Quest Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Volume 8 Issue 1: 249-266
ISSN Print: 2705-4527
ISSN Online: 2705-4535
Web: https://www.quest.edu.np

Internship Learning Experience of Business Students of Pokhara University in Kathmandu Valley

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Received: 29 January 2026
Revised: 13 February 2026
Accepted: 05 March 2026
Published: 30 March 2026

How to cite this paper:
Bhusal, L. (2026). Internship Learning Experience of Business Students of Pokhara University in Kathmandu Valley. *Quest Journal of Management and Social Sciences, 8(1),* 249-266. https://doi.org/10.3126/qjmss.v8i1.92115

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Abstract

Background: Internships bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical workplace experience, providing students with opportunities to apply academic knowledge in real-world settings. Globally, internships are recognized as essential for developing professional skills, enhancing employability, and shaping career trajectories. In Nepal, Pokhara University emphasizes internships as part of business education, yet there is limited empirical evidence on how these experiences influence students' career development, satisfaction, and promotion of internship programs through word-of-mouth, particularly in the Kathmandu Valley.

Purpose: Internships provide students with opportunities to gain practical work experience and enhance learning through structured, supervised engagement. This study examines the experiences and impact of internships on the career development of business students at Pokhara University in the Kathmandu Valley.

Design/Methodology/Approach: An explanatory research design was employed, guided by the Expectation Confirmation Theory. A probability sampling technique was used to survey 391 management students. Data collection was conducted using KOBO Toolbox, while data analysis was performed with PLS-SEM, and Microsoft Excel was utilized for data entry and tabulation.

Findings: The study finds that students perceive internships as an essential component of their education, providing valuable work experience. However, challenges exist, including organizational issues, time management, role assignment, and treatment of interns. Internship experiences significantly influence students' future career intentions and their likelihood of recommending the program (word of mouth). Managerial strategies to enhance internship effectiveness are also discussed.

Conclusion: Internships play a critical role in shaping business students' career trajectories and influencing word-of-mouth promotion of internship programs. Satisfaction with internship experiences mediates both future career intentions and word-of-mouth behavior. Addressing the challenges faced by students during internships is essential to maximize their educational and professional benefits.

Keywords: Internship, Business Students, Internship Experience, Career Development, Word of Mouth

1. Introduction

Internships have become an integral component of modern higher education, particularly in business and management programs (Urquía-Grande, & Pérez, 2021; Mareque, & de Prada, 2023). Universities across the world increasingly incorporate internship modules into undergraduate curricula to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Khan, 2024). Through internships, students gain exposure to real organizational environments, develop professional competencies, and acquire practical insights that cannot be fully obtained through classroom instruction alone (Meredith & Burkle, 2008). As a result, internship programs are widely recognized as an effective mechanism for enhancing students' employability, professional skills, and career readiness (Gale et al., 2017). In many academic institutions, internships are not only recommended but also mandatory for graduation, emphasizing their growing importance in professional education (Chong & Yazdani, 2020).

An internship can be defined as a short-term, structured work experience in which students receive training and perform relevant tasks in a professional setting related to their field of study (Baird & Mollen, 2023). This experiential learning opportunity allows students to apply theoretical concepts learned in classrooms to real-life work situations while simultaneously developing problem-solving abilities, teamwork, communication skills, and professional ethics (Baird & Mollen, 2023). Internships therefore serve as a critical platform for integrating academic learning with practical exposure, enabling students to understand the dynamics of the workplace and the expectations of employers. Furthermore, internships allow students to explore potential career paths and make informed decisions about their professional futures (Pietro, 2022).

Historically, the concept of internship can be traced back several centuries when young learners assisted craftsmen and traders as apprentices or helpers (Gomez et al., 2023). Over time, this informal training model evolved into more structured professional training systems. In the early twentieth century, universities began incorporating practical training into their academic programs. One of the earliest formal internship models emerged in the United States through cooperative education programs initiated at the University of Cincinnati in 1906, where students alternated between academic study and work experience. Later, professional fields such as medicine institutionalized internships as essential components of professional training, thereby strengthening the connection between academic education and professional practice (Abrudan et al., 2012). Since then, internship programs have expanded across disciplines and countries, becoming a standard feature of higher education worldwide.

Globally, different education systems have adopted various models of internship-based learning. For example, the cooperative education system in the United States, the "sandwich" system in the United Kingdom, and the "praktikum" model in Germany all emphasize the integration of academic study with practical training in organizations (Kapareliotis et al., 2019). These systems aim to ensure that students develop practical competencies alongside theoretical knowledge. In recent years, technological advancements and the global digital transformation have also led to the emergence of virtual internships, allowing students to gain work experience remotely through online platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the adoption of virtual internships, highlighting the flexibility and accessibility of digital learning environments in professional training.

In South Asian countries, internship programs have gained increasing importance in recent years as universities and employers recognize their value in preparing students for the labor market. The rapid growth of internship opportunities in countries such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh reflects the increasing demand for skilled graduates who possess both academic knowledge and practical competencies (Maertz et al., 2014). Educational institutions in these regions are actively encouraging students to participate in internships to enhance their employability and career prospects (Irwin et al., 2019). However, despite their growing popularity, internship programs in developing countries often face several challenges, including limited coordination between academic institutions and host organizations, inadequate supervision, lack of structured training programs, and insufficient feedback mechanisms for students (Inwin et al., 2014).

In the context of Nepal, internships have gradually become an essential component of higher education programs, particularly in business schools. Many universities, including Pokhara University, require undergraduate business students to complete an internship as part of their academic curriculum (Thapa & Regmi, 2015). The internship period provides students with an opportunity to gain practical experience in banks, financial institutions, corporate organizations, and other professional sectors. Such exposure enables students to understand organizational structures, workplace culture, and real-world business practices. Moreover, internship programs are also recognized in the national regulatory framework, as provisions related to internships are mentioned in the Labour Act of Nepal (2017), which outlines the responsibilities of educational institutions and organizations involved in internship arrangements.

Despite the increasing importance of internship programs in Nepalese higher education, empirical research focusing on the internship experiences of business students remains limited. Most existing studies in the Nepalese context primarily concentrate on internships in medical, engineering, and hospitality sectors, while relatively few studies examine the experiences and outcomes of business students' internships (Maertz et al., 2014). As business education continues to expand and the demand for skilled management professionals grows, it is essential to understand how internship experiences influence students' learning outcomes, skill development, and career aspirations.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the internship learning experience of business students from Pokhara University who completed their internships in organizations located within the Kathmandu Valley. Specifically, the study examines students' perceptions of internship programs, the factors influencing their internship experiences, and the overall impact of internships on their future career development. By analyzing the experiences of business students in real organizational settings, this research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical insights into the effectiveness of internship programs in business education in Nepal. The findings of the study are expected to assist universities, policymakers, and organizations in improving internship programs and ensuring that they effectively support students' professional development and career readiness.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Formulations

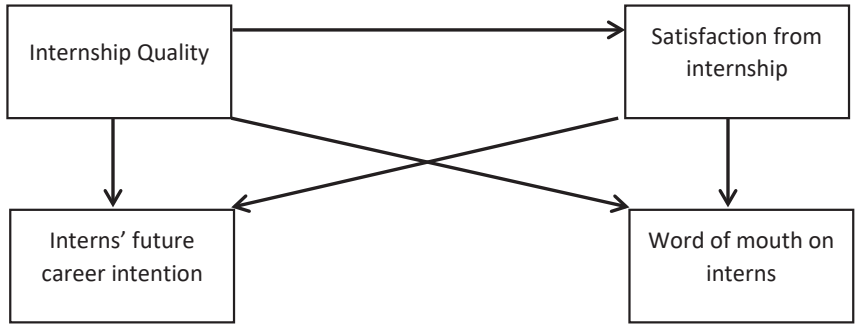
A theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation for a research study by linking the research problem with relevant theories and concepts. It helps explain relationships among variables, guides the interpretation of findings, and strengthens the academic validity of the study (Varpio et al., 2020). In research related to internship effectiveness and experiential learning, several educational and behavioral theories are commonly applied, including Social Learning Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, Behaviorism Learning Theory, Expectation–Confirmation Theory, and the Learner-Centric Approach.

Several theoretical perspectives explain the learning outcomes and effectiveness of internship programs. Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura and Walters (1977), suggests that individuals acquire knowledge and skills by observing and imitating role models within social environments, emphasizing the processes of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. In internships, students learn workplace behaviors, technical skills, and professional norms through observation, interaction, and mentorship with supervisors and colleagues (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Similarly, Experiential Learning Theory, proposed by David A. Kolb, conceptualizes learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, making internships a practical platform where students apply classroom knowledge, reflect on experiences, and develop professional competencies (Kolb et al., 2014). Behaviorism Learning Theory, associated with B. F. Skinner, explains learning through stimulus response mechanisms and reinforcement, highlighting how supervisors' feedback, rewards, and guidance during internships shape intern behavior and skill development (Shaoying, 2025). Likewise, Expectation Confirmation Theory, developed by Richard L. Oliver (1980), explains satisfaction as the result of comparing prior expectations with actual experiences; in internship contexts, students evaluate program effectiveness based on whether their workplace experiences confirm or exceed their expectations (Lin et al., 2009). Finally, the Learner-Centric Approach

emphasizes placing students' needs, interests, and learning styles at the center of the educational process, promoting active participation, self-directed learning, and reflection, which significantly influence the learning outcomes and overall effectiveness of internship programs.

Among these theories, Experiential Learning Theory forms the primary theoretical basis of this study. Internships fundamentally represent a form of experiential education in which students learn by performing real tasks in organizational environments (Yardley et al., 2012). According to David A. Kolb, knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, making experiential learning particularly relevant for understanding how internship programs enhance students' professional skills, practical knowledge, and career readiness. Therefore, this study adopts Experiential Learning Theory as its central theoretical foundation while also drawing supportive insights from the other learning theories discussed above (Kolb et al., 2014).

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



Internship Quality and Interns future career intention

The experience that generates essential, meaningful and challenging learning opportunity to the students and learner is quality internship. Internship's focus is to facilitate the learners to situate in such situation which provides exposure to involve in multiple work of an organization in real time (Seyitoğlu, 2019). Intern's future career intention means the road of intern's career in future. It means by participating in quality internship program students make a thoughts about their career related to their study area. Past studies have revealed the internship quality influence on the career planning of students (Ghosh & Jhamb 2021).

H1: Internship quality significantly impact on intern's future career intention.

Internship Quality and Word of mouth on interns

Word of mouth is the process of telling people you know about a particular product or service, usually because you think it is good and want to encourage them to try that product or services (Ghosh & Jhamb., 2021). After getting the internship by students are thy refer other to join internship program or not is a key of this variable. Along with that the quality of internship program impact in such a way so that students suggest other to participate in internship is main concern. Some of the previous studies conclude that students who get quality internship opportunity are suggesting other to participating in internship (Chen et al., 2018).

H2: Internship quality has a significant association with word of mouth on interns.

Internship Quality and Satisfaction from internship

It was taken into consideration because both of these variables were influenced by the mindset that service quality is evaluated over the long term and satisfaction is evaluated as an outcome (Fatima et al., 2018). Many others considered satisfaction as the result of service quality. Also quality is one of the components of satisfaction (Seetanah et al., 2020). In this research satisfaction from internship refers to satisfaction of students by getting the opportunity of participating in quality internship.

H3: Internship quality has a significant association with Satisfaction from internship.

Satisfaction from internship and Interns future career intention

An intern future career intention is one of the behavioral intentions in this study and according to different studies shown that there is strong and direct relation between interns future career intention and satisfaction from internship (Qu et al., 2021). Satisfaction of customers results to the attraction of customers towards the product or service. Likewise different studies mention that students prefer to choose their career in such areas where they get satisfaction (Shokouhyar et al., 2020).

H4: Satisfaction from internship has a significant association with Interns future career intention.

Satisfaction from internship and word of mouth on interns

Word of mouth is a way of suggesting others to use the product or service. Different studies found that satisfied customers suggest using the service and product to other person (Chen et al., 2018). Students who get Satisfactions from internship program put forward to consideration to other students. Studies also suggest that satisfied customer can be motivated to spread a positive word of mouth that helping to improve service and attract other customers.

H5: Satisfaction from internship and word of mouth on interns has positive and significant relation with word of mouth on interns.

Mediation of satisfaction between service quality and behavioral intentions (word of mouth and future career intention).

A mediating variable is intermediate in the causal sequence relating an independent variable to a dependent variable; such that the independent variable causes the mediating variable that causes the dependent variable (Chen et al., 2018). Studies underlying that satisfaction play a role of mediator between quality and the change in behavioral intention of customers (Kumar & Mishra 2020). Customers need to be satisfied with the products and service then after they set their behavioral intention. Satisfaction is in the middle so that after getting satisfaction with quality service then a person set thoughts regarding that service which results to continuity of accepting that service and promoting by word of mouth (Mirza et al., 2021).

H6: The relationship between quality of internship and interns' future career intentions is mediated by the satisfaction from interns.

H7: The relationship between the quality of internship and the word of mouth of interns is mediated by the satisfaction of interns.

Table 1 Variable Table

Construct	Variable Id	Definition	Explanation	Citation
Internship Quality	I1	Up-to-date equipment	Organization has up-to-date equipment (Meredith & Burkle, 2008).	(Meredith & Burkle, 2008)
	I2	Working Environment	Office has good working environment	
	I3	Professionals	Staffs are Professionals appearance	
	I4	Facilities	Facilities in the organization are visually appearing	
	I5	Course objective	Fulfillment of course objective.	
	I6	Expectation	Fulfill the expectation	
Satisfaction	S1	Choice	Decision to do internship in this organization is good.	(Bao & Fang, 2014).
	S2	Pursuing the internship	Pursuing the internship from this organization is real	
	S3	Requirements	Fulfill all requirement need for internship	
	S4	Technical skills	Develop technical skills	
	S5	Team spirit	Team spirit in the group.	
	S6	Work rotation	Opportunity for work rotation	

Word of mouth	W1	Great to work	Tell other people that this is a great to work for (Yaou et al., 2018).	Yaou et al., 2018).
	W2	Recommend	Recommend friends to do internship	
	W3	Say good things	Say good things about internship to other people	
	W4	Past experience	Share past internship experience	
	W5	Rating	Product rating	
Interns future career intention	E1	Willingness to learn	Willing to learn more about related job	Chen et al., 2018
	E2	Understanding of industry	Understanding of industry system	
	E3	Finding job	Possibility of finding job	
	E4	Innovation	Space for innovation	
	E5	Leadership	Leadership quality	
	E6	Desire to work	Desire to work in the industry	
	E7	Networking	Networking help for employment	

3. Research Methods

This study adopts post-positivism as the research philosophy because it acknowledges that although reality exists independently, it cannot be understood with complete certainty due to the influence of contextual and human factors. Post-positivism supports the use of systematic and empirical methods, such as surveys and statistical analysis, while allowing researchers to interpret complex educational and experiential variables related to internship learning outcomes (Saunders & Darabi 2024; Aalam et al., 2025). Furthermore, this study employs an explanatory research design to examine how different factors associated with internship programs influence students' learning, skill development, and overall internship effectiveness. Explanatory research is appropriate because it focuses on identifying relationships among variables and explaining how and why certain factors contribute to the outcomes of internship experiences (Saunders & Darabi 2024; Devkota et al., 2023).

Study Area and Populations

The study is conducted in Kathmandu Valley, the largest urban center and capital region of Nepal, which serves as a major educational hub attracting students from across the country. Geographically, Kathmandu Valley lies in a hilly region at an average elevation of about 1,350 meters above sea level and extends between latitudes 27°30′N–27°50′N and longitudes 85°10′E–85°31′E, covering an area of approximately 933.73 square kilometers (Shrestha et al., 2022). The valley includes the entire Bhaktapur District, most of Kathmandu District, and part of Lalitpur District, and hosts a large concentration of higher education institutions. Due to better academic facilities, many students migrate to this region for higher studies, creating a diverse academic population (Maharjan & Punnoi, 2022). In particular, a significant number of management colleges affiliated with Pokhara University are located in Kathmandu Valley. Out of 48 affiliated colleges across the country, 28 management colleges are situated in the valley, comprising approximately 11,514 management students, who constitute the population of this study (Shrestha et al., 2022).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals from a population in order to make statistical inferences about the whole population (Raymond & Darsaut, 2025). Researchers commonly apply sampling techniques to obtain reliable information in a time- and cost-efficient manner without investigating the entire population (Mahmud et al., 2020; Devkota et al., 2023). In general, sampling methods are categorized into probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling selects respondents based on probability theory where every member of the population has a known

and equal chance of selection, whereas non-probability sampling depends on the researcher's judgment and does not ensure equal representation of all population units (Mahmud et al., 2020; Pace, 2021). In this study, a probability sampling technique was adopted to select respondents from management students. The sample size was determined using the finite population correction formula: $n = (N \times X) / (X + N - 1)$, where $X = Z^2 \times p(1 - p) / MOE^2$. Here, $Z = 1.96$ for a 95% confidence level, $MOE = 0.05$ (margin of error), $p = 0.5$ (assumed sample proportion), and $N = 11,514$ (population size) (Devkota et al., 2021). Substituting the values gives $X = (1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 / (0.05)^2 = 384.16$, and thus $n = (11,514 \times 384.16) / (384.16 + 11,514 - 1) = 371.78 \approx 372$. To account for a 5% non-response error, an additional 18 respondents were added ($372 \times 0.05 = 18.6$), resulting in a final sample size of approximately 390 respondents, which were surveyed in this study.

Research Instruments, Data Collection and Analysis

After the completion of data collection, the collected data were thoroughly reviewed and organized to ensure meaningful interpretation and accurate conclusions. In this study, a structured questionnaire was used, and the responses were first pre-processed using Kobo Toolbox for digital collection. Data entry, coding, and tabulation were performed in Microsoft Excel, while SmartPLS 4.1 was used for inferential statistical analysis. Both descriptive and inferential methods were applied: descriptive analysis summarized respondents' socio-demographic profiles, their perceptions of internship programs, and key challenges, while inferential analysis examined the relationships among latent constructs using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is effective for handling multiple observed and unobserved variables (Awang et al., 2016). The analysis followed a two-stage PLS-SEM procedure. In the first stage, the measurement model was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), factor loadings, construct reliability, and discriminant validity to ensure reliability and validity of the constructs. In the second stage, the structural model was tested to examine hypotheses and confirm the relationships among study variables. Additionally, robustness checks were performed to validate the accuracy and stability of the results. The primary focus of the analysis was on the second, third, and fourth sections of the questionnaire, which captured key factors influencing internship effectiveness, learning outcomes, and skill development among management students

4. Results

Demographic Information of The Respondents

The socio-demographic analysis of respondents provides important insights into internship participation and preferences among management students in Kathmandu Valley. Out of 391 respondents, 241 (61.64%) were male and 150 (38.36%) female, reflecting the higher male population in Pokhara University's management colleges within the valley, which may influence internship participation and professional networking opportunities (see table 2). The majority of respondents were in the 24–26 years age group, followed by 22–24 years, while very few were above 30 years, indicating that internships primarily attract young students at the early stages of their academic and professional careers. In terms of residential background, 49.62% were from Kathmandu, 31.2% from Lalitpur, and 19.8% from Bhaktapur, showing that urban students have better access to educational and internship opportunities. Most respondents were unmarried (87.72%), suggesting that students prioritize education and career development before family commitments. Regarding educational level, 70% were bachelor-level students (including BBA, BHM, and Bachelor in IT) and 30% were master's students, reflecting the larger population of undergraduates and their higher engagement in internships. In terms of industry preference, 28.39% of students chose banking, followed by 17.84% in insurance, with smaller percentages in hospitality, manufacturing, and IT, and very few in NGOs and INGOs, highlighting a preference for sectors offering structured training and career potential while indicating limited exposure to the non-profit sector. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that gender, age, residence, education level, and industry choice significantly influence internship participation, experiences, and learning outcomes, providing a foundation for understanding challenges and improving internship program effectiveness.

Table 2: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	241	61.64
Female	150	38.36
Age		
20-22	23	5.88
22-24	139	35.55
24-26	142	36.32
26-28	69	17.65
28-30	17	4.35
30 Above	1	0.26
Municipality		
Kathamandu	194	49.62
Lalitpur	122	31.2
Bhaktapur	75	19.18
Marital Status		
Unmarried	341	87.21
Married	48	12.28
Family Type		
Nuclear	291	74.42
Joint	88	22.51
Extended	12	3.07
Education Level		
Bachelor	272	69.57
Master	119	30.43
Program		
BBA/BBA-TT/BBA-BI	159	40.66
MBA	108	27.62
BHM/BHCM/MHCM	89	22.76
BCIS/MCIS	35	8.95
Industry Type		
IT industry	38	9.72
Manufacturing	48	12.28
Bank	111	28.39
Entrepreneurship Organization	27	6.91
Insurance company	58	17.84
Automobile company	23	5.88
NGO/INGO	8	2.05
Hospitality	78	19.95

General Understanding of Internship

The general understanding of internship among students highlights their participation, experience, and perceived importance of the program. According to the survey, 44.76% of respondents completed internships for 7–8 weeks, 20.3% for more than 10 weeks, while 24% and 10.94% left after 6–7 weeks and 5–6 weeks, respectively, indicating that approximately 65% of students actively participated in the full internship program. Regarding financial support, 58.82% of students undertook paid internships, while

the remainder participated without remuneration. In terms of perceived value, 69.31% of respondents stated that the internship met their expectations, with 43.99% considering it very important and 23.27% important, reflecting that most students regard internships as a crucial component of their professional development. Concerning supervision, 68.8% received adequate guidance, including 46.8% with very frequent supervision and 21.23% with occasional supervision. Additionally, 64.19% of students worked longer than the required hours, and 55.24% received job offers from their internship organizations. These findings collectively indicate that internships are not only important for skill development and professional learning but also provide significant opportunities for employment and career advancement.

Challenges of Internship Program and Managerial Solutions

The survey results reveal that a significant proportion of respondents (82.61%) reported facing challenges during their internship experiences. Among these challenges, 19.18% of students identified difficulty in adapting to a new organizational environment as a major issue. Other notable challenges included time management (17.39%), behavioral interactions with interns or colleagues (15.86%), unequal or segregated work assignments (11.76%), lack of adequate supervision (9.46%), and technological constraints (7.42%). Additionally, a smaller proportion of students (1.53%) reported challenges related to compensation for paid internships and the application of theoretical knowledge to practical tasks. These findings suggest that while internships offer valuable learning opportunities, students encounter a range of organizational, personal, and structural obstacles that can affect the quality and effectiveness of the internship experience.

Several questions were asked regarding potential solutions to internship challenges, and the survey indicates that although 82.61% of respondents experienced difficulties during their internships, a similar proportion (82.1%) believed that these challenges could be mitigated through appropriate measures. Among the suggestions, 26.85% of students recommended creating a more intern-friendly organizational environment to help newcomers adapt more easily. Other proposed solutions included adequate time allocation (15.09%), clearly defined roles for interns (14.83%), proper supervision by senior staff (13.04%), updated technology and resources (8.18%), and encouraging a positive learning attitude among students (3.07%). A small percentage of respondents (1.02%) highlighted the importance of focusing on practical work and offering paid internships as additional solutions. Overall, the findings suggest that organizations can enhance intern performance, engagement, and satisfaction by improving the working environment, providing structured supervision, clearly defining responsibilities, and ensuring access to necessary resources and mentoring.

Inferential Analysis

Common Method Bias and Measurement model assessment

Common method bias refers to the distortion in research results that arises when variables are measured using the same method, potentially producing inflated or spurious relationships. In the present study, common method bias was assessed using the full collinearity Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) approach, where VIF values below 3.3 indicate the absence of bias (Kock & Lynn, 2012). The highest VIF value observed in this study was 2.021 (see Table 3), suggesting that common method bias is not a concern.

Reliability and validity are critical for ensuring that the measurement model accurately captures the constructs of interest. In this study, reliability and validity were assessed using factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). According to established guidelines, a construct is considered valid if AVE $\geq$ 0.5 and reliable if CR $\geq$ 0.7 (Alhassany & Faisal, 2018). The results presented in Table 3 show that all factor loadings for the indicators (e, i, s, w) are high, ranging from 0.865 to 0.903, which indicates strong item-construct relationships. The Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.875 to 0.905, demonstrating excellent internal consistency among the indicators. Additionally, the composite reliability (rho_c) values vary from 0.899 to 0.925, all above the recommended threshold of 0.7, confirming the reliability of the constructs. The average variance extracted (AVE) values range from 0.598 to 0.674, exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.5 (Lawaju et al., 2023), which indicates that

the constructs explain a substantial portion of the variance in their respective indicators. These results confirm that the measurement model is both reliable and valid, meaning the survey items consistently and accurately measure the intended latent constructs. High loadings and AVE values indicate strong convergent validity, ensuring that each construct captures the essence of the underlying concept. Overall, this provides confidence that the data can be used for further inferential analysis, such as testing the structural model and hypotheses (O'Cass & Ngo, 2007).

Table 3 Factor Loading, Average variance extracted, Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability and VIF

Construct	Indicators	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	VIF
Interns future career intention	E	0.865	0.875	0.598	1.05
Internship Quality	I	0.903	0.905	0.674	2.444
Satisfaction	S	0.899	0.9	0.665	1.942
Word of mouth	W	0.879	0.88	0.674	1.931

Discriminant validity was assessed to ensure that each construct in the model is distinct from the others, preventing ambiguity or redundancy in measurement (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). Using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct was compared with its correlations with other constructs. All diagonal values were greater than the off-diagonal correlations and below 0.90 (Maharjan et al., 2025), indicating acceptable discriminant validity (Hamid et al., 2017). Discriminant validity was further confirmed using the cross-loading method, where each item loaded higher on its associated construct than on any other construct. For example, all indicators under constructs E, I, S, and W showed higher loadings within their respective clusters, confirming that items measured their intended constructs accurately (Hauben & Hsieh, 2017). Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was evaluated, with most values below the stricter threshold of 0.85, except for S–I and W–S, suggesting minor but acceptable overlap between these constructs (Maydeu & Joe, 2014). Overall, these results demonstrate that the measurement model exhibits strong discriminant validity, ensuring that the constructs are distinct and suitable for structural analysis.

Table 4: Fornell – Larcker criteria

	E	i	s	w
E	0.773			
I	0.641	0.821		
S	0.688	0.857	0.815	
W	0.727	0.733	0.77	0.821

Table 5: cross Loading

	E	i	s	w
e1	**0.802**	0.546	0.587	0.636
e2	**0.796**	0.505	0.489	0.537
e3	**0.798**	0.535	0.592	0.564
e4	**0.655**	0.33	0.371	0.444
e5	**0.813**	0.534	0.579	0.607
e6	**0.764**	0.483	0.528	0.562
i1	0.471	**0.786**	0.669	0.556
i2	0.511	**0.838**	0.681	0.588

i3	0.546	**0.817**	0.687	0.62
i4	0.537	**0.832**	0.709	0.605
i5	0.518	**0.817**	0.707	0.59
i6	0.57	**0.835**	0.763	0.646
s1	0.563	0.719	**0.823**	0.649
s2	0.554	0.67	**0.807**	0.613
s3	0.588	0.719	**0.832**	0.63
s4	0.556	0.705	**0.818**	0.632
s5	0.582	0.703	**0.835**	0.648
s6	0.521	0.676	**0.776**	0.592
w1	0.57	0.6	0.593	**0.762**
w2	0.58	0.642	0.658	**0.81**
w3	0.613	0.591	0.66	**0.848**
w4	0.573	0.586	0.605	**0.838**
w5	0.648	0.586	0.638	**0.844**

Table 6 HTMT Ratio

	E	i	S
E			
I	0.714		
S	0.769	0.95	
W	0.828	0.821	0.865

Goodness of Fit: In this study, the goodness of fit of the structural model was evaluated using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which ranges from 0 to 1, with lower values indicating better model fit. An SRMR value of 0.05 or less is generally considered ideal, while values up to 0.08 are acceptable (Maydeu & Joe, 2014). The results show that the SRMR for the saturated model is 0.049 and for the estimated model is 0.062, indicating a very low badness of fit and confirming that the model fits the data well. Additionally, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) values of 0.896 for the saturated model and 0.886 for the estimated model further support the high goodness of fit, suggesting that the proposed model adequately represents the observed data.

Table 7: Goodness of Fit

	Saturated model	**Estimated model**
SRMR	0.049	0.062
d_ULS	0.665	1.062
d_G	0.285	0.322
Chi-square	632.528	689.179
NFI	0.896	0.886

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model, also referred to as the inner model, is employed to test the hypothesized relationships among latent constructs, examining how independent variables influence dependent variables within the research framework (Mueller et al., 2018). The model's performance is evaluated using several key metrics: R^2 (coefficient of determination) to assess the explanatory power of the endogenous constructs, path coefficients to determine the strength and significance of relationships between constructs, effect size (f^2) to measure the impact of each predictor, and predictive relevance (Q^2) to evaluate the model's ability to predict the outcomes of endogenous variables

Path coefficient assessment examine the relationships among internship quality (I), satisfaction from internship (S), interns' future career intention (E), and word of mouth by interns (W). The analysis reveals that internship quality has a strong and significant positive effect on satisfaction (β = 0.857, p = 0.000), indicating that higher quality internship experiences greatly enhance intern satisfaction. Satisfaction, in turn, significantly influences both future career intention (β = 0.534, p = 0.000) and word of mouth (β = 0.530, p = 0.000), highlighting its role as a key mediating factor. Internship quality also has direct effects on career intention (β = 0.181, p = 0.047) and word of mouth (β = 0.276, p = 0.000), though these effects are moderate compared to the indirect effects through satisfaction. The model explains a substantial proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs, with R^2 values of 0.735 for satisfaction, 0.478 for career intention, and 0.613 for word of mouth, indicating strong explanatory power. These findings suggest that enhancing internship quality not only improves interns' satisfaction but also indirectly strengthens their career intentions and likelihood to promote the organization, confirming the mediating role of satisfaction in shaping internship outcomes

The hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 8, showing the relationships among Internship Quality (I), Satisfaction from Internship (S), Interns' Future Career Intention (E), and Word of Mouth on Interns (W). Internship Quality, as the independent variable, demonstrated a significant positive effect on Satisfaction from Internship, with a beta coefficient of 0.857 (95% CI: 0.817–0.886), a t-statistic of 49.414, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating strong support for the hypothesis. Similarly, Internship Quality also significantly influenced Interns' Future Career Intention (β = 0.195, 95% CI: 0.02–0.366, t = 2.182, p = 0.029) and Word of Mouth on Interns (β = 0.275, 95% CI: 0.114–0.426, t = 3.484, p = 0.000), confirming the direct positive effects of internship quality on these outcomes. Furthermore, the mediation variable, Satisfaction from Internship, showed a significant positive impact on both Interns' Future Career Intention (β = 0.521, 95% CI: 0.348–0.685, t = 6.021, p = 0.000) and Word of Mouth on Interns (β = 0.534, 95% CI: 0.384–0.683, t = 6.997, p = 0.000), indicating that satisfaction plays a crucial mediating role in enhancing career intentions and positive word-of-mouth behaviors. Overall, all proposed hypotheses were supported, highlighting the critical role of internship quality in shaping interns' satisfaction, career orientation, and advocacy behaviors.

Figure 2: Path coefficient analysis

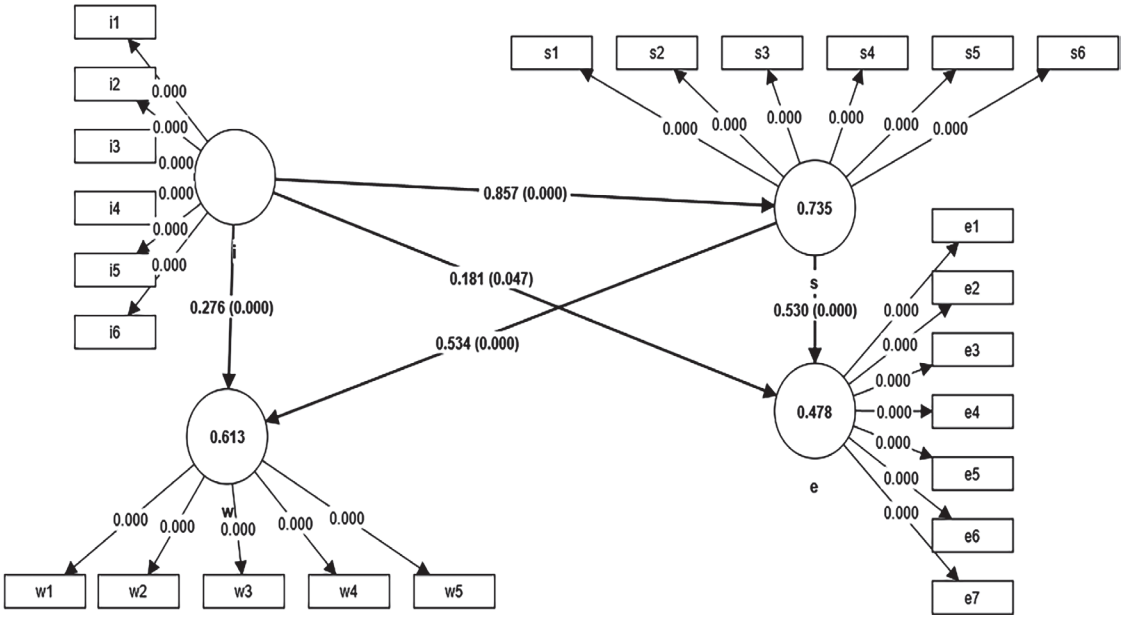


Table 8: Hypothesis Testing

Path	Beta, CI (2.5%, 97.5%)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Remarks
i -> e	0.195(0.02, 0.366)	2.182	0.029	Supported
i -> s	0.857(0.817,0.886)	49.414	0.000	Supported
i -> w	0.275(0.114,0.426)	3.484	0.000	Supported
s -> e	0.521(0.348,0.685)	6.021	0.000	Supported
s -> w	0.534(0.384,0.683)	6.997	0.000	Supported

The mediation analysis results, presented in Table 9, examine the indirect effects of Internship Quality (I) on Interns' Future Career Intention (E) and Word of Mouth on Interns (W) through Satisfaction from Internship (S). The path from Internship Quality to Future Career Intention via Satisfaction yielded a significant indirect effect with a beta coefficient of 0.588 (95% CI: 0.532–0.642), a t-statistic of 20.985, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating strong support for the mediating role of satisfaction. Similarly, the indirect effect of Internship Quality on Word of Mouth via Satisfaction was significant, with a beta of 0.660 (95% CI: 0.612–0.706), a t-statistic of 27.836, and a p-value of 0.000. These results confirm that Satisfaction from Internship effectively mediates the relationship between Internship Quality and both outcomes, highlighting that the positive impact of a high-quality internship on interns' career intentions and advocacy behaviors is largely transmitted through their satisfaction with the internship experience.

Table 9: Mediating Testing

Path	Beta, CI (2.5%, 97.5%)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Remarks
i -> s -> e	0.588(0.532,0.642)	20.985	0.000	Supported
i -> s -> w	0.66(0.612,0.706)	27.836	0.000	Supported

5. Discussion

The present study examined the impact of internship quality on business students' satisfaction, future career intentions, and word of mouth, with satisfaction serving as a mediating variable. The findings reveal that internship quality has a significant direct effect on students' future career intentions ($\beta = 0.195$, $t = 2.182$, $p = 0.029$), explaining 19% of the variance, which underscores the importance of well-structured and practical internships in guiding students' career decisions. Internship quality also strongly influences student satisfaction ($\beta = 0.857$, $p = 0.000$), accounting for 85.7% of the variance, suggesting that meaningful, skill-oriented experiences are essential for enhancing satisfaction. These results are consistent with UrquíaGrande and Pérez (2021), who emphasize that high-quality internships strengthen professional aspirations by bridging academic knowledge and practical application. Similarly, Mareque and de Prada (2023) highlight that internships offering relevant tasks, supportive supervision, and opportunities for reflective learning significantly increase student motivation and satisfaction.

The study further shows that internship quality positively affects word of mouth ($\beta = 0.275$, $p = 0.000$), explaining 27.5% of the variance, indicating that satisfied students are more likely to recommend the program. Satisfaction itself significantly impacts both future career intentions ($\beta = 0.521$, $p = 0.000$) and word of mouth ($\beta = 0.534$, $p = 0.000$), highlighting its mediating role. Mediation analysis confirmed that satisfaction significantly mediates the relationships between internship quality and both career intention ($i \rightarrow s \rightarrow e$; $\beta = 0.588$, $p = 0.000$) and word of mouth ($i \rightarrow s \rightarrow w$; $\beta = 0.660$, $p = 0.000$), showing that the benefits of high-quality internships are largely transmitted through students' satisfaction. These findings align with UrquíaGrande and Pérez (2021), who argue that affective responses to internship experiences shape career outcomes, and Mareque and de Prada (2023), who stress that satisfaction transforms experiential learning into career readiness and positive advocacy behaviors. Overall, the results highlight the critical role of structured, engaging, and high-quality internships in fostering student development, satisfaction, and professional orientation.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that internship quality plays a crucial role in shaping the learning experience, satisfaction, and career intentions of business students of Pokhara University in the Kathmandu Valley. Internship quality significantly influences students' future career intentions ($\beta = 0.195$, $t = 2.182$, $p = 0.029$), indicating that approximately 19% of the variance in career intention is explained by the quality of the internship. This suggests that students are better able to make informed career decisions when internships provide practical, well-organized, and meaningful experiences (Kumar & Mishra, 2019). Furthermore, internship quality has a strong positive effect on students' satisfaction ($\beta = 0.857$, $p = 0.000$), explaining 85.7% of the variance, highlighting that clear guidance, regular supervision, and a supportive work environment are essential factors for enhancing satisfaction (Pirlott & MacKinnon, 2016). Internship quality also positively impacts word of mouth ($\beta = 0.275$, $p = 0.000$), demonstrating that students who perceive their internships as high-quality are more likely to recommend the program to peers, accounting for 27.5% of the variance.

Satisfaction from the internship further mediates the relationships between internship quality and both career intention ($\beta = 0.588$, $p = 0.000$) and word of mouth ($\beta = 0.660$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that the positive effects of a quality internship on career orientation and advocacy behaviors are largely transmitted through students' satisfaction. Satisfaction itself significantly impacts career intention and word of mouth ($\beta = 0.521$ and 0.534 respectively, $p = 0.000$), showing that satisfied students are more motivated to pursue relevant careers and promote their internship experience positively (Smith & Hemani, 2014).

The study also highlights several practical insights. Challenges such as adapting to a new organizational environment, managing workload alongside academic commitments, and unclear roles and responsibilities were commonly reported by interns. Despite these challenges, most students maintained a positive perception of their internships, with many receiving job offers or recognizing the internship's importance in shaping their professional trajectories. These results underscore the importance of providing clear guidance, regular feedback, and a friendly and cooperative work environment to maximize the benefits of internship programs.

Overall, the study confirms that high-quality internships not only enhance students' satisfaction and career intentions but also encourage positive word of mouth, reinforcing the role of practical work experiences in bridging the gap between academic learning and professional readiness. The findings provide actionable insights for universities, colleges, and organizations to structure internship programs that are well-supervised, meaningful, and aligned with students' career aspirations, ultimately enhancing the employability and professional preparedness of business students in Nepal.

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