

The Relationship between Perceived Internship Program Service Quality and Internship Course Experience among Students at Shandong Yingcai College

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Abstract: This study employed a quantitative research approach, selecting students from Shandong Yingcai College as participants. Data were collected through a questionnaire based on standardized scales. A total of 370 questionnaires were distributed, with an effective response rate of 100%. Statistical methods, including descriptive analysis, independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation analysis, were used to examine students' perceived service quality of internship programs and their internship course experience, as well as differences and relationships across demographic groups. The findings indicate that both perceived internship service quality and internship course experience were at relatively high levels. Among the service quality dimensions, reliability and empathy performed better, while responsiveness and assurance were relatively weaker. For internship course experience, the general skills dimension showed the strongest performance. Significant differences were found across gender, major, department, and grade. Male students in science and engineering fields, those from the school of design, and senior students generally reported stronger perceptions in certain aspects. Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between internship service quality and internship course experience, with empathy showing the strongest association and closely linked with teaching and learning objectives.

Keywords: Internship Program Service Quality, Internship Course Experience, University Students

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the “student-centered” educational philosophy, the evaluation of higher education quality has gradually shifted from focusing on outcomes to emphasizing processes and student experiences. As the primary participants in educational services, students' perceptions of teaching support, learning environments, and management services are considered key indicators of education quality, influencing their engagement, satisfaction, and learning outcomes (Lim et al., 2022; Teeroovengadum et al., 2023). As a result, examining core teaching components from the perspective of student experience has become an important direction in higher education research.

Internships, as a typical form of experiential learning, are widely implemented across European, American, and Asia-Pacific higher education systems. They play a crucial role in enhancing employability, vocational competence, and professional identity. Effective internships allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, thereby strengthening learning motivation and career

awareness (Jackson, 2021). However, the effectiveness of internships depends not only on participation but also on the quality of organization and support throughout the process. With the increasing service-oriented nature of universities, internship programs now embody both teaching and service attributes, where factors such as guidance, communication, and support significantly shape students' overall internship experiences (Avleeva, 2025).

Internship experiences further influence students' perceptions of curriculum relevance, design rationality, and learning value through reflection and knowledge transfer (Silva et al., 2024). High-quality internship services can enhance students' recognition of course applicability and improve learning satisfaction, while poor service quality may lead to negative learning perceptions (Alharethi et al., 2025). Despite the growing emphasis on practical teaching in Chinese higher education, research on internship service quality from the student perception perspective remains limited, particularly in application-oriented universities (Liu, 2022). In the context of Shandong Province's

ongoing educational reforms, examining the relationship between internship service quality and internship course experience—using Shandong Yingcai College as an example—can provide valuable empirical insights for improving practical teaching systems and enhancing talent cultivation quality.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To investigate the current status of internship program service quality perceived by students at Shandong Yingcai College.
- 2) To examine the current status of internship course experience among students at Shandong Yingcai College.
- 3) To analyze the differences in perceived internship program service quality among students at Shandong Yingcai College across various demographic variables, including gender, age, major, academic department, and type of internship enterprise.
- 4) To analyze the differences in internship course experience among students at Shandong Yingcai College across various demographic variables, including gender, age, major, academic department, and type of internship enterprise.
- 5) To explore the correlation between perceived internship program service quality and internship course experience among students at Shandong Yingcai College.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

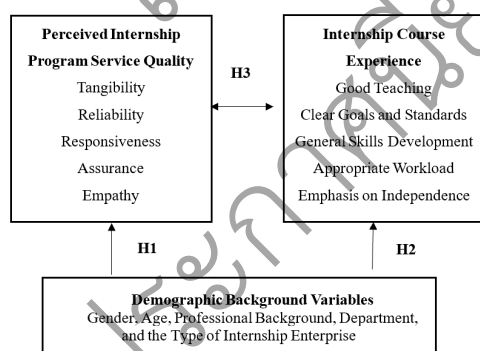


Figure. 1: Research Conceptual Framework

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality Theory

Service quality theory explains how users evaluate services based on their subjective perceptions rather than objective standards. Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined service quality as the gap between user expectations and actual service performance and developed the SERVQUAL model, which has been widely

applied in service research (Wider et al., 2024; Harahap et al., 2025). With the increasing complexity of educational services, scholars have integrated service quality theory with concepts such as customer participation and value creation. Research shows that service quality influences student satisfaction and indirectly affects learning outcomes by enhancing engagement and motivation (Harahap et al., 2023). However, the traditional expectation–perception gap has limitations in explaining the dynamic and cumulative nature of educational experiences. Students form overall evaluations through continuous interactions over time, requiring service quality theory to be adapted to specific contexts. Therefore, in higher education, students’ evaluations involve both functional and developmental dimensions, highlighting the need for more flexible and context-sensitive applications of service quality models (Terrovanadium et al., 2023).

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning theory emphasizes that learning is a process in which individuals construct knowledge and skills through experience. Kolb (2015) proposed that learning occurs through a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This theory highlights that learning is not passive but develops through continuous interaction with real-world contexts, and it has been widely applied in higher education and practical training. Studies show that through real work tasks, problem-solving, and role participation, students can better understand course content and transform knowledge into transferable skills (Billett, 2021; Silva et al., 2024). However, traditional experiential learning theory has limitations, as it often overemphasizes learners’ self-reflection while neglecting the role of institutional support and service context (Billett, 2021).

Internship Program Service Quality

Internship program service quality refers to students’ overall subjective perceptions of the services and support they receive throughout the internship process, rather than objective institutional arrangements (Parasuraman et al., 1988). As both learners and service recipients, students evaluate elements such as internship organization, guidance, communication, and feedback, forming a comprehensive perception through continuous service interactions. Based on the SERVQUAL framework, dimensions

was then conducted to establish a solid theoretical foundation by examining existing studies on students' perceived internship program service quality and internship course experience. Based on this foundation, an appropriate research design was developed, and mature, validated scales were selected to construct the questionnaire. Using cluster sampling, data were collected from internship students at Shandong Yingcai College. The collected data were subsequently screened and analyzed using SPSS to ensure scientific rigor and accuracy. Finally, the study summarized key findings, proposed relevant recommendations, and completed the research report, forming a complete and coherent research framework.

This study targeted 9,332 internship students at Shandong Yingcai College and determined a sample size of 370 based on Krejcie and Morgan's criteria. Using stratified and convenience sampling, data was collected through an anonymous online questionnaire to ensure response authenticity. The instrument included a basic information section, the Perceived Internship Program Service Quality scale (Istiadi et al., 2025), and the Internship Course Experience scale (Liu et al., 2017), both measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The service quality scale covered five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, while the course experience scale included good teaching, clear goals and standards, general skills, appropriate workload, and emphasis on independence. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

Reliability and validity tests indicated strong measurement quality. The original scales demonstrated good reliability and validity in prior studies. Pilot test results showed satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's α coefficients for all dimensions within acceptable ranges. In the formal survey, both scales exhibited extremely high reliability, with overall Cronbach's α values exceeding 0.99. Validity analysis also showed strong results, with high KMO values, significant Bartlett's test results ($p < 0.001$), and high cumulative explained variance, confirming excellent construct validity and structural stability. These findings indicate that the instruments used in this study are reliable, valid, and suitable for empirical analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENTS

This study collected 370 valid samples from internship students at Shandong Yingcai College. Among them, 223 were male (60.27%) and 147 were female (39.73%). Most participants were aged 21 and above (59.46%), followed by those aged 20 (25.41%), with fewer students aged 19 and below. In terms of academic background, science and engineering students accounted for the largest proportion (49.46%), followed by other majors (29.19%) and liberal arts (21.35%). Students were drawn from multiple colleges, with the highest proportions from the School of Business (23.24%) and the School of Medicine (21.08%), followed by the School of Preschool Education (18.38%), School of Engineering (16.22%), School of Design (13.24%), and School of Music and Dance (7.84%). Regarding internship enterprise types, most students were placed in private enterprises (57.00%), followed by other types (28.40%), while state-owned enterprises (8.40%), public institutions and government-related organizations (4.30%), and Sino-foreign joint ventures (1.90%) accounted for smaller proportions, indicating a diverse and reasonably structured sample.

Table. 1: Demographic Information of the Participants

Variables	Group	n	%
Gender	Male	223	60.27
	Female	147	39.73
Age	18 Years Old and Under	32	8.65
	19 Years Old	24	6.49
	20 Years Old	94	25.41
	21 Years Old and above	220	59.46
Professional Background	Liberal Arts	79	21.35
	Science and Engineering	183	49.46
	Others	108	29.19
Department	School of Business	86	23.24
	School of Medicine	78	21.08
	School of Preschool Education	68	18.38
	School of Design	49	13.24
	School of Engineering	60	16.22
	School of Music and Dance	29	7.84
	Others	10	2.70
Type of Internship Enterprise	State-owned Enterprises	31	8.40
	Private Enterprises	211	57.00
	Sino-foreign Joint Ventures	7	1.90
	Public Institutions and Government-related Organizations	16	4.30
	Others	105	28.40
Total		370	100.00

4.2 HYPOTHESIS TESTING

1) Internship service quality had an overall mean of $M = 3.75$, with tangibles ($M = 3.77$), reliability ($M = 3.87$), responsiveness ($M =$

findings indicate that students generally reported high levels of both internship service quality and course experience, with service quality significantly and positively influencing course experience. Differences were observed across demographic variables such as gender, major, and department, suggesting that individual and contextual factors play a role in shaping students' perceptions. Among the dimensions of service quality, empathy and assurance were particularly important in enhancing students' learning experiences. The study confirms that high-quality internship services contribute to improved curriculum perception and learning satisfaction, highlighting the importance of integrating service support with practical teaching. These results provide empirical evidence for optimizing internship management and curriculum design in application-oriented universities.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Establish an Internship Support and Feedback Mechanism Centered on Enhancing Responsiveness
- 2) Implement Differentiated Internship and Course Optimization Strategies Based on Different Demographic Backgrounds
- 3) Strengthen the Deep Integration of Empathy and Assurance Factors in Internships and Courses

7. FUTURE RESEARCH PROSPECTS

This study explores the overall relationship between college students' perceived internship program service quality and internship course experience, yet it still leaves room for further in-depth exploration in future research. Firstly, subsequent studies can adopt mixed research methods that combine quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews to deeply excavate the underlying reasons for the uneven performance of different service quality dimensions and the differentiated internship experience among students of diverse genders, majors and grades, so as to make up for the single perspective of pure quantitative research. Secondly, future research can introduce more moderating and mediating variables such as student internship motivation, self-efficacy and institutional support to clarify the internal influence mechanism between internship service quality and course experience. In addition, follow-

up studies can expand the research scope to cover more vocational colleges in Shandong or nationwide, and conduct comparative longitudinal tracking research to verify the stability and universality of the research conclusions, so as to provide more targeted and practical optimization strategies for the continuous improvement of college internship program service quality and the overall enhancement of students' internship learning experience.

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