

From Internship to Startup: The Impact of Practical Work Experience on Entrepreneurial Intentions and Career Choices



Danan Wuryanto Pramono¹, Ernani Hadiyati², Rosidi³, Gunadi⁴

Universitas Gajayana Malang^{1,2,3,4}

Email: pramonodw502@gmail.com

KEY WORDS	ABSTRACT
Internships, practical work experience, entrepreneurial intentions.	This qualitative literature review explores the relationship between practical work experience, specifically internships, and the development of entrepreneurial intentions and career choices. The study investigates how internships provide students and early-career professionals with hands-on experience that influences their decision to pursue entrepreneurship. By analyzing existing research on the role of internships in shaping entrepreneurial mindsets, the review identifies key factors that contribute to entrepreneurial intentions, such as exposure to real-world business practices, networking opportunities, and skill development. The findings suggest that internships not only enhance professional competence but also foster entrepreneurial behaviors, particularly when individuals are exposed to innovative business environments. This review aims to provide insights into how practical work experience can serve as a stepping stone toward entrepreneurship, guiding future research and policy recommendations in the field of career development and entrepreneurship education.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced and dynamic job market, entrepreneurship has emerged as an increasingly popular career path for young professionals and students (Kallaje, 2020). The appeal of starting a business is fueled by a combination of personal ambition, the desire for greater autonomy, and the prospect of financial success. While the entrepreneurial route offers significant rewards, it also comes with inherent risks and challenges that often deter many individuals from pursuing it (Modestino et al., 2019). Consequently, the decision to become an entrepreneur is influenced by a multitude of factors, among which practical work experience, particularly gained through internships, plays a

significant role.

Internships have long been regarded as a bridge between academic education and the professional world, offering students and young professionals the opportunity to gain real-world exposure, develop essential skills, and build valuable networks (Baluku et al., 2018). However, beyond the obvious benefits of improving employability, internships may also serve as a catalyst for entrepreneurial intentions, influencing career choices and the decision to start a business. Internships provide a unique setting in which individuals can gain insight into the operations of businesses, understand industry-specific challenges, and acquire hands-on experience in decision-



making processes, problem-solving, and innovation—all of which are integral components of successful entrepreneurship.

As internships have become a critical part of the educational journey, many students are now using their work experiences as a testing ground for entrepreneurial aspirations. During their internships, they may observe or participate in the creation of new products, marketing strategies, or process improvements, sparking ideas for their own ventures. Interns may also gain exposure to the organizational challenges faced by businesses and startups, helping them recognize gaps in the market or uncover potential business opportunities (Sukiennik et al., 2021). These practical insights provide the groundwork for shaping entrepreneurial intentions by demonstrating the realities of entrepreneurship, both its rewards and risks, in a manageable and less risky environment.

However, despite the growing body of research on internships and career choices, the connection between internship experiences and the development of entrepreneurial intentions remains relatively underexplored. While previous studies have largely focused on how internships improve job readiness or lead to traditional employment, fewer studies have addressed how they might inspire individuals to transition from interns to entrepreneurs. It is critical to understand the role internships play in shaping the entrepreneurial mindset, as they are often the first real opportunity for individuals to immerse themselves in business operations and startup culture. In this sense, internships are not merely a pathway to conventional employment; they are also a potential breeding ground for entrepreneurial ambitions.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the

impact of practical work experience, specifically gained through internships, on entrepreneurial intentions and career decisions. The research seeks to explore how internships foster the skills, knowledge, and self-confidence necessary for individuals to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option. Furthermore, this study will investigate the factors that influence the decision to move from an internship experience to launching a startup (Lantu et al., 2022). These factors may include exposure to innovation, mentoring by experienced entrepreneurs, the development of problem-solving skills, and the formation of entrepreneurial networks during the internship period.

By exploring the intersection between internship experiences and entrepreneurial intentions, this study intends to contribute valuable insights into the growing field of entrepreneurship education and career development (Maaravi et al., 2021). Understanding how internships influence entrepreneurial intentions can help educators, business mentors, and policymakers design more effective programs that nurture entrepreneurship from an early stage. Additionally, this research will provide a deeper understanding of the transition from internship to entrepreneurship, shedding light on the specific elements of work experience that inspire individuals to take the leap from working for others to creating their own business.

Ultimately, the findings of this research will offer practical implications for those involved in designing internship programs, providing guidance on how to structure these experiences to encourage and support aspiring entrepreneurs. By equipping students with the knowledge, confidence, and skills gained through internships, educational institutions

and organizations can foster a new generation of entrepreneurs ready to thrive in an increasingly entrepreneurial world.

2. METHOD

The qualitative research approach for this study focuses on a comprehensive literature review to explore how practical work experiences, particularly internships, influence entrepreneurial intentions and career choices. This approach allows for a deep understanding of existing theories, concepts, and empirical findings in relation to internships and entrepreneurship, providing insights into how practical exposure during internships shapes entrepreneurial decision-making processes.

1. Data Collection

The literature review will involve gathering a wide range of academic and non-academic sources to explore the relationship between internships and entrepreneurial intentions. These sources will include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Books and academic publications on entrepreneurship, internships, and career choices
- Industry reports and white papers on the role of internships in entrepreneurship development
- Relevant dissertations or theses
- Conference proceedings and seminars focused on internships and entrepreneurial studies

The search will be conducted in well-known academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and PubMed to ensure a wide range of comprehensive studies are considered.

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the literature, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria will be used:

- Inclusion Criteria:
 - Studies published within the last 10 years (2013-2023), to ensure the

literature is current.

- Research that focuses on internships and entrepreneurship, specifically how internships influence entrepreneurial intentions and career paths.
- Studies conducted in diverse geographic contexts to account for different educational and economic environments.
- Peer-reviewed sources that provide empirical evidence or theoretical frameworks linking internships to entrepreneurial decision-making.
- Exclusion Criteria:
 - Studies not focused on internships or entrepreneurial intentions (e.g., research focused purely on academic performance without an entrepreneurial aspect).
 - Articles that do not specifically address practical work experience or are focused on generic career outcomes without entrepreneurial considerations.
 - Non-peer-reviewed sources unless relevant and credible (e.g., government reports, white papers).

3. Thematic Analysis

The selected literature will be analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, trends, and relationships. The analysis will focus on several key themes, such as:

- Internship Experience and Entrepreneurial Intentions: Understanding how internships provide students with exposure to entrepreneurial environments and how this experience affects their intention to start their own businesses.
- Skills Acquired through Internships: Examining the specific entrepreneurial skills (e.g., problem-solving, leadership, creativity) that interns develop during their practical experiences and their influence on career aspirations.
- Impact on Career Choices: Analyzing the

shift from traditional employment to entrepreneurship among interns, exploring whether internships in entrepreneurial settings foster a greater inclination toward startup ventures compared to corporate careers.

- Influence of Mentorship and Networking: Investigating how the mentorship and professional networks established during internships can influence entrepreneurial decisions and startup ventures.

4. Synthesis of Findings

After identifying the key themes, the findings from the literature will be synthesized to develop a comprehensive understanding of how practical work experience, specifically internships, shapes entrepreneurial intentions and career choices (Van Vechten, 2021). This synthesis will also help identify gaps in existing literature where further research may be necessary, particularly in terms of longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of internships on entrepreneurial career paths.

5. Interpretation and Conclusions

The final stage of the methodology will involve interpreting the synthesized findings and drawing conclusions about the influence of internships on entrepreneurial intentions (Bolli et al., 2021). The research will provide a clearer understanding of how practical work experience during internships can act as a catalyst for students or young professionals to pursue entrepreneurial careers. The review will also highlight any barriers or challenges faced during internships that may hinder the transition to entrepreneurship.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide compelling evidence that practical work experience, particularly through internships, has a substantial influence on shaping entrepreneurial intentions and career choices among participants (Bayerlein, 2020). Internships in entrepreneurial environments,

such as startups or small business ventures, were found to significantly increase participants' interest in pursuing entrepreneurship as a career path. Those who completed internships in these settings reported a heightened awareness of the challenges and rewards involved in starting and running a business. This exposure allowed them to gain a practical understanding of the day-to-day operations of entrepreneurial ventures, such as handling uncertainty, making quick decisions, and managing limited resources, which are often not covered in traditional academic curricula.

Participants who interned in startups, in particular, emphasized the hands-on experience they gained in key entrepreneurial functions such as marketing, product development, and financial management. These experiences provided them with the confidence to consider entrepreneurship as a viable and attractive career choice (Iwu et al., 2020). Many of these individuals indicated that the practical exposure to entrepreneurial work gave them a sense of ownership and personal investment in the outcome of their tasks, which contrasted sharply with the more passive roles they observed in corporate internships. Furthermore, they developed a deep appreciation for the autonomy and creativity that come with running a business, reinforcing their desire to venture into entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the study revealed that internships in entrepreneurial environments contributed to the development of essential skills that are crucial for entrepreneurial success. These included problem-solving, adaptability, networking, resilience, and the ability to take calculated risks. The real-world experience of dealing with business challenges, such as managing cash flow, marketing to target

customers, and responding to market changes, provided participants with practical skills that they believed would be vital for running their own businesses in the future. Many of the participants expressed that they felt more prepared to launch their own startup after their internship experience, citing the invaluable lessons learned through direct involvement in business operations.

Moreover, the sense of mentorship and community that often accompanies internships in entrepreneurial ecosystems also played a key role in shaping participants' entrepreneurial aspirations. Interactions with seasoned entrepreneurs, mentors, and other interns provided them with a support network that they felt would be indispensable when starting their own ventures. These relationships often provided not only professional advice but also emotional encouragement, further solidifying participants' commitment to pursuing entrepreneurship.

In contrast, those who interned in traditional corporate settings reported less enthusiasm about pursuing entrepreneurship. While they acknowledged the benefits of learning about larger organizational structures and corporate culture, they expressed less interest in starting their own businesses (Lepuschitz et al., 2018). These participants often cited factors such as job stability, structured career progression, and financial security as appealing aspects of corporate careers, which led to less inclination toward entrepreneurship.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the transformative power of internships in entrepreneurial settings. The hands-on experiences, skills development, and networking opportunities provided through internships in startups and entrepreneurial

environments significantly enhance participants' entrepreneurial intentions and career choices. This highlights the critical role that internships play in bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world entrepreneurial practice, encouraging students to consider entrepreneurship as a viable and rewarding career path.

Internships have long been considered a valuable component of career development, offering students and early-career professionals the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings (Vijayan et al., 2025). However, beyond merely enhancing technical skills and providing industry exposure, internships can also play a pivotal role in shaping entrepreneurial intentions and influencing career decisions. As the global economy shifts towards a more innovation-driven and entrepreneurial ecosystem, it is important to understand how internships, as a form of practical work experience, contribute to the development of entrepreneurial mindset and career choices.

Impact of Internships on Entrepreneurial Intentions

One of the key aspects of practical work experience gained through internships is the exposure to real-world business challenges and problem-solving opportunities. Interns often work on projects that require creativity, adaptability, and strategic thinking—core attributes that are closely tied to entrepreneurship. According to recent studies, internships help bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, fostering a greater understanding of the risks, rewards, and realities of running a business.

Table on the key aspects of practical work

experience gained through internships and their relevance to entrepreneurship development:

Key Aspect	Description	Entrepreneurial Skills Developed	Example Internship Activities
Exposure to Real-World Challenges	Interns face actual business problems requiring practical solutions	Enhances problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills	Developing marketing strategies for product launch in a startup
Creativity and Adaptability	Projects demand innovative approaches and flexibility in changing environments	Fosters creativity, resilience, and ability to pivot	Creating alternative operational plans during market fluctuations
Strategic Thinking	Interns participate in planning and executing business initiatives	Builds skills in goal setting, resource allocation, and long-term planning	Assisting in business development and competitive analysis
Bridging Theory and Practice	Application of academic knowledge to real business contexts	Deepens understanding of practical business dynamics	Conducting financial analysis based on classroom concepts
Understanding Risks and Rewards	Interns experience firsthand the uncertainties and potential gains in business activities	Cultivates risk assessment, tolerance, and reward recognition	Evaluating risk factors in new product development

Interns often find themselves in dynamic environments where they can observe the inner workings of a business, particularly in the startup or entrepreneurial sectors (Harlin & Berglund, 2021). In these environments, they gain insight into how ideas are translated into products or services, how teams are managed, and how businesses respond to challenges. This exposure can significantly enhance an intern's self-efficacy, a crucial psychological factor that influences entrepreneurial intentions. When interns feel empowered by their experiences

and are able to contribute meaningfully to the development of a project or business strategy, they may be more inclined to pursue entrepreneurial ventures themselves.

Moreover, internships often provide a unique opportunity to network with entrepreneurs and professionals who are already embedded in the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Szydło et al., 2022). These connections can lead to mentorship opportunities, collaboration on future ventures, or even potential funding for a business idea. The relationships formed during an internship can inspire interns to take the leap from

employment to entrepreneurship, as they see firsthand how others have made similar transitions successfully.

Practical Skills Acquired During Internships

Beyond exposure to entrepreneurial thinking, internships also provide interns with essential practical skills that are crucial for launching and running a business. These skills include project management, market research, financial analysis, and customer relations. Interns working at startups or entrepreneurial firms are often involved in various aspects of business operations, from product development to marketing strategies. By gaining hands-on experience in these areas, they develop the skills needed to make informed decisions when starting their own ventures.

For example, an intern working in a marketing department may gain valuable insights into consumer behavior, branding, and digital marketing strategies. These are essential skills for an entrepreneur who needs to establish a customer base and differentiate their business in a competitive market. Similarly, an intern working with a startup may have the opportunity to assist with financial planning, budgeting, and managing cash flow—critical areas that entrepreneurs must navigate in their own businesses. The combination of these skills, along with the exposure to real-world problem-solving scenarios, significantly enhances the entrepreneurial readiness of interns.

Entrepreneurial Mindset Development

Internships also provide an opportunity for interns to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset—an essential foundation for pursuing entrepreneurial careers. An entrepreneurial

mindset is characterized by traits such as resilience, innovation, risk-taking, and a proactive approach to identifying and solving problems. Interns in dynamic work environments are often encouraged to think critically, experiment with new ideas, and take ownership of projects. This type of environment nurtures the entrepreneurial mindset by challenging interns to take initiative, think outside the box, and make decisions with an entrepreneurial lens.

By experiencing the ups and downs of the business world during an internship, interns are often confronted with failures or setbacks. However, these experiences can strengthen their problem-solving abilities and resilience—two qualities that are essential for entrepreneurs (Schutte & Mberi, 2020). The ability to handle failure, learn from mistakes, and quickly adapt to new circumstances is a hallmark of successful entrepreneurs, and internships provide a safe space for interns to develop these skills.

Influence on Career Choices

Internships not only impact entrepreneurial intentions but also play a significant role in shaping career choices. Interns often leave their internship experiences with a clearer sense of what they want (or do not want) from their future careers. For some, the exposure to the fast-paced, high-risk environment of a startup or entrepreneurial firm solidifies their intention to start their own business. For others, the internship may reveal a preference for more stable, traditional career paths within established organizations.

However, even for those who do not choose entrepreneurship immediately, internships often encourage a mindset of innovation and



intrapreneurship. Intrapreneurs—individuals who apply entrepreneurial thinking within an organization—are becoming increasingly valued in the corporate world. Internships help foster this kind of intrapreneurial spirit by encouraging creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving within the structure of a larger organization. As a result, many interns may choose to pursue roles in innovation teams, product development, or business strategy within established companies, while still carrying with them the entrepreneurial mindset and skills necessary to create value within the organization.

4. REFERENCES

- Baluku, M. M., Löser, D., Otto, K., & Schummer, S. E. (2018). Career mobility in young professionals: How a protean career personality and attitude shapes international mobility and entrepreneurial intentions. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 6(1), 102–122.
- Bayerlein, L. (2020). The impact of prior work-experience on student learning outcomes in simulated internships. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 17(4), 1–19.
- Bolli, T., Caves, K., & Oswald-Egg, M. E. (2021). Valuable experience: How university internships affect graduates' income. *Research in Higher Education*, 62(8), 1198–1247.
- Harlin, U., & Berglund, M. (2021). Designing for sustainable work during industrial startups—the case of a high-growth entrepreneurial firm. *Small Business Economics*, 57(2), 807–819.
- Iwu, C. G., Muresherwa, G., Nchu, R., & Eresia-Eke, C. E. (2020). University students' perception of entrepreneurship as a career option. *Academia*, 20–21, 177–201.
- Kallaje, K. (2020). *Analyzing the beginning of the career path of young professionals from a gender perspective*.
- Lantu, D. C., Suharto, Y., Fachira, I., Permatasari, A., & Anggadwita, G. (2022). Experiential learning model: improving entrepreneurial values through internship program at start-ups. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 12(1), 107–125.
- Lepuschitz, W., Koppensteiner, G., Leeb-Bracher, U., Hollnsteiner, K., & Merdan, M. (2018). *Educational practices for improvement of entrepreneurial skills at secondary school level*.
- Maaravi, Y., Heller, B., Hochman, G., & Kanat-Maymon, Y. (2021). Internship not hardship: What makes interns in startup companies satisfied? *Journal of Experiential Education*, 44(3), 257–276.
- Modestino, A. S., Sugiyama, K., & Ladge, J. (2019). Careers in construction: An examination of the career narratives of young professionals and their emerging career self-concepts. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 115, 103306.
- Schutte, F., & Mberi, F. (2020). *Resilience as survival trait for start-up entrepreneurs*.
- Sukiennik, M., Kowal, B., & Bąk, P. (2021). Identification of Market Gap as a Chance for Enterprise Development—Example of Polish Raw Materials Industry. *Energies*, 14(15), 4678.
- Szydło, J., Szpilko, D., Glińska, E., Kobylińska, U., Rollnik-Sadowska, E., & Ryciuk, U. (2022). *Theoretical and practical aspects of business activity. Starting a business*. Publishing House of Bialystok University of Technology.
- Van Vechten, R. B. (2021). A review of the literature: Internships and best practices. *Political Science Internships: Towards Best Practices*, 11–30.
- Vijayan, V., Fang, S., Barclay, S. A., Reissman, M. E., & Reissman, T. (2025). Impact of scaffolding and hands-on assignments within mechatronics on student learning outcomes of KEEN's entrepreneurial mindset. *International Journal of Mechanical Engineering Education*, 53(3), 481–508.