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## Research Note

# **Satisfaction towards Internship Programme and Future Career Development for Students in Private Higher Education Institutions: A Research Note**

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**Abstract:** In keeping with current trends in the hospitality industry, demands for the young and new generation are rapidly escalating. Internship provides an opportunity for the young generation to be exposed to the hospitality industry and gain relevant experience. Most local institutions that provide hospitality programmes are well-equipped for this purpose. In addition to being a prerequisite for completion of various hospitality degrees, internship training also plays a vital role in providing the relevant learning curve and experience for the graduate in the hospitality industry. This research note looks at factors that influence the satisfaction level of students during their internship at educational institutions that offer hospitality programmes. This research explores the knowledge and skills transfer that takes place towards preparing an industry-ready graduate. With regard to implications, this research identifies effective strategies and methods to facilitate and provide a positive learning experience in internship.

**Keywords:** Hospitality, tourism, students, internships, satisfaction, learning curve

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## Introduction

According to World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals has shown virtually uninterrupted growth – from 25 million in 1950 to 278 million in 1980, 528 million in 1995, and 1133 million in 2014, and is predicted to grow by 3.3% per year reaching 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO, 2014) and the tourism industry continues to offer limitless potential for any country (Crouch, & Richie, 1999; Rose, 2004). The tourism industry provides many economic benefits through its wide range of services including accommodation. Its rapid growth has increased the average income per capita and not only has it become more diversified by offering various products and services but also has become more revolutionised (WTTC, 2016).

Internships are vital for hospitality students as it allows them to experience actual work situations in a professional capacity, even while still studying (Zopiatis, 2007). The hands-on internship provides students an enriching experience that cannot be imparted through lectures. The bridging of the theory and practical learning happens only during internship (Collins, 2002). Previous studies show that the vast learning exposure gained by students during their internship improves self-confidence and enhances professional growth opportunities (Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997; Gabris & Mitchell, 1989; Downey & DeVeau, 1988; Zopiatis, 2007; Girard, 1999). A capable, educated, and well-trained workforce is always in demand in the competitive hospitality market (Purcell, 1993). Based on recent UNWTO statistics (UNWTO, 2015), 9 out of 11 people are offered employment in the hospitality industry. However, a substantial number of hospitality graduates leave the industry due to low job satisfaction, poor employment conditions and absence of motivational factors (Pavesic & Brymer, 1990) resulting in loss of trained personnel.

The lack of hospitality governing principles (policy) fails to align the market needs with the output of this sector, resulting in a failure to attract professional candidates to meet the expectations of the industry (Ali, Zhou, Hussain, Nair, & Ragavan, 2016). The current situation of mismatch, in the demand of hospitality personnel, results in a number of indirect impacts, including the lack of motivation and confidence for students to pursue their career in this sector (Wu & Wu, 2006). Convincingly, Fox (2001) also stated these issues exist, due to a lack in proper and adequate policies that precisely focuses on designing a structure where internship experience will not turn a young person away from the industry. As a result, industries tend to lose professional workers (Weible, 2009). Cognisant of this, Petrillose and Montgomery (1997) suggested that there is a need to investigate students' perceptions on internship qualities and whether the experiences could help prepare them for careers in the hospitality industry.

## **Problem Statement**

The hospitality industry is one of the major stakeholders of tourism industry as it offers supporting and complementary products and services including accommodation, food and beverage and recreational activities that enhance a memorable tourist experience. Currently, Southeast Asia is one of the world's fastest emerging tourism market as highlighted by WTO (2014). As the growth potential of the tourism sector is enormous, especially in the context of Malaysia, the need for a well-educated, well-trained, skilled, enthusiastic and committed workforce cannot be underestimated (Okeiyi, Finley, & Postel, 1994). However, when students are posted for internships in some hotels, they tend to experience unfavorable situations, due to a lack of good hotel management policies (Jenkins, 2001). There is a perceived misunderstanding of students' aspirations and their perceived knowledge acquirement by both the educational institutions and the industry.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this research note is to identify factors that are associated with the satisfaction of internships amongst hospitality students. The research employed a case study approach with the students of a particular programme in a private institution. The sampling was purposive aiming to understand the relationships between internship, job satisfaction, and confidence about future careers. A principal component analysis will be used to determine the internship elements that make a significant difference in the liaison between supervisor and educational programme including degree of involvement and satisfaction with supervisor, educational programme, environment, administration, and associated relationships with industry partners.

Therefore, the results of this research will prove valuable to hospitality management educators and administrators at various institutions as well as help industry professionals to better understand course development and internship experiences.

## **Literature Review**

There are significant benefits that internship opportunities provide to both the students as well as the hosting institutions (Zopiatis, 2007). Pavesic and Brymer (1990) postulated that internship experience for students from hospitality and tourism programmes can boost their confidence and encourage their intentions of working in the hospitality industry. The experience gained by students during their internship is a strong influence on their decision to continue in the industry (Waryszak, 1999). However, it was also noted that the initial experience is often perceived adversely by interns and this translates into a key decision (whether to work or not) within the hospitality industry after graduating. To meet quality and competitiveness, the hospitality industry needs to address certain internship issues

such as strategic recruitment, retention goals and socially responsive practices (Scott, 1992; Thiel & Hartley, 1997).

One of the current challenges faced by the hospitality industry is attracting and retaining skilled workforce (Finian, 2012). The function of internship in the hotel industry as defined by Finian (2012) is “as a platform to students on a work trial basis, which includes acquiring more knowledge about the reality and requirement of the industry and the job nature of hotel”.

A nurturing and supportive environment will prompt students to perform better in actual work environments (Hill, 2002). A collaborative curriculum designed by academics and practitioners with the right industry experience will provide an opportunity for students to translate their theoretical knowledge into actual working environment (Lam & Ching, 2007; Zhang & Agarwal, 2009). There are many courses that are designed to provide industry experience so that students can learn from their work experience in the hospitality industry (Yiu & Law, 2012).

From a student's perspective, low pay or sometimes not being compensated for long working hours is one of the many demotivating factors (Busby, 2003; Boger & Lim, 2005). From a positive aspect, students however get to experience the psychology of work place experience and be exposed to the work cultures of the hospitality industry (Boger & Lim, 2005); additionally, Mello (2006) argues that internship is one of the effective ways to secure employment in the hospitality industry. Many studies have shown that it is difficult to retain student satisfaction level as many internship programmes fail to nurture the students' potential and skills and consequently, when they step into real working life, they find that the industry is not meeting their expectations (Zopiatis, 2007). As a result, the satisfaction level from a student's perspective fails to enhance their future intention to work as well as their motivation level. Beesley & Cooper (2008) pointed out that while the experience level can be different for interns, it still affects the students which in turn affects their decision on whether to work in this industry or not.

An extensive work published by Ciofalo (1992) on internships: captures 31 papers including the perspectives on learning in internships (Moore, 1983), integrating the traditions of experiential learning in internship education (Wagner, 1983), exploring the relationships between intern job performance, quality of education experience and career placement (Gryski, Johnson & O'Toole, 1987). However, this work focuses on general well-being and not specifically, the hospitality industry. Although internship practices play a significant role in the training of hospitality students, the challenge in developing innovative practices to retain the next generation of hospitality professionals, should be highlighted (Zopiatis, 2007; Yiu & Law, 2012). Thus, based on the extant legitimacy arguments, if internship experience is not up to the student's expectations, their confidence in the career progression decreases. The discussions from this article are preliminary, but can be expounded further by developing hypotheses and engaging research perspectives and introducing further clarification.

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