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Internship Quality and Employability: The Mediating Role of Career Entry-Worries

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of perceptions of internship quality on students' perceptions of work ability, with concerns about entering the workforce as a mediating variable in students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Padang State University. A quantitative causal approach was employed, and stratified proportional sampling was used to obtain a total of 238 participants. A Likert-scale questionnaire was used, and data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 3. The results show that perceived internship quality positively and significantly affects perceived employability and negatively affects career-entry worries. Career-entry worries also negatively and significantly influence perceived employability. Furthermore, it was found that Career Entry Worries mediate the relationship between Perception of Internship Quality and Perception of Employability. These findings highlight the importance of high-quality internship experiences in enhancing employability by reducing psychological concerns during the transition to the workforce.

Keywords: Perceived Quality of Internship, Career-Entry Worries, Employability Perceptions, Work Ability, Psychological.

1. Introduction

The global labor market has undergone significant transformation driven by rapid technological advancement, economic globalization, and the increasing integration of automation and artificial intelligence [1]. These changes have intensified competition and raised expectations for graduates to possess not only strong academic competencies but also high adaptability and employability in dynamic work environments [2]. Consequently, higher education institutions are required to prepare students with relevant skills and competencies that align with labor market demands [3].

This phenomenon can be explained through the Career Resources Model [4], which explains that career success depends on how a person behaves ability to develop and manage career resources, including social, psychological and human capital [5]. These resources collectively influence perceived employability, meaning individual opinion regarding competence to obtain and maintain employment [6]. Perceived employability reflects the evaluation of one's competencies, skills, and available resources in meeting labor market demands [7]. According to previous studies, self-perceived employability indicates the extent to which individuals believe they can compete in the labor market based on their personal characteristics, skills, and social support [8].

Despite the increasing emphasis on employability, labor market data indicates ongoing challenges. Based on data from Statistics Indonesia 2025, Indonesia's unemployment rate reached 4.76%, with approximately 7.28 million unemployed individuals [9]. This condition highlights a mismatch between higher education outcomes and labor market demands, particularly among university graduates [10]. A similar phenomenon is observed among graduates of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang, where a considerable proportion of graduates remain unemployed after completing their studies. This suggests that graduates may not yet possess optimal readiness to transition into the workforce [11].

Internship programs are widely recognized as a crucial mechanism for bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical work experience [12]. Through internships, students can develop technical skills, gain industry insights, and build professional networks [13]. Individual careers can develop through internship programs, particularly social capital, while also strengthening psychological readiness [14]. High-quality internship experiences are expected to enhance students' confidence and improve their perceived employability [15].

However, preliminary findings indicate that many students have not fully benefited from internship programs [19]. For instance, a lack of professional certifications and limited skill development during internships may reduce their perceived employability [20]. Previous studies suggest that students who perceive their internship experience as irrelevant or low in quality tend to experience lower confidence and higher uncertainty when entering the labor market [21] [22].

In addition, psychological factors such as career-entry worries play an important role in the transition from education to employment. Career-entry worries refer to anxiety and uncertainty regarding future career

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prospects and perceived readiness for employment [23]. High levels of such worries may reduce students' confidence and negatively affect their employability perceptions [24].

Although prior studies have demonstrated that internship quality positively influences employability and reduces career-entry worries, inconsistent findings still exist [25]. For example found no significant relationship between internship experience and employability [26] [27] .This inconsistency highlights the existence of a research gap that requires further investigation. Therefore, this research aims to influence perceived internship quality on perceived employability, with career-entry worries as a mediating variable, particularly among students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang.

Based on the Career Resources Model and prior empirical findings, internship quality plays a crucial role in developing students' career resources, which in turn enhances their employability. High-quality internships provide relevant experience, skill development, and professional exposure, thereby strengthening students' confidence and readiness for the labor market. H1: Perceived internship quality has a positive and significant effect on perceived employability.

Furthermore, high-quality internship experiences are expected to reduce students' anxiety and uncertainty when transitioning into the workforce. Relevant tasks, effective supervision, and meaningful learning experiences can enhance psychological readiness and lower career-entry worries. H2: Perceived internship quality has a significant and negative effect on career-entry worries.

Career-entry worries, as a psychological factor, may weaken students' confidence in their abilities and reduce their perceived employability. Students who experience higher levels of anxiety regarding their career prospects tend to perceive themselves as less prepared for employment. H3: Career-entry worries have a negative and significant effect on perceived employability. Finally, concerns about entering the workforce serve as a mediating variable between internship quality and employability. High-quality internship experiences can reduce career-related anxiety, which in turn enhances employability perceptions. H4: Career-entry worries mediate the relationship between perceived internship quality and perceived employability.

2. Research Method

The method used is quantitative a causal design to determine cause and effect relationships among perceived internship quality, career entry worries, and students perceived employability. A causal design was selected as the study aimed to test hypotheses and statistically assess the relationships among the variables [16]. The population consisted of all 2022 cohort students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang, who had completed an internship program, totaling 586 students from the Management, Accounting, Development Economics, and Economic Education study programs. A probability sampling technique was applied using proportionate stratified random sampling, as the population was distributed across several study programs with different sizes. The Slovin formula was used to calculate the sample size with a margin of error of 5%, resulting in 238 respondents [17].

Data collection was carried out using a Likert scale questionnaire consisting of five answer choices ranging from strongly disagree to strongly disagree. (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire was distributed both online via Google Forms and directly to students who had completed their internship programs. The instrument measured three main variables. Perceived internship quality was assessed using indicators of academic preparedness, positive attitude, self-initiative, job challenge, supervisory effectiveness, and task clarity. Career entry worries was measured using the career-entry worries scale adapted. Perceived employability was measured based on the concept of self-perceived employability, encompassing both internal and external employability dimensions [18].

Data analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) consisting of evaluation of the measurement model and structural model. Assessment is carried out through discriminant validity and convergent validity, and construct reliability using outer loading, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. The structural model was evaluated based on the coefficient of determination (R^2) and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping procedures by examining t-statistics and p-values. Mediation analysis was conducted by assessing the indirect effect of how career entry concerns mediate the relationship between perceived internship quality and perceived employability.

3. Result and Discussion

The measurement model (outer model) was evaluated to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs. Validity testing consists of convergent validity was assessed by examining the outer loading values and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) which reflects the average variance explained by the indicators of a construct. An outer loading greater than 0.70 and an AVE value above 0.50 indicate that the construct meets the recommended threshold., and discriminant validity was evaluated using cross-loading values by comparing the loading of an indicator on its own construct with its loadings on other constructs. The indicator is said to be good if discriminant validity if it loads higher on its associated construct than on others. Reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. A construct is considered reliable if both CR and Cronbach's Alpha values > 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

The collected data were entered into Excel and subsequently processed using SmartPLS 3. The initial

outer loading results showed that several indicators did not meet the minimum threshold. In the Career-Entry Worries (CEW) construct, indicator CEW6 showed a loading value of 0.668. In the Perceived Employability (PE) construct, indicators PE1 (0.474), PE6 (0.486), PE11 (0.500), and PE12 (0.554) were below 0.60. In addition, indicator PIQ4 in the Perceived Internship Quality (PIQ) construct had a loading value of 0.635. Since these values did not meet the recommended threshold, the indicators were removed. Therefore, the results presented in this study are based on the recalculated model after excluding the indicators that did not adequately reflect their respective constructs. Next Final Outer Loading on Table 1.

Table 1. Final Outer Loading

Variable	CEW	EP	PIQ
CEW 1	0,877		
CEW 2	0,903		
CEW 3	0,905		
CEW 4	0,892		
CEW 5	0,871		
CEW 6	0,868		
CEW 7	0,890		
EP 2		0,754	
EP 3		0,736	
EP 4		0,758	
EP 5		0,746	
EP 7		0,768	
EP 8		0,801	
EP 9		0,752	
EP 10		0,752	
EP 13		0,784	
EP 14		0,780	
EP 15		0,784	
EP 16		0,743	
PIQ 1			0,885
PIQ 2			0,864
PIQ 3			0,857
PIQ 5			0,861
PIQ 6			0,862

In the initial stage, several indicators exhibited outer loading < 0.70; therefore, indicators that did not meet the required threshold were eliminated. After re-estimating the model, all remaining indicators demonstrated outer loading values > 0.70. Discriminant validity is assessed by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct and is said to be valid if the AVE value is greater than 0.50. Next Average Variance Extracted (AVE) on Table 2.

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	AVE
Career entry worries	0,786
Employability Perceptions	0,583
Perception of Internship Quality	0,750

The test results show that all constructs have an AVE value > 0.50, meaning that all variables have met the validity assumptions. Its reliability is measured using Cronbach's alpha and composite consistency. It is said to be reliable if the value is > 0.70. Next Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability on Table 3.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Career Entry Worries	0,955	0,963
Employability Perceptions	0,935	0,944
Perceptions of Internship Quality	0,917	0,937

The test results show that all variables are reliable because the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's alpha values are > 0.70. The inner model is determined using the R-square (R^2) value to determine how much the endogenous variables influence the exogenous variables. Next R-Square on Table 4.

Table 4. R-Square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Career Entry Worries	0,124	0,121
Employability Perceptions	0,540	0,536

An R^2 value of 0.124 indicates that Perceived Internship Quality explains 12.4% of the variance in Career-Entry Worries. The R^2 value obtained is 0.540, which means Perceived Internship Quality and Career-Entry Worries simultaneously explain 54.0% of the variance in Perceived Employability, which can be categorized as moderate explanatory power. Hypothesis testing was conducted through bootstrapping by examining path coefficient values, t-statistics, and p-values. Next Output Path Coefficient on Table 5.

Table 5. Output Path Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
CEW -> EP	-0,578	-0,579	0,047	12,358	0,000
PIQ -> CEW	-0,352	-0,356	0,062	5,710	0,000
PIQ -> EP	0,294	0,293	0,057	5,155	0,000

The direct effect hypothesis test is conducted by examining the t-statistic value generated by the inner model. The research hypothesis can be accepted if the t-statistic > 1.96. The direct effect testing of the inner model showed that Perception of Internship Quality has a positive and significant effect on Perception of Employability, has a p value < 0.05 and a coefficient of 0.294 so it can be said that the first hypothesis is accepted. In addition, Perception of Internship Quality also has a negative and significant effect on concerns about entering a career, meaning that the second hypothesis is accepted, with a coefficient of -0.352 and a p value of <0.05. Furthermore, Career Entry Worries have a negative and significant effect on Perception of Employability, with value of significant < 0.05 and coefficient -0.578 and, so the third hypothesis is accepted.

bootstrapping was done to test mediation in PLS-SEM by looking at the t-statistic and p-value values in the indirect effect. The fourth hypothesis is accepted because the p value is less than 0.05 and the t statistic is greater than 1.96, which means that Career Entry Worries can mediate the relationship between Perceived Internship Quality and Perceived Employability. Next Indirect Effects on Table 6.

Table 6. Indirect Effects

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
PIQ -> CEW -> EP	0,204	0,206	0,036	5,715	0,000

Based on these results, the indirect effect shows $p < 0.05$ and a t-statistic of $5.715 > 1.96$ with a path coefficient of 0.204. This indicates that Concerns About Entering the Workforce positively and significantly mediate the effect of perceptions of internship quality on perceptions of employability.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that perceptions of internship quality can shape perceptions of employability, both directly and indirectly through students' concerns about entering the workforce. Higher-quality internship experiences were found to increase employability perceptions while simultaneously reducing anxiety related to entering the workforce. Furthermore, Career-entry worries significantly undermined perceived employability and partially mediated the relationship between perceived internship quality and perceived employability. These findings highlight the importance of high-quality internship programs in developing students' human, social, and psychological career resources. Theoretically, this study strengthens the applicability of the Career Resources Model by showing the psychological mechanism through which internship experiences influence employability. Practically, higher education institutions should enhance the relevance, structure, and supervisory quality of internship programs while also providing psychological support to help students manage career-related anxiety. This research is limited by its focus on a single institutional context and its reliance on self-reported data. Future studies may incorporate longitudinal designs, expand the sample to diverse educational settings, or explore additional psychological mediators that shape employability perceptions.

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