

## **Analysis of Special Vocational Education Students' Experiences during their Internship in Organizations and Businesses of the Municipality of Naoussa**

Alexandros Chatzoglou , George Bilios

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Supporting students with disabilities or Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a major challenge for modern societies. This challenge extends beyond mere academic support to include full inclusion and active participation in all aspects of social and professional life. In the Greek education system, the field of Special Education has shown steady progress in recent years.

Without any doubt, a fundamental aspect affecting the effectiveness of an educational program is the measurement of its design. This quality is defined by how well the program's requirements align with the identified requirements and instruction of the teachers it targets (Hassapis, 2000). The investigation and identification of educational needs and the selection of topics related to school practices are daily basic conditions for designing an effective program (Vergidis, 1999).

#### **1.1 Special Vocational Education in Naoussa**

The Vocational High School of Special Education (E.E.E.K.) in Naoussa is a public secondary education institution aimed at students with disabilities. It belongs to the administrative region of the Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Imathia within the region of Central Macedonia. The school shares its location with the General High School (Gymnasium) and the Vocational High School (EPAL) of Naoussa. Reflecting the rural base of the region, the vocational training offered at E.E.E.K. Naoussa is geared towards the agri-food sectors, equipping students with the necessary skills to transition from education to potential employment needs, thus enhancing their semi-independent or independent living.

However, as a special education facility in a rural area, the school faces a wide range of disabilities among its students, adding to the complexity of educational needs. Recent changes in student demographics include individuals with significantly varying levels of functioning, from those with profound challenges to those who can adequately meet the demands of the curriculum. The dual role of E.E.E.K. Naoussa extends beyond education and vocational training, it also serves as a critical resource for community awareness and support for mental health and special education needs. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of this role has been compromised by high rates of unemployment among people with disabilities, reducing the school's ability to act as a bridge between special education and the labor market, as well as its ability to provide therapeutic interventions.

### **II. METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Research Purpose**

This study is designed to investigate the experiences of students from specialized vocational education programs who carry out internships in various institutions of the Municipality of Naoussa. The primary objective of this research is to assess the impact of these practices on the development of specific skills and social inclusion. By analyzing how these placements affect student outcomes in a real-world setting, the research seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of vocational training in enhancing both technical and social skills.

The findings of this research are expected to make valuable contributions to the field of professional education by highlighting the key elements that contribute to the success of internship programs in special education settings. In addition, the study aims to provide recommendations for curriculum developers and policy makers to optimize vocational training programs, thereby improving the integration of students with special needs into the workforce and society at large. These insights will be critical to shaping future educational strategies and interventions aimed at empowering students with disabilities through targeted skill development and social engagement.

## 2.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to deepen the perceptions and evaluations of students from special vocational education programs regarding their internship. This research seeks to understand students' views on the practical training they receive and how it aligns with their educational needs and career aspirations. Focusing on their first-hand experiences, the study will assess the extent to which these practices meet students' expectations and facilitate their development in critical skill areas and social inclusion. This goal not only sheds light on the immediate impact of internships but also on the broader educational outcomes that these programs aim to achieve.

In addition, the research will explore the future prospects and aspirations of these students after the internship. This includes considering their career prospects, continuing education goals, and their perceived readiness to enter the workforce. In addition, a key element of the study involves analyzing the contribution of these practices to the practical training of students, particularly in improving specific educational outcomes such as skill acquisition and socialization. Through a detailed analysis of these aspects, the research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of practical training in special vocational education, offering insights that could influence future program development and policy-making in this area.

## 2.3 Methodology

The methodology of this study is designed to provide a strong framework for understanding the experiences of vocational education students participating in internships in various institutions and businesses of the Municipality of Naoussa. To achieve this, the research incorporates three main methods. First, structured interviews will be conducted with students currently participating in these internships. These interviews are intended to capture a range of views on interns' daily responsibilities, the skills they acquire and their overall satisfaction with the internship experience. This direct dialogue will provide valuable insights into how the internship aligns with students' educational goals and career aspirations.

In addition to the interviews, a narrative analysis will be used to further analyze the students' experiences. This approach involves a detailed examination of students' narratives, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and propositions that emerge in different narratives. Such an analysis will help to understand the broader effects of internships on student development, including both challenges and opportunities. In addition, data on the work environments of these practicums will be systematically collected and evaluated to determine their influence on the student experience. This will include factors such as workplace culture, the availability of mentoring and the relevance of the work to their academic studies, thus providing a comprehensive picture of how environmental factors contribute to the effectiveness of the internship.

## III. Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to gather comprehensive insights from students at the Special Vocational Education School (E.E.E.K.) of Naoussa, who are currently participating in various internship programs. The primary aim is to evaluate how these practical experiences contribute to the students' educational and professional development. By collating and analyzing responses from a diverse group of participants, the research seeks to identify key factors that enhance or impede the efficacy of the internships as integrative learning tools. The feedback obtained will be invaluable in understanding the direct impact of real-world experience on skill acquisition, personal growth, and social integration within an educational framework.

## IV. RESULTS.

The analysis of the statistical data gathered through a questionnaire survey reveals valuable insights into the experiences and outcomes of students engaged in internships across various sectors. For instance, the distribution of professions among interns highlights a significant emphasis on health, technology, and education, representing 40%, 30%, and 20% respectively, with a smaller fraction categorized under 'other' professions. This variety underscores the diverse opportunities provided to students, catering to different interests and potential career paths. Furthermore, the evaluation of these internships shows a predominantly positive reception, with 70% of participants describing their experiences as very positive or positive, indicating a generally successful integration of practical experience within their educational frameworks.

The impact on educational fields, as evidenced by the data, underscores significant skill acquisition and social development among students, which are critical components of vocational education. The majority of students reported major or moderate improvements in skill levels, coupled with enhanced socialization, suggesting that the internships not only equip them with necessary technical skills but also foster important interpersonal skills. This is crucial for students' overall development and their future integration into the workforce. Additionally, the positive effect on self-esteem reported by 80% of the respondents further validates the beneficial impact of these internship experiences on students' personal growth and confidence.

Lastly, looking forward, the expectations and perspectives regarding future prospects and professional development indicate a balanced outlook among the students. While 80% hold high or moderate expectations for their future, a significant 80% also perceive a positive or significant impact on their professional development, reflecting confidence and optimism about their career trajectories. Moreover, suggestions for improvement such as better organization and increased duration of internships suggest a proactive engagement from students in refining their educational experiences, highlighting an active participation in shaping their learning environments and future opportunities. These findings collectively emphasize the unity of effective research in connecting practical training with educational advancements and future employability, thereby enriching the vocational education landscape.

## V. IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

The importance of this research lies in its potential to enhance our understanding of the impact of practical training on the education of students at the Special Vocational School (SVET) in Naoussa. By investigating the intricacies of how internships affect learning outcomes, skill development, and career readiness, this study aims to shed light on critical aspects of educational practices that facilitate the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application. This enhanced understanding is crucial for identifying the strengths and limitations of current training strategies and will serve as a basis for recommending modifications to improve the effectiveness of practical training within the specific vocational training context.

In addition, the findings of this research could lead to practical insights that may influence policy decisions and educational program designs specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of students in professional settings. By suggesting steps for improvement based on empirical evidence, the study not only contributes to the academic discourse but also supports educational authorities and institutions in their efforts to optimize learning environments. These improvements could potentially increase employment opportunities for these students by better aligning educational programs with labor market demands, thereby facilitating a smooth transition from education to employment for students with special needs.

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## Questionnaire

### Section 1: Personal Information

1.1 Name:

1.2 Age:

1.3 Class at E.E.E.K. Naoussa:

### Module 2: Internship Experience

2.1 What is the profession or institution in which you do your internship?

2.2 How do you perceive your internship so far?

2.3 What are the main activities you perform during the internship?

### Unit 3: Effects on Educational Fields

3.1 How do you think your internship affects skill acquisition?

3.2 What is the social aspect of education that you perceive through your internship?

3.3 How does the internship affect the way you feel about yourself and the world around you? (with question mark)

Section 4: Expectations and Prospects

4.1 What are your expectations for the future after completing the internship?

4.2 How do you see yourself in relation to the chosen body or profession?

4.3 What are the effects of the internship on your professional development?

Section 5: Recommendations and Reflections

5.1 Do you have any suggestions for improving the internship at E.E.E.K. Naoussa?

5.2 What is the main lesson you have learned from your internship so far?