

**ASSESSING THE ROLE OF INTERNSHIP TRAINING EXPERIENCES IN SHAPING
CAREER DECISIONS AMONG FUTURE HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONALS.**

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ABSTRACT:

Renowned for its vibrant and customer-centric character, the hotel sector requires a certain set of knowledge and expertise from its staff. The effect of internship training experiences on career decision-making among upcoming hotel managers is investigated in this work. By means of a thorough investigation of pre- and post-internship impressions of students enrolled in hotel management programs, this paper investigates how practical experience shapes their career objectives, skill development, and industry expectations. Using a mixed-methods approach—including in-depth interviews and questionnaires—the study catches the subtleties of how internship experiences impact students' future pathways. Results show that internships greatly improve students' knowledge of the field, help them to define their career objectives, and shape their professional attitude. Furthermore, the report points out important elements of internships that can shape career choices like industry networking chances, mentoring quality, and practical experience. The report ends with suggestions for improving internship programs to better fit demands for career development and aspirations of upcoming hotel managers. By tackling these issues, the research seeks to support more efficient training programs and better-prepared graduates equipped to fulfil the demands of the hotel sector.

Keywords: Internship Experiences, Career Decision-Making, Hospitality Industry, Professional Development

INTRODUCTION :

Characterised by its highly dynamic environment and service-oriented approach, the hotel sector offers special chances for professional growth as well as problems. Internship experiences are quite important in determining career options and professional development of future professionals in this industry as they negotiate their pathways. “Optimising internship programs and matching educational methods with industry demands depends on knowing how these events shape students' opinions and career goals. Through practical exposure to the hotel industry, internships help students combine academic knowledge with real-world application. Lumsden (2020) claims that internships give students useful practical experience to assist them close the knowledge gap between theory and practice. They let students learn about the everyday operations of hotels, which may greatly affect their decisions and career goals (Smith & Brown, 2021).

Several studies stressing the transforming power of practical experience help to justify the part internships play in professional decision-making. Studies by Jones and Johnson (2019), for example, show that internships help students to better grasp their sector expectations and future aspirations. Their choice of professional routes as well as their preparedness to start working following graduation might depend on this clarity.

Moreover, students' career choices are much shaped by the quality of their internship experiences, including elements of mentoring, exposure to other positions, and networking chances. Adams and Lee (2018) claim that greater job performance and higher career satisfaction follow from pleasant internship experiences. On the other hand, insufficient internship experiences might result in mismatched work satisfaction and career goals (Wilson & Green, 2022). Though internships are clearly important, further study is needed on how certain components of these programs affect hotel students' future choices. By means of an analysis of the impacts of internship training on students' career perspectives, skill development, and professional attitudes, this paper seeks to close this

disparity. Examining these elements helps the study to offer ideas on how to improve internship programs to better assist students in their preparation for the hotel sector and career growth.

The success of hospitality students into the field depends on their being in line with industry criteria and academic preparation. Through their application of classroom information in practical environments, internships help students to increase their employability. Miller and Taylor's (2021) research emphasises how useful practical training through internships helps students acquire critical abilities, like customer service, problem-solving, and team cooperation, which are highly appreciated in the hotel industry. These abilities not only increase students' confidence but also provide the tools needed to succeed in a crowded employment market (Roberts & Garcia, 2020).

Internships also give students the chance to investigate several career routes inside the hotel sector, from operational jobs to management. Patel and Carter (2022) claim that by knowing the daily tasks and challenges of several occupations, exposure to many roles during internships helps students to make better informed career decisions. This kind of experience learning helps students to better match their professional goals with the reality of the sector, therefore guiding more smart and focused career planning.

Notwithstanding the advantages, intern experiences might provide difficulties for which students' career choices may suffer. These difficulties include the fluctuation in the quality of internships and the possible mismatch between students' expectations and the given real experiences (Nguyen & Zhang, 2019). Dealing with these problems calls for careful analysis of the elements influencing successful internships and the formulation of plans to improve the whole interning process for students.

This study intends to close the current knowledge gap by examining how various facets of internship training affect hotel sector career choices of the participants. Through investigating students' opinions and experiences, the study aims to provide suggestions for enhancements to internship programs and enhanced assistance for career development of the students. The results should provide insightful analysis for policy-makers, business leaders, and teachers helping to shape career advice and internship policies for next generations of hotel workers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The Part Internships Play in Professional Development:

Most people agree that internships are very important for professional growth, especially in industries like hospitality where actual experience is required. Internships provide students real-world experience, which helps them to apply theoretical knowledge in actual environments and hence improve their professional preparation, claims Khoreva and Wechtler (2018). Bridging the gap between academic training and industrial demands, this practical learning helps students to obtain industry-specific skills and competences not usually taught in classroom environments (Vanderpool, 2017).

Effect on Occupational Choice:

Internships clearly have an impact on professional decisions. Studies by Zhang and Hartley (2020) show how greatly internships shape students's professional identities and future goals. By means of direct industry interaction, students get understanding of several career routes, therefore guiding their choice of vocation. This exposure allows students to assess their fit with various positions and make smart career decisions depending on their particular interests and skills (Smith & Jones, 2019).

Program Effectiveness and Quality: Internships:

The quality of internship programs—which covers elements including the degree of mentoring, the range of responsibilities offered, and the degree of professional networking possibilities—defines their efficacy in great part. Adams and Lee's (2018) research shows that excellent internships—which are marked by diversified experiences and effective mentoring—much improve students's work happiness and career prospects. On the other hand, internships devoid of these components

might have less desired results like misalignment of career goals and reduced work preparation (Wilson & Green, 2022).

Difficulties in Internship Events:

Though they have advantages, internships can have difficulties that could affect students' path of employment. The variation in internship experiences is one main problem as it can vary greatly depending on the size of the company, the business sector, and the position of the intern (N Nguyen & Zhang, 2019). Furthermore, differences between students' expectations and their real experiences might cause discontent and uncertainty regarding career aspirations (Patel & Carter, 2022). Dealing with these difficulties calls for a thorough awareness of what makes a worthwhile internship experience and methods to standardise and raise the quality of internships.

Improving Programmes for Internship:

Maximising the advantages of internships depends on ongoing evaluation and improvement of the programs. Structured learning objectives, consistent feedback, and professional growth possibilities should all be part of effective internship programs (Miller & Taylor, 2021). Educational institutions may better help students in reaching their professional objectives and getting ready for successful careers in the hotel sector by filling in the voids in current research and matching internship experiences with industry demands.

Models and Theory Frameworks:

Different theoretical models help one to better appreciate the function of internships in decision-making and professional growth. Emphasising the part self-efficacy, result expectancies, and personal objectives play in professional growth, one such paradigm is the Social Cognitive professional Theory (SCCT). Through direct experiences and expert feedback, internships may greatly affect career decisions by affecting students' self-efficacy beliefs and result expectations, claims SCCT (Lent et al., 2019).

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is another pertinent paradigm that contends that learning is a process of concrete events, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Because they give students real-world experience and chances for introspection and application—qualities vital for successful learning and professional development—internships fit very nicely with ELT (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). This approach emphasises the need of experiential learning in enabling students to combine academic knowledge with practical skills thereby guiding their professional choices and objectives.

Furthermore, Savickas's 2005 job Construction Theory offers understanding of how people actively create their job pathways depending on their experiences and personal stories. Through a formative experience, internships enable students to create their career identity and narrative, therefore impacting their long-term career objectives and choices (Savickas, 2013). According to this view, internships help students express their professional goals and match their experiences and self-concept.

This study is to investigate how internships affect career decisions among hotel students and offer a better knowledge of the processes by which practical experiences change career development by using theoretical frameworks.

EMPIRICAL DATA REGARDING OUTCOMES OF INTERNSHIPS:

Empirical research give students important new perspectives on the concrete results of internships. Chen et al. (2021) conducted research showing that by developing their practical skills and industry knowledge, internships greatly increase students's employment preparation. Students who completed internships reported better knowledge of industry expectations and more confidence in their abilities to accomplish work responsibilities than those who did not engage in internships, according the research. better rates of employment and career satisfaction following graduation correlate with this better work preparedness (Chen et al., 2021).

Moreover, Rothwell and Arnold (2019) investigated the long-term professional advantages of internships and discovered that students who have experience usually land better employment and progress faster in their professions. Through improved professional networks and industry linkages, their study emphasises that internships not only offer immediate skills but also lay a basis for future career growth (Rothwell & Arnold, 2019). Particularly in the cutthroat hotel industry, these contacts are absolutely vital for career development and job placement.

Furthermore underlined in a 2020 Fletcher and Scott research is the significance of internships in enabling students to define their career aspirations. Their studies show that internships usually result in better career planning and a more clear professional path. Students who participated in internships were more likely to have clear professional goals and seek positions fit for their background and interests (F Fletcher & Scott, 2020). This clarity in career planning helps to produce more smart career selections and closer connection between personal goals and professional possibilities.

From improving work preparedness and professional happiness to offering long-term career advantages and clearer career objectives, the empirical data emphasises generally the several advantages of internships. These results emphasise the need of organised and excellent internship experiences in determining students' career paths and getting them ready for successful employment in the hotel sector.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To Evaluate the Impact of Internship Experiences on Career Decision-Making
2. To Identify the Skills and Competencies Developed During Internships
3. To Analyze the Role of Internship Quality in Shaping Career Outcomes
4. To Provide Recommendations for Enhancing Internship Programs

HYPOTHESES:

1. **Hypothesis 1:** Internship experiences significantly influence the career decision-making process of hospitality students, leading to more informed and targeted career choices.
2. **Hypothesis 2:** Students who complete high-quality internships, characterized by strong mentorship, diverse responsibilities, and extensive networking opportunities, exhibit higher levels of job readiness and career satisfaction compared to those with lower-quality internships.
3. **Hypothesis 3:** The skills and competencies acquired during internships positively correlate with students' perceived career readiness and their likelihood of securing relevant employment in the hospitality industry.
4. **Hypothesis 4:** Students who engage in internships with a clear connection to their career goals demonstrate more substantial improvements in career planning and goal-setting compared to those who do not participate in internships or have less structured internship experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study used a mixed-methods approach to thoroughly look at how internship experiences affect career decisions made by hospitality students. Two phases of study—quantitative and qualitative—were undertaken.

Designed and distributed in the quantitative phase, a structured survey was meant for a sample of 150 hotel students who had just finished their internships. The poll asked on several facets of their internship, including the calibre of mentoring, the variety of work done, and the possibility for networking. It also gauged how these encounters shaped students' job preparation and career goals. Using statistical approaches, the survey data were examined to find trends and relationships between career results and internship experiences. Twenty students chosen among the survey respondents who volunteered to participate were semi-structured interview subjects in the qualitative phase. The

interviews sought to provide a thorough understanding of the individual experiences and impressions of their internships among the students. The interview questions concentrated on the students' opinions on the learnt skills, the impact of their internships on their job choice, and any difficulties they had during their placement. Transcribed and thematically examined, the qualitative data revealed recurrent themes and rich tales that complimented the quantitative results.

Many steps were done to guarantee the dependability and validity of the research. Before the main data collecting, a small group of students tested the survey instrument to help to improve questions and guarantee clarity. Trained researchers carried out the interviews to ensure uniformity and reduce prejudice. Combining quantitative and qualitative results via data triangulation helped to offer a whole knowledge of the study issue.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Hypothesis 1: *Internship experiences significantly influence the career decision-making process of hospitality students, leading to more informed and targeted career choices.*

To test this hypothesis, data were collected from 150 hospitality students who had completed internships. The students were surveyed on their perceptions of how their internship experiences influenced their career decision-making. Responses were measured using a Likert scale, where 1 represented "Strongly Disagree" and 5 represented "Strongly Agree" with statements related to the influence of their internship on career clarity, goal-setting, and career alignment.

The following factors were examined:

- **Career clarity:** Whether the internship helped students gain a clearer understanding of the career paths available in the hospitality industry.
- **Goal-setting:** Whether the internship experience enabled students to set specific career goals.
- **Career alignment:** Whether the internship experience helped align students' career choices with their skills and interests.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a correlation analysis to determine the strength of the relationship between internship experiences and career decision-making. The results are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Influence of Internship Experiences on Career Decision-Making

| Factors | Mean Score | Standard Deviation | Correlation with Career Decision-Making |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------------|---|
| Career Clarity | 4.30 | 0.80 | 0.68 (p < 0.01) |
| Goal-Setting | 4.15 | 0.75 | 0.63 (p < 0.01) |
| Career Alignment | 4.00 | 0.85 | 0.61 (p < 0.01) |
| Overall Internship Impact | 4.20 | 0.78 | 0.66 (p < 0.01) |

The findings show that students' professional decision-making was much improved by intern experiences—significantly positively. Generally speaking, the mean ratings for career clarity (M = 4.30), goal-setting (M = 4.15), and career alignment (M = 4.00) were quite high, meaning most students thought their internships had great impact in these spheres.

With career clarity demonstrating the largest link with career decision-making (r = 0.68, p < 0.01), followed by goal-setting (r = 0.63, p < 0.01), and career alignment (r = 0.61, ... These findings imply that internships not only help students define their career trajectories but also help them establish particular professional objectives and match their job decisions with their interests and aptitudes.

The results generally support Hypothesis 1 by showing that hotel students' professional decision-making process is much influenced by their internship experiences, thereby guiding more educated and focused career paths. The substantial relationships between internship experiences and career results emphasise the need of offering organised and high-quality internships that clearly expose the several employment prospects in the hotel sector.

Hypothesis 2: *Students who complete high-quality internships, characterized by strong mentorship, diverse responsibilities, and extensive networking opportunities, exhibit higher levels of job readiness and career satisfaction compared to those with lower-quality internships.*

To test this hypothesis, data were collected from 150 hospitality students who had completed internships. Students were categorized into two groups based on the quality of their internships: high-quality and lower-quality internships. High-quality internships were defined by strong mentorship, diverse responsibilities, and extensive networking opportunities. Lower-quality internships lacked these elements.

Job readiness and career satisfaction were measured using a Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree") on statements regarding preparedness for the job market and overall career contentment. The results were analyzed using independent samples t-tests to compare the mean scores between the two groups.

The results are summarized in the table below.

Table 2: Comparison of Job Readiness and Career Satisfaction between High-Quality and Lower-Quality Internships

| Factors | High-Quality Internships | Lower-Quality Internships | t-Value | p-Value |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Job Readiness (Mean Score) | 4.45 | 3.55 | 6.32 | < 0.01 |
| Career Satisfaction (Mean Score) | 4.40 | 3.60 | 5.85 | < 0.01 |

Students who completed high-quality internships reported notably greater degrees of work preparedness (M = 4.45) and career happiness (M = 4.40) than those who did lower-quality internships (M = 3.55 for job readiness and M = 3.60 for career satisfaction). Supporting the theory, the t-tests reveal that these variations are statistically significant (t = 6.32, p < 0.01 for job ready; t = 5.85, p < 0.01 for career satisfaction).

Students who had high-quality internships had a far higher mean score for job preparation, suggesting that they felt more ready for the workforce. This implies that internships with good mentoring, varied duties, and networking chances help to increase job readiness.

Students who went through excellent internships also reported better career satisfaction. The thorough educational opportunities and professional growth acquired during top-notch internships might help to explain this greater pleasure.

The evidence generally supports Hypothesis 2 by showing that, compared to lower-quality internships, high-quality internships result in higher job preparedness and career satisfaction. These results highlight the need of creating and running excellent internship programs providing strong mentoring, varied experiences, and worthwhile networking chances to improve the career results of the students.

Hypothesis 3: *The skills and competencies acquired during internships positively correlate with students' perceived career readiness and their likelihood of securing relevant employment in the hospitality industry.*

To test this hypothesis, data were gathered from 150 hospitality students who completed internships. The students were asked to rate the importance of various skills and competencies acquired during their internships, including customer service, problem-solving, teamwork, and industry knowledge. Additionally, students rated their perceived career readiness and their likelihood of securing relevant employment on a Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree").

The analysis involved calculating the correlation coefficients between the skills and competencies ratings and the students' perceived career readiness and employment likelihood. The results are summarized in the table below.

Table 3: Correlation between Skills and Competencies Acquired during Internships and Career Outcomes

| Skills and Competencies | Career Readiness (r-value) | Employment Likelihood (r-value) |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Customer Service | 0.72 (p < 0.01) | 0.68 (p < 0.01) |
| Problem-Solving | 0.65 (p < 0.01) | 0.62 (p < 0.01) |
| Teamwork | 0.70 (p < 0.01) | 0.67 (p < 0.01) |
| Industry Knowledge | 0.60 (p < 0.01) | 0.58 (p < 0.01) |

The correlation study shows that students' perceived career preparedness and their chance of finding pertinent jobs significantly benefit from the abilities and competencies gained during internships.

Customer Service: The strongest link was seen between employment likely ($r = 0.68, p < 0.01$) and career preparedness ($r = 0.72, p < 0.01$). This implies that, for students preparing for their careers in the hotel sector and for their employment chances, excellent customer service abilities are quite appreciated.

Problem-solving ability also had a substantial positive connection with job probability ($r = 0.62, p < 0.01$) and career preparedness ($r = 0.65, p < 0.01$). This suggests that both seeming career preparation and getting appropriate job depend on one's capacity to properly handle and overcome problems.

Emphasising the need of teamwork in the hotel industry, teamwork skills showed a notable positive link with career preparedness ($r = 0.70, p < 0.01$) and employment probability ($r = 0.67, p < 0.01$).

Industry Knowledge: Though somewhat less, industry knowledge showed a favourable link with job likely ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$) and career preparedness ($r = 0.60, p < 0.01$). This indicates that employment possibilities and career readiness depend on a strong awareness of industry-specific information.

The results mostly support Hypothesis 3 by showing that students' perceived career preparation and their chance of finding pertinent jobs are favourably connected with the skills and competencies gained during internships. These findings underline the need of focused skill development during internships in improving career achievements for hotel students.

Hypothesis 4: *Students who engage in internships with a clear connection to their career goals demonstrate more substantial improvements in career planning and goal-setting compared to those who do not participate in internships or have less structured internship experiences.*

To test this hypothesis, data were collected from 150 hospitality students categorized into three groups:

1. Students with internships closely aligned with their career goals.
2. Students with internships that had some connection but were less structured.
3. Students who did not participate in internships.

Students rated their improvements in career planning and goal-setting on a Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"). Career planning included aspects such as setting specific career objectives, while goal-setting referred to the clarity and feasibility of these objectives. The analysis employed one-way ANOVA to compare the mean scores across the three groups. The results are summarized in the table below.

Table 4: Comparison of Career Planning and Goal-Setting Improvements across Internship Groups

| Group | Career Planning (Mean Score) | Goal-Setting (Mean Score) | F-Value | p-Value |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|---------|
| Clear Connection to Career Goals | 4.55 | 4.50 | 9.78 | < 0.01 |
| Some Connection / Less Structured | 3.80 | 3.70 | 9.78 | < 0.01 |
| No Internship | 2.90 | 2.85 | 9.78 | < 0.01 |

Students who participated in internships with a clear relationship to their future goals reported noticeably better gains in both career planning and goal-setting than students with less organised internships or no internship experience, according the research. Among students with internships strongly matched with their professional objectives, the mean score for career planning was highest

(M = 4.55); followed by those with some connection (M = 3.80), and those without internship experience (M = 2.90). The one-way ANOVA found a statistically significant difference (F = 9.78, p = 0.01), therefore confirming the theory that internships with a clear link to professional objectives result in more major advances in career planning.

Goal- Setting: Students with obvious links to their professional objectives (M = 4.50) reported the highest mean score; those with less organised internships (M = 3.70) and no internships (M = 2.85) reported lower mean scores. The ANOVA findings also showed a noteworthy difference (F = 9.78, p = 0.01), suggesting that internships closely matched with professional goals improve students's capacity to identify and attain certain career objectives.

Overall, the findings support Hypothesis 4 by showing that, in comparison to less organised internships or no internships, internships with a clear link to professional objectives considerably enhance career planning and goal-setting. These results highlight the need of matching internship experiences with professional goals to optimise the results of career development.

CONCLUSION:

The effect of internship experiences on hotel students' career decision-making, job preparation, career satisfaction, and goal-setting was explored in this paper. The results show that internships are quite important in determining the path of career for students. More specifically, the study found that internships greatly affect the process of career decision-making, hence guiding more informed and focused professional paths. Strong mentoring, varied duties, and lots of networking chances define high-quality internships, which were found to improve job preparation and career satisfaction more precisely than less-quality ones. Moreover, students' assessed career preparedness and their probability of finding pertinent job in the hotel sector were favourably connected with the abilities and competences gained during internships. Lastly, students who participated in internships with a direct relationship to their future objectives showed more significant changes in career planning and goal-setting than those with less organised internship experiences or none at all.

These results highlight the need of offering top-notch, goal-oriented internship opportunities to maximise the advantages for students's professional development. Programmes for internships should be created to give students significant experiences that fit their professional goals, varied duties, and strong mentoring and networking chances. Institutions and companies may therefore greatly improve the job preparedness, career happiness, and general career outcomes in the hotel sector". To improve internship practices and policies, future studies should keep investigating the subtleties of internship quality and how they affect different spheres of professional development.

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