

EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF CHALLENGES ON STUDENTS' INTERNSHIP SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Internships serve as a critical bridge between academic education and professional development, providing students with opportunities to gain practical skills and workplace experience. This study aims to explore the challenges influencing internship satisfaction, focusing on key factors such as self-confidence, communication, health or physical requirements, problem-solving skills, supervision, working environment, and infrastructure adequacy. Using a causal research approach, data will be collected from 214 students at UiTM Kedah through structured questionnaires. This research highlights the importance of understanding how these challenges affect internship satisfaction and offers insights for improving internship programs. Practical implications include enhancing program structures, fostering mentorship opportunities, and addressing organizational challenges to ensure meaningful learning experiences. Recommendations for future research include expanding the scope to multiple institutions, employing longitudinal designs, and incorporating qualitative methods for deeper insights. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on internship satisfaction, aiming to align educational outcomes with industry expectations.

Keywords: challenges, students, internship satisfaction, academic

Introduction

Internships have emerged as a cornerstone of higher education globally, providing students with a blend of academic learning and practical exposure (Bhattacharya & Neelam, 2018). Defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) as “a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with

practical application and skills development in a professional setting,” internships offer invaluable opportunities for students to transition seamlessly into the professional world. These programs are increasingly recognized for their role in enhancing students' confidence, skillsets, and readiness to meet real-world challenges.

The global distribution of internships across various sectors underscores their significance in professional development. According to the International Labour Organization (2021), public administration accounted for 27% of internships, followed by international organizations (22%), private sector opportunities (25%), and NGOs (21%), with the remaining 5% in miscellaneous fields. This diversity highlights the adaptability of internships to cater to varied career paths and aspirations, emphasizing their pivotal role in shaping the workforce of tomorrow.

In Malaysia, internships form an integral part of academic programs in higher education. These programs aim to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application by placing students in organizations aligned with their fields of study (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2020). Malaysian internships typically involve responsibilities such as research, administrative work, and project management under the supervision of experienced professionals. Beyond skill-building, these internships provide students with networking opportunities and insights into the local business environment, equipping them for future careers.

The increasing importance of internships in Malaysia is reflected in the rising number of applications over the years. According to Malaysia Education Statistics (2016-2020), internship applications grew steadily, from 50,531 in 2016 to 53,202 in 2020. This upward trend illustrates the growing emphasis universities place on internships as a critical component of professional development, enabling students to gain hands-on experience and prepare for workforce demands. Such programs not only benefit students but also offer employers a pipeline of well-trained, future-ready talent.

Despite their growing popularity, internships are not without challenges. Past studies have highlighted issues such as communication barriers, lack of social interaction with supervisors, inadequate internet access, and difficulties balancing responsibilities (Widaningsih et al., 2022). Other factors, such as pay status, supervision quality, and working conditions, have also been identified as influencing internship satisfaction (Rogers et al., 2019). However, there remains limited research focusing on how these challenges impact overall satisfaction and career readiness.

Understanding the challenges faced by interns is crucial to developing support mechanisms that enhance the internship experience. Recent studies, such as those by Nga Thi Vo et al. (2022), emphasize the importance of identifying and addressing these obstacles to improve satisfaction levels. Addressing issues like self-confidence, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and infrastructure gaps can help create a more enriching internship experience, better preparing students for the professional world.

One effective strategy to tackle these challenges is implementing structured mentorship programs within organizations. Mentorship programs pair interns with experienced professionals who can provide guidance, advice, and industry insights, enabling interns to navigate challenges more effectively (Siegel, 2020). Such programs foster a supportive learning environment, enhance professional growth, and improve overall internship satisfaction by creating a sense of belonging and engagement.

Research suggests that mentorship programs not only benefit interns but also contribute positively to organizational culture. For instance, Holyoak (2013) notes that knowledge sharing and integration into professional communities are more likely when interns are supported by well-connected mentors. This approach not only boosts interns' confidence and career

preparedness but also strengthens organizational talent pipelines, fostering a culture of learning and development.

In summary, while internships are pivotal in bridging the gap between academic and professional spheres, challenges related to satisfaction remain a significant concern. Addressing these challenges through initiatives like mentorship programs can enhance the internship experience, making it more meaningful and impactful for students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the specific challenges influencing internship satisfaction, such as self-confidence, communication skills, supervision quality, working conditions, and inadequate infrastructure, while exploring actionable strategies to overcome them.

Finally, the article is structured as follows: it begins with an introduction, followed by a comprehensive literature review, a detailed conceptual framework, an explanation of the methodology, and concludes with key findings and recommendations.

Literature Review

Internship Satisfaction

In academic literature, 'internship satisfaction' is widely regarded as a critical outcome of internship experiences. Sartika et al. (2023) introduced the term 'student satisfaction' to describe similar experiences within internship contexts. According to Rosyidah et al. (2020), internship satisfaction is shaped by the emotional responses—positive or negative—derived from the comparison between interns' expectations and their actual performance. Beyond emotional fulfillment, internship satisfaction also encompasses achieving specific goals and objectives set by the internship program, highlighting its practical dimension. Consequently, this study examines internship satisfaction in relation to independent variables, including self-confidence, communication, health or physical requirements, problem-solving skills, working environment, supervision, and infrastructure adequacy.

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence plays a pivotal role in personal and professional development, encompassing beliefs about one's ability to achieve success. Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy, a core component of self-confidence, relates to an individual's confidence in overcoming challenges. Similarly, Rosenberg (1965) linked self-confidence to self-esteem, reflecting one's perception of self-worth. Rouault et al. (2019) emphasized that confidence forms an integral part of self-performance evaluations, affecting both local and global estimates of task effectiveness. This ability to assess one's competence directly impacts decision-making and performance, particularly when feedback is absent, leading individuals to rely heavily on self-assessed confidence. McLain (2023) further explored confidence in complex decision-making settings, such as business strategy games, highlighting that confidence in the decision-making process significantly predicts team and individual performance. This differentiation between confidence in decisions and confidence in the decision-making process underscores the multidimensional nature of self-confidence in professional environments.

Communication

Communication is integral to interpersonal and professional interactions. Derived from the Latin word *communico*, meaning "to share," communication is the exchange of ideas, information, or emotions (Marume et al., 2016). Azis et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of clear communication in conveying messages effectively. Similarly, Scms-Cochin (2011) emphasized that effective communication is crucial for ensuring mutual understanding. This study aims to explore how communication challenges impact internship satisfaction.

Health or Physical Requirements

Health, encompassing both physical and mental well-being, significantly impacts an intern's ability to perform effectively. According to Chang (2024), physical and mental health are critical components of employee performance, influencing motivation, focus, and job satisfaction. Similarly, Chen et al. (2022) highlighted that work stress and mental health are closely linked, with poor mental health negatively affecting workplace productivity. Additionally, Proper and van Oostrom (2019) demonstrated the effectiveness of workplace health promotion interventions in improving physical and mental health outcomes, advocating for holistic approaches to health management. This study examines the relationship between health or physical requirements and internship satisfaction, contributing to the broader understanding of health's role in professional performance.

Problem-Solving Skills

Problem-solving skills enable interns to navigate challenges independently and collaboratively. Ismet et al. (2020) highlighted that problem-solving involves critical thinking and adaptability, essential for workplace success. Karla et al. (2022) emphasized that problem-solving competencies allow individuals to identify, analyze, and resolve issues effectively, contributing to improved workplace performance and organizational success. Harefa and Purba (2020) further underscored that problem-solving integrates conceptual understanding and procedural knowledge, enabling interns to address workplace challenges effectively. This study explores the impact of problem-solving skills on internship satisfaction.

Supervision

Effective supervision is a cornerstone of successful internships. According to Hora et al. (2023), supervision is significantly associated with intern satisfaction and career development, highlighting the importance of clear communication, availability, and constructive feedback in supervisory relationships. Guiney and Newman (2021) described supervision as a relational and developmental process, emphasizing its role in facilitating professional growth through guidance and mentorship. However, Hora et al. (2020) observed that some organizations fail to utilize internships as learning experiences, often treating interns as temporary labor, which limits their potential for skill development and career readiness.

Working Environment

The working environment significantly influences internship experiences. Proper and van Oostrom (2019) emphasized that working conditions, including organizational and physical factors, have a profound impact on job satisfaction and productivity. Furthermore, Saidi et al. (2019) demonstrated that a supportive work environment fosters better performance and reduces workplace stress.

Inadequate Infrastructure

Infrastructure quality directly impacts the effectiveness of internships. According to Yunita et al. (2023), infrastructure, including facilities and technology, plays a critical role in creating conducive learning environments, directly influencing performance outcomes. Similarly, Santosa et al. (2024) highlighted that inadequate infrastructure, such as insufficient workspace or outdated technology, can hinder skill development and job readiness among vocational college students. Additionally, Proper and van Oostrom (2019) emphasized the importance of workplace health promotion and infrastructure improvements in enhancing productivity and satisfaction in professional settings.

Relationship Between Self-Confidence and Internship Satisfaction

Based on the previous study by Nga Thi Vo et al. (2021), they asserted that there was a connection between self-confidence and internship satisfaction. This is because the lower the self-confidence preparation of interns, the lower the level of internship satisfaction. Furthermore, a prior study by Zerihun (2019) also highlighted a link between self-confidence and students' satisfaction with internships. Zerihun described the deficiency in self-confidence as one of the weakest areas for students to achieve satisfaction during internships. Therefore, this study would like to hypothesize the effect of self-confidence on internship satisfaction.

H1: There is a positive relationship between self-confidence and internship satisfaction.

Relationship Between Communication and Internship Satisfaction

According to a study by Nga Thi Vo et al. (2021), they discovered a correlation between communication and the satisfaction of students with their internships. The research emphasizes the significance of effective communication in shaping internship satisfaction. Similar statements are also found in other studies by Azis et al., (2023), who highlighted that practical experiences gained during internships can enhance students' communication abilities. This highlights how crucial communication skills are in readying students for their future professions and elevating internship programs' overall quality. Meanwhile, in the research study by Benson (2013), he examined the communication style between supervisors and interns, noting that supervisors restrict communication to work-related discussions and casual conversations. This would affect student's satisfaction with the internship. Therefore, this study would like to hypothesize the effect of communication on internship satisfaction:

H2: There is a positive effect between communication and internship satisfaction.

Relationship Between Health and Internship Satisfaction

Referring to the study by Issa et al. (2021), health-related quality of life significantly correlates with internship satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of physical and psychological well-being in professional growth. Similarly, Lin et al. (2019) demonstrated that mental and physical health challenges, such as burnout and depression, negatively impact the quality of life and performance during internships. Maaravi et al. (2020) highlighted that a supportive work environment, combined with strategies addressing health-related barriers, enhances both satisfaction and productivity among interns. These findings underscore the need to explore the relationship between health and internship satisfaction, focusing on strategies to support interns' well-being.

H3: There is a positive effect between health and internship satisfaction.

Relationship Between Problem-Solving Skills and Internship Satisfaction

Based on the previous study by Nga Thi Vo et al., (2021), they asserted that there was a connection between problem-solving skills and students' satisfaction with their internship. Tasks assigned during internships often emphasize the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Rodzalan et al. (2020) highlighted that internships significantly enhance students' critical thinking skills, particularly when tasks involve independence and problem-solving under supervision. Similarly, Philippakos et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of structured problem-solving tasks that integrate critical thinking strategies to improve overall performance and decision-making. However, inadequate guidance during internships can hinder students' engagement with complex tasks, reducing their ability to

develop these essential skills (Rahman, 2019).

H4: There is a positive effect between problem-solving skills and internship satisfaction.

Relationship Between Supervision and Internship Satisfaction

Referring to the study by Nga Thi Vo et al. (2021), they investigate the connection between supervision and internship satisfaction. Supervisory guidance significantly influences internship satisfaction by providing interns with the necessary support and fostering a positive work environment. Hora et al. (2023) emphasized that clear communication, availability, and constructive feedback from supervisors are critical factors contributing to intern satisfaction and career development. Similarly, Ali et al. (2020) found that supportive supervisory styles enhance internship satisfaction by promoting learning and reducing stress. These findings underscore the importance of effective supervision in ensuring that internships provide meaningful and developmental experiences. H5: There is a positive effect between supervision and internship satisfaction.

Relationship Between Working Environment and Internship Satisfaction

According to a study by Nga Thi Vo et al. (2021), they found a link between the work environment and students' satisfaction with their internships. The research emphasizes the significance of both the working environment and colleagues in shaping internship satisfaction. Meanwhile, other studies echo similar sentiments. Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou (2013) notes that students often have negative perceptions of their working environments. They view disorganized workspaces as demotivating, while professional environments are seen as motivating since students expect professionalism. Tasks assigned during internships often emphasize the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. In addition, Maaravi et al. (2020) emphasized the role of supportive supervision and organizational atmosphere in enhancing interns' adaptability and performance, especially in dynamic work environments. These findings underscore the importance of structured internships that integrate challenging yet supportive environments to maximize intern growth and satisfaction.

H6: There is a positive effect between the working environment and internship satisfaction.

Relationship Between Inadequate Infrastructure and Internship Satisfaction

Infrastructure quality significantly influences internship satisfaction. A study by Ruslan et al. (2020) highlighted that organizational environment and contextual factors, including infrastructure, are critical determinants of internship satisfaction. Similarly, Hermawan et al. (2023) found that inadequate infrastructure and poorly organized systems negatively impact the learning and performance of interns, particularly in construction projects. These findings emphasize the importance of well-maintained facilities and resources to enhance the internship experience and satisfaction levels.

H7: There is a positive effect between inadequate infrastructure and internship satisfaction.

Underpinning Theory

In the context of internships, Sihombing (2021) employed academic theory to analyze factors influencing student satisfaction. The construction and validation of such theories are rooted in empirical research and systematic analysis. Researchers gather data, conduct experiments, and engage in theoretical evaluation to test and refine the assumptions that underpin these frameworks. The primary aim of academic theory is to elucidate why certain

phenomena occur by outlining the underlying mechanisms, causes, and processes that shape specific outcomes.

Academic theory also serves as a cornerstone for developing conceptual frameworks in research. These frameworks apply theoretical principles to a particular research problem, offering guidance on research design, methodology, and the interpretation of findings. Theories and conceptual frameworks are interconnected, with the former providing the intellectual foundation and the latter contextualizing the research problem within the broader body of knowledge.

In essence, academic theory is integral to justifying the relevance and importance of research. It establishes a systematic basis for inquiry, ensuring that the study is not only well-grounded in existing knowledge but also capable of contributing meaningful insights to the academic discourse.

Conceptual Framework

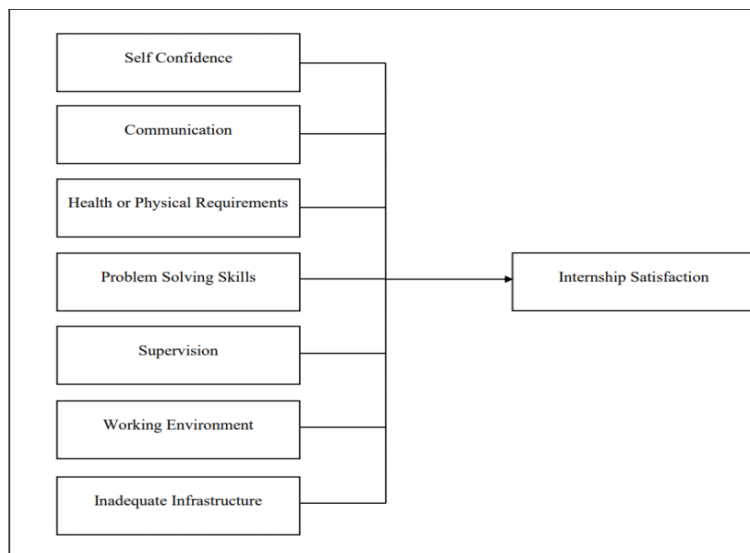


Figure 1: Research framework

Based on the research framework depicted in Figure 1, this study aims to examine the relationship between internship satisfaction, which serves as the dependent variable, and a range of independent variables, including self-confidence, communication, health or physical requirements, problem-solving skills, supervision, working environment, and inadequate infrastructure. Furthermore, investigating internship satisfaction is important for several kinds of reasons, particularly in organizational and scholarly settings. The reason we want to investigate challenges towards internship satisfaction is because we want to know whether the intern student is feeling satisfied or dissatisfied with the intern program (Rosyidah et al., 2020). Therefore, satisfying internships help students advance their careers which is if we foster positive experiences during internships, it will enhance students' employability since they will get real-world experience and practical skills. Thus, assessing internship satisfaction can aid in identifying areas that require enhancement and guarantee that internships equip students for future career opportunities (Kukreti et al., 2024). Investigating internships can significantly enhance program quality and align it with industry demands. Santosa et al. (2024) emphasized that improving internship quality through structured mentoring and tailored internship curricula positively impacts career adaptability and job search success. Similarly, Nicho et al. (2021) demonstrated that aligning internship programs with industry practices enhances students'

learning experiences and ensures that academic training meets practical demands. These findings highlight the importance of well-designed internships in equipping students with applicable skills and valuable industry exposure.

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this study will be to investigate the challenges influencing internship satisfaction, focusing on seven independent variables: self-confidence, communication, health or physical requirements, problem-solving skills, supervision, working environment, and inadequate infrastructure. By examining these factors, the study will aim to determine whether interns feel satisfied or dissatisfied with their internship experiences (Rosyidah et al., 2020). To achieve this, a causal research approach will be employed, which will explore cause-and-effect relationships by analyzing how changes in one variable influence another. For example, the study will investigate how specific challenges impact internship satisfaction, aiming to identify the most significant factors affecting the experience. The findings will contribute to designing more effective internship programs, ultimately enhancing the overall experience and satisfaction of interns.

Population and Sample Size

The population will refer to the entire group of subjects that the researcher aims to study and draw conclusions about, serving as the basis for making inferences. In this study, the population will comprise 821 students from the Faculty of Business and Management at UiTM Kedah. Since examining the entire population may be impractical, a sample of 214 students will be selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique ideal for targeting individuals with relevant expertise. This method will allow researchers to focus on participants most suitable for the study's objectives, ensuring insightful data collection while maintaining feasibility. The sample size will be determined based on the Krejcie and Morgan Table, which provides guidance on appropriate sample sizes for different population sizes, balancing precision and practicality. By employing this approach, the study will effectively investigate the challenges influencing internship satisfaction among students at UiTM Kedah.

Data Collection

The data for this study will be collected using a quantitative approach through the distribution of a questionnaire via Google Forms. This method will be selected for its efficiency, ease of use, and ability to reach a large audience within a short time frame. Google Forms will provide a platform that is cost-effective, user-friendly, and easily accessible to the target respondents, ensuring a higher response rate. The questionnaire will be designed to capture responses related to the key variables of the study: self-confidence, communication, health or physical requirements, problem-solving skills, supervision, working environment, and infrastructure adequacy. It will consist of structured questions, primarily using a Likert scale format, to measure the intensity of respondents' perceptions and experiences.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a widely used software for statistical analysis in research. SPSS will provide a robust platform for managing, analyzing, and interpreting data efficiently and accurately. The analysis process will involve descriptive statistics to summarize data, reliability testing to ensure consistency of the measures, and inferential statistics, such as regression analysis, to examine relationships between variables and test the study's hypotheses.

Conclusion

Internships serve as a critical bridge between academic learning and professional application, equipping students with essential skills and practical experience to transition into the workforce. This study aims to address the significant role of internships in fostering students' professional growth while investigating the challenges that impact internship satisfaction. By examining variables such as self-confidence, communication, health or physical requirements, problem-solving skills, supervision, working environment, and inadequate infrastructure, the study seeks to understand the factors influencing the overall internship experience.

Through a robust research design incorporating a causal approach, the study intends to analyze cause-and-effect relationships between these challenges and internship satisfaction. The findings will contribute to improving internship programs, helping educational institutions align their offerings with industry demands, and enhancing the quality of internship experiences. This research emphasizes the importance of addressing the identified challenges, as overcoming these obstacles can lead to higher levels of satisfaction, better career preparedness, and the development of a more skilled workforce.

The insights gained will benefit multiple stakeholders, including academic institutions, organizations, and policymakers, by highlighting actionable strategies to enhance the internship experience. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of internships as a transformative educational tool, ensuring that students gain not only technical expertise but also the confidence and adaptability needed for future success.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the data collection relied on self-reported responses, which may introduce biases such as social desirability or inaccuracies in recalling past experiences. Second, the study was limited to a single institution, UiTM Kedah, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other universities or regions with differing educational or cultural contexts. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study captures data at a single point in time, limiting the ability to observe changes or trends in internship satisfaction over a prolonged period. Finally, the study focused on a predefined set of variables and did not account for other potential factors, such as financial compensation, industry-specific challenges, or individual personality traits, which may also influence internship satisfaction.

To build on the findings of this study, future research could address its limitations by adopting several approaches. First, expanding the scope of the research to include multiple institutions or geographic regions would enhance the generalizability of the findings and account for contextual differences in internship programs. Second, employing a longitudinal research design could provide deeper insights into how internship satisfaction evolves over time, shedding light on the dynamic relationship between challenges and satisfaction. Additionally, incorporating variables such as financial compensation, cultural influences, mentorship quality, and industry-specific differences would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing internship satisfaction. Including qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could also complement quantitative findings by offering richer insights into interns' personal experiences and perceptions. Finally, future research should investigate the impact of digital tools, remote internships, and hybrid work models on satisfaction, particularly in light of the increasing prevalence of virtual internships in a post-pandemic world. These directions would collectively provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities surrounding internship satisfaction.

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