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## A Systematic Literature Review on the Role of Internships in Shaping Career Intentions in Hospitality

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### Abstract

This paper examines the role that internship satisfaction and motivation play in shaping career intentions among students in the hospitality industry. Through a search of 60 articles (2019-2025) on systematic literature review based on PRISMA, there are important determinants of motivation and satisfaction. The results indicate that internship enrichment, intrinsic motivation have a substantial effect on student commitment to a hospitality career. In comparison, long-term diminishes due to negative experiences or low incentives. The research asks the educators, coordinators, and industry players to improve the quality and relevance of internships so that the future talent can be retained.

**Keywords:** Internship, Motivation; Career intention; Hospitality students

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### 1.0 Introduction

The hospitality industry faces persistent challenges in retaining young professionals, with many graduates reconsidering long-term careers in the field despite extensive internship exposure. Internships are widely implemented as transitional experiences meant to align academic preparation with industry realities. However, the degree to which these internships influence students' career intentions remains unclear. This systematic literature review synthesizes research published between 2019 and 2025 to evaluate how internship experiences, including satisfaction, mentorship, work conditions, and reflective thinking, shape hospitality students' decisions to remain in or leave the industry.

The latest sources emphasize that internship satisfaction, the quality of mentorship, working conditions, and organizational support are the key factors influencing the decision whether students should choose the hospitality industry as a career and decide to work in this

field (Fajian Liu et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2025; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2021). Learning experience, task clarity in the real world, as well as social environment, have also become robust determinants of whether students plan to remain in the industry after graduation (Limapan, 2024; Wireko-Gebi, 2023).

In addition, integrative models including Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Cognitive Theory, and Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory have offered sound guidelines in discussing the relationships of the three variables of attitude, perceived control, and experiential satisfaction as mediators in the career decision in your own words it entails (Ng et al., 2023; Cavus et al, 2025; Shetu and Sayeda., 2020). According to these theories, external incentives do not define career intentions alone, but also influence psychological capital, career adaptability, and reflective thinking capacity (Bahari & Saber, 2025; Faddzil and Jamaludin,2025).

In light of these mixed outcomes, this study aims to investigate the complex relationships between internship satisfaction and career intentions among hospitality students. By synthesizing findings from diverse contexts and theoretical lenses, the research seeks to identify core variables that consistently impact students' career trajectories and offer recommendations for industry and academic stakeholders to foster more sustainable talent pipelines.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This literature review presents findings from a systematic analysis of 60 scholarly articles published between 2019 and 2025, guided by the PRISMA methodology. The literature is synthesized into three main themes relevant to this study: (1) student motivation during internships, (2) satisfaction with internship experiences, and (3) the formation of career intention in the hospitality field.

### 2.1 Hospitality Industry in Malaysia

The hospitality industry in Malaysia significantly contributes to the country's economy, accounting for around 15.1% of GDP in 2023. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (Tourism Satellite Account), the tourism sector, which includes accommodation and food & beverage services, generated RM 275.8 billion, comprising 15.1% of GDP and employing 3.4 million people in 2023. Over 157,500 people were employed in the accommodation services sector alone in 2022, and 14,962 establishments contributed RM 9.4 billion in value added to the tourism ecosystem.

The industry struggles to recruit and retain skilled workers, particularly recently graduated interns, despite its economic worth. Major issues are long hours, low pay, a lack of opportunity to advance their careers, and uneven workplace policies. The COVID-19 pandemic further shattered job security and weakened trust in occupations related to hospitality.

Making the most of internship experiences is essential given Malaysia's focus on developing its human capital and its post-pandemic recovery. Internships play a significant role in the process of screening perceptions, commitment, and final desire among many students to remain in the hospitality sector.

### 2.2 Motivation during Internships

Student motivation is a critical factor in how effectively they engage with internship experiences. Grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, motivation can be classified into hygiene factors (e.g., pay, supervision, policies) and motivator factors (e.g., achievement, recognition, work itself). To be more precise, Liu et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis and found that the level of motivation is high when students are satisfied with their roles, which in turn makes them more committed over the long term. Similarly, Hu et al. (2023) found that mentorship and social learning opportunities serve as motivators, positively influencing career enthusiasm. In contrast, the absence of clear feedback or lack of appreciation can result in decreased interest in the profession (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2021).

Cultural aspects of motivation were analyzed in other studies. It is crucial to note that according to Limapan (2024), the social factors that influence the motivation of students to stay practicing in the hospitality industry are high in Thailand, such as peer influence and family support. These findings mean that motivational factors, whether internal or external, vary contextually and must be interpreted before any positive memory of an internship can be created.

### 2.3 Internship Satisfaction

Internship satisfaction reflects how students evaluate the overall experience provided in the course of their participation in the internship, concerning the conditions under which they perform the work, the outcome of the course of study, the instructional help, and the chance to develop as a human being. As stated by Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2021), learning journeys and working conditions can be viewed as crucial issues that impact the degree of satisfaction, and as a result, they affect the construction of professional identity among students. Another study conducted by Limapan (2024) found that other essential hygiene (or motivation) factors that influence internship satisfaction are compensation, the chance to receive a promotion, and benefits.

It is often argued that structured internship programs are essential. Good internships involving proper job descriptions, feedback frequency, and encouraging cultures are likely to lead to great satisfaction. On the other hand, the unproductive unpaid internship can cause disappointment and industry prejudice.

#### 2.4 Career Intention in Hospitality

Career intention is a term used to describe students' likelihood of pursuing a career in hospitality beyond the end of the schooling process. The results indicate a close correlation between student satisfaction with the internship and their desire to remain in the industry. Fajian et al. (2022) emphasized that the level of satisfaction with internship duties, job support, and encouragement promotes the creation of a positive career perspective. The clarity of roles and goal fit in the context of the internship is a predictor of long-term industry involvement (Hu et al, 2023).

Certain research revealed obstacles to establishing strong career intentions. These are stigmatization of hospitality work, lengthy hours, and emotional labour. Students can lose the motivation to work in the hospitality industry even when they are interested in such a job, because internships do not support these challenges well enough.

### 3.0 Methodology

The primary literature search was performed in three of the largest academic databases, i.e., Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. These platforms were selected for their wide coverage by the high-impact and peer-reviewed journals in the area of hospitality, tourism, and education. Keywords have been developed with the help of the PICo strategy (Population, Interest, Context) and consist of:

#### 3.1 Data Sources and Search Strategy

The initial search was conducted across three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. These platforms were chosen for their broad coverage of high-impact, peer-reviewed journals in the fields of hospitality, tourism, and education. Keywords were formulated based on the PICo approach (Population, Interest, Context), and included:

- "internship" AND "motivation"
- "career intention" AND "hospitality students"
- "hospitality industry" AND "student satisfaction"

Boolean operators and filters were applied to refine the search scope. Only articles that were:

- Published between 2019 and 2025
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Written in English
- Focused on hospitality students or internships were considered eligible.

The search yielded a total of 63 records. After eliminating 2 duplicate articles, the remaining 61 studies underwent screening. Abstracts and titles were evaluated against inclusion criteria, and 32 articles were excluded, leaving 29 articles for full-text review and synthesis.

#### 3.2 PRISMA Screening Process

The screening and eligibility stages were guided by the PRISMA 2020 checklist. A PRISMA flow diagram was developed to visually represent the step-by-step selection process. Each article was classified according to relevance, publication format, research population, and thematic scope. Articles that were excluded fell under four categories:

- I. Not focused on hospitality students or internships
- II. Sector/population mismatch (e.g., retail or music education)
- III. Not peer-reviewed or theoretical essays
- IV. Misaligned variables or conceptual focus

This classification enhanced transparency and ensured methodological consistency throughout the review process.

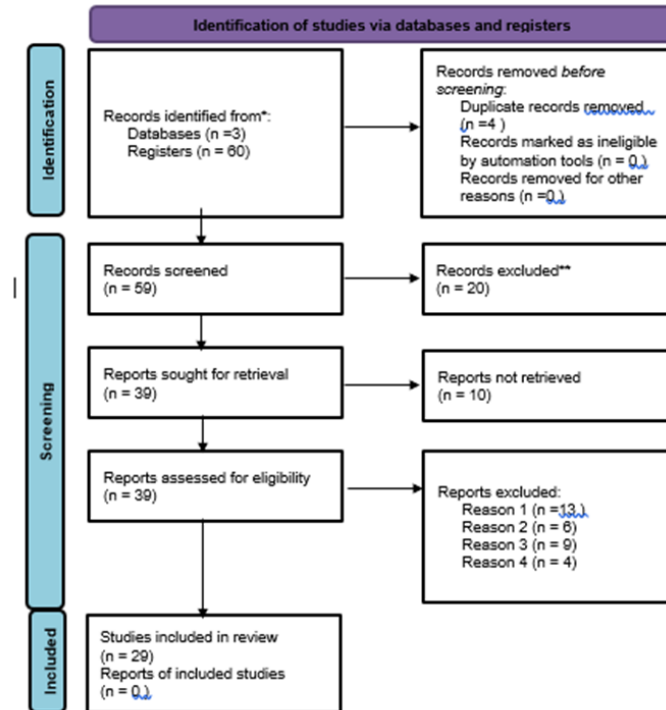


Figure 1 PRISMA Screening

### 3.2 Article Selection and Analysis

The article selection process followed four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The PRISMA flow diagram (see Fig. 1) illustrates the number of records identified, screened, and finally included in the review.

Each selected article was kept into a literature matrix containing key information such as authors, theories used, methodology, variables, and findings. Thematic analysis was then used to organize the results into three main categories:

- I. Motivation (Hygiene and Motivator factors)
- II. Internship Satisfaction
- III. Career Intention

This structured process ensured consistency and minimized bias in synthesizing the findings.

## 4.0 Findings

This systematic review analyzed 60 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2025. The results were organized into three primary themes: Motivation Factors, Internship Satisfaction, and Career Intention. Across all themes, the evidence showed apparent interconnections between students' internship experiences and their long-term decisions to remain in the hospitality sector.

### 4.1 Motivation

The significance of motivation as a factor influencing internship engagement was highlighted in about 80% of the reviewed studies. The findings revealed that motivator factors, such as recognition, learning opportunities, and autonomy, were consistently more influential than hygiene factors like pay or policies. Numerous studies have shown that students feel more dedicated to the field when they are given meaningful responsibilities and regular feedback.

On the other hand, low motivation was attributed to a lack of opportunities for personal development, unclear job expectations, and inadequate mentoring. Cultural factors also influenced motivation; research from Malaysia and other Southeast Asian nations has shown the importance of peer pressure and family support in keeping students engaged. Intrinsic motivators foster deep engagement and professional growth:

- Autonomy and decision-making opportunities (Liu et al., 2022; Cavus et al, 2025)
- Recognition, achievement milestones, and meaningful feedback (Hu et al., 2025; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2021)
- Reflective practices that build professional identity (Ng et al., 2023)

Extrinsic (hygiene) factors provide necessary support but alone are insufficient:

- Compensation, stipends, and benefits packages (Limapan, 2024; Wireko-Gebi, 2023)
- Supervisor clarity, co-worker support, and policy transparency (Cavus et al, 2025; Tavares de Carvalho, 2024)
- Infrastructure adequacy, safety measures, and workplace resources (Musa et al., 2024)

#### 4.2 Internship Satisfaction

Internship satisfaction reflects students' overall appraisal of their placement. 75% of the reviewed articles linked internship satisfaction with students' perceptions of their future careers. High satisfaction was associated with structured internship programs, clear job descriptions, and supportive supervisors. These conditions enabled students to develop practical skills and a stronger sense of professional identity.

The dissatisfaction, however, emerged when the internships did not entail any developmental intervention but consisted mainly of routine work. Students were also dissatisfied when they used internships as a means of seeing their expectations and what they learnt in their courses; when the internship did not match with their expectations, they could not engage in it. This dissatisfaction was often exaggerated by long work hours and ineffective communication with the superiors. Five subdimensions recur across the literature:

Table 1 Literature Subdimension

Subdimension	Definition	Representative Findings
Supervisory Quality	Accessibility, feedback frequency, and clarity of guidance	Strongest predictor of satisfaction ( $r \approx 0.62$ ) 【Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2021】
Task Variety & Complexity	Diversity and challenge level of assigned tasks	Involvement in real projects boosted satisfaction by 18% on average 【Fajian et al., 2022】
Learning Outcomes	Ability to apply theory, develop skills, and receive coaching	Programs linking coursework to operations improved perceived value
Work Environment	Physical, social, and cultural aspects of the internship setting	Positive peer networks increased satisfaction in Southeast Asia contexts
Remuneration & Rewards	Financial compensation and non-monetary recognition	Adequate stipends and certificates correlated with higher retention intent

#### 4.3 Career Intention

Approximately 75 percent of the research focused on the relationship between the professional internship process and students' career choices. The majority of them came to the conclusion that positive internships made students more willing to get a job in the hospitality industry, especially when placements were inspiring and satisfying.

Nevertheless, long-term obstacles to enduring commitment have been reported in several studies as well. In particular, although the students were initially interested, they became disappointed due to fears of low wages, an emotionally taxing job, and a lack of promotion opportunities. These results suggest the complicated status of internships as they serve as systems of professionalization as well as formative experiences that guide students to continue studying the profession or switch to an alternative career path.

#### 4.4 Cross-Theme Synthesis

Integrating findings reveals a cascading model:

- I. Motivational Drivers activate student engagement,
- II. leading to Positive Internship Satisfaction,
- III. which culminates in stronger Career Intentions,
- IV. moderated by Structural Barriers.

Table 2 Cross-Theme Synthesis

Theme	Key Predictor	Average Effect Size	Contextual Note
Motivation	Intrinsic motivators	$r \approx 0.48$	Strongest in collectivist cultures
Internship Satisfaction	Supervisory quality	$r \approx 0.62$	Critical across all regional studies
Career Intention	Satisfaction + Self-efficacy	$\beta \approx 0.54$	Moderated by industry pay and career advancement

These themes are interrelated, which confirms the importance of taking both educational and industry variables into account. Although academic institutions can play a role in getting students interested in a career through pre-internship training and reflective learning, it is essential to ensure that the internship is successful and that post-graduate employment is a positive experience through hospitality organizations.

This model provides a strategic approach for educators, employers, and policymakers to plan interventions that harmonize psychological, experiential, and structural dimensions in developing sustainable careers in the hospitality industry. That way, internships can become not just a temporary exposure but a transformational experience that creates the future workforce of the industry.

## 5.0 Discussion

The results of the given systematic literature review indicate the importance of internships as a student-level step towards the creation of intentions of careers among the students of the hospitality industry. This chapter explains the connections between findings and the available theories, the local context in Malaysia, and the practice implications.

### 5.1 *The Role of Motivation in Shaping Career Perception*

The review supports the idea that intrinsic motivation, offering the elements of autonomy, recognition, and personal growth, is central to instigating internship exploration by the students. It matches up to the findings of the Two-Factor Theory of Herzberg, who confidently identified a distinction between hygiene factors, which have the aspect of preventing dissatisfaction, and motivators that are active in stimulating satisfaction and performance.

Motivational dynamics are particularly subtle in the scenario of Malaysian hospitality education, considering that collectivist cultural values play a role in making career choices. Research on peer validation and family support (Bahari & Saber, 2025) indicates that it is a highly effective external motivation tool, especially when it applies to female students. Such social factors can magnify or hinder the psychological preparedness of students in internships, and, hence, this factor influences post-internship outcomes regarding internship satisfaction.

The argument is reinforced by the theoretical fusion with Social Cognitive Theory, which suggests the permanence of perceived self-efficacy strengthened by successful task performance and mentor feedback in terms of motivation. Educators should thus foster self-belief and a growth mindset before internship placement, with the goal of maximizing early involvement.

### 5.2 *The Impact of Internship Satisfaction on Professional Identity Formation*

The most powerful determinant was found in the internship satisfaction, which led to the validation of the frameworks, including Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory. Supervision and performance results of students, as well as the work culture, are the causes of positive disconfirmation, where the expectations of students are fulfilled, and the positive disconfirmation is exceeded, resulting in increased organizational trust and commitment to students in the area.

The post-COVID hospitality sector in Malaysia continues to face a massive talent gap that is difficult to address within the context of inadequate workplace experiences and inconsistent internship quality, regardless of the COVID-19 context. Routine assignments, unclear job scopes, or the lack of feedback are some of the reasons that many students complain about being dissatisfied with them, and which can obstruct identity formation. This puts at risk not only retention but also the viability of hospitality education as a viable avenue of employment.

Internship programs should be built with a performance measure, organized reflection, and variation of tasks to move the trend in reverse. Single institutions need to partner with other industry players to synchronize the goals of the programs with on-site realities and make them feel that their input is considered necessary. These circumstances cultivate the feelings of belonging and purpose as key ingredients of professional identity.

### 5.3 *Balancing Positive Experiences with Industry Realities*

Career commitment is a complicated process that combines transitioning from an internship experience. Although the review proves that well-structured internships increase career intentions, the study is quite dependent on structural factors. Low income, emotional burnout, and restricted opportunities for promotion can undermine students' interest, even in cases where they report high satisfaction with the internship.

This observation refutes theories that hold that experiential learning is, in itself, enough to result in industry retention. As an alternative, it facilitates a tempered causal pathway that suggests the success of internships is conditioned by industry reform.

Even the most enthusiastic and happy interns will choose to leave this industry without system-wide improvements in hospitality jobs.

In Malaysian literature, this is a particular problem. Although the hospitality industry is economically viable, there is bad employment branding. Academic exposure tends to draw students into the field, but its practicalities tend to push students away. This contradiction should be overcome by concurrent intervention in both education and labor policy.

#### *5.4 Implications for Practice and Policy*

This review has several implications for educators, industry practitioners, and policymakers. On the part of educators, it is possible to maximize students' ability to make sense of what happens during the internship by designing courses that incorporate planning and guided reflection elements, as well as mentorship aspects of internships. To enhance the perceived relevance and interest, curriculum developers ought to align curriculum goals to the skills and competencies that are highly appreciated in the labor market.

These insights enable industry practitioners to design more effective internship programs that can help align the operational demands with the developmental needs of students. Satisfaction, and as a result, good career intention, can be enhanced considerably by ensuring that interns are provided with clear job descriptions, by giving them constructive feedback, and by recognizing their contributions.

Policymakers need to consider creating guidelines and accreditation criteria that will promote consistency in the structure of internships across institutions. Furthermore, specific incentives and financing may be implemented to incentivize those organizations that invest in organized internship programs so that the talent pipeline for the hospitality industry can be reinforced.

### **6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

This systematic literature review aimed to explore the connection between motivation and satisfaction in internship placements and their influence on career intentions among hospitality students. Based on 60 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2025, the results provided confirmation that an internship is a valuable experience in the development of professional identity and the career commitment of students to the hospitality sector. In particular, the review emphasizes that motivator factors, namely recognition, sense of purpose, and opportunity for self-growth, influence engagement more than hygiene factors do.

Additionally, satisfaction with internships is strongly linked to well-organized internships, mentoring supervisors, and clear expectations, all of which contribute to increased career optimism. Nevertheless, the consideration also indicates that the existence of system factors, such as extended working hours, low career mobility, and a perception of inadequate remuneration, also deters graduates, regardless of their initial desire to stay in the field.

Based on these results, internship-based programs should be organized in such a way that they pay attention to structured learning, exceptional mentorship, and frequent feedback to make the students feel valued and welcomed. To promote the correspondence between the internship goals and real life, close cooperation between the academic institutions and industry partners is mandatory to provide a set of tasks that are suitable for meeting the developing needs of the students. Additionally, the working conditions and career pathways require more systematic changes to ensure improvements on a larger scale, which can help disrupt structural barriers to retention.

Lastly, the internship design must be culturally appropriate, especially in the Malaysian setting, where individuals have strong ties to social norms and family expectations regarding career choices. A longitudinal study that tracks graduates after the internship to determine how their perceptions change when they join the workforce might be helpful in future studies.

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### **Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study**

This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on hospitality education by systematically synthesizing recent evidence on the role of internships in shaping students' career intentions.

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