



Original Article

Investigating English-Majored Students' Levels of Satisfaction with Their Internship Experiences: A Case Study at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance

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Abstract: This study aims to explore English-majored students' perceptions of the value of internship and their levels of satisfaction with regard to three workplace dimensions including job characteristics, work environment characteristics, and contextual factors. Fifty interns from the Faculty of English at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF) participated in this project. Data were collected through questionnaires and then quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. The results indicated that the majority of the interns had positive perceptions of the internship experience and demonstrated their maturity and responsibility. The students also expressed high satisfaction with job characteristics, specifically skill variety, autonomy, feedback, and work-related factors such as co-workers and supervisor support. However, they were somehow dissatisfied with contextual elements such as the working hours and compensation. These findings can assist academic institutions, academic supervisors and host companies in providing students with effective internship experience and enhancing their workplace skills.

Keywords: Perceptions; internship experiences; satisfaction; benefits; English-majored students.

1. Introduction

The importance and impact of internships have been widely discussed, and most educational scientists have emphasized the value of filling the gap between theoretical knowledge and working practice [1]. They offer

students many practical advantages, ranging from getting experiences and career-related understanding to interacting with other students from various universities at the intern organization [2], and boost the students' job stability in their early future [3]. Also, they give the enterprises an ideal chance to screen and recruit talented candidates during the internship term. Indeed, direct benefits may occur to the agencies, the students, and the school.

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Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance (UEF) aims to achieve high standards in education and combine the quintessence of international education with economic evolution in the integration context. Thus, UEF students have high expectations about the internship course for their career path in the future. They significantly expect that an internship is an effective tool for them to access the workplace environment and strengthen their language skills and occupation preparation. Drawing on the study by D'Abate, Youndt and Wenzel [4], this study aims to explore university students' perceptions of the value of their internship experiences and to gain insight into their levels of satisfaction with three factors (i.e., job characteristics, work environment characteristics, and contextual factors). The research starts with a review of the relevant literature on internships, satisfaction, students' perceptions of internship experiences, and the extent of students' satisfaction; it then details the methodology adopted and finally analyses the data collected. The findings are discussed in relation to the following research questions of the study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of UEF English- majored students of the value of the internship experience?

RQ2: To what extent do the students feel satisfied with their internship experiences?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Satisfaction

All organizations have to prioritize employee satisfaction. It is described as a joyful or optimistic emotional state resulting from the evaluation of one's work or professional experiences [5]. Warr [6] puts it as simply how content an individual is with his or her job; it is determined whether or not he or she enjoys the job, both at the global scale (regardless of the total job satisfaction for the person), and at the component level (if the person is happy with a variety of work-related factors).

Students' satisfaction with internships also becomes an essential subject to investigate.

Student satisfaction with internships greatly influences career choices. Most basically, job satisfaction refers to a person's perception, and the degree to which a person is fond of what he or she experiences at work [7].

In their study, Hackman and Oldham [8] investigate thoroughly the types of job satisfaction. The research focuses on satisfaction with not only work-related pleasurable feelings in general but also happiness towards some facets of the job (i.e., compensation, relationship with colleagues and supervisors) in specific.

Typically, there seems to be less consistency when discussing job satisfaction's causes. To better understand factors linked to job satisfaction, Herzberg [9] conducts extensive research and discovers that different facets of a work condition such as motivators and hygiene factors can lead to different satisfaction experiences. By this, satisfaction results from the characteristics of the job, personal traits of the employees, and the work environment.

Concerning satisfaction with an internship, Busby and Gibson [10] find that students have a good sense of their internship because of the improvement in technical skills and knowledge. At the same time, Emenheiser, Clayton and Tas [11] agree that most of the participants are pleased with their internship on account of reinforcing their ability to solve problems.

2.2. Internship in Undergraduate Programs

The internship period is an essential part of the curriculum in tertiary education. This curriculum focuses on improving knowledge, skills, and attitudes held on and off campus. It is a learning experience for students to apply theory from college in the workforce and, at the same time, provides opportunities for students to develop their skills and expertise [12].

According to Coco [13], an internship is considered "voluntary, temporary work placements, often undertaken by students at the university and college levels, have been hailed as win-win situations for both employers and

internees". Nevertheless, McMahon and Quinn [14] state that internships are supervised work experiences whereby students work under the supervision and guidance of experienced members of staff. When it comes to the components and structure of an internship, Sovilla [15] debates that a successful internship is close collaborative work between employers and educational institutions. The internship program is also reported as an "industrial placement" or "professional placement" [21]. He stated that this program aims to enhance students' knowledge and transferable skills and equip them for professional life.

Indeed, the development of internships has a strong link with clear learning objectives and outcomes, through the amount of work tied to credit hours earned. Most significantly, it is necessary to establish regular contact between the student and faculty member and the intern employer. In addition, the student should receive regular performance evaluations from their employer. A well-structured internship program is jointly designed by industry representatives, educationalists and students who can make a notable contribution to retention success for the industry.

Several researchers have studied and recognized that an internship is likely to offer a range of considerable benefits. The outcome of the internship firstly is sharpening practical experiences that enhance their understanding of issues related to that particular subject of study, providing students with a smooth transition from the academic world to the working setting. Thus, the students themselves can capture the working culture, and experience the realistic sense of job responsibilities required in enterprises through the work they do as interns [17]. Additionally, an internship can build an individual's self-confidence and maturity [18]. These advantages of upgrading experiences and skill building can raise the graduate's labor market value [10], along with actual qualification and the industrial experiences of faculty, can contribute to future career's success [19], and play a leading part to enhance students' attractiveness to the employers in the

job market [20]. Gault, Redington, and Schlager [21] also indicate that interns can offer higher salaries and derive higher job satisfaction from the subsequent work.

Another substantial benefit of an internship is shaping a set of realistic job expectations in the real world of business. Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins [22] highlight that students who take part in the internship before beginning their formal career have stronger career goals than those who do not.

Along with improving student competencies, an internship is also beneficial to organizations in which students serve as a fresh source of ideas [23]. More specifically, internships give recruiters an ideal chance to reach potential students for possible full-time employment [24]. Compared to long-term commitment combined with regular hiring, an internship profits the enterprise through lower cost and minimal risk.

2.3. Students' Internship Experiences

Many have frequently touted internship experiences as highly beneficial outcomes that students gain from the internship programs. For students, however, several moderating factors and their expectations probably make these experiences positive or negative.

A study conducted by Rothman [25] examines the experiences that students get from internship participation. The researcher concludes that clarity of task, open interpersonal communication, and belief in challenging projects could improve students' experiences. It was also discovered that the learners consider their internships as previews of full-time experiences with their future formal job.

Concerning satisfaction with an internship, Busby, Brunt and Baber [26] find that students have a good sense of their training because of improved technical skills and knowledge. At the same time, Davies [27] agree that most of the participants are pleased with their internship to reinforce their ability to solve problems.

On the other hand, some of the studies gave contrasting findings. For instance, Ju,

Emenheiser, Clayton and Reynolds [28] surveyed Korean students whose level of satisfaction was low due to internship experience. It comes as a surprise, two-thirds of respondents did not hope for a full-time employment offer after an internship. Lam and Ching [1] also found that overall students' expectations toward their internship were unsatisfactory when considering the difference between expectations and perceptions of Hong Kong hospitality students towards the internship period. However, the degree of satisfaction still increased in terms of experiences, higher marketability, and professional skills.

3. Methodology

This study adopted the mixed research method of quantitative and qualitative in the process of data gathering and analysis. According to McCusker and Gunaydin [29], the quantitative method aims to answer questions about the "how much" or "how many" of a phenomenon. With this main characteristic, the quantitative method would reach the specific objectives of measuring the students' perceptions of the internship program and their satisfaction with internship experiences. In addition, a qualitative research method generally aims to understand how a community or individuals within it perceive a particular issue. To answer questions about "what", the qualitative method is appropriate to be used to extract the deeper meanings that students perceive in internship experiences.

To accomplish these purposes, this study employs a questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire items were related to student perception and satisfaction from internships. The survey questionnaire was created with Likert scale questions to measure students' agreement. The structured self-administered questionnaire included three main sections. In section one, students were asked to rate their perception of their experience during the internship. The aspects of the internship program were measured by students' agreement

on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, strongly disagree). Section two examined the students' satisfaction on three dimensions: job characteristics, work environment characteristics, and contextual factors on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Far too little" to "Far too much". In the last section, Hackman and Oldham's general satisfaction scale was used to measure their general feeling towards the internship experiences [8]. The details of survey questions are provided in the Appendix.

The study was conducted on 50 English-major seniors of the Faculty of English Language at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance. They just completed a two-month internship program from 1st May to 30th June 2020. The questionnaire was mailed to 50 students at the same age of 21. The students were asked to recall what they perceived after completing their once-lifetime internship. Although convenience sample technique was used, the sample was representative of the population, as students from all minors of English language major.

The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Through content analysis, it is possible to condense the word into less content-related categories [30] or classified into the same categories, words, and phrases that share the same meaning [31]. Therefore, the content analysis allowed to organize the qualitative data in a way that attained a condensed and broad description of the study objectives. Then, descriptive statistics were used to make analysis, interpretation and determine any statistical factors that contributed to answering the study questions.

4. Findings

4.1. Students' Perceptions of Their Internship Experiences

Table 1 shows details on students' perceptions of their internship experience. The overall mean value was 4.07 out of 5 (with 1 as strongly disagree and 5 as strongly agree),

meaning that the overall perception of the respondents towards their experience from their internships was very positive. As discussed in the methodology section, the students are fully aware of the significant role as well as the considerable benefits of the internship periods in terms of equipping them with academic skills for their future jobs (Table 1).

More noticeably, the students rated that the internships were an essential tool in the academic degree. When questioned whether the

internship improved their professional profiles, a very high percentage of the respondents agreed (4.2).

In terms of the factors that enable students to face the labor market with less fear, the data showed that students considered that the internship was the most effective mean for being more mature and responsible to face professional challenges, as 50% agreed and 36% strongly agreed with this, and means above 4.34 (Figure 1).

Table 1. Respondents' view on the value of the internship

Questions	Strongly disagree (1)		Disagree (2)		Neutral (3)		Agree (4)		Strongly Agree (5)		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1. Be very important for training graduates of your academic degree.	0	0	3	6	6	12	26	52	15	30	4.06
2. Improve the professional profiles of students.	0	0	1	2	4	8	29	58	16	32	4.2
3. Allow observing, analyzing, and relating the theoretical component to the work reality.	0	0	2	4	5	10	25	50	18	36	4.18
4. Allow the students to be more mature and be more responsible to face professional challenges.	0	0	1	2	2	4	26	52	21	42	4.34
5. Allow improving career networking contacts.	0	0	1	2	4	8	31	62	14	28	4.16
6. Supervisor evaluation during the internship program was valuable in learning from mistakes and understanding the interpersonal nature of the work environment.	0	0	2	4	7	14	31	62	10	20	3.98
7. Increase the student's chances of being integrated into the labor market	0	0	2	4	6	12	24	48	18	36	4.16
8. Allow understanding of which areas of my academic degree have the greatest employability potential.	0	0	4	8	12	24	22	44	12	24	3.84

Then, responses from across minors are in high agreement (4.18) that internships gave them opportunities to observe, analyze and integrate the learning process into the practical reality and to improve career networking contacts (4.16). Also, the number of 41 students (82%) marked that supervisor evaluation was valuable in learning from mistakes and understanding interpersonal nature of work environment during the internship term. The data showed that the majority of students believed that the internship was really useful in

supporting their degree, their learning, and their employability perception.

4.2. Students' Levels of Satisfaction with Their Internship Experiences

The follow-up questions were designed to evaluate students' internship experiences. In order to identify students' overall satisfaction, the questions were divided into three dimensions consisting of job characteristics, work environment characteristics, and contextual factors. The results are shown in Table 2.

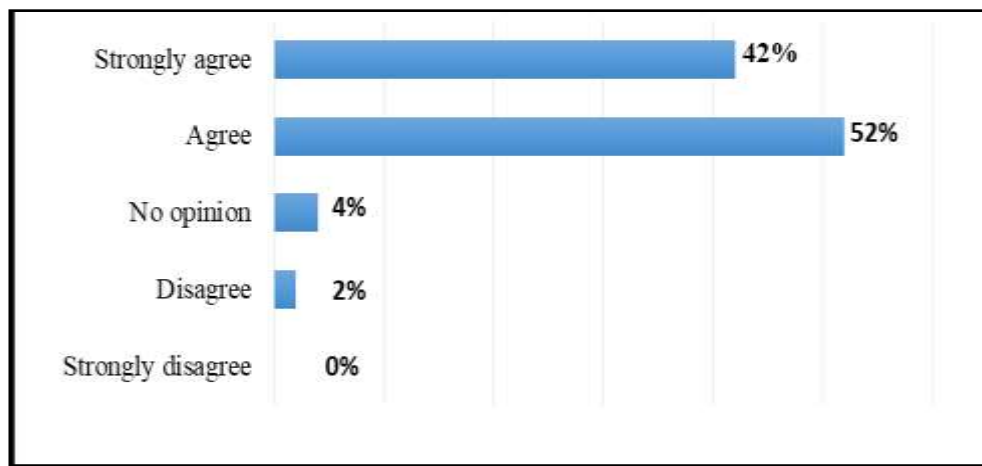


Figure 1. Students' perception of the internship experience in terms of maturity and responsibility.

As shown in Table 2, students might get a sense of actual job characteristics through a realistic job review. They supposed that they had chances to perform meaningful tasks based on the degree that they evaluated skill variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback of their internship program. The interns found that the internship required them to use several of various skills and talents to do many different things at work (3.44), as 88% of participants thought the degree of using skills was from "about right" to "too much". They felt that the work they did was very crucial for the internship organization (3.16) and they also had considerable opportunities for independence and freedom in how they did their work (3.32). Further, the co-worker or supervisor as well as the work itself provided students with necessary feedback about whether they were performing well (3.28).

When it came to working environment characteristics, the study just examined two aspects including co-worker support and supervisor support. It is evident from this dataset that most students positively valued the professional and harmonious relationship with their supervisor and other members of staff, with a mean score of nearly 4.0.

However, the findings revealed that students expressed their dissatisfaction with their work hours and their compensation. They claimed that they had few flexible working hours (only 2.36) maybe because they had to work overtime or the internship duration was too short. Besides, 29/50 respondents stated that they were not paid. And the mean score of 1.86 indicated that the interns were not pleased that they were not paid well.

Table 2. Data summary of job satisfaction (n = 50)

Job Characteristics	Far too little (1)		Too little (2)		About right (3)		Too much (4)		Far too much (5)		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	
Skill variety	1	2	5	10	24	48	11	22	9	18	3.44
Task significance	0	0	13	26	21	42	11	22	5	10	3.16
Autonomy	0	0	8	16	23	46	14	28	5	10	3.32
Feedback	0	0	11	22	21	42	11	22	7	14	3.28
Work Environment Characteristics	Strongly disagree (1)		Disagree (2)		No opinion (3)		Agree (4)		Strongly Agree (5)		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Supervisory support	0	0	5	10	15	30	20	40	10	20	3.7
Coworker support	0	0	2	4	13	26	19	38	16	32	3.98
Contextual Factors	Far too little (1)		Too little (2)		About right (3)		Too much (4)		Far too much (5)		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Flexibility of work hours	11	22	20	40	11	22	6	12	2	4	2.36
Paid satisfaction (n = 29)	11	37.9	13	44.8	3	10.3	2	6.9	0	0	1.86

In general, Figure 2 shows that the interns in the current study reported a high level of overall satisfaction, as 54% agreed and 22% strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their internship. Though, according to the

survey data, the number of thinking of quitting the internship is still high, as 30% of participants agreed with this. This figure poses the fact that some students were completely dissatisfied with their internship.

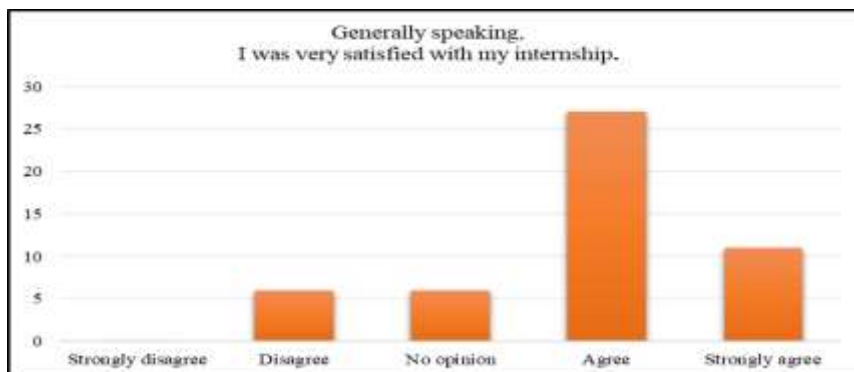


Figure 2. General internship satisfaction.

In general, Figure 2 shows that the interns in the current study reported a high level of overall satisfaction, as 54% agreed and 22% strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their internship. Though, according to the survey data, the number of thinking of quitting the internship is still high, as 30% of participants agreed with this. This figure poses the fact that some students were completely dissatisfied with their internship.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Generally, the results of the survey showed that UEF English-major students get strong agreement on the major benefits of the internship program. This study has many similarities with previous studies. For example, Emenheiser et al. [11] found that a majority of respondents were satisfied with their internship which strengthened their problem-solving ability in the hospitality industry. Similarly, a study by Busby et al., [26] stated that students were satisfied with their internship, especially in the areas of technical skills and knowledge which improved during internship. However, it also found that the intern students in UEF still have their own perceptions. Interestingly, the UEF intern students pay more attention to the development of their personal traits. According to the ratings given by the students, the most benefit widely perceived by the interns was that the internship assisted them to be more mature and made them more responsible for facing workplace challenges. It thus leads to professional profiles for the students. In agreement with Lam and Ching [1], the findings in this paper show that English major students have a positive perception of the benefits accrued in the areas of learning experience such as the ability to observe, analyze, and apply theoretical knowledge to the practice, the expansion of career networking contacts. The majority of the interns suppose that the internships help improve the marketability of graduates in the labor market and face the reality of the business world with less anxiety. This finding concurs with those by Busby and

Gibson [10], Zhou [20] who remarked the internship program can improve an intern's labor market value. The students thus accept that they understand more clearly which areas of their academic degree have the greatest employment potential. Moreover, the findings also mention that students have given high feedback on supporting from supervisors and coworkers an important tool in academic degrees, and a differentiating factor in their Curriculum Vitae. Besides the efficacy of internships, supervisor evaluation during the internship program was valuable in learning from mistakes and understanding the interpersonal nature of the work environment from UEF students' point of view.

In terms of internship satisfaction, UEF English major students reported relatively high levels with 54% agreeing and 22% strongly agreeing that they were very pleased with their practicum. Further, when interns actually participate fully in the internship, day-to-day experiences with job characteristics, work environment characteristics, and contextual factors throughout the internship will influence satisfaction levels. And, in fact, that was what this study discovered. This finding is in agreement with those by Busby [26]. In comparison with job characteristics, work environment characteristics are found to be stronger factors that affect internship satisfaction. The samples are particularly comfortable and pleasant when they have good relationships with their supervisors and colleagues. This finding affirms Hackman and Oldham [8] who exhaustively examined job satisfaction in terms of compensation and colleague relationship.

From another perspective, it is fascinating that most interns have negative perceptions of contextual factors. They are unsatisfied with their level of compensation and work hours. The interns thus do not like the short internship duration, work overload, and level of payment, however, internships are temporary in nature, and they may be more willing to accept problematic contextual factors. In short, the

findings identified co-workers, supervisory support, and skill variety as key aspects to make an impact on the internship satisfaction of English-majored students in UEF.

This study aimed to get a better understanding of UEF intern students' perceptions and how they were satisfied with their internship experiences. Based on theory and the findings, at least two things appear to be at work here. First, this study revealed that the internship program was beneficial to interns because it helped them to gain real-world experience and knowledge about the environment of a real workplace. The students generally have high mean value towards various career factors, therein they particularly view internships as venues for developing their maturity and responsibility needed in the professional world. Also, the internships provided chances for interns in the labor market. The students also valued considerably the supervisor's evaluation. Thus, desirable social experiences during the internship period can lead to a change in students' perceptions. Second, the study demonstrates that students highly rate their internship experience. In a specific way, many of the individual predictors of internship satisfaction related to job characteristics and work environment characteristics such as skill variety, autonomy, regular feedback, and co-worker, and supervisor support, are reasonably fit for students' learning and development. In contrast, the set of contextual factors was negatively viewed by students. For instance, low pay, routine tasks, and long working hours were among the reasons that influence student satisfaction. To limit such dissatisfaction, faculty members and universities should capture the students' perception in order to help to place students in internships with characteristics associated with satisfying experiences. Moreover, educational institutions should prepare students on the expectations and the working culture in order to minimize the dissatisfaction created by the long working hours and the occasional poor organization of

work. In addition, it is suggested that the internship period should be two weeks longer.

Therefore, the results of this study can assist host companies to have a narrower view of the preparation needed in the process of organizing an effective internship program. When designing internships, it is crucial for an industrial organization to make sure that interns' responsibilities and their everyday jobs are part of the organization.

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APPENDIX

In survey questionnaire, job satisfaction was measured using modified versions of Hackman and Oldham's (1975, 1980) general job satisfaction and job characteristics scales.

Part 1. Perception Towards the Internship Program

(Scale: Strongly Agree/Agree/No opinion/Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

1. The internship is very important for training graduates of your academic degree.
2. The internship improves the professional profiles of students.
3. The internship allows me to observe, to analyze, and to relate the theoretical component to the work reality.
4. The internship allowed the students to be more mature and be more responsible in order to face professional challenges.
5. The internship increases the student's chances of being integrated in the labor market
6. The internship allowed me to understand which areas of my academic degree have the greatest employability potential.
7. I feel that the internship will be a differentiating factor in my CV valued by the companies.
8. The internships allowed me to improve my career networking contacts.
9. Supervisor evaluation during the internship program was valuable in learning from mistakes and understanding interpersonal nature of work environment.

Part 2. Job Satisfaction

A. Job Characteristics (Scale: Far Too Little/Too Little/About Right/Too Much/Far Too Much)

10. To what extent did the internship require you to do many different things at work, using a variety of your skills and talents?
11. In general, how significant was your internship? That is, were the results of your work likely to significantly affect the internship organization?
12. How much autonomy was there in your internship? (To what extent did your internship permit you to decide on your own how to go about doing the work?)
13. Did the actual work itself provide clues about how well you were doing - aside from any "feedback" that co-workers or supervisors may provide?

B. Work Environment Characteristics (Scale: Strongly Agree/Agree/Neutral/Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

14. My supervisor helped make my internship a pleasant experience.
15. My coworkers helped make my internship a good experience.

C. Contextual Factors

16. Were your internship work hours flexible?
Far Too Little/Too Little/About Right/Too Much/Far Too Much
17. My internship was paid.
Yes No
18. Were you given adequate compensation for the work you did at your internship?
Far Too Little/Too Little/About Right/Too Much/Far Too Much

Part 3. General Satisfaction

19. Generally speaking, I was very satisfied with my internship.
Strongly Agree/Agree/Neutral/Disagree/Strongly Disagree.
20. I frequently thought of quitting my internship.
Strongly Agree/Agree/Neutral/Disagree/Strongly Disagree.