

# Does the Hotel Internship Improve Students' Intention of Employment in the Hotel Industry?

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## Abstract

The internship is an important means for students to improve their theoretical cognition, understand the development of the industry and clarify their future learning direction. The internship has become an important part of teaching in Higher Education Institutions, and it is also a task that students must complete to obtain an academic certificate and degree certificate. In order to improve the professional skills of the staff and the efficiency of staff recruitment, the hotel also actively establishes partnerships with universities to establish internship bases and hire interns with the expectation of retaining these interns for future employment at the hotel industry. In this research, 118 students who have finished their internship were selected for investigation and study. These students had a six-month

internship in four-star or five-star hotels in Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou, Jinan, and so on. This research studies the factors affecting students' internship satisfaction by employing questionnaires. The findings of the study showed that the interns were very dissatisfied with the internship salary, labor intensity, night shifts, space for job advancement, and the society's attitude toward hotel attendants and that the students' employment intentions in the hotel industry were very low after the internship. This study argues that hotels should increase students' internship wages, appropriately reduce labor intensity, reduce the times of night shifts, give students the chance of priority promotion, and give them more humanistic care to improve the employment rate of hospitality management students in the hospitality industry and achieve sustainable development of human resources in the hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** hotel intern, internship satisfaction, intention, labor intensity, society's attitude

## 1. Introduction

No matter which industry, people are the most important factor. People are not only the recipients of services but also the providers of services. The hotel industry is an industry of production services and consumer services. As a labor-intensive industry, the hotel industry needs a large number of service personnel to provide high-quality services (Sem, Clements, & Bloomquist, 1996), especially high-quality Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) graduates.

According to the data of China's National Bureau of Statistics, by the end of 2020, China had 4,502,200 guest rooms, 7,150,600 beds, and 1,666,224 employees. The booming hotel industry provides a large number of employment opportunities for HEIs graduates (NBS, 2020).

Graduates from HEIs are an important source of hotel human resources. At present, there are more than 1,000 HEIs specialized in tourism management and hotel management in China, including more than 300 undergraduate universities, and the others are higher vocational colleges. These HEIs can train highly qualified graduates with profound theoretical knowledge and excellent practical operation ability for society and the hospitality industry. They should not only fulfill theoretical teaching on campus, but also improve practical teaching outside campus, to make students have strong competitiveness and adapt to the needs of society for vocational skills as soon as possible (Ferrerias-Garcia, Sales-Zaguirre, & Serradell-López, 2020). For this reason, hospitality internships have become a mandatory course for many institutions of higher learning that offer hospitality programs (Chen, Shen, Gosling, & Education, 2018).

Internship occurs between the campus and the external society so that students have the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to the real society (Ruhanen, Robinson, & Breakey, 2013). Internships in hospitality education teach students practical hands-on skills and also enable them to earn the required credits. Internship credits in many colleges and universities account for 30% of the total credits. Through the internship, students can have a deeper understanding of theoretical knowledge, be more familiar with the hotel industry, and be more clear about the required skills. Students also look forward to having the internship. They can come out of boring classroom learning, contact majors and industries, and understand the external society. The hotels are also eager to recruit university or college students to have their internships. They can bring many benefits to the hotel, especially to alleviate the shortage of employees caused by the high turnover rate. According to the 2020 China Hotel Group Development Report, in 2020, the turnover rate of entry-level employees in brand hotels exceeded 20%, and the turnover rate of entry-level employees in luxury hotels was as high as 26.9% (CTHA, 2020). In addition, the lower salary of interns, faster mastery of new skills and knowledge, and easier management also make the hotel eager to recruit a large number of interns.

However, in recent years, the trend of hotel management graduates leaving the hotel industry for employment is very obvious (Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2016), and the proportion of employment in the industry is getting lower and lower, especially for university students with bachelor's degrees or above, resulting in the hotel industry still facing the dilemma of

staff shortage and high turnover rate. In particular, the number of employees in hotels has decreased dramatically due to the pandemic. After the pandemic is under control, how to recruit enough employees again to quickly resume hotel operations? This study will explore the problems faced by hotel human resource management and the solutions from the perspective of intern satisfaction.

This study is to answer the following questions:

Does hotel internship advance students' recognition of the hotel industry?

What factors affect students' hotel internship satisfaction?

Does the hotel internship advance students' willingness to find employment in the hotel industry?

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Importance of internship*

The internship is the most efficient and fast way for students to understand a certain industry. Internships can bring students knowledge, ability, skills, and first-hand experience of the industry. Internships also improve students' ability to adapt to society, improve their competitiveness (Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016; Seyitoğlu & Tourism, 2019; Stansbie, Nash, & Education, 2016), and accumulate experience for their future employment and entrepreneurship. In China, internship courses have been set up for undergraduate majors in almost all colleges and universities. Internship courses include on-campus internships and off-campus internships, and the internship time ranges from one week to half a year. In higher education, the internship is a way of learning-by-doing and experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2003; Maaravi, 2020).

Reasonable internship courses have many benefits for colleges and universities, hotels and students, and can achieve tripartite win-win results (Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller, 2015; Zopiatis, Constanti, & Education, 2012). Many studies believe that internships can apply classroom knowledge and theory to the real world and bring many positive benefits (Abu, Yusof, & Tahir, 2011; Chen, Shen, Gosling, et al., 2018; Maertz Jr, Stoeberl, & Marks, 2014; Randall & Good, 1991; Ruhanen et al., 2013). Internships provide students with real-world work experience and opportunities to master new skills (Daugherty, Sharon, & Nicole, 2000), at the same time, it has also cultivated a large number of the high-quality labor force for society and industry (Galloway, Marks, & Chillias, 2014).

The internship also provides students with a good opportunity to improve their practical ability, which can not be provided by classroom teaching (Alpert, Heaney, & Kuhn, 2009; Chang, Christian, Simone, & Robert, 2009). The internship provides students with an opportunity to improve and develop their abilities, such as teamwork, interpersonal communication, organizational leadership, bearing work pressure, psychological adjustment, and so on (Mensah, Appietu, & Asimah, 2020; Mistilis & Harris, 2009; Ruhanen et al., 2013). The internship can also enable students to understand the industry and society as soon as possible and make good knowledge, skills, and psychological preparation for entering the

workplace. Many scholars believe that internships enhance students' expectations for career prospects (Alpert et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2009; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018). Many scholars also believe that internship plays a key role in the employment intention of students majoring in hotel management (Robinson et al., 2016; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013).

### *2.2. Internship satisfaction*

For interns, the internship is a short-term and temporary job, and they will still return to university after the internship. They have the dual identities of students and hotel employees temporarily. This special identity makes students want to be specially cared for, instead of requiring them to work according to the working standards of the hotel's full-time employees. Therefore, they have different perceptions of the factors affecting internship satisfaction.

The earliest research on satisfaction comes from job satisfaction. Locke (1976) first studied job satisfaction. He defined it as "a pleasant or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job experience". Herzberg (1974) believed that job satisfaction not only comes from employees' work, it also comes from the surrounding working environment. The work environment includes physical space, security, equipment and resources, opportunities, supervision, and interpersonal relationships (Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Maharjan, 2019).

Many scholars analyzed the factors affecting intern satisfaction from different perspectives, such as relationship dimensions, personal growth dimensions, system maintenance, change dimensions, excessive expectations, being treated as cheap labor, performing menial work, outdated hr practices, particularly pay, promotion opportunities, and the relationship with managers, working hours and job security, work-family conflict, organizational commitment, collectivist values, etc (Akış Roney & Öztin, 2007; Chen, Shen, & Gosling, 2018; Fock, Chiang, Au, & Hui, 2011; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Namasivayam & Zhao, 2007; Richardson, 2008; Waryszak, 2000).

Students' satisfaction with internship experience is an important indicator of the success of internship (Farmaki, 2018). Internship satisfaction will affect students' future career choices (Chen, Shen, & Gosling, 2018). Although many factors affect intern satisfaction, scholars believe that targeted solutions to these problems will increase student satisfaction with internships and improve their employment in the hospitality industry.

### *2.3. Internship and employment intention*

Although higher education institutions are currently implementing a two-way job selection method, where students have the right to choose the company and the company has the right to choose the student. However, engaging in industries related to Majors which learned in universities can adapt to jobs faster and integrate into society faster, which is also the original intention of colleges and universities to cultivate talents.

Although many factors can affect the employment intentions of university graduates, such as the economic environment, national policies, graduate school, family income, parents' opinions, and industry development, many studies have shown that internship satisfaction has a more direct impact on university graduates' willingness to join a certain industry.

Satisfactory internship experiences can build confidence and create good expectations, as well as shorten the time it takes for students to become familiar with the job and reduce the training time for companies after employment. An unsatisfactory internship experience, on the other hand, can create a very negative impression of the industry as a whole, and students are more likely to choose to stay away from the industry (Chen, Shen, Gosling, et al., 2018; Kim & Park, 2013; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Richardson, 2008).

### **3. Research method**

In China, the internship curriculum of universities needs to comply with relevant laws and regulations, and universities can choose different hotels, set different internship duration, increase the frequency of communication with interns, etc. However, in the actual work department of the hotel, labor intensity, labor time, etc., the instructor of the university can only make suggestions rather than orders to the intern hotel to avoid disturbing the normal business activities of the hotel. Therefore, this research mainly collects and analyzes the influencing factors of interns' satisfaction with hotels.

In this study, a quantitative research method was applied to collect data by distributing questionnaires to understand the basic information of internship students and their satisfaction with their internship. In selecting the sample, 118 interns from the same university who had finished their internships were selected for this study to ensure that their perceptions of satisfaction were at the same level. Also, since it is difficult for short-term internships to give students a true perception of the hospitality industry, a study of six-month long-term internships would be a better way to get a true picture of students' feelings and to study whether they like the hospitality industry. The 118 interns were located in different cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Jinan, Shaoxing, and Dongying. The internship hotels were also in different 4-star and 5-star hotels, including state-run hotels, multinational hotels, and private hotels. The number of interns in each hotel is between 10 to 12.

### **4. Results**

The following results were drawn from the data analysis of 118 questionnaires.

#### *4.1. Basic information of internship*

This section provides basic statistics on the students' internships, mainly on the positions they held, the hours they worked, and the salaries they received.

Table 1. Profile of respondents (N=118)

Basic information of internship			
Items	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender	Male	32	27.1
	Female	86	72.9
Rating of hotel	4-star	42	35.6
	5-star	76	64.4
Internship department	Finance department	1	0.8
	Food and beverage department	71	60.2
	Executive assistant	1	0.8
	Recreation department	5	4.2
	Guest room department	10	8.5
	Concierge department	7	5.9
	Front office department	23	19.5
Working hours per day	< 8 hours	3	2.5
	8 ~ 9 hours	57	48.3
	9 ~ 10 hours	18	15.3
	10 ~ 11 hours	17	14.4
	> 12 hours	23	19.5
Working days per week	< 5 days	3	2.5
	5 days	38	32.2
	6 days	27	22.9
	7 days	6	5.1
	Extremely uncertain	44	37.3
Work shift or not	Yes	30	25.4
	No	88	74.6
Have the phenomenon of overtime	Yes	91	77.1
	No	27	22.9
Have any compensation after working overtime	Yes	63	53.4
	No	55	46.6
Internship salary	< 1500 yuan	8	6.8
	1500 ~ 2500 yuan	68	57.6

	2500 ~ 3500 yuan	35	29.7
	> 3500 yuan	7	5.9

From the analysis of the above table, we can conclude that:

1) among 118 internship students, there are 86 female students, which is 72.9%, indicating that the proportion of female students among students studying tourism management and hotel management in higher education institutions now far exceeds that of male students, which is in line with the requirements of the hotel industry for the gender of employees. However, due to the special nature of female psychology, it is also necessary for hotels and universities to design more reasonable and feasible internship programs to improve the effectiveness of the internship.

2) All of the students' internships were conducted in hotels with more than 4 stars, which indicates that with the shortage of hotel workers, it has become easy for students to enter high-star hotels for internships. According to the 2020 China Hotel Group Development Report, the number of interns in four- and five-star hotels has exceeded 8% (CTHA, 2020).

3) Students were mainly assigned to the food and beverage department, the front office department, and the guest room department for the internship, accounting for 60.2%, 19.5%, and 8.5% of the total, respectively, with the food and beverage department and the guest room department being the departments with the highest demand for hotel staff and the highest turnover rate. Through the interviews, we know that students prefer to work in the front office department, but the number of staff needs is low and it is difficult to get the position. Other departments, such as the finance department, have a much smaller number of staffing needs, making it even more difficult to obtain internship positions.

4) In terms of working hours, only 3 students worked within 8 hours, the other 115 students worked more than 8 hours, and 23 students worked more than 12 hours a day, accounting for 19.5%. There are 33 students, accounting for 28%, working six or seven days a week. There are 44 students, accounting for 37.3%. Their working hours and days are very uncertain and will be adjusted at any time according to the number of hotel customers. There are 30 students, accounting for 25.4%. They have had job rotation, that is, they have been temporarily transferred to busy departments to help. The working hours of interns exceed the 8-hour working system stipulated by the state.

5) The internship salary is mainly between 1500 ~ 3500 yuan, with a total of 103 people, accounting for 87.3, which is the statistical result after overtime compensation. A total of 91 students, accounting for 77.1%, worked overtime, and only 63 students were compensated for overtime.

Over the years, the long working hours, much overtime, and low salary in the hotel work that has been widely criticized have not been changed (Davidson, Guilding, & Timo, 2006; Richardson, 2008).



#### 4.2. Factors influencing internship satisfaction

According to the compilation of the results of the group interviews, 14 main factors influence students' satisfaction with their internship, and the proportion of these factors is counted in this section.

Table 2. Factors and proportion affecting internship satisfaction (N=118)

Factors and proportion affecting internship satisfaction	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
	Difficult to get along with colleagues	14	11.9
	Leaders don't care enough about employees	20	16.9
	Waiter's social status is too low	33	28
	Internship management system is chaotic	37	31.4
	Lack of fairness	42	35.6
	Promotion opportunities are slim	46	39
	Working night shift affects my health	54	45.8
	Overworked	68	57.6
	Underpaid	81	68.6

The statistical results in Table 2 show the influencing factors that account for more than 10% of satisfaction.

- 1) The two factors that most affect internship satisfaction are overworked and underpaid, accounting for 57.6% and 68.6%, respectively. It can also be seen from Table 1 that students' long internship hours, overworked and low salaries, which have seriously affected the internship satisfaction of students. Students think they are very tired every day, which exceeds the labor intensity they can bear. In particular, students engaged in catering service and room service need to pass dishes, wash tableware, set the table, service wine and tea, and quickly clean the room. These jobs are labor-intensive and often require overtime. During the interview, many students talked about walking more than 10,000 steps (about 6km) every day, and sometimes more than 20,000 steps (about 12km).
- 2) Another surprise is that working the night shift affects my health accounts for 45.8%, indicating that contemporary students are very reluctant to work at night. They are used to normal working hours and are unwilling to wait for guests to leave until 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. before washing tableware and setting the table, and then go back to their dormitory with tired steps and have their sleep after midnight.
- 3) Promotion opportunities are slim, lack of fairness, internship management system is chaotic accounted for 39%, 35.6%, and 31.4% respectively.
- 4) Waiter's social status is too low, the proportion of this factor is also relatively high,

accounting for 28%. During the interview, many students talked about the social attitude towards waiters, which has even hurt students' self-esteem. In the general concept of society, hotel waiter is a low-level job, a job of serving people, which is a kind of social cognition that is difficult to change. Many students' parents are also unwilling to let students engage in hotel service in the future, especially at the grassroots level.

5) Among interpersonal relationships, the relationship with leaders and colleagues also affects students' satisfaction with their internship (Gok, Karatuna, & Karaca, 2015; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; McHugh, 2017), with 16.9% and 11.9% respectively.

Other influencing factors below 10% are high work pressure, attitude of senior staff, staff dormitory environment, quality of staff meals, and the city where the hotel is located.

#### 4.3. Overall satisfaction and employment intention

This section provides a statistical analysis of the students' overall satisfaction with their internship and their intention to be employed in the industry.

Table 3. Overall satisfaction with the internship and intention of employment in the industry (N=118)

	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Overall satisfaction	Extremely dissatisfied	40	33.9
	Dissatisfied	14	11.9
	Neutral	45	38.1
	Satisfied	11	9.3
	Extremely satisfied	8	6.8
Will you work in the hotel industry after graduation	Yes	26	22
	No	92	78

Data analysis found that only 19 students, accounting for 16.1%, were satisfied with the internship. There are 54 students, accounting for 45.8%, who are dissatisfied and extremely dissatisfied with the internship. There are 45 students, accounting for 38.1%, who are neutral.

What is more concerning is that only 26 students, accounting for 22%, are willing to work in the hotel industry after graduation, and conversely, 78% of students claim that they will leave the hotel industry. This far exceeds the 43.6% research conclusion made by Scott Richardson (Richardson, 2008). After six months of internship, more students hold negative views on the hotel industry. The probability of these students entering the hotel industry again is very low. This is very dangerous for the development of the hotel industry and the development of hotel management specialty in colleges and universities. Hotels are facing the situation that they can't recruit university graduates, and hotel management specialty is facing the situation that no students apply for the examination.

## 5. Conclusion and implications

This research investigated a six-month hotel internship project and studied the overall satisfaction of students' internship and the influencing factors of satisfaction through quantitative analysis methods. The results of the study are surprising. We found that the overall satisfaction of intern students was 16.1%. At the same time, only 22% of students hope to continue working in the hotel industry after graduation.

Many studies have proven that internships are a win-win situation for interns, universities, and hotels, but this study found that students who were looking forward to their internships were disgusted with the hotel industry and did not want to continue working in hotels after their internships. They were unwilling to continue working in the hotel industry because the work they were doing was too strenuous, the pay was low, they worked overtime frequently, it was difficult to get promoted, and they faced a low social status. This perception of internships makes students determined to leave the hotel industry and has a profound impact on the recruitment of new employees in hotels.

Different from studying and living on a university campus, internships face the real world where interns must complete the work delivered by the hotel, provide customers with high-quality services, handle the relationship with leaders and colleagues, and adjust their tired bodies and mindset. These tasks have brought great challenges to interns, and they should face them actively instead of complaining and shrinking. During the internship, interns must actively learn professional skills and social experience following the requirements of the internship. Once interns encounter any difficulties or problems, they must actively communicate with the university instructors and hotel managers to resolve them quickly.

Universities should assume the responsibility of organization and supervision. The organization of internship projects and internship time should take into account both the teaching goals and the student's affordability. In-depth inspection of the intern hotel to be cooperated with, sign an internship contract, and agree on the student's internship working hours, overtime hours, internship salary, etc. During the internship process, keep abreast of the students' internship situation, solve the difficulties and problems encountered by the interns in a timely manner, and provide them with psychological counseling.

The conclusion of the study also indicates that hotels should carry out human resource management reform as soon as possible and improve the level of human resource management to alleviate the decline of the number of university students' employees (Akış Roney & Öztin, 2007). First, hotels must pay more attention to the rights and interests of post-00 university students, respect their feelings, and provide a good internship environment. Hotel instructors should also provide interns with comprehensive internship guidance, including work skills, psychological adjustment, and interpersonal relationship management. Take various methods to improve the internship satisfaction of interns. Secondly, the hotel should expand the ways of recruitment and increase the number of social staff recruitment to cope with the decrease of the number of university student employees. Finally, hotels should improve their technology as soon as possible and use artificial intelligence or robots to

replace manual services to cope with the pressure brought by the shortage of human resources.

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