# A Phenomenological Study Exploring The Challenges of Establishing An Effective Hospitality Work Based Learning Program At UiTM

**Khairil Anuar Bahari[1*], Joesri Mohd Saber[2], Mohd Zool Fadli Ibrahim[3]**
**Raja Iskandar Putera Raja Mustapha[4], Noorsa Riza Johari[5]**

[1,2,3,4,5] *Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Kampus Permatang Pauh, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia*

*Authors' Email Address: *[1]khairil777@uitm.edu.my, [2]joesr630@uitm.edu.my, [3]zoolfadli@ uitm.edu.my, [4]rajaiskandar@uitm.edu.my,[5]noorsariza829@ uitm.edu.my*

*Corresponding Author

## ABSTRACT

*This phenomenological study explores the complexities involved in establishing a successful hospitality internship program at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). The research utilizes the Experiential Learning Theory as a framework to examine the experiences of seven work base learning (WBL) coordinators from UiTM and employing interviews with semi-structured questions and thematic investigation as the primary methodologies. The study extensively identifies and analyzes key themes, including behavior, restriction, diversion, placement, sexual misconduct, expectation, and student readiness. Through comprehensive exploration, the findings highlight the complex challenges confronted by work base learning coordinators in ensuring the effectiveness of WBL programs within the hospitality sector. It emphasizes the crucial need to address these challenges to elevate the quality and efficacy of hospitality WBL programs at UiTM. The study's findings are expected to offer valuable guidance for all relevant stakeholders, aiding in the enhancement of WBL program design and strategies, particularly within the hospitality business. Moreover, it is expected to offer students and coordinators with essential insights which allowing them to effectively prepare for and address the challenges associated with coordinating and participating in the internship procedure.*

***Keywords**: hospitality industry, hospitality program, internship challenges, work base learning coordinator, work base learning student*

## INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry in Malaysia has achieved significant recognition as a crucial contributor to economic development. The hotel industry is currently an essential element of the tourism sector, and it has experienced substantial expansion in response to the needs of the market. Nevertheless, the significant increase in labour-intensive hotels has resulted in an urgent requirement for highly skilled hotel employees, requiring the provision of excellent practical education in the field of hospitality. The curriculum design for hospitality management in Malaysia emphasizes the critical role outside campus internships as an essential connection within the academic and the industry. The program

highlights an intensive dedication to practical abilities, competent training, and professional growth (Shariff, 2021). It has been discovered that WBL provides an array of benefits to universities, students, and industries, who are the key stakeholders in these programs. The perceived and tangible usefulness of WBL for students, industries, and educational institutions have considerably improved their reputation. This training term facilitates students' preparation for the workforce by offering them the chance to comprehend working conditions, enhance and cultivate new professional abilities, and establish professional connections with colleagues and supervisors (Fei, 2020). Nonetheless, the hotel sector in Malaysia persists in encountering significant obstacles concerning workforce sustainability. Employee turnover in Malaysian hotels is markedly high, reaching 25% to 30% annually, which substantially impacts operational stability (Ahmad et al., 2023). Recent studies indicate that around 40% of hospitality graduates do not pursue careers in the hotel industry, attributing this to factors such as prolonged working hours, inadequate remuneration, and restricted prospects for career advancement (Aziz & Subramaniam, 2023). These concerns emphasize the urgent necessity for enhanced internship experiences and workforce retention strategies.

A qualified workforce, from the perspective of an employer, will contribute to the success of a firm, and the WBL program facilitates the development of students' professional perspective and capabilities. Interns who have undergone comprehensive training are valuable assets for a company's potential workforce as they not only reduce the costs associated with recruitment and selection, but also serve as representatives for the organization (Aljumah, 2023). Academic institutions can enhance their educational curriculum by actively seeking feedback from industry partners through WBL programs, expanding their industry networks, thus strengthening the university's reputation and prominence. However, the implementation of WBL presented challenges for both students and individuals responsible for coordinating internships, as well as the companies involved. These challenges have the potential to hinder the delivery of a successful internship exposure for students, especially in the service-based hotel business (Pusiran, Janin, Ismail & Dalinting, 2020). Recent data also demonstrate interns' dissatisfaction with their working environment. Research reveals that inadequate supervision, absence of mentorship, and exploitative behaviors frequently occur during internships, resulting in unfavorable views of the industry and diminished willingness among students to stay involved in the profession (Xu et al., 2022; Harrison & Lin, 2023).

Students that encountered unpleasant situations in the hotel throughout their time as intern may develop worries about pursuing a profession within a similar sector following the completion of their education (Aziz, 2023). If their work experiences during the WBL do not align with their expectations, they may develop misconceptions about the hospitality industry and lose interest in seeking a profession within this field (Liu, 2022). Several students have shown a lack of understanding about the different kinds of careers and professional circumstances that are available in the hospitality industry. This can be attributed to their excessively high and unreasonable expectations of what hospitality employment is all about. This issue may arise from a lack of sufficient exposure to the actual working conditions in the hospitality industry during their academic studies (Kim, 2022), and this results in a shortage of trained workers, a high rate of employee turnover, and a lack of labor among recent graduates of hospitality programs if this situation continues and becomes worse in the future. Thus, preventing these undesirable situations requires key stakeholders to focus on addressing the underlying source of the problem, which can be achieved by promoting positive internship experiences within the hospitality industry.

Xu (2022) points out that dissatisfaction and lower motivation among hospitality interns are primarily attributable to various factors, including insufficient compensation, strained interpersonal interaction among employees and superiors, unorganized work structure and inappropriate working hours. The adverse working environments that are widespread in the hotel business led to poor perception, which subsequently reduces the motivation and performance of students throughout their internship period (Cui, 2022). Surprisingly, some small firms consider interns to be nothing more than inexpensive workers and fail to provide adequate training for the personal growth of students. Moreover, students

have expressed dissatisfaction with the personnel and management's level of preparedness in providing outstanding internship experiences. This situation resulted in a lack of organization and inconsistency in the internship training, therefore, interns may believe that WBL does not provide an opportunity to enhance their job-related skills and capabilities (Mensah, 2022).

Besides, the university represents another significant factor influencing the development of the internship experience. Interns in the hotel industry noted that the faculty members, especially the internship coordinators, demonstrated limitations in their ability to develop and analyze effectively. The institution failed to equip students with adequate training necessary for effectively navigating the current challenges and expectations of the hospitality workforce (Qu, 2021). Hence, the WBL coordinators and faculty members hold the responsibility for supervising and guiding interns, as well as actively seeking out respectable and dedicated organizations which may offer students beneficial internship opportunities. Furthermore, the institution has special duties for the safety of interns during their internships and may face legal consequences if found to be negligent (Zhang, 2023). The efficacy of WBL programs can be impacted by the roles of coordinators and inadequate industry knowledge, excessive workloads, and insufficient attention and planning in executing internships can have negative effects on the program and simultaneously adverse effects on students (Karasik, 2023). Thus, the WBL coordinators play a crucial role in ensuring a successful and efficient internship experience by engaging with both students and businesses. Despite various studies addressing the challenges perceived by students and employers (Vo, 2021; Zehr, 2020; Liu, 2022), there remains deficiency in empirical research that particularly addresses the difficulties faced by coordinators. Therefore, the current research aims to investigate the challenges identified by WBL coordinators at Universiti Teknologi Mara concerning the hospitality diploma and degree programs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

WBL programs constitute a structured form of work training, enabling students to acquire practical experience across diverse professional domains and these programs are frequently a requisite component of the academic curriculum for students enrolled in colleges and universities. Implementing a structured curriculum and offering work experiences relevant to students' future careers are both recommended to enhance their preparedness for employment in the industry (Andersson & Cummings, 2023; Taylor et al., 2024). At present, WBL coordinators hold entire responsibility for arranging placements for students to carry out their internships in the sector. The WBL program at UiTM typically lasts for a period of 40 weeks, and successful completion of the internship is a compulsory requirement for graduation. Harrison and Lin (2023), suggests that the internship experience can be improved by fostering collaboration between the industry and higher education institutions. This collaboration aims to provide effective assistance, guidance, and monitoring for students during their internship program.

While WBL provide benefits for undergraduates, academic institutions, and companies, challenges have been encountered in organizing and execution of the program which students frequently face difficulties such as overwhelming duties and little compensation. Besides, the permanent employees and supervisors were inadequately trained to make a meaningful contribution to enhance the student's internship experience, and some offered insufficient support in supporting valuable training for internships (Chowdhury & Wilson, 2024). Conversely, it is argued that educational institutions were inadequately equipped to ensure that their students hold the necessary skills and abilities to effectively handle the difficulties and requirements of actual employment in the business (Deng et al., 2023). The limitation of the internship program led to the inability to achieve the internship objectives. Regardless of industry, job roles, or standard procedures, it is crucial for both employers and educational institutions to prioritize the provision of a substantial and comprehensive internship program that offers students a valuable and thorough learning experience. Several students mentioned

their desire for increased communication with their academics, including more visits and phone conversations. They believe that this would help ensure that their academic progress is on track and provide assistance with unresolved issues (Singh & Ahmed, 2023).

Bittmann and Zorn (2024) discovered that interns' desire to excel declines when they are unsatisfied with insufficient or non-existent income. Several students hold the belief that internship programs are destructive, as they require students to work without receiving adequate remuneration and may even demand fees for participation through their university (Martin, 2020). Additionally, interns expressed dissatisfaction with their exclusion from the company's reward programs and bonuses, noting a lack of gratuities, recognition, invitations to corporate events, complimentary employee meals, or discounts. These factors contribute to concerns regarding the potential exploitation of interns. This scenario could potentially be inequitable for interns hailing from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly if the internship placement is located a considerable distance away from their residence (Skujiņa & Loots, 2023).

On the other hand, organizations encounter difficulties in implementing internship programs due to the financial implications associated with training and supervising fresh interns. Employers generally designate supervisors or staff members to deliver training, oversight, and assessment for interns throughout their training duration. The training incurs an indirect cost to the organization, as supervisors or staff members may allocate that time to fulfill their responsibilities. Interns may require close supervision and ongoing guidance in certain instances, as they may lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities. Several companies have stated that interns had poor time management, inadequate problem-solving abilities, and an inability to accept criticism. Therefore, supervisors and managers face challenges in creating and assigning activities to enhance the skills of interns, since they perceive interns to be lacking in abilities and unlikely to perform well on assigned duties (Pusiran et al., 2024). Academicians given the responsibility with planning and managing internships may deprioritize the execution of the internship program due to their other essential responsibilities, including teaching, research, and supervision. Effective internship planning requires the coordinator's authentic enthusiasm, adequate resources and faculty support, as well as comprehensive planning and evaluation strategies. Therefore, the WBL coordinator is considered a crucial stakeholder for the internship program. It is crucial to carefully choose an internship coordinator, as this person will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of the internship program, including before, during, and after its implementation (Isaacs et al., 2023).One potential strategy to improve the internship experience involves selecting a skilled internship coordinator capable of actively involving the student in meaningful research activities that take place during the internship program (To & Lung, 2024). Occasionally, faculties may alter the internship coordinator, which could hinder progress in enhancing the internship program if there is insufficient synergy between the new and previous coordinators. The internship coordinator must conduct regular evaluations of visits to the internship places and the associated regulations to improve the effectiveness of the internship program (Hora, 2023).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employs a method of qualitative research, with a focus on comprehending challenges or problems from the viewpoint of the participants and conducting qualitative research requires a significant amount of interpretation (Creswell, 2020). The aim of utilizing qualitative research methodology is to explore particular effects and their interrelations, focusing especially on the essential practical motivations of individuals and the collection of actionable knowledge derived from the empirical data obtained. This study utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis research design. Interpretive phenomenology relies on the subjective interpretation of an individual's

experiences. This technique seeks to reveal the significance of an individual's experiences and how they perceive them (Ismail & Kinchin, 2023).

## Data Collection

The selection of respondents was conducted using purposive sampling, concentrating on the coordinators presently responsible for the WBL program and academicians with previous expertise in overseeing programs for interns. The participants in the study were selected from the diploma and degree programs in hospitality offered by University Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang and a telephone conversation was initiated to arrange a meeting with the coordinator. Respondents were presented with semi-structured questions that were developed based on prior research and expert guidance during face-to-face interviews. On average, each session lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes. Besides, this study ensured that the respondents would be anonymous, voluntary participants and that their confidentiality would be upheld. After conducting interviews with a total of seven internship coordinators, it was concluded that the data obtained from these seven respondents had reached saturation. The interviews were assessed using theme analysis following their recording, transcription, and collaborative analysis. The utilization of member verification, expert review, and inter-coder agreement was employed to establish the dependability of the data during the complete process of data collection and analysis.

The data collection process occurred from June to August 2024. Interviews were carefully arranged and scheduled according to participant availability to ensure convenience for all parties involved. Upon concluding each interview, transcripts were swiftly analyzed to discern emerging patterns and insights, facilitating real-time enhancement of the theme framework. Subsequently, member verification was performed to validate the accuracy of transcriptions, so ensuring the reliability of the obtained data. Moreover, inter-coder reliability assessments were conducted to ensure consistency during the thematic analysis process. Expert evaluations were done to reinforce the findings, offering validation and ensuring the thematic framework corresponded with the study's aims.

## FINDINGS

The study employed thematic analysis to examine the data. The researchers manually coded the potential themes, subsequently gathering and refining them by consolidating some into broader themes and subdividing others into narrower ones. During the refining process, the researchers employed a thematic map to visualize the connections between the themes, which ultimately led to the development of a thematic map of the data. The researchers analyzed each theme and its corresponding description to determine the themes. After thoroughly examining and finalizing the subjects, the researchers produced a conclusive thematic map.

### Respondent Profile

A total of seven respondents from the Faculty of Hotels and Tourism Management at UiTM Penang took part in the survey. The university offers seven different courses in the fields of hospitality and culinary arts. An assigned internship coordinator oversees each program, covering different states around Malaysia and all the coordinators presently hold their roles and possess more than a year of experience overseeing internships. Table 1 presents a concise overview of each respondent's profile.

**Table 1: Summary of the Respondents Profile**

| Respondent Code | Program | Faculty |
|---|---|---|
| R1 | Diploma in Hotel Management | Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management |

| R2 | Diploma in Culinary Arts | Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management |
| R3 | Diploma in Food Service Management | Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management |
| R4 | Diploma in Tourism Management | Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management |
| R5 | Diploma in Pastry Arts | Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management |
| R6 | Bachelor of Science (Hotel Management) | Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management |
| R7 | Bachelor of Science (Culinary Arts) | Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management |

## Challenges Encountered During the Hospitality Internship

The challenges encountered by the internship coordinators at UiTM Pulau Pinang in carrying out the hospitality internship have been categorized into seven distinct themes, as revealed through interviews with the coordinators. 1) Behaviour: refers to one's mindset or disposition towards something. 2) Restriction: refers to a limitation or restriction that hinders one's actions or choices. 3) Diversion: refers to the act of influencing or controlling someone or something cleverly or deceptively. 4) Placement: refers to the act of putting or positioning something or someone in a particular location or role. 5) Sexual misconduct: refers to any unsolicited sexual contact, demands over sexual favours, as well as additional verbal or physical actions related to sexuality that contribute to an opposed or insulting circumstances. 6) Expectation: refers to a belief or anticipation about what is likely to happen or be achieved in the future. 7) Student readiness: This term denotes the degree of readiness or inclination of students to effectively participate in academic or educational endeavors. The challenge areas comprised multiple codes, which will be explained in the next section. Table 2 provides a compilation for the themes and codes associated to the identified challenges.

**Table 2: List of the Corresponding Codes and Themes**

| Themes | Program |
|---|---|
| 1.  Behaviour | ▪ Workplace matters concerning students.<br>▪ The students were noncompliant with the regulations and directions.<br>▪ Students were selective in choosing internship placements.<br>▪ The students failed to commit to the prescribed timetable for the internship application.<br>▪ The company violated its pledge.<br>▪ The employees at the company failed to adhere to the established standard operating procedures (SOPs).<br>▪ The company did not meet with the faculty's set dates for providing feedback. |
| 2.  Restriction | ▪ Financial restriction.<br>▪ Time constraint |
| 3.  Diversion | ▪ The company exploited students to its advantage. |
| 4.  Placement | ▪ Challenges in finding an internship placement.<br>▪ Length of the internship arrangement. |
| 5.  Sexual misconduct | ▪ Oral sexual misconduct.<br>▪ Physical sexual misconduct |
| 6.  Expectation | ▪ Differential expectations exist between the university and the company.<br>▪ The company provided inadequate training to the students.<br>▪ The industry has high expectations of the competence level of students.<br>▪ Inadequate abilities for the company's requirements. |
| 7.  Student readiness | ▪ Student disinterest<br>▪ Students misjudged the true nature of the real job environment. |

## Relevant Theme 1: Behaviour

Wolfgram, Vivona, and Akram (2021) emphasized the significant influence of behavior on service employees, as it impacts directly the quality of service delivered to visitors. The study revealed that internship coordinators identified behaviour as a significant barrier, with behaviour

issues arising from both students and the company. The behaviour theme is explored through seven elements: 1) Workplace matters concerning students, 2) The students were noncompliant with the regulations and directions, 3) Students were selective in choosing internship placements, 4) The students failed to commit to the prescribed timetable during the internship enforcement, 5) The organization violated its pledge, 6) The employees at the establishment failed to adhere to the established standard operating procedures (SOPs), 7) The company did not meet with the faculty's set dates for providing feedback.

Certain firms have a policy against workplace affairs and romantic relationships, as they believe it can have a negative impact on the company. There were reports of certain hospitality students engaging in personal relationships with their coworkers that went beyond professional requirements. One of the participants (R7) stated that:

The WBL coordinator additionally highlighted that the students failed to adhere to the instructions and regulations provided by the internship company. Despite being fundamental guidelines, the students completely ignored them, resulting in a negative perception of the university. “*Each semester, we provide students guidance on the importance of punctuality and dressing neatly, as these qualities are crucial for an individual. Nevertheless, there are those students who are unable to adhere to our suggestions. Hence, effectively handling students' attitudes creates a challenge for us,*” (R6).

Another issue contributing to the industry's attitude problem is the failure of employees, who may serve as co-workers to interns, to adhere to standard operating procedures (SOPs). This establishes an unfavorable precedent for the interns. The interns communicated their insight to the coordinator and requested guidance on the appropriate course of action. Their status as interns, coupled with the age disparity between themselves and the majority of employees, presented significant challenges in terms of reporting to upper management and effectively applying theoretical knowledge acquired in academic settings to practical situations.

"*...the company has standard operating procedures (SOPs), but there are specific sections that they do not adhere to SOPs for." We acquire this knowledge when our interns return and express their experiences. Interns have reported that when they are responsible for housekeeping tasks and need to work with vacuum, employee solely use guest towels for wiping down everything. Occasionally, the workers merely replace the bedsheet as well as skip over to replace the pillowcases, and the glasses have not been adequately cleansed and dried,*” (R7).

## Relevant Theme 2: Restriction

This study also investigates the issue of restriction, specifically in terms of financial and temporal constraints. Internships incur expenditures among universities and industries. Expenses might involve recruitment, training, overseeing, field trips, and intern reimbursement (Ahmad, 2020). UiTM with multiple campuses incurs significant operational expenses to facilitate the implementation of an internship program. Conducting internship evaluation visits with a significant number of students can incur substantial costs.

“*Our university has several campuses located around Malaysia. As an example, whenever the student undertakes an internship within Sabah, we would contact the lecturer at the Sabah campus to conduct a visit over the student, thereby minimizing expenses. Managing internship students at our large university involves significant financial challenges,*” (R5).

Respondents additionally stated that time restrictions hinder the efficacy of conducting the internship program. Faculty members are responsible for a variety of activities in addition to teaching, doing research, and overseeing students.

*"Time management can be a somewhat challenging task. Difficulties arise when applying for internships and when communicating with companies. Upon assuming teaching responsibilities and other obligations, I must confess that managing my time has become very tough. I experience a lack of concentration and feel overwhelmed by more responsibilities," (R5).*

## Relevant Theme 3: Diversion

The internship was discovered to be a platform for deception, where firms exploited students for their advantage. While internships are beneficial for job advancement, several businesses undervalue the usefulness of interns (Cui & Abukhalifeh, 2022). This behaviour has the potential to discourage interns and simultaneously diminish the reputation of the organization, though only a small number of employees engage in it.

*"The student is required to use strength on heavy trolleys and tidy rooms. The responsibility for completing all the tasks is with the student. On one occasion, the student was required to manage payments at the cashier system, but the responsible staff member was not present. The workers took in an unnecessarily prolonged break. The staff members failed to oversee the intern. Throughout the night shift, the student assumes the position at the reception desk while in duty personnel rest," (R6).*

## Relevant Theme 4: Placement

The procedure for placement was one of the main problems in handling internships. Securing an internship position posed difficulties for both interns and coordinators. Previous research indicates that while interns generally expressed satisfaction with their co-workers and management, they were dissatisfied with the training they received during the internship (Dung, 2023). Therefore, it is difficult to secure an internship from esteemed companies that offer excellence training plans. The findings of the present investigation reveal two components that make up the placement difficulties: 1) Challenges in finding an internship opportunity, and 2) Length of the internship placement. As a result of the economic crisis in our nation, most enterprises were unable to provide internship opportunities.

*"Presently, finding internship placements is quite challenging. As a result of the economic situation, companies are laying off their staff to cut expenses and are employing foreign labour at lower wages," (R5).*

## Relevant Theme 5: Sexual Misconduct

Park (2022) defines sexual misconduct as the act of engaging in undesired and irrational behaviour of a sexual nature. Studies have demonstrated that inappropriate sexual misconduct adversely affects employees' mental health, including increased levels of stress, depression, and disruption of family dynamics. The study identified two categories of sexual assault: 1) verbal harassment, and 2) physical harassment. Either the organization's management or a customer committed sexual misconduct. The internship coordinator must diligently oversee the harassment case, as the university may face negligence if they fail to recognize the severity of the sexual harassment.

*"As of now, there have been no significant instances of sexual harassment reported. We have received reports of two to three incidents of verbal sexual misconduct involving an employee and the executive of the hotel" (R4).*

## Relevant Theme 6: Expectation

Internship coordinators also identified another problem, which had certain expectations that included the following elements: 1) Different expectations exist between universities and industries. 2) Companies often fail to adequately train students. 3) Industries have high expectations regarding the skills of students. 4) There is often a mismatch between the skills required by companies and those possessed by students. There was a discrepancy in expectations among the university as well as the sector.

*"The university and the organization possess divergent expectations concerning the internship. We anticipate that the company will deliver training for our students, enabling them to gain comprehensive knowledge while ensuring that the company effectively utilizes the students as valuable assets. The company's objectives are inconsistent with the objectives of the university," (R3).*

One respondent identified a discrepancy in the skills possessed by students at the commencement of their internship within the organization. The internship application process must address this issue.

*"We encountered a scenario in which the intern was assigned tasks that were unrelated to their academic program. There were no objections raised during the application process. However, it became apparent that the intern's degree program did not match the organization's requirements when they started their internship at the company," (R1).*

## Relevant Theme 7: Student Readiness

The absence of student motivation, coupled with the undervaluation of the actual work environment, constitutes significant factors that impede student readiness. The internship coordinators reported that several students lacked the enthusiasm to pursue a career in the hotel business due to the demanding workload and their lack of preparedness for the realities of an employment environment within this sector.

*"Upon completing their internship in the hospitality sector, students may occasionally encounter a diminished enthusiasm for pursuing a career in this field. The challenging and exhausting characteristics of hotel employment frequently result in a reduced inclination to persist in the hospitality sector," (R4).*

*"During the discussion regarding the hospitality and tourism industry with students, it was observed that the students were genuinely taken aback by the real scope of the work. They underestimated the demanding nature of the workload in the tourist and hospitality industry. This phenomenon arises due to the excessive adaptation of students to the lifestyle prevalent on university campuses," (R3).*

The issue at hand can be effectively addressed by utilizing the Experiential Learning Theory as a suitable framework. Experiential learning theory suggests that individuals attain optimal learning outcomes through a continuous process including direct observation, abstract thinking, reflective experience, and active exploration. This theory provides a suitable framework for examining the challenges encountered by interns within the field of tourism and hospitality courses and internship programs. Interns engage in practical activities during their internships, executing tasks that reflect real-world scenarios. They then analyze and evaluate their experiences, combining them with

theoretical knowledge, and actively explore various methods and strategies (Hyasat, 2022). The continuous learning method enables interns to acquire useful insights, cultivate practical skills, and adjust their behaviour to efficiently manage problems in the sector. Experiential learning ultimately enhances interns' comprehension and competency, allowing them to excel in their positions in the tourism and hospitality industry.

## DISCUSSION

This study identified seven primary issues faced by internship coordinators in the hospitality undergraduate programs at University Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang. These challenges involve a range of factors, such as behaviour, restriction, diversion, placement, occurrences of sexual misconduct, expectations, and the preparedness of students and most of the findings align with the prior studies (Liu,2022; Chen, 2021; Razak, 2022). The finding of this investigation offers a valuable perspective to certain matters that are extremely important to the hospitality program as well as industry within Malaysia. The findings are also expected to enhance the existing body of research and offer substantial guidance for all stakeholders involved in the hospitality internship program, including the institution, industry partners, and students. The faculty and WBL coordinator shall possess the authority to formulate approaches aimed at addressing anticipated challenges and to allocate additional emphasis to specific areas during the planning of an internship program. The insights provided by both industry professionals and students can significantly enhance collaboration and comprehension, thus contributing to the effective implementation of an internship program. This study is limited by the fact that participants were exclusively sourced from a single stakeholder, specifically the internship coordinator. Researchers can obtain more thorough and fair conclusions by including feedback from multiple stakeholders, such as industry representatives, students, and the department leader. Hence, future research should incorporate all stakeholders as participants to investigate the challenges and potentially suggest solutions for the hospitality internship program.

## CONCLUSION

This study enhances the theoretical discourse surrounding the central role of Experiential Learning Theory through a detailed examination of the qualitative data gathered during the research. Concurrently, it also facilitates the practical application of this theory in relevant educational initiatives. In the forthcoming decades, there will be an increasing prevalence of Malaysian students pursuing studies in hospitality management. Their experiences in hospitality education, particularly through a productive and meaningful internship program, may represent one of the most critical phases of their lives. Collaboration between the industry and the university is essential to guarantee a favorable outcome as students engage in their internships. In this context, determining the methods to enhance the genuine development of students' comprehensive abilities, while simultaneously refining the practical teaching framework and prioritizing adaptability and innovative capacity, constitutes a critical inquiry. Off-campus placement serves as a very efficient platform for nurturing and developing talented individuals. Besides, it is imperative to make optimal use of the tools and resources available through collaboration between the university and enterprises. This will enable students to gain important hotel placements and access a wide range of internship possibilities at all levels. Hotel internships provide students with competent knowledge, enhance their professional growth opportunities, and strengthen their ability to adapt to market changes effectively.

Future research should investigate the impact of technology on the enhancement of Work-Based Learning (WBL) programs, especially with virtual internships and hybrid learning models. Moreover, comparison analyses across other businesses may yield insights into optimal techniques for overcoming problems in WBL implementation, and investigating the long-term career paths of

hospitality graduates after WBL internships may provide significant insights into the efficacy of these programs in addressing the skills gap. Finally, examining the influence of cultural and organizational elements on the internship experience may reveal solutions to enhance engagement and retention within the hospitality sector.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## FUNDING

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Saber, J. M. conceived and planned the experiments. Raja Mustapha, R. I. carried out the experiments and data preparation. Ibrahim, M. Z F. planned and carried out the simulations. Johari, N. R. contributed to the interpretation of the results. Bahari, K. A. took the lead in writing the manuscript. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis and manuscript.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

We certify that the article is the Authors' and Co-Authors' original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This research/manuscript has not been submitted for publication, nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all Authors have contributed significantly to the work, validity and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to Jurnal Intelek.

## REFERENCES

Ahmad, A., Hussain, K., Ekiz, E., & Tang, T. (2020). The advancement of hospitality and tourism education in Malaysia. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, *12*, 145-153 https://doi.org/10.1108/whatt-12-2019-0078

Ahmad, A., Hussain, K., Ekiz, E., & Tang, T. (2023). Workforce challenges in the Malaysian hotel industry. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 15(2), 134–145. https://doi.org/10.1108/whatt-2023-0012

Aljumah, A. (2023). The impact of job training on recruitment and employability skills among graduates. *International Journal of Professional Business Review.* https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i10.2806

Andersson, K., & Cummings, T. (2023). Work-based learning in hospitality: Trends and implications. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 35(3), 215–229. https://doi.org/10.1108/jwl-2023-0023

Aziz, F. A., & Subramaniam, N. (2023). TVET in Malaysia: Current situation, challenges and recommendations. *Penang Institute*. https://penanginstitute. org/publications/issues/tvet-in-malaysia-current-situationchallenges-and-recommendations

Bittmann, F., & Zorn, V. (2024). When choice excels obligation: about the effects of mandatory and voluntary internships on labour market outcomes for university graduates. *Higher Education*, *80*, 75-93. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00466-5.

Chen, Y., & Gan, N. (2021). Sustainable development of employability of university students based on participation in the internship promotion programme of Zhejiang Province. *Sustainability, 13*(23). https://doi.org/10.3390/su132313454

Creswell, J. D. (2022). *Research design, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. Sixth Edition. Sage Publication.

Chowdhury, S., & Wilson, M. (2024). The role of supervision in successful internships: Evidence from the hospitality industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*, *36*(2), 123–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/jhte.2024.0143

Cui, Y., & Abukhalifeh, A. (2022). Does the hotel internship improve students' intention of employment in the hotel industry? *Journal of Studies in Education*. https://doi.org/10.5296/jse.v12i2.19436

Deng, F., Zhou, R., & Wu, Y. (2023). Skills mismatch in hospitality internships: A systematic review. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, *75*(4), 567–590. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2023.202120

Dung, T. (2023). Investigating English-majored students' levels of satisfaction with their internship experiences: A case study at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance. *VNU Journal of Science: Education Research*.

Fei, Y. C., Waheeb, W., & Sulaiman, S. B. (2020). Student internships: A selective review. *Journal of Applied Technology and Innovation*, *4*(2), 1-5. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342570793_Student_Internships_A_Selective_Review

Harrison, T., & Lin, X. (2023). Bridging the gap: Industry-academia collaborations for improved hospitality internships. *Tourism Management*, 97, 104777. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2023.104777

Hora, M. (2023). Problematizing college internships: Exploring issues with access, program design, and developmental outcomes in three U.S. colleges. *Proceedings of the 2023 AERA Annual Meeting*. *https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341293930_Problematizing_college_internships_Exploring_issues_with_access_program_design_and_developmental_outcomes*

Hyasat, A. S. (2022). The experiential learning theory as base for tourism and hospitality courses and internship programs. *Indian Journal of Economics and Business*, *21*(1), 291-303. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358662552_The_Experiential_Learning_Theory_as_Base_for_Tourism_and_Hospitality_Courses_and_Internship_Programs

Isaacs, A., Raymond, A., Jacob, A., & Hawkings, P. (2023). Job satisfaction of rural medical interns: A qualitative study. *The Australian Journal of Rural Health*, *31*(2), 149–159. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12999

Ismail, N., & Kinchin, G. (2023). The construct of phenomenological analysis: A case study of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). *Egypt Scholars Journal.* https://doi.org/10.52649/egscj230809

Karasik, R. (2023). Gerontology internships, practicum, and field work from a faculty perspective innovation in aging. *7*, 149 – 149. DOI:10.1093/geroni/igad104.0488

Kim, Y. H., & Spears, D. (2022). Differing career expectations in the hospitality industry: A cross-cultural study. *International Hospitality Review*, *36*(2), 304-321. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ihr-08-2020-0033/full/html

Liu, F., He, Q., & Wu, N. (2022). Factors influencing students' career intentions in the hospitality and tourism industries: A meta-analysis. *Behavioral Sciences*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12120517

Liu, F., Zhang, F., Wu, N., & James, N. (2022). Career barriers of hospitality and tourism management students and the impacts on their career intention. *Economic Research.* https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1331677X.2022.2129410#:~:text=https%3A//doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2022.2129410

Martin, E. (2020). Perceived benefits of participating in an undergraduate strength and conditioning internship. *International Journal of Kinesiology in Higher Education*, *5*, 115 – 131. https://doi.org/10.1080/24711616.2020.1753603

Mensah, C., Azila-Gbettor, E., Appietu, M., & Agbodza, J. (2020). Internship work-related stress: A comparative study between hospitality and marketing students. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education, 33*, 29 - 42. https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2020.1726769

Park, J., Kim, Y., Yu, J., Yue, G., & Yoon, E. (2022). Sexual harassment to male hotel employees: An assessment of its negative consequences. *Journal of Men's Health.* DOI: 10.31083/j.jomh1808173

Qu, H., Leung, X., Huang, S., & He, J. (2021). Factors affecting hotel interns' satisfaction with internship experience and career intention in China. *Journal of Hospitality Leisure Sport & Tourism Education*, *28*, 100311. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JHLSTE.2021.100311

Pusiran, A. K., Janin, Y., Ismail, S., & Dalinting, L. J. (2024). Hospitality internship program insights. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, *12*(2), 155-164. DOI:10.1108/WHATT-12-2019-0079

Razak, R., Radha, J., & Ahmad, R. (2022). Exploring hospitality students' expectation for internship placement during the Covid-19 pandemic: The case of Universiti Utara Malaysia students. *Journal of Event, Tourism and Hospitality Studies*. DOI:10.32890/jeth2022.2.7

Singh, P., & Ahmed, R. (2023). Academic guidance in internships: A pathway to student success. *Educational Research Quarterly*, *47*(1), 24–38. https://doi.org/10.3102/erq.2023.0471

Skujiņa, R., & Loots, E. (2023). The intern economy in the cultural industry: An empirical study of the demand side. *Journal of Education and Work*, *33*(4), 343–359. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2023.1820961

Taylor, J., Smith, R., & Williams, P. (2024). Enhancing employability through structured internships: A multi-sector analysis. *International Journal of Training and Development*, *28*(1), 45–62. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijtd.2024.0010

To, W. M., & Lung, J. W. (2024). Factors influencing internship satisfaction among Chinese students. *Education+ Training*, *62*(5), 543–558. https://doi.org/10.1108/et-2024-0143

Vo, N., Le, L., & Lam, V. (2021). Challenges for student satisfaction of internship program in hospitality and tourism industry in Vietnam. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism, 23*, 1298 – 1324. https://doi.org/10.1080/1528008X.2021.1964414

Wolfgram, M., Vivona, B., & Akram, T. (2021). On the intersectional amplification of barriers to college internships: A comparative case study analysis. *Harvard Educational Review.* https://wcer.wisc.edu/docs/working-papers/WCER_Working_Paper_No_2020_5.pdf

Xu, S., Lin, Z., He, M., & Wong, I. (2022). The perils of hospitality internship: A growth curve approach to job motivation change. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management.* https://doi.org/10.1108/ijchm-12-2021-1525.

Zhang, W. (2023). Current situation and effective ways of education of higher vocational student party members during internship. *Journal of Education and Educational Research.* DOI:10.54097/jeer.v4i2.10828

Zehr, S., & Korte, R. (2020). Student internship experiences: Learning about the workplace. *Education & Training.* https://doi.org/10.1108/et-11-2018-0236