


# From Realizable Dreams to Sustainable Facts: An Empirical Study on the Role of Internships in Students' Career Plans in a Turkish Business School

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of internships that are done during undergraduate education on graduates' first job choice and later career plan in a Turkish business school context. To accomplish this purpose, a case study that utilized both quantitative and qualitative data was designed. The quantitative data were obtained from 133 graduates via an online survey form, whereas the qualitative data were obtained from nine graduates during a focus group session. The qualitative data were used to complement the quantitative data and to gain further understanding of the findings of the survey. The results showed that the graduates who did their internships in sectors in line with their career plans continued their career in the same sectors or similar sectors to the sectors in which they did their internships. The duration before starting the first job after graduation was found to be significantly shorter for graduates who did their internship in line with their career plan than for graduates who did not do their internship in line with their career plan. The findings provided useful insight into the role of internships during undergraduate business education.

## Keywords

business graduates, career exploration, internship

## Introduction

One of the most significant concepts in individuals' lives is a career, thanks to its interaction with the many aspects of social life. A career is “a sequence of positions occupied by a person during the course of a lifetime” (Super, 1957). For a successful, happy, and sustainable career, it is useful for individuals to be aware of themselves and environmental factors, and make their career plans accordingly. Individuals take action by taking into account their future careers, especially during their university education. This career stage is named exploration (Savickas, 2002; Super, 1957, 1980, 1990). This stage occurs before employment. The years of vocational exploration are generally defined as ages 14 to 24 (Savickas, 2002). Many expectations about work life are developed in this stage. What is essential in this stage is to try many potential work fields to see what one does and does not like (DeCenzo et al., 2013). These tries entail individuals making efforts to gather accurate information about themselves and work life (Super, 1957). With the help of the information gathered, students try to create a personal image and integrate themselves into their professional role (Klatt et al., 1985) at this stage. One of the tools that students use in this career exploration stage is internships. Internships help

students get exposure to real jobs and real organizations (Coco, 2000; Cook et al., 2015).

Internship occupies an essential place in career exploration (Gamboa et al., 2013; Rothman & Sisman, 2016) and career planning (Hsu, 2012). Internships are “short-term work experience that provides the opportunity to explore and recognize a career field, profession, or sector” (Perri, 2006, p. 409). Students generally seek internships during the undergraduate period, and it is a practice that helps students in the career planning process before finding a full-time job (Coco, 2000). To prepare students for work life and help them in career exploration, universities include compulsory and voluntary internships in their curricula (Silva et al., 2016). As internship programs have become prevalent across undergraduate and graduate programs, many students now enroll in these programs. Among European Union (EU) citizens, one in every two EU citizens aged 15 to 35 has enrolled in at

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least one internship in their life (European Commission, 2013). Vélez and Giner (2015) identified three main effects of business internships on students: enhancement of employment opportunities, improvement of skills and competencies, and career exploration. In a study by Chin et al. (2019), U.S. business school students refer to internships as a source of career information that increases their career exploration awareness. Despite these positive outcomes, poorly designed and executed internships can have negative consequences for students. For example, in a study by Rothman (2003), business students stated that they dislike internships. They involve too much of a time commitment, there is not enough work to do, supervision is low quality, and the work does not include real and challenging projects. As Ali and Khushi (2018) stated, an internship's most significant outcome is "experience" and having positive or negative internship experiences can affect students' career exploration process.

While the experiences gained from internships during the undergraduate period may motivate some students to continue their career journey in a particular direction (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008), these internship experiences may also cause some students to change their career plans (Beard & Morton, 1998). A stream of studies in the internship literature has examined the career intentions of students after their internship experience from the viewpoint of career exploration (e.g., Beck & Halim, 2008; Farmaki, 2018; Richardson, 2008; Robinson et al., 2016; Rothman & Sisman, 2016). There are also studies done in Turkey (e.g., Duran & Gümüş, 2013; Kaşlı & İlban, 2013; Koç et al., 2014; Köşker & Unur, 2017; Öztürk & Kıracı, 2019) that examined the career intentions of students after their internship experiences. The studies mentioned above generally rely on cross-sectional data collected via surveys after students had completed their internships during undergraduate education. In these studies, students' career intentions are measured through their perceptions and attitudes, rather than through their actual job decisions and actions. For example, Rothman and Sisman (2016) explored the relationship between internship experience and students' desire for a career within the same industry or department as their internship. These authors called for a study with interns after graduation to measure internships' impact on students' actual career decisions. Therefore, it can be asserted that there is a paucity of research that examines internships' effect on students' actual career decisions. The present study fills this gap and extends the internship literature by incorporating students' actual career decisions based on the chosen sector.

The present study aims to answer this question in general: What is the effect of internships undertaken during undergraduate years on students' actual career decisions through their employment history? This general research question is divided into three sub-questions:

- Do students make their internship choices in line with their career plans?

- After completing internships in sectors in line with their career plans, do students' career plan change due to this experience?
- Do individuals change their jobs when they find opportunities in sectors in line with their career plans?

In addition to these, hypotheses are developed based on previous career and internship studies. To answer these questions and test these hypotheses, a case study is carried out in a Turkish business school. This study's findings shed light on the effect of internships on career exploration through students' actual career decisions.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses

Internship programs help students understand the contexts of business and which job fields may be suitable for them in their future professional life (Goia (Agoston) et al., 2017; Rothman & Sisman, 2016; Wang & Chen, 2015). Likewise, Kim and Park (2013) argued that students' first impressions during their internships are essential for their career orientation. In support of these claims, it was detected that internships are particularly useful in constructing new meanings which are more realistic and different from the previous expectations of students (Barnett, 2012). In a study examining the decision-making processes regarding graduates' careers, Farmaki (2018) also revealed a relationship between internship experiences and career intentions.

Robinson et al. (2016) put forward that there are relatively few studies on the impact of students' internship programs on their future career orientation. To illustrate the point with a few studies, Kim and Park (2013) found that participants were quite pessimistic about their future careers after their internship program. Robinson et al. (2016) uncovered that tourism and hotel management students' career orientations changed after their internships. They stated that these changes were at the level of job areas within the sector rather than at the sector level. This finding bears a resemblance to the findings of Koç et al. (2014) that most of the intern students decided to take part in the tourism and hospitality sector after their internships. However, they were willing to continue their careers in different fields within the sector. In another study, Beck and Halim (2008) revealed a significant relationship between accounting students getting used to working under pressure during their internships and the emergence of career preferences: The students who thought that they had learned to work under pressure during their internship program were more inclined to choose the accounting profession. Another study that explicitly investigates the effect of internships on students' career path preferences was carried out by Rothman and Sisman (2016). This study was conducted with 198 students enrolled in an internship application course in the business department and related fields; 54% of the interns said that they preferred to pursue their

careers in the same department as the internship department, and 45% of them stated that they wanted to continue their careers in the same sector as the internship sector. In another study that investigated career intentions of tourism and hospitality management undergraduate students in the related sector after the internship period, it was found that 43.6% of these students intended to work in sectors other than the tourism and hospitality sector (Richardson, 2008).

Apart from these studies, there is also some research done in Turkey that has investigated students' post-internship career choices. A study by Köşker and Unur (2017) revealed that the internship experiences of tourism management students negatively affect their thoughts on pursuing their careers in the same sector. However, Kaşlı and İlban (2013) detected no direct relationship between internship experiences and intention to work in the tourism sector, and found that the perception of the profession has an intermediary role in this relationship. When all these study findings are brought together, it can be understood that internships give students information about the sector or department in which the internship is carried out. During the internship, students evaluate this information and decide whether to stay in the sector or change their career plans. The experiences gained during internship programs could affect the future career decisions of students. Negative effects of internships are generally reported in the tourism and hospitality sector (Farmaki, 2018; Kim & Park, 2013; Koç et al., 2014; Köşker & Unur, 2017; Richardson, 2008; Siu et al., 2012). As tourism and hospitality internships are sector-specific, students have a small degree of choice concerning their internship sector or department. This research distinctly examines business school internships, which are not sector- or department-specific. Therefore, students have a wide array of choices among many sectors when considering their career plans. Based on the variety of internships possible, business students must consider their career intentions before applying for internships. For these reasons, business students' internship choices can incorporate more conscious decisions than tourism students' internships. Hence, the following hypothesis is developed:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a relationship between doing an internship in a sector in line with the career plan and continuing in a sector that is the same/similar to the career plan after the internship.

In a study embracing the number of internship programs completed by students as a variable of professional development (Blau et al., 2018), a positive relationship was detected between the number of completed internship programs, and the expectation of finding a full-time job after graduation and the expectation of finding a job related to the field of graduation. It has been noted that internships performed during the school period increase graduates' employability (Chen et al., 2018; Rothman &

Lampe, 2010; Silva et al., 2016; Weible, 2009; Wilton, 2012). The experience gained through internship is generally the only work experience that university graduates have at the beginning of business life (Maertz et al., 2014). It is possible that this work experience gives graduates an edge during job applications. Coco (2000) noted that graduates with internship experience start business life with higher salaries and receive more job offers. In their study, Knouse et al. (1999) uncovered that students who graduated after carrying out internships found jobs in a shorter time than those who graduated without an internship. Similarly, Gault et al. (2000) ascertained that business graduates with internship experience started their first jobs earlier than the graduates without internship experience. Nunley et al. (2016) found strong evidence that the internship experience increased graduates' job opportunities. The authors detected that students who had participated in an internship program before graduation were 14% more likely to be invited to a job interview by employers than students without any internship experience. Likewise, in their study examining student internships from the perspective of employers, Gault et al. (2010) found that most employers consider that internship experiences will contribute positively to the future job performance of students, and most of them are more willing to employ students with internship experience.

Proposing full-time jobs to participating students after an internship program is an essential and expected benefit for graduate students (Moghaddam, 2011; Rigsby et al., 2013). Rothman and Lampe (2010) found that business school internships are a means for 34% of interns to get a job offer. Focusing on the idea that internships increase the probability of employment in the future, Nauffal and Skulte-Ouaiss (2018) examined a group of students whose employment changes were determined to be very high in a private university in Lebanon; 75% of these university graduates participated in an internship program before graduation, and one third of these students received direct job offers after the internship program. The employers interviewed within the study context stated that when recruiting new graduates, those who have completed internship programs are preferred. After evaluating the findings of these studies, it can be put forward that organizations have adopted internships as a method of recruitment. Henceforth, we posit the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant difference between the duration before starting the first job for graduates who did their internship in line with their career plan and those who did not do their internship in line with their career plan.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a significant difference between the duration before starting the first job for the graduates who did only one internship and those who did more than one internship.

## Method

### *The Business School*

The business school in which this study is conducted is located in Turkey. This business school has five departments: management, human resource management, management information systems, international trade, and health management. The business school implements a 7 + 1 applied training program, which allows students to gain practical experience for a semester. Except for the management department, all other departments' students complete their undergraduate studies by taking the "Compulsory Workplace Training" course in their eighth semester. In the management department, this course is elective. Apart from the curriculum, it is common for students to do voluntary internships in the summer months in this business school. Besides this, an association of human resource professionals has an office at this business school and provides professional networking and career coaching services to students. Another feature of the business school is a close collaboration with the career and talent management coordinatorship of the host university. The business school was accepted as an official member of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) in 2013. AACSB International (2018) advises business schools to collaborate with the business world and provide students with internship opportunities. Considering all these qualities of the business school, it can be said that this school is a suitable case for this study.

### *Design*

This study is designed as a case study. It uses both quantitative and qualitative methods, although it is mainly based on a quantitative study. The quantitative part of the study was designed to examine the effect of internships on students' actual career decisions. A questionnaire was used in the quantitative part as a data collection tool. In this questionnaire, questions about pre-internship intentions, internship experiences, post-internship career positions, and demographic characteristics were posed to the participants. The questionnaire was prepared with the help of human resource scholars and professionals, and previous studies (Hergert, 2009; Rothman & Sisman, 2016). All the questions are in the categorical form and are related to facts rather than students' perceptions or attitudes (see Appendix A).

The qualitative part aimed to clarify and gain further understanding of the findings of the quantitative study. Another reason for the qualitative study was to overcome the small sample size encountered in the quantitative study. For this purpose, a focus group session was held. Graduates were questioned on their experiences regarding their internships and careers using more general and open-ended questions. The questions that guided the session were developed by the authors after evaluating the findings of the quantitative study (see Appendix B).

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of the Quantitative Sample.

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Age		
20–27	92	69.17
28–31	35	26.32
32 and older	6	4.51
Gender		
Female	78	58.65
Male	55	41.35
Department		
Management	51	38.64
Human resource management	67	50.75
Management information systems	6	4.55
International trade	8	6.06

### *Sample and Procedures*

Convenience sampling was used as the sampling strategy for the quantitative study. The contact information of graduates was obtained from the business school's dean office, and calls for participation in the research were made through emails and official social media accounts. The online questionnaire form, which was used as a data collection tool, was delivered to 286 graduates via their email addresses between May and October 2018. An online questionnaire form was preferred to overcome the geographical distance problem as graduates resided in various cities and countries. Using online surveys are common among studies carried out with graduate samples (e.g., Powell et al., 2011; Shah et al., 2015; Sümer et al., 2013; Thang & Wongsurawat, 2016). The questionnaire link was also published in a call for participation in the research made through the business school's official social media accounts. At the end of these data collection attempts, 166 graduates responded to the call for participation in the research. After eliminating the questionnaire forms with high data deficiencies, the final sample consisted of 133 graduates.

The quantitative study sample consisted of 133 graduates: 78 (58.65%) were female and 55 (41.35%) were male. The majority of the study participants (69.17%) were between the ages of 20 and 27. Half of the study participants (50.75%) graduated from the human resource department, followed by the management department (38.64%), the international trade department (6.06%), and the management information systems department (4.55%). As the international trade department and the management information systems department had their first graduates in 2017, their level of participation in the study was relatively low (see Table 1).

The focus group study participants were recruited from the business school's alumni information system. These participants were invited to participate in a focus group study that was held online due to the COVID-19 outbreak. A total of nine graduates (three women, six men) accepted the invitation. Merriam (2009) advises that focus groups should



**Table 2.** Demographic Characteristics of the Focus Group Participants.

Participant	Department of graduation	Graduation year	Gender	Age	Sector
K1	Human resource management	2014 spring	Female	28	Automotive
K2	Human resource management	2018 spring	Male	26	Public
K3	Business	2014 autumn	Male	30	Iron–steel
K4	Business (in English)	2020 spring	Male	23	Iron–steel
K5	Management information systems	2020 spring	Female	27	Software
K6	Management information systems	2019 spring	Male	24	Education
K7	Business	2015 spring	Male	29	Telecommunication
K8	International trade	2018 spring	Male	26	Mining
K9	International trade	2019 spring	Female	24	Packaging

consist of six to 10 participants. The focus group session was held on October 1, 2020. The corresponding author of this article moderated the session. The moderator explained the purpose of the study, gave a short explanation of the nature of the focus group discussion and the value of interaction among participants and contributions, and ensured confidentiality at the beginning of the session. Permission was obtained from all participants to record the session digitally. The session lasted for 85 min. After the focus group session had ended, the digital recording was transcribed verbatim.

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the focus group participants. There were a total of nine participants. Two thirds ( $n = 6$ ) were male. Their ages ranged from 23 to 30. Graduation department was almost evenly distributed among participants, while graduation year was between 2014 and 2020. Participation in the focus group study was heterogeneous in terms of sector.

### Data Analysis

The quantitative study data were analyzed with IBM SPSS v.20. As some variables were measured with nominal scales and some variables were continuous (Field, 2015), the chi-square test of independence and Mann–Whitney  $U$  test were used to test the hypotheses in addition to frequency analysis.

The qualitative study was designed as a secondary study to complement the data collected through survey and to gain further understanding of the findings of the quantitative study conducted 2 years before. Due to its secondary and supporting role, articulated data (Massey, 2011) were used to support findings or to show inconsistencies between quantitative findings and qualitative findings. Articulated data arose in direct response to the questions posed in the focus group session. These data offer descriptions, interpretations, and comments in the participants' own words (Massey, 2011). In this study, articulated data are presented as direct quotes of participants.

### Results

The results of the survey revealed that 65% of graduates stated that they did their internships in sectors that

complied with their career plans. Some of the remaining 35% of graduates stated that they did their internships in random sectors due to a lack of sectorial preferences in their career plans, or they had to do an internship in another sector owing to environmental conditions because they could not find an internship opportunity in line with their preferences (see Table 3). Based on this finding, it is possible to infer that the majority of students had career goals regarding employment sector before their internship experience, and they tried to do internships that complied with their career plans.

Searching for an internship in line with the career plan was captured by the statement of one participant: “Since I want to work in the finance sector, I tried to do internships in the finance sector” (K7, male). Some participants expressed that they had difficulties when searching for internships that complied with their career plans: “I could not find a company to accept my internship application for my compulsory internship. When I just gave up, I received an internship offer and accepted it” (K9, female). Another participant had to reject an internship offer because of the lack of compensation:

I was thrilled when they offered me an internship abroad. I had a telephone call with the company executive in Germany. He said that they would not provide accommodation, health insurance, or a salary. So, although I wanted the internship, I had to reject. (K8, male)

Seventy-seven percent of the graduates stated that their internships had an impact on determining the sector of their career plans; 23% of the graduates stated that their internships had no impact on their career plans (see Table 3). One of the participants expressed the effects of internships on her career plan with these words:

I had very negative experiences in my first internship in the tourism sector, but I attributed it to the characteristics of the firm in which I did my internship. Therefore, I also did my second internship in the tourism sector. However, after these internships, I realized that I did not want to stay in the tourism sector. (K1, female)

**Table 3.** The Effect of Internship on Sector Preference in the Career Exploration Stage.

Internship preference	Career plan after the internship		Similarity between the first job and the sector of the internship (n)		Similarity between the last job and the sector of the internship (n)
The graduates doing an internship in the sector in which they planned a career <i>n</i> = 86 (65%)	Similar	Same	33	Same	38
	<i>n</i> = 65	Similar	3	Similar	11
	49%	Different	23	Different	13
	Different	Same	2	Same	0
	<i>n</i> = 13	Similar	0	Similar	2
	10%	Different	8	Different	10
	No impact	Same	2	Same	2
<i>n</i> = 8	Similar	0	Similar	0	
6%	Different	7	Different	5	
The graduates doing an internship in a sector in which they did not plan a career <i>n</i> = 47 (35%)	Similar	Same	6	Same	5
	<i>n</i> = 10	Similar	0	Similar	0
	8%	Different	2	Different	3
	Different	Same	1	Same	0
	<i>n</i> = 14	Similar	3	Similar	2
	11%	Different	7	Different	12
	No impact	Same	5	Same	3
<i>n</i> = 23	Similar	0	Similar	4	
17%	Different	15	Different	13	

The findings of the focus group study supported the findings of the quantitative study. The results of the focus group study showed that six out of nine participants mentioned that their internships had a negative or positive impact on their career plans. One of the participants whose career goals did not change after her internship experience emphasized a different reason for choosing her internship sector. She stated that although she did not want to be a programmer, she did her internship as a programmer to address a deficiency in her academic background. Participants who developed avoidance behavior toward the sectors of their internships began to work in different sectors after graduation. On the contrary, three participants who adopted the sectors of their internships began to work in the same companies in which they had completed their internships.

After completing their internships, the graduates whose career goals were reinforced in terms of sector mostly started working in the same or similar sectors to their internships; 36 graduates out of 65 whose career plans were reinforced after their internships started their first jobs in the same or similar sectors to their internship sectors. The ones who were unable to find jobs in the same or similar sectors to their internship began to head toward the sectors that complied with their career plans by changing their jobs over time. Supporting this inference, when the current jobs of the graduates were examined, 49 graduates out of 65 worked in the same or similar sectors to their internship sectors (see Table 3). Considering the findings of the focus group study, it is seen that graduates do internships in sectors that are not in line with their career plans and sometimes decide to work in their

internship sectors after completing their internship program. One example of such a situation can be seen in the statement of one of the participants:

I did my internship in the packaging sector because I had difficulties finding an internship that was in line with my career plan. But I found the packaging sector very dynamic during the internship . . . After the internship, I realized that I wanted to continue in the packaging sector and continue my career in this sector. (K9, female)

The chi-square test of independence was used to examine the relationship between doing an internship in the sector in line with the career plan and continuing in a sector that is the same/similar to the career plan after the internship (H1). The result of this test was found significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 130) = 37.663, p < .001$  (see Table 4). This means that doing an internship in the sector in line with the career plan and continuing in a sector that is the same/similar to the career plan after internship are related. Thus, H1 is supported. This was confirmed by one of the participants:

I started my internship in this company by my own choice. My first internship lasted three months. I continued to work in this company as an intern for a year after graduation. At the end of one year as a graduate, I was hired directly. (K3, male)

Another hypothesis to be tested in this research was whether there was a difference between duration before starting the first job for graduates who did their internships in line with their career plans and those who did not do their internships in line with their career plans (H2). To test H2, the

**Table 4.** Chi-Square Test of Independence Between Doing an Internship in the Sector In Line With the Career Plan and Continuing in the Sector That Is Same/Similar to the Career Plan.

Test statistics	Value	df	Asymptomatic significance (two-sided)
Pearson chi-square	37,663 <sup>a</sup>	2	.000**
Likelihood ratio	38,789	2	.000
Linear-by-linear	37,073	1	.000
No. of valid cases	130		

<sup>a</sup>Zero cells (0.0%) have expected count less than five. The minimum expected count is 9.69.

\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 5.** Mann–Whitney  $U$  Test Results for Comparison of Duration Before Starting the First Job for Graduates Who Did and Did Not Do Their Internship In Line With Their Career Plan.

Groups	$n$	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	$U$	$Z$	$p$
Graduates who did their internship in line with their career plan	85	60.81	5,169	1,514	-2,036	.042*
Graduates who did not do their internship in line with their career plan	45	74.36	3,346			
Total	130					

Note. Four of the participants who did internships in line with their career goals began to work in the same companies in which they had completed their internships just after graduation.

\* $p < .05$ .

**Table 6.** Mann–Whitney  $U$  Test Results for Comparison of Duration Before Starting the First Job for Graduates Who Did Only One Internship and Those Who Did More Than One Internship.

Groups	$n$	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	$U$	$Z$	$p$
One internship	53	67.92	3,600	1,912	-0.635	.525
More than one internship	77	63.83	4,915			
Total	130					

Mann–Whitney  $U$  test was used. The result of this test was significant ( $U = 1.514$ ,  $Z = -2.036$ ,  $p < .05$ ; see Table 5) and indicated that duration before starting the first job was significantly shorter for graduates who did their internships in line with their career plans ( $Mdn = 2$ ) than for graduates who did not do their internships in line with their career plans ( $Mdn = 4$ ). This means that there was a significant difference between duration before starting the first job for graduates who did their internships in line with their career plans and those who did not do their internships in line with their career plans. Thus, H2 is supported. One of the participants of the focus group made a sectoral distinction in terms of public and private:

I completely took a disliking to the private sector in my internship and I said that I should do whatever I could to find a job in the public sector. As a result, I waited a year and a half and finally got my dream. (K2, male)

To test H3, which hypothesized a difference between the duration before starting the first job for graduates who

did only one internship and those who did more than one internship, the Mann–Whitney  $U$  test was used. The result of this test was found non-significant ( $U = 1.912$ ,  $Z = -0.635$ ,  $p > .05$ ; see Table 6). Thus, H3 is rejected. The focus group study gives insight into this rejected hypothesis. One participant stated, “When a job candidate changes jobs or companies frequently, they [employers] think that there is something wrong with him or her” (K8, male). Another participant stated,

We were two candidates for the same position. I was accepted for the job . . . After one year, they [human resources officers] gave me the feedback that the reason I was chosen was the number of internships I did and my sectoral experience. (K1, female)

Therefore, doing many different internships may leave either a negative or a positive impression on prospective employers. As a result, it can be stated that the relationship between the number of internships done and the duration before starting the first job is ambiguous.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out whether the internships undertaken during undergraduate years affected graduates' actual career decisions through their employment history. When the findings of the study were discussed in detail, it was observed that the majority of the participants carried out their internships in sectors which were in line with their career plans. The findings of the focus group study showed that graduates seek internship opportunities in line with their career plans. Most of them accomplished finding suitable internships. However, some of them had difficulties stemming from social security problems between hosting organization and the university, non-professional perspectives of companies regarding internship, and insufficient support from their university. As students' internship motivations concerning their career plans are not often mentioned in the Turkish internship literature, it is a valuable finding that the students of this Turkish business school made their internship decisions mostly in line with their career plans.

In addition to the finding above, a significant relationship was found between doing internships in sectors in line with career plans and the behavior of pursuing careers in the same or similar sectors to the ones in which the graduates did internships. Some participants of the focus group study stated that they started to work directly for the companies where they did their internships. Taylor (1988) stated that a high satisfaction level of students regarding their internships increases the intention of these students to take part in these sectors in future. Moreover, Zopiatis and Theocharous (2013) revealed that a successful internship experience increased the intention of the interns to continue their careers in the hospitality sector after graduation. In this context, it can be put forward that internships that are in line with the career plans of students and result in a high level of satisfaction increase the potential for qualified employees for the sector in the future. It was also found that the graduates who could not find jobs in the same or similar sectors to their internship sectors moved toward jobs and sectors within the scope of their career plans by making job or sector changes over time.

Through this study, it was also found that the duration before starting the first job after graduation was significantly shorter for graduates who did their internships in line with their career plans than for graduates who did not do their internships in line with their career plans. This finding was supported by the findings of the focus group study. Most of the participants stated that they received job offers from their host companies after completing their internships. The participants who embraced these job offers started to work in those companies. Consequently, those participants did not need to search for jobs after graduation. This finding is supported by previous research (Gault et al., 2000, 2010; Knouse et al., 1999) demonstrating that doing internships increases the employability of graduates. This finding also revealed that internships carried out in sectors in line with career goals

reinforce the career goals of students and make it easier for them to find jobs.

It was also found in this research that some graduates changed their career goals in terms of sectors after their internship experience. In addition to this finding, some graduates started their first jobs in sectors which were different from the sectors in which they did internships and continued to work in other sectors. There are studies in the internship literature that provide insight into career plan changes after the internship experience. After carrying out internships in the tourism sector (Farmaki, 2018; Kim & Park, 2013; Köşker & Unur, 2017; Wang & Chen, 2015) and in the health sector (Öztürk & Kırac, 2019), the thought of a career in the jobs and sectors of the internships was found to be negatively affected. Robinson et al. (2016) indicated that the tendency to change career plans because of internship experience in the tourism and hospitality sector involves changes within the sector rather than cross-sectoral changes. In the study of Koç et al. (2014), it was found that 18.3% of students decided not to continue their careers in the tourism and hospitality sector after completing their internships, while this rate accounts for 43.6% in the study of Richardson (2008). When these findings are analyzed, it can be put forward that the graduates changed their career plans due to negative internship experiences, such as the failure of the internship to meet expectations (Koç et al., 2014) or sector-person mismatch. It is necessary to note that the graduates who had to work in the sectors of their internships due to a lack of employment in their desired sectors and other factors left their sectors entirely over time. In this sense, it can be stated that internship experiences during the undergraduate period have a long-term effect on career journey.

The findings of this study indicated that there was not a significant difference between duration before starting the first job for graduates who did only one internship and those who did more than one internship. Nevertheless, it was also found that duration before starting the first job after graduation was significantly shorter for graduates who did their internships in line with their career plans than for graduates who did not do their internships in line with their career plans. In the literature, there are significant findings related to the following issues: students who graduated by doing internships found jobs in a shorter time than the students who graduated without doing internships (Gault et al., 2000; Knouse et al., 1999); internship experience increased graduates' job opportunities and the rate of being called for job interviews (Nunley et al., 2016); and graduates with internship experience received more job offers (Coco, 2000). In line with the findings mentioned above, Blau et al. (2018) observed a positive relationship between the number of completed internship programs and the expectation of finding a full-time job after graduation, together with the expectation of finding a job related to the field of graduation. When these findings are reviewed together, it can be asserted that internship during the undergraduate period increases the probability of being



employed in the future. However, considering the findings obtained from the present study, it can be stated that doing an internship in the sector in line with the career plan is more effective and meaningful than doing a greater number of internships.

The present study pointed out the effect of the internships that individuals carried out during their undergraduate education period on their career journeys. A conclusion to be drawn from the study is the importance of starting career planning activities as early as possible. In this sense, students, educational institutions, and companies have duties and responsibilities to each other for a successful and efficient workforce.

### *Implications and Suggestions*

Based on the findings of the study obtained by two different methods, it is possible to make the following suggestions to the partners of the internship process to make the internship, which has an essential place in career planning, more useful.

Students who do internships should focus on their primary career goals in the process of searching for an internship place and choose their internship place in line with these goals. For this, they need to analyze their strengths, weaknesses, interests, expectations, and needs. Individuals should also evaluate external environmental factors. If the opportunity is obtained to do an internship in line with the determination of the individual evaluation process, the experience during the internship process will turn into a vital gain toward the career goal. However, suppose the internship is in a different department, company, or sector in the career goal. In that case, a positive perspective should be maintained that the internship process offers the opportunity to observe business life and create a network and is a meaningful experience and means of self-inquiry. This is because it may be possible to see the positive aspects of unplanned or undesirable situations, notice issues that were overlooked in the previous individual inquiry, and contribute more to the career in a macro sense. Also, interns should take advantage of the support offered by career centers in universities. Internships in line with career goals are welcomed more positively in the sector. However, an internship different from students' main career goal can help students to understand what they desire and what can they accomplish. Then, this understanding makes an essential contribution to the students' main career plan. In the end, students can set new goals by taking into account these understandings.

Businesses should choose their interns using a process similar to the one they use when recruiting an employee, considering that they may select future employees during the internship selection process. With a perspective similar to that of the recruitment process, care should be taken to ensure that interns suit the job, the business, and the group. Businesses can assist students in identifying units for the

internship using tools such as psychotechnical tests and by trying to identify the career goals of candidates in interviews. They should also support interns by guiding them to the right positions and to learn the job. In other words, enterprises should structure their organizational cultures in a way that structures the relationships between interns and employees of the enterprises from a long-term perspective. In this context, the adaptation of interns to work and social environments should be facilitated. The organizational culture should be associated with the human resource management system of the enterprise. In the internship process, which is considered as an on-the-job training method within the scope of the training function, employees responsible for interns should adopt this culture, share information with the interns, and teach and guide them. The compliance of the employees responsible for interns with this culture can be evaluated within the scope of performance evaluation. For example, the learning level of the interns at the end of the process and the ones hired after the internship can be determined as performance criteria. In addition, businesses should consider short-term internships with a new career perspective, unlike the traditional perspective, as experiences that contribute to positive development of students. Both students and businesses should not ignore that part-time work, such as internships, has an essential place in the career path.

Universities, which are the organizers of the internship process, should inform students and businesses regularly on issues such as internship conditions, operation, provided support, and expectations. In this way, obstacles such as the fact that businesses perceive a lack of information about internship practices can be removed, communication gaps can be eliminated, and problems can be prevented. In addition, career counseling support should be given to students to structure the relationship between the field of internship and the current field of study in a healthy way. Within the scope of this support, students should be helped to define themselves better in terms of personality and occupational inventory, and activities such as personal development training and career days should be provided so that students can connect with different sectors. In addition to compulsory internships, voluntary internships should also be supported to help students gain experience. Regulations should be made for students to have longer and more internships by developing university–industry cooperation.

### *Limitations and Future Studies*

This study has some limitations. First, the number of graduates that could be reached to gather quantitative data was quite low because the business school has only recently started to keep internship records. As the departments of the business school (other than the management and human resource management departments) have only started to function in the recent past, another limitation of the study is that the representation of the departments in the sample is

rather low due to the restricted number of graduates. Also, this study was conducted in a single business school in Turkey, so the results cannot be generalized to other business school students across Turkey. Other limitations of the study include dealing with individual career planning only from an internship perspective and investigating career preferences only in terms of sector.

In light of the findings of the research, it is possible to make a few suggestions for future research. The relationship between the field of internship and career fields of graduates of departments with sector orientations such as tourism management and health management can be investigated. Studies on the effects of internships in the public and private sectors, family businesses, and corporate enterprises on career choices can be carried out. Research can be conducted to determine the reasons for the decision to do an internship in a different direction to the career goal from a different perspective. In the second stage of this study, environmental factors such as social opportunities can be considered.

## Appendix A

### *The Questionnaire Form*

1. Which undergraduate program did you graduate from?
  - Management
  - Human resource management
  - Management information systems
  - International trade
  - Health management
2. Did you participate in a compulsory or voluntary internship during your undergraduate education? (If your answer is “No,” please quit the survey without answering the following questions.)
  - Yes
  - No
3. Did you work professionally during undergraduate education aside from an internship?
  - Yes
  - No
4. Please choose the most suitable option for you, considering your internship decision during your undergraduate education.
  - My internship was in the sector in which I intend to work in the future.
  - Since I could not find internship opportunities in the sector I plan to work in, I had to do an internship in another sector.
5. When you consider the most important internship you did during your undergraduate education, which one of the following best applies to you?
  - When my internship was over, I wanted to continue my career in a sector that was the same/similar to my internship.
  - When my internship was over, I wanted to continue my career in a sector different to my internship.
  - My internship did not have an impact on my career decision in terms of sector.
6. Please write the sector of the most important internship you did during your undergraduate period.
 

(.....)
7. Please indicate the duration of the internship that you consider most important for you.
  - 0–14 days
  - 15–29 days
  - 30–59 days
  - 60–89 days
  - 90 days or more
8. Considering your first job search after graduation, was there any sector you wanted to work in?
  - Yes
  - No
9. Considering the most important internship you did during your undergraduate period, the sector in which you are working now is:
  - The same as the sector in which I did my internship.
  - Similar to the sector in which I did my internship.
  - Different from the sector in which I did my internship.
10. Was your first workplace after graduation one of the firms/institutions where you did your internship?
  - Yes
  - No
11. Please indicate the sector of your first workplace after graduation.
 

(.....)
12. Please indicate how long it took you to get your first job after graduation.
 

(.....)
13. How many internships did you do during your undergraduate period?
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - More than 3
14. Please indicate the sector of your current workplace.
 

(.....)
15. What is your age?
  - 20–23
  - 24–27
  - 28–31
  - 32–35
  - 36 or older
16. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female

## Appendix B

### Focus Group Questions

1. How did you decide about your internship during your undergraduate education? Did any sector or department preference guide you on this matter?
2. Could you find an internship opportunity in line with your preferences? What difficulties did you encounter in finding an internship in line with your preferences?
3. What do you think about the duration of your internships during your undergraduate period? What is the ideal internship duration for undergraduate students?
4. Did the firm/institution offer you a job after the internship? Have you started the job at the same firm/institution?
5. How long did it take you to find a job after graduation?
6. Was the department or sector where you started your first job the same/similar to the sector or department in which you did your internship?
7. Did your internship have an effect on your future career?
8. Do you think that doing an internship makes it easier for undergraduate students to find jobs?
9. What do you think about this debate on the effects of internships on graduates' future careers: do many internships or do a single internship for a long time?

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