

## **Main Problems in Internships in Sri Lanka**

Internships are a critical bridge between academic learning and professional employment for Sri Lankan undergraduates, especially in management, commerce, and related fields. However, research and surveys among students, employers, and academic institutions reveal several persistent and systemic problems that undermine the potential benefits of these programs.

### **1. Lack of Structure and Clear Objectives**

- Many internships in Sri Lanka suffer from unclear or poorly defined job descriptions. Interns often report not knowing what is expected of them, leading to confusion, lack of motivation, and underachievement<sup>[1] [2] [3]</sup>.
- There is frequently no formal mechanism within universities or faculties to assess the effectiveness or learning outcomes of internship programs, resulting in inconsistent experiences and missed learning opportunities<sup>[3] [4]</sup>.

### **2. Limited Learning and Repetitive Tasks**

- Interns are often assigned monotonous, low-skill, or clerical tasks, with little opportunity for meaningful engagement or skill development<sup>[3] [4]</sup>.
- There is a lack of job rotation or exposure to different departments, which restricts interns' ability to understand the broader workings of an organization or to develop creativity and innovation<sup>[4]</sup>.
- Some internships focus more on "exposure" or networking rather than tangible skill-building, leaving interns with little to show in terms of practical competencies<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **3. Inadequate Supervision and Mentorship**

- Many organizations do not provide structured training, regular feedback, or mentorship to interns. This absence of guidance can leave interns feeling unsupported and unsure about their progress or future career path<sup>[2] [4]</sup>.
- The quality of feedback and supervision from both employers and universities is often inconsistent, which can diminish the learning value of the internship<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **4. Exploitative or Unpaid Internships**

- Unpaid internships with unrealistic expectations are a significant issue. Some employers exploit interns by assigning heavy workloads without compensation, under the guise of providing "experience"<sup>[2]</sup>.
- The lack of a formal contract or agreement regarding responsibilities, hours, and compensation further exposes interns to potential exploitation<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **5. Balancing Academic and Work Commitments**

- Many Sri Lankan students struggle to balance internship responsibilities with academic requirements, leading to stress, missed lectures, lower grades, and even negative health consequences<sup>[1] [5]</sup>.
- The overlap of academic and internship commitments can result in burnout, especially when students also juggle part-time jobs or other obligations<sup>[1] [5]</sup>.

## **6. Limited Relevance and Misalignment with Field of Study**

- Internships are not always aligned with the student's academic background or career aspirations, reducing their relevance and usefulness for future employment<sup>[4]</sup>.
- Some students end up in internships that do not match their field of study, limiting the transferability of skills and knowledge gained<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **7. Geographic and Language Barriers**

- Many interns complete their programs in their hometowns, which can limit opportunities to improve language skills and adapt to diverse work environments<sup>[4]</sup>.
- This lack of mobility can also restrict access to high-quality internship placements, particularly for students from rural areas<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **8. Insufficient Development of Soft and Entrepreneurial Skills**

- While internships are intended to foster entrepreneurship and soft skills, research indicates that most programs only contribute to these areas at an average level<sup>[4]</sup>.
- Interns often lack opportunities to participate in meetings, discussions, or projects that would help develop leadership, communication, and entrepreneurial abilities<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **9. Organizational and Cultural Issues**

- High turnover rates, negative company cultures, and unprofessional behavior during the recruitment process are common red flags reported by interns<sup>[2]</sup>.
- Some organizations view internships merely as a source of cheap labor, rather than as a genuine training and development opportunity<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **10. Lack of Industry-Academia Collaboration**

- There is insufficient collaboration between universities and industries to secure relevant, high-quality internship placements for students<sup>[4]</sup>.
- As a result, students are often left to find internships independently, which can lead to mismatches and suboptimal experiences<sup>[4]</sup>.

## Summary Table: Key Problems in Sri Lankan Internships

Problem Area	Description
Lack of Structure	Unclear roles, objectives, and assessment mechanisms
Repetitive/Low-Value Tasks	Monotonous duties, little exposure to real challenges
Poor Supervision/Mentorship	Inconsistent feedback, lack of structured training
Exploitative Practices	Unpaid internships, lack of contracts, unrealistic expectations
Academic-Work Conflict	Difficulty balancing studies and internship commitments
Misalignment with Study Field	Internships not relevant to academic background
Geographic/Language Constraints	Limited mobility, restricted language and cultural exposure
Weak Soft/Entrepreneurial Skill Dev	Limited opportunities for leadership, creativity, and entrepreneurship
Organizational/Cultural Issues	Negative company cultures, high turnover, unprofessional recruitment
Weak Industry-Academia Links	Poor collaboration leading to mismatched or low-quality placements

## Recommendations for Improvement

- Universities should collaborate closely with industries to secure relevant placements and monitor internship quality<sup>[4]</sup>.
- Structured feedback, supervision, and mentorship systems should be established within organizations and academic programs<sup>[4]</sup>.
- Clear contracts and job descriptions must be standard practice to protect interns from exploitation<sup>[2]</sup>.
- Internship programs should be designed to maximize learning, skill development, and alignment with students' academic and career goals<sup>[3]</sup> <sup>[4]</sup>.

These problems reflect both systemic and organizational challenges in Sri Lanka's internship landscape. Addressing them requires coordinated efforts from universities, employers, policymakers, and students themselves to ensure internships fulfill their role as a meaningful step toward professional development and employability.



1. <https://internhub.lk/blog/internship-challenges-benefits-industrial-insights>
2. <https://internhub.lk/blog/internship-red-flags-to-avoid>
3. [http://www.dr.lib.sjp.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/123456789/3694/Problems of Internship Opinions of the Management.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.dr.lib.sjp.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/123456789/3694/Problems%20of%20Internship%20Opinions%20of%20the%20Management.pdf?sequence=1)
4. <https://www.fcm.esn.ac.lk/jbs/archive/1.1.5.pdf>
5. <https://journals.sjp.ac.lk/index.php/phrc/article/view/2883/1928>

