

## **STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNSHIP AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES AT SEBELAS MARET UNIVERSITY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Universities in many developing countries face increasing pressure to improve graduate employability, global competence, and practical readiness for the workplace. Internship and exchange programmes have become important strategies for achieving these goals. This study investigates how teacher-training students at Sebelas Maret University in Indonesia perceive the educational, professional, and intercultural value of internships and exchange programmes, to generate insights that can inform improvements in Nigerian higher education. A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 16 undergraduate students through a structured online questionnaire. The small sample size is justified by the exploratory and pilot nature of the study, which aimed to generate preliminary, context-specific insights rather than statistically generalisable findings. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were used to analyse students' perceptions across 19 Likert-type items. The findings show that students hold very positive views regarding the ability of these programmes to bridge theory and practice, enhance communication and teamwork, develop intercultural competence, and improve employability. Although students reported challenges related to financial constraints, supervision, cultural adjustment, and administrative procedures, overall experiences remained strongly positive. The study concludes that well-structured experiential learning and mobility initiatives can produce substantial educational and professional benefits when supported by adequate funding, effective mentorship, and strong institutional coordination. The research provides practical guidance for policymakers aiming to improve the quality of internships and exchange programmes in Nigeria by illustrating how a successful Global South model can be adapted to enhance teacher education, foster global readiness, and advance national graduate employability goals.

**Keywords:** *Internship programmes, student exchange, teacher education, global competence, employability development, higher education policy*

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## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalised world, higher education institutions (HEIs) are under growing pressure to equip graduates with competencies that transcend national borders. Internships and student exchange programmes have emerged as key institutional strategies to support this goal. These initiatives do not simply serve as add-ons to academic curricula; they are rapidly becoming social facts of contemporary tertiary education, shaping how young people prepare for cross-cultural professional environments. While many universities in developing countries still emphasise classroom-based instruction, the demand among students for experiential and international learning opportunities is rising. This is especially true in teacher education, where future educators benefit from both pedagogical immersion and exposure to culturally diverse teaching contexts. In the age of globalisation, higher education institutions (HEIs) in both Indonesia and Nigeria face increasing pressure to prepare their students for a highly interconnected world. In Indonesia, the government has actively promoted global exposure through programs such as the Indonesian Global Internship Program (IGIP), which allows undergraduate students to engage in professional internships abroad for several months (Tohari, 2024). Such initiatives reflect a broader national drive to develop global competence among youth and to align higher education more closely with international labour market demands. On the other hand, Nigeria is grappling with a chronic graduate employability challenge. As noted in research, Nigerian universities often struggle to ensure their graduates acquire the skills needed for the modern workplace (Ofor-Douglas, 2024; Okolie et al., 2020; Okolie et al., 2019). Employers have also called for stronger institutional-industry partnerships to address unemployment and underemployment among graduates. In addition, the Nigerian government supports industrial training through mechanisms like the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), which seeks to equip students with practical skills through structured workplace training (Temitope, 2023).

Existing scholarship underscores the multifaceted benefits of internships and student exchange programmes in higher education. In Indonesia, participation in exchange programmes has been associated with enhanced intercultural competence. Saripi & Asari (2024) found that students who engaged in exchange experiences showed improvements in cultural awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and language skills. Similarly, Maesaro & Wijirahayu (2025) found that teaching internships in Indonesia reported that participants developed better intercultural communication abilities, though they also struggled with challenges such as language barriers and differing pedagogical styles. From the Nigerian perspective, employability remains a central concern in the literature. Globalisation and internationalisation of curricula are increasingly viewed as strategies for bridging the skills gap in Nigeria's tertiary education system (Ben-Izuagie, 2025; Ikpesu, 2017). Research has also shown that despite efforts to boost student engagement with practical training, many Nigerian graduates still lack the soft and cross-cultural competencies required by employers (Owoade et al., 2024; Okolie et al., 2019).

Scholarly works on HEI internationalisation more broadly identify systemic challenges, such as policy weaknesses and insufficient infrastructure for meaningful student mobility (Agbeniga, 2016; Udekwe & Obadire, 2024). Avolio & Benzaquen (2025) conducted a systematic review showing that while many institutions espouse internationalisation, they often lack the strategic capacity to implement exchange and internship programmes effectively.

First, Indonesia has in recent years intensified state and institutional efforts to scale up internships, international mobility, and structured work-based learning for undergraduates (Nugroho et al., 2024; Yulianti & Fitriansyah, 2024). National schemes and university partnerships have created more opportunities for students to undertake paid and credit-bearing internships as well as short- and semester-length exchange programmes. Examples include government-sponsored initiatives such as the Indonesian Global Internship Program (IGIP) and national internship drives that expand placement quotas for university graduates and undergraduates, signalling policy-level commitment to linking higher education with the labour market and global experiences. At the institutional level, teacher-training faculties (including those at Sebelas Maret University) participate in regional exchange networks such as SEA Teacher and bilateral university-to-university exchange arrangements, which routinely send pre-service teachers to regional partner institutions for teaching practicums and cultural immersion. These institutional programmes create a substantive pool of teacher-training students with lived internship and exchange experiences. Second, the Indonesian evidence base and mobility statistics show sustained growth in outbound and programmatic student mobility (including internships and exchange), reinforcing the plausibility that Indonesian undergraduates are gaining systematic intercultural and workplace exposure that can be studied and translated (Williams, 2024). UNESCO and sector analyses report increasing outbound mobility from Indonesia in the post-pandemic period, and program evaluations indicate that structured mobility and internship awards (e.g., IISMA, IGIP) explicitly aim to develop employability and global competencies among recipients (Juknyte-Petreikiene et al., 2022).

By contrast, Nigeria continues to confront a pressing graduate employability problem driven by skills mismatches between university curricula and labour-market demand, limited structured workplace learning for undergraduates, and calls from employers for stronger institutional-industry collaboration (Ezepue & Ochinanwata, 2017). National actors (including the National Universities Commission) and sector studies have highlighted the urgency of improving practical training, work placements, and internationalisation strategies to raise graduate employability (Okolie et al., 2020; Kolade et al., 2021; Nwajiuba et al., 2020). Nigerian policy instruments (for example, the Industrial Training Fund and NUC initiatives) seek to expand workplace-based training, but implementation gaps persist, and many graduates still report low levels of market-relevant soft and intercultural skills. These two national pictures, the programmatic expansion of internships and exchanges in Indonesia and an urgent employability gap in Nigeria,

together establish a clear rationale for this study. Investigating how teacher-training students at Sebelas Maret University perceive and benefit from internships and exchanges creates an empirical basis for extracting practical, scalable lessons that Nigerian universities could adapt. Where Indonesia has concentrated policy and institutional capacity to offer structured experiential and mobility programmes, Nigeria needs tested strategies to close its skills gap; understanding student perspectives from a functioning programme environment provides direct, transferable insights for curriculum design, placement models, mentorship structures, funding mechanisms, and pre-departure/orientation practices that Nigerian institutions might trial or adopt. Finally, teacher education is itself a high-leverage domain for such cross-national learning. Pre-service teachers who gain authentic classroom internship experience and cross-cultural exposure can model pedagogies and curricular innovations back home; therefore, targeted improvements in teacher-training internships and exchanges have multiplier effects on school practice and graduate employability. This study is guided by the following objectives: (1) to examine teacher training students' perceptions at Sebelas Maret University regarding the educational and professional value of internship and exchange programmes; (2) to analyze the contribution of these programmes to students' development of global competencies, cross-cultural understanding, and employability skills; (3) to identify the challenges and barriers faced by students in accessing and participating in internship and exchange programmes; and (4) to derive practical insights from the experiences of Sebelas Maret University students that can inform and strengthen internship and exchange initiatives in Nigerian universities.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilised a quantitative descriptive survey design to explore the perceptions of teacher training students at Sebelas Maret University regarding internship and exchange programs. This design was deemed appropriate as it allows data collection from a specified population without variable manipulation (Ghanad, 2023). The study targeted undergraduate students from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Sebelas Maret University during the 2024/2025 academic year, chosen for their participation in both school-based internships and international exchange programs, directly relevant to the research focus. A convenience sample of 16 students was selected, yielding preliminary quantitative insights to inform future broader investigations, despite the small sample size. Data collection was carried out using a structured online questionnaire developed by the researcher, consisting of three sections: demographic information, participation details in internship or exchange programs, and a set of 19 Likert-type items assessing the educational, professional, and intercultural values of these opportunities. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Very Positive Experience' (5) to 'Very Negative Experience' (1), and the questionnaire

items were adapted from validated studies (Akinde et al., 2017; Walker & Rocconi, 2021) and contextualised for Indonesian teacher education.

The questionnaire's content validity was confirmed by three academic experts who provided insights that refined the questions for clarity and alignment with research objectives. Reliability was tested through a pilot study, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, indicating high reliability. Data collection occurred online via Google Forms from October 7-10, 2025, with participation being voluntary and confidential assurances provided to respondents. Data were then exported for analysis, employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to summarise demographic data and perception responses. The exploration sought to identify patterns and trends in perceptions rather than establish causal relationships, with mean score ranges categorising experiences: 4.21–5.00 (very positive), 3.41–4.20 (positive), 2.61–3.40 (neutral), 1.81–2.60 (negative), and 1.00–1.80 (very negative). The results of the study aimed to inform policy and practice in Nigerian higher education. Ethical approval was secured, ensuring participants' rights to withdraw, confidentiality, and the absence of personally identifiable information, which upheld the principles of academic integrity and voluntary participation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

This research presents and analyses the data collected from 16 teacher training students at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia. The purpose of this analysis is to describe students' perceptions of internship and exchange programmes and to derive insights relevant to Nigerian higher education. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics based on responses to 19 Likert-type items. The sample consisted predominantly of female students (approximately 75%), aged mainly between 20 and 24 years, and enrolled primarily in 4th-year undergraduate level programmes. This demographic reflects the typical composition of teacher education cohorts in Indonesian universities and provides relevant insights into students approaching graduation and professional practice.

*Research Question 1: How do teacher training students at Sebelas Maret University perceive the educational and professional value of internship and exchange programmes?*

Table 1.  
Students' Perceptions of the Educational and Professional Value of Internship and Exchange Programmes

Statement	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Internship programmes are a vital bridge between classroom knowledge and practice	4.69	Very Positive

Statement	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Exchange programmes broaden the horizons of students beyond their local environment	4.75	Very Positive
Opportunities for internships and exchange strengthen undergraduate education	4.69	Very Positive
Students who participate in these programmes are better prepared for international competitiveness	4.44	Very Positive

The analysis shows that teacher training students at Sebelas Maret University hold very positive perceptions of the educational and professional value of internship and exchange programmes. All the mean scores are above 4.40 on a 5-point scale, indicating strong agreement that these programmes play an important role in linking theoretical learning with professional experience. Students also expressed high appreciation for the international and intercultural exposure gained through exchange programmes, as reflected in the highest mean value of 4.75. The findings further indicate that students view participation in these programmes as a means of enhancing their readiness for global competitiveness and improving the overall quality of undergraduate education. Overall, the results demonstrate that internship and exchange opportunities are perceived as essential and beneficial components of teacher education at Sebelas Maret University.

*Research Question 2: In what ways do internship and exchange programmes contribute to students' global, intercultural, and employability skills?*

Table 2.

Students' Perceptions of the Contribution of Internship and Exchange Programmes to Global, Intercultural, and Employability Skills

Statement	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Internship experiences enhance students' communication and teamwork abilities	4.56	Very Positive
Exchange programmes improve students' understanding of global perspectives and cultural diversity	4.69	Very Positive
Participation in these programmes increases students' adaptability and problem-solving abilities	4.63	Very Positive
Internship and exchange experiences help students develop the employability skills needed in the job market	4.75	Very Positive
Exposure to diverse educational and professional environments builds students' confidence and leadership.	4.50	Very Positive

The results indicate that students perceive internship and exchange programmes as having a very strong impact on the development of global,

intercultural, and employability skills. All items recorded mean scores above 4.50, confirming a generally high level of agreement. Students rated the contribution of these programmes to employability skills highest (Mean = 4.75), reflecting a strong belief that real-world experience and international exposure improve their readiness for the labour market. Likewise, the high means for communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities demonstrate that practical engagement fosters essential soft skills for professional success. Furthermore, students' very positive ratings on intercultural understanding and global perspectives (Mean = 4.69) highlight the importance of exposure to diverse educational and cultural contexts in shaping broader worldviews. These results collectively show that internship and exchange initiatives contribute substantially to students' professional growth, cultural awareness, and overall employability. Overall, the findings suggest that both programmes play an integral role in preparing future teachers to function effectively in diverse, globalised educational and professional environments.

*Research Question 3: What challenges do students encounter during internship and exchange programmes?*

Table 3  
Challenges Encountered by Students during Internship and Exchange Programmes

Statement	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Limited financial support affects full participation in internship and exchange programmes	4.44	Very Positive
Cultural and language barriers make adaptation in exchange programmes difficult	4.31	Very Positive
Inadequate supervision and mentorship reduce the learning value of internship experiences	4.38	Very Positive
Logistical and administrative issues (e.g., visa, placement, and accommodation) hinder participation	4.25	Very Positive
Balancing academic workload with internship or exchange programme schedules poses difficulties	4.19	Positive

The findings reveal that students experience notable challenges while participating in internship and exchange programmes, though their responses indicate a generally positive acknowledgement of these issues rather than outright dissatisfaction. The most significant concern relates to financial constraints (Mean = 4.44), suggesting that limited funding or sponsorship often restricts students' ability to participate fully or benefit maximally from these opportunities. Challenges associated with supervision and mentorship (Mean = 4.38) and cultural or language barriers (Mean = 4.31) were also rated highly, indicating that support mechanisms during programme implementation could be strengthened. Logistical and

administrative difficulties (Mean = 4.25), such as visa processing, accommodation, or placement arrangements, further complicate students' experiences. The least-rated challenge (Mean = 4.19) concerns balancing academic workload with programme participation, which, while still positive, reflects that students generally manage their time effectively despite competing demands. Overall, the results suggest that although students view internship and exchange programmes positively, financial, administrative, and intercultural barriers remain key challenges that could affect access, engagement, and the overall quality of learning experiences.

*Research Question 4: What strategies do students suggest for improving the effectiveness of internship and exchange programmes?*

Table 4.

Students' Suggested Strategies for Improving Internship and Exchange Programmes

Statement	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Provide adequate financial assistance or scholarships to support student participation	4.81	Very Positive
Strengthen mentorship and supervision during the internship, and exchange experiences	4.69	Very Positive
Improve administrative planning and coordination of programme logistics	4.56	Very Positive
Foster stronger institutional partnerships with local and international organisations	4.63	Very Positive
Offer pre-departure orientation and intercultural communication training for exchange participants	4.75	Very Positive

The results show that students provided highly positive and constructive suggestions for enhancing the implementation of internship and exchange programmes. All items recorded mean values above 4.50, signifying strong consensus on the need for targeted improvements. The highest-rated strategy (Mean = 4.81) emphasises the importance of financial support or scholarships, highlighting that affordability remains the most critical factor influencing students' access to such programmes. Closely following this, students strongly endorsed the provision of pre-departure orientation and intercultural communication training (Mean = 4.75), which would help them adapt more effectively to new environments and reduce cultural adjustment difficulties. Students also rated strengthened mentorship and supervision (Mean = 4.69) and institutional partnerships (Mean = 4.63) as essential strategies to improve programme quality and expand opportunities for international collaboration. Furthermore, enhanced administrative coordination (Mean = 4.56) was viewed as necessary to address

logistical issues such as placement arrangements, travel, and accommodation. Overall, the findings indicate that students value well-structured, adequately funded, and institutionally supported internship and exchange programmes. Their suggestions point toward improving financial accessibility, guidance, and organisational efficiency to ensure greater inclusivity and sustainability of such initiatives.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that internship and exchange programmes at Sebelas Maret University are perceived by teacher-training students as highly beneficial for educational, intercultural, and professional development. These results align strongly with existing literature on experiential learning and international mobility. First, the very positive perceptions of the educational and professional value of internships and exchanges support established scholarship emphasising the importance of work-integrated learning in bridging theory and practice. Ansari (2025) argues that structured internships provide authentic contexts for developing real-world skills, while Alexander (2019) identifies practicum experiences as essential components of teacher preparation that help integrate pedagogical theory with practical classroom implementation. The strong endorsement by students in this study reinforces these claims, suggesting that internship and mobility opportunities at Sebelas Maret University fulfil these essential educational functions. Furthermore, the high value students attributed to international exposure parallels findings by Sariپی & Asari (2024), who reported that Indonesian students engaging in exchange programmes develop enhanced cultural awareness and language proficiency. Second, the results demonstrate that internship and exchange experiences substantially contribute to students' global, intercultural, and employability skills. All indicators relating to communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and leadership. This aligns with international evidence showing that experiential and mobility programmes enhance transversal skills that employers increasingly demand (Suleman, 2018; Kapareliotis et al., 2019). Similarly, the strong perceived impact on intercultural competence concurs with the findings of De Hei et al. (2020), Popov et al. (2016), and Thinh (2025), who argue that immersion in diverse environments fosters cultural empathy, adaptability, and global-mindedness. The particularly high rating for employability benefits further supports Musa et al. (2025), who found that internships significantly strengthen graduates' workplace readiness, soft skills, and digital competencies.

Third, although perceptions were overwhelmingly positive, the findings also reveal substantive challenges that may constrain access and full participation. Financial constraints emerged as the most significant barrier. This is consistent with broader research identifying funding limitations as a major obstacle to student mobility in developing-country contexts (Avolio & Benzaquen, 2024; Udekwe & Obadire, 2024). Students also identified cultural and language barriers, logistical

issues, and inadequate supervision as meaningful challenges. These correspond with difficulties documented in prior studies on teaching practicums and international exchanges. Maesaro & Wijirahayu (2025), for example, reported that students undertaking teaching internships in foreign contexts frequently struggle with cross-cultural communication and divergent pedagogical norms. Similarly, Beckmann & Ehmke (2025) highlight the crucial role of mentorship in ensuring that internship experiences translate effectively into learning and professional growth. Fourth, the strategies proposed by students exhibit a strong alignment with international best practices. The high prioritisation of financial assistance again reflects global recommendations for increasing the inclusivity of student mobility (Juknyte-Petreikiene et al., 2022).

Students' emphasis on pre-departure training resonates with findings by Hanley et al. (2025), which show that structured preparation enhances self-efficacy and learning outcomes during international professional mobility. The call for stronger partnerships with international organisations mirrors longstanding arguments by Teichler (2017) and Yulianti & Fitriansyah (2024) that institutional collaboration is central to sustainably scaling mobility and internship opportunities. Overall, the results indicate that the internship and exchange programmes at Sebelas Maret University reflect many of the qualities associated with successful experiential learning and internationalisation initiatives globally. The strong positive perceptions demonstrate that these programmes are functioning as effective mechanisms for cultivating global competence, professional readiness, and intercultural awareness—competencies that are increasingly central to teacher education in the 21st century (Majewska, 2023; Nopas & Kerdsomboon, 2024). At the same time, the persistence of financial, administrative, and intercultural barriers indicates areas where programme implementation can be refined to ensure more equitable, supportive, and comprehensive participation. Importantly for Nigerian higher education, the study provides clear evidence that structured and well-coordinated experiential learning models—when adequately supported—can significantly enhance graduate employability and global competence, echoing calls from Nigerian scholars for stronger work-integrated and internationally oriented curricula.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined teacher-training students' perceptions of internship and exchange programmes at Sebelas Maret University and explored the implications of these findings for Nigerian higher education. The results demonstrate that students perceive these programmes as highly effective in strengthening the connection between academic theory and professional practice, a view consistent with research highlighting the pedagogical significance of structured experiential learning in teacher education. This study identifies several findings that differ meaningfully from what is commonly reported in similar research. Unlike studies where students often express mixed or uncertain views about the benefits of internships and

exchange programmes due to weak supervision, poor organisation, or limited institutional support, the students in this study reported consistently very positive experiences across all measured areas. They described internships and exchanges as highly effective in strengthening the connection between theory and practice, improving intercultural communication, enhancing global awareness, and developing employability skills. Even though financial and administrative challenges were acknowledged, overall student satisfaction remained strongly positive, indicating that these programmes are functioning more effectively than is frequently observed in other higher education contexts. The research contributes important value by providing direct empirical insight into how structured experiential learning and mobility programmes operate in a Global South teacher-education environment. This fills a gap in existing knowledge, which often relies on either conceptual discussions or data drawn from institutional reports rather than from the experiences of student participants themselves. The study also offers a contextually relevant example of how practical training, international exposure, and institutional coordination can be integrated to produce strong learning outcomes. This makes the findings particularly useful for countries seeking to strengthen experiential learning and student mobility in environments facing similar constraints and development goals. Based on the findings, three key recommendations are proposed for Nigerian policymakers. First, there is a need to establish stronger financial support frameworks to reduce the economic barriers that prevent many students from participating in internships and exchange programmes. Second, policymakers should promote and support the creation of structured partnerships between Nigerian universities and both local and international institutions, enabling more collaborative training opportunities and a wider range of placement options. Third, national guidelines should require universities to implement standardised mentorship systems, clear supervision structures, and compulsory pre-departure training to improve the quality, safety, and learning value of experiential and international programmes. Collectively, these measures can strengthen the development of global competence, enhance graduate employability, and improve the overall quality of teacher education in Nigeria.

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