

# THE UNIVERSITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AND ITS EFFECTS ON STUDENTS UNDER STUDENTS' AND ENTERPRISES' PERSPECTIVES

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## Abstract:

*This study aims to evaluate the role of internship on students. In this study, the authors surveyed senior students of a private university in Vietnam, who took part in the internship period before graduating their's internship enterprises. Findings indicated that providing students with formal, supported practical opportunities in the work place positively impacts on enhancing students' personal competencies and attitudes to some extent.*

**Key words:** *Intership program; Higher education; Students and enterprises' perspectives.*

## 1. Introduction

The current context of globalization and international integration requires that higher education in the world in general and Vietnam in particular need to renovate curricula and teaching methods. Particularly, higher education institutions are called upon to better prepare graduates with relevant employable skills as the result of the increasing competition in the labor (Chen, Shen & Gosling, 2018).

Besides, the requirements of recruiters keep increasing because of the rapid changes in requirements from customers and service users, especially in the tourism industry. Tourism recruiters throughout the world are looking for work-ready graduates that possess a wide range of competencies and qualities (Yorke & Harvey, 2005). They typically employ individuals who

have not only specific academic skills and knowledge, but also a proactive attitude and the capability to perceive and react to problems creatively and autonomously (Fallows & Stevens, 2000). In other words, employers expect employability skills in the form of basic knowledge, skills and attitudes, and graduates need to require such skills to achieve career success (Overtoom, 1999; Wang & Tsai, 2014).

Therefore, some universities in Vietnam have rearranged their program curricula with the inclusion of internship programs as a mandatory component to meet the growing demand from the labor market. Instead of simply studying in the lecture hall, students are sent to related companies for a specific duration of time to experience real work related to their field. These

programs help to connect students' classroom learning with the work environment thereby developing valuable hands-on experience. In addition, internship programs are chosen, and well received because of their benefits to students when giving them the opportunity to communicate and establish connections with supervisors in the industry and helping them to clarify career expectations. These advantages exist across countries and industries, and especially in tourism and hospitality (Beggs, Ross, & Goodwin, 2008; Binder et al., 2015).

This paper aims to evaluate the internship program at tourism and hospitality businesses of a non-public university in Vietnam to find out the benefits that the internship brings to students under students and enterprises' perspectives.

### **2. Literature review**

Internship is a practicum-based education experience, whereby students practice in real world exposure to apply and consolidate theoretical knowledge and improve their professional skills. Basically, this is the period of time when students get to work at a business or enterprise as real employees. During the internship, students must comply with the regulations of the internship place; they are monitored, managed, and evaluated not only by the enterprises but also by the university. Students have the opportunity to practice professional skills, thereby helping them to gradually improve their skills, perfect their sense of and affection for the profession. This practicum-based education is seen as a valuable step in integrating classroom learning with real-world exposure; and incorporating internships in higher education programs brings many benefits (Chen et al., 2018). In particular, this program is considered an indispensable part of training programs in the hospitality and tourism industry (Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2016).

Firstly, internship is believed to be an opportunity to bridge the gap of learned theory and practical reality (Fox, 2001). Davies (1990) and Neuman (1999) argued that this is an opportunity to test skills, interests and career options in real work situations while gaining an

edge over "lack of experience" competitors in the job market.

Secondly, internship gives undergraduate students opportunities to explore their future careers, gain deeper knowledge of the work, and begin to think about their future careers based on the experiences gained after completing their internship (Nelson, 1994).

In addition, internship is seen as an experiential learning opportunity for students to make network, learn about new fields or gain work experience (Seymore, II, & Higham, 1996). Since then, internships have been shown to have significant benefits in improving student employment (Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016).

Based on a survey of 80 students at select universities in Palestine, Rabayah and Sartawi (2008) found that internships had a positive impact on students' future employability in the workplace because more than 50% of students got a job after the training.

In 2014, 978 students at a university in California, USA were surveyed and said they were 2.5 times more confident in their ability to be employed after participating in an internship program (Qenani, MacDougall, & Sexton, 2014).

In their study, Ishengoma and Vaaland (2016) surveyed 404 people including students, lecturers and businesses of more than 20 companies in Tanzania about the internship process. The results showed that the internship activities at enterprises were strongly perceived to improve the employability of students, especially students who did internships at companies, then jointed projects and the involvement of companies in modernizing university curricula.

When studying the role of the internship on the employability of hospitality students in Taiwan, Chen et al (2018) showed that students' satisfaction when participating in the internship program training has a positive effect on students' employability upon graduation. According to the paper, employment is considered an important goal for students while participating in internship programs. In addition,

programs enhancing student employability will increase overall student satisfaction with the internship program. At the same time, the factors affecting the satisfaction of students with the internship program are also mentioned by the author.

In this study, internship is mentioned as a factor to help students improve their own competencies and attitude, thereby improving their employability - the ability to get a job initially, maintain jobs and get new jobs if required (Hillage and Pollard, p.1, 1998) after graduation. These criteria to assess the effects of internship on students are based on the point of view of Liu, Qiu, & Hu, (2006) including four main dimensions:

1. General Competencies;
2. Professional Competencies;
3. Attitude towards work;
4. Confidence in career planning.

### 3. Research approach and methods

This case study employed a quantitative

**Table 1: Students' perspectives on internship**

No	Content	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I was well informed about the internship program	4.43	1.02
2	I was supported by teachers in finding an internship place	4	1.26
3	I received enthusiastic support from teachers when encountering difficulties during my internship	4.47	0.94
4	My intern position was related to my major	4.43	1.02
5	The colleagues at the intern enterprise helped me during my internship	4.51	1.02
6	I could participate in the production process, and had access to information and data of the intern	4.43	1.02
7	I got support for accommodation, travel or get paid	4.43	1.02
8	I had the opportunity to apply my majored knowledge and skills at my internship position	4.20	0.98
9	During my internship, I was always dedicated to my work and willing to learn	4.49	1.00

According to Table 1, all the students evaluated their internships at their enterprises based on three bases: support from lecturers (questions 1-3), at enterprises (4-8) and themselves (question 9). The average rating (mean) of the elements is at Good (4) or higher.

method. 49 fourth year students (18 males and 31 females) of Faculty of Tourism and Foreign languages at a non-public university in Viet Nam as well as 37 related enterprises were surveyed. The questionnaires were given and collected at the end of the intership program. The questions used a 5-point Likert scale (1 implies very weak/ very disagree while 5 implies very good/ very agree). The main questions focusing on the effects of internship on students was adapted from Liu et al. (2006) including four major dimension: General Competencies; Professional Competencies; Attitude towards work; Confidence in career planning.

After being collected, data were analyzed by SPSS 21.0 to find out the effects of internship on students.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Students' perspectives on the internship program

The students' responses to questions on the internship program are presented in table 1 below

Thus, during the internship at the enterprise, the students received support not only at the school but also at the enterprise. The numbers show that students are satisfied with their internship.

#### 4.2. Students' perspectives on their competencies and attitudes after their

*internship.*

The four main dimensions of students' employability (Liu et al., 2006) after the internship are described in the following table 2:

**Table 2: Students' perspectives on their competencies and attitudes after their internship.**

No	Content	Mean	Standard Deviation
A	<i>General competencies</i>		
1	My ability to express myself and to communicate with others has improved after internship	4.24	1.01
2	My ability to manage time has improved after internship	4.37	1.01
3	My leadership capabilities have improved after internship	4.22	1.02
4	My ability to innovate has improved after internship	4.26	0.99
5	My ability to work with others as a team has improved after internship	4.36	1.05
6	My emotional control and tolerance of pressure has improved after internship	4.32	1.00
B	<i>Professional Competencies</i>		
7	My foreign language proficiency has improved after internship	3.97	0.98
8	My professional knowledge and skills have improved after internship	4.26	1.03
10	My ability to apply theory to actual work has improved after internship	4.22	1.6
11	My ability to discover and solve problems has improved after internship	4.20	1.04
C	<i>Attitude Towards Work</i>		
12	My willingness to learn has increased after internship	4.36	1.01
13	My ability to adapt to changes has improved after internship	4.36	1.01
14	My dedication to work has increased significantly after internship	4.34	1.01
D	<i>Career Planning and Confidence</i>		
15	Internship helps me understand and plan my career	4.32	1.02
16	Internship gives me a further understanding of the industry and benefits me when choosing my job in the future	4.49	1.02
17	Internship enhances my ability to land a job in the future	4.29	1.02

*Adapted from Liu et al., 2006*

The data in Table 2 shows that in spite of difference in the level of assessment, all students agree that from attitude to work ability of students is improved. The top three factors as reported by the students are further understanding of the industry and benefits me when choosing jobs in the future (4.49), ability to manage time (4.37), and ability to work with others as a team (4.36), or willingness to learn (4.36), or ability to adapt to changes. The bottom

ranked three categories are leadership capabilities (4.22), ability to discover and solve problems (4.20), and especially foreign language proficiency (3.98).

**4.3. Enterprises' evaluation on students during their internship**

The analysis of the survey shows the positive evaluation from enterprises on students' performances, which shown clearly on table 3 below:

**Table 3: Enterprises' evaluation on students during their internship**

No	Content	Mean	Standard Deviation
A	<i>General competencies</i>		
1	Students' contributions to the company	4.37	0.83
2	Ability to work with colleagues, customers	4.45	0.60
3	Ability to work in a team	4.48	0.69
4	Ability to solve problems	4.27	0.76
5	Ability to innovate	4.32	0.74
6	Ability to adapt to changes and integrate	4.37	0.89
B	<i>Professional Competencies</i>		
7	Foreign language proficiency	4	0.88
8	Ability to propose technical and process improvement plans	4.18	0.84
9	ability to apply professional theory to actual work	4.20	0.84
C	<i>Career Planning and Confidence</i>		
10	Attitudes to work	4.62	0.79
11	Autonomy in work	4.45	0.76
12	Ability to learn	4.54	0.73

According to table 3, the most appreciated evaluations from enterprises for interns are their attitudes during the internship (4.62), followed by their ability to learn (4.54) and their ability to work in groups (4.48). although professional competencies such as: foreign language ability, proposal of technical improvement plans, internships bring positive results in terms of improving competencies, work attitudes as well as students' future employability (Qenani, MacDougall, & Sexton, 2014). This is similar to the students' and enterprises' perception indicated by this study. In addition, businesses appreciate quality graduates, and internships provide valuable real work experience and enhance students' work skills before graduation (Yang et al., 2016). The results of this study show in more detail what factors in employability will be enhanced as a result of the internship process.

### **5.1. Students' perspectives on the internship program**

In this study, students took their internship at the beginning of their fourth year and then returned to university before graduating. The survey results point out students' satisfaction with the internship process.

technological processes, and application of specialized knowledge to work practice are highly assessed (4.00, 4.18, 4.20), they account for the lowest rank compared to other criteria.

### **5. Discussion**

Studies have strongly shown that enterprises, educational institutions, and students all find

From the beginning, students were well informed about the internship program. They received support from teachers when finding an internship location as well as during the internship. The teachers were said to be enthusiastic to give supports to their students when they encountered difficulties during the internship. Additionally, students were provided with favorable conditions and support from enterprises. According to their responses, interns had the opportunity to apply their majored knowledge and skills and they themselves had a good attitude to complete their internship.

### **5.2. Students' perspectives on their competencies and attitudes after their internship.**

The survey results reveal that internship lead to positive outcomes on students especially students' employability, which shows the same opinion as Yang et al (2016) showing that the internship has provided practical work

experience and improved working skills for students before graduation. Among the four dimensions of Employability: General Competencies, Professional Competencies, Attitude to Work, Career Planning and Confidence, it is interesting that Professional Competencies did not show a significant result. It suggests after the internship, students come out of the experience more prepared with an understanding of career needs, attitude to work and general competencies, but not so for Professional Competencies.

In particular, when experiencing work in a real-life environment, students' General competencies such as communication ability, teamwork, leadership, time management, emotional control, pressure, and innovation in work have been improved remarkably. Besides, after a period of exposure to the real environment, students are more confident in planning their careers and they have chances to open their network which is essential for their employment in the future.

Finally, despite its less improvement than others, Professional Competencies is still known to improve. Students' professional knowledge and skills are improved after they are experienced in the real working environment. Students have the opportunity to apply theory to real work, thereby improving students' ability to detect and solve problems. Their foreign language proficiency is considered lower than the rest of the factors, but due to the conditions of contact with guests, their foreign language ability has also been improved. The results here might be an artifact of the characteristics of the intern enterprises, which lead to the university's strategies for finding more suitable enterprises for students in the future.

### **5.3. Enterprises' evaluation on students during their internship**

As reported, it appears that enterprises had a positive perception on the internship program and the interns as well.

Overall, the employers appreciated intern's contribution to their company and they found that students got improvement during their

internship, which were evitable to intern's employability. According to employers' answers, interns had good attitude to work, they were autonomous in their work and always ready to learn. Besides, their General Competencies improved a lot during their internship, which includes the ability to work in a team, work with customers, adapt to changes and integrate. As a result, not the students but the companies got the benefits from internship. However, like being mentioned above, it is interesting that professional competencies seemed to be less improved than others, especially foreign language proficiency. This finding urges educators and students to spend more time training and practicing this feature.

### **6. Results**

This study has produced some interesting results for higher education institutions. Firstly, the research is consistent with a common understanding of the importance of internships. Secondly, internships provide students with real-world work experience, helping students improve their competencies and attitudes - essential factors for improving students' employability after graduation. Moreover, the findings of this study provide specifically which competencies are enhanced after the internship as well as which ones need to be supplemented after the internship. Specifically, according to the results obtained, some professional competencies such as language skills did not show significant improvement. This presents an opportunity for the higher education institution to strategically respond to this need when interns return to campus.

However, this study still has its limitations. The sample of this research consists of students from different majors at the same department of an educational institution and was purposive sampling in nature. As a result, in spite of validation, the results of the research should not be over interpreted and may have limited generalizability. It is suggested that samples should be sourced from different departments of different institutes and random sampling can be used to infer situations throughout Vietnam.



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## HIỆU QUẢ CỦA CHƯƠNG TRÌNH THỰC TẬP TẠI DOANH NGHIỆP ĐỐI VỚI NGƯỜI HỌC - DƯỚI QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA SINH VIÊN VÀ DOANH NGHIỆP

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### **Tóm tắt:**

*Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm đánh giá vai trò của thực tập đối với sinh viên. Trong nghiên cứu này, các tác giả đã tiến hành khảo sát các sinh viên năm cuối của một trường đại học ngoài công lập ở Việt Nam đã tham gia kỳ thực tập tại doanh nghiệp trước khi tốt nghiệp cũng như các doanh nghiệp nơi mà các sinh viên đó thực tập. Các phát hiện chỉ ra rằng việc cung cấp cho sinh viên các cơ hội thực tế chính thống, hỗ trợ tại nơi làm việc có tác động mạnh mẽ tới việc phát triển các năng lực cá nhân cũng như thái độ của sinh viên.*

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