

Designing internships: Student demographics and student motivation



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Background: Internships as a means for learning and job training are increasingly getting traction among universities and policymakers. Still, we do not know what motivates students to undertake such external experimental learning arrangements.

Aim: This study reveals students' motivation for engaging in two different internships design.

Setting: We explore the motivation among Norwegian bachelor and master business students for engagement in internships locally and abroad.

Methods: This is a quantitative study where 244 students responded to our survey. The students themselves provided input on the survey topics. We applied t-tests, correlations, and regressions to analyse the data.

Results: Demographical variables as well as motivational factors influence the student's preferences regarding internships.

Conclusion: The complexity and design inherent in the internship are accepted by the student depending on their family situation, their job experience and their learning expectations.

Contribution: Internships are not a one-size-fits-all. The students' family situation, their previous work experience and their academic achievements give hints to what the student looks for in an internship: a local internship offering future job opportunities or an international internship promising greater learning opportunities.

Keywords: internship; work practice; entrepreneurship; business student; motivation.

Introduction

There is a call among governments, businesses and students alike to make business educational offerings more applicable and job-relevant (Botha & Bignotti 2016; Mabeba 2021). This, as the environment in which entrepreneurs and enterprises operate, is increasingly more competitive (Nabi, Walmsley & Holden 2013). Hence, also established companies hiring fresh business graduates need to be entrepreneurial: intrapreneurship is the new significance of the 'entrepreneurial imperative of the twenty-first century' (Kuratko 2009). Internships are typically considered a specific means of experiential learning or learning-by-doing, and companies see intrapreneurship (or organisational innovation) as a means to survive and prosper in the rapidly changing business environment (Baruah & Ward 2014).

One way the universities reply to this call towards students capable of handling such challenges is by arranging work practice or internships as a part of students' learning experiences during study. Arranging for work practice is then an emergent trend in facilitating students' learning. It is common to arrange such work practice as a project-based internship programme, being student-focused, encouraging critical thinking, in open-ended situations, and by project-based learning techniques (Johari & Bradshaw 2008). Internships are an experiential learning process that develops students' ability to identify opportunities, as well as their problem-solving and their action orientation (Lu & Wang 2018). Much research has focused on the many positive outcomes students benefit from doing internships (Binder, Baguley & Miller 2015), that is, we know some regarding the results of students' engagement in internships. Benefits to students include better options for future employment, making their education more relevant, providing professional growth, career preparation, job satisfaction, work-based learning, developing communication skills, developing job-related skills, getting sooner job offers, developing a stronger resume, receiving feedback, enhancing student learning, networking and all this together with valuable real-world experience (Divine et al. 2007). Internships offer real-world experiences, experiences that are an integral component of an academic programme and provide students with the

opportunity to develop not only work skills but also an understanding of the workplace.

These outcomes are benefits we as educators think to gain the students. To what extent students share this view is not obvious. What we still do not know fully is the motivation of the student for engaging in internships and how their life situation influences their choice regarding internships. This aspect is important as students differing in demographical and academic characteristics might seek different types of experiences fitting their life situation, their skills and their career aspirations. Cannon and Arnold (1998:205) recommend that universities offering internship programmes should ensure that such programmes reflect both the reality of the employment market as well as what students expect to gain from enrolling in such programmes. Binder et al. (2015) conclude that the academic benefits gained from internships may be because of aspects of the internship situation itself. They also ask for research investigating the student motivation for internships as well as how different designs for internships influence students' assessments of internships. Recent research has highlighted that there is a considerable mismatch between the expectations of companies and students (Gerken et al. 2012). Hence, understanding differences in stakeholders' (universities, businesses and students) reasons for engaging in internships may help universities design internship programme guidelines that respond to the call for capable graduates (Maaravi et al. 2021). This study replies to this call. This research then represents a shift from investigating what we as educators think the students need, to investigating what the students themselves want regarding experiential education in the form of internships.

If we know more about the *how* and *why* regarding students' engagement in internships, universities and we as entrepreneurship educators could make a better fit between need and offer (Cannon & Arnold 1998). By such allowing more students to gain valuable work practice experience and become guided in how to relate the scholarly theories to their everyday work practice. Such students will be more motivated interns and students. We as educators would also benefit from the feedback students would be able to provide from the business realm. An internship could be a key to enhancing educational quality because it invites 'user' feedback and experience (Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felten 2011). The businesses would gain from engaging with the student and learning their capabilities. The businesses could discover the potential and experience the students contribute to their business practice. This then without employing them and the potential cost of firing them in case the match was not good enough. The student would gain from the ability to build networks and impress a potential employer, to test out learned theories, and to learn new practices as well as to discover potential unsolved issues they would like to study further. Then the university will be regarded as more useful in the business community. Our research question is then: Why would business students want to engage in internships?

This study is original as it included students themselves in research on how to improve our entrepreneurship educational offerings. The students themselves gave inputs to understanding the important drivers for engaging in internships and they themselves depicted the different ways such internships could be designed. Adding the student perspective to research on designing work practice helps understand what students seek from engaging in internships.

The Theoretical framework section reveals the theoretical foundations on which this research is built upon and sought to enhance. We start by defining internship and depicting its many forms. Then we discuss the gains such arrangements might provide to the student. This theoretical normative discussion allows us to derive some hypotheses regarding what students could gain from an internship as well as how they would like this internship designed. The Method section describes the national setting for the study as well as how we engaged our students in researching this topic. We also describe the data we derived together with the students. The Result and analyses section displays our findings and allows us to compare our findings with our hypotheses. Finally, the Conclusion and implication section discusses our revised research model. Addressing our revised research model allows for a discussion of the theoretical takeaways that might inform further research and practices on this important issue. We also provide advice to universities, entrepreneurship and business educators as well as students and policymakers. Seeing this issue from the student perspective opens other paths of research, and based upon our findings, we point to remaining unresearched areas needing attention.

Theoretical framework

There are different approaches to arranging learning experiences such as internships for students, and such learning arrangements have many labels. Some label it work placements (Wilton 2012), work practice (Buys & Casteleijn 2007), work-based practices (Crossley et al. 2012), work-integrated learning (Patric et al., 2008), experiential education (Stansbie, Nash & Jack 2013) or blended learning platforms (Price & Ronnie 2021). These concepts share that the student is facilitated with a learning experience outside the traditional classroom, utilising didactics where the student is exposed to real-life problems resembling those that the student will be likely to encounter after graduation. The most used expression for such arranged learning experiences is internships. Botha and Bignotti (2016:3) then define internship 'as structured and career-relevant work in an external organisation, occurring in a controlled experiential environment, where a student receives academic credit and/or applicable knowledge'.

According to self-determination theory, students put their effort into the activities that promise the most gain for their invested energy (Gagné & Deci 2005). The gain is then the motivator, and the motivation could stem from within the individual itself, that is, from intrinsic incentives. Intrinsically motivated behaviour is propelled by an interest in the activity and is autonomously driven by the individual's own self-

selected goals. Activities that the individual does not find interesting or useful, need external motivation, that is, extrinsic motivation. Hence, non-interesting activities need to be motivated by a reward, a reward other than the pleasure or the experience of the activity itself to be deemed relevant.

Universities provide a diversity of educational offerings to their students. Students enrol in these educational offerings voluntarily. Some elements of these educational programmes could be regarded as more or less relevant for the student even if the overall educational programme is evaluated as relevant. Hence, students select educational offerings that the students find interesting to explore or that the students perceive will provide them later benefits. The academic discussion regarding internships and similar educational offerings posits that the students will gain several present and subsequent benefits. Internship programmes allow students to develop important skills, apply theories and methods learned in the classroom to real-world problems, and become familiar with the daily routines and rhythms of professional life (Wolinsky-Nahmias & Auerbach 2022). Moreover, internships have been found to improve students' academic understanding, their marketability and to allow students to establish contacts with potential employers (Renganathan, Karim & Li 2010). Hence, we could presume that also students believe internships pay off in the long run. We then propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Students believe internships pay off in the long run.

The value of internships could take different forms. Internships offer other learnings than traditional classroom lectures. The interest in the internship experience could be rooted in an inner motivation for learning. An internship offers opportunities for the application of academic knowledge, that is hands-on learning to complement academic learning (Hora, Parrot & Her 2020). The intrinsic, more present, motivation for deeper learning might include the possibility to test out academic knowledge in a practical situation, learn more on an issue not covered by textbook teaching or apply academic knowledge in a practical setting to build job-relevant confidence.

Johari and Bradshaw (2008) find that firms accepting interns sometimes allow interns to engage in everyday routines as ordinary employees, while some firms prefer the intern to do tasks that do not distract ongoing operations, but develop options and pursue opportunities through project-based work. Increasingly, interns are assigned to project teams that focus on a single project for the duration of the internship so that they become part of a tangible deliverable from start to finish (Hurst & Good 2010). Internships represent an experiential learning design, inviting the student to encounter entrepreneurial learning events. Work practice, or internship, is a means for learning-by-doing and is a way to foster entrepreneurial learning among students (Pittaway et al. 2015; Lu & Wang 2018; Rae 2006). What distinguishes experiential learning from traditional education is the focus on the process of learning as opposed to the outcome of learning (Kolb & Kolb 2008).

Internships are such experimental learning, and results indicate that internships bring theory to practice (Johnson 2019). Stansbie et al. (2013) argue that a learning situation where the student wants to learn, where the student takes ownership in the learning goals and the learning process, situations that involve hands-on practice evidencing the learning, where the learning process is facilitated and adjusted to the cognitive capacity of the student, and where the student is assisted in reflecting on the achievements, provides good conditions for learning. Hence, it is important that such learning experiences include elements that offer value and importance for the learner (Hackman et al. 1975). Learning is a key motivation for participating in internships in the first place (Daugherty 2000; Wasonga & Murphy 2006). Also, Alon (2003) noted internships develop skills as a result of experiential learning, skills including communication, teamwork, problem-solving and critical thinking. By working with an entrepreneurial learning approach in professional practice, students reported an enhanced reflective understanding of learning outcomes and the theory-practice gap and developed an ability for opportunity identification (Ramsgaard & Østergaard 2018). This leads to hypothesis 2:

H2: Students want an internship to provide learning opportunities.

The latter, subsequent and extrinsic benefits could be better chances for a well-paid and interesting job, or a relevant network leading to such job opportunities. An internship could be career-relevant. The career relevance could also be that the student is able to test out different job positions that their education might lead to, or rule this option out or to strengthen their competitive position for such job options later. Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks (2014) find that one major purpose of an internship, as seen by the student, is to investigate such different career paths. They see that interns experience what they want and do not want from work, realising this earlier in their job search process than non-interns. An internship could offer an opportunity to test out different job elements or job positions the education might lead to.

Hora et al. (2020) find that the most important issue regarding students' motivation for partaking in an internship is to be competitive in the job market. As educators, we strive towards such benefits for our students. The major role of an internship is to offer a planned transition from the classroom to the job, and it is a natural bridge between universities and the labour market (Coco 2000). Gault, Redington and Schlager (2000) report significant early career advantages for undergraduates with internship experience. Research also shows that students view internships less as a vehicle for learning, and more as a tool for getting a job (Cannon & Arnold 1998). We then suggest hypothesis 3:

H3: Students want an internship to be relevant to their career.

Blended learning platforms, such as internships, could be a means for providing students with lasting networks within their academic field outside the university (Price & Ronnie 2021). Such increased competitiveness could then relate to

internships being a ‘door-opener’ to potential employers (Hora et al. 2020). Either as it is a relevant job experience raising employers’ interest, or directly as the internship itself could serve as a long job application. Hence, hypothesis 4:

H4: Students want an internship to extend their professional network.

There are a wide variety of designs for internships. Research indicates that even the internship design itself has an influence on the experienced student learning and motivation (Hora et al. 2020). The type of firm as well as the physical arrangement influence the student learning situation. Some universities make an internship mandatory for their students. Such an approach might prevent the student even from enrolling in the programme offered by the university if the fit is poor. Other universities offer internships as a voluntary option. Students then do not need to do internship courses. Alternatively, then the student could select another theoretical course instead of stepping into the unknown territory of adult work life. A required internship programme with poor student fit may not be suited for universities that have a large percentage of part-time or non-traditional students, as compared to universities that are predominantly populated with traditional students (Divine et al. 2007).

The learning outcomes from internships can vary a great deal and depend on both the workplace context and assignments set in the given internship as well as the commitment of the students in the internship (Varghese et al. 2012). Walmsley, Thomas and Jameson (2012) find that internships in Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME) could be more troublesome for students than an internship in larger firms. O’Higgins and Caro (2021) find better results regarding employment offers if the student had an internship in larger firms. On the other end, Degraevl (2011) reports positive results from internships in SMEs. Rigsby et al. (2013) ask for research on firm size and firm type related to internships. Hora et al. (2020) recommend avoiding one-size-fits-all approach to internship design as they find in their study that internships can serve different purposes for different students. Based upon the argument from Divine et al. (2007), Varghese et al. (2012) as well as Hora et al. (2020), we then propose that different internship locations and designs will attract different students based on their capacity and career aspirations. We suggest hypothesis 5 in that regard:

H5: Demographical variables as well as motivational factors influence the student’s preferences regarding internship design.

We then expect that students’ motivation for engaging in internships abroad or locally depends on how the student perceives internships to pay off in the long run, if they think the internship will provide an interesting learning experience, if the internship is career-relevant, and if they believe this will extend their professional network. Likewise, the demographical characteristics of the student as well as motivational factors will also influence motivation for engaging in varieties of internships. This is then summarised in Figure 1.

Method

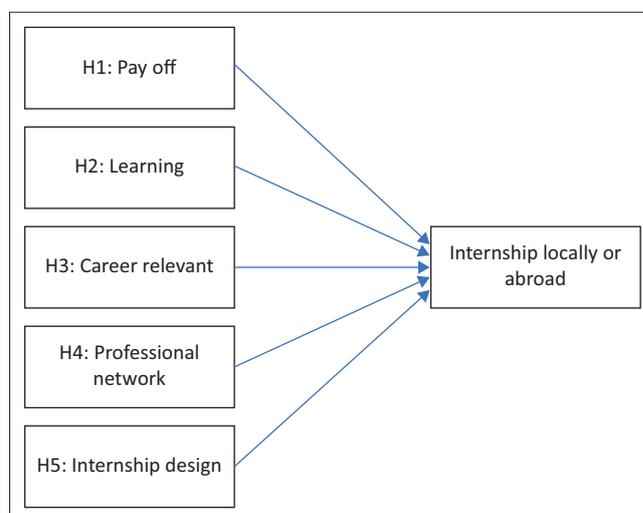
Norway as context

The context for this study is a business school at a Norwegian university. Norway is a small rich export-oriented country positioned northernmost in Europe. As much as 38.4% of those aged 19–24, and 17.0% of those aged 25–29 are currently students at a university (SSB 2023). Norway is classified as an innovation-driven economy with high levels of employee engagement in innovation (GEM 2022). Unemployment is low, about 2%–4%, and mostly structural. Business master graduates usually get a job offer even before graduating from business school; still, bachelor graduates are not equally easily employed. The local industry mainly consists of SMEs.

The business culture in Norway is characterised by being egalitarian and democratic, focusing on progress, continuity and change; the staffs are intrinsically motivated and want to play a role in the process of progress. Managers use a delegating and participating leadership style and tend to consult their subordinates while encouraging individual initiatives from the subordinates; managers try to manage through enthusiasm, according to Bjerke (1999). Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM 2014) shows that the level of entrepreneurship among the adult population is rather low, but the level of intrapreneurship is high. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2014) reports a strong correlation between country-level intrapreneurship and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Entrepreneurship in the form of intrapreneurship and employee engagement is then vital and necessary for Norwegian firms. Hence, it is also important for Norwegian Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) to prepare their business students for such work environments.

Student engagement in internship design

The author of this research combines teaching entrepreneurship with teaching BSc and MSc business students in applied quantitative methods. Our methodological



H, hypothesis.

FIGURE 1: Our research model.

TABLE 1: Demographical description of the sample ($N = 244$).

Study level	Student level							
	Male	Female	Age 20–24	Age 25–29	Age 30+	Average grade AB	Average grade CDE	Have had a relevant job
BSc	88	73	98	35	28	43	99	61
MSc	43	40	41	25	17	39	42	39
Total	131	113	139	60	45	100	141	100

BSc, Bachelor of Sciences; MSc, Masters of Sciences.

approach allows the student voice to be accounted for. In the quantitative part of this method course, the students are to write a mini-thesis on a maximum of four pages containing all elements and chapters of a thesis. One theme is selected as common for the whole class. The theme discussed here was 'Students and internships'. The teacher starts by explaining the structure of a thesis and what an internship is. The students are then to reflect one and one on why or why not and how they would like to take part in such an arrangement. Then they group two and two sorting out their main reasons and concerns. Then the teacher makes a mind map on the blackboard on all the issues raised by the students. The teacher then explains what frequencies, t-tests and correlations could tell from survey data. The class then discusses different issues one could investigate from such a dataset. Then the teacher structures the mind map into a survey which all the students then complete before the next class. Before the next class, the students are then provided the dataset and grouped in smaller groups where they are assisted in doing their selected quantitative analysis towards their hand-in exam, the mini-thesis.

In this part of the course in applied methods, we then started with a discussion on what an internship is and the different ways to arrange it. This discussion was then partly based on the inputs from the students and partly based on an extensive literature review conducted by the teacher on internship design and motivation for internships. We concluded on two main approaches: physical internships in their home town, or physical internships abroad, as a problem solver developing a new product or service for the firm.

In class, we then discussed issues related to motivation for taking part in internship programmes. The survey consists of 172 items because of the engagement and input from the students. In addition to some demographical variables and the student's present living conditions, the topics covered were which information that was needed from the university, the type of firm to work at, what the student wanted to learn from it, who should pay whom what, the duration and the structure of the internship as well as the student's motivation for taking part in an internship and what was hindering them in doing so. Then we developed a survey to which all 161 BSc and 83 MSc students replied. The items were either categorical or measured along a seven-point Likert scale. The students then used this data for their own work on their four-page mini-thesis for the method course.

As it was a compulsory requirement to reply to our survey, all students replied. Our final dataset consists of 244 replies.

This study focuses on Norwegian students, as we would like to explore internships among domestic students. Table 1 shows the demographical description of the sample. There are 131 male students and 113 female students among the investigated students. As many as 100 students reported their average grade in their present study to be A or B, while 142 reported a C, D or E on average. Among these 244 students, 100 reported having had a job relevant to their studies.

We included gender, family obligations, educational level, grades and previous work experience as controls. Male students and female students differ in their work values and have different motivations for their careers (Farrington, Gray & Sharp 2012). We measured family obligations as having responsibility for the care of children living at home. We expect that having family obligations reduces the opportunity to undertake educational commitments if the internship is far away from where they live or it demands working at odd times. We included the level of education as bachelor and master students differ in their academic proficiency, and this might have an influence on their work confidence. We also include grades as a control, as Cannon and Arnold (1998) find that students with lower grades view internships as a means for getting a job while the students with better grades to a larger extent engage in internships for the academic challenge it offers. Divine et al. (2007) argue that students with below-average grades would be more reluctant to do internships. We also included previous relevant work experience as a control as internship experience is information 'good to add' to the résumé (Pinto & Pereira 2019), and previous relevant work experience might compensate for a missing internship. We propose that differences in demographical variables would explain differences in the student's preferences regarding internships and that students having a part-time job, students with kids and older established students with work experience, would respond differently to different internship designs.

We test our hypothesis by means of multiple regressions. Multiple regressions allow for studying the influence of several independent variables on one dependent variable. We run two separate but parallel regressions. We explore issues related to students' interest in partaking in a local internship and an internship abroad.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results

Table 2 displays the mean score, the kurtosis and the skewness as well as the standard deviation of the involved variables. Table 2 reveals that the mean for item B1 ‘I would like to take an internship/work placement at a local company’ is 5.40 on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (To a very small degree) to 7 (To a very large extent), while the mean for the item B3 ‘I would like to take an internship/work experience abroad’ is 3.69 on the same scale. A t-test gives that B1 is significantly higher than B3 (t -test = 0.00).

TABLE 2: Means, skewness, kurtosis and standard deviations of the used variables.

Label	Variables	Measurement			
		Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
B1	they I would like to take an internship/work placement at a local company	5.40	1.86	-1.06	0.12
B3	I would like to take an internship/work experience abroad	3.69	2.18	0.18	-1.38
A01	Gender (1 = Male, 2 = Female)	1.48	0.50	-	-
A09	Level (1 = BSc, 2 = MSc)	1.39	0.49	-	-
A08	Grade (AB = 1, CDE = 2)	1.69	0.46	-	-
A03	Have responsibility for the care of children living at home? (Y = 1, N = 2)	1.83	0.38	-	-
A07	Have you had a job that is relevant to your education? (Y = 1, N = 2)	1.58	0.49	-	-
D06	H1: A work practice course will pay off in the long run	5.82	1.41	-1.31	1.30
D15	H2: I will learn much by doing work practice	5.90	1.42	-1.42	1.56
D04	H3: A work practice will be relevant to my career	5.79	1.43	-1.37	1.73
D21	H4: A work practice program will expand my professional network	5.37	1.48	-0.84	0.39
E05	H5a: ...the host organization is – A start-up company	2.96	1.60	0.38	-0.58
E06	H5b: ... the host organization is – A small business	3.33	1.68	0.18	-0.75
E07	H5c: ... the host organization is – A large company	3.93	1.78	-0.11	-0.78
E08	H5d: ... the host organization is – An international company	3.67	1.85	0.07	-0.97

Note: Labels’ B1 and B3 are measured by: *To what extent do the following statements suit you and your situation: To a very small degree 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 To a very large extent.* Items D and E are measured by: *How much do you disagree or disagree with the following statements about you: It is important to me that ... To a very small degree 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 To a very large extent.* SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 3: Pearson correlations among the used variables, $n = 250$.

Label	B1	B3	A01	A09	A08	A03	A07	D06	D15	D04	D21	E05	E06	E07	E08
B1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
B3	0.112	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
A01	0.183 ***	-0.060	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
A09	-0.095	0.084	0.063	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
A08	0.019	-0.108	-0.049	-0.152 **	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
A03	0.032	0.313 ***	-0.202 ***	-0.007	0.044	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
A07	0.174 ***	-0.058	-0.065	-0.087	0.142 **	0.149**	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
D06	0.521 ***	0.224 ***	0.216 ***	-0.125 **	-0.001	0.076	0.099	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
D15	0.551 ***	0.245 ***	0.243 ***	-0.120	-0.030	0.056	0.040	0.661 ***	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
D04	0.498 ***	0.234 ***	0.177 ***	-0.084	-0.053	0.084	0.081	0.802 ***	0.689 ***	1	-	-	-	-	-
D21	0.346 ***	0.182 ***	0.231 ***	0.063	-0.030	-0.132 **	0.063	0.530 ***	0.505 ***	0.553 ***	1	-	-	-	-
E05	0.101	0.216 ***	-0.050	0.187 ***	-0.048	0.104	0.010	0.119*	0.087	0.087	0.130**	1	-	-	-
E06	0.185 ***	0.074	-0.022	0.029	0.025	0.125**	0.022	0.101	0.136**	0.095	0.053	0.709 ***	1	-	-
E07	0.146**	0.247 ***	-0.131 **	0.135**	0.018	0.188 ***	-0.050	0.120*	0.153**	0.172 ***	0.280 ***	0.458 ***	0.439 ***	1	-
E08	0.031	0.418 ***	-0.102	0.186 ***	-0.060	0.202 ***	-0.012	0.095	0.088	0.104 *	0.261 ***	0.484 ***	0.393 ***	0.745 ***	1

***, $p > 0.01$; **, $p > 0.05$; *, $p > 0.10$.

Moreover, it is important for the students that they feel that work practice is relevant for their career (mean = 5.79 on a 7-point Likert scale), that they think a work practice will pay off in the long run (mean = 5.82), and that they believe they will learn much by undertaking an internship (mean = 5.90), and that they believe the internship to be relevant for their career (mean = 5.81). The students also believe that they will expand their professional network by doing an internship (mean = 5.37). An internship in a large company is more interesting than an internship in an international company (t -test = 0.05), and more interesting than at a small business or a startup (t -test = 0.00). Doing an internship at an international company is not more popular than an internship at a small business (t -test = 0.13), but more popular than doing an internship at a start-up (t -test = 0.00). An internship at a small business is more popular than an internship at a start-up (t -test = 0.00). The skewness for B01, D04, D06 and D15 is slightly over the threshold range of -1 to 1 recommended by Hair et al. (1998). Likewise, the kurtosis for variables B3, D04, D06 and D15 are slightly over the threshold range of -1 to 1 recommended by Hair et al. (1998). Higher n implies lesser noise impact because of kurtosis and skewness on the regression calculations, but this still gives reasons to interpret the impact of these variables with caution.

Table 3 shows a correlation matrix of the involved variables. The table shows a weak relationship between gender (A01: males coded 1 and females coded 2), and the want for a local internship (B1), indicating that female students are more likely to prefer a local internship than male students. Academic level (A09) and grades (A08) do not seem to influence the student’s preferences for an internship; grade A or B is coded 1, while C, D or E is coded 2. Students without kids (A03: kids are coded 1 and no kids are coded 2) are the ones interested in internships abroad. Those without relevant work practice (A07: yes is coded 1 and no is coded 2) are the ones interested in a local internship.

It seems as if the local internship arrangement is deemed the internship most likely to pay off in the long run (D07),

TABLE 4: Regressions on interests in work practice arrangements.

Design of work practice and internship	B1 Local internship	B3 Abroad internship
A01 Gender (male = 1, female = 2)	0.054	-0.044
A09 Level (BSc = 1, MSc = 2)	-0.002	0.056
A08.g Grade (AB = 1 CDE = 2)	-0.007	-0.054
A03 Children at home (Y = 1, N = 2)	-0.028	0.250 ***
A07 Had a job that is relevant to your education (Y = 1, N = 2)	0.148 ***	-0.120 **
H1 – D06 A work practice course will pay off in the long run	0.217 **	0.069
H2 – D15 I will learn much by doing work practice	0.305 ***	0.206 ***
H3 – D04 A work practice will be relevant to my career	0.051	0.106
H4 – D21 A work practice program will expand my professional network	0.045	-0.144 **
H5a – E05 A start-up company	-0.057	0.159 **
H5b – E06 A small business	0.156 **	-0.222 ***
H5c – E07 A large company	0.154 *	-0.174 **
H5d – E08 An international company	-0.171 **	0.492 ***
Adj R ²	0.367	0.312
F	12.194 ***	9.759 ***

***, $p > 0.01$; **, $p > 0.05$; *, $p > 0.10$.

Adj R², adjusted R-squared; BSc, Bachelor of Sciences; MSc, Masters of Sciences.

the design the student expects to learn most from (D15), the most career-relevant (D04), as well as the one most likely to extend their professional network (D21). Likewise, the students seem to perceive a connection between internship designs paying off in the long run, providing good learning opportunities, being career-relevant and offering useful business networks.

Table 4 offers the results of two regressions, displaying the influence of demographical as well as motivational variables on the student's preference for a local internship, and an internship abroad.

The results from the regressions displayed in Table 4 reveal that the students interested in the local internship lack relevant job experience, they think that the internship will pay off in the long run and they will learn much from the internship. If they were to do such an internship, they prefer to do so at a small or large business located near their place of study. They do not prefer the business to be international and are indifferent to it being a start-up. Furthermore, the students interested in an internship abroad do not have kids that need to be taken care of. They too expect that they will learn much from doing such an internship. They do not believe an internship abroad will expand their business network. They do not want to do their internship at a small or a large company, but the hosting company should be internationally oriented or a start-up. There were no differences in interest for any type of internship because of gender, grade or academic level. Interestingly enough is also the finding that to what extent the students perceive the internship to be relevant for their career has no influence on their motivation for an internship.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that students are motivated to engage in internships by the expectation that internships will pay off in the long run. This hypothesis is only partly confirmed. Students think that only local internships will pay off in the long run. The assumption that internships pay off in the long

run does not motivate internships abroad, supporting the finding of Pinto and Pereira (2019) regarding internship as 'good to add' to the résumé but not 'the more international the better'. Hypothesis H2 states that students want an internship that offers learning opportunities. Table 4 revealed that if the students perceive that an internship will provide opportunities for learning, then the student will be interested in pursuing an internship, and this counts for both types of internships; locally and internationally. H2 was then confirmed.

Likewise, Table 4 informs that hypothesis H3 was not confirmed, and implies that students expect an internship to be relevant to their career. Hypothesis 4 predicts that students are motivated towards an internship to extend their professional network. This hypothesis was not confirmed either. Internship abroad is negatively associated with expectation of it to expand their professional network. Students do not view an internship abroad as useful for extending their professional network.

Hypothesis 5 proposes that demographical variables as well as motivational factors influence the student's preferences regarding internship designs. Students are not indifferent to the physical location of their internship, or the design. The t-tests show that an internship nearby the campus city is more popular than an internship abroad. We see this as the students associate different locations (local or abroad) and different types of firms (start-ups, small businesses, large companies and international companies) with different modes of internships. This implies that H5 was confirmed.

Gender, academic level and grade do not influence on student's motivation for doing an internship. Having kids at home seems to restrict students to only local internships; the students with kids do not want to do an international internship. We see that students who already have relevant work practice tend to prefer an international internship, while those who do not already have relevant work practice tend to prefer a local internship position. Students are motivated by different motivational factors towards different internship designs.

Conclusions and implications

The structure of an internship programme is an important factor in providing high-quality and productive internship experiences (Gryski, Johnson & O'Toole 1987; Kim, Kim & Bzullak 2011). Hora et al. (2020) claim that the literature discussion on the benefits gained from internships promises more than experienced by the students. They further propose that students who have undertaken an internship course conceptualised internships in more multi-faceted and critical ways than what is proposed by the literature. Our findings support the view that students conceptualised internships in more multi-faceted ways and not as one-size-fits-all.

The immediate insight from this study is that business students are interested in different types of internships, and different

types of students prefer different types of internships. There is no such thing as a 'one-size-fits-all' internship. Universities need to offer a variety of internship designs to meet the requirements of their students and make their experiential learning process-related educational offerings relevant. Our study may then shed more light on how to structure, design and manage successful programmes for the benefit of universities and their students. Preparing internship offerings that are better aligned with the student's needs, could tempt more students to engage in internships. Knowing more about how students perceive the value of internships might allow us as teachers to design better internship offerings or express our offerings more in line with their needs, motivating more students to undergo internships during their studies.

Theoretical contributions

This research offers important implications for theory. Current research and practice tend to regard internships as a coherent concept, addressing all students the same way with the same aim, operationalising internships based upon what we as educators think students lack to fit the need of society. Wilton (2012) finds that the completion of a degree including a work placement element does not universally translate into either greater reported skills or superior labour market achievements. Stansbie et al. (2013) argue that better internship design could lead to improved student satisfaction and student motivation. This study supports their arguments and refines their statement further by expressing which student characteristics that could aid such designs.

According to self-determination theory, people tend to select actions that benefit them, either as it responds to their own inner goals or if the action promises valuable rewards as a subsequent result of the action. The students in this study prefer internship designs that fit their preferences, that is, internships that pay off in the long run and where they expect to learn much. Some would like this arena for learning to be local firms. This setting resembles the industry structure where the students will operate after graduation. Some again prefer to learn in internationally oriented firms abroad where the learning challenge is more eminent.

Students seek learning opportunities by engaging in internships. Even so, the students do not believe all internship designs to be relevant for their careers. Bachelor students have less academic knowledge than master students, but this does not influence their want for an internship learning experience. Students at both levels of education report that they would like to take part in an internship, given that the condition for doing so fits their situation. They particularly prefer internships at a local business; internships abroad are less in demand. Students report that they deem local internships to be relevant to their career, to pay off in the long run as well as offer learning. International internships offer challenging learning opportunities, but the students do not see such a design as adding to their professional network. Universities then need to design internships that students themselves find more relevant for their careers.

Similarly, internship designs need to allow the student to take part and reap the learning benefits from the offered internships. This research shows that the student's context and living situation matter and influence their motivation for participating in different learning designs. The student's living situations, academic achievements, identities, and career aspirations all differ among our students. All this should inform the design of our experiential educational offerings to interest the student. Our findings suggest that the student's living condition, that is, if they have kids or not and to what extent the student already has achieved relevant work experience is particularly relevant regarding motivation and capability to undertake an internship. Hence, theoretical models discussing student motivation and student learning achievement should include a description of their situation and context. As Divine et al. (2007), we see that the student's living conditions and context delimit or open various learning paths. A mature student with kids, a house, a mortgage and a part-time or full-time job will not be equally able to relocate and engage in unscheduled learning activities as is the young resourceful single student. We, as Binder et al. (2015), are concerned that not all students are equally served by educational offerings such as internships.

Students regard internships as a great opportunity to learn. Students also perceive that some internship designs will actually pay off in the long run. Still, the students question the career relevance of internships. This variable is not significant in our study. Students do not think that internships abroad offer valuable networking opportunities. The student without kids wants a more academically challenging learning experience, preferably abroad in an internationally oriented firm or in a start-up. Students do value the potential learning opportunity internships abroad offer. Students who want to do an internship abroad would like to engage in a challenging business environment; they would like to work in start-ups or international-oriented businesses.

More settled students, students with family and work obligations do not see themselves undertaking an internship abroad that entails leaving their family, finding other housing and quitting their daytime job. By tailoring internship courses differently for different types of students, universities might tempt both the homebound student as well as the more adventurous student into exploring a more hands-on learning environment. By offering internships in different designs, the offerings will better adhere to the student's living situation, their work experience, and their learning aspirations and by such to the student's wanted career path.

Universities should seek to respond to this call for varied educational offers. Increased intrinsic motivation might lead to greater engagement and subsequently to improved learning and better performance during the internship. This might then lead to better job opportunities and a better reputation for the university for providing relevant educational offerings.

Practical contributions

This insight gives reason to suggest some implications for practice. The students need to be motivated to undertake an internship. We as educators need to arrange for different work practice designs that suit different groups of students. In doing so, both demographical and motivational factors need to be fine-tuned into the design to interest students in undertaking an internship.

Universities should offer internship positions resembling the local industry structure where the students might be employed after graduation. The data suggest that students with less relevant job experience would like internships in firms that resemble the type of firms they might get employed in at after graduation. They would like a job experience that is relevant to their education and then an internship at a local organisation addressing local needs. The local businesses in our contexts are often small, but some students also want to do an internship in a larger local company. Universities should also offer more challenging internships for the more traditional student. Some students want internships abroad, and then they would like a challenging learning situation in start-ups or internationally oriented firms. This will attract single students who already possess relevant work experience.

Entrepreneurs and business managers should emphasise the learning potential their business offer students interested in an internship. They could spur more interest among students if they then also express how this hands-on learning could be career relevant, and by such, pay off in the long run. Start-ups and international-oriented firms who would like to attract also local students, could prepare learning situations less demanding, or provide more assistance during the internship. Some students prefer more demanding learning situations, and firms that would like to attract such students could emphasise this element of the internship offer.

Universities also need to advocate the benefits of extending networks and express how internships will be relevant for their future career. As for now, students do not necessarily see these benefits stemming from engaging in internships. Hora et al. (2020) remark that the students who had undertaken an internship differed substantially from those who had not, in their conception of what an internship actually provides. Universities could then engage students who already have done internships to advocate for internships among their peers. They will then express their learning achievements and their job experience along with the needs of the students, emphasising the internship elements that are perceived as of value among the students themselves.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that it investigates internships as seen from Norwegian business students. Business students might want different outcomes from an internship course than other types of students. Internships are not a compulsory element in most business programmes, as they might be for,

that is nursing or teacher students. Norway might differ from other countries in its industry composition and structure. The findings on the low emphasis that the students put on internships as a means for networking and advertising themselves as potential employees might stem from the low unemployment rate in Norway and the ease of students' experience of getting a relevant job. Business students in different settings might prioritise otherwise. There are also some methodological limitations. The involvement of students provided a rich source of issues related to how and why students do or do not engage in internships. Even so, as this survey is a result of the many issues deemed important or interesting by the students themselves, and that the students were involved in wording the items, our measures rely on single items.

Further research

This study might inspire future studies to develop measures that allow better internal consistency and reliability by including several items capturing different aspects of the same concept. This investigation addresses the intrinsic motivation as well as the extrinsic incentives students value related to internships. This study shows that business students value and are motivated by the expected learning opportunity. This study does not reveal what the students would like to learn. Research suggests that students would like to test academic knowledge, learn more about practical applications of academic knowledge and that they want to learn if a certain job situation is preferable or not. All these are potential learning goals. This study does not go into detail about who among the students value which of these learning goals and how much.

Unveiling the internship need and offer as seen from the business's perspective is still not adequately done. We as educators presume that businesses and entrepreneurs are willing to invest the necessary time and effort in preparing and aiding the internship process. We do not fully know what triggers this willingness from the business side and similarly, we do not know who among the businesses is capable and willing to engage with universities as hosts for internships.

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Data availability

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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