

# Students' Experience of Industrial Attachment: A Case of a Public University

Hoseah Kiplagat, Jennifer W. Khamasi & Rachel Karei

## Abstract

*Industrial Attachment (IA) in most post-secondary and higher learning institutions is a structured, credit-bearing work experience in a professional work setting. This study sought to investigate university students' experiences during IA with a focus on the things they liked most about IA firms, employees, their own colleagues and the overall IA exercise. We had witnessed over the years that a number of students took longer time than others to find placement for IA. When there is no or little involvement by the training institutions in finding placement, the exercise is normally stressful to the students. In 2013, we carried out a questionnaire survey after the students returned to the University from a two month IA. The questionnaire was organized into 11 question items some of which had sub-categories. A total of 107 questionnaires were conveniently administered to the respondents who were available during data collection. Overall, we found out that majority (81%) of the respondents liked the knowledge and skills and experiences acquired while on IA. This study confirms that, despite the stressful process that students undergo when finding placement for IA, there are many gains from the exercise – both to the institutions where student-trainees serve and to the individual student-trainee. We recommend that training institutions play an active role in placing students for IA so as to increase the gains and consequently, the quality outcomes.*

**Key words:** Students' experience, Industrial Attachment, Public University, quality outcomes

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## **Introduction**

Industrial attachment (IA) is meant to familiarize students to the world of work. It is one of the essential requirements of any learning institution (Bansal et al, 2010). Industrial Attachment has become an important element of training as employers continue to demand for fully trained students because it is a platform to assimilate theory into practice (Matamande et al, 2013). To most students, the IA experience is unique in terms of exposure to unfamiliar technology, work place expectations, work schedule, and the administrative/organizational structure.

Despite the known differences between programs, most institutions acknowledge that the IA experience is meant to: facilitate the trainee to develop awareness on the requirements of the world of work, enhance already acquired work related skills which include social skills, have a hands on experience with modern technology in whichever workplace a trainee serves, as well as, make a personal connection between theory and practice (Mihail, 2006). Further, the objectives of the supervised industrial attachment program among others are to: firstly, expose students to new scientific and technological equipment and how to manipulate them, secondly, enable students reinforce theoretical instruction through the use of applied learning facilities, thirdly, enable students interact and share experiences and ideas with those in industry on issues relating to safety precautions, industrial health, environmental pollution and culture of work in industry, fourthly, enable students acquire new practical skills and sharpen old ones by trying their hands on machines and equipment related to their

courses of study. Enable students know of the problems and contributions of industry to national development; and fifthly, enable the department to identify problems associated with its curriculum and review it to meet current and future workplace requirements (Donkor et al, 2009). Industrial Attachment provides opportunities for undergraduates to apply what they have learnt at the university, provides on-the-job training and real-life job experience, making them more employment ready (Rahman *et al*, 2009; Pillai and Yusoff, 2007). The benefits of Industrial Attachment are further demonstrated by Matamande et al (2013) who established that industrial experience help the students to have an appreciation of the real world, apply theory to practice, enhance communication skills and boost their confidence.

The background to this study is based on an earlier study that sought to find out the means used to place students for Industrial Attachment (Kiplagat et al, 2013). This study revealed that the teaching department was not involved in the placement of students. Perhaps that was the reason why many students took longer time in finding placement. When there is little or no involvement of the institution in the placement of students for IA, the procedure is stressful for students. The findings of the present study agree with those of a study in Ghana by Ayarkwa et al, (2012), Pillai and Yusoff (2007) and by Edziwa and Chivheya (2013). Mihail (2006) stated that academic institutions should organize and promote the placement of students in private and other organizations to foster work experience so that students will attain the necessary skills

to supplement theoretical training. Further, Gill and Lashine (2003) reiterated that while students are still in the University, it should be the responsibility of the university to organize Industrial Attachment since it can help students develop a core of global market skills such as communication, time management, better self-confidence, and better self-motivation that are now considered requirements for employment.

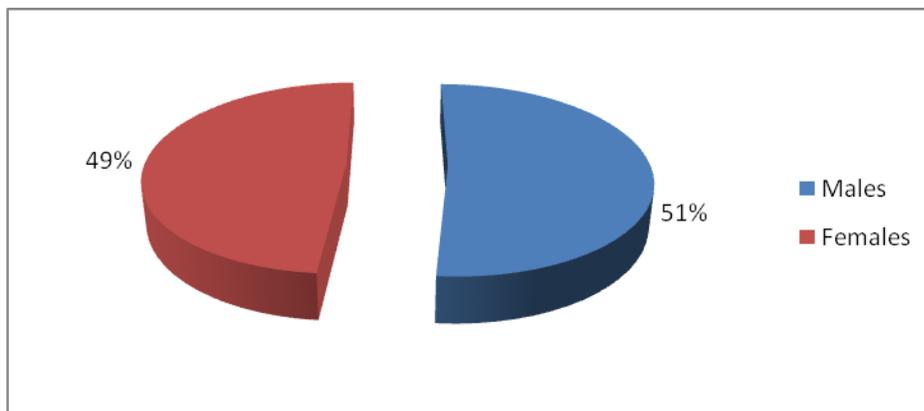
Since majority (48%) of the students had received placement through their own efforts as reported in Kiplagat *et al* (2013), we sought to find out the students' experiences or likes about the IA institution, employees they worked with, their own colleagues from University of Eldoret and the overall IA exercise.

## **Research Approach**

This study was carried out from September to October 2013 in 3 academic departments at the University of Eldoret. The target population was the students who had participated in IA between May and August 2013. Purposive sampling method was used to select the 3 departments and homogenous sampling technique used to select the 6 participating groups. A total of 103 questionnaires with open ended question items were conveniently administered to the 6 groups in their respective homogenous cohorts: Department 1- 1 group, department 2 – 3 groups and department 3 – 2 groups. This paper focused mainly on the responses from 4 (that is, Likes) of the 11 question items.

## Findings

Fifty-five (51%) males and 52 (49%) females from the three selected departments, conveniently participated in the study as shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. The study sample*

This study investigated students' experiences about the institution, employees, their own colleagues from UoE and the overall IA exercise. The next sub-sections show these experiences in detail

From the findings in Figure 2, the study revealed the three things that students liked most about the IA was carried out: the staff members who were very friendly and supportive (29%), the organizational structure (23%), and the quality of services/products rendered by the attachment institutions (12%).

### *Three things students liked most about Industrial Attachment*

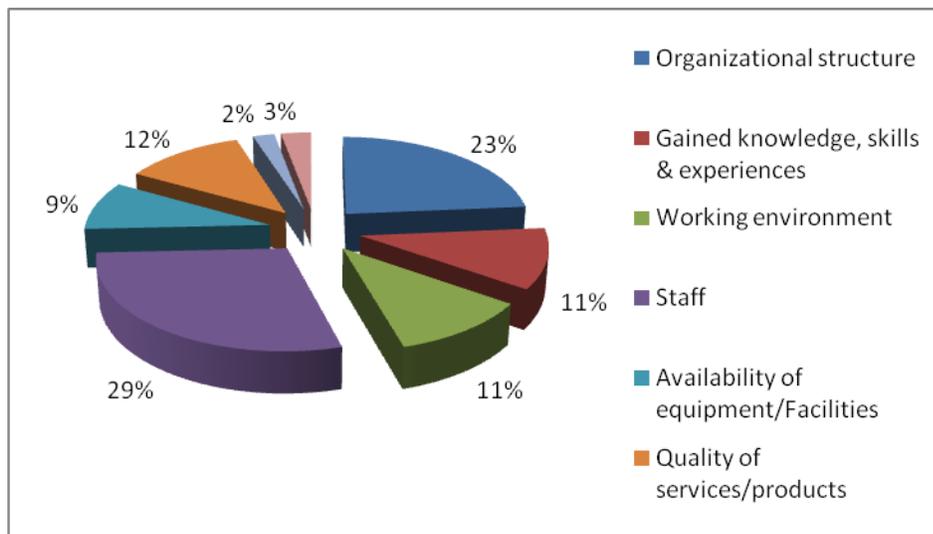


Figure 2. *Three (3) things students liked most*

Other things that the students liked were the knowledge, skills and experiences acquired, and the conducive working environment as shown by ratings of 11% each. The study revealed that some of the attributes learnt by the students from the IA exercise contributed to their professional growth. The friendliness demonstrated by the members of staff allowed students to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and experiences during the attachment. These findings are related to those of Acheampong et al (2014) who established that the students were able to use machines and equipment while on the job, participate in group and team activities, learned basic work ethics during the attachment period, and practiced good human relations skills.

### *Three things the students liked most about the employees they worked with*

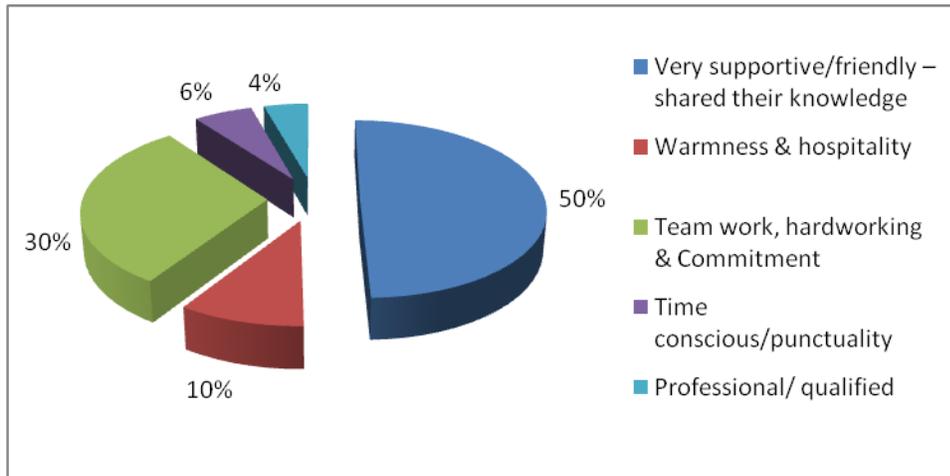
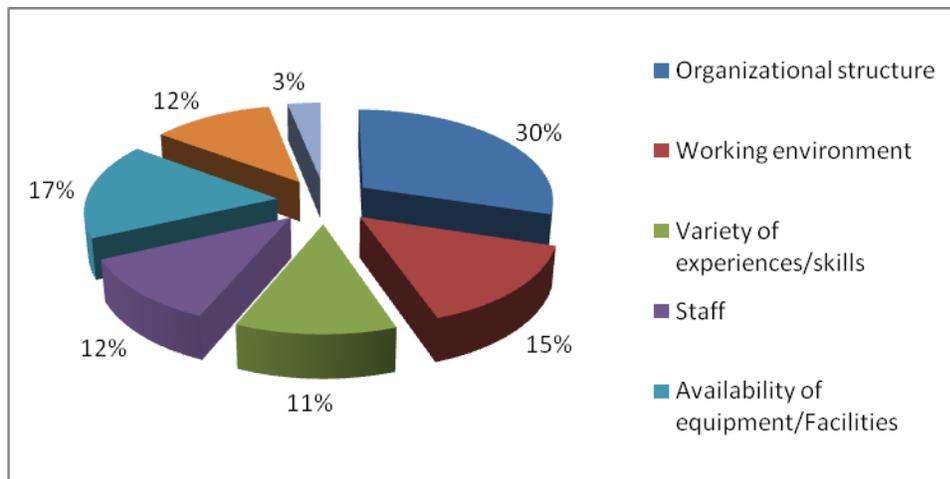


Figure 3. Three (3) things students liked most about the employees they worked with

The findings revealed the top most three things that the students liked about employees they worked with were: the employees were very supportive, friendly and shared knowledge (50%), their team spirit, hard work and commitment to work (30%), and their warmness and hospitality (10%). Some of the attributes that the students liked most about the employees are the employability skills that employers want from new graduates. The benefits of Industrial Attachment enable students to acquire some soft or generic employability skills which include: good communication skills, teamwork and ability to build positive relationships; self and time management, ability to influence others and to negotiate, problem-solve, network, manage change and information, leadership, and ability to prioritize tasks and plans. Research also shows that while on IA, the students also improve in their use of technologies, ability to take criticism, and to see the bigger picture (Andrews & Higson, 2007; Andrew and Higson, 2008; Hall, Higson and Bullivant, 2009).

***What the students liked about the IA Institution***

*Figure 4. What the students liked about the IA institution*

In Figure 4, the findings revealed that majority (30%) of the respondents liked the organizational/management structure of the IA institutions; and Figure 5 show that 48% of the respondents liked the team work, hard work and commitment to work demonstrated by the employees. On the other hand, 43% of the respondents liked very supportive and friendly employees who shared knowledge when needed.

These are very positive attributes that students are supposed to acquire so that they can apply the same to world of work when they graduate from the university. Ford et al, (1992) stated that attachment period exposes students to various working relationships with their seniors and peer workers and in the process they learn about the type of work that they are involved in.

***What the students liked about the employees they worked with***

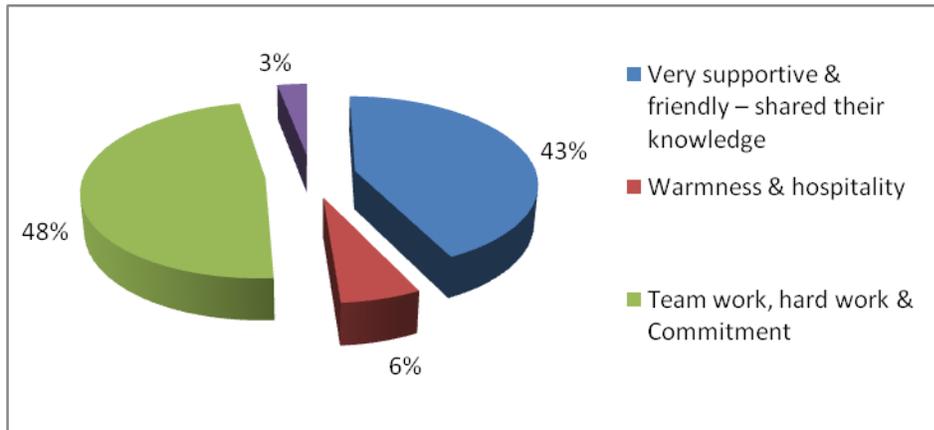


Figure 5. What the students liked about the employees they worked with

### What the students liked about their colleagues from University of Eldoret

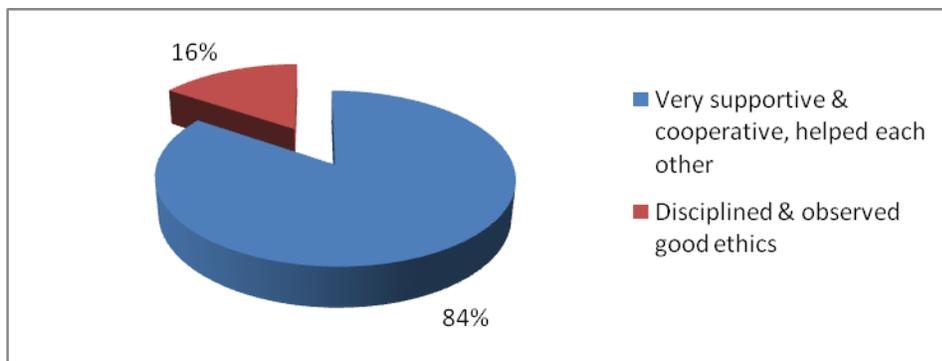
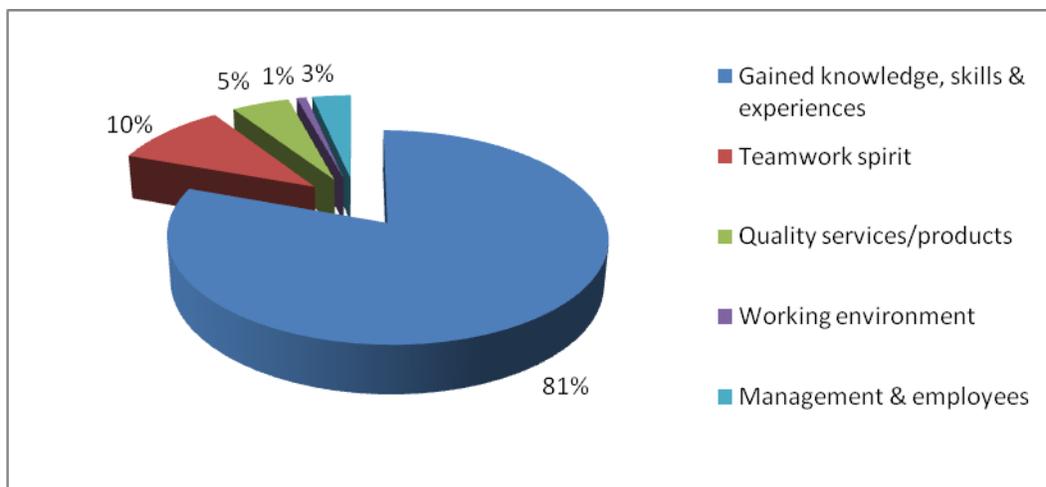


Figure 6. What the students liked about their colleagues from University of Eldoret

The findings in Figure 6 indicate that majority (84%) of the respondents reported that their colleagues were very supportive and cooperative and responded in time of need. These positive attributes can make students maximize gains of IA exercise. Rae (1998) lists the following as critical elements of attitudes that should be found in students on IA: *Responsible* - they should take responsibility of their own learning, thus the need to

be attentive, observant and seek clarity where understanding is lacking; *Open* - trainees should be able to say what they think and feel during training, thus the ability to share their opinions with others; *Punctual* - trainees should be time conscious, come to work early and return from break times on time; and *Co-operative* - trainees must not be difficult to work with, thus should allow the trainer to show them the right way (correct procedures) of doing tasks from the start as unlearning may be difficult. Perhaps, when these qualities are practiced by the students on IA, they are able to learn much more from each through support and cooperation.

#### *What the students liked about Field Attachment*



*Figure 7. What the students liked most about Field Attachment*

The findings in Figure 7 revealed that majority (81%) of the respondents liked the knowledge gained, skills and the experiences acquired from Industrial Attachment. These findings confirm that IA is a very important exercise, a fact that is well-articulated by Gumbe, Sivotwa and Mupambireyi (2012). Gumbe et al's study indicated

that Student Industrial Attachment plays a critical role in instilling new ideas to the students while gaining the necessary experience needed in the industry by the time they complete their studies. The findings of our study agree with those of Lam and Ching (2007) who established that internships assist the internee to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality, an experience that most likely make the students require little or no induction when they finally find full time jobs. The gains of the present study also agree with those of a study by Garavan and Murphy (2001) who reported that work experience provide credible means for softening the reality shock of transition from the classroom to the world of work. Further, our findings agree with those of Watamande et al, (2013) who established that majority (85.6%) of the students who had undergone IA were able to apply theory into practice. The acquired experience will allow graduates to contribute immediately on starting work, and graduates need to develop their skills within a short time towards the competence level set by the employer (Fallows and Steven, 2000).

In addition, a study by Acheampong et al (2014) in Ghana indicated that the benefits of industrial attachment experience to students are: they gain insights into the operational aspect of the industry, they get exposed to real work challenges, they acquire additional knowledge and skills, they improve their interpersonal and communication skills, they increase their professional set of connections, the experience provides them with background information and experience in professional choice, in addition to providing

the time and space to practice what was learnt at school. To maximize on the gains of IA, training institutions should continually obtain credible attachment places on behalf of students (Watamande et al, 2013)

## **Conclusion**

The study findings have revealed that there is value in Industrial Attachment exercise. Despite the findings of Kiplagat, Khamasi and Karei (2013), Watamande et al, 2013, Edziwa and Chivheya, 2013, Ayarkwa, 2012 and Pillai and Yusoff (2007) on the stressful nature of placement procedure for Industrial Attachment, this study has shown that there are more benefits from IA exercise. Results indicated that if the placements are conducted as scheduled and as per each institution's IA Placement Policy, the gains for the students and the industry will be much higher.

## **Recommendations**

We recommend that training institutions play an active role in the placement of students for IA to minimize stress that is experienced by students. Evidently, when the students struggle individually to find placement, they end up taking 'anything' that comes their way. An experience from such a compromised option might impact negatively on the output and outcomes; consequently an academic institution will end up producing graduates who are ill prepared for the workplace.

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