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INTERNSHIP IN SOCIOLOGY: A NEW DIMENSION OF INCREASING STUDENTS' EMPLOYABILITY IN MALAYSIAN JOB MARKET

[1]Nurazzura Mohamad Diah, Khairulanuar Abd Rahman, Sohela Mustari and Noor Syafika Ramli
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, KIRKHS
International Islamic University Malaysia
Correspondence: [1]nurazzura@iium.edu.my

ABSTRACT

High requirements of job market inclined universities of today to make internship training as part of the graduation prerequisite. This study attempts to investigate the outcome of internship programme in Sociology and Anthropology department. Findings from this study explicitly show that internship among students from this discipline has essentially improved their soft skills, increase their work place literacy and wellbeing. Despite the lack of information about this discipline as well as its practicality aspects by the industry, sociology and anthropology students are well accepted in both private and public sectors to undertake their internship training. Methodologically, this study was conducted to congregate the opinions and experience about internship programme among Sociology and Anthropology students. Survey was used to collect required data from 100 Sociology and Anthropology students who had completed their three months internship either in public or private sector. In general, internship is crucial particularly among social sciences students as it enriches their experiences, knowledge and skills both in personal and social life.

Keywords: Internship, sociology, soft skills, employment

1. INTRODUCTION

Internship is commonly undertaken by final year undergraduate students in many universities of the world. Students are expected to pass the course as part of the requirement of their academic degree. The need to offer internship at the undergraduate level is to give students the opportunity to shift from being a student an employee who has the responsibility of handling and managing office works.

With the ever changing landscape of the Malaysian economy, Malaysian universities nowadays are facing a tremendous challenge to prepare students with theoretical knowledge and practical skills, along with soft skills required by the industries. Also, this is in line with the Malaysian education policy to generate a better human capital to the nation in its vision to become a high income nation in 2020.

Internship in Sociology and Anthropology at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) was introduced in 2008. Students are required to complete their training in three months from June until September every year. The objectives of introducing internship to Sociology and Anthropology students are to develop students' ability to apply concepts and theories at work, familiarize students with the actual work setting and develop students' skills such as leadership, communication, management, problem solving and team work imbued with Islamic values. At the same time, the department aims to make Sociology and Anthropology relevant in job market similar to Economics or Engineering.

However, there was no formal initiative taken to understand students' internship experience. Feedbacks from the organizations were the only indicator of how the department should improvise and strengthen the programme from time to time. Data on ideas, feelings, emotion and personal experience that were part of the students' life during the three months experience were yet to be collected and analyzed seriously. The knowledge of what students have in mind prior, during and after their internship training are yet to be studied and discussed academically. By studying their internship experiences, it is expected that the department can improve and

enhance the internship programme, not only to fulfill the needs of the industry, but also as part of the department's responsibility to prepare students in facing the real life work experience once they have completed their studies at the university.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Internship is an opportunity for the undergraduates to practice and undergo working experience in a real-world environment that will give them a chance to apply theoretical knowledge learned previously in the classroom setting (Bakar, Harun, Yusof, & Tahir; Idrus, Mohamed Noor, Salleh, & Mohd Hashim, 2010).

Thus, internship is an avenue to integrate theoretical knowledge with real working environments and put them into practice. An internship is a panorama for the undergraduate students to integrate work-related experiences and theoretical knowledge into their university education. To do this, they need to take part in a supervised and planned work in the real-world specialized settings (Alexei, Galina, & Tamara, 2013; Muhamad, Yahya, Shahimi, & Mahzan, 2009; Nurkasymovna, Kydyrovna, & Nurhametovich, 2013). Some of the benefits of internship as stated by Knouse and Fontenot (2008) are that it enhances employability, provides the students with realistic expectations of interns, and provides satisfaction of the internship experience and giving internship prerequisites as predictors of internship success. In a similar vein, Hughes (1998) and Furco (1996) believe that internship can serve the purpose of providing students with practical skills that can boost their understanding of issues which are significant to a particular work. It has been found that soft skills are best gained through this collaboration and strategic partnership. Thus, internship provides a unique opportunity for undergraduates to learn about the roles and tasks relevant to their fields of study.

3. THE STUDY

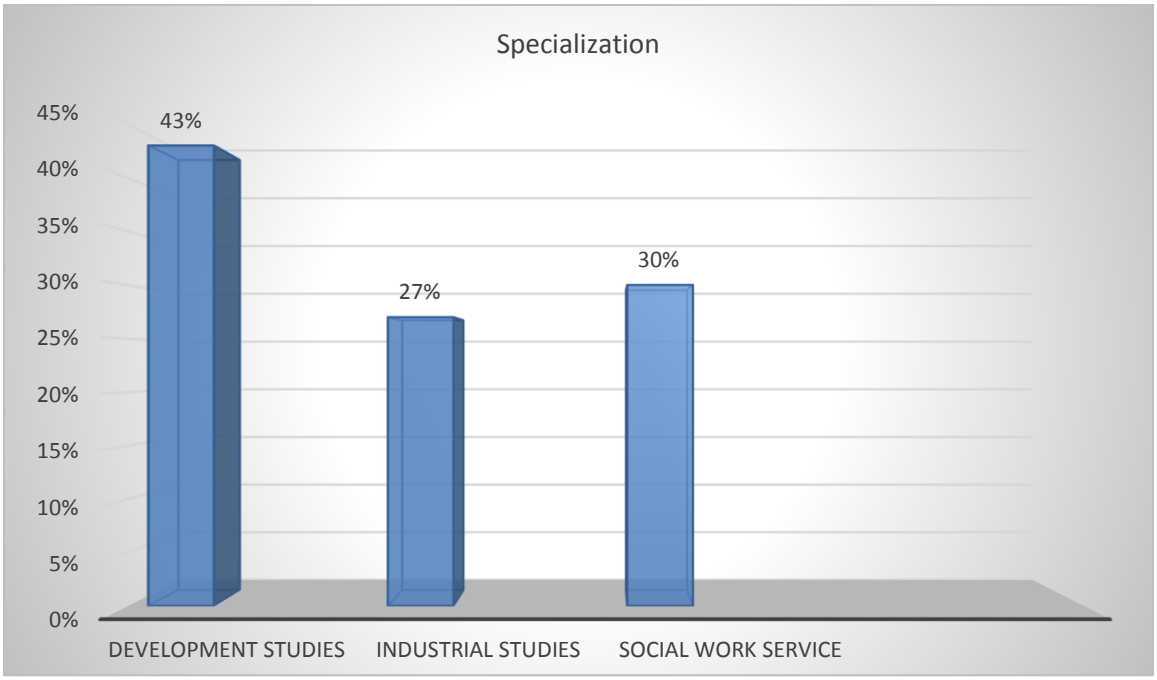
A survey method was employed to collect data for this study. The targeted sample for this study is 100 Sociology and Anthropology students (referred to as interns) who have completed their three-month internship either in the public or private sectors. A questionnaire was designed to measure the interns' self-assessment of their knowledge and skills before and during and before the internship to investigate the changes that this training had brought on them. The questionnaire was sent through e-mail.

The survey contained four parts: demographic background, soft-skills level before and after internship, internship experience, and interns' expectations towards the host company. For parts two, three and four, a Likert scale of 6-point was used to measure the interns' responses with 1=*strongly disagree* to 6=*strongly agree*. A pilot study was conducted prior to the research and feedbacks were incorporated to strengthen the questionnaire. All data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology allows students to choose from three different fields for their internship programme and these fields are Development Studies, Industrial Studies and Social Work Studies. Students are permitted to choose any one of these fields independently where they need to enroll in the internship programme for three months consecutively. It was found that from 2008-2012, 43% of the students went for Development Studies whereas 27% chose Industrial Studies and 30% enrolled Social Work sequentially.

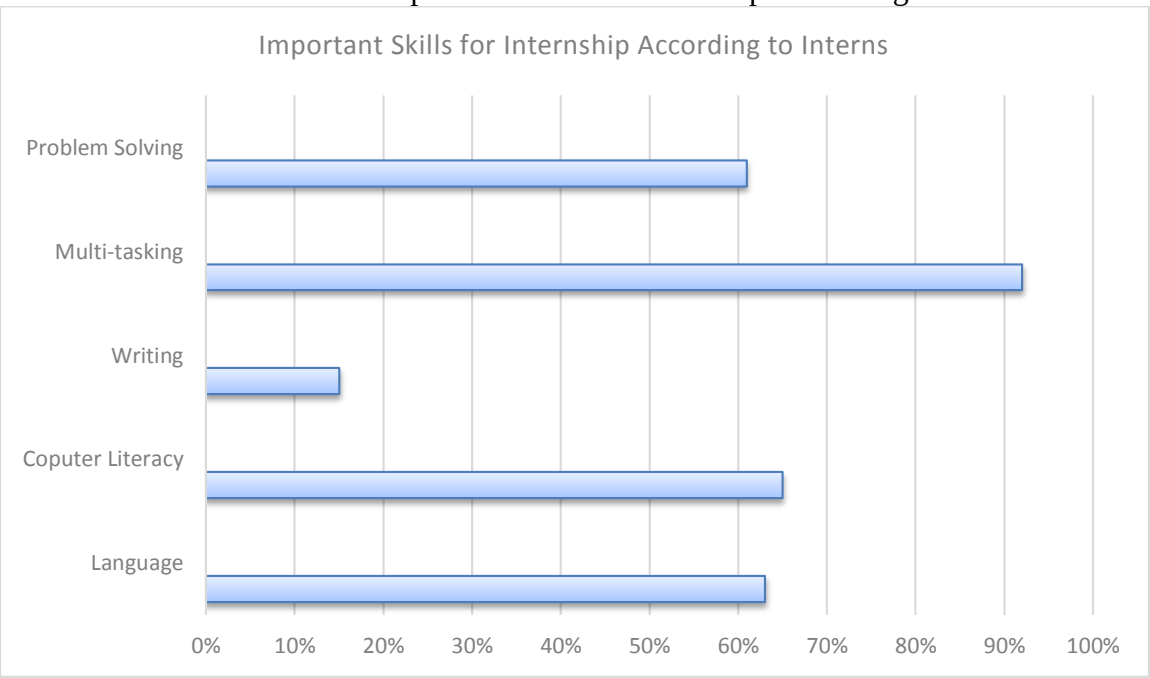
Table 1: Percentage of SOCA interns enrolled in Development Studies, Industrial Studies and Social Work Service



***A. Required skills according to the intern's experience*:**

98% of the interns who shared their experience of internship identified multi-tasking knowledge as the most important skill that a person needs to succeed in their working life. However they felt that overcoming of language barrier, being computer literate and having problem solving skills are three important skills for conquering the job market.

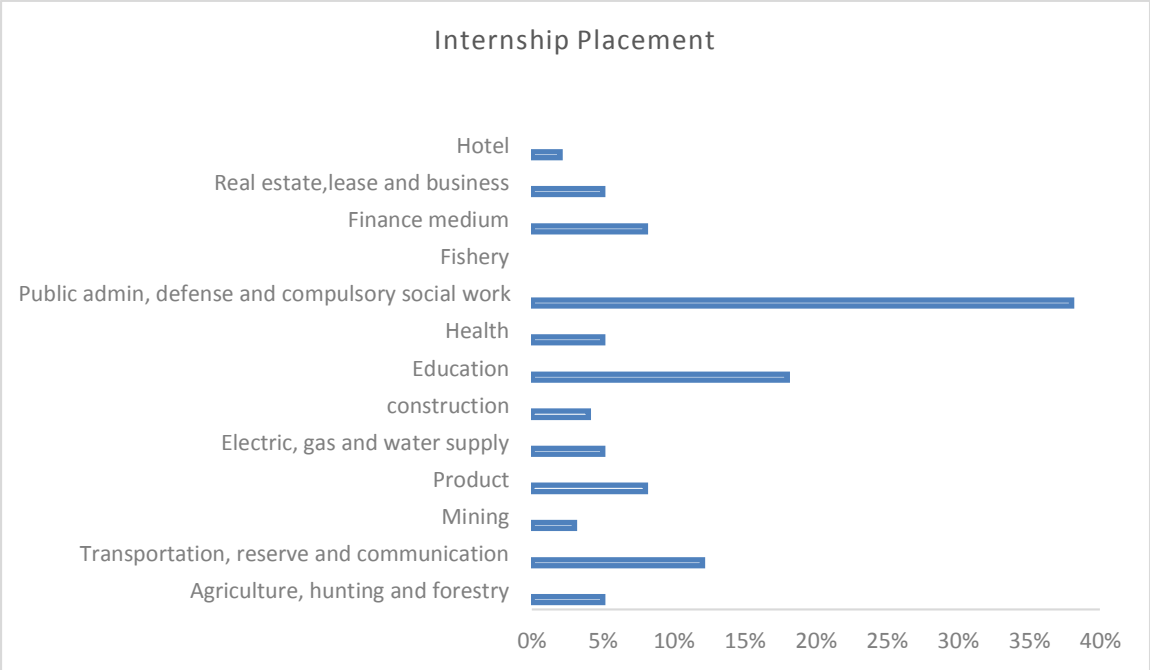
Table 2: Important Skills for Internship According to Interns



B. *Internship Placement According to Sectors*

In terms of internship placement distribution into different sectors, the highest number of students joined the public administration, defense and compulsory social security. Some of them were placed in education, transportation reserve, and communication and finance sectors as well. However, most of the interns did their training with the public sector as it is not strict about students' CGPA and English language.
Comparatively, only a few students did their internship programme with private and multinational corporations. These bodies require high CGPA, English proficiency level and thus became barriers for students in getting offers from the private sectors. Nevertheless, it was found that almost every sector accepted Sociology students as their trainee. Moreover, very interestingly, it was found that 54% of the students were not placed in any specific unit of a sector, rather they served various units throughout the whole 3 month of internship period and were not specifically assigned to any particular department. Our data shows that Sociology and Anthropology students are well-suited to work in almost any division in the organization.

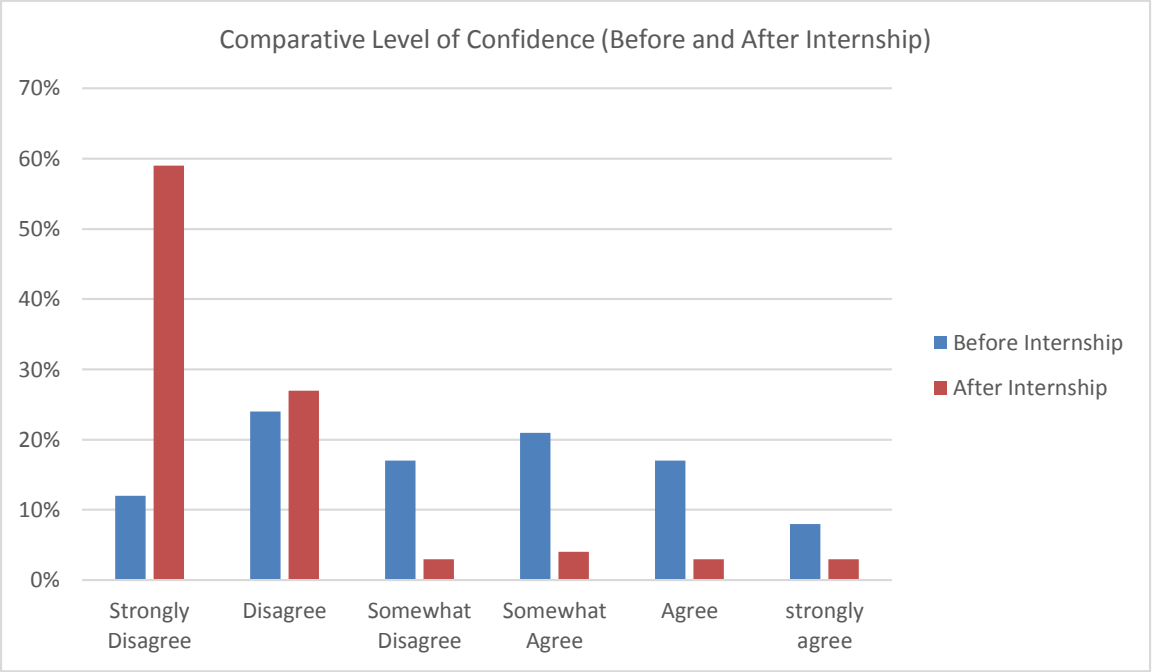
Table 3: Internship Placement



C. Confidence Level of Interns

Comparing students' attitude before and after the internship training in terms of confidence, it was found that 8% of the students were absolutely without confidence prior to their training. This number reduced to 3% once they completed their internship training. On the other side of this scale, it was found that 12% of the students strongly denied not having any confidence before starting their training. The number increased sharply to the peak of 59% after completing their training. They became more confident of their abilities that they have learnt in the class room which can be applied at their work place and that they can be accepted as a deserving candidate from sociology and anthropology. Moreover, they became more confident about their capabilities in providing their organizations with their intelligence.

Table 4: Comparative Level of Confidence (Before and After Internship)



Internship programme in social sciences in general and Sociology and Anthropology in particular is rarely included as a part of education curriculum. This generates a kind of vague conception among students. Before enrolling in internship, the students were not clear about what benefits can be achieved if they undergo the internship. Additionally, they had a misconception about the practicality of the discipline as well. However, this research discovered that such vague conception lessened after completing their internship training. As in other parts of the research, it was found that before undergoing for internship, 11 % of the students strongly disagree that they had vague ideas about internship. However, this 11% increased to 59% after completing their internship. Thus this data strongly recommends that this kind of training is worthy in making students perception clear and perfect towards illumining their confidence. This was established as a fact when similar results were projected in other parts as well. For example, before going to the internship programme, they were not clear about how they could apply their academic knowledge in their internship sessions. It was found that only 11% of the interns strongly agreed that they knew how to apply Sociology and Anthropology knowledge for their internship purpose. However, the statistics changed sharply after coming back from internship which was 34%.

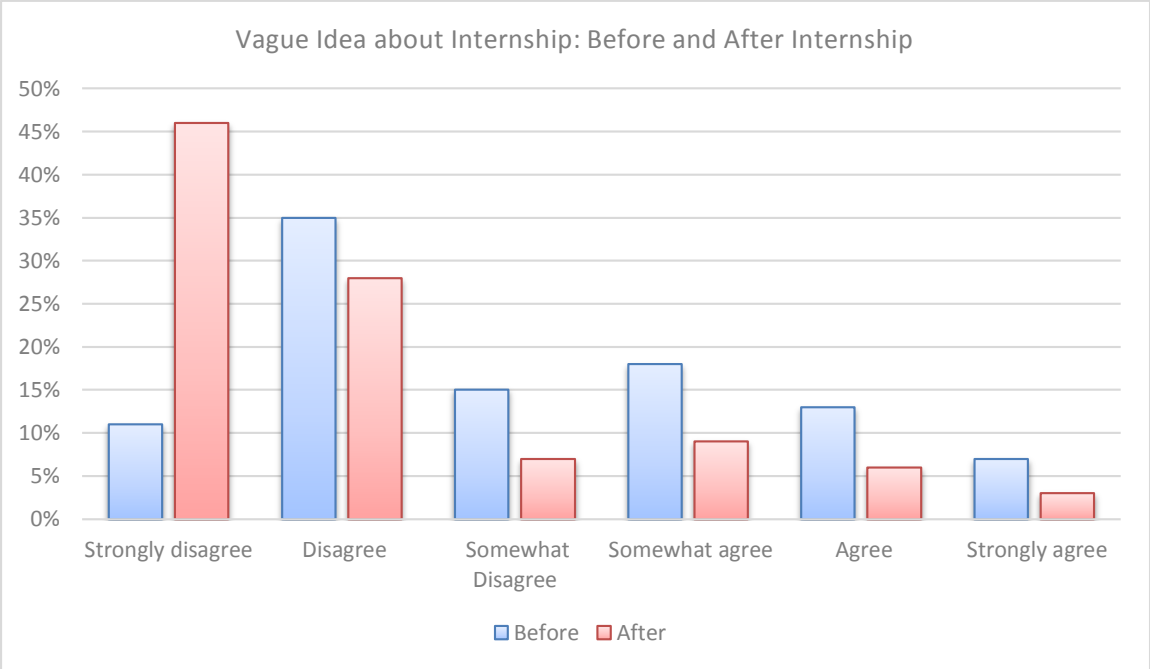
This trend continued in other parts as well. 82% of them believed that they had no problems in working with other people before internship and the percentage increased to 91% after their internship. Similar result comes when asked about their ability to engage with others in that organization. From this, it can be understood that the students attitude before and after the internship training changed significantly. Based on the short experience that they had undergone, they were able to learn new things about life and it changes their attitude as well as how they conceptualize things.

D. Satisfaction Level of Interns'

In general, 94% responded that they are very satisfied with their internship training. The students reported that they have done their best to achieve the organizations' expectations, fulfilling their duties and responsibilities at their utmost capability and effort. It can be said that they are happy with the working conditions given, their surroundings, which include workmates and connections between classroom teachings with their working experience. 98% of them agreed that the internship experience has better prepared them to enter the public,

private or non-profit organization once they complete their studies at the university. This is a result of their exposure to the working environment that they received during the three months of internship training.

Table 5: Vague Idea about Internship: Before and After Internship



E. Interns' Expectations towards Their Organization

The students' expectations are very high towards their organizations in various aspects. Based on the data, 85% of them expected organizations to give them outside jobs, 56% wanted the organizations to allow them to work extra hours, and 89% believe that the company needs to provide them with proper workstations and 90% want the organization to treat them like permanent staff. 97% of the students demanded that the organizations listen to their voices and assign them to more meaningful tasks during the internship training.

F. Sociology in Bridging Classroom and Workplace Knowledge

Students of Sociology and Anthropology in general, learn about various aspects of society, its culture and organizational behavior, process of socialization and adaptation and other issues of society. The IIUM, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, no different in providing general course curriculum of sociology, however, it is unique as this department is the first in Malaysia to introduce internship programme at the undergraduate level to increase employability value of the students. This department, for this purpose, made English compulsory as its official language to overcome language difficulties and communication barriers. Moreover, like many other departments, this department makes use of power point presentations, using computer and other modern equipment, writing research paper and others which enable students to express themselves as part of the department, think rationally, take specific actions in solving organization problems, and apply the importance of norms and values that they have learned it from sociology. Internship programme made the department more aware of, how these students are capable of using the theoretical and instrumental knowledge in their practical working life. This explains why, though before going to the internships 61% students strongly agreed that internship is an effective means in increasing students' involvement in public issues and services which increased by 84% after their internship.

In Table 6, though 57% of the students understood and believed that academic study and work place expectations differ largely, however, 39% of them believed that every organization has a position where he can join after graduating. In addition, 64% of them strongly believed that internship programme prepared them to enter any organization. This explains why 58% of them were strongly satisfied with their internship.

Table 6. Sociology in Bridging Classroom Study and Workplace Knowledge

Statement	% of agreement
Capable of in using theoretical and instrumental knowledge.	84%
Believed that academic study and work place expectations differ hugely.	57%
Believed that every organization has a position for them.	39%
Believed that internship programme prepared them for job market.	64%
Socially comfortable in communicating with anyone.	93%
Analyzed information before making decision.	98%
Believed in teamwork.	88%
Acknowledged and recognized colleagues' abilities.	97%
Believe that knowledge can be applicable in workplace.	97%
Believed that academic learning helped them in internship period.	93%
Comfortable at their workplace.	92%
Became more disciplined in time management.	92%
Overcome English language communication behavior.	88%
Believe that academic assignments are relevant.	86%
Agreed that internship has prepared me for the public, private or non-profit sectors.	98%

Interestingly, 93% of Sociology's students who underwent for internship were socially comfortable in communicating with anyone. 98% agreed that they analyzed every detail before making any decisions. 88% of them believed in team work and agreed that they can change roles from being a leader to follower and vise-versa. They were dynamic in nature as 97% of them acknowledged and recognized their colleagues' abilities.

The findings have shown the importance of internship experience to the Sociology and Anthropology majors. The experiences they have gained in various organizations and from different sectors have provided them with the skills, knowledge and opportunity to apply and practice what they have learnt in the classroom.

5. CONCLUSION

Internship should be made compulsory to all students from the social science disciplines. It is a training ground for students to learn about an organization, its culture, structures and group dynamics. It is through internship that students get a platform to express their intelligence, expand their networking and exploit their potentials. Internship should be seen as a good partnership between university and the industry. The industry should welcome interns from social science disciplines particularly Sociology and Anthropology into their organizations as they have learnt about culture, group dynamics, relationship between ethnic groups, social change and development as well as other contemporary issues of the society. Here, it can be stated that like any other disciplines of other schools, socio-anthropological knowledge is

equally important to the society and to establish this in the job market, internship can play a vital role.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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