Developing Career Resources Through Work-Based Learning: A Qualitative Study on Internship Experiences

Merve Gerçek[1] , Cem Güney Özveren[2]

Abstract: *Work-based learning (WBL) is an educational approach that builds a bridge between theory and practice. While there has been much study on the effectiveness and success of internships in fields like health, engineering, and teaching, there is a scarcity of studies examining how internship experiences might impact the career outcomes of business students. Based on social cognitive career theory, this study aims to explore business students' internship experiences and their potential influence on their career resources. A qualitative research design was employed in this study. Two diverse focus group studies, which consisted of thirteen students in total, were conducted to investigate the participants' internship experiences deeply. The findings were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Based on the results, two themes emerged: "internship satisfaction factors" and "career resources." The findings showed that internship experiences make significant contributions to the career development process by providing vital skills, including networking, communication, and job searching, in addition to facilitating the transfer of theoretical knowledge into practice. The findings provide valuable insights for scholars and policymakers in higher education institutions and various organizations interested in establishing internship programs.*

1. Introduction

Acquisition of knowledge frequently takes place through firsthand encounters and gaining practical experience (Realin, 1997). Work-based learning (WBL) is an educational approach that combines theory and practice. WBL allows students to use theoretical knowledge in actual situations, facilitating the development of practical skills, the acquisition of business perspectives, and enhanced comprehension of career expectations. Since educational institutions are obligated and responsible for maximizing chances for the intellectual growth of students, academic professionals in higher education increasingly offer undergraduates plenty of opportunities to engage in experiential learning (Esters & Retallick, 2013). Activities focusing on developing specialized workplace skills and transferring work-related knowledge will become less relevant as the skill sets required of "higher-level" employees evolve and grow. Individuals are increasingly demanding to recognize and develop the skills necessary for their present and future positions (Lester & Costley, 2010). Underdeveloped countries frequently encounter significant unemployment rates, particularly among the younger population. Work-based learning programs, such as internships, can be beneficial in

[1] Asst. Prof., PhD., Kocaeli University, Hereke Ömer İsmet Uzunyol Vocational School, Department of Management and Organization, Kocaeli, Turkiye, merve.gercek@kocaeli.edu.tr (Corresponding Author)
[2] Asst. Prof., PhD., İstanbul University, Institute for Aviation Psychology Research, Istanbul, Turkiye, cem.ozveren@istanbul.edu.tr

decreasing unemployment rates by providing individuals with the proper skills for their careers. The fact that young people do far worse in the job market is a sign of the widespread disparities in the workplace across several nations. With a worldwide youth unemployment rate of around 14% in 2022 (ILO, 2023), the likelihood of young unemployment in the labor force is three times greater than that of adults. In recent years, there has been an increase in students seeking internships, with colleges and institutions offering them as extracurricular activities or incorporating them into their curriculum (Margaryan et al., 2020). A qualified education background does not ensure employment, especially considering the effects of automation and the current state of the economy. However, university curricula must include prerequisites and courses to improve graduates' abilities for a competitive job market. In this sense, experiential learning is highly beneficial, and internships are becoming regarded as a crucial course choice (Alawamleh & Mahadin, 2022; Margaryan et al., 2022).

From the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SSCT) (Lent et al., 1994), internship programs provide individuals with practical experience that helps them develop a clear awareness of the potential career outcomes, enhancing their self-efficacy. Moreover, internship experiences enable students to make appropriate career decisions by allowing them to use their academic knowledge in professional environments. Lent et al. (1994) suggested that internships facilitate exploring occupational opportunities. SCCT integrates cognitive-person characteristics (such as self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, and objectives) and environmental variables that can either promote or limit an individual's career development process (Lent et al., 2000). Also, since internships provide students with direct practical experience and opportunities to explore potential careers, they significantly impact individuals' career decisions.

Internship programs are widely regarded as highly advantageous programs that facilitate the transition into the practical field of business. Education experts acknowledge that internships offer numerous benefits when discussing the significant involvement of business schools (Clark, 2003). Internships can facilitate students in obtaining employment, act as milestones toward permanent positions, provide satisfying experiences that stimulate specific career aspirations, and help students develop realistic expectations about the professional world while clarifying their career objectives (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008). Although many studies focus on internship experiences from the WBL approach, there are few investigations on how internships affect career intentions (Ng et al., 2023). Thus, the current body of research on internships frequently fails to thoroughly investigate the interns' perceptions and interpretations of their learning and career prospects. The present study aims to fill this research gap by examining these interactions. By documenting and analyzing interns' detailed personal and work experiences, our research highlights aspects of WBL that are frequently disregarded, such as informal learning, mentorship dynamics, and the development of soft skills, which are critical in the workplace. Based on theoretical frameworks and empirical data, our objective is to address the following research question: "*What characteristics contribute to the effectiveness of internships for career development, and how do internship experiences impact the development of career resources for university students?*" Conducting a qualitative inquiry into the elements contributing to the success of internships and their impact on the career development of university students might produce useful theoretical and practical implications. The study has the potential to enhance current career development theories by offering detailed insights into internship experiences. Furthermore, it can provide a useful application of SCCT, demonstrating how students acquire skills and gain confidence in their abilities in work environments. Hence, this qualitative investigation could build a bridge between theory and practice, providing practical answers to enhance internship experiences and significantly influence students' career development. The selection of a qualitative study design was driven by the necessity of obtaining a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the subjective experiences of interns during their training in a professional setting. Qualitative methodologies are particularly appropriate for investigating multifaceted phenomena through a personal lens, enabling researchers to comprehend the significance that participants attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2015). This research significantly benefits from this approach, as it considers the interns' viewpoints, challenges, and skills they develop during their internships. This study makes a distinct contribution to the existing body of internship and WBL research, which has primarily relied on quantitative approaches to assess specific outcomes of internships, such as rates of employment or levels of satisfaction after the internship (e.g., Wan et al., 2013).

The study starts with a literature review focusing on the relationship between SCCT and WBL experiences. The following section provides conceptual and empirical examples of how internship experiences strengthen individual career resources. The third section describes the study approach, while the fourth section presents the findings. The fifth section discusses the study findings, including some suggestions for researchers and practitioners.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Cognitive Career Theory and Work-Based Learning Experiences

Lent et al. (1994: 117) defined SCCT as the process of primarily addressing the developmental activities that occur before, during, and immediately after entering an occupational field. Within the framework of internship experiences, the SCCT proposes that individuals acquire career-related competencies by observing and learning from others with similar roles (Lent, 1999). In many studies, SSCT was used as an explanatory framework for WBL experiences (e.g., Neuenschwander et al., 2018; Morris, 2018). Internship experiences allow students to observe professionals in their fields, acquire knowledge from their actions and methodologies, and develop a sense of self-efficacy in performing similar duties. In addition, the SCCT framework considers the impact of environmental factors, such as the social and organizational context of internships, on individuals' career development. This phenomenon explores how students' self-efficacy, along with their internship experiences and observations, impact the acquisition of career-related skills and the effective utilization of career resources. Career resources is a broad term that refers to several tools, opportunities, networks, information, and support systems that individuals could use to develop and manage their careers effectively (Monteiro et al., 2023). According to SCCT, personal resources such as self-efficacy influence an individual's task selection, determination, and resilience when confronted with career-related problems. Interpersonal elements such as colleagues, mentors, and supervisory support could be crucial for career success by affecting information acquisition and skill development and providing emotional support during difficult situations. On the other hand, technical abilities are frequently the foundation of job performance, enabling individuals to carry out their responsibilities successfully. For example, a person's self-efficacy in learning and using new technology could influence their performance and relationships in a team context. Similarly, workplace culture and support as interpersonal variables could have an impact on an individual's capacity to acquire and utilize technical skills successfully (Lent, 1999). According to the career resources approach, a variety of resources, including self-esteem, optimism, knowledge, and skills, contribute differently to facets of career success (Hirschi et al., 2018), and these have been proven essential for achieving professional success (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020).

SCCT incorporates cognitive-person traits and contextual elements that can either enhance or constrain an individual's career development process (Lent et al., 2000). Previous studies suggest that self-efficacy beliefs are formed due to successful performance or achievements in different educational activities, such as internships (Luzzo et al., 1999). According to the modified model of SCCT by Morales and Jacobson (2019), the internship process is one of the contextual influences that influence outcome expectations, career interests, career goals, and career actions. Interns gain practical experience in a realistic work setting and acquire knowledge about their chosen professions (Friesenborg, 2002). Interns enhance their sense of security in their capacity to succeed professionally, supporting their belief in their abilities. This, in turn, motivates students to pursue their professional interests further and establish specific career objectives and strategies (Morales & Jacobson, 2019).

The incorporation of WBL into educational institutions has progressed rapidly since the 1960s and has garnered significant scholarly attention in the United States of America (USA) (Freestone et al., 2006). "Work-integrated learning," "experiential learning," and "work-based learning" have been used interchangeably. The relationship between SCCT and WLB experiences is significant for career development and vocational decision-making. Through WLB, students may engage in both academic and technical learning, develop career competencies, explore potential career paths, and get ready for future employment. Prior studies show that skill variety, interpersonal relationships, and learning opportunities are key elements of

the internship process that significantly contribute to career outcomes (D'abate et al., 2009). In their study, Ng et al. (2023) investigated how several aspects of the internship environment, such as the diversity of skills, chances for learning, support from supervisors, and interpersonal interactions, influence students' career plans by affecting their reflective thinking processes based on SCCT. Also, it was seen that positive internship experiences increase individuals' career decision-making skills (Yaşar & Sunay, 2020) and career decision-making self-efficacy (Ramaprasad et al., 2022).

2.2. The Links Between Internship Experiences and Individual Career Resources

Internships allow students to utilize and enhance their skills in a professional environment, gaining practical experience in both their career field and personal growth. The literature consistently demonstrates that internships are effective in developing both hard and soft skills (e.g., Garavan & Murphy, 2001; Narayan et al., 2010; Velez & Giner, 2015). Studies by Narayanan et al. (2010) and Higgins and Kram (2001) highlight significant improvements in interns' technical and interpersonal skills, as well as opportunities to build valuable professional connections. Additionally, factors such as economic conditions, industry demands, educational institution policies, and government legislation affect the availability of internships (Gault et al., 2000).

Internships include experiential learning. This element underscores the significance of interns acquiring practical experience and developing skills that may be applied in many contexts (Thompson et al., 2021). Moreover, internships are specifically characterized as temporary, unpaid job placements often undertaken by students enrolled in higher education institutions. Internships are perceived as beneficial for both employers and interns, as they provide a practical environment where academic information is applied (Binder et al., 2015). An internship is a closely supervised period of training in certain situations, such as undergraduate programs in healthcare. The statement highlights the dynamic transformation of professional practice through educational experiences (Bhandari et al., 2022). Internship programs involve structured and monitored tasks that promote the growth of students' career related skills and expertise while increasing their interpersonal competencies (Anjum, 2020).

Career development refers to the ongoing journey of skill development, job engagement, and navigating life changes, all aimed at progressing toward an individual's self-determined future (Savickas, 1994). It holds significance as it enables individuals to make accurate career decisions, improves job satisfaction, and contributes to life satisfaction. According to Fouad et al. (2023), career development refers to choosing a job as a person grows from adolescence to maturity. It is currently accepted that people make many decisions regarding their jobs and professions throughout their lives, even though this was formerly assumed to be a decision early in life (Fouad et al., 2023). Career development depends on various career resources, which include knowledge, skills, and motivational and environmental resources required for effective career development. Career resources include many factors, such as self-concept clarity, career insight, career identity, transferrable skills, employability, and social support (Hirschi, 2012). Hirschi et al. (2017) state that fundamental career resources include soft skills, learning, career exploration, job market knowledge, and occupational expertise. Students can enhance their soft skills, such as teamwork and communication, by participating in internship programs. Furthermore, interns acquire important insights, abilities, and skills unique to their chosen vocational fields.

Career resources encompass a wide array of factors that are crucial for career success, including self-concept clarity, career insight, career identity, transferrable skills, employability, and social support (Hirschi, 2012). Furthermore, Hirschi et al. (2017) suggest that fundamental career resources also include soft skills, learning, career exploration, job market knowledge, and occupational expertise. Such resources can be significantly enhanced through practical experiences, such as internship programs, where students not only improve soft skills like teamwork and communication but also acquire unique insights, abilities, and skills pertinent to their chosen sectors. Haenggli & Hirschi (2020) mentioned additional elements such as self-esteem, optimism, career adaptability resources, knowledge and skills, motivational factors, and environmental factors, illustrating the multifaceted nature of career resources that contribute to a person's career development. According to Monteiro et al. (2023), career resources are often adaptable, and they

evolve during the course of the higher education process, with limitations in the exploration of information related to future career opportunities. Also, career resources predict life satisfaction and academic performance through involvement in studies (Akkermans et al., 2018). Additionally, the career literature has extensively acknowledged mentoring as a substantial career resource that plays a crucial role in several facets of career development. According to Allen et al. (2004), mentors play a vital role in facilitating personal growth and fostering confidence in a professional environment by offering professional guidance, information exchange, and support. Moreover, networking is an essential component that significantly contributes to the advancement of one's career. It entails establishing and sustaining connections with a network of individuals who may help, knowledge, and prospects. According to Kauffeld and Spurk (2021), a positive correlation exists between psychological capital and job success, whereas external networking serves as a mediating factor in achieving objective career success.

Numerous organizational elements are thought to have an impact on students' satisfaction with internships. The effectiveness of the supervision provided and the level of expertise of the supervisors are essential factors that influence employee satisfaction. Prior research suggests that effective supervision is critical for interns' satisfaction with their internship programs (Cannon et al., 2008; Kuwaiti & Subbarayalu, 2020; Sein & Tumbo, 2012). According to Kukreti and Dani (2020), several organizational factors affect intern satisfaction. These factors include the working environment, which encompasses career growth and development, learning opportunities, organizational culture, and co-workers. Contextual factors such as working hours, payment, and location also play a role in interns' satisfaction (D'abate et al., 2009). Furthermore, task characteristics, including task clarity and its dimensions, have been identified as critical factors for intern satisfaction (Abuduaini, 2009; Agho et al., 1993).

The combination of an employee's or intern's work activities, the working environment, the contextual characteristics of the job, and the job itself collectively contribute to an increased degree of overall job satisfaction (Agho et al., 1993; Kukreti & Dani, 2020). An internship for a university student presents a good chance for them to get insights into the workplace culture and their prospective role within the organization while also equipping them with valuable career resources. Also, task mastery and social integration mediate between the influencing factors and internship satisfaction (Huang & Jia, 2010). Anjum (2020) carried out a quantitative study that showed internship programs have a substantial impact on the career and skill development of business students by directly affecting their personal growth, abilities, and capacities. Thus, internships are closely linked to acquiring the necessary career resources for adapting to career challenges in the contemporary work environment.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design. "Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research/SRQR" by O'Brien et al. (2014) was adopted. The 21-item SRQR framework includes reporting "*the title, abstract, problem statement, research question, study design, data collection and analytic techniques, results, interpretation, discussion, and integration, and additional details of the publication*" transparently and systematically. To explore the internship experiences and their potential impacts on career development, a focus group technique was chosen. Focus groups are a standard method for obtaining qualitative data that has increased over the last 20 years (McLafferty, 2004). Focus groups are highly valuable for accurately representing the social dynamics of a particular cultural group through direct interaction with its members (Hughes & DuMont, 1993). A focus group study is a form of qualitative research in which a limited number of participants engage in a guided discussion led by a facilitator, intending to explore and examine a particular subject (Rabiee, 2004). The objective of a focus group study is to acquire a comprehensive understanding, viewpoints, and perspectives on the topic by employing group engagement and discourse. One of the advantages of a focus group is its capacity to produce data through the collaborative activity of the group (Green et al., 2003). Thus, the focus group technique was used to provide a comprehensive investigation of internship experiences, which are often multifaceted and encompass not just job responsibilities but also contacts with coworkers, mentors, and exposure to the organizational culture. The interactive nature of focus group discussions allows students to share their experiences, respond to each other's feedback, and collectively discover various aspects of their internship experiences.

This study focuses on business students at a public university and is grounded in two primary reasons. Although business students are considered future leaders and these programs are designed to educate individuals for important roles (Gunkel et al., 2010), the fact that internships are not mandatory requires careful consideration. Business internships are known to be advantageous since they improve job prospects, set practical goals, and provide a fulfilling experience (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008). Additionally, it has been observed that studies on internship experiences in Turkey predominantly concentrate on fields such as accounting and tourism (e.g., Olcay et al., 2015; Uzay, 2005), with a noticeable scarcity of research dedicated to business students' internship experiences. The availability of internships in Turkey is contingent upon the specific educational discipline and degree of postgraduate education. Internship requirements are mandatory at vocational institutions, particularly in health, engineering, and related fields. However, most faculties of economics and administrative sciences, such as business administration and economics, lack such obligations. Obtaining an internship in these disciplines is slightly more challenging. To address this challenge, the Presidential Human Resources Office (CBİKO) has established a platform to connect businesses and university students through a structured national internship program (CBİKO, 2020). Thus, exploring the internship experiences of business students may yield useful insights. Participants for this study were recruited through university networks to reach students who had finished their internships. The research has been granted ethical approval by Kocaeli University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with decision number 2023/15-9, dated 25.12.2023.

The students participated in focus group discussions on campus. The choice of focus group approach was driven by its ability to stimulate participant engagement, enhancing the data with more nuanced insights into their experiences and perspectives (Warr, 2005). Also, focus groups allow researchers to gain a wider range of experiences and perspectives in a single session and are used in studies focusing on internship experiences (Ti Ngoc Ha & Dakich, 2022). The encouraging atmosphere of focus group talks is thought to encourage members to provide data. Two focus groups were formed, including 13 students in total. Previous studies on students' internship experiences have also utilized focus groups, with an average of 15 to 29 participants (e.g., Mbous et al., 2022; Nyanjom et al., 2023). Also, in focus group studies, small qualitative samples were accepted to give adequate code accessibility and theme representation, with a minimum of 6-9 participants required for meaningful theme completion (Young & Casey, 2019).

The data-gathering process concluded with two focus groups when the themes and codes from both investigations began to reoccur, and no new codes or themes emerged, reaching code saturation (Yang et al., 2022). To accurately evaluate all students' internship experiences, their internships needed to be completed. Students participating in internships were in their 2nd to 4th year of study, as it is common to start internships over the summer after the 1st year. Students choose to participate in internships within the department depending on their preferences and requirements due to the non-mandatory nature of the program. Consequently, due to the voluntary nature of these internships, there is no system established to determine the exact number of students participating in internships at the university. This resulted in the selection of a snowball sampling method. As the data collection tool, a semi-structured interview question form was used. The questions were determined according to the prior research findings and theoretical background of the research topics (e.g., Downey & DeVeau, 1987; Ferreras-Garcia et al., 2019; Rothwell et al., 2008; Stamati & Wilmott, 2023; Olcay vd., 2015). The semi-structured interview questions were as follows:

- How would you describe your overall internship experience?

- Which aspects do you believe influenced the overall satisfaction levels of the internship?

- Did your internship experience significantly contribute to your career development? If so, how?

- How do you believe your internship experiences have influenced your approach to obtaining employment?

- What specific skills do you believe you acquired throughout your internship?

In addition to semi-structured interview questions, interviewers used probing questions for more detailed information. The focus group interviews lasted about 1–2 hours and were recorded with the voluntary consent of the participants. Focus groups reduce the influence of researcher biases because they make it easier to conduct unstructured interviews, give study participants more autonomy, and let the group conduct the interview (Liamputtong, 2016). In this regard, the groups intervened as little during the sessions. The focus group's content is transcribed and examined thereafter. Examining the conversation topics and comprehending the relational and technical aspects of group dynamics are also part of this step. Ultimately, it's critical to analyze and report the findings of a focus group study (Acocello & Cataldi, 2021). Following the conclusion of the interviews, the authors transcribed the data and applied a thematic content analysis procedure to identify the primary themes following the interpretation. Thematic content analysis is a qualitative research design that aims to identify, analyze, and communicate themes or patterns within datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcribed data were assessed through thorough, iterative readings. The codes obtained from open coding are categorized according to a specific framework and perspective. The research questions were formulated based on the literature concerning the development of career resources through internship experiences and the need to explore these dynamics in greater depth. The data was coded by two independent researchers. To assess the reliability of the coding between researchers and ensure inter-rater reliability. According to the methodology proposed by Miles and Huberman, inter-rater reliability ratings were calculated subsequent to the first coding phase. The average score obtained was 0.85, suggesting a substantial degree of consensus among the researchers. Any inconsistencies in coding were discussed and resolved at meetings, therefore enhancing the coding structure and guaranteeing agreement. Categories and themes were created using the theoretical framework and literature analysis that specifically addressed career development and work-based learning. In the final phase, themes were formulated, considering the commonalities of the categories. Researchers make individual coding decisions, such as density and frequency, based on their methodological background, research design, and research questions (Elliot, 2018). In qualitative data analysis, the number of themes and codes derived from research data is generally associated with comprehensiveness and saturation. The number of codes and themes might indicate the depth and breadth of the investigation. However, in qualitative investigations, code frequency is restricted by sample size. Also, the concept of saturation is crucial in qualitative research since it refers to the moment at which no more codes or themes can be found through further data analysis. Saturation in qualitative research hinges more significantly on the likelihood of encountering new codes rather than merely accumulating a large number of codes (Rijnsoever, 2017). Saturation is thus not reached by the mere addition of new codes; rather, it is achieved when subsequent data fail to yield novel information, indicating that the data collection has sufficiently captured the range of variations within the phenomena under study.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Characteristics

Participants from distinct groups were designated with identifiers (P) in order to ensure anonymity. Table 1 shows that the age groups of the participants ranged between 18 and 22, and sectors varied, such as production, health, banking, telecommunication, clothing, and auditing. The table displays the organizations in various sectors that provide internship programs, including food manufacturing, energy distribution, and banking. This diversity demonstrates the breadth of options for young people seeking practical experience in various sectors. The duration of their internship ranges from 1 month to 12 months. The lack of a mandatory internship requirement leads to different lengths of internships among participants, thereby offering a diverse range of experiences. The differences in internship time frames among students could expand the data by providing different types of experiences. Focus groups allow for a direct comparison of experiences, problems, and learning outcomes among internships of different durations (Hollander et al., 2004; Nyanjom et al., 2023). Moreover, a longer internship duration does not necessarily guarantee a richer experience compared to a shorter one, as a short-term internship might encompass a wide variety of expertise and responsibilities. Hence, these differences were presumed to be potentially beneficial within the context of focus groups. However, this assumption could have certain limitations, which are discussed in the limitations

section of the study. The students selected to provide better data were divided into two groups without regard to any criteria. Estimating the number of participants was difficult due to contextual considerations particular to the internship programs that were being investigated. Internships were not mandatory components of the business programs from which the participants were drawn, and as such, there is no organized digital or manual tracking system established that records participation.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Codes	Age	Gender	Internship Length	Industry	Department
P1 (Group 1)	20	Female	1 Month	Food production	Human Resources
P2 (Group 1)	19	Male	1 Month	Metal production	General Management
P3 (Group 1)	22	Female	1 Month	Public sector	Human Resources
P4 (Group 1)	19	Female	1 Month	Law firm	Accounting
P5 (Group 1)	18	Male	1 Month	Health services	General Management
P6 (Group 1)	20	Female	1 Month	Energy distribution	Rotation (Several Units)
P7 (Group 1)	19	Female	1 Month	Public sector	Human Resources
P8 (Group 2)	21	Male	12 Months	Auditing Sector	Auditing
P9 (Group 2)	20	Male	3 Months	Bank Sector	Controlling
P10 (Group 2)	19	Female	8 Months	Telecommunication	Customer Relations
P11 (Group 2)	21	Female	5 Months	Clothing Industry	Marketing
P12 (Group 2)	22	Female	1 Month	Auditing Sector	Auditing
P13 (Group 2	20	Male	10 Months	Food Production	Human Resources

4.2. Thematic Content Analysis Results

After conducting the data analysis, two primary themes emerged. According to the analyses, forty-one codes, two themes, and four categories emerged. The initial theme was designated "Internship Satisfaction Factors" due to its incorporation of critical elements about the effectiveness and success of the internship process. Theme 1, as indicated in Table 2, comprises two sub-categories: "supportive factors" and "challenging factors." "Orientation program" and "internship pay" were the most frequently occurring codes in the subcategory of supportive factors. According to the participants, the most challenging factor about internships was the short time length and "delegating unqualified work to interns."

The participants believe that several factors affect how successful the internship program is. Most students emphasize how crucial compensation is to their internships. It was observed that although some students reported receiving compensation, which positively impacted their motivation, others reported receiving no compensation or internship insurance:

"Getting paid for my internship was a significant motivation for me. It increased the significance of my internship." (P2)

"It disappointed me that my employer did not pay me. I believed that there was an injustice." (P5)

"Unfortunately, our faculty did not have insurance support; this was a disadvantage." (P9)

Some participants stated that they were not fulfilled with their internship experiences:

"The location of the company was in a central location. I learned nothing. None of the managers treated me badly, but they were not interested. The school did not pay my insurance because I had no internship obligation, and the company did not want to pay much. We made photocopies occasionally, and I

didn't have any other job. For 1 month, I came and went idly. Since it was a short time, I could not meet anyone, so the internship did not contribute to finding a job." (P12)

Table 2. Theme 1: Internship Satisfaction Factors

Theme 1: Internship Satisfaction Factors	Codes	Frequency
	Orientation program	8
	Internship pay	8
	Co-worker support	7
	Internship time length	6
	Supervisor support	6
	Insurance support from the university	6
	Physical working conditions	6
Sub-Category 1: Supportive Factors	Positive attitudes of supervisors	5
	Leadership style	5
	Coaching/mentoring	5
	Flexible working hours	4
	Course schedule flexibility	4
	Formal internship training	3
	Performance feedback	3
	Organizational culture	2
	University support for finding an internship	2
	Personal workspace	1
	Short internship time length	6
	Delegating unqualified work to interns	4
	Course schedule-internship overlap	4
Sub-Category 2: Challenging Factors	Not taking internship programs seriously by supervisors	3
	Unprofessional attitudes of supervisors	3
	Laking procedural justice	2
	Lack of coaches/mentors	2
	Lack of internship insurance	2

Table 3 represents the second theme, which is called "Career Resources." This theme's subcategories, "technical factors" and "personal and interpersonal factors," were in line with the specified study objective. As technical factors, "job search skills" were the most often used code. The other skills included computer skills, vocational knowledge and skills, software and digital skills, and language skills. Among the personal and interpersonal factors, transfer of theoretical knowledge and communication skills were the most frequent ones stated by the participants.

Table 3. Theme 2: Career Resources

Theme 2: Career Resources	Codes	Frequency
	Job search skills	8
	Computer skills	8
Sub-Category 1: Technical Factors	Vocational knowledge and skills	7
	Software/digital skills	6
	Language skills	5
	Presentation skills	2

Table 3. Theme 2: Career Resources (Continue)

Theme 2: Career Resources	Codes	Frequency
	Networking skills	**9**
	Training transfer	7
	Communication skills	6
	Self-awareness	5
Sub-Category 2: Personal and Interpersonal Factors	Self-confidence	5
	Labor market awareness	5
	Social skills	4
	Psychological resilience	3
	Time-management skills	2
	Global perspective	2

The participants mostly emphasized the importance of "networking" during their discussions. Most students highlighted the significance of the networking skills they acquired from their internship experiences:

"I met with very nice people. They told me that even if they could not offer me a job in the future, they would recommend me to different employers." (P4)

Participants characterized their internship experiences as an effective instrument for the development of career resources such as self-confidence, self-awareness, and social skills:

"*During the internship period, I realized what kind of company I would like to work in the future.*" (P3)

"It was a very good internship period. The hours of my courses at my university did not prevent me from doing my internship. I had the chance to work with managers from many different companies. I had a chance to make a nice network. A manager I met told me to let me know when I finish school. These words brought me confidence in myself. Now I feel more competent. What I learnt at work showed me that I can do this job. My managers and colleagues always supported me. This made my job easier." (P13)

"I had the chance to learn different programming. I had the chance to see different options related to my profession. I can also turn to the tax field. I realized there are very different applications from what I learned in accounting lessons. I had all kinds of equipment in my office." (P8)

These statements highlight internships' important role in skill development and improving employability and professional networks. Ultimately, internships emerge as crucial experiences that develop technical skills and promote personal growth and confidence, providing participants with a more comprehensive view of their future career choices. As can be seen from the tables above, networking skills, job-search skills, and computer skills were the career resources that the participants attributed the most importance to in Theme 2. When the internship satisfaction factors in Theme 1 were analyzed, it was found that orientation programs, internship payment, and short internship duration were the most important satisfaction factors. In the following section, the results are discussed.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to explore the internship experiences of business students by utilizing the SSCT framework and the WBL approach. The objective was to gain insights into the dynamics of internships and their connection to career development. By taking a qualitative approach, two focus group studies were conducted. The findings indicated that the participants emphasized two primary concerns, namely the factors that determine their satisfaction with their internship and the career resources they gained from their internship experiences. The current study findings were consistent with previous studies in several aspects.

The analysis of the focus research highlights the multifaceted function of internships in career development, which is divided into two key themes: "Internship Satisfaction Factors" and "career resources." Each subject is further subdivided into sub-categories with codes to represent the interaction of factors

determining internship outcomes. The first category, internship satisfaction factors, includes supportive and challenging factors. Supportive factors such as orientation programs, internship payment, coworker support, and supervisor support are critical since they provide a favorable introduction and continuous satisfaction during the internship, providing an optimal setting for learning. This study's findings of internship experiences provide valuable insights into the critical role internships play in matching academic accomplishments with real work experiences, which is a key component of SCCT. According to SCCT, professional growth is driven by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal objectives, all of which are fostered through practical work experiences such as internships (Lent, 1999). Studies suggest that self-efficacy positively affects internship satisfaction (Chao, 2019). Supervisor support, mentoring, and hard and soft skill development are the main themes in this study; these factors can potentially serve self-efficacy. Self-efficacy positively affects intern engagement. This engagement positively affects the motivation of interns (Hong et al., 2021). Previous research suggests that intern satisfaction depends on the working environment and contextual factors like hours, salary, and location (D'abate et al., 2009; Kukreti & Dani, 2020). In line with the previous research, this study's findings show that the physical working environment, working hours flexibility, school course schedule flexibility, personal workspace, and coaching are essential topics. Although organizational culture emerged as a theme due to the research, the themes in supporting and challenging factors also include issues related to organizational culture. Moreover, Rothman (2007) identified multiple variables associated with satisfaction in internship experiences, including well-defined tasks, continuous feedback, and exposure to diverse aspects of the business. Also, multiple studies have indicated that internships are more beneficial when the interns receive guidance and mentorship at their place of work (Callanan & Benzing, 2004). However, the observed problematic elements, such as short internship periods and unqualified job assignments, have the potential to reduce interns' perceptions of their professional talents and hinder their long-term career goals. These dynamics support the SCCT's claim that positive work environments strengthen career interests and intentions by increasing self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Also, the findings highlight the importance of internship pay and insurance for university students. Rogers et al. (2021) found that unpaid internships exhibit worse work qualities than paid internships, resulting in diminished job satisfaction and limited career advancement for unpaid interns. According to the results obtained in the study, pay and salary are important factors affecting internship satisfaction.

The second theme, "career resources", focuses on the development of technical and interpersonal skills necessary for professional advancement. Technical skills such as job search capabilities and computer proficiency are frequently stated, displaying their significance within work settings. Also, personal and interpersonal factors such as networking and communication skills emerge as critical, improving long-term career paths. These findings are consistent with SCCT, which states that supportive environments increase self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which are essential for career decision-making and performance. Also, the categorization of career resources in this study is consistent with Katz's (1974) paradigm for managerial skills, which posits that successful management and professional growth depend on a blend of technical, human, and conceptual abilities. The inclusion and importance of internships in our study are justified by the correlation between the career resources found through mentorship and networking and the wider skill sets, as evidenced by our approach to the subject. Furthermore, acquiring career resources such as job search skills, technical expertise, and interpersonal abilities are essential for efficient career management and align with Human Resource Management (HRM) approaches aimed at maximizing employee growth (Esters & Retallick, 2013). The findings are consistent with WBL theories, indicating that internships provide a practical setting for applying theoretical knowledge and improving career preparation and flexibility in the labor market.

Organizations and educational institutions could employ these findings to improve their internship programs. As reported in the study results, the participants saw short internships as the most challenging factor. This result reveals that interns want to learn the profession and increase the possibility of finding a job during the internship, not just to have an internship experience. Improving the quality of mentorship, extending internship periods, and ensuring meaningful participation in career duties may all considerably improve the internship experience. Furthermore, setting clear objectives and offering consistent feedback

can assist interns in better understanding their career pathways and building the skills required to thrive in their chosen career paths.

The coordination of efforts between higher education institutions and organizations is necessary for the successful integration of internships into the academic experience. Universities play a critical role in promoting internship success through curriculum integration, mentorship programs, monitoring and evaluation systems, and career counseling (Franco et al., 2019). Public and private sector organizations also have a significant impact on how well internships proceed because they design programs with specific goals, give chances for professional growth, provide a variety of experiences, and promote networking. Also, through these programs, companies provide students with hard and soft skills, encourage lifelong learning, and help them build professional networks (DeHoog, 2015). Enhancing essential graduate qualities and employability abilities through industry-university collaboration could lead to mutually advantageous outcomes (Nyanjom et al., 2023).

There are some limitations to this study. The research only included students who were enrolled in a particular public university. As a result, it could be difficult to generalize these results to other universities or wider populations. Due to the voluntary nature of internships in business school programs, the study has a relatively limited number of participants. This research utilized only two focus groups for data collection. Future studies should investigate broadening this scope to enhance the reliability and validity of their findings. Moreover, the sample includes a wide range of internship periods, which could cause heterogeneity in the research results. While it was assumed that such diversity enhances the richness and depth of the data, future research should consider limiting the range of internship durations within each focus group. This methodological adjustment could improve the data's generalizability. Secondly, since every student had their internship experience in a different organization, it is not possible to arrive at conclusions about the organizational or sectoral dynamics. Also, it may be advisable to do longitudinal research to examine the impact of the internship program evaluations on students' success in the workforce after graduation. Moreover, only a few of the many resources that fall under the category of career resources were found during the current investigation. Hirschi (2012), for example, claims that career resources comprise multifaceted social, psychological, human capital, and identity resources. Expanding the sample size could enable future research to produce more thorough findings. Furthermore, it would be possible to do independent research on how internship experiences affect certain career resources, such as proactive career behaviors, career resilience, and career identity. Despite its limitations, this study provides new perspectives on how business students perceive internship programs and how they help them advance their careers by providing them with specific career resources.

Declarations and Disclosures

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