

How College Students Experience Work: Implications for Policy and Practice Development

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the status of work experience programs of college students and to suggest a measure for the future improvement of the work experience. A survey was conducted to the currently enrolled students of college and universities and those who graduated in February 2015, and 1,459 respondents were collected and analyzed. These college students who had work experiences showed significant differences in satisfaction according to the absence or presence of salaries and written employment contracts, and they also displayed differences in terms of the types of jobs they performed depending on the participation period. Also they called for improvement of salaries, discriminative treatment and safety of work experience programs. In order to improve future work experience programs, it is necessary to establish institutional protection measures by reflecting those demands.

Keywords: *College students, University students, Interns, On-site training, Work experiences.*

1. Introduction

According to the report of Korea National Statistical Office released in June 2015, the unemployment rate for the youth aged between 15 and 29 was 10.2%. This is the highest record since the same month in 1999 (11.3%) during the Korean financial crisis. The report shows that 450,000 of the 1,050,000 unemployed in total in June 2015 were unemployed youth, as youth unemployment problem is one of the most serious problems of our society, the two most important keywords for youth jobseekers are 'job' and 'experience'. Young people are trying to demonstrate their ability in the process of job recruitment by associating the job performance with work experiences they gained from internships and on-site training during their college career. Work experience during college has the aspect of "on-site training" to apply the knowledge gained from college education to practice, and the aspect of "career exploration" to prepare for the future by gaining experience in the field [1, 2, 3, 4].

The work experience defined by this study excludes simple part-time work and youth intern programs of college graduates, and means programs and activities that are provided by companies and institutions to ensure that college students can work at industrial sites for more than one month. To gain such experience before applying for a job becomes not a choice but a must, and the types of work can be classified into internship, industry-academy cooperation training, on-site training, workplace experience, work-based learning, etc. [5, 6]. However, work experiences like interns do not always have positive influence on the choice of jobs, employment, switching to regular workers, or they can be unsatisfactory for youth job-seekers [7, 8]. On the other hand, social problems related to

work experience such as “low pay for popular jobs” and “exploitation” also drew significant attention. It will become a common trend that college students engage in career exploration, gain job experience, and expand employment opportunities in the future through work experience before full-scale employment. To prevent the increase of the side effects of work experience programs, in the context of the growing trend of youth work experience, it is important to conduct a comprehensive examination of the youth’s needs for work experience. Given this, the study is to look into the status of work experiences, to present measures to improve the work-experience-related systems and programs, and to reflect them in the development of future work-experience programs.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Review of Internship

The most typical form of work experience during college is internship. The term, internship, is a compound of “intern” that originally refers to a trainee undergoing practical training in medicine and “-ship” that indicates status, and can be conceptualized as “on-site practical training” [9]. Internship was first introduced in Korea when LG Group recruited talents among college students for the company. Internship is the program to determine job aptitude while providing job training by employing students during a vacation or a semester, and then, link the internship to full-employment after graduation [10, 11]. The purpose of internship is for companies to achieve early retention of young talents through determination of job aptitude and save training costs, and for students to apply the knowledge gained from education to practice. Internship is the most common form of work experience before full-time employment, and human resources managers in companies also rate highly of internship experience in the hiring process [12].

2.2 Review of On-site Training

On-site training first started in the form of industry-academia cooperative education at University of Cincinnati in the U.S. in 1906, which focused on students’ specialization of their majors in relation to the careers after graduation. In the early stage, on-site training at University of Cincinnati took the form of cooperative education. On-site training became common as Riverside Junior College then began implementing on-site training in the fields including library science, nursing, and civil engineering [13]. On-site training is a type of work experience designed to improve students’ practical skills. This is an activity that links regular college curricula to work in actual industries, and enables students to gain work experience within a regular curriculum, unlike the internship in which students work individually during a break or a semester. In his 1996 study, Mason defined on-site training as an extension of learning activity that utilizes work environment and enables learners to learn the knowledge, skills, and attitude related to work by having them participate in work environment. The significance of on-site training is to expand the location of student learning to workplace beyond classroom.

2.3. Review of Other Work Experience

In addition to internship and on-site experience, work experience programs include the “work-based learning” and “workplace experience”. Work-based learning was designed to be similar in form to German and Swiss apprenticeship, and implements dual education of workplace and school. Specifically, school provides theoretical education for 1-2 days a week and workplace provides practical training and responsibilities to perform for 3-4 days a week. Work-based learning is characterized by the following: Designing the training program is led by the company in need of workforce; trainees are responsible for professional and technical duties through education and training; work and learning are

combined but clearly differentiated; and the program must not consist solely of either work or learning. In addition, the most important feature of the program is that the trainees are trained while being employed. It has a long-term training period between six months and four years, and a minimum of 300 hours and maximum 1,200 hours of training annually. Curriculum takes the form linked to school curriculum such as contract courses, and those who complete the training are awarded a certificate, license, or degree [14].

Workplace experience programs are designed to assist vocational and career choice through a wide range of opportunities for on-site experience. The programs in other countries include the transfer semester program in Ireland, the gap year program in the U.K., Afterschool in Denmark, PRAO in Sweden, and Workplace Experience Week in Japan. In Korea, the programs are not implemented in a semester basis or in an institutionalized; however, workplace experience is gained through a variety of forms of opportunities. Specifically, it takes the forms of practicum for discovery of interests and aptitude through short-term practical training of specific duties, workplace visit for the tour of companies or government agencies, and work-place exploration for long observation of specific duties and job sites.

3. Research Method

3.1. Participants

The survey conducted was for of two or three-year colleges and four-year universities that participated in work-experience programs more than once during their college years. For the study, the entire college students across the country were set as the parent population, the students of two- or three-year colleges and four-year universities as well as the recent college graduates were selected as the sample population, which consisted of 160 students of two- or three-year colleges and 1,299 students of four-year universities, adding up to a total of 1,459 people.

Table 1. Information of respondents

		N	%
gender	Male	605	41.5
	Female	854	58.5
	Total	1459	100.0
Age	Under 20	38	2.6
	21-23	592	40.6
	24-26	644	44.1
	27-29	183	12.5
	Over 30	2	0.2
	Total	1459	100.0
University information	University (4 years course)	1299	89
	College (2,3 years course)	160	11
	Total	1459	100.0
Current status	Enrolled Student	959	65.7
	Leave of absence student	153	10.5
	Put off graduation	111	7.6
	Alumni	236	16.2
	Total	1459	100.0

Major	Humanities	245	16.8
	Sociology	458	31.4
	Education	55	3.8
	Engineering	345	23.6
	Natural Science	171	11.7
	Medicine, Pharmacy	83	5.7
	Art	102	7
	Total	1459	100.0

3.2. Instruments

The questionnaire is composed of the items that were validated regarding validity and reliability in a similar study, and the pilot test of the survey instrument was conducted using face validity by constructing the representative group of the population. The survey items constructed is based on the process that follows.

Table 2. Category of Work Experiences Survey

Classification	Contents
Information on work experiences program	Participation grade, Participation timing, Purpose of participation, Participation period, Paying status, Employment contract, Satisfaction, Participation motive, Information of participatory company
Procedure of participation in Work-Experience	Assignment of jobs, Treatments they received during their participation, Content of major jobs, unfair treatments
Management and Future Improvement of Work-Experience Programs	Post-management, Improvement in the work-experience program

3.3. Procedures

This study investigated college students' perceptions and status of work experience in order to determine the status of college students' "work experience during college" and provide the data to serve as the basis for improvement of future work experience programs. First, a review of previous studies on "work experience" was conducted, and a questionnaire was developed based on previous studies. After establishing the foundation for this study, a survey was conducted by sending email invitations to the survey to college students and college graduates in Korea for the month of April 2015 with cooperation from colleges and universities throughout Korea. The content of the email included the purpose of the survey, and respondents participated in the survey using the link attached in the email. The number of the questionnaires collected for the one-month period was 4,927, and the analysis included 1,459 questionnaires, excluding the questionnaires that did not meet the following two criteria: (1) status regarding participation of work experience, and (2) college students or those who graduated a college after February 2015.

3.4 Data Analysis

The statistical analysis of the data collected in this study was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 22.0, and included the following. First, frequency analysis was performed to analyze sociodemographic characteristics of study

participants, the content of work experience participation process, and comments regarding improvement of work experience in the future, among others. Second, t-test was performed to compare groups in satisfaction with compensation for work experience program participation. Third, the analysis of the differences between groups in compensation and key responsibilities during work experience participation was conducted using cross-tabulation.

4. Results

4.1. Information on Work Experiences Programs

The most frequently participated year of work experience programs of college students turned out to be the third-year of four-year university students and the second year of the two- or three-year college students. They participated in work experience programs for a short period of about one month during their summer or winter vacation. In terms of their motivation to participate in work-experience programs, the largest group totaling 50% of the respondents said it was for job experience, followed by career exploration (21.8%) and to earn credits (15.1%). Half of the entire participatory company was small-sized companies with a workforce of less than 50 people, while those with a workforce of more than 300 people accounted for 20%, which shows that most students participated in work-experience programs offered by small-sized company. 60% of the entire students said they participated in the paid work-experience programs, whereas 40% of them said they took part in the unpaid programs. After conducting a statistical verification on program satisfaction depending on the presence and absence of salaries, the paid work-experience program participants showed a more satisfaction level than their counterparts. In regard to the question “Did you sign a written employment contract when you participated in the work-experience program?” 68% said they did, while 38% said they did not.

After conducting the statistical verification on program satisfaction depending on the presence and absence of written employment contracts, it was found that college students who signed a significantly higher level ($p < .001$) of satisfaction than their counterparts. All in all, the treatments that work-experience program participants received, such as the presence and absence of salaries and written employment contracts, had significant influence on the satisfaction of college students who participated in work experience programs.

Table 3. Information of Work Experience Programs

		N	%			N	%
Participat ion grade	1st grade	251	17.2	Participati on timing (Semester)	Spring	367	25.2
	2nd grade	375	25.7		Fall	191	13.1
	3rd grade	512	35.1		Summer	475	32.6
	4th grade	303	20.8		Winter	372	25.5
	Put off graduation	16	1.1		Leave of absence	51	3.5
	After graduation	2	0.1		After graduation	3	0.2
	Total	1459	100.0		Total	1459	100.0
	Participat ion period (Month)	1	645		44.2	Participati on hours per day (Hour)	~2
	2	424	29.1		2~4	209	14.3
	3~4	230	15.8		4~6	238	16.3
	5~6	63	4.3		6~8	359	24.6

		6~	97	6.6				8~	527	36.1
		Total	1459	100.0				Total	1459	100.0
Participat ion purpose (multiple responses)	Work experience		1065	50.0	Company Size (total number of people)	~30	705	48.4		
	Credit Job preparation		464	21.8		30~100	287	19.7		
	Certificate		322	15.1		100~300	148	10.1		
	Essential for graduation		103	4.8		300~1000	171	11.7		
			175	8.2		1000~	148	10.1		
Total		2129	100.0	Total		1459	100.0			
Paying status	Paid	875	60.0	Employment contract	Yes	905	62.0			
	Unpaid	584	40.0		No	554	38.0			
	Total	1459	100.0		Total	1459	100.0			

Table 4. Satisfaction level under Paying status and Employment contract

		N	M	SD	t
Paying status	Paid	875	3.69	.980	6.171***
	Unpaid	584	3.38	.913	
Employment Contract	Yes	905	3.71	.974	7.251***
	No	554	3.34	.909	

4.2. Procedure of participation in Work Experience

46.7% of the respondents said the assignment of jobs was randomly determined by a participating company or institution, while 37.7% of them said it was done according to their wishes and 14.6% said they could experience various jobs through the rotation system. This shows that most participating companies and institutions assigned jobs to the participants on a random basis rather than to their wishes.

In regard to the treatments they received during their participation in work-experience programs, a majority of the respondents totaling 56.4 said they were treated as apprentices, followed by simple work assistants (18.6%) and part-time workers (16.2%). The results of the cross-correlation analysis on the perceived treatments depending on the participation period were measured at $\chi^2=82.811$, which is a statistically significant level of .001. Those college students who participated in the programs for only one or two months felt they were treated as work assistants, while the longer the participation period, more students felt they were treated as part-time workers.

Concerning the content of major jobs that they performed during their participation in the work-experience programs, the largest group at 31% said they gained a job experience of an entry-level associate, followed by simple repetitive jobs (30.2%) such as meeting preparation, and regular worker assistants (22.4%). After the cross-correlation analysis was conducted on the content of jobs depending on the participation period, the results were measured at $\chi^2=53.253$, which is a statistically significant level of .001. Those with a participation period of one or two months usually carried out simple repetitive jobs, while those with a participation period of three to six months gained a job experience of an entry-level associate, and those with a participation period of more than 6 months performed the same jobs as regular workers. All in all, the content of jobs that they performed can vary depending on their participation period.

In regard to the question “Have you ever received any kind of unfair treatments during your work experience program?” 25.8% of the respondents said that they had to a job different from the one they were promised to do; 27.5% of them said they had to work at night and on weekends; 22.7% of them said the working hours were not well abided by; 18.9% of them said that they had to do more errands than jobs; 19.1% said they had to purchase outfits and equipment they needed to perform their jobs out of their own pockets.

Table 5. Procedure of participation in work experience program

		N	%
Assignment of Jobs	Following their wishes	550	37.7
	Randomly determined	681	46.7
	Rotation system	213	14.6
	Others	15	1.0
	Total	1459	100.0
Treatments	Apprentice	824	56.5
	Regular worker	103	7.1
	Part-time worker	237	16.2
	Work assistant	271	18.6
	Others	24	1.6
Total	1459	100.0	
Major job during work experience	Regular worker’s job	190	13.0
	Regular worker assistants	327	22.4
	New employee level	452	31.0
	Simple repetitive jobs	440	30.2
	Others	50	3.4
Total	1459	100.0	

Table 6. Cross-tabulations between work period and treatments/job1

	Period (Month)						Total	df	x ²	
		1	2	3	4	5				
Treatments	1	N	449	26	86	107	5	673	16	82.811* **
		%	30.8	1.8	5.9	7.3	.3	46.1		
	2	N	222	34	73	92	8	429		
		%	15.2	2.3	5.0	6.3	.5	29.4		
	3~4	N	100	22	45	45	5	217		
		%	6.9	1.5	3.1	3.1	.3	14.9		
	5~6	N	21	7	16	12	3	59		
		%	1.4	.5	1.1	.8	.2	4.0		
	6~	N	32	14	17	15	3	81		
		%	2.2	1.0	1.2	1.0	.2	5.6		

¹ 1: Apprentice, 2: Regular worker, 3: Part-time worker, 4: Work assistant, 5: Others

A: Regular worker’s job, B: Regular worker assistants, C: New employee level, D: Simple repetitive jobs, E: Others

		Total	N	824	103	237	271	24	1459						
			%	56.5	7.1	16.2	18.6	1.6	100.0						
		Period (Month)		A	B	C	D	E	Total	df	χ^2				
Major job during work experien ce	1	N	71	127	223	223	29	673	16	53.253*	**				
		%	4.9	8.7	15.3	15.3	2.0	46.1							
	2	N	51	118	122	127	11	429							
		%	3.5	8.1	8.4	8.7	.8	29.4							
	3~4	N	32	44	71	64	6	217							
		%	2.2	3.0	4.9	4.4	.4	14.9							
	5~6	N	11	15	20	12	1	59							
		%	.8	1.0	1.4	.8	.1	4.0							
	6~	N	25	23	16	14	3	81							
		%	1.7	1.6	1.1	1.0	.2	5.6							
	Total		N	190	327	452	440	50				1459			
			%	13.0	22.4	31.0	30.2	3.4				100.0			

Table 7. Unfair treatments during work experience program

		N	%			N	%
Different job from first promised	Yes	376	25.8	Do regular worker's job	Yes	513	35.2
	No	1013	69.4		No	815	55.9
	Unknow n	70	4.8		Unkno wn	131	9.0
	Total	1459	100.0		Total	1459	100.0
Work night and weekend s	Yes	401	27.5	Not abided working hours	Yes	1070	73.3
	No	1019	69.8		No	331	22.7
	Unknow n	39	2.7		Unkno wn	58	4.0
	Total	1459	100.0		Total	1459	100.0
Do more errands than jobs	Yes	276	18.9	Purchase outfits and equipmen t	Yes	278	19.1
	No	1111	76.1		No	1136	77.9
	Unknow n	72	4.9		Unkno wn	45	3.1
	Total	1459	100.0		Total	1459	100.0

4.3. Management and Future Improvement of Work Experience Programs

In regard to the question “Did you receive any post-management after your work-experience program is finished?” 57.6% of the participating college students said that they did not receive any continued management. Also, concerning the question whether they were in contact with company or institution that they worked for, 71.1% said they had never been in contact with the institution and company, while only 28.9% said they kept in contact with them. In regard to the question “Is there any room for improvement in the work-experience program for the future?,” the largest group at 31% of the participating college students said that it is necessary to expand the participation to

various kinds of occupations and companies, followed by the education before and during the program (18.4%) and treatment improvement (17.8%). Concerning the question “Which domain needs a protection measure?” the largest group totaling at 61% said a protection measure for salaries is needed, followed by the protection against unreasonable discrimination (22.9%) and an industrial safety measure (12.1%).

Table 8. Work Experience Program Post-Management

		N	%			N	%
Manage ment from school or institution	Yes	619	42.4	Keep contact with institution	Yes	422	28.9
	No	840	57.6		No	1037	71.1
	Total	1459	100.0		Total	1459	100.0

Table 9. Improvement Point of Work Experience Program for the Future

	N	%
Education before and during the program	269	18.4
Treatment improvement	260	17.8
Adjustment of experience period	209	14.3
Increase the participation of various company	453	31.0
Improvement of percentage for regular jobs	122	8.4
Expand of career development and management	81	5.6
Wage improvement	22	1.5
None	23	1.6
Others	20	1.4
Total	1459	100.0

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

By conducting a survey on college students who participated in various types of work experience programs such as internship, on-site training, and workplace experience programs, the study was trying to assess the current status of workplace-experience programs in order to recommend measures of improving the future work-experience programs. The analysis results are as follows.

First, whether participants were paid for their participation and whether labor contract was signed were found to influence participant satisfaction. Participants’ sense of security based on economic security and fair contract may influence their commitment to and satisfaction with the work experience program. Second, regarding the participation period and the task level, it was found that short-term participants tend to perform simple repetitive tasks, while long-term participants tended to perform the tasks at the level of regular employees’ responsibilities. Third, it was found that work experience program participants require protection in a variety of areas including working overtime, performing tasks other than designated responsibilities, and pre-training and continuing education. Fourth, follow up on participants after completion of the work experience program were found to be necessary.

In order to maintain the high-quality work experience program by making improvements in the areas mentioned above and increasing participant satisfaction, schools, companies, and government must implement following measures respectively.

Schools should in charge of ongoing management of students from before, to during and after the program through pre-training, continuing education, and follow-up. First, pre-training should provide support for students' adjustment by including the basics that the students who begin the life outside academia for the first time through work experience must have as a member of society. Second, continuing education should provide education for the lack of competence in students during the program, in response to the feedback from companies and agencies where students participated in work experience. Third, schools must provide the support for students' experience to be linked to employment through the ongoing follow-up after completion of the work experience program.

Companies, first, should provide work experience program participants with sufficient compensation, which can contribute to participants' sense of security, leading to increased satisfaction. Second, companies must establish fair contractual relationships with work experience for program participants. The sense of security that participants experience from fair contract may have a positive influence on satisfaction and efficiency. Third, companies must specify the roles of work experience program participants. The participants tended to perform the responsibilities identical to those of regular employees as their program participation prolonged. The roles of participants must be specified such that the nature of the tasks they perform is characterized as learning through experience rather than work. Fourth, companies must facilitate the employment through work experience program participation. The expansion of the culture of employing excellent participants after the completion of the program can benefit companies in early retention of young talents and training cost savings, and also benefit the society at large by its contribution to reducing the youth unemployment problem.

The government, first, must have in place the institutional mechanism to protect work experience program participants. Government must establish clear criteria and legal basis for the status of the program participants in the status between employee and student to protect them. Furthermore, government should create the measures to protect the participants from various unfair practices by establishing regulations on standard employment contract, and work experience programs, among others. In addition, the government must implement thorough monitoring of job sites. Second, government must provide support for companies to facilitate employment from work experience participation. Government should provide a wide range of monetary and nonmonetary benefits including expansion of incentives for employment, tax breaks, low-interest loans, and various assistances. Third, government must provide companies with incentives for participation so that companies in various business areas can offer work experience. Many participants listed the expansion of participating companies and business areas as the areas to be improved. To expand participating companies, measures should be created to accommodate diverse needs of participants.

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