



Examining the Implementation Fidelity and Stakeholder Value in the Malawi Government Graduate Internship Programme

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Presentation Layout

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Introduction

- Fresh graduates are usually unable to transition smoothly into employment due to employers' high expectations for abilities and personal qualities (Helyer and Lee, 2014)
- Sub-Saharan Africa needs 25 million new jobs annually (World Bank, 2025)
- Malawi's youth unemployment rate is at 23%
- The Ministry of Labour in Malawi has been implementing the Graduate Internship Programme (GIP) since 2018, reaching 20232 graduates (11 cohorts) with the to provide work-integrated experience to improve their employability



The Research Problem

- Large-scale Investment with no Systematic Evaluation despite M&E requirements in guidelines
- No formal assessment of implementation fidelity
- No evidence of whether objectives are being met
- Policy effectiveness depends on implementation fidelity, not just design quality (Allen, Shelton, Emmons, & Linnan, 2017)



Literature Review

- Youth unemployment extensively documented in Africa (ACBF 2017; World Bank 2022; World Bank 2025; AUC/OECD 2024)
- Programme outcomes vary by implementation practices, program maturity, labor market capacity
- Duration, workplace integration quality, monitoring systems substantially influence outcomes
- Implementation fidelity may moderate participation-employment relationship (Fokou, Kamga & Wouabe, 2025)
- **Gap in Literature**
- *"Systematic evaluation of government interventions through internships is limited"* (Fokou, Kamga & Wouabe, 2025)



Study Aim & Research Questions

- Examine how effectively the Malawi Government Graduate Internship Programme is implemented and determine the value that interns and host organizations gain from participating.

□ Questions

- How does actual implementation align with programme design?
- What value is created for stakeholders?
- What factors influence fidelity?



Theoretical Framework

- **Implementation Fidelity Theory** (Lemire et al., 2022; Hill & Erickson, 2019)
 - *"The degree to which core programme elements are delivered as intended"*
 - Fidelity moderates the relationship between intervention and outcomes
- **Human Capital Theory** (Becker; Kholifah et al., 2025)
 - *"Investments in education, training, and skills development increase individual productivity and economic value"*
 - Examining how implementation quality affects human capital development in resource-constrained public sectors



Methodology

- Mixed Methods Sequential Explanatory
- Quantitative-Online questionnaires (Kobo-toolbox) n=97 from Sample of 192 and population of 8,485. 50% response rate
- Qualitative -Semi-structured interviews (supervisors, Ministry officials); 2 focus groups (8-10 participants each); Document analysis (contracts, guidelines)
- Data Analysis
 - Thematic analysis using ATLAS, Descriptive statistics using SPSS



Finding 1: Mixed Placement Fidelity

- **Design Specification:** "Place interns considering qualification, specialization, organizational needs, and proximity"

Component	Fidelity Level	Evidence
Qualification match	HIGH (87%)	Survey data
Needs assessment	LOW	"Organizations just allocated interns" - KII
Proximity consideration	LOW	Transport burden recurring theme



Finding 2: Work Assignment Quality Gap

Challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percentage (%)
Being underrated	0.68	0.5	68
Being given little work	0.4	0.5	37
Not being assigned work	0.3	0.5	29
Being given irrelevant work	0.3	0.4	26
Verbal abuse	0.1	0.3	12
Being given too much work	0.1	0.3	12
Sexual advances by permanent officers	0.1	0.3	8.3

- Being underrated (68%)
- being given little work (37%)
- not being assigned work (29%),
- and being given irrelevant work (26%).
- “Had to find my own work” ;
- “Supervisor didn't give me anything to do”; “Had to change organizations”

Experience depends on organization/department/supervisor

MSF Finding 3: Skills Development Pattern



Administrative-heavy (minutes 59%, admin support 49%) vs. sector-specific (38%)

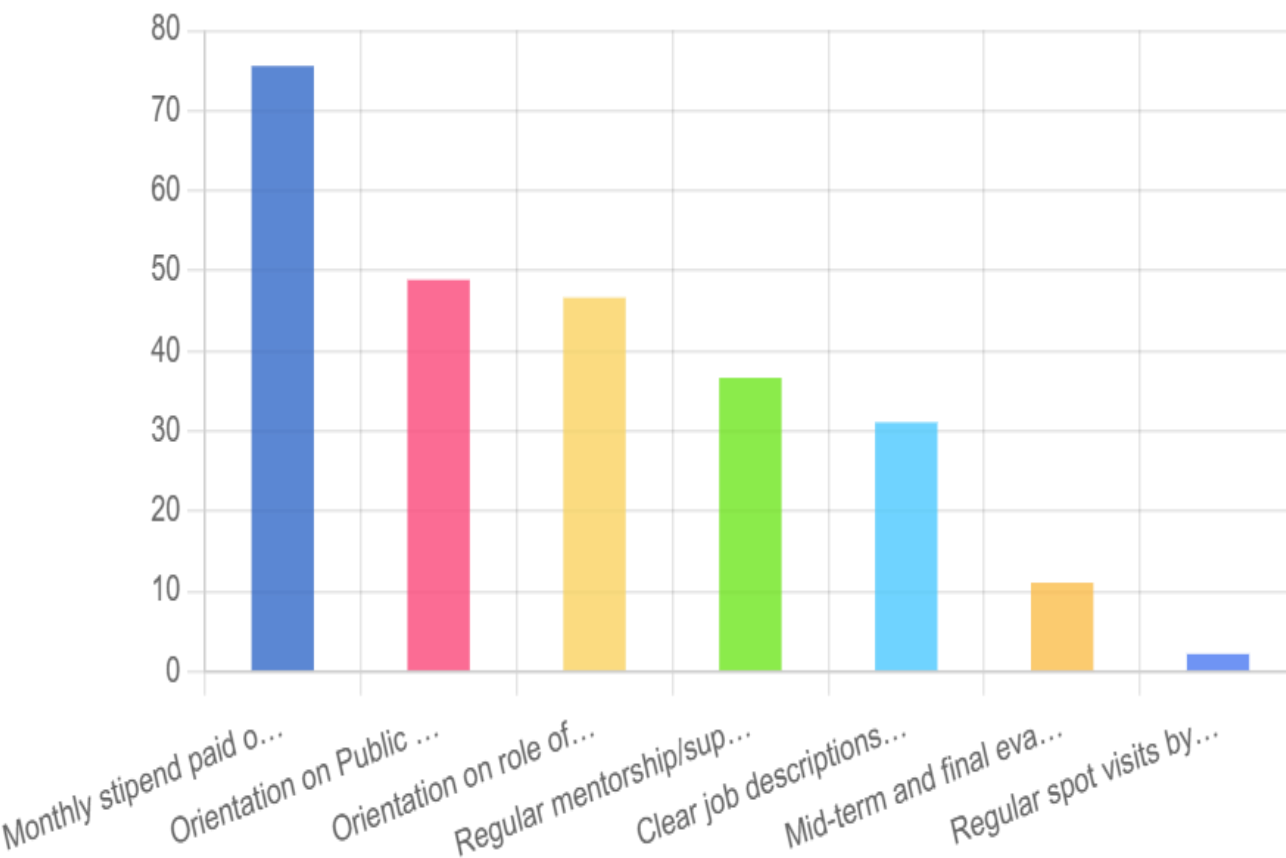
Skills gained mirror tasks
Human capital development limited by work assignment patterns

Skill Type	Frequency	Interpretation
Technical (admin-focused)	84%	Generic, transferable
Soft skills	77%	Workplace socialization
Leadership	66%	Contextual opportunities
Sector-specific	38%	Professional depth lacking

Tasks	Frequency
Taking Minutes in Meetings	59%
Support Administrative activities e.g printing, records keeping etc	49%
Representing organization in meetings	46%
Support planning and implementation of new initiatives	27%
Drafting Memos	19%



Finding 4: Weak Monitoring and Evaluation of the GIP



- Interaction rarely goes beyond allocation letter
- Not done since program introduction
- No post-program reports from interns to the Ministry of Labour
- Some institutions get post-placement reports



Fidelity Summary

Design Element	Fidelity Assessment
Qualification matching	High (87%)
Needs assessment	Low (not done)
Proximity consideration	Low (not done)
M&E system	Very Low (2-10%)
Mentorship structure	Low (structural only)
Timely stipends	High (75%)



Benefits to Stakeholders - Interns

- **Skills Development**
 - Data analysis, communication, teamwork, report writing
- **Workplace Culture Exposure**
 - Understanding employee requirements, office dynamics
- **Leadership Opportunities**
 - Representing organizations, taking responsibility
- **Personal Growth**
 - Transformation "from university students to employees"
- *Some interns secured employment after completion*



Benefits to Stakeholders -Host Organization

☐ Filling Labour Gaps

- Public service faces the challenge of unfilled positions
- Interns provide a temporary solution
- Some interns manage entire departments/units without permanent staff

☐ Fresh perspectives and innovative approaches

- Have introduced various databases

☐ Support for administrative functions



Factors Influencing Fidelity

Inadequate Needs Assessment-Organizations allocated interns without consultation

Resources - Stipend inadequate, no M&E budget

Monitoring and Evaluation – Interaction with Host organizations limited

Varied Work Allocation-Depends on supervisor/Organization, no guidelines

Mentorship and Supervision - Structural assignment only, no functional mentoring

Orientation - No standardized job descriptions



Key Areas for Improvement (Stakeholder Perspectives)

Theme	Frequency
Employment pathway after internship	20.50%
Increase stipend	19.30%
Monitoring & supervision	17%
Extend duration	12.50%
Mentorship & training	12.50%



Study Conclusion

- All respondents indicated that the GIP is an important and impactful government intervention
- Implementation Fidelity has mixed results with timely stipend payments, qualification matching, and provision of basic orientation.
- However, some significant gaps include the lack of host organizations' needs assessment, minimal monitoring & evaluation, limited mentorship, and administrative-heavy tasks vs. sector-specific skills
- Programme is relevant and beneficial but requires substantial improvements to achieve full implementation fidelity

Recommendations

1. Active Participation by Coordinating Ministry

- Develop implementation fidelity checklist
- Regular monitoring visits
- Meaningful engagement with MDAs

2. Needs Assessment

- Consult MDAs before placement
- Match intern specializations to actual needs
- Regular review of organizational requirements

3. Revision of Internship Conditions

- Review Stipends
- Standardize orientations across all MDAs
- Provide clear job descriptions
- Comprehensive induction process



Lessons for Other African Countries

- The Malawi GIP serves as a valuable learning ground for other nations
- Addresses youth unemployment, fills public service labour gaps, provides workplace exposure, and is an opportunity for skills development opportunity
- Implementation matters, design does not always equate to delivery.
- Evaluate the middle, not just inputs/outputs
- Context shapes fidelity, e.g., governance capacity, resource availability and institutional culture



Future Research

- Quality of intern work by the University of origin
- Long-term employment outcomes
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Refining implementation fidelity frameworks for African contexts



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