From Classroom to Career in Sibiu Romania – Engineering Students’ Perception on Internships and School Practices

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to highlight the most important ideas about internships and school practices from students’ point of view. The paper is structured in three parts. In the first section the topic based on building a career in Romania while being a student is discussed along with the employers’ expectations of having experience for getting a job and the problematic of today educational system. Further on the differences between traineeships and internships are detailed according to the Romanian framework and international sources to see exactly what do these mean and which one weights more for a company at the time of interviewing. Taking into the account what has been mentioned a survey was conducted among students from Faculty of Engineering where 100 replies were received. The questions asked highlighted how often Romanian students are being a part in such an activity, which are means of information they use to find out about the open positions and the students’ degree of satisfaction about the opportunities internships and school practices offer them, on a long-term aspect.

Keywords: internship, experience, career, students

BUILDING A CAREER IN ROMANIA WHILE BEING A STUDENT

The term "internship" has emerged and developed in Romania when multinational companies started to come, initially being used as a substitute element for the traineeship of students / master students to complete their studies. At this moment, the Law in Romania demands that every student has to be a part of a school practice or internship, to get some insightful ideas about what his profession will look alike in his field of studies. This is regulated by Law 258/2007 as a mandatory condition to complete the studies, completed by a Minister Order 3955/2008, where the framework of practical training is detailed. But there is no legal restriction on how much long this internship or school practices should be, it is specified only a numbers of hours that the trainee should have done in the company (usually it is around 3 weeks but the collaboration between students and company can be extended if both parties agree on).

Internships and traineeship are the first step that students can take, to make sure they gain experience in their field of studies, which will help them have the career they are preparing already in the classrooms of University. Practical experience is not just well appreciated for companies but quite mandatory, when it comes about getting a specific position as bellow described. The need for having done an internship in a student CV, at the time of interviewing for a position, will put him in...
a good light in front of his possible employer. One of the platform of finding a job or posting the vacant positions from a specific company in Romania (bestjobs.ro) has carried out a survey to see how much weight for an employer that his candidate has or has not experience. The results were indicating that for one of two companies having experience is an eliminatory criterion. For a graduate, a real work experience gained during the studies period will increase the chance to get a qualified job in a good company, reducing the major difference between theoretical training and labor market requirements. Such a real experience that brings useful skills for the future graduate is the school practice/ internship, the best method of transition between the educational system and the specialized field of work.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A TRAINEESHIP AND AN INTERNSHIP

Traineeships and internships remain the best option for students to acquire that experience that proves to be an elimination criterion in an interview. According to the law, internship / traineeship is the work done internally within a host organization that aims to deepen the theoretical knowledge and improve practical skills (internship.uniunea.ro/proiectul-de-lege). Yet, the two concepts differ greatly through the following aspects detailed below:

- **Who performs it** – internships can be carried out by bachelor students, master students and graduates, while school practices are done almost exclusively by students, especially because these are a compulsory part of their University curriculum.

- **Recruitment** – the internship recruitment process is more complex, and may include tests similar to interviews for a real job, while for a traineeship, in most cases, there are agreements established between the University and companies, so students can be sent directly to a specific firm, without being interviewed or tested.

- **Time frame** – A traineeship can be done at the end of the semester / year of study according to the curriculum, while internship can be done throughout the year.

- **Working tasks** – work tasks are more complex during an internship due to the fact that the duration is between 2 up to 6 months and employers have more time to explain more working procedures compared to a school practice.

In a recent report (Hora, Wolfgam & Thompson, 2017, p. 6), about internship in United States, the authors tried to explain the distinctions between different types of work-based learning. Internship it is seen as “a short-term opportunity for students to work (paid or unpaid) for an employer where ideally their academic learning can be applied to real-world tasks”. On the other side, traineeship (practicum) is “a component of some educational programs where students are placed in a job site and observe the work of professionals while also spending some time performing tasks themselves. Typically, students are also enrolled in a course connected to the practicum for deeper understanding and meaningful facilitation of what is being learned during the experience”.

For many employers an internship weighs more than a practice, because the student has more time to develop, learn more and get acquainted with the labor market. According to the study by Catalyst Solutions, 29% of interns commit to the end of the program in the company where they worked. But traineeships are also appreciated in the resume of the person.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

It is chosen a descriptive research that is characterized by addressing "in detail only a certain segment of the population of interest" (Cernușcă, D. and Thistlethwaite, P., 2001, p. 81) to determine statistics aimed at the "population of interest" in full.

*Research motivation (research proposal)* – The graduates of the faculties in Romania encounter a strong resistance to entering the labor market. This is primarily due to the requirement of large companies regarding the experience of job applicants. School practice and internships remain the best option for students to gain that experience which proves to be an elimination criterion in the
It is desired to carry out an analysis to see what is the current situation of the school practice and internship to find methods of improvement for this periods of practice, so that the graduates of the Faculty of Engineering have an easy passage in the real work field and that the lack of experience is getting smaller and why not, if it can be nullified. As the internship is compulsory for ending the bachelor studies, one wants to become aware of the importance that the practice offers to a student, both, for acquiring specific skills in the working environment, and specialty competencies, but also regarding the seriousness of her treatment to become that coveted experience of employers. Taking into account the statistical analysis on the situation of the integration of young people in the labor market made by the European Commission and taking into account the data obtained from the secondary sources, it was concluded that a complete analysis of the three parties involved in these activities is necessary to improve the communication between the Faculty of Engineering and the partner companies in the city of Sibiu, but also for increasing the degree of satisfaction of the engineering graduates on this aspect.

Primary objectives – drawing up and studying the present situation regarding student school practice and internships from the perspective of the students, the teaching staff and partner companies and finding practical ways to improve the communication between the parties involved.

Secondary objectives:
- establishing the deployment framework and the conditions for the school practice and internship
- identification of the respondents' opinion on the degree of satisfaction and on the expectations of the subjects regarding the activity carried out
- determining the aspects to be improved and how to evaluate the activity
- determining the contribution of the faculty in finding school practice and internships for students
- analysis of the main characteristics of the respondents

Research hypotheses:
- companies highly appreciate in the job interviews that candidates have completed school practice or internship during the studies
- there is a high probability that after completing the internships or the student internship they will be offered the continuation of the activity in the same company
- “evidence indicates that internships improve students’ employability, academic outcomes, and career crystallization” (Hora, Wolfram & Thompson, 2017, p. 2).

The questionnaire is made up mainly of predetermined answers, but also contains some open questions to see the direct opinions of the subjects without restricting their possibilities of answering or inoculating a certain variant. The questionnaire was made by the online survey method, being posted on different social groups used by the students from the Faculty of Engineering, thus using an indirect method, giving the respondents the opportunity to respond as quickly, simply, whenever they can, but also by the classical method, printed on paper and distributed among students, teachers and companies, ensuring that the recovery rate of the questionnaires will be as high as possible. The results were automatically collected in an Excel spreadsheet when filling in online and manually adding the answers to the existing ones for those that were completed classically.

A total of 100 questionnaires were completed by students from students and recent graduates of Faculty of Engineering from University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu. To understand more our target audience, we notice that from out 100 respondents who filled in the questionnaire, 59 are in "Bachelor's Degree Program” only 16, are those who recently graduated all studies and the difference is doing the master degree. Only 47% of the respondents are women, as we can notice men still are predominant in the technical area.

In this paper we have chosen to present a small part of the research done on this topic, the one that concerns the opinion of the students related to school practice or internship. The research
component that analyzed the employers' opinions related to this process was presented in another paper (Miricescu & Tabusca, 2017).

THE STUDENTS’ POINT OF VIEW ON INTERNSHIPS/ SCHOOL PRACTICES

An analysis was carried out to find out what is the current state of traineeships and internships in order to find ways of improving them so that the students will have an easy transition in the real work field and build a great career.

To establish the framework and the required skills by employers related to internships and traineeships we started by asking our respondents if they been a part of an internship or a school practice (Figure1).

![Figure 1: The level of participation of the subjects in internships or school practice](image)

As can be noticed in Figure 1, traineeships are more common among Romanian students than internship. 87.10% of them have been doing a school practice and only 30.70% have ever been a part of an internship experience.

This is understandable given the fact that for the students / graduates of Faculty of Engineering from Sibiu traineeship is a mandatory condition in the 2nd and 3rd year of bachelor, while internship remains a choice.

The benefits that an internship and a school practice comes with have been already mentioned. Getting the chance to work in their field of specialization, meeting professionals from their own domain up to increasing employability for a good job are well known for both sides. What was interesting to see was how the Romanian student gets to know about these available positions in good company in order for him to get all these opportunities.
It is clear that most students learn about the available posts due to presentations in faculties based on a partnership agreement with the business environment (Figure 2), around 51%, followed by 31.60% who are recommended by someone inside from the company. The least ones, 11.20% of respondents use "flyers and brochures" to inform themselves.

Building a career will take time, patience, passion and effort to grow. It can be easy to be a classic student. Be present physically in the classroom, go to your exams and don’t miss the mandatory classes. There are students who fit in this category. But behaving like that won’t be helpful for your professional road, at least not to touch the peaks. Excitement and involvement will push you to a brighter side and for the analysis was mandatory to know “what were the reasons for which students would do an extra traineeship apart from the mandatory one?” In order to understand the true determination of students to perform such an activity, it was preferable to omit the compulsory traineeship and to observe the answers of those who attended a program other than that required by the curriculum (Figure 3).
So, we find that 67.10% of students chose to do an extra traineeship/ internship (Figure 3) for "acquiring experience"; 28.90% of the respondents have opted for "enriching C.V". Interestingly, only 38.20% chose "the opportunity to remain in the company after the end of the period."

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 4: Have you been offered to remain in company after completing your practice or internship?**

*If the answer was yes, then what was your choice?*

There are some companies that are amazed by some students so they want to offer them a position at the end of the traineeship/internship. This aspect of the possibility of staying in the company after the end of practice was among our interests to observe since getting a real job can be the start of a beautiful career. This question was addressed to students to see what their response is (Figure 4). It can be noticed that for 69.6% of the respondents, the chance to remain in the company was granted, but only 56.4% of them chose to accept it.

We were discussing in the first part of this article how important is to have such experiences in CV’s when building a career while being a student. In the graph above (Figure 5) we can see if Romanian students share our belief that a traineeship or an internship it is quite useful when discussing the professional future.

Figure 5 includes the results from two questions: "How satisfied are you with your internship / school practice?" and "How useful to your future career you think this traineeship / internship? Was?". 44.03% consider that this traineeship is "very much" useful for the professional future, while only 37.10% agree the same criterion of satisfaction of the performed activity. Although the utility rate has achieved a higher percentage, it also has 1% of the correspondents who consider it "very little" useful. Overall, taking into account the "much" criterion, the majority of respondents have a good opinion about the degree of satisfaction of the activity, but also its usefulness for the future career.
To conclude following one of these programs are useful for a better chance in building a bright and successful career after graduation as we can notice that our respondents answered.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the results of this research regarding the perspectives of the real beneficiaries of the school practice as well as the internship, clearly demonstrates that the practical experience among the students is more and more sought and appreciated, this being considered as an important competitive advantage for finding a job in the field, as well as for career achievement. It is normal that the theoretical study in engineering should be supplemented and enriched with these practical experiences, but it is an encouraging fact that the students of the Faculty of Engineering understand the importance of this approach. All these are complemented by the fact that, at this moment, there is a major development of the industrial sector in the Sibiu area, and the demand for skilled labor force is increasing. The unemployment rate in Sibiu County in April 2019 is one of the lowest in the country, 1.7%, and the gross domestic product per inhabitant is one of the highest in Romania, 44289.1 lei (www.sibiu.insse.ro – accessed on 01.07.2019).

Many of the working hypotheses of the study have been confirmed, and one of the most important stakeholders in this process, the students, has an open and favorable attitude to the idea of going through an school practice or internship within a company. The most important motivations behind the involvement in this process are: the desire of companies to attract the young workforce and to gain the experience, the increased interest of the students, eager to be able to pass on the CV elements that would give them an advantage in employment, acquisition of experience in the field, professional development and the possibility of to remain in the company after completing this internship.

It is noteworthy that the expectations of those who have gone through a school practice or internship have been met by the industrial companies in the Sibiu area, 61.60% of those questioned being offered by companies with jobs within the company, and more than half of those offered (56.40%) also accepted employment in the company. All these justify the high level of satisfaction regarding the school practice or internship and regarding the consequences of this activity.

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