

## STUDENTS' AND EMPLOYERS' SATISFACTION OF INTERNSHIP IN COMPANIES

**Ivaylo Staribratov**

*Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"*

**Summary:** *The article examines the factors influencing the high school students' satisfaction of the internships, as well as the interrelationship between student satisfaction with the internship and the employers' satisfaction of the students' performance. A study of this satisfaction has been presented on the basis of a conducted survey. Positive interrelations have been established and the fact that primarily the organizational environment, the IT teacher's support and contextual factors play a crucial role in the high level of satisfaction with the production internship in ICT and non-ICT field.*

**Key words:** *motivation, internship satisfaction, ICT, organizational environment, school, employers*

The transition from the life and role of a student to the world of labor and a worker is not always easy and pleasant, it is often accompanied by difficulties and problems in adaptation. Young people who have just graduated have to enter the labor market by applying their knowledge and skills learned at school in the context of the work. However, young graduates can not directly apply their school education knowledge in the new work environment. This in turn is a prerequisite for experiencing frustration, demotivation at work, which may lead to increased turnover of young employees in the organization. This transition can be facilitated and alleviated when schooling and learning at work go hand in hand and thus enable students to integrate the theory learned at school into practice by visiting manufacturing /production internship in a real environment.

This also applies to the internship in ICT business, which is a mandatory subject in all classes with ICT ("system programming" and "graphic design", "computer networks", "computer technologies", etc.). Pupils carry out their mandatory internship either in a company with which the school has a contract or they find a place for their traineeship independently.

The present study can be of benefit to all school teachers and principals who develop, integrate in the curriculum and administer internship programs for students for the first time. Its outcomes aim to undertake more effective and flexible policies for traineeships. They can also be a reference point for teachers, indicating that pupils get the maximum benefit from their internship, and this in turn is a feedback to both school and the company that the relationship between ICT education and ICT business is stable. The good interrelation between education and business brings benefits to both the educational institution, which needs to be "up and running" with

all new ICT technologies and for the business itself, which can more easily attract and hire potential talents, as well as for the students themselves who have the opportunity to apply the learned lessons in a real environment and thus their transition and adaptation to business is maximum balanced.

The overall understanding of the process can be seen through the satisfaction of the internship experience both with students and with employers providing internships. However, Bulgaria currently lacks any territorial organization of the career guidance system. There are centers and consultants without clear co-ordination in their work. In classrooms, only the pedagogical counselor and form teachers work on the career guidance of students, which can not satisfy the need for quality and purposeful work with young people [1]. Therefore, any career start in the form of internship allows students accumulate work experience and habits in the ICT field. Finding work experience, in turn, satisfactory and meaningful, can help students build a career throughout their entire work cycle.

In order to gain a clearer idea and conceptualization of the many factors influencing the satisfaction of the internship in the IT business and non IT business environment, different perspectives and practices will be presented. First of all, a review of the concept of "business internship satisfaction" for both learners and employers will be examined, then the factors influencing the satisfaction of internships in the IT sphere will be examined and some theoretical models will be presented on this issue .

**Definition of "internship".** The internship is a fixed period of time during which a newly recruited worker, employee or student is trained practically in his/her specialty. Workplace internships have existed for centuries, and they have first appeared in medical education. Today, this term applies to many types of work. Trainee practice can be defined in different ways - in the scientific literature it is defined as "learning by experience", ie learning by doing "learning for experience", ie practical application of what is learned in theory, "practice" or experience in a given area, 'service-based learning', ie the accumulation of service-related experience but not necessarily linked to a career, 'cooperative education' resulting from learning through service, 'on-the-job', ie work experience gained outside the classroom [11], "industrial training "[16]" dual training ", ie parallel courses of theory and practice in companies. From the above definitions, it can be summarized that internship is a production practice, the learner gains practical experience in order to master a specialty.

**Internship Satisfaction.** Job/internship satisfaction is defined as a set of psychological attitudes towards the work done by the worker/trainee. In the process of professional adaptation and self-identification an important role is played by the labor activity motivation and the labor satisfaction. Satisfaction with the internship depends on the correspondance of the outcome of the work with the trainee's internal needs.

There are different views in the scientific literature on the satisfaction of internships among young and inexperienced people, but most of them unite their views in the following trends:

- Students who have gained more experience in a work environment are clearly aware of their advantages and prospects in finding a job and building a career. They are more likely to remain in the company they have practiced [5].
- In the initial stages of the internship, trainees show a certain level of dissatisfaction with their assigned tasks, but at the end of the internship they find that they have understood the reasons for their assignments, which is a predictor of their ultimate satisfaction with the internship [2].
- Opportunities to start/stay in the company where the internship is held also play a major role in the satisfaction of learners' internship. Okay and Sahin have found that job offers are received by trainees who have taken their internship seriously, have carried out their delegated tasks responsibly and conscientiously, being disciplined and initiative, and therefore they have been highly rated by employers [14].
- Satisfied with their internship are trainees who have had constant feedback from their employers and also had some autonomy about how to perform their duties. Trainees who have been taken as part-time employees by their employers have shown low levels of satisfaction [4].

Factors influencing the satisfaction of the internship.

**Individual factors.** Some authors study which of the trainees' characteristics predispose to success in their practice, which in turn leads to the satisfaction of the internship. They identify three individual factors which are defined as important prerequisites for an effective internship program: academic readiness (good theoretical training and practice in the specialty), positive expectations for practice and prospects of staying in a company [5,18] and self-initiative(active searching for information, building constructive relationships with other trainees/employees) [6]. In other studies, as predictors of satisfaction, qualities such as maturity and responsibility [10] are also distinguished.

**Support from the IT Teacher educational environment.** According to Klee (trainees who receive support and feedback from their lecturers are much more satisfied with the internship than those who do not receive it.) The reason for this is that the school supervisors in the practice play the role of consultants and help trainees in the presence of difficult situations [9]. Frequent teacher visits [11], constant monitoring and supervision [16] are perceived as useful by learners.

Moghaddam studies the effectiveness of student internship through the prism of the university administration responsible for this. Students who have been satisfied with the internship have indicated that the university administration has taken care of the good organization of their internship, taking into account their university tasks, has

effectively contributed to establishing and maintaining communication between business mentors and direct mentors at the university [12].

**Work characteristics.** Work characteristic are a set of variables related to employee activities at work. Lord and others quote studies that found that an important predictor of job or traineeship satisfaction was the similarity between trainees' skills and the associated task characteristics [10]. Other factors influencing the satisfaction are: the identity of the task, the skills, the importance of the task, the autonomy and the feedback. Skills are related to a range of activities and talent. Identifying the task is the extent to which the trainee manages to complete the task from start to finish. The importance of a task affects the extent to which the performance of the task is important to others, the autonomy is related to the freedom and relative independence the trainee has in planning and performing the tasks assigned to him, and the feedback - obtaining clear and direct information from the direct supervisor of how the employee manages the tasks.

**Organizational environment.** The organizational environment, also known as the work environment, includes all learning opportunities, career development opportunities, company mentor support, opportunities to work in a team, co-worker support, and organizational satisfaction.

Tarquin and Truscott found that the connection and relationship between trainees and their mentor in the organization were very important [17]. Adequate support, monitoring and assistance from the mentor, as well as from the other company employees, is a prerequisite for a high level of internship satisfaction [9]. Introducing in the organizational culture and identifying with the work staff leads to a higher commitment to the organization, clear perception of the roles in the company, lack of absences, low levels of stress, and reduced risk of conflict with other trainees [6,7].

Another study, conducted by a team of researchers from Math High School "Acad. Kiril Popov", establishes that the students who have done their internship have remained very satisfied with the work in the company and that is of great benefit to them - both the gained experience and the useful contacts they have made with the employers and employees. Employers often provide them professional literature and students manage to keep close contacts with the employer [1].

Wen conducted a survey of a sample of 113 trainees, and found that the effectiveness of the attention, control and clarity of the tasks assigned by company mentors were positively related to the success of the internship [18]. Rothman adds to all this, and good communication, giving and receiving feedback from the mentor, offering challenging tasks as good predictors of traineeship efficiency [15].

Gupta and others quote studies that found that feedback, new tasks once the old ones were completed, clear job results, autonomy, a comfortable work environment, job prospects, new skills and teamwork are essential factors for trainees' satisfaction [5].

**Contextual factors.** D'Abate and others distinguish several contextual factors that affect the satisfaction of the internship: salary, working time, travel to the internship place and the location of the organization in which the traineeship takes place. [3] Nelson also adds workplace security, peers, colleagues, and mentoring [13].

Paid traineeships or those in which financial compensation is offered lead to significantly higher levels of satisfaction than unpaid ones [9]. The interesting thing about Gupta's study is that there is no significant link between the length of the traineeship, the trainee's working hours during the week and the satisfaction of the traineeship [5].

The location of the internship also affects the satisfaction of it because internships with location close to the family environment are perceived more positively [3]

**Internship Employers' satisfaction.** Besides learners, employers can also benefit from internship programs. They more often prefer to hire people with knowledge and work experience and expect young people to be well-prepared for their needs. Recent studies, however, show that there is a significant gap between the expectations of companies and students [8]. For example, learners often expect when they start work to be introduced and well trained for their job position. Employers, however, expect well-trained staff to avoid additional training costs. Having in mind the disparity between the knowledge and skills of students, on the one hand, and the demands of employers, schools must offer internships to help students in the real world of business.

The purpose of this study is to establish the predictors of high satisfaction with internships in high school students and the relationship between student internship satisfaction and the satisfaction of employers with student performance.

167 students are the subject of the survey, students from Math High School "Acad. Kiril Popov" and Vocational School for Electrotechnics and Electronics VSEE, they complete their internship both in the field of ICT and in other fields. Of these, 9.8% are from the 11 th grade, 90.2% from the 12th grade. The girls are 21.1 % and the boys - 78.9%. Students from different specialties - "System Programming" - 16%, "Graphic Design" - 17,9%, "Computer Technics and Technologies" - 21,8%, "Computer Networks" - 7,1%, "Microprocessors" - 18,6%, "Automation of Continuous Production" - 10.3%, "Electricity production" - 8.3%.

The study involved 13 companies: 6 companies are occupied with ICT production (hardware and software) and 7 companies are occupied with non-ICT production (refrigerators, bicycles, automotive parts, lighting fixtures and others.)

**Methods of research.** Satisfaction with the internship was measured by a battery of D'Abate [3], Klee [9], Marlborough [11], Moghaddam [12], and Wen [18] methodologies. It contains 44 statements, divided into six scales, measuring the satisfaction factors of the internship in a 7-point scale of the Likert type:

The first scale of "Individual Factors" includes 7 items. It is highly reliable on the Kronbach criteria ( $\alpha = 0.901$ ). It contains statements, related to the personal qualities of the trainees, predisposing for a better internship, eg. "I was actively looking for feedback from my company mentor during the internship," "I volunteered to do my job."

The second scale is "IT Teacher Support". It contains 9 items and the reliability of the scale is also high -  $\alpha = 0.966$ . Sample statements from this scale are: "The IT Teacher provided me with direct and immediate feedback about how I was doing," "The school administration cared for the normal running of the organizational traineeship."

The third scale is "Work Characteristics" consisting of 6 items ( $\alpha = 0.957$ ). It contains statements like that "The actual work in the company has given me an idea of what my knowledge of ICT is and how well I am doing my internship."

The fourth scale is "Organizational Environment". It contains 10 statements and also has high reliability ( $\alpha=0.958$ ). For example, "During the internship I learned a lot of things I would never learn in the classroom," "My mentor in the company shared personal experience to give me an alternative view of the problems I had during the project implementation"

The fifth scale is "Contextual Factors", consisting of 6 items ( $\alpha = 0.880$ ): e.g. "I had flexible working hours at the traineeship," "The people who worked where I was practicing were good-natured, and they helped me when it was necessary."

The last scale is " Internship Satisfaction", it contains 5 items ( $\alpha = 0.948$ ) as "I really like the company I practiced", "One day I would be happy to start my career at the company I completed my internship."

The satisfaction of the pupils' performance was measured by an author's method, consisting of 24 items in a 7-point Likert type scale. Statements: "Students show good problem solving skills", "Demonstrate self-efficacy and independence in their internship". This test is constructed to identify the main Employers and Mentors' satisfaction with the students and performance of students, the skills and knowledge that is considered important for a successful business: adapting to the organizational climate, decisions making, learn quickly, flexible behavior towards change, ability to apply new technology. Mentoring assessment is indicator of both the degree of internship effectiveness and indicator of dissonance between the knowledge received at school and the knowledge that is learned in internship.

**Results.** In order to identify the factors influencing the overall satisfaction of the internships, a multiple regression analysis of all students was performed. In addition, ANOVA results will be presented to better illustrate and explain the significant statistical differences on the "field of internship (ICT and non-ICT)" and "gender and field of internship" factors. In figure 1 below the  $\beta$ -coefficients show which predictors of satisfaction have the greatest influence:

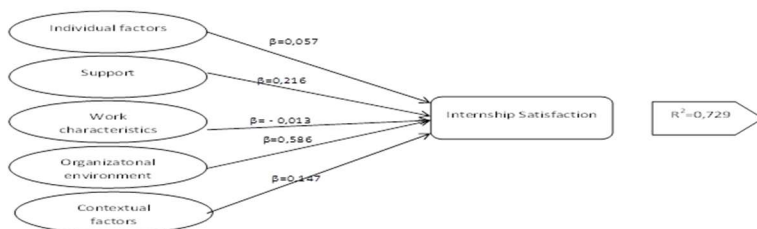


Fig.1 Impact of the predictors on the overall satisfaction of internships

$R^2$  in the present study shows the degree or percentage of how independent variables can explain the variance in the dependent variable (total internship satisfaction).  $R^2$  for this model is 0.729. This means that independent variables (individualistic factors, teacher support, performance characteristics, organizational environment and contextual factors) can account for 75.9% of the variance of the dependent variable. However, this means that 24.1% of the variance remains unexplained, which implies the presence and existence of other additional variables that have a significant function in interpreting the concept of internship satisfaction that is not the subject of this study.

The results of the regression analysis show that the organizational environment ( $\beta=0.586$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) has the greatest influence on the overall satisfaction with the internships. The perceived organizational support is positively related to the level of employee satisfaction. Organizational commitment and the presence of a manager who serves as a role model for trainees with whom to share their experiences is a significant factor in their positive perceptions of internship. No statistically significant difference ( $F(334,860) = 1,440$ ,  $p = 0,232$ ) was determined by "gender and internship field", but only by the "internship field" factor was found that students who have completed their internship in ICT field show higher levels of organizational environment than students in the non-ICT field internship ( $F(1288, 59) = 5.542$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ). During the ICT internship, pupils acquire new habits and skills that they have not developed so far in their classrooms at school. Organizational support, as well as school support, are vital for the internship during the course of the school year. The ICT organization is a place where students create their professional role models and enter the corporate world. Employers are also expected to practice such culture of sharing and providing valuable information and experience with their trainees, giving them an adequate insight into the organization's work processes. This in turn leads to a sense of belonging to trainees, as well as improved and meaningful understanding of the profession or business they practice. This also gives students a clear view of future career choices, and this in turn enables employers to retain the best talent for themselves. The accessibility of the learning material studied in the organization, the possibilities for acquiring different techniques and skills, the prestige of the

organization influence the overall satisfaction with the internship. In addition, the ability to work smoothly and qualitatively in the future, the prospects of remaining in the firms where the internship takes place also have an impact on the overall satisfaction.

Also, the relationship between the teacher/school administration's support for the practice and the overall satisfaction with the internship ( $\beta = 0.216$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ) is also significant. Teachers and school have always been a great factor in the development of students' professional identity, especially when it comes to the ICT field. Evidence for this is that ICT practitioners have shown higher values on the "IT Teacher Support" scale than students who do not practice their internship in the ICT field ( $F(2044,678) = 8,306$ ;  $p = 0,005$ ). Career guidance is very specific and involves many and diverse activities - diagnosis of specific talents in children; counseling parents and students after entering a high school; labor market survey; working with companies and making a connection with the business [1]. There is a general trend that the support of the IT teachers and school administration is very important for the students before joining internships. Students are actively seeking more information from their teacher, as most often this is their first manufacturing experience. When the knowledge, technology and skills acquired at school are in dissonance with business requirements, students rely on their school mentors for consultation, advice, and recommendations on how to address a particular problem they face in the internship. It is interesting to note that girls who work in ICT companies rely heavily on the support of IT teachers or schools compared to girls practicing in non-ICT companies ( $F(1588,282) = 6,452$ ;  $p = 0,012$ ). This may be in the widespread stereotype that girls are not good at engineering disciplines and production, while there has recently been a higher feminization of the ICT market. It is crucial to disseminate constantly important, clear and timely information regarding the organization of the internship, as well as the easy contact with the teacher in the presence of emergencies for consultations. For students, the available appropriate orientation before the internship and the follow-up by the school, as well as the influence of the teachers exercising control, accessible counseling and personal support during the internship and subsequent evaluation and recognition of the pupils' work, have an impact on the overall satisfaction of the pupils during their entire internship in the designated organization. Here is also included the mandatory documentary part of the traineeship, ie the timely signing of contracts between the school and the organization, planning and recording the documentation for the internship in the form of diaries, reporting forms etc.

Significant predictors of overall internship satisfaction are contextual factors ( $\beta = 0.147$ ,  $p = 0.021$ ). Although the internship is of a temporary nature, contextual factors have a significant impact on overall satisfaction with it. Although students focus on teacher/school support and the organizational environment as leading, the working time and location of the company where the internship takes place have a significant



effect on the satisfaction. If the traineeships are not located near the place students live, the transport is a problem or if the time frame itself is inadequate to the students' time, this can lead to low levels of satisfaction. In the present study, however, there is a positive factor, which means that the two school administrations have helped the students to practice in a comfortable manner, taking into account their curriculum and also the time for transportation to the place of internship. There were no statistically significant differences in the "internship field" ( $F(279,674) = 3,576; p = 0,061$ ) and "internship field and gender" ( $F(35,043) = 0,448; p = 0,504$ ).

The predictor of "individual factors" ( $\beta = 0.057, p = 0.319$ ) is negligible. It can be assumed that the positive attitude and activity of trainees don't play a key role in the high satisfaction with the internship, as Huang and Jia (2010) suggest. However, a significant statistical difference was found in the "internship field". Students practicing in the ICT sector have higher values on this scale than students in the non-ICT field ( $F(574,135) = 5,935, p = 0,016$ ). There were no significant differences in the "field internship and gender" factor ( $F(175,105) = 1,810, p = 0,181$ ). Getting acquainted with other company employees, the initiative to search for information or feedback, and other proactive actions are not so crucial to the learners' satisfaction. This is probably because of the students' perception of the internship as a temporary phenomenon and an obligation in their educational process, and this leads to less proactive actions and initiatives on their own compared to other employees. A large number of pupils who have decided to apply for a job in another professional field or study abroad after finishing the secondary school do not perceive the accumulation of knowledge, skills and abilities in the organization as significant for their overall satisfaction with the internship as they do not see a perspective to remain in the company where their practice takes place. There is a tendency for a strong external motivation and a weak internal one in the course of the students' internship.

Nearly no impact has the predictor of "work characteristics" ( $\beta = -0.013; p=0.904$ ). The diversity of skills and habits, the identity of the tasks, the personal significance of the assigned tasks, the autonomy in performance and the feedback are not relevant to the overall satisfaction. There was no statistically significant difference between internship field and gender ( $F(358,590) = 3,599; p = 0.060$ ). It can be assumed that the mentors in the organization where the internship is held do not entrust the students with complex or very specific tasks that have a direct impact on the overall business process within the company/ enterprise. As a result, students do not perceive the tasks assigned to them as personally significant. It is possible that tasks or responsibilities concerning the general work process are not assigned to the students and therefore they do not take the job characteristics as a factor determining their overall or final satisfaction with the internship. However, students who practice their ICT internship also show higher values on this scale than non-ICT students ( $F(1453,891) = 14,592, p < 0,001$ ). ICT autonomy in performing tasks is decisive. But in general a large number of managers responsible for designating the tasks of their

trainees do not impose much control over them as they have to fulfill other duties related to their job position.

This implies freedom and autonomy in fulfilling the assignment tasks by the pupils, but this is not perceived as an advantage by the students. Mentor's feedback is also not considered to be crucial to overall satisfaction because, although they have a final assessment of the internship given by the mentor, this assessment is usually formal and does not directly indicate the skills and habits of the students acquired in the companies where they work. However, students who practice in IT companies show significantly greater satisfaction with their internship than students who are not practice their internship in this field  $F(349,396) = 5,107; p = 0.025$ ).

Many employers try to benefit from student internships by looking at their trainees as "temporary tenants" and thus saving the need and time of recruiting and selecting cadres needed for certain projects, they often succeed in discovering "the best potential" for their needs but they do not have the necessary time resources to provide the maximum levels for training young people or cannot keep them for their needs because of the students' desire to continue their education elsewhere or students' high requirements to start a career.

In order to establish the correlation between the student satisfaction and the employers' satisfaction with the students' performance in ICT sector, a correlation analysis was made. Pearson's coefficient was low and negligible ( $R^2=0,263; p=0,126$ ). It cannot be said that the satisfaction of the trainees is directly dependent on that of the employers. Perhaps the reasons for this are complex: the quality of the feedback given by the employer, the identity of the tasks assigned to them, the quality of project implementation, etc. So a conclusion could be drawn that the relationship between education and business is positive, but further efforts are needed in this direction to be improved.

## **Conclusion**

The present study found the influence of certain factors on the high school students' satisfaction with the production internship. A multiple regression analysis was used that determines the predictors that have the greatest impact on satisfaction. These are: organizational environment, teacher/school support and contextual factors. To a lesser extent, it concerns individual factors and work characteristics. The correlation analysis showed that there is a very low and insignificant but positive correlation between student satisfaction with internship and employers' satisfaction with student performance. But if employers and school administrators take into account that focusing on the organizational environment, IT teacher support, and contextual factors have a strong impact on overall student satisfaction, they could further strengthen their cooperation in these areas and in this way to build an even stronger link between education and business, proof of which will be the strong satisfaction with the students' internship.

## Literature

1. Staribratov I. and colleagues. Methodological guide for vocational orientation of students from 13 to 19 years in the field of information technologies, published by Koalapress, 2015
2. Cord, B., Bowrey, G., Clements. Accounting students' reflections on a regional internship program. *Australasian Accounting Business and Finance Journal*, 2010, 4(3), 47-64.
3. D'Abate, C. P., Youndt, M. A., Wenzel, K. E. Making the most of an internship: An empirical study of internship satisfaction. *Academy of management Learning & Educational*, 2009, 8(4), 527-539.
4. Freestone, R, Williams, P, Thompson, S and Trembath, K. „A quantitative approach to assessment of work-based learning outcomes: An urban planning application“, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 2007, 26, 4, 347-361
5. Gupta, P. B., & Burns, D. J. An exploration of student satisfaction with internship experiences in marketing. *Business Education & Administration*, 2010, 2(1), 27-37.
6. Huang, H., Jia, J. Factors affecting internship satisfaction: Based on organizational socialization theory, *Artificial Intelligence and Education (ICAIE)*, International Conference, 2010.
7. Hurst, J. S. Factors involved in increasing conversion rates of interns into full-time employees. *Michigan State University*, 124, 2007.
8. Hurst, J. L., & Good, L. K. A 20-year evolution of internships: Implications for retail interns, employers and educators. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 2010, 20(1), 175-186.
9. Klee, C. R. Recent school psychology graduates: A preliminary survey of their internship experience, satisfaction, and support. *University at Albany, State University of New York*, 2011
10. Lord, K. R., Sumrall, D., & Sambandam, R. Satisfaction Determinants in Business Internships. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 2011, 2(10)
11. Marlborough, K. Development and validation of an instrument to assess student satisfaction with community college internships. *University of Iowa*, 1999, 245-252.
12. Moghaddam, J. M. Perceived effectiveness of business internship: Student expectations, experiences, and personality traits. *International Journal of Management*, 2011, 28(4).
13. Nelson, A. A. Hospitality internships: The effects of job dimensions and supportive relationships on student satisfaction. *Wayne State University*, 1994.
14. Okay, S., & Sahin, I. A study on the opinions of the students attending the Faculty of Technical Education regarding industrial internship. *International Journal of the Physical Sciences*, 2010, 5(7), 1132-1146.
15. Rothman, M. Lessons learned: Advice to employers from interns. *Journal of Education for Business*, 2007, 82(3), 140.
16. Smits, W. The Quality of Apprenticeship Training. *Educational Economics*, 2006, 14(3), 329-344.
17. Tarquin, K. M., & Truscott, S. D. School psychology students' perceptions of their practicum experiences. *Psychology in the Schools*, 2006, 43, 727-736.
18. Wen, K. P. Determinants of internship effectiveness for university students in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Baptist University*, 2010.