

Article Review: Internship Satisfaction Determinants Among Undergraduates in the Service Industry

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Abstract

An internship program is integrated into higher learning institutions curriculum. It is aimed to

cultivate students ability in applying knowledge from classrooms to practices. Internship satisfaction is identified as one of the focal points to assess the effectiveness of an internship program. Nonetheless, only little studies reviewed the determinants of internship satisfaction, particularly within the service-oriented industry. Thus, the main objective of this study was to review factors that influence internship satisfaction in the service industry, particularly the hospitality industry. Besides, the importance of internship in developing self-competencies among students is also discussed. A number of articles were obtained from two different databases, using keywords related to the topic. The articles were carefully examined, derived from relevant disciplines in the service industry: hospitality and tourism, business, sports management, education, and human resource. Main determinants of the internship satisfaction were clustered into five categories: individual factors, job characteristics, organisational environment, contextual factors, and career potential. Besides, the importance of internship experiences in fostering students self-competencies were discussed, including interpersonal skills, problem-solving, self-confidence, and knowledge about the job market. Findings on this paper are anticipated to extend the literature review on internship research and assist internship stakeholders in structuring a well-rounded internship program. As this paper is only based on traditional literature reviews, it has a limitation in its methodology. Hence, future research is recommended to use a structured methodology such as systematic reviews or scoping reviews.

Keywords: student competencies, higher learning institutions, internship, internship satisfaction, undergraduate students.

1. Introduction

The design of curriculum revision in higher learning institutions (HLIs) has become critical as the industry keeps expanding and evolving, which required the supply of competent fresh graduates (Casado, 2003; Jafari & Ritchie, 1981; Lefever & Withiam, 1998; Pavesic, 1984, 1993; Tribe, 2002; Umbreit, 1992). Currently, graduates employability has been a growing concern in many countries, including Malaysia. A climate of opinion from the industry is that HLIs are taking the responsibility to ensure graduates are well-equipped with the relevant skills in order to be employed in the job market (Robinson & Garton, 2008).

Malaysia is heading to attain the status of a developed country. However, the fact that Malaysian graduates are still encountering insufficient knowledge, skills, attitudes and related experiences demanded by the industry requires a concern (Rahmah et al., 2011). Chook (2013) reported that the main reasons Malaysian graduates fail to get job opportunities are the lack of employability skills. To that point, the critical function of possessing adequate employability skills, especially among Malaysian graduates, has been vital in the everchanging workforce (Robinson & Garton, 2008).

In regards to the mismatch in the supply and demand of graduates, the Ministry of Education Malaysia and HLIs have given their best effort to enhance the student learning experience by incorporating the use of experiential learning to develop 21st-century skills (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2006). By having successful experiential learning, students can acquire professional skills, learning experiences, and a greater understanding of the industry

requirements (Scalzo & Turner, 2007).

Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019) released its latest key statistics of Malaysia labour force for August 2019. According to the report, the unemployment rate in August 2019 remained unchanged at 3.30% as for July 2019. However, the Malaysian youth employment rate is more than triple the national rate of 3.30%, which is 10.90% (Hunter, 2019). Two main factors preventing Malaysian graduates from obtaining employment opportunity are the low proficiency in English and lack of exposure to real-world situations. Employers nowadays face substantial burdens despite graduates lacking real-world experience as many companies prioritise employees with work experience (Free Malaysia Today News, 2017). Unfortunately, in Malaysia, students often fail to realise the importance of possessing real-world experience by focusing only on scoring good grades. As a result, many Malaysian graduates could not express themselves very well in job interviews, adding that their struggles with English proficiency decrease their confidence level, leading to the failure to get the job offer. Hence, HLIs need to emphasise the involvement of experiential learning, such as internship program that allowed undergraduate students to gain valuable real-world experience. Future graduates should take the internship program as an opportunity for a training ground to improve their employability skills and try to make the best out of it (Razak et al., 2014).

According to Lee and Chao (2013), the satisfaction from the internship experiences perceived by students can be a significant input to HLIs to help them improve their curricula. Also, students perspectives may provide information to ease graduates access to the labour market. Despite the importance of this issue, internship satisfaction is identified as a research area that has been largely neglected (D'Abate et al., 2009; Divine et al., 2007; Feldman & Weitz, 1990; Narayanan et al., 2010; Paulins, 2008; Rothman, 2003).

It is also argued that internship contributes to developing students competencies in management (Knight & Salter, 1985; LeBruto & Murray, 1994; Mariampolski et al. 1980; Tas, 1988). Students who undergone an internship were able to develop their competencies in several management areas: including leadership, human resource management, oral and written communication, interpersonal communication, problem-solving, teamwork, planning and decision-making (Tas, 1988; LeBruto & Murray, 1994). However, there is limited literature to support these claims with few studies assessing changes in students management competencies due to undertaking an internship.

Internships and graduate competencies are both viewed as a critical element in the scope of human resource management, particularly human resource development. Therefore, this paper aimed to review the factors that influence students satisfaction level regarding their internship experiences. Besides, this paper also discusses the importance of internship in infusing self-competencies among undergraduate students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Internship

The job market nowadays requires fresh graduates to possess related experiences within the industrial field besides acquiring adequate skills and competencies to be employed (Zopiatis,

2007). As a result, the curriculum in HLIs plays critical roles to provide relevant pedagogy intends to boost graduate employability skills (Collins, 2002; Lam & Ching, 2007; Richardson, 2009). Previously, researchers proposed some of the suggestions to the academics and practitioners in overcoming ill-prepared graduates, and one of the suggestions is to infuse and develop the required skills during an internship (Walo, 2001).

The internship provides a professional learning experience that integrates knowledge and theory learned in classrooms with the practical work experience (Barrows, 1999; Bosselman, 1999). As mentioned by Scott (1992), an internship is the best way of training, particularly in the hospitality industry as it is the most effective way for students to learn the reality of the positions they are considering for a future career. It is also essential to prepare graduates for a future job to develop their leadership as it is found to be associated with intrapreneurial behaviour such as being innovative and proactive (Özsungur, 2020).

2.2 Importance of Internship in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs)

To date, most of the local universities incorporate an internship program in their curriculum design, which intends to enhance students skills. Coco (2000) and Paulins (2008) asserted that the internship benefits the students with opportunities to polish their career skills and gain on-the-job experience.

Previous literature has proven that work experiences have a significant impact on the personal career choices as it is known to provide a planned transition from the classroom to the job environment and at the same time prepare students with realistic expectations of their future careers (Walsh & Taylor, 2007). Blomme et al. (2009) reported that the hospitality interns who had completed their training agreed to some extent that previous internship satisfaction would have a strong influence on their career intentions. According to Chinomona and Surujlal (2012), one of the internship goals is to provide and develop students with the necessary skills to be effective in the work environment. In fact, given that internship is the first working experience for many college or university students, they tend to improve career decision making and perceptions of self-efficacy obtained from a beneficial learning experience (Brooks et al., 1995).

Undoubtedly, many previous academic researchers had discussed the benefits and positive outcomes of internships. However, the nature of successful internship experiences depends on the satisfaction of students with their internships. Thus, the internship experience outcome should focus on improving the learning experiences as it will assist graduates throughout the real world of employment (Huang & Jia, 2010).

3. Methodology

The selected articles embrace the factors that influence students satisfaction level related to their internship experiences and the importance of internship in infusing self-competencies among undergraduate students. The articles were identified using Emerald Insight and Google Scholars databases. To be specific, only indexed journal articles were included in this study. Articles with performing keywords in their full text such as “internship satisfaction”, “competencies”, “internship experience”, “career”, “students, employers, and higher learning

institutions perception towards internship”, “factors affecting internship satisfaction”, and “employment” were chosen to ensure the contextual relevance.

The articles were carefully filtered by reading the abstracts to identify disciplines related to the topic, for instance: hospitality and tourism, business, sports management, education, human resource, and computer science. However, articles concerning internships with irrelevance contexts for this study (i.e. medicine, accounting, and other related contexts) were excluded due to the different measured factors.

4. Findings and Discussion

There were 15 articles that suit this article review content and context, from the databases as mentioned above. The articles are within related disciplines, focus on the internship satisfaction and importance for graduates competencies. The determinants of internship satisfaction were classified into five categories, and the influence of internship on graduates competencies was discussed. The subheading 4.1 delineates the factors affecting students internship satisfaction, while subheading 4.2 discusses the importance of internship experiences in infusing self-competencies among undergraduate students. Table 1 shows the factors affecting internship satisfaction from each of the identified articles.

4.1 Factors Affecting Internship Satisfaction of Students

Table 1. A summary of the factors affecting internship satisfaction

Author (s)	Year (s)	Context (s)	Determinants of Internship Satisfaction
1. Sasithorn Phonkaew, Lalida Arphawatthanasakul, Christelle Khamsing	2018	Hospitality and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer relationship • Advisor accountability • Students self-efficacy
2. Yuliana	2016	Hospitality and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship • Work environment • Supervision • Location • Job • Pay
3. Faruk Seyitoğlu and Sevket Yirik	2015	Hospitality and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary • Paying for overtimes • Not having excessive working hours • Fair management behaviour between training interns and permanent employees
4. Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou	2013	Hospitality and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional environment • Learned a lot • Interesting work

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good supervision • Made valuable contacts • Felt like part of the team • Made good money • Flexible schedule • New skills • Self-knowledge • Meaningful task 	
5.	Bao Yafang and Fang Gongyong	2008	Hospitality and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job itself • Supervision • Training and development • Pay • Peer relationship
6.	Ivaylo Staribratov	2018	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational environment • Contextual factors
7.	Adnan Jawabri	2017	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working environment • Academic preparedness • Self-initiatives • Challenges on-job • Effectiveness of supervision • Task clarity
8.	Gisela Sanahuja Velez and Gabriela Ribes Giner	2014	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing feedback • Autonomy • Positive attitudes as interns • Job skills • Technical skills • Work experience • Job placement • Meaningful task • Qualified supervision • Relationship with supervisor
9.	Kenneth R. Lord, Delia Sumrall , and Rajan Sambandam	2011	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to apply academic skill • Accomplish goals and express opinions • Co-worker relationships
10.	Pola B. Gupta, David J. Burns, and Jaime S. Schiferl	2010	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive internship experience • Positive work environment • Improved job prospects • New skills • Work environment • Communication skills

11. Caroline P. D'Abate, Mark A. Youndt and Kathryn E. Wenzel	2009	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill variety • Task significance • Autonomy • Feedback • Co-worker • Supervisor support • Development opportunities • Flexible working hours • Commute • Pay • Location
12. Wen Keyin Phoebe	2010	Human Resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge job • Effectiveness of supervision • Pay
13. George Kipreos and Panagiotis Dimitropoulos	2016	Sports Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature of the placement • Cooperation with the host organisation • Future employability • Career enhancement • Obtaining career related experiences
14. Wan Chen Lu and Che- Chun Kuo	2016	Sports Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive personality • Self-efficacy
15. Gi-Yong Koo, Michael J. Diacin, Jam Khojasteh and Anthony W. Dixon	2016	Sport Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill development • Task significance • Professional network

The determinants of internship satisfaction, as listed in the table, were then classified into five categories based on the model proposed by previous authors:

4.1.1 Individual Factors

According to Phoebe (2010), the author examined the student perception of the factors that lead to internship satisfaction. The findings revealed that three types of individual factors tend to have a high impact on the internship experience: academic preparedness, positive attitude, and self-initiative. The author has developed a model to support the correlation between individual factors and internship satisfaction. In other words, it has been widely used by other researchers from different contexts of studies to be applied for their research purposes. It can be concluded that several studies which emphasised on those three types of individual factors including Jawabri (2017), Lord et al. (2011), Lu and Kuo (2016), Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2013), Phonkaew et al. (2018), and Sanahuja and Ribes (2015).

4.1.2 Job Characteristics

Hackman and Oldham (1980) proposed the job characteristics model (JCM) in their study, which focuses on the work redesign. This model propounds five core dimensions that satisfied workers, consisting of skills variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. According to the authors, if employees perceived quality job dimensions, it will contribute to the high level of employee satisfaction and motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). The job characteristics model can be applied to permanent employees and interns (Rothman, 2003). Based on Table 1, it can be summarised that the studies related to these five core dimensions are Bao and Fang (2008), D'Abate et al. (2009), Gupta et al. (2010), Jawabri (2017), Koo et al. (2016), Phoebe (2010), Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2013), Nelson (1994), Sanahuja and Ribes (2015).

4.1.3 Organisational Environment

A model of the organisational environment was developed by D' Abate et al., (2009), which includes the site supervisor, co-workers, task clarity, learning opportunities, professional growth, and organisation satisfaction as the elements that affect the satisfaction level of interns or employees. Based on Table 1, the studies conducted by Bao and Fang (2008), Gupta et al. (2018), Jawabri (2017), Kipreos and Dimitropoulos (2016), Koo et al. (2016), Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2013), Phoebe (2010), Phonekaew et al. (2018), Sanahuja and Ribes (2015), Seyitoğlu and Yirik (2015), Staribratou (2018), and Yuliana (2016) suggested at least one of the above elements had an impact to the internship effectiveness.

4.1.4 Contextual Factors

As referred to D'Abate et al., (2009), several contextual factors were convenient to interns. These factors include pay, work hours, commute, and location. According to the findings, the studies that emphasise on these factors derived from Bao and Fang (2008), Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2013), Phoebe (2010), Seyitoğlu and Yirik (2015), Staribratou (2018), and Yuliana (2016).

4.1.5 Career Potential

Studies by Gupta et al. (2010), Sanahuja and Ribes (2015), Kipreos and Dimitropoulos (2016), and Yuliana (2016) proposed that job prospects could be influenced by internship satisfaction. This statement is further supported by Devine et al. (2007), which they claimed that an internship able to influence student career choice by cultivating a better understanding of the job market and allowing them to adapt in the work environment. The internship acts as a medium for the transition from the educational environment to the industrial environment.

4.2 The Importance of Internship Experiences in Infusing Self-competencies among Undergraduate Students

Many researchers have investigated an internship educational value in terms of competencies, career, and personal development. According to Raybould and Wilkins (2006), practical experience is crucial in delivering university student skills and competencies, specifically for the service industry. Faculty members, students, and employers in the United States perceived

that hands-on work experience is vital in delivering skills and competencies (Ford & LeBruto, 1995). Therefore, an internship is perceived as an integral part of any academic program.

A well-planned internship with the commitment from all stakeholders (employers, students, and educators) have the potential to adequately prepare graduates for job placement (Mensah et al., 2020; Pauze et al., 1989; Petrillose & Montgomery, 1998; Sauder et al., 2019). Both educators and practitioners agree that internship offers students a variety of learning techniques by blending the theory with practices in order to effectively develop self-competencies such as human relations, leadership, communication, team building and customer relations (Tangaro, 2019; Tas, 1988; Okeiyi et al., 1994). Therefore, many organisations expect students to understand the industry, interpersonal skills, work ethic, teamwork, problem handling, and excellent communication based on what they have learned from their internship experiences (Daugherty, 2001).

Khalil (2015) proposed that students who completed their internship at Kuwait University gained a better knowledge of the job market, enhanced some skills which they were not able to develop within the classroom (i.e., professionalism and team-playing capability) and finally improved their career potential since they were better prepared to adapt themselves to the workplace upon graduation. Also, Andrews and Higson (2008) documented that skills relating to problem-solving, critical thinking, self-confidence, and even verbal communication also enhanced among students who had internship experiences.

As opined by Zopiatis and Constanti (2007), an internship has multiple benefits, including the practical skills that cannot be obtained in class, besides mastering the students in using specialised equipment and dealing with demanding customers. From the employer point of view, writing, speaking, and listening are essential for business success. The following desirable employee qualities were a strong work ethic and self-initiative (Tuzon, 2016). Hence, those sets of skills are required to create proficient, and quality employees demanded by industry if taught correctly through internship experiential learning.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This review paper is anticipated to extend the literature review related to the internship research field. Additionally, this paper is expected to help researchers identify which determinants of internship satisfaction need further investigation, either in quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approach. Practically, it can also be beneficial for internship coordinators from both universities and hospitality industries to strategise the internship programs. Hence, an internship program can be better implemented by giving more attention to these determinants. The essence of a successful internship design depends on the satisfaction of students towards their internship experiences. Thus, the factors that contribute to the internship effectiveness should be a concern to all related stakeholders.

There is a need for future research to understand the elements of an internship program that contribute to the desired employability. One of the limitations of this paper is the exclusion of irrelevance articles due to the different measured factors that contribute to the internship satisfaction. Year of publication for the literature review was not arranged chronologically,

which may lead to the limitation of looking at the trend of internship satisfaction determinants. This paper did not apply a systematic literature review that provides a more thorough, relevant databases and statistical analysis resources. Therefore, future research is required to provide a systematic literature review in a chronological order to discover the everchanging patterns of internship satisfaction determinants and their impacts in developing graduates competencies in the workforce. Additionally, future research should also explore internship experiences in the context of intrapreneurship among professional organisations.

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