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Ibnu Handono Putra

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia, ibnuhandono@gmail.com

Debora Eflina Purba

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia, eflina@ui.ac.id

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Ibnu Handono Putra¹, Debora Eflina Purba^{1*}

¹Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia

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Abstract

Internship programs can serve as recruitment and selection strategies that facilitate data collection on the abilities of potential employees to manage their daily work duties. This study aims to examine factors that may influence a student intern's intentions to apply to convert the internship into a permanent employee position at the same company after graduating from university. The study is grounded in the theory of planned behavior to probe whether internship satisfaction, subjective norms, and self-efficacy are predictors of the intentions of student interns to apply for jobs at companies that offer internship programs. Data collected from 261 Indonesian university students demonstrated that internship satisfaction and subjective norms positively and significantly predicted the intentions of student interns to apply to convert their internships into permanent jobs at the same company. However, self-efficacy did not predict such conversion intentions. Finally, the practical implications of these outcomes are discussed, and directions for prospective research are suggested.

Keywords

Internship satisfaction, subjective norms, self-efficacy, student interns' intention to convert

Ideal employees enhance organizational performance and growth. Thus, companies must adopt diverse effective strategies to ensure they can secure talented employees. Recruitment and selection processes provide companies with opportunities to realistically evaluate the performance and abilities of prospective employees (Sackett et al., 1988). Organizations increasingly employ internship programs to identify talented future employees in the context of urban employment (Rose, 2013). Potential employees receive specific knowledge and partial organizational training during their internship programs.

The ability to apply for permanent prospective job placements through recruitment processes applied during internships may also benefit students in their eventual job search and career development (Rose, 2013). Previous studies have evidenced that students with internship backgrounds generally took a shorter time to find jobs, were viewed by companies as more appealing, evinced a more accelerated career growth, and earned higher starting salaries (Gault et al., 2000). However, the extant studies have also described several difficulties that cause student interns to discontinue working for companies for which they have interned (Huseini, 2014; Rose, 2013). Students cite their poor evaluation of their internship experience at the respective companies among other reasons for not wanting to convert the internship into a permanent job opportunity (McManus & Feinstein, 2014). When an internship experience is not positively evaluated, a student intern is

Corresponding Author:

Debora Eflina Purba

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia
Kampus Baru UI, Depok, Jawa Barat – 16424

Email: eflina@ui.ac.id

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0610-3209>

motivated to quit the company after the completion of the internship period (Huseini, 2014; McManus & Feinstein, 2014; Rose, 2013). Thus, numerous studies have already attempted to determine the factors that may influence a student's desire to continue to work for the company in which the student has undertaken an internship (Hurst et al., 2012; Huseini, 2014; Rose, 2013).

A student intern's desire to continue working for the company they interned for following their graduation or to accept the company's offer for a permanent position is termed the *intern's intention to convert* in the extant scholarly literature (Huseini, 2014; Rose, 2013). The present study utilizes Ajzen's (1991) definition of the intention to convert: the term intention indicates a person's determination to exert effort in executing a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). It may be generally asserted that the greater a person's intent, the more likely the display of the related behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This definition leads to this study's assumption that the greater a student intern's intention to "convert," the more likely the person is to continue working for the company in which the internship is undertaken.

The *theory of planned behavior* (TPB) represents a theoretical framework that substantiates the predictors of intention in various aspects of behavior (Ajzen, 1991). TPB is widely used as a framework for the prediction of behavioral intentions and/or behavior. TPB is an enhanced version of the *theory of reasoned action* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), adding the feature of perceived behavior control (PBC) to the earlier model. PBC is incorporated into the previous model as an exogenous motivational variable that acts on intentions that may determine a person's perception of their own abilities in executing a behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Thus, TPB is better at predicting intention through behaviors that are not entirely within a person's control (Ajzen, 1991). In the TPB theoretical framework, intentions are affected by variables including attitudes, subjective norms, and PBC. Arnold et al. (2006) have demonstrated the predictive power of TPB factors vis-à-vis occupational intentions in respondents based in the United Kingdom. These authors found that the three factors of intent (attitudes, subjective norms, and PBC) were able to significantly predict intentions to work for Great Britain's National Health Service.

However, to the knowledge of the authors of the present investigation, the TPB framework has not been applied to a study on the student interns' intentions to convert their internship to a permanent staff position. The present study, therefore, aims to examine the predictive ability of the factors of internship satisfaction, subjective norms, and self-efficacy in the Indonesian context. These attributes represent the three predictors of the TPB framework and should thus influence the intentions of student interns to apply for a permanent job at the companies for which they have interned.

As a representation of the attitude variable, internship satisfaction illustrates the overall internship experience (Rose, 2013) which, for students, is akin to job satisfaction for employees (D'Abate et al., 2009). Job satisfaction is one of the most frequently utilized attitude constructs in organizational research (Ahmad et al., 2010; Brief & Roberson, 1989; Rose, 2013). Student interns do not weigh risks as highly as permanent employees during the decision-making process to accept or decline offers to continue in the same company after completion of the internship period (Rose, 2013). Student interns who are dissatisfied with their internship experience are more likely to exit the concerned company, or even the related industry (Richardson, 2008). Thus, increasing internship satisfaction becomes an important factor for organizations seeking to recruit the best prospective permanent employees because this factor predicts a student intern's desire to convert (Rose, 2013). High satisfaction levels have also empirically been proven to predict the intention of student interns to convert into permanent employees (Huseini, 2014; Rose, 2013). These findings bolster the notion that internship satisfaction may predict the intention of student interns to convert into permanent employees. Therefore, this study's first hypothesis reads:

Hypothesis 1: Internship satisfaction positively predicts the intention of student interns to convert into permanent employees.

Subjective norms denote a person's perception of actions they must or must not perform according to most of the significant people in their lives (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Subjective norms are rarely included in meta-analyses of the TPB

framework because their influence tends to be weak (McDermott et al., 2015; Paquin & Keating, 2017). However, extant studies conducted in the Western context have demonstrated that the predictability of subjective norms may differ according to the cultural context of society (Fischer et al., 2019). It is thus contended by the present study that individualist-collectivist values may exert an impact on the study of subjective norms. This argument is based on prior studies that have revealed that collectivist values tend to prioritize subjective norms in decision-making (Lee & Green, 1991; Lee & Wan, 2010). Social life is integrated within groups in collectivist cultures, in which people feel a sense of integration with the cohesive in-group that protects them from birth; in return, they offer their utmost loyalty to the in-groups to which they belong (Hofstede, 2011). Collectivist societies also tend to prioritize group interests above their own (Lee & Wan, 2010). Moreover, a study of Indonesian college accounting students by Hatta and Riduan (2017) demonstrated that subjective norms predicted the participants' intent to work overseas as accountants, thus indicating that Indonesians still regard the opinions of their significant others to be important to their decision-making with regard to their career paths. Based on these arguments, this study assumes that subjective norms are important predictors of the intentions of students to convert into permanent employees in the companies for which they have interned. Therefore, the second hypothesis of the study is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Subjective norms can positively predict the intentions of student interns to convert into permanent employees.

This study also probes the role of the PBC variable of general self-efficacy, which illustrates the perception of one's ability to influence the results of one's behavior (Bandura, 2010). Self-efficacy best describes PBC (Ajzen, 1991), and previous TPB studies have employed it as a substitute for the PBC variable (Broadhead-Fearn & White, 2006; Shook & Bratianu, 2010). People with high self-efficacy are likely to evince an elevated degree of confidence in their own ability to deal with discrete life stressors (Scholz et al., 2002). University students are expected to

experience crisis-like stress when they are about to transition into the workforce (Super & Hall, 1978). The shift can be challenging for some students because their minimum knowledge and experience occasionally generate high and unrealistic expectations (Ng et al., 2010; Lyons et al., 2012) that could result in low confidence and high stress during their job search (Hu & Gan, 2011). Thus, student interns with high self-efficacy tend to display a higher intention to apply to the companies in which they accomplish their internships to convert to full-time jobs because they are confident about discharging the requisite functions having imbibed on-the-job knowledge during their internship experience. Therefore, the third hypothesis is asserted as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Self-efficacy can positively predict the intention of student interns to convert to permanent positions.

Method

Participants

This study's participants comprised students who had completed internships in the past (1) year. This criterion was applied because attitudes (in the form of internship satisfaction) form an aspect of the predictors probed by this study and may alter in the longer term (after a year) (Hormes et al., 2013). The minimum sample size was calculated on the basis of GPower calculations (Faul et al., 2007), and the insertion of the smallest effect size coefficient yielded a minimum sample size of 258 participants. Of the 261 participants who responded, 24.5% were male, and 75.5% were female. In terms of the lapse of the post-internship period, 11.5% of the participants had completed their internship in the previous (1) year, 18% had finished 10–11 months ago, 12.6% 7–9 months ago, 26.15% 4–6 months ago, 23.4% 1–3 months ago, and 8.4% within the past month. To specify the industry of internship, 8% of the participants had worked in manufacturing, 12.6% in services (banking, consulting), 11.5% in technology-based startups, 8.4% in educational/health institutions, 19.5% in government administration, 11.9% in government-owned companies, and 27.6% reported industries not categorized in the

questionnaire. Responding to how they had enlisted in the internship companies, 55.9% of the participants said that they had applied personally, while 44.1% applied through referrals from faculty members or other associates.

Measures

Each instrument administered in this study was processed through a translate-back-translate process (Brislin, 1970). A pilot study was initially conducted to assure the quality of the items that were included. The procedure followed by the pilot study matched the actual investigation and used identical participant criteria. A total of 31 students from Universitas Indonesia's Faculty of Psychology met the respondent criteria (48.4% males and 51.6% females) and participated in the pilot study. Quantitative analyzes were conducted based on the results of the pilot study by testing internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha levels as follows: internship satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.796$), self-efficacy ($\alpha = 0.860$), student's intent-to-convert ($\alpha = 0.778$), and subjective norms ($\alpha = 0.682$).

Internship satisfaction was translated from the internship satisfaction instrument used by Rose (2013). This measure consists of three items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). "I often consider extending my internship period" is a sample item of internship satisfaction. This scale's Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.81 (inter-item correlation range is 0.66–0.70).

Subjective norms pertaining to the intentions of student interns to convert were queried via two items translated from the subjective norms scale used by Arnold et al. (2006) and adjusted to the present study's context. One of the items stated, "Most people who are close to me want me to continue working for the last company in which I interned." Subsequently, two items denoting descriptive norms were constructed for this study (Fischer et al., 2019); for example, "Many of my peers wish to continue working for the last company in which they interned." This scale eventually comprised four items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree) and its Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 0.79 (inter-item correlation range is 0.43–0.76).

Items for the variable of **self-efficacy** were

translated from the general self-efficacy instrument used by Song and Chathoth (2010). This measure encompasses eight items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). A sample item of this variable is "I can definitely complete the difficult tasks I am assigned." This instrument's Cronbach's alpha was 0.84 (inter-item correlation range is 0.5–0.618).

Items pertaining to the **intent-to-convert** were translated from the converting intentions of interns used by Hurst et al. (2012). This scale incorporates four items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). "When I was still an intern, I discussed my chances of continuing in the job after I graduate university with my supervisor/superior" is an example of an item querying this aspect. This scale's Cronbach's alpha was computed as 0.83 (inter-item correlation range between 0.75–0.83).

Control variables

The present study controlled for gender in congruence with a previous study probing internship satisfaction (D'abate et al., 2009). It was also assumed that the post-internship period could be negatively correlated with the intentions of student interns to convert. Students who ended their internship earlier could have lower intentions to convert to permanent jobs in the company in which they had accrued the internship experience than students who ended their internship later. As Hormes et al. (2013) have stated, attitudes may change after a 1-year period. Therefore, gender and post internship period were included as the control variables in the current study.

Procedures

The data were collected using self-reporting questionnaires. The cover letter assured potential participants that the survey was confidential and voluntary and that they could cease their participation whenever they wanted. An informed consent letter was also included. This document cited their rights as participants before they responded to the questionnaire. Participants who agreed to participate could proceed with the survey; those who did not agree could quit. However, participants were

allowed to end their engagement even after their consent to participate. The survey was posted via Google Forms. Participants were recruited through social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Line. Using the snowball method, participants were requested to forward the study's questionnaire link to their peers. Participants from various universities across Indonesia (such as Universitas Indonesia, Universitas Diponegoro, and Universitas Brawijaya) responded, and 10 lucky participants each received a Rp 25.000 incentive value as phone credit, OVO, or Go-pay credits. A common method bias could influence the study's results because the survey was self-administered (Podsakoff et al., 2003); the survey design attempted to mitigate this bias by assuring the anonymity of the participants, keeping the items simple and concise, and randomizing items to control priming effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003)

Statistical analysis

The relationships between the three predictor variables of internship satisfaction, subjective norms, and the intent-to-convert criterion variable along with self-efficacy were analyzed via a multiple regression analysis using IBM SPSS version 24.

Results

Table 1 presents the results of correlation analyzes accomplished through Pearson's correlation to determine the correlation coefficients between the demographic data and all the study

variables. Internship satisfaction was positively and significantly correlated with the intent-to-convert ($r = 0.61, p < 0.01$). Subjective norms were also positively and significantly correlated with the conversion intention ($r = 0.59, p < 0.01$). Finally, self-efficacy was also positively and significantly correlated with the conversion intention ($r = 0.14, p < 0.05$).

Regression analyzes were conducted using the 4-step method. Table 2 illustrates the multiple regression analyzes results. The first step inserted demographic variables (sex and post-internship periods) as predictors. The analysis results of Model 1 evinced that post-internship periods exerted positive and significant effects on the intent-to-convert ($b = 0.62, SE = .24, p < 0.05$). Overall, demographic variables contributed 3% variance to the intent-to-convert ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.05$). The analysis results of Model 2 revealed that internship satisfaction exercised a positive and significant influence beyond the effects of sex and post-internship period on the intent-to-convert ($b = 0.85, SE = 0.07, p < 0.01$), implying that the higher a student's internship satisfaction, the higher the student's desire to work after graduation for the company in which the internship was undertaken. Internship satisfaction displayed a distinctive variance of 36% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.36, p < 0.01$) on the conversion intention after controlling for sex and post-internship period. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 (internship satisfaction predicts students' intent-to-convert) was supported by the data.

The results of Model 3 demonstrated that subjective norms applied a positive and significant effect on the intent-to-convert ($b = 0.42, SE$

Table 1.

Means, standard deviations, and intervariable

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	NA	NA	1.00					
2. Post-internship Periode	NA	NA	0.01	1.00				
3. Internship Satisfaction	15.41	4.23	-0.12	0.09	(0.81)			
4. Subjective Norms	18.85	5.33	0.00	0.09	0.53	(0.79)		
5. General Self-Efficacy	31.24	4.37	0.03	-0.05	0.22	0.28	(0.84)	
6. Intent to convert	17.01	5.94	-0.06	0.16	0.61**	0.59**	0.14*	(0.83)

Note. $N = 261$. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. NA = not applicable. Gender codes (0 = Females, 1 = Males), Postinternship period codes (1 = 1 year ago, 2 = 10-11 months, 3 = 7-9 months, 4 = 4-6 months, 5 = 1-3 months, 6 = <1 months)

Table 2.

Multiple regression analysis of the study variables toward the intentions of student interns to convert

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>		<i>Model 4</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>N</i> = 261								
Constant	15.01	0.96	2.42	1.28	-0.80	1.25	1.18	2.12
Gender	-0.88	0.84	0.14	0.68	-0.20	0.62	-0.17	0.62
Post-internship periode	0.62	0.24	0.40*	0.19	0.33	0.18	0.32	0.18
Internship satisfaction			0.85**	0.07	0.57**	0.07	0.58**	0.07
Subjective norms					0.42**	0.06	0.43**	0.06
General Self-Efficacy							-0.07	0.18
R ²	0.03		0.39		0.49		0.49	
ΔR ²	0.03*		0.36**		0.10**		0.00	
F	3.78*		54.18**		60.98**		49.12**	
ΔF					50.22**		1.35	

*Note** $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$

= 0.06, $p < 0.01$) transcending internship satisfaction. Thus, the greater a student's conformity to subjective norms, the greater the student's desire to continue working after graduation for the company in which the internship experience was acquired. After controlling for sex, post-internship period, and internship satisfaction, subjective norms evinced a unique variance of 10% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.10$ $p < 0.01$) on the intent-to-convert. Hence, the data support Hypothesis 2 (subjective norms predict students' intent-to-convert). Finally, self-efficacy did not significantly predict student intent-to-convert in Model 4 ($b = -0.07$, $p = 0.18$) and did not yield a distinctive variance on the conversion intentions of the participating students. Therefore, the data do not confirm Hypothesis 3 (self-efficacy positively predicts students' intent-to-convert). Model 4 merely demonstrated that internship satisfaction and subjective norms could positively predict the conversion intention. All the included predictors in this study exhibited a 49% contribution to the variance of the conversion intention.

Discussion

This study aimed to scrutinize the predictive ability of certain variables on the conversion intentions of student interns, a term that denotes

the plans of student interns to apply for permanent positions in the companies in which they accrued their internship experience. To this end, the TPB framework was applied to the factors of internship satisfaction, subjective norms, and self-efficacy to determine the influence of the three variables as predictors of the conversion intentions of students. Internship programs are viewed as a means for students to be introduced to a company's values and accord students the opportunity to consider whether or not they would like to apply for a permanent position in the company. Data obtained from 261 students based in Indonesia were examined to study whether internship satisfaction, subjective norms, and self-efficacy could predict the conversion intention of students who had completed their internship programs within the past year. It was discovered in congruence with the TPB theory that internship satisfaction could significantly and positively predict the conversion intention of the sample of this study. This outcome supports the investigations conducted by Huseini (2014) and Rose (2013) and evinces that the greater the satisfaction with the internship experience at a company, the higher the conversion intention. This result may be attributed to the fact that positive and satisfying internship experiences are likely to lower the anxiety levels of students and ease their transi-

tion into the workforce (Koo et al., 2016). Pleasant first experiences may also generate favorable attitudes in interning students toward the company, sector, or industry to which the company belongs (Koo et al., 2016) and may further augment their desire to delve deeper into a related occupation after graduation. This dynamic is termed the *affective occupational commitment* (Koo et al., 2016). Although this construct is not included in the present study's research model, it is assumed to explain why internship satisfaction can exert a substantial influence on conversion intention. In comparison to the other considered factors, work satisfaction is the predictor with the strongest correlation to the conversion intention. The findings of this study reemphasize that the provision of a satisfying work environment for interns is critical for organizations desiring to recruit desired personnel at entry levels by enhancing the conversion intention of student interns after they graduate (Rose, 2013).

This study also found that subjective norms can positively and significantly predict conversion intention. This finding corresponds to the TPB theory and the study results attained by Hatta and Riduan (2017), who found that subjective norms exercised substantial influence on Indonesian university students. The outcomes of the present study oppose a meta-analysis of the TPB framework that determined that subjective norms were weak predictors of intention (McDermott et al., 2015; Paquin & Keating, 2017). This result indicates that the opinions of significant others are essential for Indonesian university students when they make decisions about workplaces. The results of this study also align with similar investigations conducted in collectivist countries such as China and Pakistan (Abbasi et al., 2015; Lee & Wan, 2010). It is acknowledged that collectivist societies tend to prioritize the establishment of harmonious relationships within communities (Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede's (2011) collectivism-individualism aspects were not directly probed in the present study. It is thus recommended that future investigations should include collectivism and individualism as moderators of the associations between subjective norms and the conversion intention.

Self-efficacy was unable to positively predict conversion intention in this study. This finding does not correspond to the TPB framework or

the outcomes obtained by Song and Chathoth (2010). To explain this nonsignificant finding, it is argued that Song and Chathoth's (2010) study on students from a tourism academy who completed internships in the tourism and hospitality industry. Hospitality students are likely to seek jobs in domains similar to their internship programs. This study, however, encompassed participants from diverse educational contexts doing internship to varied industries that may or may not be related to their educational backgrounds. For example, psychology students who interned at large human resource firms could easily decide to work for smaller companies in other fields such as marketing. A high degree of confidence could make students more open to opportunities in discrete domains and they could decide not to work for the companies that gave them their internship experience; on the other hand, elevated levels of self-efficacy could also yield the opposite result of making student interns confident of continuing within the same company after graduation. It is also possible that general self-efficacy may not adequately describe the PBC variable of the TPB framework and thus account for this study's divergence from Song and Chathoth's (2010) results. It is thus suggested that future studies should contemplate the use of a more specific domain of self-efficacy: career self-efficacy or occupational self-efficacy could be cited as exemplars of such a refinement (Betz & Klein, 1996).

In terms of practical implications, companies planning to recruit and select potential employees through internship programs could design programs that offer satisfying internship experiences to students to elicit stronger intentions to apply to the company to continue working as permanent employees after they graduate. Aspects such as job characteristics that allow student interns to actively contribute to the company, or the consistent provision of relevant feedback have been found to enhance internship experiences (D'Abate et al., 2009; Dabke, 2015). Company-specific social environments or policies that endorse permanent positions after erstwhile interns graduate from their university courses could also influence the conversion intentions of student interns. Therefore, companies should also attend to their existing social environments to succeed in their recruitment and selection plans vis-à-vis their internship

programs.

Several limitations of the present study must be noted at this juncture. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design in which all data were collected in a single time-window. Thus, the causal relationships between study variables cannot be ensured. Future studies should replicate the model and measure the variables using temporal separation. For instance, the measure of internship satisfaction could be taken immediately after the internship program, and the intention to convert could be queried several months after the completion of the internship program. Second, a common method bias may have occurred since all the data were attained through the administration of a self-reporting survey. Such a bias could inflate the relationships between the predictors and the outcome variables. Although measures have been taken to avoid the bias by informing students that the survey was confidential and voluntary, and items were shuffled according to Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) recommendations about reducing the common method bias, future studies should adopt the longitudinal method by measuring variables over several time periods because intentions can change over time.

Conclusion

The present study probed the influence of three predictors and found that internship satisfaction and subjective norm could significantly forecast the intentions of student interns to convert their internships to permanent placements in the same company. Contrary to a hypothesis posited by this study, general self-efficacy did not predict the conversion intention. Prospective studies should contemplate the examination of specific types of self-efficacy and individualist-collectivist values as possible moderators of the relationships between subjective norms and the intentions of interns to convert.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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