, which can demoralise the interns.

Insight Global Education (2023) notes that one of the most common challenges of an internship is feeling like there is no work to do. This can lead to hours whiled away in boredom and feeling completely purposeless in the company. From the data, there was concern that interns were taken as experience-seeking people and thus were not allocated tasks that were not helping them gain experience. Thus, framing interns in such a manner makes them seen as people who can be given any task, which becomes detrimental to their development.

Moreover, confusing roles also resulted in the direct mismatch between what the intern does and the qualifications one holds. The findings revealed that interns sometimes were not placed or given roles in areas/departments or agencies where their roles resonate with their skills. This results in interns performing work/tasks not aligned with their qualifications, further consolidating brain waste. Interns face many challenges during internships, such as menial tasks, lack of feedback, payment issues, and co-intern competition.

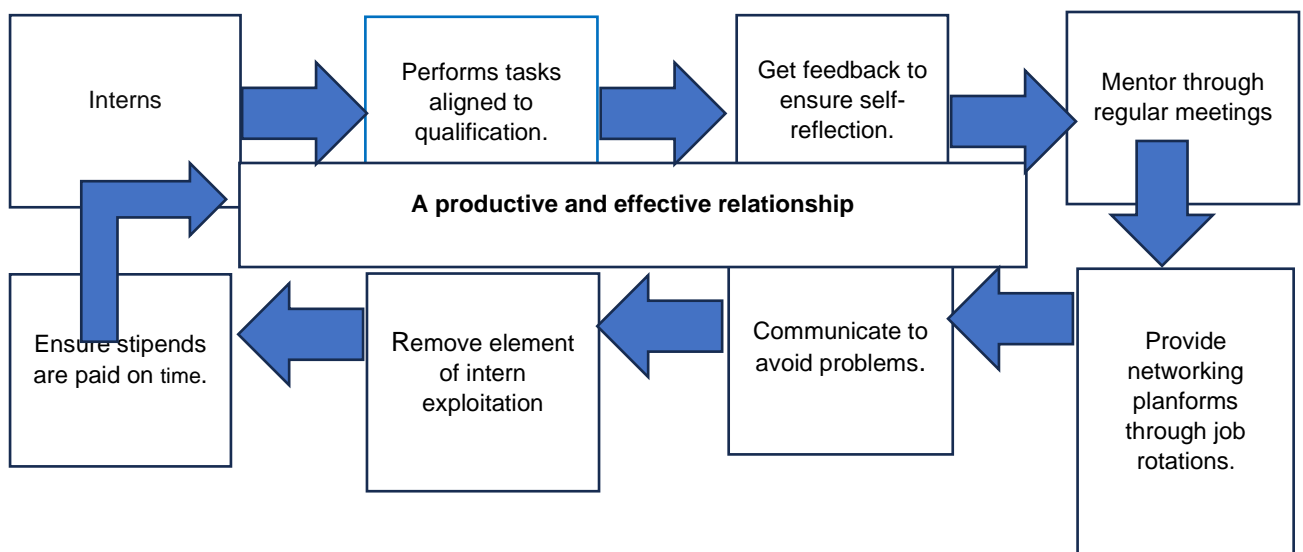
From the data, stipend issues topped the list of concerns from participants. This raised great fear that they had to go into debt to cover their operational day-to-day expenses as stipends were delayed. For example, in Kenya, on May 29 2023, Medical interns held protests outside Afya House to demand payment. This is after the Ministry of Health failed to keep the promise to have the interns paid all their arrears by May 22 (Saya, 2023).

There were arguments from interns that the delay in paying them had made them struggle to make ends meet and barely meet their basic needs. From the findings, the late delay in payment also had similar effects as interns had to venture into loan sharks to make ends meet, which created a cycle of never-ending debt. Finally, because interns are seen as junior and will do anything they can to get the experience they need, there were cries of exploitation where interns were given roles that should be done by seniors outside their scope of qualification and roles they were not briefed about.

Chamberlain (2019) supports this notion and states that many companies regularly rely on intern labour to perform substantive work, often with very little protection in the case of abuse or exploitation. For example, a report by the Guardian titled "Schoolchildren in China work overnight to produce Amazon Alexa devices" found that Foxconn - a supplier for Amazon and Apple - employed students from technical colleges and schools (some as young as 16) in China to make Amazon's Alexa devices under the guise of an internship.

According to that report, the company insisted that the arrangement provides “practical work experience.” However, students said that they were often expected to work overtime to meet production targets and that the factory work had no relevance to their courses. This further reinforces the notion that interns can be exploited without proper checks and balances out of their desperate work-related experience. In this study, there was the notion that developing an intern/employer operational framework would be key in helping guide how this relationship ought to be consolidated. The below diagram explains this.

Figure 5-7: An ideal intern/employer operational framework based on the data



A productive working relationship within the context of interns/employers can only work if both parties come to the table. While interns need help, resources, support, and mentoring, employers must provide continuous feedback, explore the option of job rotation for maximum gain, and support interns through effective communication channels to avoid problems that may demoralise the intern or portray the employers as uncaring.

5.4 Challenges of creating an intern/employer productive and effective relationship

Undoubtedly, the above discussion reflects the importance of internships for development, growth, and a broader understanding of the workplace environment. It also shows how essential internships are in shaping the thinking, understanding, and relationship between the intern (career development) and employer (career support). However, one cannot say that internships are processes; therefore, they are not devoid of operational challenges that affect every day processes.

Nevertheless, internships have proven beneficial, provided they are implemented effectively and guided by relevant laws, policy support, and legislation. Within this study, internships were seen as beneficial as they give young people experience, skills, and knowledge, which would be vital in helping better position them for permanent job opportunities. However, for internships to effectively impart this to the intern, it needs to be guided by policy, but most essentially, at the centre of this policy should be cooperation that goes both ways.

Findings in this study support this notion and note that consistent support and mentoring would eventually lead to gaining experience from the intern's side and playing a vital role in ensuring the interns understand the process and what is expected. The added benefit would be a happy, productive, and effective intern. However, such cannot be done from the confines of simplicity as internships are processes and thus are likely to experience challenges.

Building an effective, collaborative, and trustworthy relationship needs to be underpinned by the spirit of cooperation and communication. It is vital that in the beginning, vital elements are explained to the intern; for example, understanding the financial constraints associated with an internship programme needs to be communicated at the earliest moment. This will, for example, remove the notion that the internship programme can be extended anyhow. Interns are seen as desperate whenever there is a need to consolidate such a relationship; they need to be at the centre of any solution-driven approach. This will ensure trust, integrity and dedication.

Nevertheless, it is vital to reflect that establishing such a relationship is hindered by various factors. Findings revealed that the stipend paid to participants was too low to cover their operational day-to-day needs. Secondly, it becomes vital to ensure a clear line of communication on issues that may be problematic at a later stage. For example, there is the perception among interns that government departments/agencies have money to spend, hence the need to increase the stipend and extend the internship duration.

Communication at an early stage can help remove these thoughts, thus allowing the intern to focus solely on the job at hand without worrying about prospects. Another concern from the data was the observation that interns need sustained mentoring and support; however, in many cases, those who are assigned to mentor interns are often occupied with their work and have less time to dedicate to interns, thus depriving them of vital support they need to understand the workplace better and depriving them of vital feedback. Giving feedback is also a vital element that many participants argued was unavailable.

This means interns are simply given jobs or tasks to perform, and whether those tasks were performed optimally to the satisfaction of the employer is not a necessary process. Providing feedback is essential as it helps the intern better understand how to do a particular task, whether they're doing it correctly, or how to improve. The lack of resources meant some participants could not perform effectively. Essential elements such as lack of space, laptops, and other vital elements meant these interns could not perform optimally.

These challenges call for greater emphasis on checks and balances. Participants argued that there is a greater need for monitoring and evaluating interns' progress after being placed. This will be important in understanding how effective the programme is and where it needs improvement to consolidate and improve intern/employer relationships.

5.5 Employer perceptions

Employers argue that a good working relationship between the employer and the intern needs to be supported by a good working environment and the interns must have a good work ethic and attitude. Smith (2021) notes that good work ethic is a personality trait that employers look for in candidates. Showing values related to it can improve your employability and make you eligible for more opportunities.

Figure 5-8: Work ethic and success in the workplace



From the above, Smith (2020) notes that employers appreciate candidates who possess a strong work ethic because they can be a positive influence on their coworkers. Having a team of people with a good work ethic is also desirable because an employer is more likely to achieve their company goals, and they don't have to spend time micromanaging their employees.

Moreover, self-discipline is the ability to work hard without much oversight, which is a strength that employers often want interns to have. If you're self-disciplined, you're likelier to have a strong work ethic and complete tasks within deadlines. This resonates with the data analysis that employers prefer interns with a positive work ethic. For the employers, interns who are positive showed that they were willing to work hard and learn as much as possible.

Their positive attitude was also an indicator that they could be a collaborative team member and contribute to a harmonious work environment. Even though there were issues around the internship duration, Employer 3 argued that if interns understood the importance of time management, they would not complain about the duration but rather use it to their maximum gain. Ross (2016), posit that time management comes with numerous benefits.

Figure 5-9: Benefits of time management



Employers stressed that time management is an important personality trait, especially when working in an organization. Managing time properly increases efficiency output and helps a person grow personally and professionally. Hence, rather than complain about the internship's duration, perhaps interns could be punctual and use the time to learn about the organization. This was stressed by employer no 3. Combining these elements (work ethic, attitude, and time management) may go a long way in getting full-time employment after the internship. Hence, these, according to employers, are important traits interns should have.

5.6 Conclusion

Data analysis using thematic content analysis unearthed four main themes. Overall, the themes point towards a view that perceived positives and negatives around internship programmes. At the same time, other operational challenges made the internship programme demoralising, with the most notable challenge being the late payment of stipends.

The discussion section provided insights into the identified themes. The discussions show much debate on how SASSETA can improve its internship offering. In the discussion, it was noted that even though the internship programme is vital for skills development, wherever interns are placed, they must consider their qualifications, access to resources, and the importance of support and mentoring. More importantly, however, there was a need to ensure that SASSETA invests tremendously in monitoring and evaluation, as this is important in identifying challenges that might exist at their earliest.

An effective intern and employer relationship depends on both parties' support, consistency, and cooperation. The formation of this relationship is likely to ensure the development of a collaborative relationship between the interns and the employer, which will be vital for the intern in creating connections and networking opportunities, thus improving the post-employment possibility for the intern. Perspectives from the employer on work ethic and attitude, and time management were also discussed and their long-term benefit.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study on the impact of internship programme post work placement within the safety and security sector. Conclusions are based on the findings from the empirical study in conjunction with findings from the literature. The chapter reconciles the themes established in the data analysis chapter and discussed in the discussion chapter with the study research objectives and research questions. Summaries of the study's chapters and findings are presented before conclusions to the study's research questions are made. The chapter ends by concluding on the topic of the study and the research process pursued in reaching this conclusion.

6.2 Summary of the study

In Chapter 1, the SASSETA inception report was presented. This report included the title, objectives, and research questions were presented. Research questions were further broken down to solicit more information from participants. The chapter identified the need to understand the possible return on investment through SASSETA-funded internships and extended partnerships.

Chapter 2 was titled Internships, Challenges, and Their Socio-Economic Impact: A Reflection. It was the first of the two literature review chapters of the study. In the chapter, internships as a process were discussed, their associated positives, challenges, and importance for both the intern and the employer. There was a general view that internships were favourable for developing and imparting skills to the intern.

Moreover, it was a great process for the employer to have more hands on deck, allowing them to have more employees at a much lower cost. From a South African perspective, laws such as the Legislative Framework, Skills Development Act of 1998, National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), and Skills Development Levies Act of 1999 were discussed as they relate significantly to skills development, which internships are at the core of.

Finally, essential topics such as Graduate unemployment and the socio-economic conundrum in South Africa, the advantages and disadvantages of a formal internship (student perspective), the impact of internship on post-graduate employability, and the future of internships in South Africa were also discussed to give a more concise reflection of the title under study.

In Chapter 3, the philosophies, processes, and procedures used in collecting and analyzing data were identified and explained in detail. The interpretivism philosophy guided the study. Interpretivism was justified as a philosophical view that enables the researcher to get various subjective views or perceptions from the sample. The study used a secondary or desktop research design and an exploratory and explanatory research design.

In the first design, data was collected from existing sources, analysed, and presented. In the explanatory study, data was gathered from interviews with 75 participants who have previously participated in the SASSETA-funded internship. These individuals were selected through purposive sampling, with a sample of 88 being initially targeted. In Chapter 4, the data analysis processes are also discussed. Data was analysed using thematic content analysis on Atlas.ti.8 and employed a narrative approach to discussing the findings. The goal was to bring out themes and subthemes that could effectively answer the research questions, enabling the study to meet its objectives.

Ethical matters, particularly ethical considerations made in the research processes, were also discussed in Chapter 3. These included abiding by the data collection permission letter from SASSETA. Participant confidentiality, informed consent, and protection from harm were also noted. Finally, the chapter covered data quality management issues. Content validity, conformability and transferability were also discussed.

In Chapter 4, data collected through interviews and online surveys was analysed, interpreted, and reported. Thematic content analysis was used, and themes and sub-themes presented data narratively. Six main themes emerged from the analysis, with theme four having sub-themes. These were: Theme 1: Insufficient stipend amount, Theme 2: Lack of support, Theme 3: Roles not aligned with qualifications, Theme 4: Delay in stipend payment, Theme 5: Internship too short, and Theme 6: Unrealistic workload for interns. Also, the findings were discussed further. The discussions involved comparing the findings with what was found in the literature. In Chapter 5, the chapters were summarised. Conclusions to the research questions were made. Finally, recommendations for further studies and limitations of the study were presented.

6.3 Summary of findings

As highlighted earlier, the study unearthed six broad themes from the data analysis and interpretation process. This section summarises these findings by theme.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Insufficient stipend amount

The first theme of the study was the Insufficient stipend amount that interns received. Under this theme, there were significant concerns about the increasing cost of living in South Africa. The internship stipend should reflect these changing socio-economic perspectives. Tom (2019) communicated that the average salary for an internship in South Africa is R3 940 per month – close to minimum wage, which comes in at R3 500 per month.

Smith (2022), on the other hand, noted that South Africa is in the grip of a cost-of-living crisis, with rocketing food and fuel prices, along with painful increase rate hikes, forcing households to make difficult decisions. A single person's estimated monthly costs are said to be R 21,741. Therefore, the argument for increasing the stipend paid to interns was based on the current economic situation in the country. The arguments from participants were that because of the rising costs of living, perhaps going forward, stipends could also be adjusted to offset these rising costs.

6.3.2 Theme 2: Lack of support

Stillmann (2011) communicates that the issue most people get angry about is paid versus non-paid, and that's the wrong issue to be upset about. Internships are not jobs. They are not meant to be jobs. They are meant to be educational, support-based experiences. Suppose one does have the educational component and does not have the support component. It does not matter if one gets paid a million dollars a second. In that case, it is not an internship, and one will not benefit from it in the long run.

Mellott, Arden, and Cho (1997) further reflect that when host organisations have not trained their internship supervisors to provide feedback and support, it can result in interns' lack of satisfaction with the internship experience. Mentoring is a commonly accepted method of delivering meaningful learning experiences to students.

From the data, there were concerns that interns were not getting enough support through mentoring, feedback, and constant support to help the intern acclimatise in the workplace. The lack of support gives rise to exploitation and results in interns doing all sorts of tasks that do not contribute to their development. More worryingly, it fails to help the intern self-reflect, an essential process as feedback is vital to help the intern improve where needed.

6.3.3 Theme 3: Roles not aligned with qualifications.

The third theme is that the role of interns is not aligned with qualifications. The study shows that interns are brought into organisations with qualifications and skills but might find themselves doing tasks that don't fully utilise their expertise. The study further shows that this can be frustrating for the interns and the organisation as it might not make the best use of their potential. From an employer's perspective, internships can help their organisation discover the talents of immigrants and identify where a newcomer's skills are best used.

From a newcomer's perspective, an internship can help them build a professional network in the industry. However, if roles are misaligned with the job interns do, they rarely gain the needed experience. The data made it clear that some interns were given roles that did not align with their qualifications. Arguably, the primary reflection around this theme was that because interns are looking for experience, they are seen as willing to do anything. This, in the long term, deprives the intern of vital growth and knowledge related to one's field. The suggestion was to monitor the interns after they have been placed to address this.

6.3.4. Delay in payment of stipend

From the preliminary data analysis, it became clear that most participants were unhappy about the stipend delay. From the preliminary data, delays were frequent and caused a great deal of financial stress, hindering their effective concentration at work. The lack of communication from SASSETA as to the reason behind the payment was also seen in a negative light. For most participants, people never wanted to take full accountability for this. Another frustration reflected was that where interns

were placed, the employer was not liable for their stipends; hence, when they inquired, employers would tell interns to contact SASSETA, which they felt was another administration burden. From the data, the late payment negatively affected the day-to-day operation of the interns as they could not make ends meet. Late payment of stipends was detrimental to the focus and survivability of internship as a whole. For example, a similar situation in Kenya saw medical interns hit the streets of Nairobi yesterday and demanded payment of their four months' delayed salary.

At the core was the delayed payment of stipends. This was negative as colleagues who have to choose between food and fare, rent and decent clothing (Kebaso, 2023). Within the context of this study, interns are often recent graduates, and participants argued that they came from families that depended on their stipend for support. Thus, when the stipend is paid late, it forces them into debt to make ends meet.

6.3.5 Internship too short

Under this theme, one of the biggest criticisms around internships is their temporary nature. While they equip interns with skills and experience, the period is short for interns to get a holistic view of the work processes. Hence, some argued that the current time frames of the internship should be extended.

Participants questioned the possibility of imparting skills they needed in such a short time. This assertion displayed feelings of unease, uncertainty, and a need for policy change to increase the internship programme duration. The short nature of the internship consolidated the view that it would be impossible to allow the intern to get a holistic view of the workplace.

6.3.6 Unrealistic workload for interns

Berishak (2017) notes that for many inexperienced and unemployed youngsters, internships are the only way to gain the necessary skills and work experience to have the slightest chance of employment. However, minimally regulated within the current legal framework, interns are often exploited by being overworked, given trivial tasks with no real skill development opportunities, having no mentors, and often working without a contract while being denied compensation for their efforts.

There were concerns among the participants they were overworked because they were seen as people who only needed experience rather than people who could contribute to organisational development. This demoralised interns and resulted in a change of attitude: that is to say, interns came to work for the sake of the stipend rather than learning.

6.4 Conclusions to research questions

The section below gives the final answers and conclusions to each of the study's 11 research questions, starting with Research Question 1, which was directed at interns.

Research questions 1 - 11

Do you think internships equip you with the skills to make yourself employable post the internship period? What expectations did you have when applying/joining the programme? Where all the expectations met?

From the data, most participants noted that they appreciated the internship as it gave them a better chance of employment post the internship period. There were differing voices as to whether their expectations were met. Some participants argued that the challenges they experienced were limited or perhaps removed their expectations before partaking in the internship. However, some argued that the internship was what they expected, and they had their expectations met. Perhaps this reflects the unequal support interns got in their placement.

Were you given the necessary resources during the internship period? If not, please explain. If yes, were they effective in helping you perform your tasks?

Participants were torn apart on these questions. While some praised their line managers, the office culture, and the provision of resources, some lamented the lack of resources. Those who had access to resources functioned effectively, met deadlines, and enjoyed the duration of the internship, albeit with duration concerns compared to those who did not have such resources. This again points to the need for continuous project monitoring after the intern has been placed to ensure adherence to contractual obligation.

An enabling environment is vital to ensure interns succeed. During your internship, how would you describe your operating environment?

Participants were caught between concerns about whether their environment contributed to their overall development. This stems from the observation that some interns did not have adequate resources to help them partake in those daily operations in the workplace. Therefore, this will differ significantly from those with resources, as they enjoyed working, met deadlines, and were characterised by robust support. Those who did not have such resources had to rely on using equipment or resources that belonged to other people, and this was not conducive to allowing them to contribute meaningfully towards their operating environment. Therefore, the majority were in favourable based on the availability of resources.

As an intern, what challenges have you encountered in your participation in the internship programme and how did you mitigate them?

Some of the challenges interns faced were lack of support, mentoring, resources, late payment of stipends, lack of instruction on what one must do, and lack of communication and feedback. Mitigation strategies included trying to find extra work, asking seniors what they can do to help and where possible or helping a senior colleague who needs help. However, this did not contribute

directly to their development as they were not given clear instructions, which means they may have been performing tasks outside their qualification.

Had the programme developed you enough to allow your career to flourish after it? Please explain in detail.

The majority of participants applauded the internship programme despite the challenges encountered. Many argued that it helped them in terms of networking, creating connections, and getting to know the workplace and its dynamics; hence, they hope that this experience will go a long way in helping them get permanent jobs.

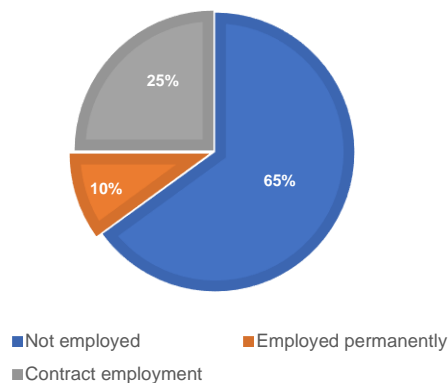
If you had another opportunity to participate in this internship again, would you agree? If yes or no, please explain.

Many argued they would participate in the internship primarily for money rather than the experience. This reflects the fact that many who say they will do this for money are not adequately trained or supported in participating effectively. This, of course, may have resulted from a lack of resources and mentorship and support. Hence, for the sake of money, they would participate rather than enjoy working in the environment. However, some did argue that they would participate in their internship not because of money but because of the support and growth they received.

Are you currently employed at the time of answering this interview?

Most participants stated that they were not employed during data collection. While some were employed, it was part-time, and very few were employed permanently.

Figure 6-1: Past SASSETA learners employed at the time of data collection



If yes, is your current employment in line with your qualifications?

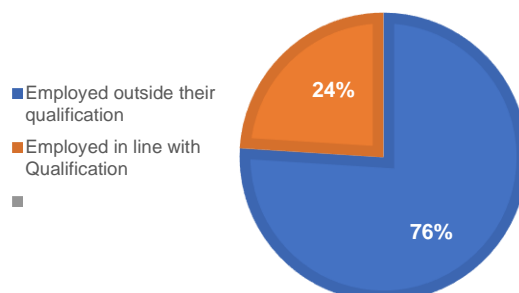
Of the 25% participants who said they were employed, 19% stated they were employed outside their respective qualifications. They argued that the need to survive was more important.

If now, roughly how many interviews have you attended, and what do you think is the reason for being unsuccessful?

Five participants who said they have attended interviews noted that they (at the time of data collection) have not gotten feedback.

More argued that the need to survive was more important than qualifications alignment.

Figure 6-2: Past SASSETA learners in and outside their qualification at the time of data collection



- How long after completing your internship did it take for you to find suitable employment?
 - Most participants started around 6 months to 1 year.
- If you could, what would you change in the programme to make it more beneficial to other interns in the future?
- To ensure the effective functioning of this programme, stipends should be paid promptly, enough support to interns, a hands-on approach in monitoring and evaluation, and, more importantly, communication is critical to addressing potential challenges.

6.5 Conclusions to research questions (*Employers*)

1. What are your perceptions of the SASSETA-funded internship programme as an employer?
 - The perceptions of employers were positive and reflected a cooperative pattern. It was clear that employers appreciated the role and relationship they have with SASSETA. While challenges were there, however, there was a general feeling of appreciation for the internship programme.
2. To what extent would you say you provided effective support to interns and how do you manage the everyday challenges that come with hosting interns?
 - It was noted that despite the need to impart vital skills to the intern, at times, resource constraints meant employers could not contribute as much as they would have hoped.
3. To what extent was hosting intern beneficial in terms of work effectiveness, cost reduction and other operational activities?
 - There was a general feeling that having more hands on deck was beneficial not only for optimised operational processes but also because other employees could be assigned to other roles while exposing the interns as much as possible.
4. Were there any interns given permanent employment after the internship period, if yes how many, if not any reasons?
 - The lack of capacity and resources meant that even though employers would have loved to permanently employ hard-working interns, the lack of resources prevented such.
5. Some argue that a 12-month internship is too short to impart the necessary skills and experience in an intern. What is your take on this?
 - Time management is essential in any internship program. While some employers argued that 12 months might be seen as short, time management was seen as vital if one wished to grasp elements of the workplace. Hence, there was that feeling that instead of complaining about the duration of the internship, interns could better manage their time in order to maximise their learning.

6. After hosting interns, what would your personal advice to them be as they venture into the real world of work?

- Employers felt the right work ethic and attitude coupled with time management is crucial for the development of interns post the internship program.

7. What other interventions do you think are essential in imparting graduates with skills and experience besides internships?

- They need to go the extra mile beyond their given scope of work. If they wish to learn effectively, they need to ensure they can do more than what is required of them.

8. Does the supervisor who was managing the interns have formal mentorship or leader training?

- Mentors were skilled and understood what was required of them in supporting the interns. There was a general feeling of appreciation in this regard.

9. Other than funding, is there any other assistance / aid that you think SASSETA should provide to employers to make the internship programs more successful?

- Increased communication is seen as a vital component. Frequent contact was seen as an essential ingredient in the quest to ensure the programme's success.

10. Would you be willing apply to host interns again in the near future?

- Employers were more than happy to host interns future

6.6 Conclusions to research questions (SASSETA)

1. As SASSETA, what operational challenges do you face in implementing the internship program?

- The Manual payment of the stipends is the most challenging administrative and operational issue.

3. What processes are followed before awarding the intern to the employer?

- Yes they were followed to ensure the program would run smoothly

3. What are some of the administrative related issues do you face in administering the program and do these have a bearing on the success of the program?

- Collation of documents per payment phase and delays in the project end date. Primarily, if projects are run nationally, consolidation becomes an issue.

4. From your experience, are internships effective in preparing the intern for the work, if yes why?

- Yes, with the right support from employers, interns can acquire a variety of skills that will contribute towards their growth post the internship.

5. Do employers require a fee or financial support for them to absorb the learner after the internship period?

- That is the prerogative of employers, depending on capacity and budget.
6. How best do you think we can monitor the progress of interns post the internship period?
- Processes need to be developed, and tracing studies are also critical.

6.7 Recommendations

- (a) The study recommends that SASSETA must improve its project management (monitoring of the project progress)
- (b) Frequent communication and follow-up sessions are necessary to ensure interns complete the programme and SASSETA is aware of the issues interns face. This will allow for better planning.
- (c) Another intervention could be setting up a dedicated hotline for intern-related queries. When interns are placed, they will be given a hotline to call whenever they have issues. This will ensure seamless integration and cooperation between SASSETA and the interns.
- (d) Developing a dedicated employer's email would be noble. Employers will send their issues via this email, and a dedicated team from SASSETA will be responsible for attending to any issues that might arise.
- (e) Team leaders could also be an option amongst interns. One intern could be selected as a team leader and give SASSETA monthly reports on the progress, challenges, and any other operational challenges they may have.
- (f) Another intervention would be the establishment of a Google form link. This link will be populated with operational questions which interns will have to reply to, thus keeping SASSETA updated with any challenges interns may face and allowing for a quick response.

6.8. Conclusion

This study was vital in contributing to unique knowledge generation, which reflects current dynamics in the internship domain and seeks to understand how internships play a fundamental role in skill development. Skills are vital for any economy. Skilled human capital is essential. However, professional human capital that does not have the necessary skills, exposure, mentoring, and support is unlikely to obtain employment and contribute towards the country's economic development.

Therefore, with this said, it was vital for this study to get through first-hand reflections from past participants, their opinions, thoughts, and understanding of whether the internship they participated in was beneficial to their self-growth development and valuable to their career exposure. The living conditions of interns might also creep in and impact how they view the learning intervention. That is to say, despite internships being essential for one's development, living conditions driven by the increasing cost of living may portray learning interventions as ineffective. From an employer's perspective, the right work ethic coupled with effective time management is essential for interns going forward, especially as they seek permanent employment. This study and subsequent results will go a long way in informing future internship trends.

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