

Investigating the desirable assessment methods of the performance of the BA Law students during internships

ZAHRA BABADI AKASHE
AHMAD REZA NASR ESFAHANI¹
MOHAMMAD REZA NILI
SEYED MOHAMMAD SADEGH TABATABAEI
University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

The present study aimed to investigate the desirable assessment methods of the performance of the BA law students during internships, using a mixed methods research approach. The data was collected by using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. In the qualitative part of the study, interviews were conducted with 28 internship experts, lawyers, faculty members from the University of Isfahan, and graduate students, who were purposively selected. In the quantitative part, questionnaires were administered to 114 students from the academic year 2017-2018 and the graduates from 2014-2017 in the field of law. The results of the qualitative part of the study revealed that the interviewees emphasized the professor's assessment of student performance. The results of the quantitative part of the study revealed that "student performance in simulated settings" and "practical and diagnostic capabilities of students for dealing with client problems" are among the desirable assessment methods of the performance of the BA law students during internships.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, internship, assessment, curriculum, law

The purpose of the higher education is to develop skilled human resources (HR) for the growth of national economy in the expansion of the global markets (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008). For universities to develop competent HR for the society, they have to reconsider curriculum design and pay special attention to those practical courses requiring skills in the integration of theory and practice. Many fields of study, including law, consider the integration of theory and practice an important part of education (Stichman & Farkas, 2005). Such integration can be achieved by work-integrated learning (WIL). High-quality work-integrated learning opportunities are of benefit to students, bridging the gap between students' theoretical knowledge and work experience (Desai & Seaholme, 2018). WIL has long been considered to play a key role in work-readiness in professional education and present ever more opportunities for improving the work-readiness of graduates, even in areas not traditionally associated with clear employment outcomes (Venville, Lynch, & Santhanam, 2018).

There is a general agreement that the main function of law faculties is to prepare students for work (Stuckey, 2007). Work-related learning helps students prepare for practice in real-world legal centers by developing skills and linking theory and practice and supports their transfer from the university to the real world of practice (Shirley, Davies, Cockburn & Carver, 2006). The literature on WIL is replete with detailed descriptions of a variety of WIL programs being developed within universities. For example, activities such as internships are rated as having high engagement with students (Rook, 2017). Internships exist in a wide variety of industries and settings. Gault, Leach, and Duey (2010) defined academic internship as an opportunity to incorporate professional experiences into academic education through participation in planned and supervised activities. In Iran, an internship, also known as work placement (Nghia & Duyen, 2018), is a short-term placement in governmental and non-governmental

¹ Corresponding author: Ahmad Reza Nasr Esfahani, arnasr@edu.ui.ac.ir

organizations where students work without being paid. The students work under the supervision of a course supervisor or an internship supervisor.

The diversity, sensitivity, and significance of legal issues have led universities to train students to meet the needs of the society. This necessitates that universities offer appropriate internship programs to help students gain practical experience in law. Ensuring the readiness of students for the proper application of skills in practical settings requires an assessment of students' knowledge and skills (Jay & Owen, 2016). Assessment and grading are central to students' active learning (Kahl, 2017) and shape their learning experience (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). Appropriate assessment focuses on directing student learning rather than focusing on the classification of students and comparing them with each other (Abbasi, Einollahi, Gharib, Nabatchian, Dashti, & Zarebavani, 2012) and affects student learning (Ramsden, 2003).

One of the important issues in assessment concerns the person who should carry it out. This person is a university lecturer or an internship supervisor in the workplace or a combination of both (Shaketange, Kanyimba & Brown, 2017). Student assessment in the process of internship is usually carried out by three individuals: assessment of the intern by an academic member, assessment of the intern by a student, and assessment of the intern by an internship supervisor in the workplace. The course lecturer as a supervisor is involved in providing students with learning, monitoring, and assessment opportunities. The course supervisor bases the assessment on six dimensions: students' relationships with others, attitude, judgment, learning ability, reliability, and quality of the work (Barber & Bailey, 2015). In addition to visiting the internship place, the course supervisor assesses students by giving them certain assignments. The course supervisor and the internship supervisor in the workplace can keep in contact by telephone or by written communication (Bailey & Manning, 2016). However, a course supervisor can use new technologies to observe and monitor student performance when the internship place is far away. At the California University of Pennsylvania, (2010) for example, where internship locations are almost 75 miles further from the university, alternative approaches to student assessment, such as video conferencing, call-to-speech, and travel co-ordination with colleagues, are used.

At some universities such as those in Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington Counties, interns are informally and formally assessed by workplace supervisors during the internship year. Interns are assessed at the beginning of the internship year, and reassessed at the end of each trimester, in the middle of the internship year, and at the end of the internship year (HealthEast Care System, 2017). At the University of Isfahan, there is a focus on the supervision carried out by the course lecturer and the supervisor in the workplace (University of Isfahan, n.d.).

Self-assessment is also used to assess the internship course. De La Harpe, Radloff, and Wyber (2000), for example, defined assessments as collaborative efforts between students and their instructors. Instructors encourage students for self-assessment because task assessment by students themselves encourages students to engage in lifelong and deeper learning. Williams and Alawiye (2001) found that the presentation of conferences and course planning with the help of the internship supervisor improve self-assessment and self-reflection of students in internships.

Assessment for learning will be applicable and useful if there is an integrated and comprehensive approach to assessment (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Therefore, a combination of assessments carried out by the course lecturer, the internship supervisor, and students will be beneficial. McNamara (2008) reported that for assessing skills in law student internships, a combination of workplace supervision

documents, including work samples, work electronic documents, and student internship assessment and self-assessment documents, are used. After collection, these documents are submitted to a faculty member responsible for internships. Moreover, a combination of assessment methods, such as student portfolios, assessment of the internship program, and the final report of the supervising lawyer, were reported by law students.

Another important issue in assessing internships is assessment methods. According to the literature, assessment methods vary considerably. For example, student portfolios, activity logs, reports, article analyses, literature reviews, classroom presentations, and final reviewed articles are used in internship assessment (Dunsmuir, Atkinson, Lang, Warhurst, & Wright, 2017). According to Walsh (2007), suitable methods for assessing applied knowledge include problem solving, presentations, critical analysis of events, oral tests, and personal and group projects. Ross and Elechi (2002) considered writing a research paper central to internship assessment. Williams (1976) believes that professors should consider interns' attitudes, interests, and completion of projects in internship assessment. To Abeysekera (2006), grading criteria include the presentation of assignments on learning experiences, the preparation of reports, weekly workshops, the presentation of articles, the presentation of daily reports, the examination of student teammates, and workplace supervisors' reports. Diaz, Leon, and Hernandez-Luna (2015) considered the overall performance, oral presentations, and the presentation of the daily and final reports by the internship supervisors and professors appropriate for student performance assessment.

An appropriate method for assessing skill development is to use a portfolio of purposive collection (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Preparing portfolios help students become more aware of their characteristics, identify and document their skill development, and plan and improve their skills for employers (Abeysekera, 2006). Similarly, Bay and McKeage (2006) stated that it would be better to use a portfolio model for assessment. A portfolio should include interns' works and changes during internships. Portfolios help students prepare themselves for a job and create a professional look. A portfolio encourages students to reflect on learning, which is a good tool for assessing students' practical skills (Robinson, 2018). Abner and Kierstead (2016) have also argued that professional people use portfolios, various feedback forms, the evaluation of writings, and practical tests to ensure student insights and growth.

Some scholars believe in the direct observation of students' performance for assessment. For example, Grosberg (2006) pointed out that direct observation is the traditional approach to skill scoring. Assessment tools that support direct observation include video performance testing, multiple choice tests administered possibly based on the texts of video interviews with students, (written or oral) self-reflection, standard attendees, and computer assessment tools combining videos and multiple-choice video tests. However, Ebner, Cohen, and Honeyman (2012) suggested innovative approaches to assessing law skills such as case studies, counseling, inspection, legal billing, and defense. These methods include tests, reporting a hearing, role-plays, interviews, video documents, and negotiation (Abner & Kierstead, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, assessment is an educational process. Designing assessment methods contributes to facilitating learning in the higher education (McLean, 2018). Despite the role of assessment in raising awareness of student learning and the success of internships, some assessment methods used to judge students' performance in the process of internships are not appropriate (Pachana, Sofronoff, Scott, & Helmes, 2011). This can reduce the quality of education and students' motivation. Considering the significance of this issue, not much research has been conducted on internship assessment methods,

especially in the field of law. Therefore, the present study will make an attempt to investigate desirable methods for assessing internship experience in BA law students.

METHOD

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-analytical in terms of data collection. Quantitative and qualitative methods (a mixed-method research approach) were used to collect data (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2006). The qualitative approach was used for collecting the opinions of the faculty members, internship experts, lawyers, and graduate students about internship assessment methods, and the quantitative method was used for examining the opinions of the third- and fourth-year BA law students from the academic year 2016-2017 and of graduates from 2014-2017 at the University of Isfahan.

In the qualitative part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 people selected from the law faculty members at the University of Isfahan (8), experienced internship experts (5), management of the Office of University Relations (7), lawyers, and graduate students (8). A purposive sampling method was used in the qualitative part of the study. Open-ended questions were used. The interviewees were asked about the desirable methods of assessing law internship programs. Although interviews began with comprehensive questions, if needed, additional questions were used to obtain more information and allow for a deeper scrutiny of the subject of the research.

In the quantitative part of the study, the proportionate stratified random sampling method was used to select students and graduates of the University of Isfahan. The statistical population consisted of three groups: third-year students, fourth-year students and the graduates. The participants were selected proportionate to the sample size from each group. Therefore, a sample of 114 people was selected by using the Cochran formula. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample

Row	Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Female	75	65.20
		Male	40	34.80
2	Education Level	Third-Year	30	26.10
		Fourth-Year	24	20.90
		Graduate	61	53.00
3	Internship Experience	Yes	20	17.40
		No	77	67.00
4	Internship Hours	0-50	7	6.10
		51-100	4	3.50
		101-200	0	0
		Above 200	3	2.60
5	Employment	Employed	76	66.10
		Unemployed	35	30.40
6	Job Type	Completely Related	23	20.00
		Somewhat Related	4	3.50
		Unrelated	11	9.60

Questionnaires were used to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire contained seven items and was based on a 5-point Likert type scale. Table 4 provides a complete list of the questions used in the questionnaire. In order to determine the validity of the questionnaire, five faculty members of the Faculties of Law and Education of the University of Isfahan were consulted. To determine the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was used. After pilot testing the questionnaire on 30 participants, its reliability was estimated as 0.85. At this stage, items with Cronbach's alpha values lower than 0.35 were deleted or corrected. The questionnaire was prepared in printed and electronic forms. A printed questionnaire was used to collect the opinions of the third- and fourth-year law students at the University of Isfahan. The electronic version link was provided and sent on social media and by email to graduates from 2014-2017.

Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. The process of analyzing the content of interviews, as Krippendorff (2003) has argued, involves collecting, reducing, deducing and analyzing the data. After recording and transcribing the interviews, the data was coded and classified. For each interview, the classification and revision of codes in each category continued until they were convincing. All the items in each category were then assigned names. Finally, the codes and categories identified in the previous interviews were reviewed and compared. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic characteristics of the participants, and inferential statistical methods (one-sample t-test and the Friedman test) were used for answering the research questions.

All ethical principles for research with human participants were adhered to during the research process: informed consent was obtained, information confidentiality was protected, and the approval of the university's Office of the Vice President for Research was obtained. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Isfahan with the code of ethics reference IR.UI.REC.2017.NN3.

RESULTS

In the two sections below the findings of the qualitative and quantitative parts of the study are presented, respectively.

Interview Results

According to the interviewees' opinions, BA law student internship assessment can be considered in the following two categories: internship assessment methods and internship assessors. These categories are explained in more detail as follows:

Internship assessment methods

The most important internship assessment method is student performance assessment during internships. Student performance during specialized activities, such as drafting a bill, issuing a verdict, problem solving, concluding deeds, and sample work during internships, is examined. Seventeen interviewees emphasized this method. For example, interviewee 5 stated that: "At the end of the internship program, we need to take an exam to ensure that interns are well-trained; for example, they should be able to write a bill, issue an order or a verdict regarding a case". Interviewee 16 believed that "assessment should be practical and interns should be able to prepare petitions and present a report of a court's verdicts". Interviewee 6 believed that it would be better to use experiences in counseling and judgment courses in internship assessment:

a good internship test is a test when you ask students what is practical. For example, law interns should be assessed to determine whether they are familiar with what is happening in practice. Students are asked to read 5 cases, summarize them, analyze the parities' comments, and write their own opinions.

Another internship assessment method proposed by the interviewees is assessment based on oral or written tests. For example, interviewee 1 stated that: "On completion of internships, interns should be asked about their assignments about the preparation of reports and critiques of the verdicts in court cases to determine whether interns themselves carried out their assignments and how much they have learned?" Interviewee 3 believed that "oral and written exams in laws and practical legal topics, reviewing internship assignments, law faculty members' interviews with interns, and law case studies are among the best ways to assess the internship course". According to the interviewee 22, it would be better to use research projects for assessing student performance, stating that:

I ask my interns about whether they can rewrite a law more efficiently, and what critiques they can offer. I pose a research problem. For example, under the law, if a murderer who has deliberately killed somebody dies, then both the Diya (monetary compensation) and the Qisas (retaliation in kind) are abolished. Then, I ask another question. I tell them naturally we cannot retaliate against a dead murderer but why the law requires compensation to be abolished? On what grounds does the law determine it? Is the law right or not? Well, this needs some research.

Summary of the internship assessment practices proposed by the interviewees is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Interviewees' Opinions about BA Law Internship Assessment Methods

Initial Coding	Frequency of Opinions*					
	Lawyers	Internship Experts	Faculty Members	postgraduates	Total Opinions	Percentage
1. Performance assessment	7		8	3	17	48.60
2. Direct supervision of the faculty members	3	2		1	6	17.00
3. Written and oral tests	4	2			6	17.00
4. Presenting written reports on court cases			3	2	5	14.00
5. Doing research projects			1		1	2.85
Total	14	2	12	6	35	100

*To answer this research question, interviews were conducted with 28 people from four groups. Considering that each interviewee proposed different internship assessment methods, so the frequencies of opinions are not equal to the number of interviewees. Here there is an emphasis on the opinions of the interviewees.

Internship assessors

From the perspective of the interviewees, internship assessment should be done by faculty members, the course supervisors or both. 12 interviewees proposed internship assessment by the faculty members as an appropriate assessment method. According to interviewee 15, “The course professor is appropriate for internship assessment. For example, the professor of “Virtual Courts” and “Virtual Cases” should simulate the court conditions for assessing students. He/she can assess them by analyzing student work reports, such as reports on trial procedures in a court. In other words, faculty members can assess students by simulating legal cases as much as possible.” The Virtual Court is a simulated learning environment for familiarizing students with the court proceeding in the real world. In virtual courts, students learn defense methods, the plaintiff’s reactions, the defendant’s reactions, the defense process, and how a court hearing is held. The professor assesses student performance by observing and reviewing student performance in these courts. Interviewee 2 expressed the view that “professors can assess students by reviewing reports that they have provided.”

Seven interviewees stated that the assessment of the internship should be done by the course supervisor who is present on site. For example, interviewee 9 acknowledged that “it is necessary for the internship professor to assess students on site.” Similarly, interviewee 15 believed that “the student’ activities should be assessed in the organization. This assessment should be carried out by the on-site internship supervisor.”

According to the views of five interviewees, internships should be assessed jointly by faculty members and internship supervisors. For example, interviewee 4 maintained: “The scores given by both course professors and internship supervisors should be considered but the score given by internship supervisors should be more emphasized. If the course professor is involved in internship assessment, students feel more engaged.” Interviewee 19 believed that assessment should be done collaboratively, stating that “the supervising professor should assess students by visiting the organization. In addition, the internship supervisor who is in charge of the enrolment of students can submit a report on the performance of students to the professor. And finally, the course professor can assess interns based on their assignments during internships”.

Summary of the interviewees’ opinions about internship assessors is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Interviewees’ opinions about law internship assessors

Initial Coding	Frequency of Opinions					Total Opinions	Percentage
	Lawyers	Internship Experts	Faculty Member	postgraduates			
1. Course lecturer	3	3	2	4	12	50.0	
2. Course supervisor		4	3		7	29.2	
3. Joint supervision by professors and supervisors	1		2	2	5	20.8	
Total	4	7	4	6	24	100.0	

Questionnaire Results:

In the quantitative part of the study, the participants' opinions about internship assessment methods were examined. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4: Participants' opinions about internship assessment methods

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
1. Should assessment be based on a checklist of standards of conduct and performance on the job?	27.8	44.3	26.1	0.9	0.0*	3.96	0.84
2. Should assessment be based on student portfolio?	23.5	53.9	19.1	1.7	0.0	3.93	0.88
3. Should assessment be based on the analysis of daily student diary by the internship supervisor?	24.3	45.2	21.7	5.2	1.7	3.80	1.03
4. Should assessment be based on the observation of interns by the internship supervisor?	34.8	37.4	20.9	5.2	0.9	3.97	0.99
5. Should assessment be based on the analysis of practical and diagnostic capabilities of interns?	45.2	34.8	14.8	4.3	0.9	4.19	0.90
6. Should assessment be based on the analysis of student performance in simulated settings?	47.8	28.7	20.0	0.9	1.7	4.17	0.99
7. Should assessment be based on role-plays?	40.0	33.0	21.7	3.5	0.9	4.05	0.98
Total						4.00	0.71

* In the frequency distribution table, the numbers in the first row are frequencies and the numbers in the second row are percentages.

According to Table 4, in the case of BA law internship assessment methods, the highest mean scores were 4.19 and 4.17 related to "practical and diagnostic capabilities of students for dealing with client problems" and "student performance in simulated settings," respectively. The lowest mean score was 3.80 related to "the analysis of daily student diary by the internship supervisor."

To examine the significant differences in the participants' opinions about internship assessment methods with the hypothetical criterion of 3.5, one-sample t-test was used. According to the results, the mean score of the participants' opinions about law internship assessment methods was found to be four. Therefore, the results of the research are significant ($p < 0.05$).

The Friedman test was used to determine the trend of agreement regarding the priority of internship assessment methods on the basis of the participants' opinions (Table 5). The results indicated that the priority of internship assessment methods was different according to the participants' opinions ($\chi^2 = 31.12$, $p = 0/00$).

TABLE 5: Prioritization of BA law internship assessment methods

Priority	Item	Mean Score
1	Assessment of student performance in simulated settings	4.49
2	Assessment of students' practical and diagnostic capabilities for dealing with client problems	4.38
3	Student assessment based on role-plays	4.16
4	The course supervisor's observation of interns during internships and his/her assessment of student performance based on completed assignments	3.97
5	Analysis by the internship supervisor and the course lecturer of daily student diary	3.76
6	The course lecturer's analysis of student portfolio, including analysis of the documents related to student activities and working hours	3.74
7	The course lecturer's assessment based on a checklist of standards of conduct and performance on the job	3.50

According to Table 5, items 1 and 2 with the mean scores of 4.49 and 4.38, respectively, were ranked first and second in order of priority by the participants. In addition, item 4 with the mean score of 3.97, was ranked third in order of priority. Finally, item 7 with the mean score of 3.96 was ranked fourth in order of priority.

DISCUSSION

The main aim of the study was to investigate desirable assessment methods of student performance in undergraduate law internships. Faculty members, lawyers, internship experts, and law postgraduates were interviewed in the qualitative part of the study, and in the quantitative part questionnaires were administered to undergraduates and graduates.

The results of the qualitative research revealed that assessment by the lecturer of student performance in specialized activities such as writing a bill and issuing a verdict by different methods was the most important internship assessment method. This finding is consistent with the results of the quantitative part of the study. The results of the quantitative research revealed that student performance assessment in simulated settings was the most important assessment method according to the participants. This finding is consistent with those of Ebner et al. (2012), Walsh (2007), and Diaz et al. (2015). In these studies, different student performance assessment methods during internships were proposed. It seemed difficult to develop an internship program in real environments and with real clients. Real clients in the legal centers may not be willing to present their legal issues in the presence of others. Additionally, it seems challenging to make arrangements for students to participate in the legal system because of the crowdedness and accumulation of cases in the courts, and it seems difficult to obtain the required licenses. Hence, student performance assessment in simulated settings and by role-plays may be more appropriate for internship assessment methods.

In the qualitative research the results revealed that half of the interviewees preferred internships to be assessed by the course lecturer. While in some universities such as those in Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington, (Internship program the training setting, 2017) students are assessed by the internship supervisor. The majority of postgraduate students, who responded, emphasized assessment by the internship course lecturer. From the viewpoint of these students, the high workload of internship supervisors, their inadequate awareness of the position and importance of practical courses, and their

inadequate knowledge and skills of assessment practices leads to inadequate on-site internship assessment. For this reason, students prefer to be assessed by the course lecturer. It should be noted that if these problems are solved, internship supervisors will be able to comprehensively assess internships by constantly observing and reviewing student performance on site. However, the university professors (faculty members) seemed to be more aware of the different assessment methods and their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, in the assessment of practical courses, especially internships, they will be able to follow best practices to the best of their knowledge and ability.

In addition, the quantitative results revealed that students' practical and diagnostic capabilities for dealing with client problems should be considered in internship assessment. In the same vein, Grosberg (2006) also introduced direct observation of the practical and expert skills of students in the area of legal activities in the assessment process. Since law graduates would deal with different individuals and various complex legal issues, they should acquire the necessary expertise. The theoretical training, however complete, should be integrated into practical experience to deepen the learning. By emphasizing the practical and diagnostic capabilities of students for dealing with client problems, the participants in the quantitative part of the study emphasized the significance of this issue. When assessment is carried out on this basis, work-readiness of graduates after internships can be ensured.

Suggestions

According to the research findings, the following suggestions are made:

- For student assessment, it would be better to use new methods such as role playing and using simulated settings instead of using traditional methods such as tests.
- Training workshops and courses should be held to familiarize internship course lecturers and supervisors with different effective internship assessment methods used in different settings.
- In spite of the attention paid by the interviewees and the literature (see Abeysekera, 2006; Dunsmuir et al., 2017) to internship assessment based on students' written reports, the analysis of daily student diary by the internship supervisor is ranked fifth in order of priority by the undergraduates and graduates. Perhaps, the reason for their lack of attention to this item is their lack of familiarity with methods of reporting and note-taking. Therefore, internship course lecturers should train students in this area before they begin internship programs. Training students in standard methods of note-taking and writing diaries is effective in increasing their learning and their assessment.
- Since it is difficult and time-consuming for the professors to be present on-site during internships, it is possible to use electronic technologies and tools to assess students. The results of Grosberg's (2006) and the University of Pennsylvania's (2010) emphasized this finding.

CONCLUSION

It is important to choose the appropriate method to assess students in an internship course (Orrell, 2011). When assessing an intern, one needs to consider which methods are well suited to this purpose. Assessing student performance in the real-world professional activities is the most acknowledged assessment method for an internship course (McAllister, Lincoln, Ferguson & McAllister, 2010). Student performance assessment can take place on site or in simulated settings. To develop a comprehensive approach to internship assessment, it seems vital and useful to review and compare the

views of the three main beneficiaries of internships, that is, students, universities, and organizations, about different internship assessment methods.

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