‘I wish to do an internship (abroad’)’:

Investigating the perceived employability of domestic and international business internships

Luisa Helena Pinto

Pedro Capa Pereira

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Pinto, Luísa Helena[1]
University of Porto, School of Economics
Rua Dr. Roberto Frias,
4200-464 Porto
Portugal
Phone: +351 225 571 100
Fax: +(351) 225 505 050
Email: lhpinto@fep.up.pt
ORCID: 0000-0001-8323-9313

Pereira, Pedro Capa
University of Porto, School of Economics
Rua Dr. Roberto Frias,
4200-464 Porto
Portugal
Phone: +351 225 571 100
Fax: +(351) 225 505 050
Email: pedro.capa.pereira@gmail.com

[1] Correspondimg author

Abstract

This study examines the perceived employability of facultative domestic and international business internships, using an experimental between-subjects factorial design. A sample of 194 Portuguese business employees rated the employability of six fictitious résumés of business graduates varying in gender and participation in a facultative internship. The résumés were target to an entry-level marketing position and were rated on a set of employability outcomes, such as job suitability, employability skills and starting salary. The results showed that the non-participation condition resulted in the worst rates of job suitability and employability skills, while the outcomes of the international and the domestic conditions were not significantly different from each other. Male-interns were the most well-ranked in job suitability and starting salary, while female non-interns were the worst ranked. This study provides evidence that an internship experience, even if facultative, is an information ´good to add´ in the résumé but does not support the prediction that 'the more international the better'. This evidence suggests that graduates' employability depends not only on the academic credentials and skills they can bring to the labour market as on the expectations about their unique contribution. This study is one of the first to empirically examine the perceived employability of facultative business internships, exploring the relevance and value of domestic and international experiences.

Keywords: perceived employability, business graduates, facultative internships, domestic internship, international internship**,** higher education

Introduction

The transition from school to work is an important career step that is easier for young people who complete higher education (HE) and engage in work-study programs (OECD 2013a). However, in the years of the economic crisis (and later) the relative advantage of these aspects has weakened, prompting graduates to seek alternatives, such as pursuing more education and engaging in international experiences (Gates, 2014). Students may gain international exposure through international business education (e.g. studying abroad, following an international curriculum and/or an exchange program) or living in a foreign country and/or engaging in experiential learning experiences (Schworm et al. 2017). Although the career impact of international business education has been documented (Schworm et al. 2017), the employability outcomes of international work-related experiences during studies were neglected. Previous attempts to address the marketability value of internships received limited empirical attention and were subject to limitations that include: (1) using internships of different scope and duration, such as curricular internships and cooperative education assignments, which prevent meaningful comparisons and integration; (2) selecting a limited set of employability outcomes, such as unemployment rate after studies, which disregard other career-related variables and employability skills. Herein, the approach of Silva et al. (2016) is used, by defining a facultative internship as an optional work-based learning experience during studies not included in the HE programs. Often, these internships include summer work or volunteering experiences, both domestically and abroad. Additionally, earlier attempts employing résumé audits with industry-relevant internships (e.g. Nunley et al. 2016) did not differentiate potential interaction effects, for instance, between the degree choice, the academic performance, the internship type and other extracurricular activities. Hence, an investigation of the perceived employability of facultative domestic and international internships is required for practical and academic reasons.

From a practical point of view, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly investing in experiential learning experiences (Schworm et al. 2017), while business students voluntarily seek work exposure through international exchange organizations, such as AIESEC (2017). However, there is no reliable evidence of the employability value of these initiatives. It may be that these learning experiences at work develop important employability skills that improve the chances of getting a job and a higher salary (Hills et al. 2003; Wilton 2012), but this is a proposition that requires further examination.

From an academic point of view, most interpretations of employability are overly agentic and neglect how getting and keeping a fulfilling job depends on the decision of several career actors. While internship experiences provide personal and professional developmental outcomes (Maertz et al. 2014) it remains unclear how a facultative domestic internship compares to an international one and influence the perception of graduates' employability (Wilton 2012). Silva and colleagues (2016), for example, in a large-scale study of Portuguese first-cycle HE programmes showed that mandatory internships and shorter internships during studies were positively associated to graduates' employment six months after graduation, and the programs that combined two or more work experiences (e.g. *thin sandwich courses*) outperformed the ones that integrated only one single internship, frequently at the end of the degree (e.g. *thick sandwich courses)*. Similarly, Silva et al. (2018) reported that off-campus learning experiences were the most efficient to reduce Portuguese graduates' unemployment rate, which could be related to the extent and type of supervision provided. Based on this evidence, it is likely that students completing a facultative internship might gain a comparative advantage in the transition to the labour market. Likewise, students gaining international work-experience might score higher in a number of employability outcomes, a proposition that requires empirical scrutiny.

To address these research gaps, this study employs an experimental between-subjects factorial design. Six fictitious résumés of young business graduates applying to an entry-level marketing position operationalize the conditions of: (a) being a female or a male graduate; and (b) having a facultative internship experience while studying (international versus domestic versus no internship). All résumés were target to the same marketing entry-level position because in this area employers recruiting new entrants rely more on their transferable skills than on the specific job knowledge (Schlee and Harich 2010). Finally, the participation of Portuguese business employees was sought so that the diversity among résumés' reviewers and organizations would increase the generalizability of the results.

The main aims of this study are threefold. Firstly, this research aims to provide additional evidence on the relevance of a facultative internship in the transition from HE to the labour market by distinguishing the impact of domestic and international experiences. Secondly, this study aims to contribute to the literature of perceived employability by showing how résumés content predict graduates' employability outcomes. Prior research involving graduates' selection and résumé audits used actual résumés and convenience samples of university recruiters. Although this approach may raise the realism of the findings (Tsai et al. 2011) it has limited control over other intervening variables (e.g. résumés' design), and therefore, provide limited comparability and generalizability. By using previously tested fictional résumés (Author 2017) varying solely in the independent variables, this study provides an empirical examination of how the engagement in a facultative internship influences a widespread perception of graduates' employability. This approach answers earlier calls to address graduates' employability in diverse cultural settings (Cole et al. 2007), and further examine the perceived value of internships in higher education (Crossman and Clarke 2010; Silva et al. 2016). Finally, this study aims to provide a methodological contribution since it is one of the few empirically controlling for the

possibility that the employability ratings might vary with the rater's characteristics (for an exception see Thoms et al. 1999). The similarity-attraction effect (Byrne 1997), which reflects the tendency to prefer similar people, provides an explanation for potential employers' preferences. As such, this study examines how respondents' demographics can explain the perceived employability of business internships, as suggested by Crossman and Clarke (2010). Such an understanding is timely, given the circumstance that the same résumé information might not be uniformly successful to secure a job interview.

Background

Graduate Employability

The term employability dates to the beginning of the twentieth century and name the probability of being employed (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005). So far, there has been little agreement on a single definition, but the multidimensionality of the concept is usually accepted. According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), "employability is about being capable of getting and keeping a fulfilling work" (…) and "move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment" (p. 1). This involves four main elements: (a) the range of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired; (b) the approach to apply them through job searching and career management skills; (c) the presentation of these skills to employers, for example through résumé writing, work experience and interviewing skills; and finally (d) the context (e.g. unemployment rate) and the external circumstances (e.g. family situation) affecting individual's efforts to find and secure a job.

Most interpretations of employability and related models (e.g. the DOTS model from Law and Watts (1977) or the USEM model from Knight and York (2004)) are overly agentic and individualized, minimizing the bounding influence of social and political factors. Relevant to this

claim is the recognition that not all employability skills are equally valued. Tymon (2013), for example, found that graduates primarily value the development of personal attributes, while employers prize the skills that are relevant for the job (Raybould and Sheedy 2005). According to Brown et al. (2003): “In this contest for jobs, a credential enables the individual to stay in the race” (…) but “the idea that the 'more you learn the more you earn' has a degree of validity as long as other people are not learning the same things, otherwise one is running to stand still” (p. 111).

In this competitive context, there has been a growing awareness among graduates that academic qualifications are insufficient for getting a job (Tomlinson 2008) and that employers are favouring individuals with technical knowledge and "soft skills" (Andrews and Higson 2008). Students are progressively adopting new employability strategies that include volunteering and engaging in facultative internships (Gates 2014). These strategies build students’ realistic expectations and develop their transferable skills (Vélez and Giner 2015); and increase graduates’ marketability through employers’ interest and preference (Knouse and Fontenot 2008).

A variety of informational cues, such as biographical data, academic credentials and extracurricular activities, have been used as sources of inference from résumé screening (Brown and Campion 1994; Cole et al. 2007; Imose and Barber 2015). However, to date, it remains largely unexamined how a facultative internship mentioned in the résumé is perceived and valued. Therefore, the present study addresses the employability of graduates from a ‘non-substantialist’ point of view (Bailly 2008) and defines perceived employability as the perception of individuals about the chances of someone getting a job and staying employed. This definition is adapted from Vanhercke et al. (2014) and highlights the subjective evaluations people do of the possibilities of securing and maintaining a job given similar personal and structural factors.

In addition to examining the job suitability and starting salary of graduates, this study singles out several employability skills (i.e. learning, interpersonal, creativity, innovation and change skills). Some reasons justify this selection. Firstly, these skills are frequently developed by work-learning experiences but have been neglected in studies addressing the marketability value of internships (Silva et al. 2016). Secondly, learning and interpersonal skills are largely influenced by HE in general (Evers and Rush 1996; Pool and Sewell 2007) and internships in particular (Crossman and Clarke 2010) so they are likely to be well-established among graduates (Evers and Rush 1996). Thirdly, these skills have been consistently valued by graduates (Andrews and Higson 2008) and managers (Evers et al. 1998) in the transition from school to the labour market (Evers and Rush 1996; Schlee and Harich 2010). Finally, prior studies (Evers et al. 1998; Cole et al. 2007; Rocha 2014; Author 2017) have not found consistent gender differences in these employability skills, which suggest that they are adequate to assess the perceived employability of entry-level candidates, especially in association with undergraduate internships (Crossman and Clarke 2010).

Despite the growing recognition that there are no gender differences in these employability skills, youth unemployment affects women more than men and gender income inequality remains high in most countries (OECD 2016b). According to the Eurostat (2018), the average gender pay gap in Europe persist, although it is generally lower for young employees. In Portugal, women (less than 25 years old) earn less eight percent on average than men (of the same age category), a gap that widens to 43% for elder workers. While this gender pay gap might increase with the career interruptions women experience during the career cycle, the income differences exist in Portugal at entry-level jobs. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: No gender differences are expected for the ratings of (a) job suitability; and (b) employability skills of the applicants to an entry-level marketing position; whereas (c) higher ratings of starting salary are expected for the male applicants.

Undergraduate Internships

The rationale for students' engagement in an internship is the opportunity for experiential learning by testing the practical relevance and limits of the contents learnt (Knouse and Fontenot 2008). Previous reviews (e.g. Maertz Jr et al. 2014; Vélez and Giner 2015) highlight the benefits of internships for different stakeholders: students, schools, and employers. Benefits for trainees include work-related outcomes (e.g. job skills), networking/employability advantages (e.g. widen awareness of career paths) and career success (e.g. lower unemployment levels, higher salaries and job satisfaction). The benefits to HEIs are also substantial in terms of visibility and reputation, since the formal assessment required to progress in the educational rankings benefit from the connections with the business community and potential funders (Maertz Jr et al. 2014). For employers, internships can also be a cost-effective strategy to facilitate the selection and socialization of new entrants, increasing organizational commitment and retention (Maertz Jr et al. 2014).

Current and ongoing debate about the employability outcomes of business internships are relevant for this investigation. Although human capital theory (Schultz 1961) asserts that education (and work-learning experiences) provide the skills and abilities relevant to future employment, the job market signalling theory (Stiglitz 1975) postulates that such experiences would signal certain characteristics and useful skills to obtain and maintain a job. For instance, Gault et al. (2000) reported higher objective outcomes (e.g. salary) and subjective career success (e.g. job and overall success) among the interns of a US public university; while Silva et al. (2016) in a large-scale study of 1.158 Portuguese first-cycle HE programs found that graduates

with work-related experiences were more likely to find a job. Similarly, Nunley et al. (2016) using experimental data from a résumé audit in the US, found that an industry-relevant internship during studies can raise the chances of a job interview. Drawing on these contributions, one would expect that a graduate presenting a résumé without an internship, even if facultative, would be perceived as less skilled and employable than a counterpart with some earlier, although short, internship experience. Given the lower career capital of non-interns a lower income would be expected too. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

H2: Higher ratings of (a) job suitability; (b) learning skills; (c) creativity, innovation and change skills; (d) interpersonal skills; and (e) starting salary are expected for the applicants who have a facultative business internship (versus those who have not such experience).

Previous research on the employability outcomes of international internships covered three main points: the learning advantages of these internships across different disciplines and occupational groups (Gates 2014; Miller and Gonzalez 2016), the motivations and expectations of graduates and employers (Albers-Miller et al. 1999) and the career outcomes of these short-term experiences (Ruhanen et al. 2013). For example, Albers-Miller et al. (1999), in a study with 69 US recruiters, explored their willingness to hire graduates distinguishing three internship forms: an internship in the US in a domestic company, an internship in the US with a foreign company and an internship in a foreign country. The results showed that most recruiters had a slight preference for students having an international internship over those who had an internship in the United States working for international or domestic companies. Interestingly, however, was the fact that 12 of the 69 recruiters surveyed showed no significant preference for any amount of international experience. Among the executives interviewed, the authors noted that international internships were considered preferable to studying abroad, but only marginally, since a true international learning experience would require a longer stay. According to Gates

(2014), international experiences including internships, study abroad, and volunteer service, might turn graduates more attractive for hiring provided they are able to highlight the benefits of these experiences to the employer. Toncar and Cudmore (2000) further noted that this participation "may not get a student hired, but it does get a student noticed" (p. 60).

Preliminary evidence from Europe shows that international business education and/or international experience are positively related to a global identity and subjective career outcomes (Schworm et al. 2017), suggesting that international experience affects cultural learning and employability. Similar findings were described by Crossman and Clarke (2010), who found that Australian employers, business academics and students, agree that international experience increases learning, cultural sensitivity and interpersonal skills, and can give 'an edge' in the initial recruitment process (p. 609). The employers inquired by Crossman and Clarke (2010) further argued that "international experience 'would really stand out on a CV' (p. 605), which is consistent with the predictions of the signalling theory (Stiglitz 1975). Therefore, résumés reporting an international internship are expected be more job suitable and reach a higher income, as follows:

H3: Higher ratings of (a) job suitability; and (b) starting salary are expected for the applicants who have a facultative international business internship (versus those who have not such experience or have a domestic internship).

In students' opinion, the benefits of engaging in an international internship include the development of professional/personal interests, the expansion of linguistic/cultural knowledge, and the acquisition of some earlier workplace and occupational experience hardly available otherwise (Gates 2014; Miller and Gonzalez 2016). Educators and employers recognize similar advantages, reporting access to more mature and flexible graduates, often more willing to travel and accept foreign assignments (Toncar and Cudmore 2000). Previous research has also reported

positive effects of studying abroad on the creative approach to solving problems, especially as this opportunity can generate unconventional ideas useful for problem solving (Cho and Morris 2015). Crossman and Clarke (2010) found similar advantages reported by Australian employers. Graduates with international experience were better able to 'learn first-hand', 'forge relationships and networks' and 'interact interculturally' (Crossman and Clarke 2010, p. 607). Therefore, one might expect that the résumés reporting an earlier engagement in an international internship would be accredited for these employability skills, so the following hypothesis is suggested:

H4: Higher ratings of (a) learning skills; (b) creativity, innovation and change skills; and (c) interpersonal skills are expected for the applicants who have a facultative international business internship (versus those who have not such experience or have a domestic internship).

Methods

Design and Participants

This study employed a 2 (applicant gender) x 3 (applicant résumé with an international versus domestic internship versus no internship) experimental between-subjects factorial design (Ellsworth 1990). An online survey was used to collect the data. It was directed to Portuguese business employees because they are often involved in the recruitment of new entrants mainly in smaller companies (Holden and Jameson 2002). Five criteria were used to target these participants: (1) be a local citizen, over 18 years old; (2) have secondary or HE; (3) be employed; (4) have workplace business experience; and (5) be willing to participate in a business graduates' employability study.

By agreeing to participate, each respondent was randomly presented one out of the six fictitious résumés of a young business graduate applying to an entry-level marketing position. Upon reading the résumé the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and provide

some additional personal data to describe the sample. To control for potential respondents' bias, all participants were asked to report gender, age, education (including international studying), occupation, actual recruiting experience and professional international contacts, and previous participation in an internship while studying. The survey, taking approximately 10 minutes to complete, was designed in Portuguese and administered through a web link. Social media (e.g. LinkedIn and Facebook) and researchers' personal contacts with potential respondents were used to first approach business employees and invite their participation.

Overall, 194 persons fitting the selection criteria completed the questionnaire. The number and characteristics of the respondents per experimental condition are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The average age was 31.48 years old and 54.1 percent of the respondents were female. Respondents were highly qualified (only 8.8 percent were not graduated) and occupied professional and managerial jobs in services (88.1 percent). Several had international experience: 73 individuals (37.6 percent) had participated in an international exchange program (e.g. Erasmus) and 55 (28.4 percent) had done a facultative international internship (e.g. AIESEC). Most respondents (56.7 percent) worked for small and median companies and had earlier recruiting practice (45.4 percent). In the current position, most subjects (57.2 percent) reported daily international contacts. No significant demographic differences were found according to company/industry provenience and occupation.

There were no significant sample differences in age, gender, education, recruitment experience, previous internships and actual international contacts for the six experimental

conditions. These results confirm that the respondents were evenly dispersed by the six experimental conditions which authorize the use of the data for further comparisons.

Stimulus Materials

For standardizing the experimental conditions, previously tested fictional résumés (Author 2017) were used, varying solely in the independent variables (gender x internship type). The résumés portrayed a male/female business graduate applying to a marketing entry-level job (Appendix 1). The layout and content were kept from Author (2017) and reflect the expected résumé information (Brown and Campion 1994; Knouse 1994). No work-experience and photo were included to prevent for potential attractiveness biases (Pegors et al. 2015). Because the academic performance and the participation in extracurricular activities influence the perceived employability of the applicants (Author 2017), all fictitious résumés reported an average academic performance of 13 out of 20 and did not mention any extra-curricular activities.

For the facultative internship conditions, it was followed the definition of Silva et al. (2016), in that "internships are facultative when students are given the possibility to choose a work-related experience" (p. 708) that is not mandatory in the study program. Three variations were designed differing in the manipulated variable: (a) having a facultative international internship; (b) having a facultative domestic internship; and (c) having no internship. Therefore, the résumés from this condition contained information regarding the nature and format of the internship: (a) an unpaid placement taking place between July and September of the previous year in the marketing department of a commercial company, respectively arranged through the youth network organization of AIESEC in the United Kingdom (UK) for the international variation; and (b) arranged in a local Portuguese company for the domestic scenario. The reasons for choosing UK as a destination for the international internship were the fact that this country is the second choice of foreign students (OECD 2013b) and the first country of emigration of the

skilled Portuguese workers (Pires et al. 2016). The use of a single destination is a potential limitation of the selected design, although the subsequent pilot tests confirmed the readability, memorability and distinguishability of the six résumés, considered adequate to portray a graduate applying to an entry-level marketing position.

Measures

Job suitability. It was measured following the Portuguese adaptation of Author (2017) for the measurement of applicant suitability from McElroy et al. (2014). The scale contained five items measuring the candidate suitability for an entry-level marketing position, using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree). Sample items included: "This applicant is a good match for the position"; "This person has a good chance of making a 'short list' of candidates for this position"; ''I would not hire this person for this position'' (reverse coded). In this study the reliability of the scale was .89, which compares well with earlier findings (.86 according to Author, 2017).

Learning skills. Evers and Rush (1996) operationalized this basic skill using a 2-item scale also adapted to Portuguese by Rocha (2014). This variable measures the degree to which the job applicant is competent to: "Keeping up-to-date on developments in the (professional) field" and "Gaining new knowledge from everyday experiences". A 5-point Likert response scale format was used (1 = very low competence/ability level; 5 = very high competence/ability level). The Cronbach alpha for the scale was .84, which is considered good and higher than the original (α =.67) from Evers et al. (1998). Following Eisinga, Grotenhuis and Pelzer (2013) recommendations the Spearman-Brown coefficient was also computed (0.841) thus confirming that this scale has a good reliability.

Interpersonal skills. This variable drawn from Evers and Rush (1996) measures how well the individual would relate to superiors, fellow employees, subordinates and others. The

Portuguese adaptation of Rocha (2014) was used, employing the aforementioned 5-point Likert response scale. The original reliability of the five items scale was .80 (Evers et al. 1998) whereas in this study was .96, which is considered very good and supports its use.

Creativity, innovation and change skills. This variable was measured following the Portuguese adaptation of Rocha (2014) for the corresponding five-item scale of Evers et al. (1998). Sample items include: "Providing novel solutions to problems"; "Adapting to situations of change" or "Initiating change to enhance productivity". The same 5-point Likert scale was used. The reliability for this sample was .89 which is good and higher than the original (.82 according to Evers et al. 1998).

Starting Salary. This variable measured respondents' estimates of the starting salary for the applicant given his/her credentials and the target job. Respondents were asked to report a gross monthly salary in Euros.

Other measures. All subjects were asked about their age, gender, education, recruiting experience, earlier international studying, participation in internships while studying, and actual professional international contacts, to control for potential respondents' biases related to biographic similarities with the target (Byrne 1997). Age was computed in years. Gender was dummy-coded (0 = Female; 1 = Male), as well as Education (0 = Less than higher education; 1 = higher education). Recruiting experience and international studying were dummy-coded (1 = Yes; 0 = No). Finally, earlier participation in an international facultative internship was also dummy-coded as well as actual professional international contacts (Yes = 1; No = 0).

Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics for the main variables within each experimental condition were computed before testing the hypotheses. To determine whether the sample characteristics were

evenly dispersed several analyses of variance (one-way ANOVA) were run confirming the adequacy of the experimental manipulation.

Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent variables per experimental condition. The data indicate higher means than the mid-point scales, which reflect the high perceived job suitability and employability skills of the candidates.

Insert Table 2 about here

Next, Pearson correlations among the main study variables appear in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Subsequent multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) were performed to detect mean differences across the six experimental conditions for each dependent variable: (a) job suitability, (b) starting salary, (c) learning skills, (d) creativity, innovation and change skills, and (e) interpersonal skills. Levene's test for equality of error variance and Box's test of equality of covariance matrices were computed and were non-significant for most dependent variables. The homogeneity of variances tested by Levene's test was violated in two cases; the error variance was unequal by the international internship condition for the dimension of job suitability (F = 4.689; df =1; p = .032) and by the control condition (no internship) for the same dependent variable (F = 6.155; df =1; p = .014). As none of the largest standard deviations of these variables (Table 2) were more than four times the size of the corresponding smallest, the ANOVA was considered robust (Howell 2007). Given that among respondents' demographics,

only respondents' age was significantly associated with the criterion variables (Table 3) it entered in the ANOVA as the sole covariate. Table 4 summarizes the multivariate analyses of covariance and the values presented refer to the corrected model. The partial Eta square (η_p^2) are used to report the effect sizes obtained for the overall model considering that a partial Eta squared of 0.0099 is small, of 0.0588 is moderate, and of 0.1379 is large (Richardson 2011).

Insert Table 4 about here

Hypothesis 1 predicted no gender differences when respondents rate (a) the job suitability, and (b) the employability skills of the applicants to an entry-level marketing position; whereas (c) the male résumé conditions were expected to be rated higher regarding the starting salary. The results shown in Table 4 support hypothesis H1a and H1b, but not H1c. While male résumés obtained higher values than female résumés, this statistically significant difference was entirely explained by the age of the respondents ($\beta = 5.185$; $t\ (101) = 2.358$, $p < .05$), as only older respondents assigned higher starting wages to male candidates.

Hypothesis 2 predicted higher ratings of: (a) job suitability; (b) learning skills; (c) creativity, innovation and change skills; (d) interpersonal skills; and (e) starting salary for the applicants with a facultative business internship. As observed, the results support the predicted effects. The average differences between the interns and the non-interns were statistically significant for all dependent variables (respectively $F\ (1,191) = 9.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$, for job suitability; $F\ (1,191) = 4.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$, for starting salary; $F\ (1,191) = 6.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$, for the learning skills; $F\ (1,191) = 6.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$ for the creativity, innovation and change skills; and $F\ (1,191) = 2.88$, $p = .058$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$ for interpersonal skills). Separate post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test for detecting multiple differences across

groups confirm these findings, revealing that non-interns, respectively conditions E and F, scored significantly lower in all dependent variables and did not score differently among them. These findings support H2 and confirm that the résumés mentioning a facultative internship are more employable.

Hypothesis 3 predicted higher ratings of (a) job suitability; and (b) starting salary for the applicants who have a facultative international business internship (versus those who have not such experience or have a domestic internship). Following Table 4, the résumés of graduates with an international internship scored significantly higher in both dependent variables (respectively F (1,191) = 4.69, p <.001, η_p^2 = 0.05, for job suitability; and F (1,191) = 3.39, p <.05, η_p^2 = 0.03, for starting salary). Regarding the starting salary, international interns attained higher salaries than the remaining conditions, an effect entirely explained by the age of the respondents (β = 5.185; t (101) = 2.358, p < .05), as older respondents assigned higher starting wages to these résumés. Post-hoc comparison tests confirmed that the résumés reporting an international internship (conditions A and C) scored significantly higher in job suitability but only against the non-intern's candidates (conditions E and F) (M_{diff} =0.83; SD =.19, p = 0.000). These findings do not support hypothesis H3 as the job suitability and the starting salary of candidates who reported an international internship are similar to those who reported a domestic one.

Hypothesis 4 stated that taking a facultative international business internship would provide higher ratings of: (a) learning skills; (b) creativity, innovation and change skills; and (c) interpersonal skills. As shown in Table 4, the main effects of an international internship were significant for learning skills (F (1,191) = 4.23, p < .01, η_p^2 = 0.04), for creativity, innovation and change skills (F (1, 191) = 3.43, p < .01; η_p^2 =0.04) and for interpersonal skills (F (1,191) = 4.93, p = .01, η_p^2 = 0.05). Consistently, post hoc comparison HSD Tukey's tests revealed that the

international internship conditions scored significantly higher in all employability skills but only against the control conditions of non-interns (respectively M_{diff} =0.42; SD =.12, $p < .001$ for learning skills; M_{diff} = 0.39; SD =.11, $p < .001$; for creativity, innovation and change skills; and M_{diff} = 0.36; SD =.11, $p < .001$ for interpersonal skills). This result partially supports hypothesis H4 since no differences were found against the domestic internship conditions. Despite the predictions, résumés reporting an international internship scored higher in employability skills but only against non-interns.

While it was not hypothesized, Table 4 displays significant interaction effects between gender and internship. Male interns scored higher than all counterparts in job suitability (F (1,191) = 3.23, p <.05, η_p^2 = 0.03) and the reverse occurred for female non-interns (respectively F (1,191) = 7.81, p <.001, η_p^2 = 0.08). Regarding starting salary, male interns earn a higher income than all other applicants (F (1,191) = 5.66, p <.001, η_p^2 = 0.06), including female interns. Income differences for the remaining conditions (male and female non-interns) were significant but entirely explained by respondents age. As displayed in Figure 1, male graduates are especially favoured when they engage in a facultative internship (i.e. they are more job suitable and earn more), while female graduates are derogated when they do not (i.e. they are less job-suitable).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Discussion

The current study extends earlier research by empirically examining the perceived employability of facultative domestic and international business internships. Subjects rated one

of six fictitious résumés randomly arranged within a 2 (gender) x 3 (internship type) factorial design that tested the main and the interaction effects of the independent variables.

Consistent to predictions, no gender differences were found in the degree to which male and female candidates were perceived as adequate and skilled for the target job, which corroborate earlier studies (Cole et al. 2007; Author 2017). However, interaction effects showed that male interns were more job suitable and earned more, while female non-interns were especially downgraded in terms of job suitability. This finding resonates earlier results from a longitudinal UK survey (Wilton 2012), which showed that taking a job placement provided male graduates with higher earnings. In this study, female interns earned a higher starting salary compared to non-interns but lower than male interns, which confirm that the gender pay gap starts early in the working life (OECD 2013a; Ellemers 2018). In this study, non-interns scored significantly lower in all employability outcomes, which support earlier findings with mandatory internship programs (Gault et al. 2010; Silva et al. 2018).

Interestingly, an international facultative internship does not offer any distinctiveness against a domestic one nor does it increase the chances of a job interview. Although unexpected, this is consistent with the findings reported by Albers-Miller et al. (1999) who showed that, despite the personal benefits of engaging in an international internship, such involvement may not foster graduates' employability. This is also consistent with former concerns about the potential of certain labour markets to reward graduates with higher employment prospects and higher earnings (OECD 2016a). These findings can also be explained by the signalling theory (Stiglitz 1975), since the development of employability skills during an international internship, particularly if it is facultative, may go unnoticed and be socially ignored, failing to ensure graduates' success in the labour market.

The first original contribution of this study is the empirical examination of the perceived employability of facultative domestic and international business internships in HE. Overall, the findings provide a deeper understanding of this issue. On one hand the absence of a facultative internship decreases the perceived employability of business graduates and constrains the chances of getting a job after college, mainly for women. On the other hand, an international internship does not pay-off since it does not increase the perceived job suitability and income of these graduates nor the significance of their employability skills. Engaging in an internship while studying, even if facultative, is an information 'good to add' in the résumé that can secure a job interview and a higher salary, but 'the more international' is not the better. Apparently, the importance of having done a facultative internship far exceeds the worth of an international experience, at least for a marketing entry-level job. It remains unclear whether similar results would be observed for other destinations, longer experiences, and for jobs with a wider international reach. Future research might further explore these aspects.

A second contribution of this study is the confirmation that the same résumé content is not uniformly successful to secure a job interview, which validates the adequacy of a psychological approach to the study of employability (Vanhercke et al. 2014). Following the desire to gain distinctiveness in the labour market, graduates have been expanding or affirming potential career directions through short-term international facultative experiences (Gates 2014) that actually do not provide employability gains. As shown, the chances of securing a job and attain a higher income begin with people's subjective beliefs about the candidate (i.e. gender) and the value of certain credentials (i.e. internship). Future research might explore which internship features are most valued in finding and securing employment as well as the reasons for different gender outcomes.

Finally, this study adds a methodological contribution. The use of an experimental design and the procedure of employing standard fictitious résumés varying solely in the independent variables are key requirements to ascertain that the observed effects can be traced back to the experimental manipulation (i.e. résumés variations). This study also tested how employers' characteristics affect the employability ratings of graduates influencing their chances of getting a job. It seems that older Portuguese workers expect a greater gender pay gap, a relationship that might be examined in other contexts and for other work-related experiences.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has also some limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the set of 'generic' skills employed to rate graduates' employability is limited and was chosen to apply equally to all résumés' variations. However, the selection of other transferable skills also developed during international studies, such as critical-thinking, self-confidence, intercultural competence, visioning and risk-taking (Crossman and Clarke 2010) can help discern the employability outcomes of international internships. For practical reasons and given the actual number of experimental conditions, the same entry-level position was used for all résumés' variations, which may have limited the perception of the positive outcomes of an international internship. Thus, future research might explore the interplay between the résumés' information when candidates apply to a domestic versus international position, for which distinct employability skills might be expected.

Secondly, the résumé ratters were all Portuguese business employees, having workplace experience as well as some recruiting practice and actual professional international contacts. Although the findings are not generalizable outside this cultural setting and to other occupational groups, the résumés' variations were comprehensive enough to test the effects of the independent variables across a variety of organizations. Future research might examine how other résumé

evaluators appraise the employability outcomes of business internships, for instance distinguishing these experiences by duration, scope, accreditation, destination and content. While an internship in UK was meant to be plausible and relevant given the increasing number of skilled Portuguese relocating to the country, less familiar destinations might better capture the learning benefits and potential employability advantages of international internships.

Finally, future research can extend our understanding of the career developments following the engagement in a facultative business internship. If, the employability outcomes of a domestic and an international internship do not differ, graduates are likely to use other self-promotion and impression management tactics in résumé-writing to increase fit perceptions, which requires further scrutiny. Likewise, if non-interns are less job suited and skilled for an entry-level job, especially women, they are likely to receive fewer calls for a job-related interview. Because they are less likely to advance in the selection process, women are expected to find less skilled and less paid jobs. Given that inferences about the employability of graduates may be independent of academic credentials, the implications for career success are significant. Knowing how these earliest inferences made from the résumé's content interact with subsequent career outcomes are, therefore, timely and pertinent.

Managerial Relevance

From a practical standpoint, this research has implications for HEIs, employers and business graduates. A practical implication for HEIs is the need to build a wider range of networks to shape the expectations of a larger audience, including employers, for the nature and scope of the skills developed through HE studies. An extensive recognition of the quality of the studies provided and the quality of the graduates is required to strengthen youth employability. As shown, graduates' employability depends not only on the academic credentials and skills they can bring to the labour market as on a more realistic set of expectations about their unique

contribution. Thus, HEIs can contribute to boost graduates' employment by designing and implementing facultative work-related experiences, in addition to curricula, with recognizable employability benefits. For employers and business persons in general, the findings suggest that the employability of graduates is subject to common beliefs about their quality (or lack of) and the value of their skills, which are often inferred from partial or inaccurate information. Instead of judging individuals on their own credentials, people frequently rely on group-based expectations and often reproduce a gender pay gap that begins early in the career. This bias puts the female graduates in a difficult position that is further amplified when they do not engage in an internship. Since gender stereotypes are difficult to change (Ellemers, 2018), employers and recruiters are urged to acknowledge and combat their pervasive negative effects. Finally, for business students, the findings confirm that a facultative internship during studies is an information 'good to add' in the résumé since those who leave college without an internship, even if facultative, have lower perceived employability. In the transition to an increasingly competitive job market this is still a valuable approach.

Conclusion

Given the importance of further deepening the understanding of the career impact of business internships, this research investigated the relationship between gender and participation in a facultative domestic or international internship on the perceived employability of business graduates. The results confirm the social relevance of mentioning a work-learning experience in the résumé but do not support the prediction that 'the more international the better'. In some career settings, the 'grass is not greener abroad' and the participation in international facultative activities does not grant employability distinctiveness.

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Table 1

Sample demographics per experimental condition

Experimental Condition	*N*	Gender		Age		Education		Earlier INTST	Earlier INTINT	Earlier Recruiting Experience	Professional International Contacts
		Male	Female	M	SD	< HE	HE				
Condition A (Male x International Internship)	31	35.50%	64.50%	33.65	2.74	9.70%	90.30%	35.50%	29.00%	35.50%	54.80%
Condition B (Male x National Internship)	30	53.30%	46.70%	33.07	2.25	16.70%	83.30%	36.70%	26.70%	36.70%	50.00%
Condition C (Female x International Internship)	39	51.30%	48.70%	32.85	1.60	2.60%	97.40%	38.50%	33.30%	56.40%	71.80%
Condition D (Female x National Internship)	31	58.10%	41.90%	29.32	1.84	9.70%	90.30%	25.80%	22.60%	58.10%	38.70%
Condition E (Male x No Internship)	31	35.50%	64.50%	31.61	2.02	6.50%	93.50%	48.40%	29.00%	48.40%	64.50%
Condition F (Female x No Internship)	32	40.60%	59.40%	28.22	1.33	9.40%	90.60%	40.60%	28.10%	34.40%	59.40%
Overall Sample	194	45.90%	54.10%	31.48	11.30	8.80%	91.20%	37.60%	28.40%	45.40%	57.20%

Notes: HE - Higher Education; INTST - International studying; INTINT - International Internship

Notes. HE - Higher Education; INTST - International studying; INTINT – International Internship.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics per experimental condition

Experimental Condition	*N*	Job Suitability		Starting Salary		Learning Skills		Creativity, Innovation and Change skills		Interpersonal Skills	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Condition A (Male x International Internship)	31	5.37	0.82	979.84	55.87	3.71	0.68	3.56	0.57	3.57	0.70
Condition B (Male x National Internship)	30	5.25	1.12	979.57	128.56	3.68	0.66	3.41	0.48	3.31	0.56
Condition C (Female x International Internship)	39	5.28	1.13	884.21	33.69	3.74	0.64	3.40	0.64	3.57	0.72
Condition D (Female x National Internship)	31	5.05	1.05	873.23	37.23	3.52	0.75	3.39	0.67	3.34	0.50
Condition E (Male x No Internship)	31	4.73	1.17	798.39	30.28	3.31	0.63	3.09	0.68	3.18	0.72
Condition F (Female x No Internship)	32	4.31	1.22	828.44	36.76	3.33	0.87	3.11	0.65	3.26	0.70
Overall Sample	194	5.01	1.15	889.13	347.08	3.56	0.72	3.33	0.64	3.38	0.67

Notes. Starting Salary — gross monthly salary in Euros.

Table 3

Correlations Among Key Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	31.48	11.30		0.04	-0.07	-0.02	0.04	0.18*
2. Job Suitability	5.01	1.15			0.47**	0.47**	0.33**	0.10
3. Learning skills	3.56	0.72				0.74**	0.59**	0.03
4. Creativity, Innovation and Change skills	3.33	0.64					0.67**	0.12
5. Interpersonal skills	3.38	0.67						0.14*
6. Starting Salary	889.13	347.08						

Notes. Starting Salary is in gross monthly euros.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. $n = 194$

Table 4

Summary of the MANCOVA results for all dependent variables after incorporating the demographic variable of the participants' age as covariate.

Effects Between Conditions	*N*	Job Suitability						Starting Salary						Learning skills						Creativity, Innovation and Change skills						Interpersonal skills					
		M	SD	*F*	*df*	*p*	η_p^2	M	SD	*F*	*df*	*p*	η_p^2	M	SD	*F*	*df*	*p*	η_p^2	M	SD	*F*	*df*	*p*	η_p^2	M	SD	*F*	*df*	*p*	η_p^2
Effects of Gender																															
Male (Conditions A, B, E)	92	5.12	1.07	0.85	2	0.43	0.01	918.61	454.66	3.43	2	0.03*	0.04	3.57	0.68	0.44	2	0.64	0.01	3.35	0.61	0.15	2	0.86	0.00	3.35	0.68	0.36	2	0.70	0.00
Female (Conditions C, D, F)	102	4.92	1.21					862.55	206.02					3.55	0.77					3.32	0.67					3.41	0.66				
Effects of Internship																															
International (Conditions A, C)	70	5.34	1.00	4.69	2	0.01**	0.05	925.36	260.17	3.39	2	0.04*	0.03	3.74	0.66	4.23	2	0.02*	0.04	3.49	0.62	3.43	2	0.04*	0.04	3.58	0.70	4.93	2	0.01**	0.05
National (Conditions B, D)	61	5.15	1.08	0.85	2	0.43	0.01	925.52	513.83	3.61	2	0.03*	0.04	3.60	0.71	0.55	2	0.58	0.01	3.40	0.58	0.51	2	0.60	0.01	3.32	0.53	0.49	2	0.61	0.01
None (Conditions E, F)	63	4.51	1.20	9.64	2	0.00***	0.09	813.65	188.67	4.92	2	0.01**	0.05	3.32	0.75	6.17	2	0.00**	0.06	3.10	0.66	6.86	2	0.00***	0.07	3.22	0.71	2.88	2	0.058$^+$	0.03
Effects of Gender x Internship																															
Male x Internship (Condition A, B)	61	5.31	0.97	3.23	2	0.04*	0.03	979.70	536.70	5.66	2	0.00**	0.06	3.70	0.67	2.33	2	0.10	0.02	3.49	0.53	2.78	2	0.07	0.03	3.44	0.64	0.50	2	0.61	0.01
Female x Internship (Condition C, D)	70	5.20	1.10	1.63	2	0.20	0.02	878.14	204.74	3.08	2	0.05*	0.03	3.65	0.70	1.31	2	0.27	0.01	3.41	0.66	0.84	2	0.44	0.01	3.47	0.63	1.25	2	0.29	0.01
Male x No Internship (Condition E)	31	4.73	1.17	1.32	2	0.27	0.01	798.39	168.56	4.41	2	0.01**	0.04	3.31	0.63	2.66	2	0.07	0.03	3.09	0.68	2.74	2	0.07	0.03	3.18	0.72	1.87	2	0.16	0.02
Female x No Internship (Condition F)	32	4.31	1.22	7.81	2	0.00***	0.08	828.44	207.93	3.36	2	0.04*	0.03	3.33	0.87	2.64	2	0.07	0.03	3.11	0.65	2.63	2	0.08	0.03	3.26	0.70	0.78	2	0.46	0.01

Notes. Values refer to the corrected model. There were significant positive effects of age (as covariate) in the multivarate tests for the dependent variable of starting salary.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001