The need for internships and school practices as a method of bridging the gap between education and industry in Romania

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the current situation of school practice and internships as ways of reducing the gap between the labor market and education. In the first part, there is highlighted the current situation of Romania comparing with other European countries when it comes about graduates finding a job in their field of studies. Among the biggest issues encountered by a young graduate we see that "Lack of experience" play a big role in not finding a proper job in our country after graduation. So the need to reduce this problem is vital in order to ease finding a job in the studies areas for graduates. A list of advantages is presented to encourage internships/school practice among the students. Observing the upsides aspects of having such an experience, a research was done among 13 companies in Sibiu to see if indeed they taking into consideration candidates for a serious job, having done an internship/school practice. The results of this survey are presented below, seeing if indeed for a Romanian student is valuable to have an experience like that.

Keywords: internship, experience, interviews, job

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ROMANIAN GRADUATES

According to a report written by the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion in 2008, while in countries like Austria, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands, a percentage higher than 75% of brand new graduates succeed to find a job in their study field in the first year after graduation, while Romanian graduates do not reach the rate of 50% (EU-wide final report 2008) in the first year after graduation. And on a long perspective, the statistics show that in Romania practicing the job in which studied areas you prepare for is somewhere between 20-30% (internship.uniunea.ro).

These points out that more than half of the graduates decide to take a different path in the labor market from different considerations.

One of the reasons could be, the period of transition from school to the labor market which is negatively affected by three factors: inexperience, lack of required skills for the job and lack of qualifications.
Lack of experience is the most common barrier to new graduates on the labor market in Romania. Experience has become a vital criterion for employers and the incentives provided by the state for companies seem not to balance the odds for the inexperienced graduates.

An average period of transition from student life to being a professional in their chosen field of studies (from school to work) for a young Romanian is around 103 months, equivalent to more than eight years, in contrast with a graduate from Netherlands where this period will be up to 28 months slightly more than three years (EU-wide final report 2008).

The analysis performed by bestjobs.ro shows that for one of the two employers in Romania, experience is the eliminatory selection criteria. So, for a young Romanian person who has never work, even getting called to attend an interview is quite difficult.

According to the study published by Bell and Blanchflower, a young man in his 20s who hasn’t work experience will be negatively impacted on the long term by this issue compared with others who worked early. This will also affect how much he is going to be paid. He will have a lower satisfaction because he will expect more from the employers due to his higher education, expectations rarely fulfilled at the beginning. In short, a professional late start may have negative consequences for young people's future.

**Romanian legislation for internships/school practices in curriculum**

The Law of National Education compels the universities to ensure a minimum of 30% from the required internships that students must have in their curriculum as programs being obtained through real partnerships with the businesses, so a part from these young people will have the chance to catch a glimpse of what is really happening in the industry. This means that the remaining 70% of the students will have to find their individual practice program (stagii-internship.ro/propunere).

The internship is regulated by Law 258/2007 as a requirement for graduation, supplemented by Order 3955/2008 where the details of being part of internships are specified.

The law defines internship as a "work done by students according to the curriculum, which is designed to verify the applicability of theoretical knowledge learnt” and follow a "framework agreement of cooperation or conventions, as appropriate, agreed between hard the organizer and practice partner”(Legea-nr. 258/2007 privind practica elevilor şi studenţilor).

In Romania, internships and school practice are slightly different in terms of who can take part, if the participant is paid or not, the working hours and the tasks. All students have do at least 3 weeks of practice in their field of studies, but if someone is doing a longer internship that can be equivalent of what is required in the curriculum.

**The advantages of doing an internship/school practice**

If someone was skeptical about how useful an internship can increase his changes in obtaining a better job after the graduation in Romania, here are some upsides aspects in determining you to take part in such an experience:

1. You have the opportunity to work in the field of specialization and to understand what is happening in the labor market. Most tasks received during an internship are well established by the companies which know exactly what to ask from an intern and what to teach him practical skills.

2. The possibility of meeting professionals from your upcoming working domain that you may to keep in touch with and start the creation of a network of professional contacts. Working in a serious company as an intern, you get to see the specialists in action and you can "steal" some secrets from those who practice for years what you plan to do it after graduation In addition knowing an expert in the field, will always will be an advantage for a rookie when you will face some difficulties.

3. The attainment of professional and personal responsibility. For many students, the first money earned is a paid internship. A person who earns his own money, he's more
responsible for his professional future and be more confident, seeing that his work is rewarded.

4. Increasing employability in good company. This simply means fewer headaches for the young at the time of interviews when they will be asked about experience, plus great chance to stay in the company after the internship.

5. Ability to perform research thesis in the company you are intern. This will give to students a real database which could help with the paper diploma.

6. Ability to test other fields. Being an extracurricular activity, internships are not limited only to the field of study attended, as an undecided student or one who wants to develop in other areas may apply for an internship in a different area of education.

THE COMPANIES’ POINT OF VIEW ON INTERNSHIPS

A total of 30 questionnaires were completed by the 12 companies. The survey aims to see what these companies think of students who are doing internships. To describe a little bit who were the respondents, 53.34% of them activates in the field of production of automotive components, followed by 13.33% which are dealing with procurement, material trade & construction and the difference belongs to companies that operate in the "safety and security domain.

For have a realistic view about their capacity of hiring, 57% of the surveyed companies are large enterprises, with more than 250 employees today and only 7% of these have employees between 10 and 49 (small companies).

To establish the framework and the associated requirements for these internships, we started with asking them if they ever had interns or school practitioners. The results can be identified in the figure 1.

As can be seen, only 89.29% from the surveyed companies had practitioners, while only 39.29% offered internships. The difference is 50%. This may be due to the fact that internships, although entered the Romanian market with the arrival of multinationals, are not widely known among companies in Sibiu.

The affirmative received answers in this large amount are encouraging for the students from Sibiu who want to take part from one of these programs.

Therefore, the next question comes to point out if the students at the end of the school practice / internships were they able to return to the company after graduation or to extend the contract so they can continue while in college.
This question aims to see how many companies offer the chance to stay or to return after graduation.

**Figure 2. The possibility of returning to the company after graduation or extend his internship contract**

It can be seen that the companies are giving to practitioners/interns this opportunity to stay/return "often" in proportion of 42.31%, followed by option "always" with a percentage of 34.62%. Only 3.85% of them prefer not to suggest a future collaboration between them and the students. Overall, we can sum up that chances in Sibiu for graduates to work in the study are very high if they are taking part in one of these collaborations.

Since the importance of such experience was above explained in Sibiu, it has really important to understand „What were the criteria for selection?”. It aims to highlight the most important aspects that make the difference from "no" to a "yes" to obtain an apprenticeships/internships.

**Figure 3 The most important criteria for selection**

As can be seen, the most important criterion is the impression from the interview in the proportion of 64.29%, followed surprisingly by "the marks from school", particularly for 39.29% of these companies that offer such programs, this is quite significant and. Less important for companies in choosing their candidates is the criterion of previous professional experience. Among answers to "Others" there can be found answer such as teacher recommendations.

The purpose of the following question is to understand which are the strengths and weaknesses of practitioners/interns in order to improve those parts where students from Sibiu don’t excel.
Of all these aspects, interns are best on the attitude they had during the training period, where 34.62% of the companies were "Extremely satisfied" and "very satisfied". This has been also assessed as "Slightly satisfied" with a rate of only 3.85% as seen in the chart. At the opposite pole, what seems to reach the least the expectations of the employers is knowledge of the students / graduates, for which was assigned a percentage of 30.77% for "Slightly satisfied" and 7.69% of "Extremely satisfied".

"Level of involvement" is positioned between the two above explained aspects as the degree of satisfaction of the participants, where they left a good impression, followed backwards by the "level of responsibility" of these, where there is enough room for improvement.

To conclude if, overall, these programs are useful for a chance to get a serious job after graduation the following question has been added in the survey. In the below chart are recorded the answers on "How much you take into considerations practical training / internships when are you interviewing a candidate for a serious job?"

![Figure 4 The strengths and weaknesses of practitioners / interns](image)

![Figure 5 Taking into considerations practical training / internships when are they interviewing a candidate for a serious job](image)
It can be seen that 39.29% of the questioned companies have chosen "often" criterion and "always" when it comes about the importance of a previously training period/internship at the moment of hiring which highlights that the young who have taken part in such programs do not need to worry for their lack of working experience in the interview time.

CONCLUSIONS

The results revealed that companies focus heavily on the impression during the interviews with the candidates, followed closely by their college grades. The survey it also points out the fact the questioned are least happy about students' knowledge and this aspect should improve with time. It is noted that the 13 surveyed companies gave very satisfied / extremely satisfied with this collaboration, reflecting the fact that there aren’t major problems in these activities and a good collaboration is great for both sides. Therefore, these companies consider these internships for possible employment at a high rate. Taking into consideration the current situation from Romania and the results obtained from the survey it is a good way to close the gap from education and labor market by encouraging students to take part in such programs. The benefits are visible and it does reduce their transition period and give them a better chance to find a good and paid job in their domain after graduation.

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