

# Exploring the Role of Internships and Job Shadowing in Namibia's Organizational Learning and National Development: A Qualitative Study in Light of Vision 2030

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## Abstract

Namibia's Vision 2030 aims to create a knowledge-based society, aligning with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study investigates the perceived importance of internships and job shadowing in Namibia, examining their impact on national development, organizational learning, and advancement towards Vision 2030 and key SDGs. Employing a qualitative approach with exploratory focus, the research used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to explore perspectives from organizational leaders, student interns, and policymakers.

**Keywords:** Internships, Job Shadowing, Organizational Learning, National Development, Namibia, Vision 2030, SDGs

## 1. Introduction and Background

Namibia's national development strategy, Vision 2030, represents an ambitious blueprint for transforming the country into a knowledge-driven society. This vision is intricately linked with global development objectives, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The pursuit of quality education, decent work, economic growth, and infrastructure development requires innovative approaches to bridging the gap between academic preparation and professional readiness.

Internships and job shadowing programmes emerge as potential catalysts for achieving these multifaceted development goals. These experiential learning opportunities offer a unique mechanism for

transferring knowledge, developing practical skills, and creating meaningful connections between educational institutions and industry sectors. However, despite their potential significance, these programmes have remained largely underexplored in the Namibian context.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

While internships and job shadowing are widely recognized as potential tools for skill development and organizational learning, their systematic implementation and impact in Namibia remain inadequately understood. The existing literature reveals a critical gap in comprehensively examining how these programmes contribute to national development objectives and align with Vision 2030's aspirations.

## **3. Research Objectives and Questions**

The primary research objectives were to:

1. Examine the perceived importance of internships and job shadowing in Namibia
2. Assess their positive and negative effects on national development
3. Understand their role in organizational learning
4. Evaluate their alignment with Vision 2030 and relevant Sustainable Development Goals

Specific research questions guiding the study included:

- How do internships and job shadowing contribute to bridging the skills gap between academia and industry?
- What are the perceived benefits and challenges of these programmes from the perspectives of organizational leaders, interns, and policymakers?
- To what extent do these programmes support Namibia's national development goals?

## **4. Literature Review**

Previous research has highlighted the significance of experiential learning in developing workforce capabilities. Jauch's (2020) study on youth unemployment in Namibia emphasised the critical need for innovative approaches to skill development. Kakwambi and Naris (2018) specifically examined internships' impact on employability, providing foundational insights into the University of Namibia's experiences.

The United Nations Development Programme's (2019) report on Sustainable Development Goals emphasized the importance of strategic interventions that connect education, skills development, and economic growth. These perspectives frame the context for understanding internships and job shadowing as more than mere training programmes, but as strategic instruments for national development.

Experiential learning and workforce development have gained significant attention in emerging economies. Chaka and Schalkwyk (2018) highlighted the critical role of practical training in addressing skills mismatches in southern African contexts, emphasizing that traditional academic approaches often fail to prepare students for complex professional environments.

Rothmann and Cooper (2015) highlighted the importance of bridging theoretical knowledge with practical skills, particularly in developing nations seeking to enhance human capital. Their research in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region revealed that structured internship programmes can significantly improve employment readiness and organizational adaptability.

Namibia's unique developmental context requires typical understanding of skills transfer. Shikongo and Indongo (2019) argued that effective internship programmes must address both individual skill development and broader national economic objectives. Their study demonstrated that strategic internship interventions could contribute to reducing youth unemployment and promoting economic diversification.

Global perspectives on internships provide additional insights. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory continues to inform contemporary understanding of workplace learning, suggesting that direct experience is crucial for meaningful skill acquisition. This theoretical framework aligns closely with Namibia's Vision 2030 objectives of creating a knowledge-based society.

International comparative studies by Morley (2016) highlight the transformative potential of internships in developing economies, noting that such programmes can serve as critical mechanisms for knowledge transfer and social mobility. However, Boud and Higgs (2016) caution that poorly structured internships may perpetuate existing social and economic inequalities.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017) has consistently emphasized the role of practical learning in achieving sustainable development goals. Their research indicates that countries with robust internship and job shadowing programmes demonstrate more significant progress in skill development and economic innovation. Local scholarship by Iiping and Shivolo (2021) specifically examined the challenges of implementing effective internship programmes in Namibian contexts. Their research identified critical gaps in mentorship, institutional support, and strategic alignment between educational institutions and industry partners.

## **5. Theoretical Framework**

The study was grounded in organizational learning theory and human capital development perspectives. These theoretical lenses allowed for a comprehensive examination of how knowledge transfer, skill acquisition, and organizational adaptation occur through internship and job shadowing experiences.

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### **5.1. Organizational Learning Theory**

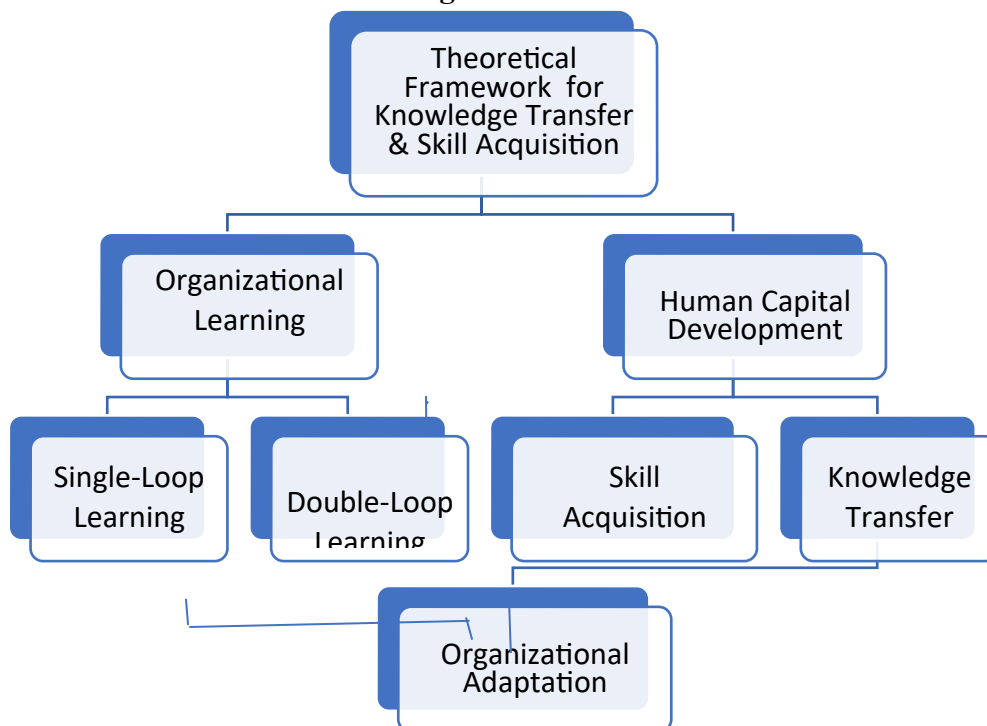
Organizational learning theory posits that organizations, much like individuals, can learn and adapt over time. This theory emphasizes the importance of continuous learning processes that enable organizations to improve their performance and remain competitive in dynamic environments. Key contributors to this field include Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, who distinguished between single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop learning involves adjusting improve performance without altering underlying policies or goals, while double-loop learning entails questioning and modifying these foundational assumptions in response to changing circumstances (Argyris & Schön, 1978). This distinction is crucial as it highlights the depth of learning processes within organizations. The concept of a learning organization, popularized by Peter Senge in "The Fifth Discipline," describes an organization that fosters a culture of continuous learning among its members. Learning organizations are characterized by shared visions, team learning, and systems thinking, which collectively enhance their ability to adapt to change (Senge, 1990). The emphasis on creating a supportive environment for knowledge sharing and collaboration aligns with the objectives of internship and job shadowing programs, where experiential learning is vital. However, organizational learning theory is not without its critiques. One limitation is

its idealistic assumption that all members of an organization are willing to engage in collective learning. In practice, factors such as organizational politics and resistance to change can impede the learning process (Chamberlain, 2015). Additionally, measuring organizational learning can be challenging due to its abstract nature compared to individual learning (Nowell et al., 2017).

## 5.2. Human Capital Development Perspectives

Human capital development perspectives focus on the value of individuals' skills, knowledge, and experiences as critical assets for organizational success. This framework emphasizes that investing in employees' education and training enhances their capabilities, leading to improved organizational performance. According to Becker (1993), human capital refers to the attributes gained by individuals through education and experience that contribute to their productivity. Internship and job shadowing experiences serve as practical applications of human capital development theories by providing opportunities for skill acquisition and knowledge transfer. These experiences allow individuals to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, facilitating deeper understanding and enhancing their professional competencies. Moreover, human capital theory aligns with the concept of lifelong learning, which underscores the necessity for continuous skill development in an ever-evolving job market. Organizations that prioritize human capital development foster a culture of growth and adaptability, enabling them to respond effectively to external challenges (Schultz, 1961).

## 5.3. Visual Theoretical Framework Diagram



## 5.4. Explanation of the Visual Diagram

The central theme encapsulates the overall objective of understanding how knowledge transfer, skill acquisition, and organizational adaptation occur through internship and job shadowing experiences.

The branches represent the two main theoretical lenses guiding the study: organizational learning theory emphasizes processes within organizations that facilitate learning, while human capital development focuses on individual skill enhancement as a critical asset for organizational success.

Each sub-concept highlights essential components that contribute to the overarching themes of knowledge transfer and skill acquisition, illustrating their interconnectedness.

## **6. Methodology**

### **6.1. Research Design**

A qualitative approach with an exploratory focus was employed to capture distinctive perspectives and experiences related to internships and job shadowing.

### **6.2. Population and Sample**

The study involved a diverse group of participants to gain comprehensive insights into the subject matter. It included five organizational leaders who provided strategic perspectives, ten student interns who contributed their experiences and viewpoints, and three policymakers who offered insights into regulatory and governance aspects. Additionally, two focus groups were conducted, each consisting of five to ten participants representing various stakeholders, ensuring a broad range of opinions and experiences were captured in the research. This varied participant composition aimed to enrich the study's findings and enhance its relevance to multiple facets of the topic.

The study employed purposive and convenient sampling techniques to select participants, ensuring that the sample was both relevant and accessible. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to intentionally choose individuals who possessed specific characteristics or experiences pertinent to the research objectives, such as organizational leaders, student interns, and policymakers. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation by capturing diverse perspectives from those directly involved in internship and job shadowing experiences. Additionally, convenient sampling was utilized to enhance accessibility, enabling the inclusion of participants who were readily available and willing to contribute to the study. This combination of sampling methods ensured a rich and informative dataset that effectively addressed the research questions.

### **6.3. Data Collection**

Data collection employed a qualitative approach utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to capture rich, multidimensional perspectives on internship experiences. In-depth interviews enabled detailed, individual exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences, while focus group discussions facilitated interactive dialogue and collective meaning-making. This methodological triangulation allowed researchers to gather distinct insights, ensuring comprehensive understanding of internship programmes' complexities in the Namibian context by capturing both individual narratives and collective perspectives.

### **6.4. Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was utilized to identify key patterns, insights, and emerging themes from the collected data.

Thematic analysis was utilized in this study because it provides a flexible and systematic approach to analysing qualitative data, allowing for the identification of key patterns, insights, and emerging themes. This method is particularly effective in exploring complex data sets, as it enables researchers to organize and interpret diverse perspectives from various participants, including organizational leaders, student interns, policymakers, and focus group members. By employing thematic analysis, we can capture the richness of participants' experiences and viewpoints, facilitating a deeper understanding of the underlying issues and dynamics within the context of the study.

Moreover, thematic analysis allows for both inductive and deductive reasoning. It enables researchers to derive themes directly from the data (inductive) while also allowing for the exploration of pre-existing theories or frameworks (deductive). This dual approach enhances the robustness of the findings by ensuring that they are grounded in the data while also being informed by relevant literature.

Additionally, thematic analysis is accessible and straightforward, making it suitable for researchers with varying levels of expertise in qualitative research. Its emphasis on identifying and interpreting themes makes it easier to communicate findings to a broader audience, including stakeholders who may not have a background in qualitative research methodologies. Overall, thematic analysis was chosen for its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data while remaining adaptable to the specific needs and context of this study.

## **7. Findings of the study**

### **7.1. Key Themes**

#### **7.1.1. Skills Gap Bridging**

In the complex landscape of workforce development, internships emerge as critical mechanisms for translating academic knowledge into practical competence.

Participants consistently emphasized internships' role in connecting academic knowledge with practical industry requirements.

- “As an intern, I realized how different theoretical knowledge is from practical application. Our classroom concepts suddenly made real sense in the workplace,” shared a student intern from a local financial institution.
- Another intern from a telecommunications company stated, “Before my internship, I thought I knew everything from textbooks and notes of our lecturers. Now I understand that real-world problem-solving requires adaptability and continuous learning, it is indeed a lifelong learning journey.”
- An organizational leader emphasized, “Interns bring fresh perspectives that challenge our established processes. They are not just learning from us; they are helping us innovate.”
- A technical manager noted, “We see internships as a two-way knowledge exchange. Our experienced staff learn from young, digitally-native interns just as much as interns learn from us.”
- A senior HR professional articulated, “These programmes are our talent pipeline. We are not just offering temporary work; we are nurturing future industry leaders.”

The narratives of interns and organizational leaders collectively underscore that skills bridging is not a linear process but a dynamic, reciprocal exchange of knowledge and expertise.

#### **7.1.2. Industry-Academia Collaboration**

The study revealed significant potential for strengthening connections between educational institutions and industry sectors.

Perspectives on collaboration revealed complex interdependencies:

- A policymaker strongly asserted, “Internships are not optional extras; they are critical infrastructure for our national skills development strategy.” Similarly, another policymaker stated, “These programmes are not just about individual skill development, but about creating a more responsive and adaptive national skills ecosystem.”



- “Universities must stop functioning in isolation. Real learning happens when academic curriculum is co-designed with industry,” declared an education policy expert.
- An industry leader shared, “We have redesigned our recruitment processes to prioritize candidates with practical internship experiences. Academic grades are no longer our primary metric.”
- A university department head reflected, “Our curriculum revisions are now directly informed by feedback from industry partners who host our interns.”
- A student intern candidly observed, “The gap between what we learn and what industries need is shrinking, but we still have a long way to go.”

These collaborative efforts reveal that meaningful partnerships transcend transactional interactions, embodying a strategic approach to holistic human capital development.

### **7.1.3. Professional Identity Development**

Professional identity formation represents a typical journey of self-discovery, critically mediated through experiential learning opportunities.

Participants articulated profound insights into personal and professional growth:

- “This internship transformed my understanding of who I am as a professional,” shared a marketing intern from a telecommunications company.
- Another intern from a government department stated, “I learned that professional identity is not just about job titles, but about continuous learning and adaptability.”
- A young engineer reflected, “Internships are where theoretical knowledge meets real-world complexity. They challenge everything you thought you knew.”
- A human resources specialist observed, “We see interns gradually constructing their professional narratives through these experiences.”
- A senior manager noted, “Many interns arrive with textbook confidence and leave with genuine professional humility and curiosity.”

The emerging narratives demonstrate that professional identity is not a fixed construct but a continually negotiated, context-responsive process of personal and professional becoming.

### **7.1.4. National Skills Ecosystem Development**

Internship programmes surpass individual skill acquisition, representing strategic interventions in national human capital development strategies.

Participants provided systemic perspectives on skills development:

- “Internships are our national strategy for breaking cycles of unemployment,” declared a policymaker.
- An educational administrator asserted, “We are not just placing students in jobs; we are redesigning our entire skills development architecture.”
- A technical industry leader shared, “Each intern represents a potential innovation pipeline for our national economic transformation.”
- A university policies and practices expert commented, “These programmes are living laboratories for understanding skills gaps and emerging workforce needs.”
- A government economic planner concluded, “Vision 2030 is not just a document; it is a dynamic process of continuous skills reimagination.”

These perspectives reveal internships as dynamic instruments of social and economic transformation, integral to Namibia's vision of a knowledge-driven, adaptive national workforce.

### **7.1.5. Challenges and Limitations**

Despite the potential of internship programmes, significant structural and systemic challenges persist in creating meaningful experiential learning environments.

Participants identified critical challenges:

- Inadequate mentorship structures
- Potential intern exploitation
- Short-term productivity disruptions

A student intern shared, "While the experience is valuable, we often feel underprepared and unsupported during our internships."

Moreover, participants candidly discussed existing obstacles:

- "Many internship programmes feel like cheap labour arrangements rather than genuine learning experiences," critiqued a student intern.
- An organizational leader admitted, "We struggle to provide meaningful mentorship. Our staff are often overwhelmed with their primary responsibilities."
- "Some organizations view interns as free workforce instead of potential talent," a policymaker commented critically.
- A human resources manager acknowledged, "Our mentorship programmes are inconsistent. We lack standardized guidelines for intern supervision."
- A student intern vulnerably shared, "I often felt like an inconvenience rather than a learning participant during my internship."

The voiced challenges illuminate the need for comprehensive, thoughtful interventions that prioritize genuine learning and professional development over superficial workplace engagement.

## **8. Discussion of the findings**

### **8.1. Comparative Theoretical Implications**

The study's findings reveal significant intersections with contemporary organizational learning theories. Whereas traditional perspectives viewed internships as unidirectional knowledge transfer, the Namibian context demonstrates a more complex, multi-dimensional learning ecosystem.

### **8.2. Theoretical Disruption of Traditional Learning Models**

The research challenges conventional human capital development frameworks by highlighting mutual learning processes. Interns are no longer passive recipients but active knowledge co-creators, challenging hierarchical understanding of professional development.

### **8.3. Socio-political Dimensions of Experiential Learning**

Internship programmes emerge not merely as skill acquisition mechanisms but as potential instruments of social mobility and economic transformation. They represent strategic interventions addressing historical educational inequities inherited from colonial educational structures.



#### **8.4. Global-Local Knowledge Interactions**

The study illuminates how local contextual factors mediate global best practices in internship design. Namibian experiences suggest that universal internship models require significant localization to remain effective.

#### **8.5. Methodological Reflexivity**

The qualitative approach enabled deeper exploration of subjective experiences, revealing distinctive perspectives often obscured by quantitative methodologies. Participant narratives provided rich, contextually embedded insights into organizational learning dynamics.

#### **8.6. Intersectionality of Learning Experiences**

The research uncovered how individual internship experiences are simultaneously shaped by institutional structures, personal backgrounds, and broader socioeconomic contexts. This intersectional perspective highlights the complexity of professional identity formation.

#### **8.7. Developmental State Perspective**

Internships are conceptualized not just as individual developmental opportunities but as strategic state interventions aligned with national development goals. They represent deliberate mechanisms for building human capabilities consistent with Vision 2030's aspirations.

### **9. Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, the recommendations emphasize a holistic approach to enhancing internship and job shadowing programmes in Namibia. Developing comprehensive and standardized internship policies is crucial to provide a clear regulatory framework that protects intern rights and ensures meaningful learning experiences. These policies should be complemented by robust mentorship programmes that offer structured guidance, professional support, and systematic skill development pathways. The recommendations highlight the critical need for enhanced collaboration between educational institutions and industry, creating dynamic partnerships that allow for continuous curriculum refinement and alignment with evolving workforce requirements. To achieve this, stakeholders must develop structured frameworks for internship and job shadowing experiences that clearly define learning objectives, performance expectations, and evaluation mechanisms. Equally important is investing in professional development for mentors and supervisors, ensuring they possess the necessary skills to effectively guide, mentor, and nurture emerging talent. By implementing these interconnected recommendations, Namibia can transform internship programmes from mere compliance activities to strategic instruments of national human capital development, ultimately supporting the Vision 2030 objectives of creating a knowledge-based, economically competitive society.

### **10. Conclusions**

Internships and job shadowing represent significant potential for advancing Namibia's national development goals. By strategically addressing identified challenges and leveraging their inherent strengths, these programmes can become powerful mechanisms for building a knowledge-based society aligned with Vision 2030 and global sustainable development objectives.

## Authors' Biography

### Charlene Keja-Kaereho



Charlene Kaereho is a Senior Lecturer and PhD student at the University of Namibia, where she also earned her Master's degree in Adult Education and Community Development. As a proactive community development worker, she is dedicated to enhancing engagement in both academic and community settings. Her research interests encompass a wide range of fields, prominently featuring community development and adult education, as well as sociology, open and distance learning, adult literacy, community health development, the green economy, education for sustainable development, and entrepreneurship. Additionally, she focuses on teaching and learning in higher education, student support, Learning design, instructional material development, educational research, cooperative and work-integrated learning, professional ethics, organizational learning, lifelong learning, and self-directed learning within higher education institutions.

Charlene embodies the principles of Ubuntu, which emphasize the importance of interconnectedness within communities. Her work reflects a commitment to fostering sustainable development through a holistic approach that integrates educational practices with community needs.

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Lukas Matati Josua is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of High Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Namibia. He holds a PhD in Educational Management and Administration from the University of Namibia and a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education for Academic Developers from Rhodes University, South Africa. Matati holds a Master of Education (Education Management and Administration) and a Bachelor of Education (English and Business Studies). His research interests include decoloniality, higher education context, educational management and leadership.

### Brenden Rinouua Tjizu



Brenden Rinouua Tjizu is the Veterinary Academic Hospital Administrator and an MA Anthropology student at the University of Namibia, where he holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Industrial Psychology. He is a policy analyst and researcher specializing in climate change, indigenous economies, and community development. His academic background includes sociology, health and society, the fourth industrial revolution, future studies, social anthropology, and international relations. Currently, Brenden's research interests focus on climate change, blue oceans, solid waste management in Africa, indigenous economies, environmental sustainability, and self-directed learning in higher education institutions. He emphasizes the significance of local economies and cultural life while advocating for an integrated approach that combines knowledge and environmental stewardship to foster sustainable development in Africa. His work highlights the critical role of sociology in understanding community dynamics and the importance of self-directed learning as a means to empower students in their educational journeys.

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