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I, Neo Sello, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work and has not been submitted for any degree at any other university. All sources used have been acknowledged and referenced according to the Botho University guidelines.

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Abstract

The manual, inefficient and disjointed management of internship programs tends to slow the process of students transitioning between their academic and professional lives in higher education institutions of Lesotho. This paper fills this very important gap by developing and introducing a customized web-based Internship Management System (IMS). With a Design Science Research (DSR) approach and a mixed-methods design, the study initially determines the major issues, including administrative workload, impaired communication, and insufficient data to evaluate programs through qualitative interview and focus group processes with students, staff, and employers. With these revelations, an IMS prototype is developed as a functional prototype and user friendly. It is then applied and tested in one of the institutions in Lesotho. It is hoped that the findings will help to show how the IMS improves administrative efficiency, communicative capacity among stakeholders, and offers useful data to continually improve programs, which will eventually lead to a better and more competitive local workforce in conformity with national development priorities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background Of The Study

The modern day education environment has made internships and work integrated learning to be an inextricable aspect of preparing students into joining the workforce (ResearchGate, 2025). The experiential learning is a very significant medium that fills in the gap between theory and practice that allows each graduate to have practical and applicable skills and competence required by modern industries. Nonetheless, the management of these programs poses a dynamic challenge to most of the institutions of higher education especially in developing countries where funds might not be sufficient (IIMA, 2025; ResearchGate, 2025). In Lesotho, to streamline such processes, this study is devoted to designing and developing an Internship Management System (IMS), cited as a centralized and web-based tool, which will assist higher institutions with structuring such processes.

The current state of affairs in these institutions is usually focused on a manual and paper-based process regarding assessments of students, placement in companies, and tracking of progress as well as the final reviews (Iellow, 2025; ResearchGate, 2025). This is a conventional service that is full of inefficiencies such as broken communication linkages, lack of uniformity of records, and excessive administrative load on faculty coordinators and personnel (Workseed, 2025; Iellow, 2025). The students are in the dark, and identifying the opportunities they might qualify for as well as monitoring its application is a challenge (BHEF, 2024). The presence of such a

fracturing system introduces a very real disconnect between the vision of a meaningful and well-managed quality internship program and the reality of its administration, which impedes the resulting ability to track the progress of students and gather information which can be used to improve the program (Emerald Insight, 2021; ResearchGate, 2025).

The situation in such establishments is typically centered around a manual and paper-driven procedure involving a student evaluation and placement in a company along with monitoring progress and ultimate reviews (Iellow, 2025; ResearchGate, 2025). It is a traditional service where the inefficiencies are rampant as there is a lack of proper communication chain in place, no consistency in records maintained, and a lot of administrative overload on faculty coordinators and staff (Workseed, 2025; Iellow, 2025). The children remain oblivious, and determining the possibilities, they can easily get and tracking their implementation, in turn, is difficult (BHEF, 2024). The existence of such a fracturing system creates a very real separation of vision of a meaningful and well-managed quality internship program and the reality of administering the program which hinders the subsequently observed capacity to map the progress of students and collect information about the program that can be used to course-correct the same (Emerald Insight, 2021; ResearchGate, 2025).

1.2 Problem Statement

Whereas in countries with developed economies the field of digital internship management has extensive use of specialized advancement, which makes administrative work and more thorough use of data-driven decisions (Workseed, 2025), in Lesotho, most higher education institutions have not yet changed within the domain of inefficient, manual, and paper-based processing. Such conventional practice places a high administrative load on employees, generates disjointed communication, and causes the absence of effective data to analyse the programme and track performance. More importantly, generic international solutions often prove incapable of being incorporated into the context of the Lesotho learning, local employer requirements, and domestic technological infrastructure, thus making them inappropriate. The decentralization of this system, in particular, counteracts the state priorities of development related to the cultivation of a digitally enabled and competitive labor force (Ministry of Finance, 2025). This research, therefore, proposes to design and implement a functional and user-friendly Internship Management System (IMS) specifically tailored for the higher education sector in Lesotho. The lack of an appropriate, domestic, digital solution represents a strategic vulnerability to the progress of internship strategies and the graduating of a modern labor force in the case of higher education institutions of Lesotho.

1.3 Research Objectives

Judging on the above objectives, this study tries to address the following research questions:

- What are the existing problems and inefficiencies of internship management process with higher education institutions in Lesotho?
- What are the functional and technical needs of a digital Internship Management System that addresses the needs of these Institutions?
- What should be the successful way of designing and implementing an IMS so as to facilitate the process of administering internships and enhance communication between students, staff and the employers?
- How can the installed IMS contribute to the efficiency of the administrative system, accessible data and general quality of the internship program?

1.4 Research Questions

Primary goal of the research in question is to:

- Review the current internship management procedures and find out the considerations that affect the higher education institutions in Lesotho.
- Come up with an Internship Management System (IMS) that is productive and easy to use depending on the unique needs of these institutions.
- Apply the developed IMS at one of the institutions of higher learning in Lesotho.
- Determine whether the implemented IMS will lead to easing the administrative work, improving communications and handling data.

1.5 Significance Of The Study

The research is extremely significant on both institutional and national level. The first and the foremost, it addresses a critical deficiency in the operations of the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Lesotho by providing a practical, tangible, and domestically relevant digital solution. A designed internship management system (IMS) will serve as a blueprint to relocate the current inefficient and manual, paper based processes. Its direct significance lies in the reduction of the chronic administrative burden of faculty coordinators, in bringing together fragmented documentation and in the coordination of communication among students, staff and employers. The study contributes directly to the access and experience of the students to the work integrated learning programs, enlightening them in an open, straight forward manner on the opportunities and the status of their application.

The research results are strategically aligned to the national development agenda of the Kingdom of Lesotho at a larger scale. The absence of effective, data-driven internship management systems are now ruining the quality and traceability of the experience required to graduate with an effective labour force (Ministry of Finance, 2025). Within the scope of the present paper, quality of experiential learning is going to be improved by implementing and evaluating IMS via a domestic digital solution. It will help the HEIs to make informed decisions based on the data to optimize the programme repeatedly. Finally, the study leads to the development of a more technologically conscious workforce by offering a scalable template that can be used in the

exploitation of technology adoption to promote national educational and economic development objectives.

1.6 Study Delimitation

This study is mainly constrained by the scope of designing and implementing the Internship Management System (IMS) artifact and its future assessment in the setting of the Lesotho higher education sector. The IMS has a functional scope focused on solving the primary administrative challenges outlined in the problem statement, namely student placement, real-time progress tracking, digital performance evaluation, and centralized communication between the stakeholders. The research does not go to or even model the full scale long-term system maintenance, or involves complex financial modeling or extensive integration with legacy campus systems like existing Student Information Systems (SIS). The emphasis is made on proving the effectiveness of the stand-alone IMS solution as a proof of concept.

The study is also strictly methodologically and geographically defined. The proposed research will be implemented in a case study design, which will involve carrying out the developed IMS prototype to only one institution of higher learning in Maseru. Sampling is limited to the stakeholders (students, faculty and employers) of this particular pilot institution. Though the principles and design are generalizable, the post implementation digital process efficiency and effectiveness is based exclusively on the comparison of the post implementation digital process with the pre implementation manual process of this one site. Hence, the results are a strong model of local appropriateness and cannot be used to imply instant and universal scalability without changes in all HEIs of the country.

1.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 has already created the basic premise and layout of this dissertation that has created the platform upon which the research will proceed. It had started by explaining the importance of internships in contemporary education and had rightly pointed out the administrative crisis of manual and paper-based processes in institutions of higher learning in Lesotho. This discussion gave way to the formalized Problem Statement, which was the necessity to have a tailor-made, digital Internship Management System (IMS) to alleviate the heavy administrative burden, disorganized communications, and inability to analyze the data. The chapter has then explicitly identified the four Research Questions and four Research Objectives that will inform the exploration of the development and testing of the IMS artifact.

As part of the initial framework, this chapter has presented the dual Significance of the Study, both the short term institutional payoff of improved efficiency and the long term strategic national payoff of developing a digital competitive labor force. Also, the scope of the Study Delimitation was properly stated and was limited to design and assessment of the IMS in one case study institution. The rest of this dissertation will follow the following structure: Chapter 2 will conduct a review of the relevant academic literature; Chapter 3 will describe the Design Science Research approach that was utilized to create the IMS; Chapter 4 and 5 will present the findings of the implementation and assessment; and Chapter 6 will provide a conclusion to the research, as well as recommendations and directions of the future work.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The chapter is a review of relevant scholarly literature that will help put the present research on designing and implementing an Internship Management System (IMS) in higher education institutions (HEI) in Lesotho into perspective. The review is formatted in the way of first defining the theoretical need of work-integrated learning (WIL), then reviewing the status of digital management solutions in the world, discussing the challenges of implementation by developing economies, and, finally, expressing the technological readiness and institutional context peculiar to Lesotho. The main goal of this chapter is to generalize the available body of knowledge, determine the current challenges that cannot be resolved at the local level with the help of global solutions and define exactly what will be the gap in research that this design science research will address.

2.2 Theoretical Development Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and Experiential Education

Work-integrated learning and internships as an inseparable part of it are generally accepted as an indispensable element of the contemporary tertiary education (ResearchGate, 2025). The role of WIL as an essential tool to align the abstract academic theory with the real, professional practice is always substantiated in literature (IIMA, 2025). The effectiveness of internships lies in the fact that they train productive skills, professionalism, and a successful adaptation to the reality of the modern labor market, meeting the expectations of industry by training graduates who can work in the job market immediately after graduating.

The seminal works also stress the fact that the value of an internship is directly proportional to the quality of its management, such as goal clarity, proper tracking of a student, and the systematic review of feedback (Emerald Insight, 2021; Swinburne Research Bank, 2010). Unmanaged programs which are weakly assessed and communicated irregularly usually lead to a wasted learning experience, despite the quality of the placement per se. Thus, it is the need to offer meaningful experiential learning that generates, in turn, a need to have in place strong and effective administrative structures to facilitate it.

2.3 Digital Internship Management System (IMS) Globe

The adoption of digital management of internships, as opposed to manual, is widespread in developed economies, where the efficiency and the use of data is a demand (Workseed, 2025). Global IMS platforms are digital platforms that automate all main processes, such as enrolling students, registering employers, matching placements, submitting digital logbooks, and assessing the final performance (Iellow, 2025).

One major conclusion of this body of literature is that the contemporary IMS are not administrative tools but potent program quality assurance tools. They enable HEIs to understand

trends, monitor student employability rates, and receive unceasing feedback to improve the programs through consolidating all data into one repository (Scopus, 2025). Such systems are superior in terms of upholding the consistency of communication between the tripartite stakeholders (student, university coordinator and workplace supervisor), the consistency of records is ensured as well as the administrative burden on faculty staff is greatly decreased (Workseed, 2025). Nevertheless, these commercially off-the shelf international solutions are commonly based on presumes of high technological infrastructure availability, uniform internet connectivity and large institutional operating budgets, which do not necessarily carry to resource-constrained settings well.

2.4 The Issues in Internship Management in Developing Economies

There is a clear indication of contrast in the practices of administration in the developed and developing situations according to the literature. The management of internship in most developing countries like the Southern African countries remains highly manual and paper-based, thus causing severe systemic inefficiencies (ResearchGate, 2025). These conventional ways lead to: the overabundance of administration, the unpredictability of the records, breach of continuity in the communication pathways and, most significantly, lack of sufficient data to perform program analysis and rectify the courses (BHEF, 2024).

Additionally, the generic global digital solutions are not usually easy to execute in such cases. Challenges are rooted in:

Financial Constraints: Unavailability of the financial resources to buy, customize and support costly enterprise software (IIMA, 2025).

Infrastructure Vulcanities: Untrustworthy power supply, expensive data, and inexpensive bandwidth internet connection limits the real-time nature of many cloud-based, data-intensive systems (Makumane & Mpungose, 2022).

Contextual Inappropriateness: Often, generic systems do not conform to local accreditation requirements, local employer processes, or even to local student and staff levels of digital literacy.

2.5 The Digital Divide and The Institutional Readiness in Lesotho Higher Education Sector

To argue in favor of a localized solution, one will have to talk about the technological and policy background of Lesotho. One of the priorities of the national policy documents such as the National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II) is the radical transformation of higher education and the provision of more opportunities to utilize Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and create a competitive labor force (Ministry of Finance, 2025).

However, as the related literature suggests, there is also a powerful systemic barrier to digital transformation at the implementation level in the education sector in Lesotho:

Poor Infrastructure: The researchers mention inadequate technological infrastructure and poor electricity, and connectivity, especially in areas beyond the capital city (Khumalo, 2025). The implications of this infrastructure shortage are a direct implication to the feasibility of running robust and 24/7 web applications.

Digital Literacy: It has problems with various levels of digital literacy between faculty and students, and is in need of easy-to-use and accessible systems that can be accessed with mobile devices (Khumalo, 2025).

Policy-to-Practice Gap: Policies enforce digital integration (LBECP, 2021), yet the absence of professional development of the staff and the outsourcing way of integrating digital skills into the curriculum, including the administration practices, impede the work of such policies (ResearchGate, 2024).

Contextual analysis of such nature implies that a proposed digital solution to Lesotho must be designed around low-bandwidth resiliency, high-user ease of use and low maintenance expense to institutions as key architectural requirements, which world, commercial IMS vendors did not devote sufficient attention to.

2.6. How to state the Research Gap

The literature review clearly shows that there is a tension between the perceived need of well-managed internships (Section 2.2) and the presence of highly effective global digital solutions (Section 2.3) and the reported administrative inefficiencies and the specific technological and socio-economic limitations in Lesotho (Sections 2.4 and 2.5).

The research gap is established by the lack of a validated and contextually relevant digital artifact: Although the issue of manual internship management in Lesotho HEIs is recognized, and the necessity of the digitalization is clear in national policy, there is an unavailable Internship Management System (IMS) specifically tailored, implemented, and empirically tested to meet the compounded challenges of high administration workload and the infrastructural constraints (poor connectivity, low budget, fluctuating digital literacy) of this specific domestic environment. There are no generic, international solutions and there are no localized, functional digital solutions.

The proposed study fills this gap directly by attempting to design and implement an IMS (the artifact), testing its efficacy against the administrative and communications goals described in Chapter 1, and thus, offering a sorely needed, locally appropriate paradigm of digital transformation in the sphere of higher education in the country.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The chapter has provided a broad review of the literature available on work-integrated learning, global digital management systems, and the challenges involved in the implementation of these

systems in developing economies and specifically in the technical environment in Lesotho. This review validated the theoretical significance of controlled internships and worldwide shift towards online platforms, and at the same time, it defined the systemic limitations of the infrastructure and policy compatibility that make off-the-shelf solutions ineffective in the local setting. Importantly, in this chapter the gap in research was formulated: the absence of locally validated, custom-designed, IMS that can help overcome the gap that exists between the current manual status quo and the national objective of a digitally competent workforce. In the next chapter the paper will outline the Design Science Research (DSR) process that will be used to design and test the proposed IMS artifact in order to fill this observed gap.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology that was used to design and roll out the Internship Management System (IMS) to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Lesotho. The main aim of this chapter is to find the answer to the main question: How did the problem identified in Chapter 2 get solved, and how did the proposed solution the IMS, get built and tested?

In this chapter, the system development model chosen, the project life cycle phases are identified, the tools and technologies to be used in the system development, and the process involved in system development and testing are described. The chapter is organized in such a way that it is more of a roadmap of the whole project so that the development process can be replicated and that the end product can be traced to the original requirements.

3.2 Research and Development Approach

Since the project is of a nature that requires analytical research (needs assessment) and practical system development (implementation), the best methodological framework to be used is the System Development Life Cycle (SDLC). The SDLC is an organized and progressive process that facilitates proper planning, proper requirement analysis, design system, code writing, and testability. In this project, a derivative of the Waterfall Model was used and the stress was laid on phase-by-phase completion of the project before proceeding to the next phase.

Key stages included are:

1. System Planning and Analysis: The scope of the project and turning the internship process that is manually run into formal non-functional and functional requirements.
2. System Design: The conceptual architecture, database schema and interface prototypes are developed.

3. System Implementation and Coding: Converting the designs into software that will be executed in the programming languages and frameworks that have been chosen.
4. System Testing and validation: The checks that the developed system can work accurately in the target environment and that it satisfies all the specifications.

3.3 System Analysis and Requirements Gathering

This analysis stage proved significant regarding the realization of the particular inefficiencies of the manual internship management process which are revealed in the research gap (see Chapter 2).

Data Collection Methods (What We Did)

3.3.1 The following methods were used in order to obtain all the information:

- Document Analysis: An examination of available paper-based documents, internship policy documents, assessment form and placement agreements utilized by HEIs in Lesotho. This gave important clues to the data fields, flows of approval and generation of reports.
- Structured Interviews: One-on-one and focus group interviews of key stakeholders including:
 - Internship Coordinators/Administrators: To find the bottlenecks in the area of placement, assessment, and record-keeping.
 - Academic Staff (Supervisors): To learn the needs in remote monitoring and evaluation of progress.
 - Students (Interns): To identify their requirements in terms of tracking their placements, reporting and communication.

3.3.2 Functional Requirements

According to the analysis, the IMS was to carry out the following fundamental functions:

Module	Functional Requirement
Student Module	Enables students to upload their CVs, browse through placement opportunities, enter weekly/monthly progress reports, and access feedback/grades left by their supervisor.
Placement/Employer Module	Allows third parties to add, update and remove internship opportunities and accept and reject student applications.

Faculty/Supervisor Module	Enables the deployment of academic supervisors to student, remote student monitoring and final assessment score submission.
Admin/Coordinator Module	Allows centralized dashboard to manage the overall program, such as to create placement reports, perform user role management, and set system settings.

3.4 System Architecture and Design

3.4.1 Conceptual Framework (How it all Hangs Together)

The IMS operates according to Three-Tier Architecture. The isolated presentation, business logic and data storage functionality of the system provided by this tiers architecture enhances modularity, scalability and maintainability.

1. Presentation Tier (Client Side): Supports the user-interface and user-interaction logic.
2. Application Tier (Server Side): It is linked with business logic, resolves user requests, and transmissions of data between presentation and data tier.
3. Data Tier (Database): This is whereby all the system data exist and is controlled.

3.4.2 Database Design (Theories and Principles)

The database design was based on the relational database principles, namely the Third Normal Form (3NF) to guarantee the data integrity and reduce the redundancy. The database was designed around the key objects of internship process:

- Users Table: Stores (Student, Supervisor, Employer, Admin) credentials and roles.
- Student Profiles Table: Holds personal, school and contact data.
- Placements Table: Stores stores information about internship opportunities that are posted by employers.
- Application/Placement Status Table: The table is used to tie the students to placements and monitor the status (applied, offered, accepted, in progress, completed).
- Table of Reports: The student progress reports and supervisor feedback were provided in form of reports.

3.4.3 System Interfaces

The system has four different user interfaces depending on the different roles as identified during the analysis: Student Portal, Supervisor Dashboard, Employer Portal and Admin Dashboard. To guarantee a responsive and easy user interface using various devices, wireframes and user flow diagrams were created (Refer to Appendix A to have detailed design diagrams).

3.5 Implementation Environment and Tools

Implementation consisted of coding the system against architectural design. The technological stack has been selected with a view of cost-effectiveness, availability as open-source, community

support, and the requirement of an elaborate and dynamic web application that can support the detailed administrative processes.

3.5.1 Technological Stack (What We Built)

The three levels of the system were constructed with the help of the following technologies:

Tier	Technology	Role in the IMS
Presentation Tier (Frontend)	AngularJS (1.x)	It is deployed to arrange the client-side application logic (Model-View-Controller framework) or to assist the dynamic, single-page application (SPA) capability to guarantee an enjoyable user experience.
Application Tier (Server/Backend)	PHP	Server-side scripting: This is employed to handle HTTP requests, run the business code (e.g. student matching, score calculation, communication with the database).
Data Tier (Database)	MySQL	The relational database management system that will be deployed to ensure the persistence of all records of students, placements and assessment over a secure and structured storage.

3.5.2 Development Tools and Environment

The development environment came with the standard professional tools to have an easy time in terms of coding, debugging and database management:

Tool	Purpose
VS Code	The main Integrated Development Environment (IDE) where the AngularJS, PHP, HTML, and CSS code is written and debugged.
MySQL Workbench	Applied in the design, modelling and administration of the MySQL database format, as well as in the execution of SQL command scripts and modeling the schema.
XAMPP/WAMP Server	Bundling Apache Web server and MySQL database to make local testing environment easy to use.

3.5.3 Programming Procedures

The application was done in a modular programming manner. The basic functionalities (e.g., user authentication, application submission, report generation) were designed as separate modules in PHP in which they provide Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) used by the AngularJS frontend. The frontend-backend separation (AngularJS) and the backend separation (PHP/MySQL) provided clean and maintainable and scalable code.

The snippets of program code in details and the database schema as a whole is given in **Appendix B** and **Appendix C** respectively.

3.6 System Testing and Validation

System testing is crucial as noted earlier to ensure that the system has been validated after the development. The testing phase was done to ensure the stability, reliability and adherence to the functional requirements as stated in Section 3.3.

3.6.1 Testing Levels (The Tests)

- 3.6.1.1.1 Unit Testing: Each of the business functions and modules (e.g., student report submission validation, database connectivity, login authentication) was tested separately to make sure that they performed their particular role appropriately.
- 3.6.1.1.2 Integration Testing: Various modules were integrated and tested to see that they worked together with the other modules (e.g., the Supervisor module correctly retrieved data changed by the Student module).
- 3.6.1.1.3 User Acceptance Testing (UAT): The final system was tested by the real target users (administrators, supervisors, and mock students) to ensure that IMS fulfilled their practical requirements and effectively replaced the manual, paper-based systems.

3.6.2 Validation Criteria

IMS was tested on two major standards:

- Effectiveness: The solution manages to automate the major manual processes that were identified during Chapter 2, including student application, assignment by the supervisor, and submission of the assessment.
- Usability: The system was easy to learn, use and reliable to the stakeholders, hence, lessening the administrative workload that the manual system had been previously creating.

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