

Culinary Students' Career Intention in the Hospitality Industry: The Importance of the Work Environment During Practical Training

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to examine the importance of the work environment during students' practical training toward students' career intention in the hospitality industry. This study uses a quantitative method through the distribution of self-administrated questionnaire surveys. Convenience sampling was selected from 159 culinary arts students at UiTM Cawangan Terengganu Kampus Dungun (UiTMCTKD). This sampling design was selected due to its high efficiency. The students had completed their practical training 2 weeks before data collection. Descriptive and inferential analyses were used to interpret the data. Findings from this study revealed that the work environment influences students' career intention toward pursuing employment in the hospitality industry after graduation.

Keywords: *Work Environment, Culinary, Career Intention, Practical Training, Hospitality Industry*

INTRODUCTION

Generally, a university will assign its students for practical training to produce skilled individuals that meet the needs of the industry. Culinary arts programmes require students to undergo practical training for 3 to 6 semesters. Practical training will help the students to apply their knowledge, attitudes, and skills they have learnt in university, to prepare them for the actual workplace (Binder et al., 2015; Tsai, Hsu, & Yang, 2017; Seyitoğlu, 2019). Thus, students should improve their skills and familiarise themselves with the industry's requirements. In addition, practical training also provides them with a better understanding of the industry that they will be experiencing in the future (Wang, Chiang & Lee, 2014). A study by Knouse & Fontenot (2008) reported students' admission that they have gained more knowledge and skills from practical training than from studying in academic institutions alone; those who have undergone practical training typically show good performance in their studies. Ukwuoma and Akanwa (2008) revealed that practical training boosts students' knowledge and skills in their tasks. Besides that, practical training is a pivotal component in shaping students' overall capability. Practical training presents an ideal component of experiential learning for students who seek employment opportunities in the hospitality industry (Benavides, Dicke, & Holt, 2013). Practical training has also allowed students to familiarise themselves with authentic workplace settings and apply the theoretical components that they have learned in university. This in turn demonstrates students' career pursuits and

augments their skills and abilities (Wang, Kitterlin-Lynch, & Williams, 2018). Practical training is crucial in supplying well-prepared students for upcoming engagements in the hospitality industry (Pusiran et al., 2020).

Some researchers discovered that students' practical training experience produces good outcomes; thus, the advantages of practical training are unquestionable (Binder, 2015; Tsai, Hsu, & Yang, 2017; Seyitoğlu, 2019). Even though many researchers mentioned that practical training provides students with the enthusiasm to pursue a career in the hospitality industry, others have been more concerned that the experience perceived during practical training might influence students' intention to remain static in the hospitality industry (Huang, Liu & Hsu, 2020; Mensah et al. (2020). On the other hand, it was reported that culinary students are not willing to enter the hospitality industry after graduation (Briner, 2000; Pang, 2010). This trend should not arise because the growth in the hospitality industry offers a wide range of career employment. Therefore, to handle such growth, the industry has increased the demand for fresh graduates. However, there is a difference between students' perceptions about a certain job and the expectation of the job after they have completed practical training. A previous study indicated that dissatisfaction among students may lead to their unwillingness to join the industry (Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005). Therefore, the researchers believe that these topics need to be examined, especially on the reasons that may cause culinary graduates to lose the intention of joining the hospitality industry. A previous study by Ko (2007) showed that engagement in the hospitality industry depends on students' positive work environment experienced during their practical training. The importance of the work environment towards students' satisfaction is undeniable. The work environment is a vital factor that affects the level of students' satisfaction and motivation. Potential engagement in the hospitality industry is determined exclusively by the environment in which students have completed their practical training. Therefore, the current study examines the effects of the work environment on students' career intention in the hospitality industry.

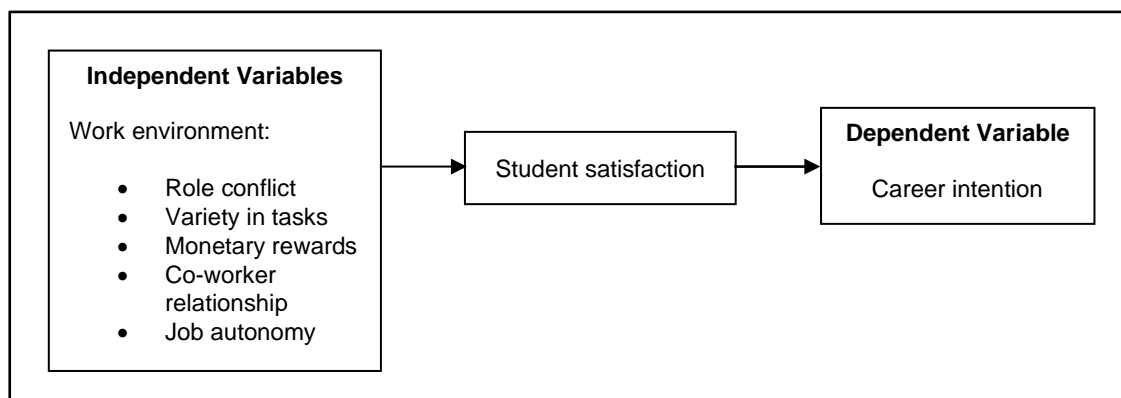


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was adapted from Cammann et al. (1983), who had developed the variables of the work environment. Cammann et al. (1983) revealed seven (7) determinants of work environment which are role conflict, variety in tasks, monetary rewards, a co-worker relationship, job autonomy, demographic factors, and alternative employment opportunities. However, the researchers selected only five (5) determinants that are suited to this study, since it focuses on students and not actual workers. Furthermore, students conducted their internships within their hometown; thus, the variables of demographic factors and alternative employment opportunities were omitted.

METHODOLOGY

This study used convenience sampling. The total number of students who have completed the practical training during the semester at UiTMCTKD is 159 students. The data were derived from the university's database. A quantitative approach was used in this study through a self-administrated questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was adapted from the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) by Morgeson & Humphery (2006), with certain adjustments made to fit this study. Although already a standardized instrument, the researchers examined the content of the questionnaire items to ensure relevance and validity for the context of the current study. For example, if the question asks: "Are you satisfied with the job?" the researchers would change it to "Are you satisfied with the practical training?" Moreover, changing certain words in the questionnaire would help respondents to be familiar with less vocabulary and the survey would be able to ascertain the items to be measured.

There are four (4) parts in the questionnaire. The respondents' demographic profile is in Section A, while section B assesses the importance of work environment elements, i.e., role conflict, variety in tasks, monetary rewards, a co-worker relationship, and job autonomy. Section C evaluates the respondents' satisfaction level of the work environment during their practical training. Section D measures the effects of satisfaction on career intention in the hospitality industry. The questionnaire survey uses a numerical five-point Likert scale, ranging from least important (1) to very important (5).

A pilot study was conducted on 30 Culinary Arts students to test the instrument, specifically to ascertain whether respondents would understand the questionnaire (In, 2017). Google form was used to create the questionnaire and the link was shared through email and social media. Ten printed questionnaires were distributed physically at UiTMCTKD. Before conducting the survey, the researchers contacted students via telephone and email to obtain consent. Subsequently, upon completion, the data gathered from the pilot study were tested using Cronbach's Alpha. This was to ensure the instrument's reliability that should show the correlation of each item (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The result of the reliability test is tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Test

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Section B	21	.908
Section C	21	.869
Section D	6	.838

N=30

Based on the above table, since all values show $\alpha \geq 0.80$, the items are considered to have an excellent internal consistency (Hair et al., 2007). Sekaran & Bougie (2010) mentioned that data values of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ are suitable for actual data collection.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In total, 159 questionnaire surveys were distributed during the actual data collection. However, only 123 (77.4%) have been returned with completed answers. The statistical analysis used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A descriptive analysis was used to determine that the objective of the study would be achieved. Frequency analysis is a descriptive statistical method that calculates the mean for the respondents' profile and the variables used in this study.

Socio-Demographic Respondents' Profile

Frequency analysis was used to analyse the socio-demographic respondents' profiles.

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics Of Respondents

Characteristics	Percentage
Gender	
Male	22.8
Female	77.2
Age	
23 years and above	96.75
20–22 years	3.25
Place of training	
Hotel	71.5
Fast-food	16.3
Catering	6.50
In-flight catering	5.70

Out of the 123 respondents, the majority 77.2% are females, while 22.8% are males. For the age distribution, the majority were 23 years or above (96.75%). Only a few respondents were from 20–22 years (3.25%). With most of the students having undergone 4–5 months of practical training, Table 2 indicates that approximately 71.5% had been interns in hotels, 16.3% had been trained in fast-food restaurants, 6.50 % had been in catering, and 5.70% had trained for in-flight catering.

The Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the instrument. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2007), $\alpha \geq 0.70$ and above are acceptable values and can be used for research. Factor analysis was used to test the instrument's validity. The results showed that variables in this study are valid for real data collection because their values were 0.8 and above.

The Importance of Work Environment Variables on Students' Career Intention

A descriptive analysis was used in this study to examine the importance of the work environment on students' career intention in the hospitality industry.

Table 3: Mean Scores for The Importance of Work Environment Variables

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.
Variety in tasks	123	3.8959	.66744
Role conflict	123	3.6707	.62505
Monetary reward	123	3.6890	1.13276
Co-worker relationship	123	4.0772	.78284
Job autonomy	123	3.8252	.66832

The co-worker relationship showed the highest importance for students ($M=4.0772$, $S.D.78284$). Students agreed that a positive relationship with co-workers in the workplace can boost teamwork. As such, they were able to complete tasks within a given time. Hong Bee et al. (2019) discovered that a positive relationship among co-workers occurs when students and staff benefitted each other through sharing experiences, skills, passions, and encouragements. The students also agreed that a healthy relationship with co-workers during the practical training could prevent or reduce stress. This is due to staff's trusting students to handle tasks without supervision, yet students fulfilled their tasks perfectly. Therefore, the workload could be decreased, and stress could be reduced. Co-workers' support is essential for work-related problems and can lessen the work pressure compared to non-work support such as family support (Christine, Helga, & Phil, 2014). Besides that, a healthy relationship with co-workers also enhances production. Min & Yong (2014) stated that the communication between co-workers impacts the organisation of jobs, which will affect the ability of an individual worker. Co-worker relationships may in some way affect students' satisfaction with the work.

Among the five variables, role conflict was perceived with the least importance. This is due to the students' focus on completing their practical training; therefore, staff did not expect more from them. All given tasks were guided and ample time was given to complete them. Furthermore, students did not have to compete with staff and jobs were done within the given time. Role conflict became insignificant.

Effects Of Students' Satisfaction on Career Intention in The Hospitality Industry

The outcome presented in Table 3 above showed that students' satisfaction influences their career intention. The mean ranking, $M= 3.3482$ signifies those culinary students were slightly satisfied with their practical training and this affected their career intention in the hospitality industry. Past researchers discovered that practical training students who were dissatisfied would have a reduced motivation to join the industry (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017). Students would be demotivated if the head chef gave them fewer tasks compared to others because this insinuated that the students could not perform well. Supposedly, the tasks given to the students should be under supervision and co-workers need to show them how to handle the tasks. The abovementioned factors may traumatise the students and they would have no intention of continuing in the hospitality industry. Some students quit their practical training in the middle of the semester because they could not bear the pressure.

Table 3: Mean Score on Career Intention in The Hospitality Industry

Variable	N	Mean	S.D.
Career intention in the hospitality industry	123	3.3482	.80865

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that the work environment does influence students' satisfaction; thus, affecting their career intention to join the hospitality industry. Work environment elements that have influenced students' satisfaction were role conflict, variety in tasks, monetary rewards, a co-worker relationship, and job autonomy. The results show that the work environment has a moderate impact on students' career intentions. However, if the industry provides a better work environment during students' practical training, there is a possibility that they will not hesitate to join the industry. Elements that prove to improve student's work environment include working hours, benefits given, being surrounded by positive people, and have opportunities for career development. In the future, culinary lecturers should urge their students to apply skills and knowledge earned during their practical training. Students

need to overcome all the difficulties during the practical training and perform well so that the industry will not underestimate their skills and knowledge. Students need to be humble and respectful of their co-workers during the learning process.

Additionally, the organization which hosts the practical training must ensure a comfortable and conducive work environment for internship students. Should students find other industries that can provide them with a better work environment, they will likely follow through and eventually leave the hospitality industry. Students hoped for a good work environment, yet the hospitality industry had not met this criterion. During their practical training, students became frustrated with the determining factors related to the work environment. Thus, to improve the work environment, the industry should pay attention to the factors that have displeased the students. The factor that displeased the student is crucial for the future since culinary students will join the hospitality industry. Accordingly, a satisfactory work environment will motivate practical students to stay in the industry.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study provide an understanding of the work environment effects on culinary students during their practical training, which influences students' satisfaction and career intention in the hospitality industry after graduation. However, this study encountered several limitations. First, the respondents from this research comprised culinary arts students at UiTMCTKD. The data cannot be generalised to the overall population which includes other Culinary institutions in Malaysia. Therefore, the data obtained from this study do not provide comprehensive findings. Therefore, future studies should be conducted to ascertain the work environment effects during practical training on students' satisfaction in other culinary institutions in Malaysia.

Second, this study used non-probability sampling, which did not generalise the whole population of culinary students in the country. This is because the respondents of this study were only sampled from the most current group of culinary students in the semester. It is recommended that probability sampling be used for upcoming studies. Third, this study used a motivational factor, i.e., work environment. It is advisable to examine alternative motivational factors in the workplace, such as impact, career choices, and job attributes in culinary institutions in Malaysia.

Finally, respondents were required to state their previous practical training experiences when filling out the questionnaire within three months upon completion of their practical training. Respondents needed to remember their experiential emotions, and this might have created a response bias. Future studies need to ensure that respondents can answer questionnaire surveys during their practical training. Besides that, future researchers are recommended to collect data before and after students' practical training for comparison.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on the effects of the work environment on culinary students' career intention in the hospitality industry. The results showed that most culinary students who have completed their practical training demonstrated a moderate intention of joining the industry after graduation. This response was due to the work environment elements that they perceived after having completed the practical training. Almost all post practical training students perceived that co-worker relationship is the most important. Students found that staff in the practical training organisation have been helpful and friendly. They agreed that a good relationship with staff had made them enjoy their practical training. Therefore, the industry should hire more educated employees to improve the current work environment, which may provide a better impression for practical students (Seyitoğlu, 2019). Moreover, poor elements of the work environment, such as low salary and extended working hours, which might have been experienced

by practical students, should be addressed by the management in detail. Academic institutions and the hospitality industry ought to have the determination of offering a good placement for practical students, specifically in terms of a comfortable work environment. Hospitality organisations can offer better allowances and wages for overtime, which may encourage students to join the industry after graduation. In addition, role conflict, task variety, and job autonomy must not be overlooked. In managing these elements thoroughly, there should be a collaboration between academic institutions and the industry players. Therefore, academic institutions and industry players should establish a rapport with each other to solve complaints professionally. In the hospitality context, complaints can be used as a tool for improving the practical training system, by rectifying flaws and drawbacks from previous practical training sessions. A good and systematic practical training system will enhance students' motivation and provide them with a positive perception of their career and employment. Ultimately, the purpose is to encourage culinary students to remain in the hospitality industry.

Even though many efforts have been done to provide healthier work environments for practical training, students may still have personal barriers. Thus, lecturers should advise students on the challenging traits of the hospitality industry, specifically in terms of the work environment. This approach may motivate students to prepare themselves both mentally and physically for practical training and or actual employment. The rule of thumb acknowledges that if students are capable of overcoming obstacles and challenges during practical training, they will be able to survive working in the hospitality industry, which has been known to be tough and arduous.

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