

# **Developing skills via practical training: the Algerian Business Students' Experience**

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**Universiti Utara Malaysia**

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# **Developing skills via practical training: The Algerian business students' experience**

**A thesis submitted to the graduate school in partial  
Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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**Universiti Utara Malaysia**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to evaluate the development of important set of skills during a period of practical training within Algerian business master. It discusses the practical training within higher education with its benefits. A questionnaire-based survey was administrated to business master students at University Farhat Abbas-Setif (UFAS). A comparison between three departments was been done. As a result, the students agreed that they were effective in developing a set of skills.

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## **DEDICATION**

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## **LIST OF ABREVIATIONS**

**APRM**= African Peer Review Mechanism

**CD**= Commerce Department

**ED**= Economic Department

**LMD**= Licence, Master, Doctora

**MD**= Management Department

**UFAS** = Universiti Farhat Abbas –Setif

**HEIs**= Higher Education Institutions

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Practical training is one of work experience placement that is still be used by many universities and higher education institutions (HEIs). It can be identified as an established academic and business practice observed by students in an organization within a given period (Ellis, 2000). It is also known as "co-operative education" or "internship". The aim of most tertiary institutions is how to make high employable students who are ready for working life and any failure in equipping them with employability skills has far-reaching effects (Bhaerman & Spill, 1988; Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2003; Cotton, 1993; NSF, n.d.). Most of the institutions organize and promote the placement of students in both private and public sectors in order to develop student's work experience. As a result, the necessary skills will be attained by those students to supplement their theoretical training. Moreover, practical training provides real life experiences based on industry demands and hands-on learning needed to rekindle skills and update their knowledge (Harris & Zhao, 2004). For many reasons, studies on graduates' employability are very important specifically in developing countries where studies of this kind are not sufficient (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). It is contended that demand on employability skills and working patterns that graduates can join, are needed to be identified by the tertiary institutions. For that reason, studies on this area are clearly needed.

Second, knowing how gender differences of students can affect them in attaining employability skills during practical training period (Nabi & Bagley, 1998).

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

As mentioned earlier, studies on development of transferable skills are needed in many developing countries, and Algeria is no exception. Algeria is one of the countries that are transferring its higher education system in order to produce a higher quality students required by employers. Currently Algeria produces 100 000 university graduates per annum. The total number of students in higher and university education is close to 1 million to day and it is estimated to be around 1.4 million by the end of the decade (APRM, 2007).There are many challenges facing Algerian higher education as it was mentioned in the report that has been edited by APRM on Algeria which are how to ensure modernity in its education system in terms of its programs and the way of teaching. As well as, how to provide high quality training for labour market's demand in order to reduce the large number of unemployed graduates and to equip students with necessary skills for competition in the quasi-global labour market and to reduce the risk of brain drain phenomenon.

As a result, the 'license, master and doctora' (LMD) system in that can be translated as degree, master and PhD, has been introduced in Algeria in the year 2004-2005, in order to make the equivalence of diplomas "guaranteed " and to locate the LMD project in the economic and social development. Consideration also has been given to potential jobs for graduates by making them highly employable. Practical training is one of the tools that have been used to achieve this objective.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The research questions of this study are;

1. What were the students' reasons for going to university and how the students consider the possibility of undertaking a practical training?
2. What is the students' perception on the benefits of practical training?
3. To what extent does a set of skills can be developed during practical training period?

## **1.3 Research objectives**

The study is aimed at achieving the following objectives;

1. to determine the students perceptions towards the benefits of acquiring university education.
2. to determine the students' perceptions towards the benefits for undertaking practical training.
3. to identify the set of skills that can be developed by business student during the practical training.

## **1.4 Scope and Research Limitations**

Based on the context mentioned above, this study is conducted on graduate students of college of business at University Farhat Abbas-Setif(UFAS) Algeria.

This study is meant to expand the insight of employability skills of business students in Algeria by exploring the development of some selected skills during the period of practical training and their perceptions on its benefits.

Due to time constraint, this study covered only business students at one university. However the study couldn't cover lecturers' and supervisors' perceptions on the development of skills and the benefits of practical training.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

Finding of this study gives insights into the successful development of variety of transferable skills during practical training in students. Also the study provides an insight on business students' perceptions on skills acquisition and development in developing countries, specifically Algeria. However, by comparing the data from students in the three departments additional insight on the issue can be gained.

### **1.6 Organization of the paper**

The reminder of this study is as follows: first it will introduce the study. Chapter two discusses prior studies. Then it is followed by the discussion on chapter three. The presentation of results will be covered in chapter four. Chapter five will include discussion on the results with conclusion and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

There are many prior studies have been done on Work experience which can take many forms, e.g. work placements, work-based project, part time work, voluntary work, practical training/ internship, sandwich placements and its advantage in developing certain employability skills. Based on the research objectives mentioned in chapter one the remainder of this chapter has been shown below:

#### **2.2 Practical Training and Reasons for Going to University**

Career is a result of interplay between individuals within organizational and social structures, it yields well to analyse from diverse perspectives ranging from occupational psychology to organizational sociology. Career choice is a complex phenomenon that can be better appreciated through a study of its key components. The concise Oxford dictionary defines 'career' as a course or progress through life, which is a wide explanation (Corfield, 1995). Career success is increasingly being seen as those careers that are being managed by the individual ensuring that they promote their capabilities and skills in the marketplace while still maintaining a balance between their work, family and personal needs (Simonson, 2000, Greenhaus et al., 2000).

According to De la Harpe et al.,( 2000); Medhat, (2003) the employers perceive that universities or all the tertiary institutions have to play the main role in preparing students for working life, students and their parents as well as guardians are using the published destination tables as a measure of a university's success in achieving employable graduates, so employability become a big issue for universities (Cox & King, 2006). The prime motivation in attending university for the majority of students is not to study a particular subject in depth, but to enhance their employment prospects (Stewart & Knowles, 2000). In the one hand, when student decide to pursue his education rather than of joining work force means no income could be earned during the time of study and incurring the fees, on the other hand, it can be seen as a good decision in the expectation of later increase in earnings (Woodley, 2001).

Students have to be aware of how their employability skills and why are being developed, at the same time they have to recognize the importance of the approach. Then, they will be more responsible and take ownership of these initiatives, as a result, far more chance for success (Gammie et al., 2002). Producing employable graduates is becoming more important and more complex, at the same time the number of graduates diverse in age, social and motivation is expanding faster than the market. Usually students leave universities with a good knowledge of the subjects they studied during the previous few years (Cottrell, 2003). Although, these skills still not enough or fully meet labour market requirements and Graduates still need to develop their personal and professional skills relevant to this market in order to improve their chances of employment. This is because employers are looking for graduates, who have developed generic skills in many areas.

At the same time they want them with relevant subject skills, knowledge and understanding (Harvey et al., 1997). In addition, universities have a big responsibility toward students' need to take an advantage of the opportunity to develop these skills during work placement or practical training, as well as, employers who are demanding the skills are responsible for employee's development of employment skills (Raybould & Sheedy, 2005).

### **2.3 Terminology**

Employability skills and career can be called “workplace know-how skills” or “workplace basics” (Hollenbeck, 1994). Education is not like training, just as employability is not the same as employment. In this context, employability has been defined as: “a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Moreland, 2006). Therefore, Hillage and Pollard (1998) define employability as the ability to “gain initial employment”, “maintain employment” and “obtain new employment” and it has been posited that a more appropriate definition of employability is “the relative chances of acquiring and maintaining different kinds of employment” (Brown et al., 2003).

Milne (2000) describes student employability as “capabilities students develop at university that go beyond content” and increase the “chances of acquiring and maintaining different types of employment. Thus, Hillage and Pollard (1998) suggest that: In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work.

More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment. However, policy-makers defined employability as “a characteristic of the individual” (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). This definition has been criticized for promoting an overly simplistic definition and fails to recognize the “duality of employability”, which incorporates the important role played by economic conditions when the most highly skilled individual can become “unemployable” during times of economic crisis (Baker, 2010).

An employable person has set of skills, understanding and personnel attributions that make him/her more successful and more likely to secure the appropriate job to the benefit of many parts, him/her, the community of workers, and the community in general and the economy (Knight & Yorke, 2004). These employability skills include interpersonal attributes (i.e. teamwork, abilities and communication) and personal abilities (i.e. knowledge, intellect, self motivation and self-reliance, willingness to learn, flexibility etc.)(Harvey, 2000). So employability for graduates means that they have a set of skills such as knowledge, understanding, and personnel attributes, these skills make them able to acquire a job appropriate to their educational standard. Then they can choose and secure the job in which they can be satisfied and successful (Dearing, 1997). Furthermore, the development of these skills requires the involvement of a large number of individuals who must be closely involved from the offset; for their important insight into employability, careers advisers need to be participated to the design and implementation of any initiative; and, at the end, to ensure that there is the influence to embed any skills initiative, at the same time senior management must also be “on board” (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Stewart & Knowles, 1998).

Employability has four main elements: The first one ‘employability assets ‘of persons which are their knowledge attitudes and skills. Secondly employment consists of career management skills. Thirdly “job getting skills” for example work experience, CV writing and interview. Finally, personnel circumstances like family responsibilities and an external factors like the mean level of opportunity within the labour market (Cox & King, 2006).

## **2.1 Practical Training within Higher Education**

The interconnections between the worlds of academia and work have been evolved during the twentieth century especially in higher education (HE) that has been expanded in that time (Teichler & Kehm, 1995). The relationship between academia and industry are described by Neumann and Banghart (2001), as a “gap to be bridged “. Higher education (HE) institutes attempt to bridge this gap through a variety of methods by involving employers in the assessment of courses after the design and delivery of those courses. The cooperation among academic world and vocational world is very important and highly needed. In the agenda for tertiary institutions in the UK and based on a successive reports have stressed the need for high employable manpower (RAE, 2007). As well as, the trends that are happening in the world of work and higher education, though it is very different, for that reason are increasingly being encouraged to develop links. French (1993) argued that such links are required for enhancing what students learn. In general and from his view, ““educational institutions” teach you how to learn from your life, but “real life” itself, actual experience. Practice is the most important

thing that the graduates need in their working life which is defined by Saunders (1995) as “a way of doing something, the pattern of which is reproduced in a social context”.

Now the labour market demands on capabilities requirements of students and skills level increase, hence a competition increase for employment opportunities. Higher education is the more responsible for preparing students for the workforce and it should be more active for doing that. The key for the best preparing for students and managing their career expectations for work and how they can face future changes and challenges in labour market after finishing their studies is the emphasis on a collective approach from higher education and industry to provide structured programs to enhance the employability and effectiveness of students when they enter the workforce. Which is considered the best investment for managing stable transition of employment skills from the practice of lifelong learning techniques. Additionally, a direct link among learning and working life experience could be explored more on how this can be developed, optimised and operationalized as part of work-based programmes of study (Ester & Nicola, 2009). Parliament Trust’s study group and industry in UK reported that graduates who are coming to the labour market have less quality and the improvement of this quality can be met only through cooperation and partnership of stakeholders (guardians, educators, employers and government) (Clarke, 1997). An empirical study was done on the unemployment in Greek by Mihail (2006), where he found the percentage of unemployment is very high among graduates; hence the ministry of higher education launched a program of internship with different organizations ranging from two to six months in order to improve transferable skills of students.

This process enables students to identify their objectives and clarify which skills are lacking and to devise ways of developing these skills over the time of their training (Nabi & Bagley, 1999). Throughout professional life and the initial career decision Graduate attitudes and skills are factors which should be nurtured (Littlejohn & Waston, 2004). In fact, many developed countries focus on how to equip students with the required skills to be ready for working life, for instance, in 1980 British government made a program in order to improve Britain's economic performance by increasing number of young people entering post compulsory education and improve professional skills of workforce (Lenton, 2008).

Boyle and Crosby (1997) suggest that for adequate evaluation of the quality of educational programs Internship should be required for both faculty and students. The small and medium firms SMEs expectations are that the universities have to make graduates who are considered as its finished product able to make an immediate contribution. For SMEs without development infrastructure and training, a mismatch in expectations will be held between what the universities are doing to prepare the graduates for working life and what the SMEs want. In contrast, Larger firms have more capabilities to take the generic skills of the graduate and equip them with the more required and specific skills that the larger firms want (Woods & Dennis, 2009). There are many changes in employment patterns which have reinforced the idea of employment skills as transferable skills, for example, in case of downsizing the workforce within firms, people who still work are required to attend a wider range of tasks, as well as the needs of customers require more flexibility from employees (Fallows & Steven, 2000).

IT skills; proficiency in networking and team working; readiness to explore and create opportunities and willingness to learn" (Raybould & Sheedy, 2005). In addition, Watson (2002) mentioned that there are many skills that are required for an effective team, such as planning and goal setting, record keeping, time management and organization, the ability to lead, to communicate and to make decision. Zinser (2003) categorize these skills into three categories as follows: academic, technical and social skills which include some challenges such as global economy, a high technology, and increasing social diversity. The most skills learned by students during their academic career are technical skills which refer to content-specific knowledge of studied subjects or within particular discipline like computer science or economics. However, non-technical skills are those skills that can be obtained through working or training in different jobs or professions (Sherer & Eadie, 1987). Enhancement of these skills is not solely the outcome of attending training courses. But the combination of learning and development approaches can be beneficial, whilst both are seeking to improve employability skills. In fact, many skills will be developed via practical training that was provided by universities. Many universities organize and promote the placement of students in private sector or public sector; as a result of which students will obtain necessary skills such as time management, communication skills, team work, and ability to prioritize tasks and specialised knowledge during their years of study (Mihail, 2006). Now many skills are considered as requirements like market skills, time management skills, communication skills and better self confidence (Gill & Lashine, 2003; Dennis, 1996).

Eraut (1990) determined six types of knowledge which can be arguably be developed at the time of doing work placement : situational knowledge (how to read real -life

situations), knowledge of practice, knowledge of people , conceptual knowledge, process knowledge or knowledge of specific techniques, and control knowledge such as time management ,self management ,and problem-solving skills. Lucas and Tan (2007) found that student's reflective capacity can be developed by work-based placement learning. The four groups (male students, female, lecturers and employers) which have been chosen for collecting data on the importance of employability skills that was conducted by Wicramasinghe & Perera, (2010), identified Problem solving, self-confidence, and team work as important requirements, therefore, university lecturers identified communication as important while male identified creative and innovative thinking as important requirements. Work placement and academic study can develop a different range of skills to different extents. On the one hand, Subject skills are more relevant to ones career. On the other hand, transferable skills used within any stage and any profession, which refer to certain abilities of individual and can transfer form one role of doing a job to another (Cox & King, 2006). In contrast, subject skills alone are not sufficient for fresh graduate to be ready for working life and to meet employers' requirements. They need to gain transferable skills in order to enhance their chance of being successful. Also the graduate ability to deal with information and communicate it effectively is more important than subject skills that were studied by graduate from some employers' perspective (Knight & Yorke, 2002; LIRNEasia, 2006). The education's skills and experience relate positively to employability and low levels of human resource (HR) have a direct impact on employability (Tome, 2007).

However, Arnold et al., (1999) said that work placement could develop some skills more effectively than academic study and the ability of higher education to successfully foster

transferable skills within the academic curriculum has been questioned (Kemp & Seagraves, 1995), and work placement can be viewed as an alternative locus for such role (Cox & King, 2006; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Harvey et al., 1997; Warn & Tranter, 2001)). Therefore, Buck & Barrick (1987) state that an employer looks to an employee as an asset through his/her technical competence; hence he requires certain employability skills. However, Atkins (1999) mentioned that the region, the market orientation of the business and its size make no sense to the common set of skills that employers require graduates to have and to develop. The world of employment is changing quickly, experience and established practice have been made irrelevant and traditional career paths have been disappeared by new technologies (Clarke, 2008; Fallows & Steven, 2000). For that reason increasingly, specific occupational skills are not more important than graduates attributes (Busse, 1992; Cotton, 1993; Lees, 2002; LIRNEasia, 2006; Young, 1986). Thus, after the survey that was conducted by Ellis (2000) among final year BA in business study students between 82 and 97 per cent feel their personnel skills have been improved, specifically, they developed more skills in the following areas which was classified in descending order of frequency: self-confidence; time management; verbal communication; working on own initiative; analysing information; using IT; gathering information; problem solving; and written communication. In addition to high levels of insight that was gained by students included in the study that was conducted by Ellis (2000) on “Developing graduate sales professionals through co-operative education and work placements: a relationship marketing approach.”, the understanding of all aspects of the host company's business and dealing with suppliers, self confidence are other performance areas mentioned by these students. Furthermore, Nabi and Bagley (1998)

mentioned that the skills were tended to be rated by female as more than male. In this regard, Wickramasinghe and Perera (2010) also Found that gender could influence employability skills based on the nature of the sample that was chosen for this study male and female having equal chances to study, to work and to apply skills to gain an appropriate job and so on, in contrast, the finding suggest that all the employability skills have been given an importance by female than male graduates except oral communication skills. In addition, gender was found correlated significantly with two skills which are 'self confidence, and 'learning skills'. A comparatively high level of 'learning skills' and self confidence were demonstrated by female compared to male graduates.

## **2.5 Benefits of Practical Training**

### **2.5.1 A Students' Perspective**

The main objective of training in knowledge, skills and attitudes is to promote school-to-work transition. Employability skills are the way of improving career prospects after graduation, for students and the development of these skills will increase academic performance (Baker, 2010). Academic and placement work were considered to be helpful in developing competence. Mihail (2006) found that the participants in the survey perceive some skills as key skills such as time management, communication skills, teamwork, ability to prioritize tasks and specialist knowledge which have been greatly enhanced during the period of internship. In that respect, the Work experience through co-operative programs provides credible means for softening the reality shock of

transitioning from the world of academics to the working world (Garavan & Murphy, 2001; Collin & Tynjalla, 2003). When a person has high employability, this means that he can get job or maintain a job (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). As a result, students who participate in an internships have the opportunity to find jobs more quickly upon graduation than students who did not have internships (Knouse et al., 1999). Since it allows them to develop and improve their job skills and work values, focus more on their career choices, directly access job sources, even to impress potential employers, even the higher institutions develop these skills, it must be a core subject for all undergraduate programmes, which profess to develop “capable graduates” (Cassidy, 2006). Surridge (in press) found that placement students outperformed non-placement students academically in University of the West of England. More effectively skills like communication, teamwork and problem solving can be developed by Work placement, these skills have been found to be deficient in accounting students (Allen, 1991; Marshall & Mill, 1993).

The incorporation of work placement into degree programs links the worlds of academics and work, and the academic and vocational domains; interconnections are facilitated by placing what they learn in a different context (Hager, 2004) and the environment influences (social, cultural and economic ) help the student to critique what they have learned (Lawy, Bloomer, and Biesta, 2004).

A number of benefits of practical training have been derived by students in the end of the specific period for that, for example, there are a general consensus from graduates' perspective that practical training or work placement offered them a real world experience in terms of skills, how to create knowledge and experience (Ester & Nicola,

2009). Furthermore, there is evidence that relating to co-operative and communication abilities of psychology students who they had placement experience; as a result, they got a unique experience such as management competence, Confidence and consequent ability to take on increased responsibility not obvious for non-placement students (Auburn; Ley & Arnold, 1993). As per as work placement is concerned, as a vehicle for the transformation of knowledge through practice or real-life setting by Ashworth & Saxton (1989). Many host companies offered jobs for many students by the end of placement period. As well, placement can bring the long term benefit of raising the profile of Host companies and become as players in the highly competitive marketplace of graduate recruitment, as well as pre-selected graduate recruits (Ellis, 2000). A range of benefits will be extended through internships, for instance, employment retention increase if graduates are equipped with necessary skills which help them to become more motivated and efficient in the fulfilling of their work tasks (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). Practical training provides a real world industry that is highly desired. Students who come from industry have guest expectations, team work and they often miss the enthusiasm that make them functioning within process's rhythm quickly and solving customers and co-worker problems (Harris & Zhao, 2004). Also Placements are seen as an opportunity to raise profile of companies owned by employers, when students gain increased core skills, for instance, communication (Rawlinson & Connor, 1996). Additionally, employers recognize further benefits such as students' enthusiasm and energy, and creativity or new ideas (Thompson, 1991).

## **2.6 Summary**

The literature reveals that employers required set of skills which graduate applicants have to be equipped with such as self-management skills; self-confidence; ability to cope with uncertainty; ability to work under pressure; communication skills ;action-planning skills; IT skills; proficiency in networking and team working. As well, the previous studies examined the benefits of these skills and how it influences career which is considered as a main objective by people during their working life and these work will focus more on the main points which have been highlighted by this literature but in a wider scope as it is mentioned earlier in chapter one.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the method that was used in this study to achieve the identified objectives. This chapter outlines all the features and the tools that need to be utilized in this study in order to arrive at appropriate results.

#### **3.1 Target population**

Populations of this research are postgraduate students in college of business at University Farhat Abbas- Setif (UFAS) that is located in Setif town in the east of Algeria.

#### **3.2 Sample**

A number of 230 postgraduate students were identified as potential respondents. These students are doing different business programs in their final year under the new system applied in Algerian universities since 2004 which is called 'license, master and doctora' (LMD) in French it can be translated into English as degree, master and PhD. However, only those have undergone practical training were selected in the study. At UFAS all students are required to attend practical training as compulsory component

before graduation. The 230 students were selected to answer the questions which are provided on the questionnaire.

### **3.3 Instrument**

The instrument used in this study is structured questionnaire which came in the form of a modification from a study done by Catriona Paisey, Nicholas J. Paisey, (2010) titled "Developing skills via work placements in accounting: Student and employer views." The questionnaire consists of four sections as follows: section A has 6 questions related to Demographic information; section B consists of 14 items about skills which students perceived to be developed during the period of practical training; section C includes 4 items on reasons for going to university; and section D include 4 perceived benefits of practical training.

### **3.4 Data collection**

Questionnaires will be used by respondents after conducting pilot study to test the accuracy of the research instrument. After getting a good result from the pilot test questionnaire will be distributed through emails to the administration of college of business in University Farhat Abbas -Setif (UFAS) in order to distribute on the sample of students that has been selected to answer the questions. The questionnaire will be distributed to the English business class in order to have meaningful responses from the respondents. After one month the data used in this study was collected via

questionnaires completed by 230 students in order to maximize the response rate in three business departments undertaking different majors as part of their postgraduate studies at college of business University Farhat Abbas Setif (UFAS) in Algeria. As we can see below:

- 1- Department of economics which include three programs namely; insurance & finance, money & banking and Islamic banking.
- 2- Department of commerce which includes finance & accounting, audit & accounting, Strategic marketing and Service marketing.
- 3- Department of management has management of SMEs, as well as audit & management control.

The 230 questionnaires were distributed and collected directly from the respondents at each Class. After eliminating unusable questionnaires, an effective 183 responses (79.56% response rate) were used. Most of the unusable responses were due to the incompleteness of the Questionnaires.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program was used for statistical analyses. The requirements gathering process takes as its input the goals identified in the high-level requirements section of the project plan. Each goal will be refined into a set of one or more requirements.

These requirements define the major functions of the intended strategic planning, define operational data areas and reference data areas, and define the initial data entities. Major functions include critical processes to be managed, as well as mission critical inputs,

outputs and reports. For this study the requirements gathering will occur through distributed questionnaire through email to the business students at UFAS Algeria. Data was analysed predominantly by t-test as well as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

### **3.6 Reliability Analysis**

According to Sekaran (2003) the consistency of a set of measurements or measuring instrument, often used to describe the test. Reliability test can either be whether the measurements of the same instrument give or are likely to give the same measurement (test-retest), or in the case of more subjective instruments, such as personality or trait inventories, whether two independent assessors give similar scores (inter-rater reliability). The relationship between independent variables and dependent variable will be tested using coefficient of correlation.

In addressing the students' perceptions of developing important set of skills via practical training and its benefits with the list of main reasons for going to university the study uses descriptive statistics to examine the attitude of postgraduate students towards practical training.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

#### 4.0. Introduction

This chapter reports and analyses the data collected from the respondents. First, the demographic section includes all the items shown in tables 1, 2 and 3 below. Second, the development of skills is shown in tables 4 and 5, where it is discussed as the main point in this study. The third and fourth sections include the reasons for going to university and the perceived benefits of practical training as it is shown in tables 6 and 7. In each table, aggregate results for all students followed by consideration of whether gender and students in three departments revealed significant differences. Finally, table 8 shows the correlation of the items included in the last three sections mentioned before.

#### 4.1 Descriptive study

**Table 4.1:** Gender and Age

|               | <b>Respondents</b> | <b>Number of<br/>respondents</b> | <b>Total mean</b> |
|---------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Gender</b> | Female             | 133                              |                   |
|               | Male               | 50                               |                   |
|               | Total              | 183                              |                   |
| <b>Age</b>    | 20-25years old     | 183                              | 22.28             |

Table 4.1 presents the respondents' age and gender, from the Table 4.1 it can be seen that the majority of the respondents are female making a share of 133 from 183; while the respondents' age is between 20-25 years old.

**Table 4.2: Current Programmes and High School Qualification**

|                                              |                      | NUMBER OF  |             |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|-------------|
|                                              |                      | PROGRAMMES | RESPONDENTS |
|                                              |                      |            | %           |
| <b>Department of Economics</b>               | Islamic Banking      | 25         | 14          |
|                                              | Money & Banking      | 30         | 16          |
|                                              | Insurance & Finance  | 40         | 22          |
|                                              | Finance & Accounting | 30         | 16          |
| <b>Department of Commerce</b>                | Audit & Accounting   | 16         | 8.7         |
|                                              | Marketing            | 13         | 7.1         |
|                                              | Management of SMEs   | 18         | 9.8         |
| <b>Department of Management</b>              | Audit & Management   | 11         | 6           |
|                                              | Total                | 183        | 100         |
| <b>Respondents High School Qualification</b> | Economic             | 47         | 26          |
|                                              | Science              | 128        | 70          |
|                                              | Technical            | 7          | 3.8         |
|                                              | Other                | 1          | 0.5         |
|                                              | Total                | 183        | 100         |

Table 4.3 shows that there are three groups of students related to their departments, the number of respondents is different because the real number is different as it was mentioned in chapter three and also the usable responses that have been received is different but sufficient for the study. As well as, there are 128 respondents (69.9%) coming from science background related to their high school qualification, and 47 respondents (25.7%) coming from economic background while the rest coming from technical and one from mathematics background.

Table 4.3 Analysis of respondents by gender, place of practical training and work experience

| Place of Practical Training           | Total      |            | Male      |            | Female     |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
|                                       | N          | %          | N         | %          | N          | %          |
| Audit Firm-Big Four                   | 1          | 0.5        | 1         | 2          | 0          | 0          |
| Audit Firm International Non Big Four | 2          | 1.1        | 0         | 0          | 2          | 1          |
| Audit Firm Local                      | 5          | 2.7        | 0         | 0          | 5          | 4          |
| Commercial Company                    | 81         | 44.3       | 24        | 48         | 57         | 43         |
| Government Department                 | 66         | 36.1       | 17        | 34         | 49         | 37         |
| International Bank                    | 24         | 13         | 6         | 12         | 18         | 13         |
| Local Bank                            | 4          | 2.3        | 2         | 4          | 2          | 2          |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>183</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>50</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>133</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Part –Timer                           | 15         | 8          | 10        | 20         | 5          | 4          |
| Not Part Timer                        | 168        | 92         | 40        | 80         | 128        | 96         |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>183</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>50</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>133</b> | <b>100</b> |

Table 4.3 shows that majority of the students (81 or 44.3%) join commercial companies for practical training followed by government companies (66 or 36.1%) and other like international banks and local banks by (28 or 15.3%). While the rest join audit firms.

Generally in Algeria students work after they graduated, hence table 4.3 shows most of respondents (168 or 91.8%) have no part-time job. However, 15 respondents or 8.2% are working part- time.

#### **4.2 perceived development of important job skills**

Students were asked about the extent of development of a list of fourteen skills. These skills were selected as they were commonly cited in the literature reviewed earlier. Table 4.4 displays the number of students ranking these skills as being 'strongly developed' and 'moderately developed', while Table 4.5 provides full details of the students' perception of the development of skills during practical training period, reporting mean scores. Taken together, these tables show that the internship appeared to be most successful at developing listening, computer ability, working in group, oral communication, coping with stress and meeting deadlines skills, but by coming to students in departments the results for the four first skills are highly developed with small difference in ranking except students in management department ranked written communication skill as the fourth one. Therefore, they show that other skills are not developed to the same extent during practical training period.

**Table 4.4** students 'views of development skills (N= number of students)

|                                                                  | Total | Departments               |                                                           |                          |                                                           |                                                           |                                                           | Management Department (MD) |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
|                                                                  |       | Economics Department (ED) |                                                           | Commerce Department (CD) |                                                           | believeing strongly developed or moderately developed (N) |                                                           |                            |  |
|                                                                  |       | Rank                      | believeing strongly developed or moderately developed (N) | Rank                     | believeing strongly developed or moderately developed (N) | Rank                                                      | believeing strongly developed or moderately developed (N) |                            |  |
| Listening                                                        | 108   | 1                         | 171                                                       | 53                       | 1                                                         | 86                                                        | 36                                                        | 59                         |  |
| Working in group                                                 | 97    | 2                         | 149                                                       | 48                       | 3                                                         | 92                                                        | 35                                                        | 46                         |  |
| Computer ability                                                 | 94    | 3                         | 167                                                       | 45                       | 2                                                         | 78                                                        | 27                                                        | 45                         |  |
| Coping with stress                                               | 64    | 4                         | 146                                                       | 32                       | 5                                                         | 75                                                        | 21                                                        | 6                          |  |
| Meeting deadlines                                                | 63    | 5                         | 139                                                       | 31                       | 4                                                         | 70                                                        | 18                                                        | 4                          |  |
| Oral communication                                               | 62    | 6                         | 157                                                       | 31                       | 8                                                         | 75                                                        | 17                                                        | 5                          |  |
| Time management                                                  | 49    | 7                         | 118                                                       | 28                       | 6                                                         | 83                                                        | 17                                                        | 7                          |  |
| Written communication                                            | 49    | 8                         | 144                                                       | 23                       | 10                                                        | 66                                                        | 14                                                        | 9                          |  |
| Critical thinking                                                | 41    | 9                         | 150                                                       | 21                       | 7                                                         | 56                                                        | 12                                                        | 8                          |  |
| Ability to interpret financial information                       | 37    | 10                        | 113                                                       | 19                       | 9                                                         | 73                                                        | 11                                                        | 10                         |  |
| Problem solving skills                                           | 37    | 11                        | 146                                                       | 18                       | 12                                                        | 69                                                        | 11                                                        | 11                         |  |
| ability to extract an analyse information from a variety sources | 33    | 12                        | 145                                                       | 17                       | 13                                                        | 82                                                        | 11                                                        | 13                         |  |
| Ability to generate practical ideas                              | 33    | 13                        | 154                                                       | 15                       | 11                                                        | 73                                                        | 10                                                        | 12                         |  |
| Creative thinking                                                | 23    | 14                        | 110                                                       | 9                        | 14                                                        | 49                                                        | 10                                                        | 14                         |  |

**Table 4.5** Students' Views of Development Skills –Mean Scores

- For each of the following skills, students were asked to indicate whether they felt that the skills had been strongly developed, moderately developed, or not developed. There were ranked 1, 2, and 3, respectively and mean score are calculated

| Skills                                                            | Mean score | Rank | Male   | Female | Total                    |      |                          | Departments |                            |      | Management Department (MD) |      |                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------|--------|--------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|----------------------------|
|                                                                   |            |      |        |        | Economic Department (ED) | Rank | Commerce Department (CD) | Rank        | Management Department (MD) | Rank | Economic Department (ED)   | Rank | Management Department (MD) |
| Listening                                                         | 1.47       | 1    | 1.38   | 1.51   | **1.53                   | 2    | **1.36                   | 1           | **1.41                     | 2    | 1.52                       | 1    | 1.52                       |
| Computer ability                                                  | 1.57       | 2    | **1.74 | **1.51 | 1.54                     | 1    | 1.61                     | 3           | 1.59                       | 3    | 1.59                       | 3    | 1.59                       |
| Working in group                                                  | 1.66       | 3    | 1.66   | 1.65   | 1.7                      | 3    | 1.73                     | 2           | 1.62                       | 5    | 1.62                       | 5    | 1.62                       |
| Oral communication                                                | 1.8        | 4    | 1.76   | 1.82   | 1.83                     | 4    | 1.8                      | 4           | 1.83                       | 10   | 1.69                       | 10   | 1.69                       |
| Coping with stress                                                | 1.85       | 5    | 1.84   | 1.86   | 1.87                     | 6    | 1.83                     | 5           | 1.83                       | 6    | 1.72                       | 6    | 1.72                       |
| Meeting deadlines                                                 | 1.9        | 6    | 2      | 1.86   | 1.88                     | 7    | 1.92                     | 8           | 1.92                       | 8    | 1.72                       | 4    | 1.72                       |
| Written communication                                             | 1.95       | 7    | 2.02   | 1.92   | 1.94                     | 5    | 1.98                     | 13          | 1.79                       | 8    | 1.79                       | 8    | 1.79                       |
| Critical thinking                                                 | 1.96       | 8    | *1.82  | *2.01  | *1.96                    | 9    | *1.98                    | 9           | *1.98                      | 8    | *1.79                      | 8    | *1.79                      |
| Ability to generate practical ideas                               | 1.98       | 9    | 1.98   | 1.98   | 2.03                     | 8    | 2.01                     | 6           | 1.86                       | 11   | 1.86                       | 11   | 1.86                       |
| Problem solving skills                                            | 2          | 10   | 1.94   | 2.02   | 2.06                     | 12   | 2.02                     | 11          | 1.97                       | 13   | 1.97                       | 13   | 1.97                       |
| Ability to extract and analyse information from a variety sources | 2.03       | 11   | 1.96   | 2.05   | 2.07                     | 10   | 2.03                     | 10          | 1.97                       | 7    | 1.97                       | 7    | 1.97                       |
| Ability to interpret financial information                        | 2.08       | 12   | 1.96   | 2.12   | 2.08                     | 11   | 2.03                     | 7           | 2.03                       | 9    | 2.03                       | 9    | 2.03                       |
| Time management                                                   | 2.09       | 13   | 2.02   | 2.11   | 2.19                     | 13   | 2.1                      | 12          | 2.07                       | 12   | 2.07                       | 12   | 2.07                       |
| Creative thinking                                                 | 2.27       | 14   | **2.08 | **2.35 | **2.39                   | 14   | **2.17                   | 14          | **2.1                      | 14   | **2.1                      | 14   | **2.1                      |

\*Development of skill is significant at the 0.05 level (T-Test, 2-tailed).  
 \*\* Development of skill is significant at the 0.01 level (T-Test, 2-tailed).

**Note:**

Comparison between Male and Female was done by independent sample T-test.  
 Comparison between Departments was done by one –way Anova.

### 4.3 Reasons for Going to University

When students were asked to rank their reasons for entering higher education, they regarded career reasons as the most important, followed by personal development reasons. Encouragement, by either parents or school, was of lesser importance as it is shown in Table 4.6 from students perspective in the two departments (ED) and (MD) there was one significant difference relating to the importance of encouragement by parent and encouragement by school in the decision to go to university for (ED) and (MD). In contrast, all the students agreed that encouragement by school was the least important reason for going to university.

**Table 4.6** Reasons for going to university

Student ranked four reasons as follows: 1= most important reason, 4= least important reason. Mean scores were then calculated.

| Reasons                  | Total      |      |            |            | Departments |          |            |
|--------------------------|------------|------|------------|------------|-------------|----------|------------|
|                          | Mean score | Rank | Male       | female     | Economic    | Commerce | Management |
|                          |            |      | department | department | department  | (ED)     | (CD)       |
| career reasons           | 1.55       | 1    | 1.54       | 1.56       | 1.51        | 1.63     | 1.55       |
| personal development     | 1.64       | 2    | 1.58       | 1.67       | 1.6         | 1.61     | 1.86       |
| encouragement by parents | 2.07       | 3    | 2.16       | 2.03       | **1.82      | 3        | **2.76     |
| encouragement by school  | 2.83       | 4    | 2.83       | 2.83       | **2.61      | **2.12   | 3.17       |

\* Reason is significant at the 0.05 level (T-Test, 2-tailed).

\*\* Reason is significant at the 0.01 level (T-Test, 2-tailed).

**Note:**

Comparison between Male and Female was done by independent sample T-test.  
Comparison between Departments was done by one-way Anova.

### 4.3 Perceived Benefits of Practical training

Students considered that the main benefit of a work placement was getting 'real life' experience as it is shown in Table 7. The opportunity to earn money was the lowest ranked reason.

Male students felt that enhanced employability was more important than female who felt that was moderately developed. There was no significant difference between perceived benefits from students' perspective in the three departments.

**Table4.7** Perceived Benefits Of Practical Training:

Students ranked four reasons as follows: 1=most important reason, 4= least important reason.

| Benefits                                                                    | Total      |      |            |            | Departments |          |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------|------------|------------|-------------|----------|------------|
|                                                                             | mean score | Rank | Female     | Male       | Economic    | Commerce | Management |
|                                                                             |            |      | department | department | department  | (ED)     | (CD)       |
| getting a real life experience                                              | 1.5        | 1    | 1.47       | 1.6        | 1.52        | 1.56     | 1.34       |
| making you more employable                                                  | *2.14      | 2    | 2.24       | **1.9      | 2.35        | 2.29     | 2.34       |
| chance to tray business work before committing your self to a permanent job | 2.28       | 3    | 2.31       | 2.2        | 2.04        | 2.14     | 2.21       |
| opportunity to earn money                                                   | 2.97       | 4    | 3.01       | 2.86       | 2.89        | 3.07     | 3.03       |

\* Benefit is significant at the 0.05 level (T-Test, 2-tailed).

\*\* Benefit is significant at the 0.01 level (T-Test, 2-tailed).

**Note:**

Comparison between Male and Female was done by independent sample T-test.

Comparison between Departments was done by one -way Anova.

#### 4.5 Correlation

**Table4.8** Correlation (N=183)

|                                 |                     | Skills | Reasons | Perceived benefits |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| Skills                          | Pearson Correlation | 1      | .003    | .151*              |
|                                 | Sig. (2-tailed)     |        | .963    | .041               |
|                                 | N                   | 183    | 183     |                    |
| Reasons for going to university | Pearson Correlation | 1      | .281**  |                    |
|                                 | Sig. (2-tailed)     |        | 0       |                    |
|                                 | N                   | 183    |         |                    |
| Perceived benefits              | Pearson Correlation |        | 1       |                    |
|                                 | Sig. (2-tailed)     |        |         |                    |
|                                 | N                   |        |         |                    |

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation is a bivariate measure of association (strength) of the relationship between two variables. It varies from 0 (random relationship) to 1 (perfect linear relationship) or -1 (perfect negative linear relationship). It is usually reported in terms of its square, interpreted as per cent of variance explained. Correlation will also be attenuated to the extent there is measurement error, including use of sub-interval data or artificial truncation of the range of the data. Correlation can also be a misleading average if the relationship varies depending on the value of the independent variables. This section reports the correlation analysis results of maximum figures of inter-factor correlation

were 0.151 between skills and perceived benefits for students, and shows the relationship between reasons for going to university and perceived benefits was 0.281.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The findings in chapter four have presented an insight into perception on how practical training can be used as tool to develop important skills. By comparing the findings based on gender and on different departments which provide different programmes greater insight can be gained.

#### **5.1 Discussion**

##### **5.1.1 Development of skills during the period of practical training**

The results in chapter four show that, listening, computer ability, working in group and oral communication skills are highly developed by all students that have undergone practical training. "coping with stress" was also ranked high by students in those departments. However, students in management department ranked written communication more highly than the other two departments because of the kind of practical training they did which is more related to their programme (management).

It is interesting to note that female students have acquired better computer ability skills. It was the only skill that females ranked differently from males at a statistically significant level. On the other hand, males ranked critical thinking and creative thinking at statistically significant level different from females, thus, showing that the perception of this skill remains constant by gender over different types of programmes.

### **5.1.2 Reasons for going to university**

The result also show that students at three departments ranked their reasons for going to university in the same order. There were two statistically significant department's differences in reasons for going to university were evident. Students at (ED) and (MD) ranked encouragement by parents before encouragement by school differently from students at (CD), because school play a main role in encouraging students for going to university and choosing professional business programmes like accounting and audit, hence it is very required by labour market in Algeria .

### **5.1.3 Perceived benefits of practical training**

Students considered that the main benefit of a work placement was “getting a real life experience”. There was a significant difference between male and female students regarding the enhancement of employability; male students felt that enhanced employability was more important than females. For the other perceived benefits there were no significant difference between male and female students and they ranked opportunity to earn money as the least important reason, even though, males regarded this reason more strongly than females. There was no significant difference between perceptions of students in the three departments.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The above findings show that the postgraduate students in a final year at college of business in UFAS -Algeria were highly career-orientated. Students perceived the gaining of ‘real life’ experience to be an important benefit of undertaking a practical training.

There was considerable satisfaction with the practical training and the participation in this program had influenced the career plans of most students. The career-orientated nature of the students involved in this program is important in any interpretation of student perceptions of the development of skills on the postgraduate program. There was considerable agreement among students in the three departments (department of economics, department of commerce, and department of management) about the development of a wide variety of skills. The fact that there was a high level of agreement between the views of students in different departments lends weight to the argument that practical training appears to be an effective vehicle for the development of some skills. In contrast, other skills still need to be developed especially ability to extract and analyse from a variety of sources, and ability to interpret financial information for accounting & finance students, insurance & finance, and banking students in two departments (ED) and (CD) related to their programmes.

A number of gender differences were. These two groups of students displayed one difference in their perceived benefits of practical training. Males were more likely to consider employability higher than their female counterparts. Males also ranked the development of critical thinking and creative thinking significantly higher than female students. However, female ranked computer ability skill significantly higher than male. This finding lends weight to the view that the sexes do hold differing views about aspects of their own abilities, while this relates to perceptions and not to the development of skills. But, it is very important to know that as it has contributed to the differences discussed above. On the one hand, the male and female students play different roles

within companies. But based on the job descriptions of the different posts held by students suggest that no difference in the role between gender.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

The findings that have been discussed above would be useful to business universities and specifically to ministry of higher education most especially Algerian ministry of higher education in order to know at what extent some employability skills were developed by students during practical training period. It is also important to identify reasons of less development of other skills which considered very important to business students such as, the ability to extract and analyse information, ability to interpret financial information and time management.

Furthermore, the finding of perceived benefits of practical training from students' perspective and reasons for going to university could be useful for measuring career orientation for students which help them to improve some technical skills which they have already acquired from the university.

In addition, the university might also introduce a course on career orientation and employability skills that will prepare students for working life. Students should also be taught how to write curriculum vitae (CV).

The findings of this study would be useful to other Business colleges in Algeria and other Arab countries in making good and effective career plans for business students. This will enable the institutions to produce employable graduates that can compete in the global labour market.

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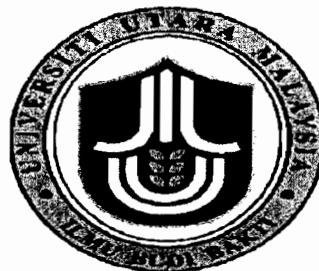
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## APPENDIX



### Questionnaire

#### **Developing skills via practical training: The Algerian business students' experience**

**Dear participants,**

**Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the development of important job skills during the practical training period among students doing business course in Algeria.

**Process**

It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete the questionnaire. There is no right or wrong answer. Please answer the questions honestly.

**Consent and feedback**

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and withdrawal from the study is allowable at any time. The overall results of this study will be made available to any participants upon request.

**Thank you for your time and cooperation.**

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**Section A: Demographic information**

*Please answer or tick (✓) one of the following boxes for each question.*

1. What is your gender?  Male  Female

2. Please state your age? \_\_\_\_\_ Years old.

3. In what main subject areas are you currently majoring:  Accounting,  Finance,  Management  Marketing,  Audit,  other, please state \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you working part-time now?  Yes  No

5. Place of practical training:

- Audit firm -Big Four
- Audit firm- International non-Big Four
- Audit firm - Local
- Commercial company
- Government department
- Other, please state: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please state your high school qualification stream:

- Economic
- Science
- Art
- Technical
- Other, please state: \_\_\_\_\_

### Section B: Perceived Development of Important Job Skills

*Please circle to indicate how practical training has affected the development of the following job skills to you.*

| Developed skills                                                            | Strongly developed | Moderately developed | Not developed |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| <i>Ability to extract and analyse information from a variety of sources</i> | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Time management</i>                                                      | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Ability to interpret financial information</i>                           | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Meeting deadlines</i>                                                    | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Computer ability</i>                                                     | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Oral communication</i>                                                   | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Listening</i>                                                            | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Critical thinking</i>                                                    | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Working in group</i>                                                     | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Problem solving skills</i>                                               | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Coping with stress</i>                                                   | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Written communication</i>                                                | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Ability to generate practical ideas</i>                                  | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |
| <i>Creative thinking</i>                                                    | 1                  | 2                    | 3             |

### Section C: Reasons for going to university

*Please circle the importance of these reasons to you for attending university*

| List of reasons                 | Most important reason | Important reason | Moderately important reason | Least important reason |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Career reasons</i>           | 1                     | 2                | 3                           | 4                      |
| <i>Personal developments</i>    | 1                     | 2                | 3                           | 4                      |
| <i>Encouragement by parents</i> | 1                     | 2                | 3                           | 4                      |
| <i>Encouragement by school</i>  | 1                     | 2                | 3                           | 4                      |

### Section D: Perceived benefits of practical training

*Please circle the importance of these perceived benefits*

| Perceived benefits                                                               | Most important reason | Important reason | Moderately important reason | Least important reason |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Getting a real life' experience</i>                                           | 1                     | 2                | 3                           | 4                      |
| <i>Making you more employable</i>                                                | 1                     | 2                | 3                           | 4                      |
| <i>Chance to try business work before committing yourself to a permanent job</i> | 1                     | 2                | 3                           | 4                      |
| <i>Opportunity to earn money</i>                                                 | 1                     | 2                | 3                           | 4                      |

✿ Thank you ✿