

Article

## Determinants of Intern Retention: The Role of Perceived Organizational Support in an Emerging Economy

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### Abstract

This study examines the determinants of intern retention in enterprises in Hai Phong, Vietnam, with a specific focus on the mediating role of perceived organizational support (POS). Drawing on Organizational Support Theory and Social Exchange Theory, the research investigates how mentoring, training, benefits, and work environment influence both POS and interns' retention intentions. Data were collected from 491 interns and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that mentoring and work environment have significant positive effects on POS, while training has a significant negative effect and benefits show no significant effect. POS, in turn, has a significant positive effect on intern retention. Regarding direct effects on intern retention, only mentoring shows a significant positive relationship, whereas training, benefits, and work environment are not statistically significant predictors. Mediation analysis further reveals that POS significantly mediates the relationships between mentoring and intern retention as well as between work environment and intern retention. However, the mediating effects of POS for training and benefits are not supported. This study contributes to the literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of intern retention in an emerging economy context, highlighting both enabling and non-significant organizational mechanisms. The findings underscore the critical importance of mentoring and a supportive work environment in fostering POS, which ultimately enhances retention. Practical implications suggest that organizations should prioritize structured mentoring systems and improve workplace support conditions to strengthen intern retention outcomes.

**Keywords:** intern retention; perceived organizational support; mentoring; work environment; emerging economy

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### 1. Introduction

In the context of intensifying labor market competition and the increasing demand for skilled human capital, interns have emerged as a critical strategic talent pool for organizations. Internships not only provide students with essential opportunities to acquire practical experience and apply academic knowledge, but also function as a low-risk recruitment channel through which firms can identify, evaluate, and potentially retain future employees (Bauer et al., 2025; Lee & Chao, 2012). Despite these advantages, converting interns into long-term employees remains a persistent challenge, particularly in emerging economies where labor mobility is high, career switching is common, and organizations compete aggressively for qualified talent (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017). In industrial hubs such as Hai Phong, Vietnam, enterprises

increasingly struggle to retain interns due to limited organizational engagement, unclear career pathways, and the availability of more attractive external job opportunities.

From a theoretical perspective, intern retention can be effectively explained through Organizational Support Theory (OST) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). OST posits that when individuals perceive their organization as valuing their contributions and caring about their well-being, they are more likely to develop stronger affective commitment and positive work attitudes (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Complementarily, SET suggests that social relationships are governed by reciprocity, whereby individuals respond to favorable treatment with positive behavioral outcomes such as loyalty, commitment, and intention to remain (Blau, 2017; Lawler, 2001). In the internship context, organizational practices such as mentoring, training opportunities, benefits, and work environment are key antecedents that shape interns' perceived organizational support (POS), which in turn influences their retention intentions (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Lisa et al., 2010).

Empirical research has identified several determinants of intern and employee retention, with mentoring shown to enhance skill development, role clarity, and psychological support, while a supportive work environment fosters engagement and organizational attachment. Training opportunities contribute to perceived employability and competence development, whereas organizational benefits reflect the tangible value exchange between interns and firms. Across studies, POS has consistently been recognized as a central psychological mechanism linking organizational practices to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, including retention.

However, existing research has predominantly focused on full-time employees, with relatively limited attention to interns, whose short-term employment status, transitional career stage, and evolving expectations distinguish them from permanent staff (Lee & Chao, 2012). Moreover, prior studies often examine individual antecedents in isolation, rather than integrating them into a comprehensive explanatory model. In the Vietnamese context, empirical evidence on intern retention remains limited, with most studies emphasizing career intention, satisfaction, or employability rather than actual retention-related outcomes.

To address these gaps, this study develops and tests an integrated model examining the effects of mentoring, training, benefits, and work environment on intern retention, with POS as a mediating mechanism. By doing so, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of intern retention in an emerging economy context and provides both theoretical and practical insights into how organizations can design effective internship experiences to improve retention outcomes in competitive labor markets.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **2.1. Intern Retention in Emerging Economies**

Intern retention has become an increasingly significant topic within human resource management and organizational behavior literature, particularly in the context of talent acquisition, workforce planning, and sustainable organizational growth (Bauer et al., 2025; Lee & Chao, 2012). Organizations increasingly use internship programs not only as experiential learning platforms for students but also as strategic recruitment pipelines for identifying and hiring future employees. Internships enable organizations to evaluate potential employees in real work settings while simultaneously allowing interns to develop professional competencies and gain exposure to workplace practices.

Despite these advantages, retaining interns beyond the internship period remains a persistent challenge, especially in emerging economies. In such contexts, labor markets are characterized by high mobility, intense competition among employers, and a growing number of alternative employment opportunities for young graduates (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017). As a result, organizations often struggle to convert interns into long-term employees, leading to increased recruitment costs and loss of trained talent. In industrial regions such as Hai Phong, Vietnam, this issue is particularly relevant due to rapid economic development, expanding industrial clusters, and rising demand for skilled labor.

Furthermore, prior research suggests that retention decisions among early-career individuals are influenced not only by economic incentives but also by developmental opportunities, organizational support, and workplace experiences (Lee & Chao, 2012; Arshadi, 2011). Compared to full-time employees, interns operate in a more transitional and uncertain employment context, making their retention decisions more sensitive to organizational practices and perceived value exchange. Therefore, understanding the determinants

of intern retention in emerging economies requires a more nuanced perspective that integrates both structural and psychological factors.

## 2.2. Theoretical Foundations

This study is grounded in Organizational Support Theory (OST) and Social Exchange Theory (SET), which together provide a strong theoretical foundation for explaining intern retention behavior in organizational contexts.

OST theory, developed by Eisenberger et al. (1997), posits that employees form global beliefs regarding the extent to which their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This perception, known as POS, plays a central role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. When individuals perceive high organizational support, they are more likely to develop emotional attachment, trust, and commitment toward the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017). OST further suggests that supportive organizational practices create a psychological obligation in employees to reciprocate positive treatment through favorable behaviors such as loyalty and retention.

SET theory, introduced by Blau (2017), complements OST by explaining workplace relationships as reciprocal exchanges. According to SET, individuals engage in relationships where benefits received from one party create an obligation to reciprocate. In organizational contexts, when employees receive favorable treatment—such as training, mentoring, or supportive working conditions—they feel a sense of obligation to respond positively through attitudes such as commitment and behaviors such as intention to stay (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Lawler (2001) further emphasizes that emotional attachment emerges when exchange relationships are perceived as fair and beneficial over time.

In the internship context, these theoretical perspectives suggest that organizational practices such as mentoring, training, benefits, and work environment function as important signals of organizational support. These signals influence interns' POS, which in turn shapes their retention intentions. Therefore, POS serves as a key mediating mechanism between organizational practices and intern retention, consistent with prior research on employee retention and organizational behavior (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017).

## 2.3. Perceived Organizational Support as a Central Mechanism

POS is a core construct in OST theory and refers to the extent to which employees believe that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS has been widely studied in organizational behavior research and has been consistently linked to important outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, reduced turnover intention, and improved performance (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Arshadi, 2011). These findings highlight the central role of POS as a key psychological mechanism through which organizational practices influence employee attitudes and behaviors.

In the context of internships, POS is particularly important because interns are typically in a transitional employment stage and often lack strong contractual or long-term commitments to the organization (Lee & Chao, 2012). Their decision to remain or leave is therefore highly influenced by their subjective perception of how they are treated during the internship period. When interns perceive that the organization invests in their development and supports their well-being, they are more likely to reciprocate through positive behavioral intentions, including staying with the organization after the internship period, in line with the principles of social exchange (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

## 2.4. Mentoring and POS

Mentoring is widely recognized as a critical developmental tool in organizational settings. It involves a relationship in which experienced employees provide guidance, feedback, emotional support, and career advice to less experienced individuals (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Allen et al., 2004). In internship programs, mentoring plays an especially important role in helping interns understand organizational processes, develop professional skills, and integrate into the workplace culture.

From an OST theory perspective, mentoring serves as a key signal that the organization values and invests in interns' personal and professional development (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

When interns receive consistent guidance and support from mentors, they are more likely to perceive that the organization values their growth and well-being. Mentoring relationships enhance psychological support, provide both instrumental and emotional resources, and increase individuals' sense of belonging within the organization (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Allen et al., 2004).

Empirical studies further confirm that mentoring is positively associated with POS and favorable employee outcomes (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Arshadi, 2011). By facilitating knowledge transfer, career development, and social integration, mentoring strengthens interns' perception that the organization genuinely cares about their success. Therefore, it is expected that:

H1: Mentoring positively influences POS.

## 2.5. Training and POS

Training represents an organization's investment in developing employees' knowledge, skills, and competencies, and is widely recognized as a key human resource practice for enhancing employee capability and performance (Noe et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2012). In internship contexts, training programs may include technical skill development, orientation sessions, workshops, and on-the-job learning opportunities that help interns acquire both professional and organizational knowledge.

From an OST theory perspective, training can be interpreted as a signal that the organization values interns' future potential and is willing to invest in their human capital development (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Such investment is expected to strengthen interns' perception of organizational support by demonstrating concern for their growth and long-term success. When interns perceive training as meaningful and relevant, they are more likely to interpret it as a form of organizational care and support.

However, the effectiveness of training in shaping POS may depend on its quality, relevance, and structure. If training is perceived as superficial, poorly designed, or unrelated to actual job roles, its impact on POS may be weakened (Noe et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2012). This suggests that not all training initiatives automatically lead to higher perceived support, particularly in internship settings where time is limited and expectations are evolving.

Nevertheless, prior research generally indicates that well-designed training programs contribute positively to POS by enhancing competence, facilitating learning, and signaling organizational commitment to employee development (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Arshadi, 2011). Therefore, it is expected that:

H2: Training positively influences POS.

## 2.6. Benefits and POS

Organizational benefits refer to tangible rewards provided to employees, such as stipends, allowances, insurance coverage, transportation support, or other financial incentives (Milkovich et al., 2014; Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). In internship contexts, benefits are particularly relevant because interns often work in low-paid or unpaid positions, making compensation an important factor in their evaluation of organizational fairness and attractiveness.

From a SET theory perspective, benefits represent the economic dimension of exchange relationships and signal how the organization values its members (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When interns perceive that the organization provides fair and adequate benefits, they are more likely to interpret the organization as supportive and equitable. Fair exchanges are expected to strengthen relational ties and encourage reciprocal behaviors such as commitment and retention. However, the influence of benefits on POS may vary depending on interns' expectations and motivational priorities. Some interns may prioritize learning opportunities and career development over financial compensation, while others may place greater emphasis on economic rewards. This suggests that the effect of benefits on POS is not uniform across individuals and may be contingent upon personal goals and contextual factors. Nevertheless, prior research generally indicates that fair compensation and benefits contribute positively to POS by reinforcing perceptions of organizational justice and reciprocity (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, it is expected that:

H3: Benefits positively influence POS.

## 2.7. Work Environment and POS

The work environment refers to the overall organizational climate in which interns operate, including relationships with supervisors and colleagues, organizational culture, communication patterns, and psychological safety (Schneider et al., 2013; Kahn, 1990). A supportive work environment is characterized by respect, collaboration, openness, and effective supervision, all of which contribute to a positive employee experience.

From an OST theory perspective, the work environment serves as a strong signal of organizational care and concern for employees' well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). When interns experience a positive and inclusive environment, they are more likely to perceive that the organization values their presence and supports their development. A healthy work environment reduces stress, enhances engagement, and fosters a sense of belonging, which are critical factors influencing perceptions of organizational support.

Empirical research further supports the notion that work environment significantly influences POS and related employee outcomes (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2003). A supportive environment enhances trust in the organization and strengthens emotional attachment, which is particularly important for interns who are still forming their professional identity and organizational expectations. Thus, it is expected that:

H4: Work environment positively influences POS.

## 2.8. POS and Intern Retention

POS is widely recognized as a key predictor of employee attitudes and behavioral intentions, particularly in relation to organizational commitment and turnover decisions (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Employees who perceive high levels of organizational support are more likely to feel emotionally attached to the organization, develop stronger organizational commitment, and exhibit lower turnover intentions (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Arshadi, 2011).

From a SET theory perspective, POS represents a form of socio-emotional resource that fosters reciprocal relationships between employees and organizations (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When individuals perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, they are more likely to reciprocate through positive attitudes and behaviors, including a stronger intention to remain with the organization (Luturlean et al., 2019).

In internship contexts, POS plays an even more critical role due to the absence of long-term employment contracts and the exploratory nature of internships (Lee & Chao, 2012). Interns who feel valued and supported are more likely to view the organization as a desirable workplace and consider continuing employment after the internship period. Conversely, low levels of perceived support may lead to disengagement and a higher likelihood of leaving.

H5: POS positively influences intern retention.

## 2.9. Direct Effects of Organizational Practices on Intern Retention

In addition to their indirect effects through POS, organizational practices may also directly influence intern retention. From both OST and SET theory perspectives, certain organizational practices can generate immediate attitudinal and behavioral responses without necessarily operating through mediating mechanisms (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Mentoring can strengthen interpersonal relationships, enhance emotional attachment, and foster a sense of belonging within the organization, thereby directly encouraging interns to remain (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Allen et al., 2004). Training may enhance perceived employability, skill development, and career prospects within the organization, increasing the likelihood that interns will continue their employment (Noe et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2012). Benefits may increase satisfaction through economic rewards and perceptions of fairness, which can directly influence retention decisions (Milkovich et al., 2014; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Similarly, a positive work environment may directly enhance the overall internship experience, strengthen organizational commitment, and promote retention (Schneider et al., 2013; Parker et al., 2003).

However, the strength of these direct relationships may vary depending on individual perceptions and contextual factors, particularly in transitional employment settings such as internships. This suggests that while POS plays a central mediating role, direct effects may still coexist and provide additional explanatory power. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H6a: Mentoring positively influences intern retention.
- H6b: Training positively influences intern retention.
- H6c: Benefits positively influence intern retention.
- H6d: Work environment positively influences intern retention.

### 2.10 Mediating Role of POS

Building on OST and SET theory, POS is expected to mediate the relationship between organizational practices and intern retention (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Organizational practices such as mentoring, training, benefits, and work environment serve as antecedent signals that shape interns’ perception of organizational support. These practices communicate the extent to which the organization values and supports its members, thereby influencing their attitudes and behavioral intentions.

From a SET theory perspective, POS represents a socio-emotional resource that fosters reciprocal relationships between interns and organizations (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Once POS is formed, it enhances interns’ emotional attachment, trust, and commitment, which in turn increase their likelihood of remaining with the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Arshadi, 2011).

Mentoring and work environment are expected to have particularly strong indirect effects through POS due to their relational and psychological nature, while training and benefits may also operate through POS, although their effects may depend more on perceived relevance and individual expectations. This suggests that POS functions as a central psychological mechanism linking organizational practices to intern retention. Accordingly, the following mediation hypotheses are proposed:

- H7a: POS mediates the relationship between mentoring and intern retention.
- H7b: POS mediates the relationship between training and intern retention.
- H7c: POS mediates the relationship between benefits and intern retention.
- H7d: POS mediates the relationship between work environment and intern retention.

Figure 1 presents research model.

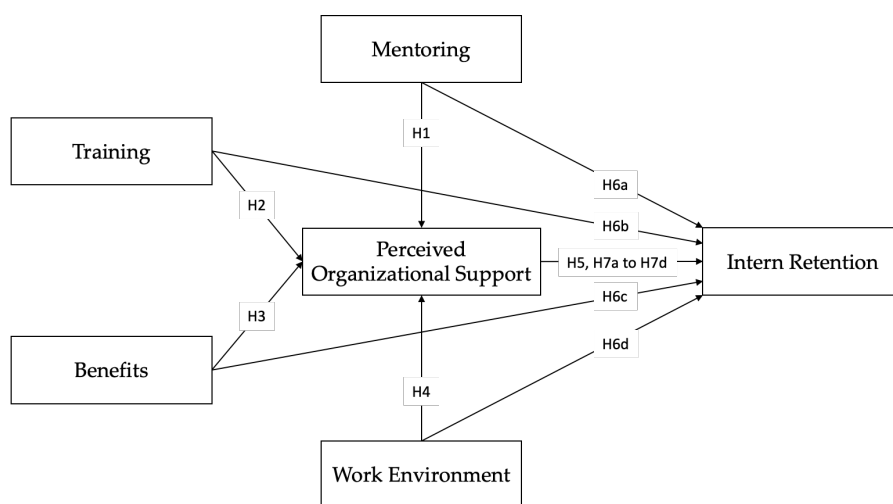


Figure 1. Research model.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to empirically examine the proposed conceptual framework and test the associated hypotheses. Data were collected from individuals who had participated in internship programs at enterprises in Hai Phong, Vietnam. The data collection process was conducted over a

three-month period, from December 2025 to February 2026. A structured questionnaire was administered through both online and offline channels to maximize accessibility and participation. A total of 529 responses were initially obtained. Following data screening procedures to remove incomplete, inconsistent, or invalid responses, 491 usable questionnaires were retained for analysis, resulting in a valid response rate of 92.82%.

Due to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame of interns in Hai Phong, a non-probability sampling approach was adopted. Specifically, snowball sampling was used, whereby initial respondents were asked to refer other individuals who had relevant internship experience. This technique is particularly effective for accessing dispersed and hard-to-reach populations. In addition, elements of convenience sampling were incorporated, as respondents were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the survey. The combination of these approaches facilitated efficient data collection and ensured variation across respondents from different organizations and industries. Such sampling techniques are widely accepted in organizational and social science research when probability-based sampling is not feasible (Etikan et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2019).

All constructs in the research model were measured using multi-item scales adapted from established studies to ensure content validity and reliability. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used for all measurement items. Intern retention was measured using items adapted from Robinson (1996), capturing respondents' intention to remain with the organization after the internship period. Mentoring was assessed based on the Mentoring Function Questionnaire developed by Changya et al. (2011), encompassing both career-related and psychosocial support dimensions. Training was measured using items adapted from Bai et al. (2018), reflecting the relevance and applicability of training programs. Benefits were measured based on Lee and Chao (2012), capturing both tangible and intangible rewards provided to interns. Work environment was assessed using items adapted from Hakim et al. (2025), reflecting workplace conditions, interpersonal relationships, and organizational climate. POS was measured using the widely validated scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (2002). All items were slightly modified to fit the internship context in Hai Phong while preserving their original conceptual meanings, and the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure clarity and contextual relevance.

Given the complexity of the model, which includes multiple latent constructs and the mediating role of POS, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed as the primary analytical technique. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for predictive and exploratory research, especially when the objective is theory development and when models involve multiple interrelated relationships. In addition, the method is robust to violations of multivariate normality and is appropriate for small to medium sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2021). It also enables the simultaneous assessment of the measurement model, including reliability and validity of constructs, and the structural model, which examines the hypothesized relationships among variables.

#### **4. Results**

Table 1 presents the demographic and internship-related characteristics of the respondents. In terms of gender distribution, the sample consists of 214 male respondents (43.6%) and 277 female respondents (56.4%), indicating a slightly higher representation of females in the study. This suggests that female interns constitute a larger proportion of the internship population in the surveyed context, which may reflect broader participation trends in higher education or specific industries in Hai Phong. Regarding educational background, the majority of respondents are at the graduate level, accounting for 424 individuals (86.4%). In comparison, 31 respondents (6.3%) are from college-level programs, and 36 respondents (7.3%) are postgraduates. This distribution indicates that internship participation is predominantly concentrated among undergraduate students, which aligns with the common structure of internship programs embedded within university curricula. With respect to internship status, 257 respondents (52.3%) are engaged in mandatory, curriculum-based internships, while 234 respondents (47.7%) are participating in voluntary internships. The relatively balanced distribution suggests that both academic requirements and self-initiated participation play important roles in shaping internship engagement among students. In terms of internship duration, more than half of the respondents (279, or 56.8%) reported internship periods of less than three months. A further 157 respondents (32.0%) completed internships lasting between three and six months, while only 55 respondents (11.2%) reported internships extending beyond six months.

**Table 1.** Respondents' profile.

| Category            | Classification               | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender              | Male                         | 214       | 43.6           |
|                     | Female                       | 277       | 56.4           |
| Education           | Graduate                     | 424       | 86.4           |
|                     | College                      | 31        | 6.3            |
|                     | Postgraduate                 | 36        | 7.3            |
| Internship Status   | Voluntary                    | 234       | 47.7           |
|                     | Mandatory (curriculum-based) | 257       | 52.3           |
| Internship Duration | Less than 3 months           | 279       | 56.8           |
|                     | 3–6 months                   | 157       | 32.0           |
|                     | More than 6 months           | 55        | 11.2           |

Table 2 presents the results of construct reliability and convergent validity for all latent variables included in the study, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The results indicate that most constructs demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency reliability. Specifically, intern retention (INT), perceived organizational support (POS), benefits (BEN), and mentoring (MEN) exhibit high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.922, 0.918, 0.891, and 0.886, respectively, all exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. Similarly, their composite reliability values (ranging from 0.918 to 0.945) further confirm strong internal consistency. Work environment (WEN) also shows acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.728 and composite reliability of 0.830, both above the minimum recommended level. However, training (TRAIN) reports a relatively lower Cronbach's alpha of 0.639, which falls slightly below the conventional threshold of 0.70. Despite this, its composite reliability value of 0.798 exceeds the acceptable cutoff of 0.70, indicating that the construct still maintains adequate reliability. This is consistent with prior research suggesting that composite reliability is a more appropriate measure in PLS-SEM, particularly when Cronbach's alpha is sensitive to the number of items. In terms of convergent validity, all constructs meet the recommended threshold for AVE, with values exceeding 0.50. Specifically, AVE values range from 0.551 (WEN) to 0.811 (INT), indicating that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its respective indicators. This confirms that the measurement items adequately converge to represent their underlying constructs.

**Table 2.** Measurement model.

| Construct                        | Item   | Loading | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | AVE  |
|----------------------------------|--------|---------|------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Benefits                         | BEN1   | 0.791   | 0.891            | 0.918                 | 0.74 |
|                                  | BEN2   | 0.935   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | BEN3   | 0.849   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | BEN4   | 0.853   |                  |                       |      |
| Intern Intention                 | INT1   | 0.883   | 0.922            | 0.945                 | 0.81 |
|                                  | INT2   | 0.897   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | INT3   | 0.907   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | INT4   | 0.913   |                  |                       |      |
| Mentoring                        | MEN1   | 0.876   | 0.886            | 0.921                 | 0.75 |
|                                  | MEN2   | 0.879   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | MEN3   | 0.838   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | MEN4   | 0.86    |                  |                       |      |
| Perceived Organizational Support | POS1   | 0.893   | 0.918            | 0.942                 | 0.8  |
|                                  | POS2   | 0.891   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | POS3   | 0.923   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | POS4   | 0.875   |                  |                       |      |
| Training                         | TRAIN2 | 0.842   | 0.639            | 0.798                 | 0.57 |
|                                  | TRAIN3 | 0.622   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | TRAIN4 | 0.789   |                  |                       |      |
| Work Environment                 | WEN1   | 0.691   | 0.728            | 0.83                  | 0.55 |
|                                  | WEN2   | 0.805   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | WEN3   | 0.724   |                  |                       |      |
|                                  | WEN4   | 0.744   |                  |                       |      |

Table 3 presents the discriminant validity results using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct (diagonal elements) is compared with the inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal elements). The results indicate that all constructs satisfy the discriminant validity requirement. Specifically, the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with all other constructs. Benefits (BEN) has a diagonal value of 0.858, which exceeds its correlations with other

variables such as intern retention (INT = 0.022), mentoring (MEN = 0.043), POS (POS = 0.071), training (TRAIN = 0.173), and work environment (WEN = -0.136). Similarly, intern retention (INT) shows a square root of AVE of 0.900, which is higher than its correlations with other constructs, including POS (0.386) and MEN (0.311). Mentoring (MEN) also meets the criterion, with a diagonal value of 0.863 exceeding its correlations with POS (0.383), WEN (0.263), and other variables. POS demonstrates strong discriminant validity, with a square root of AVE of 0.896, which is greater than its highest correlation with another construct (INT = 0.386). Likewise, training (TRAIN) has a diagonal value of 0.757, exceeding its correlations with all other constructs, despite some relationships being weak or negative.

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion).

|       | BEN    | INT    | MEN    | POS    | TRAIN | WEN   |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| BEN   | 0.858  |        |        |        |       |       |
| INT   | 0.022  | 0.900  |        |        |       |       |
| MEN   | 0.043  | 0.311  | 0.863  |        |       |       |
| POS   | 0.071  | 0.386  | 0.383  | 0.896  |       |       |
| TRAIN | 0.173  | -0.047 | -0.029 | -0.067 | 0.757 |       |
| WEN   | -0.136 | 0.199  | 0.263  | 0.283  | 0.131 | 0.742 |

Table 4 presents the results of the structural model assessment, including path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and hypothesis testing outcomes. The findings provide insights into both the direct and indirect relationships among the constructs. The results indicate that mentoring (MEN) has a significant positive effect on POS ( $\beta = 0.315$ ,  $t = 7.434$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1. Similarly, work environment (WEN) also demonstrates a significant positive effect on POS ( $\beta = 0.229$ ,  $t = 5.556$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H4. In contrast, training (TRAIN) shows a significant but negative relationship with POS ( $\beta = -0.106$ ,  $t = 2.147$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ). Although statistically significant, this effect is in the opposite direction to that hypothesized, leading to the rejection of H2. Benefits (BEN), on the other hand, do not exhibit a statistically significant effect on POS ( $\beta = 0.107$ ,  $t = 1.859$ ,  $p = 0.064$ ), and thus H3 is not supported. With respect to the effect of POS on intern retention (INT), the results reveal a strong and significant positive relationship ( $\beta = 0.294$ ,  $t = 5.566$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H5. This finding confirms the central role of POS in enhancing interns’ intention to remain with the organization. Examining the direct effects of organizational practices on intern retention, mentoring (MEN) is the only variable that shows a significant positive influence ( $\beta = 0.177$ ,  $t = 3.275$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), supporting H6a. In contrast, training (TRAIN) ( $\beta = -0.033$ ,  $p = 0.531$ ), benefits (BEN) ( $\beta = 0.009$ ,  $p = 0.849$ ), and work environment (WEN) ( $\beta = 0.074$ ,  $p = 0.105$ ) do not have significant direct effects on intern retention, leading to the rejection of H6b, H6c, and H6d. These results suggest that, apart from mentoring, other organizational practices do not directly influence interns’ retention decisions.

Regarding the mediating effects, POS significantly mediates the relationship between mentoring and intern retention ( $\beta = 0.093$ ,  $t = 4.181$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H7a. Additionally, POS also significantly mediates the relationship between work environment and intern retention ( $\beta = 0.067$ ,  $t = 3.679$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H7d. However, the mediating effects of POS for training ( $\beta = -0.031$ ,  $p = 0.060$ ) and benefits ( $\beta = 0.031$ ,  $p = 0.105$ ) are not statistically significant, leading to the rejection of H7b and H7c. In terms of explanatory power in Figure 2, the model explains 20.0% of the variance in POS ( $R^2 = 0.200$ ) and 18.5% of the variance in intern retention ( $R^2 = 0.185$ ).

**Table 4.** Path coefficients.

| Hypothesis | Paths             | Beta   | Standard Deviation | T-Statistics | P-Values | Decision      |
|------------|-------------------|--------|--------------------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| H1         | MEN → POS         | 0.315  | 0.042              | 7.434        | 0.000    | Supported     |
| H2         | TRAIN → POS       | -0.106 | 0.050              | 2.147        | 0.032    | Not Supported |
| H3         | BEN → POS         | 0.107  | 0.058              | 1.859        | 0.064    | Not Supported |
| H4         | WEN → POS         | 0.229  | 0.041              | 5.556        | 0.000    | Supported     |
| H5         | POS → INT         | 0.294  | 0.053              | 5.566        | 0.000    | Supported     |
| H6a        | MEN → INT         | 0.177  | 0.054              | 3.275        | 0.001    | Supported     |
| H6b        | TRAIN → INT       | -0.033 | 0.053              | 0.627        | 0.531    | Not Supported |
| H6c        | BEN → INT         | 0.009  | 0.047              | 0.190        | 0.849    | Not Supported |
| H6d        | WEN → INT         | 0.074  | 0.046              | 1.623        | 0.105    | Not Supported |
| H7a        | MEN → POS → INT   | 0.093  | 0.022              | 4.181        | 0.000    | Supported     |
| H7b        | TRAIN → POS → INT | -0.031 | 0.017              | 1.888        | 0.060    | Not Supported |
| H7c        | BEN → POS → INT   | 0.031  | 0.019              | 1.625        | 0.105    | Not Supported |
| H7d        | WEN → POS → INT   | 0.067  | 0.018              | 3.679        | 0.000    | Supported     |

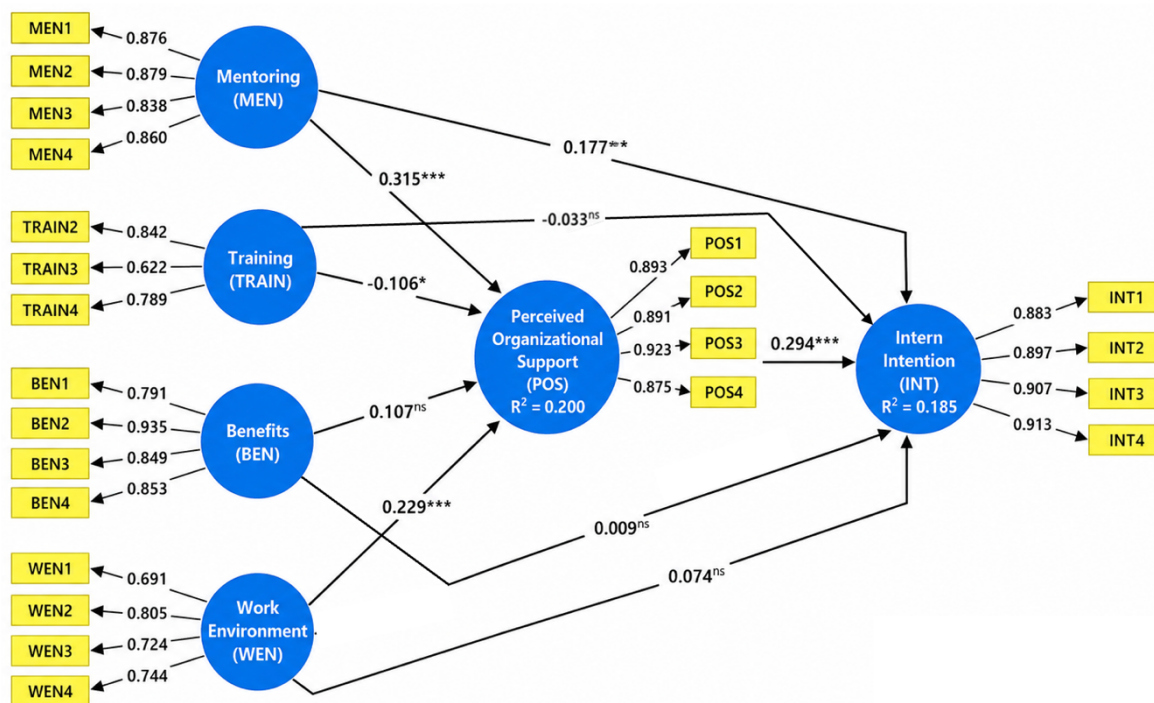


Figure 2. Structural model.

### 5. Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence on the determinants of intern retention in an emerging economy context, specifically in Hai Phong, Vietnam, by examining both direct and indirect effects of organizational practices through POS. The findings support the relevance of OST and SET theories in explaining intern retention behavior, while also revealing important nuances regarding the relative importance of different organizational practices (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Blau, 2017).

Consistent with theoretical expectations, mentoring and work environment were found to significantly and positively influence POS. These findings suggest that relational and contextual factors are central in shaping interns’ perceptions of how much the organization values and supports them. Mentoring, in particular, appears to be a critical mechanism through which interns receive both professional guidance and psychosocial support, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging and organizational attachment. Similarly, a supportive work environment—characterized by positive interpersonal relationships, effective supervision, and a conducive organizational climate—enhances interns’ overall experience and reinforces perceptions of organizational care. These results are consistent with prior studies highlighting the importance of social support and workplace environment in fostering positive employee attitudes (Lisa et al., 2010; Kurtessis et al., 2017). In the context of emerging economies, where interns may face higher uncertainty and limited prior work exposure, such supportive mechanisms become even more critical.

The results also confirm that POS has a significant positive effect on intern retention, reinforcing its role as a central psychological mechanism linking organizational practices to behavioral outcomes. Interns who perceive higher levels of support are more likely to develop emotional attachment and a sense of obligation toward the organization, which in turn increases their intention to remain. This finding aligns strongly with OST and SET, as well as prior empirical evidence demonstrating that POS enhances commitment and reduces turnover intentions (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Importantly, given the relatively moderate explanatory power of the model ( $R^2 = 0.200$  for POS and  $R^2 = 0.185$  for retention), POS emerges as a meaningful but not exhaustive determinant, suggesting that additional psychological or contextual factors may also influence intern retention decisions.

With regard to direct effects, mentoring is the only organizational practice that significantly influences intern retention. This indicates that mentoring not only enhances POS but also exerts a direct relational impact on interns’ intention to stay. The dual influence of mentoring underscores its strategic importance in internship programs, as it simultaneously fulfills developmental, emotional, and relational needs (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Allen et al., 2004). In contrast, training, benefits, and work environment do not exhibit significant direct effects

on retention, suggesting that their influence operates primarily through indirect mechanisms rather than immediate behavioral outcomes. This finding is consistent with prior studies indicating that developmental and contextual factors often influence retention through psychological processes rather than direct effects (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Several unexpected findings provide important insights. Notably, training demonstrates a significant but negative relationship with POS. This counterintuitive result may reflect a misalignment between training design and interns' expectations or needs. Training programs may be perceived as overly theoretical, insufficiently engaging, or lacking practical relevance, thereby reducing rather than enhancing perceptions of organizational support. Similar findings have been discussed in prior research, where ineffective training design leads to lower perceived value among employees (Noe et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2012). This finding highlights the importance of not only providing training but ensuring its quality, relevance, and alignment with interns' roles.

Similarly, benefits do not have a significant impact on either POS or intern retention. This suggests that financial or material rewards may not be the primary drivers of intern attitudes in this context. Instead, interns may place greater value on developmental opportunities, learning experiences, and supportive relationships. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that intrinsic and experiential factors often outweigh extrinsic rewards for early-career individuals (Lee & Chao, 2012).

The mediation analysis further emphasizes the pivotal role of POS. POS significantly mediates the relationships between mentoring and retention, as well as between work environment and retention, confirming that these organizational practices influence retention primarily by shaping interns' perceptions of support. However, the mediating effects for training and benefits are not supported, reinforcing the notion that not all organizational practices are equally effective in generating meaningful perceptions of support. This aligns with recent mediation research suggesting that psychological mechanisms selectively transmit the effects of organizational practices (Nitzl et al., 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by extending the application of OST and SET to the internship context in an emerging economy. It also advances existing research by integrating multiple organizational practices into a unified model and empirically demonstrating the selective and differentiated effects of these practices. Unlike prior studies that often assume uniformly positive effects, this study highlights that some practices (e.g., training) may have unintended or even negative implications if not properly designed.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings suggest that organizations should prioritize high-quality mentoring programs and foster supportive work environments to enhance intern retention. Particular attention should be given to designing mentoring systems that provide both career guidance and emotional support. Additionally, organizations should critically evaluate their training programs to ensure alignment with interns' expectations and practical job requirements. Rather than relying heavily on financial incentives, managers should focus on creating meaningful and engaging internship experiences that strengthen interns' perception of organizational support.

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of intern retention by demonstrating that relational and experiential factors, mediated through POS, play a more critical role than purely economic incentives. These insights are particularly relevant for organizations operating in competitive and dynamic labor markets, where attracting and retaining young talent has become increasingly challenging.

## **6. Conclusions**

This study examines the determinants of intern retention in enterprises in Hai Phong, Vietnam, with a particular emphasis on the mediating role of POS. Drawing on Organizational Support Theory and Social Exchange Theory, the study develops and tests a comprehensive model linking mentoring, training, benefits, and work environment to intern retention. The findings demonstrate that mentoring and work environment significantly enhance POS, while POS itself plays a crucial role in increasing interns' intention to remain with the organization. Among all factors, mentoring emerges as the most influential, exerting both direct and indirect effects on retention. In contrast, training and benefits do not significantly contribute to retention outcomes, and training shows a negative association with POS, suggesting potential misalignment between training practices and interns' expectations. Furthermore, mediation analysis confirms that POS serves as a key mechanism through which mentoring and work environment influence retention, whereas no mediating effects are found

for training and benefits. These results highlight that relational and experiential factors are more critical than transactional elements in shaping intern retention. The study contributes to the literature by extending the application of Organizational Support Theory and Social Exchange Theory to the internship context in an emerging economy. From a practical perspective, organizations are encouraged to prioritize mentoring and supportive work environments while improving the quality and relevance of training programs. The findings underscore the importance of fostering POS to enhance intern retention in competitive labor markets.

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