

## THE LEVELS OF PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILL DURING GRADUATION INTERNSHIP OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY – VIETNAM

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### ABSTRACT

*This research mentioned the level of problem-solving skill during internship course of university students in Ho Chi Minh City – Vietnam. The result showed that university students in Ho Chi Minh City had encountered many problems related to their specialties, professions and regulations; problems related to communication and behaviors, relationship establishment, and some related to adaptation. The problem solving skill during internship course of students was mainly at a low level.*

**Keywords:** Skill, problem solving skill, problem solving skill during internship course

### INTRODUCTION

According to a survey of the Ministry of Education and Training, in 2011, in our country, there were 63% of students being unemployed due to lack of skills. It was an unpleasant and alarming reality of tertiary education in our country. After a long time studying in college or university with a huge investment of time and money of individuals, families and society, students should have found suitable jobs with corresponding incomes to contribute to the construction and development of the country. However, the reality is an opposite (Ministry of Education and Training, 2003).

Every year, in Ho Chi Minh City there has been about 60,000 college and university final-year students preparing for graduation (Ministry of Education and Training, 2003). This also means that there is a corresponding number of students participating in the internship course in firms, businesses, production companies, schools ... This is not only a requirement or a task for students but also a precious opportunity for their future career if they know how to grasp and make the most of them. Basically, the graduation internship is an interview process of the employers for candidates who are students. Therefore, if students are positively evaluated during internship time, they will have good chances in later employment with a high rate of success.

In fact, a large amount of students have not truly respected the role of the internship; therefore they do not have proper interest and investment for this. Many students only consider it as a mandatory requirement for their graduation. Some others have disregarded it. They just perform in a perfunctory way so as to gain the passing marks. Stemming from that thought, there have been some arising problems about the internship course, such as students relying on relationships to get high scores even when they actually do not take the course. The popular situation is that many students are very passive and do not timely adapt to the working environment during internship due to lack of problem solving skill, which leads to the fact that students cannot determine what to do, how to behave with "colleagues" in their work place. Of course, it is also necessary to fully consider the internship course of students

from both the internship places' side and the students' one. However, the important factor is still the students themselves. If students do not have a thorough mental preparation and appropriate problem solving skill with the working environment, they may lose valuable opportunities for employment after graduation (Huynh, 2011).

Internship course is a testing process for students to improve basic skills in order to effectively work when they become official employees. Internship course of Pedagogy student is actually very important for them to become teachers in the future. Settling all the issues during internship time is a challenge; overcoming them means that students will have more chances for employment thanks to the ready mentality and occupation skills. Nevertheless, in fact, Pedagogy students are still facing difficulties in solving problems in internship. Therefore, understanding the situation of problem solving skill during internship of students absolutely plays a crucial role.

## **MEASURES AND PARTICIPANTS**

The research uses a combination of research methods, in which the method of using questionnaires is the main one and the others are supplementary methods.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### ***Research Method Using Questionnaires***

The questionnaires are designed for students – main object, lecturers – supplementary object and instructors in students' graduation internship places.

#### ***a. Design Principles***

- i. Ensure the quality in terms of contents
- ii. Reliable in terms of statistics.
- iii. Use forms of questions relevant to the research contents and characteristics of the research's object.

#### ***b. Questionnaire Design Process***

##### **1<sup>st</sup> Phase: Design the Open Questionnaire**

The main objective of this research was to determine the real situation of problem-solving skill during graduation internship of students so as to propose solutions for enhancing their problem-solving skill during graduation internship. Therefore an open questionnaire was required to collect initial data from students. Through open questionnaire, the researcher synthesized and analyzed the data to conduct the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase.

##### **2<sup>nd</sup> Phase: Design and Complete the Official Questionnaire**

- i. From the result obtained after distributing the open questionnaire, combined with theories of the research, researcher conducted designing the testing questionnaire.
- ii. The testing questionnaire was sent to psychiatrists and educators for professional comments.
- iii. Then the testing questionnaire was distributed to 60 students, 30 lecturers for comments on form and language.
- iv. The questionnaire was completed after adjustments based on objects' feedbacks about language, quantity, content and design. In parallel, official questions for

ascertaining the real situation of problem-solving skill during graduation internship of students were given.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Phase: Conduct the Official Survey**

Conduct distributing official survey form for two groups of objects including students – instructors and instructors in graduation internship places.

#### *c. General Description of the Questionnaire*

The official questionnaire included two questionnaires for two groups of objects including students – instructors and instructors in graduation internship places.

The first questionnaire was for students with a view to surveying the problem-solving skill during graduation internship of students. This questionnaire included:

#### Information of the Objects

This section consists of questions about basic information of the objects including: University, gender, specialty, academic performance, experience of soft skills training, internship result, and position in internship crew.

#### The Survey Contents: Include Two Main Parts

Part 1 (from question 1 to question 8): referred to the extent of the problems and the awareness of students on basic issues related to problem-solving skill during graduation internship.

Part 2: determined the problem-solving skill during graduation internship through five common situations which students tend to encounter.

Part 3 (from question 1 to question 8): ascertained students' self-assessment of their problem solving skill during graduation internship.

Part 4: included 5 questions to gain ideas for enhancing problem-solving skill during graduation internship for students.

### ***Interview Method***

#### *a. Purpose*

Interview students and lecturers to:

- i. Supplement more information to clarify the survey results.
- ii. Check the reliability of the replies for the questionnaire.
- iii. Learn more about the research subject through some typical objects.

#### *b. Procedure*

- i. Contact 20 students and 10 lecturers who had been examined to clarify the processed data on the reality of the problem-solving skill during graduation internship of students.
- ii. Conduct interviewing basing on the questionnaire with prepared questions according to the research purpose. Additional questions can be used in case of having arising issues in objects' replies.

### **Mathematical Statistics Method**

#### *a. Purpose*

Process the quantitative results obtained from the survey in order to provide evidences for the research result.

#### *b. Content*

- i. Statistics description: sum, average values, frequency, percentage ...
- ii. Comparison of results between groups of objectives, different aspects of a same research indicator.

#### *c. Procedure*

Use the software SPSS 20.0 to process the data obtained for the analysis of data in the research process.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTS**

The main research objects included 1179 students in four universities in Ho Chi Minh City. In particular, the amount of surveyed students in Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy was 296 (25.1%), that of Ho Chi Minh Banking University was 310 (26.3%), that of Ho Chi Minh University of Economics was 359 (30.4%) and that of Nguyen Tat Thanh University was 214 (18.2%).

The distribution of objects was quite acceptable and not too different between the numbers of objects among 4 Universities. This was in conformity with the principle of choosing samples and the mathematical statistical principle.

In terms of gender, due to the selection of random samples and the characteristic of the Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy in which female students exceed male students, research objects were slightly skewed toward female students. However, this reason stems from the objectivity; therefore, the results still adhered to scientific principles. Specifically, women accounted for 65.3% and men accounted for 34.7%.

In terms of academic performance, the amount of students with excellent academic performance was 28 (2.7%), with good performance was 220 (21.4%), with fair performance was 659 (64.0%), with average one was 116 (11.3%) and under average level was 6 (0.6%). This ensured the reliability and objectivity of the study sample.

In terms of the position during graduation internship, deputy/leader of delegations accounted for 22 (2.5%) students, the amount of leaders of groups was 90 (10.1%), and the rest was members whose amount was 775 (87.4%). This proportion ensured sampling principles in scientific research.

In terms of experience in learning problem-solving skill, the number of students who had learned this skill was 397 (34.8%), that of students who had never studied this skill was 744 (65.2%).

### **THE RESULT OF STUDYING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILL**

#### **The Reality of the Level of University Students Encountering Some Types of Problems during the Graduation Internship in Ho Chi Minh City**

**Table 1. Level of University students encountering some types of problems during the graduation internship**

| <i>Level of Students Encountering Problems (%)</i> | <i>Types of Problems</i>                                   |   |                              |  |   |
|--|--|---|------------------------------|--|---|
|  | <i>Related to Specialties, Professions and Regulations</i> | <i>Related to Communication, Behaviors and Establishing Relationships</i> | <i>Related to Adaptation</i> | <i>Related to the Internship Group</i> | <i>Related to Spiritual and Material Life</i> |
| Never  | 1.9  | 1.7   | 2.4                          | 4.7                                    | 4.8   |
| Rarely   | 6.3  | 9.1   | 13.7                         | 16.9                                   | 12.5  |
| Occasionally                                       | 31.0   | 26.6  | 31.7                         | 35.2                                   | 34.5  |
| Frequently   | 39.5   | 42.5  | 39.6                         | 29.5                                   | 34.2  |
| Very Often   | 21.3   | 20.1  | 12.7                         | 13.7                                   | 14.1  |

Among the issues related to specialties, professions and regulations, the percentage of “Frequently” which students chose the most was 39.5% and the percentage of “Very often” was 21.3%; the sum of both was 60.8%. This was a relatively high proportion, which showed that specialties, professions and regulations were among the most difficult contents for students during graduation internship. The proportion of “Rarely” and “Never” accounted for very low percentages, respectively 6.3% and 1.9%. This could be explained as the result of students’ transition between learning and practicing. In this transition, students would face predicament in applying new methods in internship since there was a huge gap between academic knowledge learned in university and the reality. Besides, the viewpoints of each labor generation were different from each other as they were governed by specialties as well as environmental impacts and working conditions. Hence, sometimes some problems rose such as the difference between the internship guidance in the University and the requests of the instructors in internship places. Students working in a company were to produce profits and to make progress for that company, thus there could not be the best condition for students to promote their capabilities according to the adequate process and standards of their careers. In addition, internship in Universities in Ho Chi Minh City at the moment is almost conducted in the form of straight posts. This means that the contact between departments and internship places is limited in order to increase the autonomy and independence for students. Therefore, students’ understanding of the administrative procedures, internship regulations was not sufficient. Despite the fact the all Universities participating in the survey had training classes about contents, regulations as well as administrative procedures for students, research data showed that this work still did not really achieved the expected results.

In problems related to communication, behaviors and relationships establishment, there were up to 42.5% of students who chose “Frequently” encounter with this problem, “Very often” made up 20.1%. This is also a relatively high rate. Only 9.1% and 1.7% of students rarely and never encountered this type of problem. Communication is an indispensable condition of all forms of social activities and human individuals. During the graduation internship, students have to participate in many relationships: with the instructor, the "boss", colleagues, customers and with other staff in the internship facilities. Effective communication between interns and customers or people who work at the facility has a great influence on the quality

of students' work in graduation internship. However, students are not always provided the best conditions to establish these relationships. In fact, college students, through practical experience, will face many different situations as some customers do not cooperate or deliberately make difficulty because the interns are still too young and inexperienced and do not have the ability to persuade consumers or partners of the internship company, ... Especially, in the process of communication between students and instructors, other workers or employees at the internship facilities, due to the absence of university lecturers – the link between students and the work place, as well as the interns' inexperience and their thought as only being students, not many places show their respect and enthusiasm for students. Since then, this leads to the apprehension and fear when students have any feedback or suggestions for the instructors. Students feel embarrassed and difficult when being exposed to the leaders in the work place. They are also hesitant to express themselves for the fear of failure, errors or ostentation. Besides, some other issues may arise such as the lack of respect from officers and other employees or not actively establishing relationships with different staff (assistant, protectors, ...).

As far as the adaptation is concerned, the level of "Frequently" received the highest percentage of 39.6%, the next two levels were "Occasionally" with 32.7% and "Very often" with 12.7%. "Never" and "Rarely" made up 2.4% and 13.7% respectively, which are below expectations. Adaptation in the graduation internship is the process of students adjusting the content, the method of operation and communication to meet the requirements of the graduation internship environment in order to fulfill their duties. Due to the transition from a free and comfortable University environment to a working environment with strict rules, there are some issues arising about the adaptation of University students to the new environment. In addition, having gone through a practice session, many students use the experience obtained to mechanically apply to the new internship environment. Typical examples contain the failure to integrate themselves into the activities of employees in the work place, being unfamiliar with meetings and professional activities, being unfamiliar with the additional internship requirements, with the prescribed work attire, or the type of communication and vocative in exposure to customers...

In matters relating to the internship groups: 35.2% of the students chose the level "Occasionally"; 13.7% of students chose the level "Very often" and 29.5% of them chose "Often". There were 13.7% and 2.4% of students choosing "Rarely" and "Never". Although these rates are not too significantly high, the data shows that this problem often causes difficulties for students during their graduation internship. In fact, at schools participating in the survey, interns are arranged in groups consisting of varied faculties' students, one of whom is appointed the leader. This contributes not only to strengthening the students' positiveness and pro-activeness but then also to creating problems on both the psychosocial issues and other related ones. Besides, the recent selection of universities for students to be the internship chief often bases on their good academic performance and positive participation in Youth Union - Union of Students, but not actively interested in skills training and job-related practice, which leads to lack of working skills and behavior. Consequently, the chief could directly or indirectly create problems to be solved. For example: the difficulty to communicate with teachers and schools; no initiative to promptly update new information to the members; not able to answer and resolve problems promptly or tend to get stumped by the difficulty that the delegation faces. In addition, inappropriate and unconvincing leadership style of the head may also lead to internal conflicts in the internship group. For example: the conflict between the director and members over the work of the delegation or the conflict with other individuals in the internship group over communication, behavior, work distribution, discipline...

In the group of issues relating to spiritual and material: While the level of “Often” and “Sometimes” made up a virtual proportion of 34.2% and 34.5% respectively, the proportion of “Very often” accounted for 14.1%. 12.5% and 4.8% was the percentage of students choosing “Rarely” and “Never”. Although today, with the development of the society and economy, students are also more satisfied in terms of physical and mental demand. However, students are likely to face many difficulties related to this issue due to spending their entire time and effort in graduation internship. Besides, because of the absence of faculties and university’s lecturers who company as a direct manager, students can hardly find the sharing and support from those experienced people when facing difficulties. The instructor will only work with students within a month, which causes the difficulty in creating the cohesion and camaraderie so that students can confide all of their minds. In addition, too detailed regulations which interweave with each other from planning to implementing the plan, internship profiles, time, discipline and working styles in the internship will create a mental pressure on students. During the internship, there is a number of other issues related to materials and physical conditions such as property stolen, harassment, psychological pressure ... but students are not capable of dealing with them.

### The Levels of Problem-Solving Skills during Graduation Internship of College Students in Ho Chi Minh City

Table 2. The levels of problem-solving skill during graduation internship of college students

| <i>The Levels of Skill</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage %</i> |
|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Poor                       | 778              | 67.6                |
| Low                        | 195              | 16.9                |
| Average                    | 90               | 7.8                 |
| Fairly                     | 34               | 3.0                 |
| High                       | 54               | 4.7                 |

The statistical result in Table 2 shows that the problem-solving skill during graduation internship of students was mainly at “Poor” level with 778 students (occupied 67.6%), which is a high rate compared to the general population. At this level, students have no desire to resolve the problem situation and also not mobilize any steps in the process of solving problems. This is a really notable result to bear in mind for enhancing skills in students.

In the next position, the level of “Low” accounted for 16.9% of students. At this level, students are aware of the necessity of solving problems and can implement actions in the process of solving the problem, but still in limited scale. As students reveal limitations in their problem solving skill, they cannot solve the problems thoroughly or face many difficulties in solving problems.

Standing in the third place with 7.8% of students was the “Average” level. When reaching average level, students perform relatively complete tasks in the process of solving problems, but there are still a significant number of wrong operations in the different situations. Consequently, students can solve familiar problems but given new situations, the ability to respond remains poor.

The statistical results also showed that the three levels: “Average”, “Weak” and “Poor” summed up to 92.3% of students, which is a very high percentage. Thus it can be seen that there are more than 90.0% of students who do not have the ability to solve problems actively in the internship to develop themselves as well as to support their future careers. This issue once again raises questions about the results of current graduation internship when most of students obtain quite high results.

Finally, only 7.7% of students achieved the level “Fairly” and “Good” in problem-solving skill in graduation internship. This modest figure is an alarm bell about the reality of training and practicing soft skills of University students in Ho Chi Minh City. This affects not only the result of students’ study and the quality of school education but also the quality of human resources in the future, especially during the current competitions for workforce.

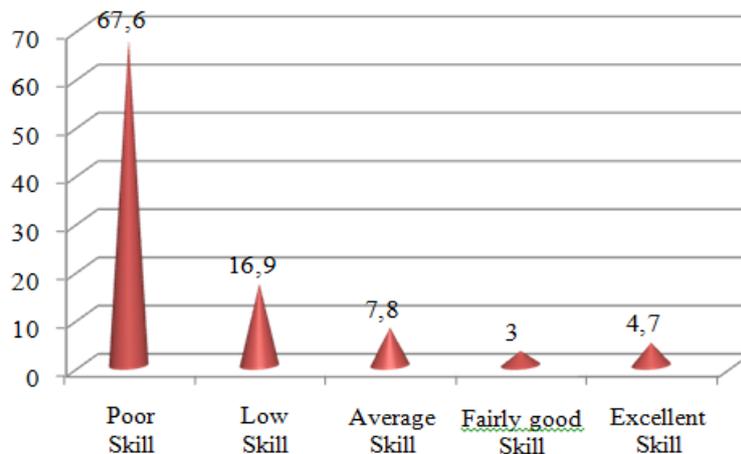


Chart 1. Levels of problem-solving skill of students

## CONCLUSION

In summary, during the graduation internship, University students in Ho Chi Minh City has encountered many problems related to specialties, professions and regulations; issues related to communication, behaviors, establishing relationships and adaptation. Problem-solving skill during graduation internship of students is mainly in low level with 67.6% - a high rate compared to general situation. This result needs to be paid more attention to from the Universities, internship places as well as the students themselves so as to enhance the efficiency of students’ internship.

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