

INTERNSHIP SATISFACTION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CAREER DECISION-MAKING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract. Internship experiences have become an integral part of higher education programs, offering students a preview of real-world working environments. This study investigates the relationship between internship satisfaction and career decision-making self-efficacy among final-year university students in Malaysia. Drawing on the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Theory (CDSE), the research aims to explore how elements such as supervisor support, meaningful task assignments, and organizational culture impact students' clarity and confidence in making career decisions post-internship. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 300 internship completers from public universities, and the data were analyzed using single regression. Results indicate that internship satisfaction significantly predicts career decision-making ability, especially when students report high levels of mentoring and task ownership. These findings suggest that internship quality is not only essential for skill development but also plays a pivotal role in shaping students' career trajectories. The study contributes to internship program design and offers practical insights for university-industry collaboration.

Keywords: *internship satisfaction, career decision-making, university students, supervisor support, CDSE, Malaysia*

Introduction

Internships have become a crucial component of university curricula, particularly in preparing students for the transition from academic environments to the professional world. In Malaysia, higher education institutions require students to undertake industrial training or internships as part of their program requirements to enhance employability and practical exposure. These experiences are intended not only to develop technical and soft skills but also to help students make informed career choices. However, the quality and satisfaction derived from internship experiences vary significantly among students. Factors such as the nature of assigned tasks, supervisory support, workplace culture, and alignment with academic background can significantly impact how beneficial students perceive their internships to be. According to the Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) theory, individuals are more likely to make confident and clear career decisions when they experience mastery, receive constructive feedback, and feel supported in real-world environments.

This study investigates how internship satisfaction affects university students' confidence in making career decisions, using CDSE as the guiding theoretical framework. Understanding this relationship is essential for improving internship program design, academic-industrial partnerships, and student career services. Despite

the widespread implementation of internship programs across Malaysian universities, there is a growing concern about the uneven quality of internship experiences and their influence on students' future career clarity. Some students report highly engaging and educational internships, while others feel underutilized, unsupported, or mismatched with their field of study. These inconsistencies raise questions about the effectiveness of internships in facilitating career decision-making, especially in a rapidly evolving labor market. Moreover, limited empirical research in the Malaysian context has examined how students' satisfaction during internships translates into career decision-making self-efficacy. Without such insights, universities may continue to enforce internship policies without understanding the actual student outcomes. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap by assessing the extent to which internship satisfaction influences students' self-efficacy in making career-related decisions, using data from public and private university students in Malaysia.

Literature review

Previous research (e.g., Gault et al., 2010) suggests that satisfaction during internships is driven by mentoring quality, task relevance, and organizational fit. High satisfaction levels lead to better perceived value of the internship. Internship satisfaction refers to students' perceived quality and value of their internship experiences. Several studies suggest that satisfaction is influenced by factors such as supervisory support, task significance, feedback, work environment, and alignment with students' academic field (Gault et al., 2010; D'Abate et al., 2009). Interns who are treated as valuable contributors and are given opportunities to learn and apply skills tend to report higher satisfaction levels (Narayanan et al., 2010). In the Malaysian context, Yaacob et al. (2021) emphasized the role of industry-university collaboration in ensuring that internships are structured and beneficial. However, discrepancies in internship experiences across organizations suggest a need to examine which components of satisfaction most strongly influence students' future decisions.

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDSE): CDSE (Taylor & Betz, 1983) refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully make career-related decisions. Internships often expose students to specific industries and roles, improving decision clarity. Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy, first conceptualized by Taylor and Betz (1983), refers to individuals' belief in their ability to successfully complete tasks related to career decision-making. These tasks include selecting a career, setting goals, and gathering career-related information. CDSE has been shown to significantly affect students' motivation, career exploration behaviors, and decision-making clarity (Betz & Hackett, 2006). The internship experience, by exposing students to real workplace demands, can enhance their CDSE by increasing their confidence in their career direction. According to Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, mastery experiences and verbal persuasion are major sources of self-efficacy both of which can be developed through internships.

Studies (Yousefi et al., 2022; D'Abate et al., 2009) report that positive internship experiences reinforce career interests, while poor ones may cause. Recent studies have linked internship satisfaction to greater career certainty, reduced career anxiety, and higher confidence in decision-making (Yousefi et al., 2022; Dull & Witte, 2019). When interns receive mentorship and feedback, they gain more accurate perceptions of their career preferences and capabilities. A study by Jackson and Wilton (2016) found that structured internships with learning components significantly boosted students' career

decision-making confidence. However, if internships lack structure, challenge, or relevance, they may reduce students' belief in their career path. Therefore, this study posits that internship satisfaction is a critical predictor of CDSE, particularly when internships offer real engagement, mentoring, and professional feedback. Students to reconsider their path.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey questionnaire to examine the relationship between internship satisfaction and career decision-making self-efficacy among university students. A questionnaire is a written set of questions in which respondents record their answers. The questionnaire was adapted from established instruments related to internship satisfaction and the Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) scale. Data were collected from 110 final-year students enrolled in various academic programs at a public university in Malaysia. The sample was selected using a convenience sampling method, focusing on students who had completed their internship placement. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (1) demographic information, (2) internship satisfaction items, and (3) career decision-making self-efficacy items. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) were used to summarize the demographic and key variables. Reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha) were conducted to assess the internal consistency of the scales, and regression analysis was performed to examine the predictive relationship between internship satisfaction and career decision-making self-efficacy.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 131 respondents who participated in this study. Female respondents constituted the majority of the sample ($n = 108$, 82.4%), whereas male respondents represented only 17.6% ($n = 23$). This gender distribution reflects the enrolment pattern commonly observed in business-related programmes within Malaysian public universities, where female students generally outnumber their male counterparts. Although the predominance of female respondents may limit the generalisability of the findings across genders, the sample accurately represents the target population from which it was drawn. Similar gender distributions have also been reported in previous internship studies involving Malaysian university students, suggesting that female students are more frequently represented in internship and employability research. With regard to age, the majority of respondents were between 21 and 23 years old ($n = 97$, 74.0%), followed by those aged between 24 and 26 years ($n = 33$, 25.2%). Only one respondent (0.8%) belonged to the 27–29 age group, while no respondents were below 21 years or above 30 years of age. This finding is consistent with the demographic profile of undergraduate students undertaking compulsory industrial training during their final year of study. Since internships are generally completed shortly before graduation, the age distribution confirms that the respondents were at an appropriate stage of career exploration and transition into the

labour market. Consequently, they represent a suitable population for examining career decision-making self-efficacy.

Table 1. *Demographic Analysis.*

Category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Gender			
Male	23	17.6	17.6
Female	108	82.4	100
Age			
18 - 20 years	0	0	0
21 - 23 years old	97	74	74
24 – 26 years old	33	25.2	99.2
27 - 29 years old	1	0.8	100
30 and above	0	0	100
Hometown			
Rural	37	28.3	28.3
Urban	65	49.6	78.6
Sub-urban	29	22.1	100
Ethnicity			
Malay	127	96.9	96.9
Others	4	3.1	100

Regarding respondents' hometown, almost half originated from urban areas (49.6%), followed by rural (28.3%) and suburban areas (22.1%). The relatively balanced representation across different residential backgrounds indicates that the sample was not concentrated within a single geographical setting. Students from urban areas may have greater exposure to employment opportunities and industry networks, whereas those from rural areas may experience different career expectations and employment challenges. Nevertheless, the inclusion of respondents from diverse localities enhances the representativeness of the sample and provides broader insights into internship experiences among Malaysian university students. The ethnic composition of the respondents showed that the overwhelming majority were Malay (96.9%), with only 3.1% representing other ethnic groups. This demographic profile reflects the composition of the participating institution and should therefore be interpreted within that context. While the findings may not fully represent all ethnic groups within Malaysian higher education, they remain appropriate for examining internship satisfaction and career decision-making among the selected study population. Overall, the demographic findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly female Malay students aged between 21 and 23 years who came from diverse residential backgrounds. These characteristics are consistent with the profile of final-year undergraduate students undertaking compulsory internships in Malaysian public universities and therefore provide an appropriate context for investigating the relationship between internship satisfaction and career decision-making self-efficacy.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables. Overall, respondents reported a high level of internship satisfaction ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.77$), indicating that most students perceived their internship experiences positively. The relatively high mean score suggests that the internship placements generally met students' expectations in terms of workplace learning, organisational support, and professional development. Among the internship satisfaction dimensions, support received from colleagues

recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.47$), followed closely by meaningful task assignments ($M = 4.43$). These findings indicate that interpersonal relationships and opportunities to undertake authentic work responsibilities were the most valued aspects of the internship experience. According to Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, positive interpersonal interactions and successful task accomplishment constitute important sources of self-efficacy development. Students who receive encouragement and constructive feedback from supervisors and colleagues are more likely to develop confidence in their professional capabilities. Conversely, opportunities to apply academic knowledge ($M = 4.19$) and internships meeting initial expectations ($M = 4.25$) recorded comparatively lower mean scores. Although these values remain high, they suggest that some students perceived a gap between university learning and workplace practices. This finding supports previous studies which reported that stronger alignment between academic curricula and industry expectations contributes to more meaningful internship experiences and improved employability outcomes.

Table 2. *The descriptive.*

Variable	No. of items	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Satisfaction	5	4.38	0.73	2.40	5.00
Career	5	4.17	0.82	2.00	5.00

Regarding career decision-making self-efficacy, respondents also demonstrated a high level of confidence ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.82$). Students generally agreed that their internship experiences assisted them in clarifying future career choices, increasing career certainty, and strengthening confidence in making employment-related decisions. The highest-rated career item indicated that internship experiences helped respondents make future career decisions ($M = 4.20$), suggesting that practical workplace exposure plays an important role in reducing career uncertainty and facilitating informed career planning. Overall, the descriptive findings indicate that respondents perceived their internship experiences positively and demonstrated strong confidence in their future career decisions. These results provide preliminary evidence that internship satisfaction may contribute positively to career decision-making self-efficacy. The internal consistency of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. As presented in Table 3, the internship satisfaction construct recorded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.896, while career decision-making self-efficacy achieved an alpha value of 0.947. Both values substantially exceed the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency and reliability. Accordingly, Cronbach's alpha values above 0.90 indicate excellent reliability, whereas values between 0.80 and 0.89 demonstrate good reliability. Therefore, the measurement instruments employed in this study can be considered highly reliable for assessing both constructs. The strong reliability coefficients further indicate that the questionnaire items consistently measured the intended concepts and minimised measurement error. Consequently, the data were deemed suitable for subsequent inferential statistical analyses, including regression analysis. The high reliability observed in this study is comparable with previous research examining internship satisfaction and career decision-making self-efficacy, providing additional confidence regarding the robustness of the measurement instruments used.

Table 3. *The reliability test.*

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items	Strength of Association
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Satisfaction	0.896	5	Excellence
Career	0.947	5	Excellence

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of internship satisfaction on career decision-making self-efficacy. The regression results presented in *Table 4* demonstrate that internship satisfaction significantly predicts career decision-making self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.871$, $t = 18.456$, $p < 0.001$). The positive regression coefficient indicates that students who reported greater satisfaction with their internship experiences also exhibited higher levels of confidence in making future career decisions. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.759$) indicates that internship satisfaction explains approximately 75.9% of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy. This represents substantial explanatory power, suggesting that internship satisfaction is a major determinant of students' career confidence. The remaining variance may be explained by other factors not included in the present study, such as personality characteristics, career adaptability, family influence, employability skills, or labour market conditions. The findings support the proposed hypothesis:

H1: Internship satisfaction has a significant positive influence on career decision-making self-efficacy among university students.

Table 4. Regression analysis.

Variable	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficient Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	0.172	0.220	-	0.781	0.436
Satisfaction	0.921	0.050	0.871	18.456	0.000

Accordingly, H1 is supported. The findings are consistent with Career Decision Self-Efficacy Theory (Taylor and Betz, 1983), which proposes that successful learning experiences strengthen individuals' confidence in making career-related decisions. Positive internship experiences provide mastery experiences, constructive feedback, and opportunities for observational learning, all of which enhance students' beliefs in their ability to evaluate career alternatives and make informed occupational choices. Similarly, Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory suggests that successful performance experiences represent the strongest source of self-efficacy development. The present findings also corroborate previous empirical studies. Feng et al. (2023) reported that internship satisfaction positively influenced career identity through self-efficacy, while Wang (2021) demonstrated that positive internship experiences strengthened students' commitment to their future careers. Likewise, Yousefi et al. (2022) concluded that internship satisfaction significantly enhanced students' career confidence and reduced career uncertainty. The consistency between the present findings and previous studies reinforces the importance of high-quality internship experiences in promoting career readiness among university students. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that universities should collaborate closely with industry partners to ensure that internship placements provide meaningful tasks, supportive supervision, and structured learning opportunities. Organisations should also recognise that internship programmes serve not only as recruitment pipelines but also as important developmental experiences that shape students' career aspirations and long-term employability. Investing in effective mentoring, constructive feedback, and

authentic work assignments may therefore produce mutually beneficial outcomes for students, employers, and higher education institutions.

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of internship satisfaction on career decision-making self-efficacy (CDSE) among university students in Malaysia. The findings reveal that internship satisfaction is a significant and positive predictor of career decision-making self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.871$, $p < .001$), explaining 75.9% of the variance in students' confidence to make career-related decisions. This finding indicates that students who reported higher levels of satisfaction with their internship experiences were more likely to demonstrate greater confidence in identifying suitable career paths, evaluating employment opportunities, and making informed career decisions after graduation. The strong explanatory power of the regression model suggests that internship experiences constitute an important developmental process that shapes students' professional confidence and career readiness. The findings support the Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) Theory proposed by Taylor and Betz (1983), which argues that individuals' confidence in making career decisions develops through successful learning experiences and positive beliefs about their own capabilities. According to the theory, students who experience mastery, receive encouragement, and successfully overcome workplace challenges become more confident in their ability to perform career-related tasks, including gathering occupational information, evaluating career alternatives, setting career goals, and making employment decisions. The present findings demonstrate that internship satisfaction represents one of these mastery experiences by providing authentic workplace exposure that strengthens students' confidence in their future careers.

The results are also consistent with Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, which identifies mastery experiences as the most influential source of self-efficacy. During internships, students are exposed to real organisational responsibilities, professional expectations, and workplace problem-solving situations that differ considerably from classroom learning. Successfully completing assigned responsibilities enables students to recognise their own competencies while receiving constructive feedback from supervisors and colleagues reinforces their belief that they are capable of succeeding within professional environments. Consequently, students who perceive their internship experiences positively are more likely to develop stronger confidence in making career-related decisions. One of the most notable findings of this study is the high level of internship satisfaction reported by the respondents. Students generally agreed that their internship experiences provided meaningful learning opportunities, supportive working environments, and valuable exposure to professional practice. Among the internship satisfaction dimensions, support from colleagues and meaningful task assignments obtained the highest mean scores. These findings suggest that interpersonal relationships and authentic work experiences constitute the most valuable aspects of internship programmes.

The importance of supervisor and colleague support has been widely documented in internship literature. Narayanan et al. (2010) argued that effective supervision provides interns with continuous guidance, constructive feedback, and emotional support, enabling students to adapt more effectively to workplace environments. Similarly, D'Abate et al. (2009) found that mentoring relationships significantly enhance interns' learning experiences, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment. The present findings reinforce these observations by demonstrating that students who experienced supportive workplace environments were more satisfied with their internships and

subsequently reported greater confidence in making career decisions. Supervisor support is particularly important because internship students often experience uncertainty when entering professional workplaces for the first time. Unlike experienced employees, interns require frequent guidance, reassurance, and opportunities to discuss workplace expectations. Supervisors who provide regular feedback, encourage independent thinking, and involve students in organisational activities facilitate experiential learning that strengthens both technical competence and psychological confidence. Such supportive environments enable students to recognise their strengths while identifying areas requiring further professional development. Meaningful task assignments emerged as another important contributor to internship satisfaction. Students who perceived their work assignments as relevant and challenging reported greater satisfaction with their internship experiences. This finding is consistent with Jackson and Wilton (2016), who argued that internships should extend beyond routine administrative work by providing opportunities for students to participate in authentic organisational projects that require critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and decision-making. Meaningful work allows students to apply theoretical knowledge acquired at university while developing practical competencies demanded by employers.

The present findings further support previous studies demonstrating that authentic workplace responsibilities enhance professional identity formation and career confidence. When students successfully complete meaningful assignments, they gain evidence of their own capabilities and develop realistic expectations regarding future employment. Conversely, internships characterised by repetitive administrative tasks or limited learning opportunities may reduce students' motivation and provide little contribution to career development. Therefore, organisations should design internship programmes that encourage active participation rather than passive observation. The positive relationship between internship satisfaction and career decision-making self-efficacy identified in this study is also consistent with recent empirical evidence. Feng et al. (2023) reported that internship satisfaction positively influences career identity through enhanced self-efficacy, suggesting that positive internship experiences strengthen students' confidence in pursuing long-term career goals. Similarly, Wang (2021) found that students who experienced supportive internships demonstrated stronger intentions to remain within their chosen industries because workplace experiences increased career clarity and organisational commitment. Likewise, Yousefi et al. (2022) concluded that internship satisfaction significantly improves students' career confidence while reducing uncertainty regarding occupational choices. Their structural equation modelling analysis demonstrated that internship experiences influence career decision-making through psychological mechanisms associated with self-efficacy. The present study extends these findings by providing evidence from the Malaysian higher education context, where empirical studies examining internship satisfaction and career decision-making remain relatively limited.

The Malaysian context provides additional insights into interpreting these findings. Internship programmes are compulsory components of most undergraduate programmes within Malaysian public universities and represent students' primary opportunity to experience professional employment before graduation. Consequently, internship experiences may exert stronger influences on career confidence than in educational systems where internships are optional. Students often rely on industrial training to evaluate whether their academic programmes align with workplace expectations and

whether their chosen professions match their personal interests and capabilities. Furthermore, Malaysia's increasingly competitive graduate labour market has heightened the importance of high-quality internship experiences. Employers consistently emphasise practical experience, communication skills, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities when recruiting graduates. Internship programmes therefore provide important opportunities for students to acquire these competencies while simultaneously evaluating their own career interests. Students who complete satisfying internships are likely to enter the labour market with greater confidence, clearer career goals, and improved employability compared with students whose internship experiences were less positive. The practical implications of these findings are significant for universities, employers, and policymakers. Universities should view internship programmes not merely as graduation requirements but as integral components of career development strategies. Academic institutions should strengthen partnerships with industry organisations to ensure internship placements provide structured learning objectives, meaningful work assignments, and continuous supervision. Regular monitoring of internship quality, supervisor engagement, and student feedback should also be incorporated into internship evaluation systems to maximise educational outcomes.

For employers, the findings highlight the importance of investing in structured internship programmes that prioritise learning rather than short-term organisational productivity. Assigning interns meaningful responsibilities, providing mentoring, encouraging participation in organisational activities, and offering constructive performance feedback can significantly enhance students' professional development and career confidence. Such practices may also strengthen employer branding and improve future graduate recruitment by encouraging talented interns to seek permanent employment within the organization. Although internship satisfaction explained a substantial proportion of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy, approximately one-quarter of the variance remained unexplained. This suggests that career confidence is also influenced by additional factors beyond internship experiences. Variables such as career adaptability, personality traits, employability skills, family expectations, labour market conditions, self-esteem, and career counselling may also contribute to students' career decision-making processes. Future research should therefore examine these variables as potential mediators or moderators to provide a more comprehensive understanding of graduate career development.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that internship satisfaction plays a critical role in enhancing students' confidence in making career decisions. High-quality internship experiences characterised by supportive supervision, meaningful work assignments, constructive feedback, and positive workplace relationships provide students with valuable mastery experiences that strengthen career decision-making self-efficacy. These findings reinforce the theoretical assumptions of Career Decision Self-Efficacy Theory and Social Cognitive Theory while providing practical evidence that improving internship quality can contribute directly to graduate employability and career readiness within Malaysian higher education.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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