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Students' satisfaction with their internship: A case study of the Department of Educational Sciences and Social Work (DES & SW) at the University of Patras

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Abstract

Internship is considered a matter of paramount importance as it links theory with practice and prepares prospective teachers for their entry into the profession. The question raised is whether prospective teachers themselves feel satisfied with their internship. The purpose of our research was to investigate both the organization of the internship in Departments of Primary Education (DPEs) and the satisfaction of students with their internship in a specific Department (DES&SW). In this paper, we focus on the latter. Our research was conducted using a mixed-method approach (with questionnaires and individual semi-structured interviews) during the 2023-2024 academic year with fourth-year students who had completed their internship. The results of our study showed that students are generally satisfied with their internship. However, lower levels of student satisfaction were associated with the available educational material and the duration of the internship.

Keywords

Student satisfaction, prospective teachers, internship.

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Introduction

Research shows that the gap between the skills and competencies of graduates and the demands of the labor market is growing increasingly wider. Many prospective teachers struggle to meet the "reality" of educational practice. The first contact with a school classroom is a source of anxiety and stress. This is because, while they have been taught the theory of teaching, they have not yet become familiar with the school environment and its demands (Furlong & Maynard, 2012; Bell & Mlandenovic, 2013; Theelen et al., 2020).

However, according to researchers, the anxiety of prospective teachers and the difficulties they face in educational practice can be reduced through positive experiences and satisfaction with their internship (Miralles-Quirós & Jerez-Barroso, 2017; Theelen et al, 2020).

Consequently, research interest is focused on the satisfaction of prospective teachers with their internship, which links pedagogical theory with educational practice (Allen & Wright, 2014; Fterniati & Frounta, 2018). Before presenting our research and its results, it is necessary to refer to the concepts of internship and student satisfaction.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 Internship for Prospective Teachers

The term "internship" refers to a defined period of experience outside the educational Institution (e.g., in a workplace) during which students develop specific knowledge, skills, and competencies as part of the program they are following. In the case of prospective teachers, internship is considered part of the formal education they receive, which equips them with theoretical knowledge and practical experiences both within the school environment and in alternative educational settings. Upon completion of the internship, the student receives a certificate of practice issued by the host Institution or Service, which aims to promote transparency and highlight the value of the student's experience during their internship. Additionally, the Department commits to ensuring the quality and relevance of the internship, monitoring the student's progress, and recognizing ECTS credits for completed learning outcomes. Internship is considered one of the most important compulsory courses in the teachers' initial education and has an impact on shaping their professional identity (Tang S., 2003; Zeegers & Smith, 2003; Wilson E., 2006; Zeichner K., 2010; ECTS Users' Guide, 2015; Guillen & Zeichner, 2018; Hamilton & Margot, 2020).

Internship is a work-based learning experience for students, providing them with the opportunity to gain practical experience, along with the necessary knowledge and skills, to make a successful transition to the labor market (Jose Cela et al., 2015). As Kragerlund (2012) also mentions, internship is a form of "learning by doing." It pertains to the learning students acquire in their workplace, as part of their formal professional education and can be considered an integral part of their formal education.

According to Shön (1983, 1987), internship is a process where prospective teachers actively engage and gain knowledge of specific teaching techniques to prepare for their future profession. Students, when called to teach, find themselves balancing between the knowledge and skills they have acquired from their academic studies and real-world working conditions. In this context, they create a work plan, selecting appropriate methods and teaching tools according to the specific educational situation. Additionally, by participating in internship, students have the opportunity to apply new and innovative teaching methods and strategies in the classroom, which they have learned in their University courses (Hascher et al., 2004).

In general, internship acts as a bridge between theory and practice, as it allows students to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired during their studies into practice, transforming it into competencies. For this reason, internship is an essential stage for a more comprehensive professional and scientific formation and better preparation for the labor market (Pampouri, 2016).

Through internship prospective teachers gain knowledge, networking opportunities, and experience in teaching processes and classroom organization. They also build knowledge within real situations and environments where learning processes of great educational value take place. However, an essential prerequisite for engaging with these processes is the possession of theoretical knowledge (Sofos, 2015; McHugh, 2017; Gourgiotou et al., 2018).

Internship, as a concept and process, has been linked to teacher education and training in Greece. From an "apprenticeship system" in Pedagogical Academies, it evolved into a more dynamic process integrated into the curriculum of Departments of Primary Education, with variations in implementation between Departments. Through internship, students gradually familiarize themselves with teaching and the school curriculum, through observation, micro-teaching, and actual teaching, approaching it critically. Furthermore, they become familiar with school life, the realities of school and school administration, and, in general, they link their theoretical knowledge with school practice (Taratori, 1996; Stamelos & Emvalotis, 2001).

Various studies have highlighted the importance of internship for prospective teachers as a work-based learning experience. During this period, trainee students experience events that significantly influence the development of their sense of self-efficacy, ultimately leading them to become effective teachers (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005; Pendergast et al., 2011; Leal Filho, 2019).

Regarding the content of internship, it typically includes observation by prospective teachers, sample teaching, and the experience of collaboration with mentor teachers. This occurs within a framework of "apprenticeship" and continuous knowledge enrichment, enhancing their professional identity. In such a context, during internship, the prospective teachers apply the knowledge they have acquired during their undergraduate studies to their teaching (Ure et al., 2009).

In conclusion, students' internship is considered a matter of great importance, and its benefits are numerous (Allen & Wright, 2014; ECTS Users' Guide, 2015; Jose Cela et al., 2015; Pampouri, 2016; Wang, 2018; Georgiadou & Kakana, 2018; Fterniati & Frounta, 2018; Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019; Frounta et al., 2020; Theelen et al., 2020).

It is therefore essential that it is organized and designed effectively, to equip students with the necessary pedagogical and teaching skills and to prepare them for the challenges and demands of their profession. Furthermore, it must be aligned with the field of study of the trainee students and should prioritize education over employment. The quality in the organization of internship provides fertile ground that encourages and supports future teachers in their professional development (Weible, 2010; Grudnoff, 2011).

After discussing the concept, content, and benefits of internship, we will now focus on the concept of satisfaction and, subsequently, on the satisfaction of prospective teachers with this process.

1.2 Students' Satisfaction

Regarding the concept of satisfaction, Westbrook and Reilly (1983) state that it originates from marketing and emerges as a pleasant emotional reaction to experiences related to services, processes, or specific customer characteristics. As other researchers point out, satisfaction is an evaluation process that depends on the extent to which the experience aligns with the customer's expectations (Hunt, 1991; Frounta et al., 2020).

Specifically, satisfaction refers to the feelings of pleasure or dissatisfaction a person experiences, which arise from the subjective comparison of a product's performance relative to their expectations. It is a function of the relative level of expectation and individuals'

perceptions of the pleasant fulfillment of a service (Kotler et al., 2017; Salinda-Weerasinghe et al., 2017).

Student satisfaction is a multifactorial and multidimensional process influenced by various factors. Researchers categorize these into two groups. The first group includes personal factors (age, gender, employment, learning preferences), while the second group consists of institutional factors (quality of the Institutions, prompt feedback from professors, clarity of expectations, and teaching style) (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005; Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Petropoulou, 2019).

Key factors affecting student satisfaction include the quality of the professors, the quality of the facilities, and the effective use of technology. Moreover, student satisfaction is influenced by the quality of classrooms, feedback, student-teacher relationships, interactions with fellow students, course content, available teaching equipment, library resources, and teaching materials (Garcia-Aracil, 2009; Kuh & Hu, 2001). Given that the primary outcome of higher education is for students to acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies, the perceived quality of teaching at the university, as well as students' experiences with courses, seem to be significant factors influencing their satisfaction (Jian Xiao, 2015).

Additionally, teaching competence, the University's prestige and reputation, independence, support services, student progress and development, student-centered approaches, campus atmosphere, institutional effectiveness, social conditions, and flexible curricula are all key factors influencing student satisfaction (Douglas et al., 2006; Palacio et al., 2002).

Regarding the curriculum, as a significant factor determining the quality of educational services and student satisfaction (Mai, 2005; Douglas et al., 2006; Letcher & Neves, 2010), students evaluate its design, variety, flexibility and usefulness. They assess how well the courses meet their needs and how they respond to contemporary demands and labor market requirements. Students also evaluate classroom size, the difficulty level of University courses and their workload (Anastasiadis, 2017).

In summary, student satisfaction appears to be a psychological process influenced by many factors in different environments (Salinda-Weerasinghe et al., 2017). It is a crucial aspect of University operations and is considered one of the indicators for evaluating the Institution, as it reflects the extent to which the curriculum and University services meet students' expectations and needs (Cartwright & Green, 1997; Isani & Virk, 2005).

1.2.1 Prospective teachers' satisfaction with their internship

Regarding prospective teachers' satisfaction with their internship, key contributing factors include interaction with mentor teachers, the school principal, and other teachers at the host school, the feedback process, and the application of prior knowledge (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Varrati & Smith, 2008; Moody, 2009; Frounta et al., 2020).

Although mentor teachers play a vital role in the professional development of prospective teachers through their guidance, some researchers argue that mentors are often unprepared or untrained in mentoring skills and processes, which creates challenges (Hall et al., 2008; Tang & Choi, 2007).

The interaction with mentor teachers plays a significant role in the degree of prospective teachers' satisfaction with their internship. This interaction is seen as a collaborative effort between mentors and student teachers. It includes teaching guidance, socio-emotional support, and integration into the professional environment (He, 2009; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2016; Izadinia, 2015).

However, according to Smith and Lev-Ari's research, prospective teachers did not always have a positive relationship with the principals of the schools where they completed their internship, even though principals could potentially act as mentors as well. The researchers concluded that students were less satisfied with principals, as they reported that principals were not particularly supportive and had limited communication with them (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005).

Another key pillar of satisfaction for prospective teachers during their internship is the theoretical knowledge they receive and how well they can apply it. Allen and Wright note that theory refers to concepts and skills related to declarative and procedural knowledge taught to students at University, while the internship focuses on pedagogy in the classroom and the role of the teacher (Allen & Wright, 2014).

An additional important dimension of prospective teachers' satisfaction is their understanding of the process of reflection. Reflection refers to the process of transforming experience into a learning subject, aiming to derive new knowledge through examining that experience (Boud, 2001). According to Ullmann (2019), reflection involves reflective thinking, a conscious and purposeful cognitive process that seeks to solve ambiguous or unresolved personal problems from past, present, and future experiences. This is a complex, demanding, time-consuming, and continuous internal process, which requires strong motivation and full engagement from participants (Gioftsali & Pitsou, 2021).

Prospective teachers often have high expectations from their internship, but these expectations are not always met (Oikonomidis, 2015). The positive experiences gained during the internship influence students' attitudes toward teaching and learning, which, in turn, affect their perception of the teaching profession. On the other hand, challenges faced during the internship can lead to the formation of a negative view of the program they participated in and, consequently, of the teaching profession itself (Papoulia, 2017).

2. Literature Review

Regarding the literature review on prospective teachers' satisfaction with their internship, recent international studies indicate that prospective teachers:

- Generally express satisfaction with their internship (Owusu-Addo et al., 2018; Liu, 2020; Theelen et al., 2020; Jacquelie et al., 2020; Ardiyansah, 2021; Alcantara, 2021; Pepito, 2022; Jin, 2022).

- Report positive experiences and benefits from their internship (Zhao & Zhang, 2017; Amankwah et al., 2017; Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Nghia & Huynh, 2019; Anjum, 2020).

In contrast, few studies are showing that prospective teachers are not satisfied with their internship (Grudnoff, 2011; Trumble, 2015; Özdaş, 2018; Yakovleva, 2022).

In the Greek literature, there is a limited body of specialized research on student satisfaction with their internship (Frounta et al., 2020). Most of the studies conducted are case studies, often focusing on students from a single Department and conducted by researchers who may be involved in the internship of that Department (Oikonomidis, 2015).

More specifically, according to the research by Chaniotaki et al. (2006), students reported dissatisfaction with the number of teaching sessions and the feedback they received from their supervising professors. However, they expressed satisfaction about their collaboration with the teachers at the host schools. Other studies have shown that students are generally satisfied with their internship (Stavridis et al., 2014; Oikonomidis, 2015; Fterniati & Frounta, 2018; Frounta et al., 2020), while some studies reported that students were generally dissatisfied (Poulou & Chaniotakis, 2006).

Based on the existing literature, there is an interest, on one hand, in investigating student satisfaction with their internship, and on the other hand, in deepening the analysis of the areas in which students are more or less satisfied, as well as identifying the structural elements of the internship that determine their level of satisfaction.

Therefore, the research questions for our study are formulated as follows:

- Are the students of the Primary Education Direction at the DES&SW satisfied with their internship?

- What are the structural elements of their internship?

- In which aspects are they more (or less) satisfied?

3. Research Methodology

The research was conducted using a questionnaire from October to March, along with interviews conducted in July during the 2023-2024 academic year.

As for the questionnaire, it included closed-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale ("not at all," "a little," "quite a bit," "very much," "don't know") (McDonald, 2011). The construction of the questionnaire was based on variables from satisfaction models by Elliot and Healy (2001), Elliot & Shin (2002), Douglas et al. (2006), Wilkins et al. (2013), Yusoff et al. (2015), Wang et al. (2011), Pathmini et al. (2012), and Farahmandian et al. (2013). The questionnaire sample consisted of 103 students from the DES&SW at the University of Patras who had completed the internship in their 8th semester. The questionnaire was created using google forms and sent to students via email, as well as posted in social media groups of the department. The data collected was analyzed using the statistical program SPSS-28. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for internal consistency was calculated for overall student satisfaction with the internship, and it was found to be 0.869.

For the qualitative research, an interview tool was developed, with discussion topics linked to our research questions. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, lasting approximately 20 to 25 minutes. The sample consisted of 16 students from the same Department who had completed the internship in their 8th semester. For anonymity, interviewees were referred to as "In1," "In2," etc. After transcription, the qualitative data was processed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Tsiolis, 2014).

In both the questionnaire and the interviews, students were initially informed about the context and purpose of the research. Additionally, following ethical guidelines, anonymity was ensured, and the recorded information would be used exclusively for this study. Finally, before each interview, students gave their consent for the interview to be recorded.

Before presenting our findings, we will mention a few demographic characteristics of the students who participated in the study (gender, region of origin, and rank of preference on their University application form). Regarding gender, the questionnaire sample consisted of

78 women, 22 men, and 3 who answered "Prefer not to say," while the interview sample included 13 women and 3 men.

The research data shows that this Department was a positive choice for the vast majority of students, both those who responded to the questionnaire and those interviewed, as it was one of their top choices on their University application form. Furthermore, the students in our sample, in both research methods, primarily came from Southern Mainland Greece.

In the questionnaire, students were asked to indicate the degree of their satisfaction with the internship. Their responses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Student Satisfaction with the internship*

Question **In the context of evaluating your internship, please indicate the degree of your satisfaction:**	Not at all	A little	Quite a bit	Very much	Don't know
Are you satisfied with the responsible university faculty?	2 (1.9%)	24 (23.3%)	56 (54.4%)	21 (20.4%)	
Are you satisfied with the members of the teaching staff and their way of functioning (support, preparation)?	4 (3.9%)	18 (17.5%)	56 (54.4%)	23 (22.3%)	2
Are you satisfied with the mentors/school teachers in the classroom?	4 (3.9%)	11 (10.7%)	55 (53.4%)	33 (32.0%)	4
Are you satisfied with your relationship with the students in the classroom?	2 (1.9%)	9 (8.7%)	45 (43.7%)	46 (44.7%)	1
Are you satisfied with your relationship with your fellow students?	2 (1.9%)	8 (7.8%)	62 (60.2%)	29 (28.2%)	2
Are you satisfied with the available educational material?	2 (1.9%)	35 (34.0%)	56 (54.4%)	10 (9.7%)	
Are you satisfied with the feedback received after completing the internship?	6 (5.8%)	25 (24.3%)	50 (48.5%)	22 (21.4%)	
Are you satisfied with the overall duration of the internship?	7 (6.8%)	27 (26.2%)	49 (47.6%)	19 (18.4%)	1
Are you satisfied with your mentor/school teacher?	4 (3.9%)	19 (18.4%)	54 (52.4%)	24 (23.3%)	2
Are you satisfied with the degree of freedom you have in the classroom during the internship?	3 (2.9%)	27 (26.2%)	50 (48.5%)	23 (22.3%)	

If we match and compare the students' responses from the questionnaire (Table 1 - summing the responses "Quite a bit" and "Very much") with their responses in the interviews regarding their satisfaction with the internship, we can conclude that the students of the Primary Education Direction at the DES&SW are generally satisfied with their internship experience. Below, we provide a more detailed presentation of these results.

3.1 Satisfaction with University supervisors

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (74.8%) with the University supervisors. Regarding the students' responses to the interviews, there is a positive and supportive picture of the responsible academics, highlighting their friendliness, collaborativeness and experience. As the interviews show, University supervisors approach students with a spirit of equal cooperation, treating them as future colleagues and offering meaningful support at every stage of the educational process. They appear willing to help with any difficulties that arise, ensuring the continuation and success of the internship without obstacles. Their kindness, knowledge and experience work to enhance the student experience, fostering a framework of mutual respect and pedagogical support.

"Regarding the instructors, I can say that there were some professors whom I hold in high regard because they provided very good lessons according to my criteria, and I also think they evaluated the students who were hardworking and attended correctly. There was this recognition, and I liked that a lot; generally, there was a very good contact. I would consult them about many things" (In1).

"They were quite good; they were all cooperative… in the workshops we did… the supervisors were next to us… so I am quite satisfied" (In6).

"...Everyone was very cooperative. All the professors. The professor we collaborated with, but the whole team was very helpful. If you had any issues or problems, they were all very willing to cooperate and help you solve them, to keep up with your work, to not lose your internship" (In16).

3.2 Satisfaction with teaching staff members (support, preparation)

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (76.7%) with the teaching staff and their way of functioning (support, preparation). Also, the qualitative data depict a complex but overall positive picture for the teaching staff, that plays a crucial role in the educational experience of the internship. Students acknowledge their essential contribution through ongoing support, regular feedback and discretionary guidance. Although some personalities are characterized as stricter or with a particular communication style, the general climate remains supportive, with a focus on encouragement and improvement. Weekly meetings, monitoring of student progress and a focus on psychological support through encouragement indicate a model of operation based on discretion, empathy

and systematic guidance. Their presence is positively evaluated, reinforcing the experience of the internship as a process of learning and personal development.

"I had no complaints... they helped in one way or another" (In3).

"...There were no problems, they were very friendly and very helpful. Well, they are experienced individuals; they have been doing this job for many years, they know exactly what is going on and they want to help, that is very good. It's also very positive that there is equal treatment; they see you as a colleague, that is very good and also positive" (In4).

"The mentor... was very good in my opinion. I knew him from courses we had at the school" (In14).

3.3 Satisfaction with mentors/school teachers in the classroom

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (85.4%) with the mentors/schoolteachers in the classroom. The qualitative data highlight a particularly positive role, with an emphasis on their supportive and guiding attitude. Mentors are presented as approachable, encouraging and highly pedagogically sensitive, offering empirical knowledge and meaningful encouragement to students. Their collaboration is described as equal and creative, with a clear intention of integrating students into the educational environment not just as trainees but as future colleagues. The recognition of students as active members of the educational process, as well as the provision of stress-free guidance, contributed positively to both their learning and psychological enhancement. Mentors, through discreet supervision and a human approach, were models of professional practice and pedagogical empathy.

"Our mentors acted as mentors, guiding us... they didn't stress us at all, and I think I gained many experiences from them. They taught me a lot" (In1).

"Regarding the mentors, they were quite encouraging; they suggested some ideas for us to improve and acted as motivators, meaning they were very helpful towards us and treated us like educators, not just as students" (In6).

"Both individuals I had were exceptionally helpful in all areas, and this truly contributed to my feeling good being there, and to feeling more confident... Generally, when you deal with a kind and good-natured person, everything goes better" (In15).

3.4 Satisfaction with relationship with students in the classroom

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (88.4%) with their relationship with the students in the classroom. According to the

qualitative data, students' experiences of interacting with students during the internship are reflected as deeply emotional and formative in shaping their professional identity. Student responses to the interviews highlight a bond of trust, acceptance and authentic interaction, as students greet students with warmth, enthusiasm and tenderness. Hugs, drawings, souvenirs and sincere expressions of affection outline a context of affection and emotional reward. Students describe this relationship as one of the most meaningful and moving aspects of their practice, experiencing the joy of acceptance and a sense of having truly impacted school life. Their presence is not just perceived as helping in the classroom, but as a vibrant, positive and integral part of the children's lives.

"I enjoyed the contact with the kids; I loved their interaction and their questions during the lessons… as the kids are at a young age, they become familiar with you and feel like you are part of them; they embrace you, kiss you, and are excited to see you again…" (In4).

"The love from the kids... and their affection. That's what has stuck with me, and I think I will remember it all my life" (In5).

"The kids' hugs, their smiles… Because just seeing a child smiling at you is everything for me" (In6).

"I think the most beautiful memory relates to the kids, who, at the end of each day, said goodbye to us in a very sweet way, and even better was that they often waited for us at the door in the morning… they wanted to chat with us and approached us during breaks… This interaction with the kids was, I think, the most beautiful part of the practicum" (In10).

3.5 Satisfaction with relationship with fellow students

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (88.4%) with their relationships with fellow students. As shown by the qualitative data, the relationships between students during the internship are described as highly positive and supportive, contributing substantially to the overall experience. The cooperation within the teams is characterized by mutual help, a sense of camaraderie and shared experience, both at the level of teaching practice and in the interpersonal relationships developed on the margins of the school routine. Fellow students act as supportive and not only as practical partners, creating a climate of security and pleasure. The narratives emphasize the importance of a good team, mutual understanding and a common path, elements that enhanced the quality of the internship and left positive memories. Emotional connection with fellow students emerges as a key factor in successful and enjoyable internship.

"... the group I did my teaching practice with, we all bonded and helped each other, which was very important" (In11).

"...with all the classmates, the relationship was excellent. We all spent time together during breaks, laughed, and talked… even during our free time. I have no complaints about my relationship with my classmates" (In12).

"...I liked it. I bonded a lot… with the other students, we were within the other school, we bonded a lot… It was nice… I didn't expect that to happen" (In14).

3.6 Satisfaction with available educational material

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (64.1%) with the available educational material. According to the qualitative data, students' experiences regarding the availability of educational material reflect a variety of practices, with the majority referring to the need to search, prepare and print materials independently. The instances of teachers providing some basic resources or suggestions were isolated.

"They provided us with educational material" (In1).

"Some books were available at the school for the plan. Handouts, photos, teacher's books, etc." (In8).

3.7 Satisfaction with feedback after completing the internship

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (69.9%) with the feedback they received after completing their internship. According to the students' responses to the interviews, the feedback process after the internship was described as an essential and empowering part of their experience. Feedback appears to have been systematic in nature and offered through structured discussions with tutors, supervisors and the wider team, enhancing the opportunity for reflection and improvement. Students particularly valued the fact that they were able to analyze their teaching plans, identify areas for improvement and share experiences with their peers through a safe and supportive process. The contribution of the animators and workshops was considered crucial, as they offered not only guidance but also the opportunity to transform classroom experiences into learning material. The feedback did not just act as an evaluation, but as a tool to develop, encourage and enhance students' pedagogical confidence.

"...The feedback we received was essential… At every stage, they provided feedback and helped with encouragement… the whole process was feedback-oriented, so I am quite satisfied" (In6).

"...The professor who supervised us was truly very helpful; she was discreet, really didn't stress us at all, and at each of our weekly meetings, we analyzed the plans of most students, identifying our mistakes…" (In10).

"We made the lesson plan, and if we had any questions, we asked the professor; We taught and then discussed our questions with him. The feedback we received from our teaching was discussed with the professor and the rest of the team" (In13).

3.8 Satisfaction with overall internship time

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (66.0%) with the overall time of the internship. According to the qualitative data, the duration of the internship is evaluated by most students as sufficient and satisfactory, providing the required time for substantial involvement in the educational process. Although some acknowledge the intensity of the program-especially when the internship is combined with university courses ,the general feeling is that the three-month duration, with daily presence in the school, provided the opportunity for empirical immersion and understanding of the school reality. It is also stressed that time balance is important not only for the students but also for the teachers who receive them, as a longer time presence may affect classroom dynamics.

"I believe that compared to other Universities I've seen, our internship is sufficient, and I don't think anything should be changed" (In6).

"...it was quite long. Three months, and every day, was... quite sufficient" (In9).

"I think this time was very satisfactory... because you can learn during this period what you need to learn and understand what it's about. I think maybe more time would create confusion" (In10).

3.9 Satisfaction with their mentor/school teacher

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (75.7%) with their mentor/schoolteacher. The classroom mentor teachers emerge, through the student narratives, as essential and supportive companions during the internship. They are described as collaborative, encouraging and pedagogically available, offering guidance without pressure and acting as role models for teaching. Through their years of experience, they shared knowledge, advice and practical ideas, enhancing students' teaching confidence. The sense of acceptance and recognition by the mentors - as future colleagues and not just as students - enhanced the climate of trust and collaboration. The understanding, kindness and

emotional support they offered contributed decisively to the psychological empowerment of the students and the positive outcome of the internship.

> "There was no difficulty with the students in the class, everything went smoothly… the mentors and the schoolteachers advised us. And that's how I found out how to manage the class" (In6).

> "...The kids were like angels; they were obedient, and you could easily conduct your lesson; for a student, it was the most ideal class since we are generally inexperienced" (In9).

> "...The internship helped me to better plan a lesson, to accurately gauge the time, to find the objectives and adapt them to the level of the students in the class, and to achieve them through specific exercises and various practices" (In10).

3.10 Satisfaction with the freedom they had in the classroom during the internship

From the students' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that they are generally satisfied (70.8%) with the freedom they had in the classroom during the internship. As emerged from the interviews in general, there was sufficient freedom to design and implement teaching interventions during the internship. Although the experience varied depending on the school context or the particular mentor, most students reported that they were given considerable autonomy in the design and implementation of their lessons. There was flexibility in the use of materials and creative approaches to the curriculum, even with deviations from the official textbook. However, individual cases were also recorded where restrictions or observations were made, particularly when the planned programme appeared to be insufficiently advanced. Despite these exceptions, the overall picture is positive, with students feeling that they had the space to experiment, express their pedagogical ideas and cultivate their professional autonomy.

> "In one class, we were very free; in another one, we had some restrictions... But overall, yes, we had enough freedom regarding what we could do" (In7).

> "...They let us do whatever we wanted; there were only a couple of times when they complained that the syllabus wasn't progressing. Most of the time, we taught lessons outside the book" (In14).

From the above, we see that the satisfaction rates of students from their internship are generally high (ranging from 64.1% to 88.4%), indicating that students are generally satisfied. However, we cannot overlook the fact that there are also lower satisfaction percentages,

particularly concerning available educational material (64.1%) and the overall time of the internship (66.0%).

Some indicative statements from students can explain why they are less satisfied in these two areas. Regarding satisfaction with available educational material, some students mention difficulties in preparing visual aids independently. The burden of creating and securing the necessary materials seemed to fall mainly on the students themselves.

"We had to prepare it ourselves" (In4).

"We had to find it ourselves and prepare it. We made lesson plans, so it was our responsibility to find the materials" (In6).

However, they also mentioned that while they would have preferred to be provided with the material, it wasn't something that bothered them. This process, for some, was a creative challenge. They found it to be a pleasant and creative experience.

"I would have preferred it to be provided, but it didn't bother me" (In4).

"I liked it because I came up with my ideas and materials" (In6).

Whereas some students express dissatisfaction about using materials for their teaching at their own expense. It emerged as an element of pressure or even embarrassment, especially when the use of school resources was accompanied by financial or moral reservations. In general, the provision of materials was not systematic, with the result that students largely used personal resources and initiatives for their teaching preparation.

"We paid for everything out of our own pockets, meaning we had to pay for the materials we needed for projects, experiments... for everything inside the classroom, we covered the costs ourselves" (In11).

"We were on our own. The supervisor advised us. However, sometimes, like with cardboard or photocopies… from the school, I didn't feel very comfortable. But in one class, the teacher offered to give us money to buy the materials we wanted" (In13).

Regarding satisfaction with the overall time of the internship, students indicate a desire for a longer duration. More specifically, students' responses to the interviews highlight a strong desire to extend the duration of the internship, reinforcing the demand for a more systematic and timelier link between theory and practice. Many students expressed the view that internships, as they currently exist, are not sufficient to establish a meaningful educational experience, particularly in terms of pedagogical relations with students and the application of teaching methods. The rotation of classes and the limited time available do not allow for in-depth learning or full familiarization with the role of the teacher.

"The internship should be longer; that's the most important thing. I mean, we talked about many things in theory. In practice, when you step in, it's all different; it has nothing to do with it" (In2).

"Under certain conditions, yes. I think I would prefer three weeks every semester from the second year, so you're always in this process…. Maybe if it was longer but a bit earlier, it would be better" (In4).

"Obviously, in these few months, you can't get to know the kids well enough, nor can you adapt the new methods you've learned at the University… and it's also the rotation of classes. We change two classes. So, I would say I'd prefer it to be longer" (In6).

4. Response to Research Questions

In concluding our research, we will attempt to answer the research questions we posed:

1. Are the students in the Primary Education Direction of DES & SW satisfied with their internship?

In response to the first research question, we can say that students in the Primary Education Direction of DES & SW are generally satisfied with their internship, as their satisfaction rates range from 64.1% to 88.4%.

2. What are the structural elements of their internship?

Answering the second research question, as seen from the students' statements, the structural elements of the teaching practice that determine their level of satisfaction include University supervisors, members of the educational staff, and their functioning (support, preparation), the mentors/school teachers, the students in the classroom, the fellow students, the available educational material, the feedback after the completion of the internship, the total duration of the internship, their classroom management, and the degree of freedom they had in the classroom during the internship.

3. In which aspects are they more (or less) satisfied?

The data indicate that students are more satisfied with their relationships with mentors/schoolteachers (85.4%) and students in the classroom (88.4%). However, they express less satisfaction regarding the available educational material (64.1%) and the overall duration of the internship (66.0%), indicating areas where improvements could be made.

5.Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the students' satisfaction from the Departments of Primary Education (DPEs) regarding their internship. Specifically, we aimed to identify the structural elements of the internship that determine the students' level of satisfaction and to explore which aspects they are more or less satisfied with.

We conducted a case study involving the final-year students, of the Primary Education Direction at DES & SW of the University of Patras, who had completed their internship in the 8th semester.

In general, our findings reflect a multidimensional and generally positive experience of the internship, with an emphasis on collaboration, support and pedagogical development. Overall, students recognize internship as an essential pillar in the formation of their educational identity and call for them to be extended.

Connecting the results of our research with findings of other similar studies, we could say that:

- The results showed that students are generally satisfied with their internship experience, a finding that aligns with most recent international research (Owusu–Addo et al., 2018; Liu, 2020; Theelen et al., 2020; Jacquelie et al., 2020; Ardiyansah, 2021; Alcantara, 2021; Pepito, 2022; Jin, 2022) as well as greek studies (Stavridis et al., 2014; Oikonomidis, 2015; Fterniati & Frouda, 2018; Frouda et al., 2020).

- Regarding the structural elements of the internship that contribute to student satisfaction, our finding concerning the interaction with mentor educators and the feedback process is consistent with the findings of Chaniotakis et al., 2006; Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Varrati & Smith, 2008; Moody, 2009; as well as Frouda et al., 2020.

A potential extension of this research could be a nationwide study exploring the satisfaction of students across all DPEs programs regarding their internship, providing a broader overview of this issue.

In conclusion, through the study of Greek and international literature, one realizes the crucial role of internship within the framework of initial teacher education. It lays the groundwork and foundations for the teaching profession. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for Universities and educational policy bodies to give due attention to the internship issue, as ensuring its quality determines the entire educational framework and, consequently, the future of our society.

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