

*Research Article*

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**The influence of internship determinants on  
hospitality undergraduates' satisfaction level: A  
case of public universities in Malaysia**

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**Abstract**

Being a university undergraduate no longer guarantees job placement. Previous literature has proven that the work experiences of an internship program make a significant impact on students' career choices as it provides students with realistic expectations of their future careers. Students who have undergone their internship program agree that internship satisfaction would have a strong influence on their career intentions. Although several studies emphasized on student internship experiences and career intention, there is a lack of empirical research that has been carried out on the relationship between internship determinants and internship satisfaction, particularly within the hospitality context. Therefore, this present study aims to examine the factors associated with internship satisfaction. There are three factors identified as the determinants of the internship satisfaction, namely job characteristics, organizational environment, and contextual factors. A quantitative research method involving 302 hospitality undergraduates from seven public universities that offer Bachelor in Hospitality and Food Service courses in Malaysia had been conducted. Findings from the three independent variables (job characteristics, organizational environment, and contextual factors) show that the organizational environment has the highest impact on internship satisfaction (beta = .480), followed by job characteristics (beta = .366), and contextual factors (beta = .113).

**Keywords:**

Contextual Factors, Food Service, Hospitality, Internship Satisfaction, Job Characteristics, Organizational Environment.

**1 Introduction**

Hospitality education has been developed to overcome the mismatch between hospitality education and the industry needs. Historically, the University Institute of Technology MARA had introduced a program known as hospitality education in 1967 under the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (Goldsmith & Zahari, 1994).

Nowadays, the Bachelor of Food Service and Hospitality Management program is being offered by many public higher academic institutions particularly in Malaysia such as Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT).

In addition, various private higher academic institutions are also offering a similar program at the Bachelor's degree level, for instance, Taylor's University College, Segi University College, Sunway University, Management and Science University (MSU), KDU University, UCSI University, Stamford College, Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan University, Nilai University, Curtin University Sarawak Malaysia, MAHSA University, Manipal University, Lincoln University College, City University College of Science and Technology, UNITAR International College, Tunku Abdul Rahman University College, and Islamic University College of Malacca.

With so many public and private institutions in Malaysia offering the underlined program, the quality of the curriculum delivery has become a significant issue for hospitality education. According to Sahney et al. (2004), the problem arises when Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) often fail in meeting the employer requirements towards producing more high-skilled graduates as the industry moves faster in restructuring new demand than the evolution of programs offered by educational institutions. As of now, the academic institutions believe that there is an urge to balance the theory and practice of hospitality education by infusing industrial training as a compulsory component to the pre-requisite of graduation specifically in the hospitality curriculum of the higher institutions.

One of the main goals in implementing an internship program as a part of the curriculum especially in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) is to provide comprehensive access to students by giving them a chance to experience the real working environment (Coco, 2000). On top of that, Paulins (2008) also pinpointed that internship brings along a lot of opportunities to help, guide and prepare students with realistic expectations of their desired future careers after completing the internship placement.

Practically, industrial training possesses positive perspectives from students who have already completed their internship placement. According to Cannon and Arnold

(1998), students view industrial training as an effective platform that enables them to screen their desired future career and gain valuable experience to improvise their skills and knowledge related to their particular fields of study. Based on a research conducted by Belt and Richardson (2005) regarding the effectiveness of industrial training in regards to building strong generic skills among interns, they reported that most of the interns noticed that their generic skills (for examples people skills, and business skills) had improved after joining internship program and the majority of them were offered a job from their respective internship supervisor due to their job performance.

However, according to (D'Abate et al., 2009; Devine et al., 2007; Feldman and Weitz, 1990; Narayanan et al., 2010; Paulins, 2008; Rothman, 2007), there is a gap in measuring internship experiences in regards to the satisfaction levels among students. Besides, the authors also suggested that measuring effectiveness and satisfaction levels through their internships, whether related to Hospitality Management or other service industries, should be considered as the primary concern in conducting the future study.

Paulins (2008) opined that students' satisfaction in regards to their internship experiences; they tend to have more positive perceptions towards their academic institution. She also added that students who satisfied with their internship experiences would give their best performance to their companies when they begin their careers. Thus, this paper aims to examine the factors associated with internship satisfaction among hospitality undergraduates, specifically from public universities in Malaysia.

## **2 Literature Review**

According to Knouse et al. (1999), aside from gaining experiences and improving students' self-confidence through practical training, students who have had internship programs are offered job opportunities by the organizations faster compared to students who have never attended any internship program. Additionally, the authors also justified, students with well-equipped skills are more likely to receive a better job offer as they apply their full potential into the real world of work.

Furthermore, the literature from a study conducted by Cutting and Hall (2008) suggested that it is crucial to notice the students' satisfaction towards their internship experiences as they appear to perform work correctly in line with their satisfaction with the job task. Beard and Morton (1999) also carried the same perception that students would be very successful in performing their tasks based on their positive performance towards the job given.

### **2.1 Definition of internship**

According to Tan (2008), an internship is defined as a short-duration of work activities that is not more than six months implemented by educational institutions due to the requirement for students' graduation. The author also added that part-time employment or other outside working experiences are an exception as a form of experiential training as well despite its similar goals to the internship practices.

Initially, internship practices had been introduced earlier to the field of medical education (Marlborough, 1999). Today, this term has been extensively applied to various sectors and departments all over the world based on their intuition. Other than the term internship that has been commonly utilized, there are other terms used which are similar to the meaning of internship, for example, experiential learning which carries the purpose of learning by doing, and experiential education which means reflecting the practical application of experiential learning theory. Furthermore, the author also cited the meaning of practice or practicum, referring to the academic institution. Meanwhile, service-learning means it relates to internship experience that is service-related but not necessarily connected to one's career. Moreover, there are other terms used rather than internship which are cooperative education, which means the result from service-learning, and lastly, fieldwork or field experience, that is, knowledge obtained outside of the classroom that may not be directly related to a specific course (Duley, 1974; Marlborough, 1999).

## **2.2 Internship satisfaction**

The importance of infusing an internship program as a part of the curriculum for students has been discussed over the past few years. One of the most important outcomes that should be noticed by universities is to figure out whether students achieve learning outcomes from internship programs as offered (Elkins, 2002). Therefore, students' feedback and satisfaction should be working together to develop and improve the internship program as the program needs to be evaluated from students' perceptions (Swindle and Bailey, 1984).

Satisfying internship experiences provide many advantages. Students who have satisfying internship experiences tend to have a more positive outlook towards their career search process and also towards their educational institution (Paulins, 2008, cited in Gupta and Burns, 2010). These students will be able to contribute better to their companies when they start their careers.

There is evidence revealing that students can be satisfied with internships from different perspectives, for example, job responsibilities, working hours, as well as payment (Nelson, 1952; McCombs and Van Syckle, 1994; Beard, 1998). Girard (1999) also claimed in his study that students are most satisfied in terms of the perception of work and their supervision. Besides, Emenheiser et al. (1997) found out that most of the internship students are satisfied with their improvement in problem-solving skills in the service industry.

Gupta and Burns (2010) carried out a study among marketing business interns to understand the level of satisfaction based on their experience from completing their internship training. The study revealed that the qualities of the internship, which include the nature of an internship experience, and the benefits received would affect a student's satisfaction level.

Okay and Sahin (2010) conducted a research study aimed to obtain the students' perspectives regarding industrial training implemented by their academic institutions

from the Faculty of Technical Education (FTE). The authors highlighted that students who received job offers from the internship supervisor showed more significant levels of satisfaction compared to the students who did not receive any offer. Students who had performed well during their internship training by taking the program seriously in gaining more valuable experiences and showing good self-initiative tended to have high chances to receive an offer for a job position by their employers.

A study conducted by Bao and Fang (2008) investigated the satisfaction level of students on their internship experience and the factors that affect their overall satisfaction within the hospitality and tourism industry. The study revealed that students are dissatisfied with their internship experience due to the low mean scores. Also, Nelson (1994) conducted a similar survey of hospitality students regarding their internship experience and found that the students are most satisfied with internships that provide relevant work, autonomy, and timely feedback.

The internship is also a platform to shape and develop students in terms of experience and self-confidence by developing skills and abilities as well as their understanding of the industry itself (Zopiatis, 2007). On the contrary, a study managed by Collins (2002) and Lam and Ching (2007) stated that students could also be dissatisfied with the internship program in terms of poor payment, no allowance, poor relationship between employees and managers, long working hours, lack of coordination and communication as well as the overall working environment.

In a study of accounting students' regional internship program experiences, Cord et al. (2010) found that students revealed some level of dissatisfaction with the tasks given to them. Most of these students indicated the reasons why they felt dissatisfied with their internship program were due to the students' roles in the organization, which assigned them to passive roles that would affect their level of internship satisfaction.

### **2.3 The factors of internship satisfaction among hospitality undergraduates**

D'Abate et al. (2009) conducted a study on internship satisfaction and assessed the satisfaction of interns by looking into three factors which are job characteristics, organizational environment, and contextual factors. This study has utilized the similar three elements but with some different items that have been adapted according to the nature of internship chosen and diverse target population, which is among hospitality undergraduates from public universities in Malaysia.

#### *2.3.1 Job characteristics*

Hackman and Oldham (1980) had developed a model, namely the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) whereby this model provides a framework to assist in defining task characteristics and also their relationship to employees' satisfaction, motivation, and performance. According to the model, job characteristics have a significant impact on the outcomes of job satisfaction. This model consists of five core dimensions, namely, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Wubuli (2009) defined skill variety as a job that involves a variety of activities

and talent. The author also suggested the meaning of task identity, the extent to which an employee completes a particular job given from the beginning until the end. Whereby, task significance relates to the impact of the job that people concerned. Furthermore, autonomy means how much the job provides freedom and independence to a worker in an evaluation of his or her performances.

### *2.3.2 Organizational environment*

The characteristics of the general organizational environment are found to be an excellent factor for internship satisfaction (D'Abate et al., 2009). Organizational environment, or also known as work environment, covers six core dimensions, which are learning opportunities, career development opportunities, site supervisory support, co-worker support, networking opportunities, and organization satisfaction. On the other hand, research conducted by Nelson (1994) stated that the job dimensions and its work environment including supportive relationships are the contributors to students' satisfaction towards their internship.

### *2.3.3 Contextual factors*

Rothman (2003) defined context as the specific setting of a program that occurred, such as social, political, cultural, historical, and personal factors. Meanwhile, Kim et al. (2003) referred to contextual as activities that differ from the performance of the job task. Also, D'Abate et al. (2009) identified several contextual factors in the context of interns. These factors are said to have a more significant impact on internship satisfaction among interns, for example, pay, work hours, commute, and location.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Target population and sampling size**

The unit of analysis of this study was the hospitality undergraduates from public universities in Malaysia, particularly for those who had undergone their internship in Food Service and Hospitality/Hotel Management programs only. A total of seven public universities in Malaysia offering Bachelor in Food Service and Hospitality courses with different duration of the internship were involved. Approximately 445 total population of hospitality undergraduates were available for being the potential candidates for this research.

### **3.2 Sampling technique and data collection**

The convenience sampling was employed for this study due to its convenient accessibility and close location to the researcher. The descriptive data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. All of the questionnaires had been distributed and collected from the respondents within two months, with a 100% response rate.

The present study conducted a quantitative study, where a questionnaire was presented in an online and paper-based survey form as a tool for the data collection. The questionnaire was developed based on extensive literature related to the area of research.

### 3.3 Questionnaire Design

This study consisted of three main sections – internship determinants, general internship satisfaction, and demographic information, with a total of 41 items. The items were adopted from the literature that examined similar issues on internship determinants and internship satisfaction (e.g. D’Abate et al., 2009; Gupta and Burns, 2010). An empirical study of the internship satisfaction survey instrument proposed by D’Abate et al. (2009) was adopted as it had been validated by many previous studies with different background of research fields. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section A, B, and C.

Section A required the students to rate based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) according to the extent to which they agree or disagree for each of the statement listed. This section analyzed internship determinants. The internship determinants consist of three main clusters, which are job characteristics, organizational environment, and contextual factors.

Section B assessed general internship satisfaction and was measured as a uni-dimensional construct. This part was presented in a 5-point Likert response format. Students were required to rate the scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Lastly, section C aimed to collect demographic data of students including gender, year of study, working experience within the hospitality industry, job offer by internship supervisor, types of internship placement, and salary or allowance.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study explain two main categories – demographic background, and multiple regression analysis consist of the factors associated with internship satisfaction among hospitality undergraduates which are job characteristics, organizational environment, and contextual factors.

### 4.1 Demographic profile

#### 4.1.1 Gender

Table 1: Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	68	22.5	22.5	22.5
	Female	234	77.5	77.5	100.0
	Total	302	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 shows the gender of respondents who had participated in this study. Out of 302 respondents, it is shown that females dominated the samples with 234 respondents (77.5%) whereas 68 respondents (22.5%) were males.

#### 4.1.2 Year of study

Table 2: Year of study

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Year 2	4	1.3	1.3	1.3
	Year 3	60	19.9	19.9	21.2
	Year 4 and above	238	78.8	78.8	100.0
	Total	302	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that 238 (78.8%) of our respondents were in Year 4 and above students followed by 60 (19.9%) in Year 3, and only 4 (1.3%) in Year 2.

#### 4.1.3 Working experience within the hospitality industry

Table 3: Working experience within the hospitality industry

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Yes	116	38.4	38.4	38.4
	No	186	61.6	61.6	100.0
	Total	302	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows that 186 (61.6%) of the respondents did not possess working experience aside from internship training within the hospitality industry, and 116 (38.4%) had working experience apart from internship training offered by academic institutions within the hospitality industry.

#### 4.1.4 Job offer by the internship supervisor

Table 4: Job offer by the internship supervisor

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	Yes	178	58.9	59.5	59.5
	No	121	40.1	40.5	100.0
	Total	299	99.0	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	3	1.0		
<b>Total</b>		302	100.0		



Table 4 shows that their respective internship supervisor had offered 178 (58.9%) of the respondents a job placement; meanwhile, the rest 121 (40.1%) respondents did not receive any job offer from their internship supervisor.

#### 4.1.5 Types of internship placement

Table 5: Types of internship placement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Hotel	130	43.0	48.5	48.5
	Restaurant	25	8.3	9.3	57.8
	Catering	19	6.3	7.1	64.9
	Fast Food	22	7.3	8.2	73.1
	Others	72	23.8	26.9	100.0
	Total	268	88.7	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	34	11.3		
<b>Total</b>		302	100.0		

Table 5 shows the types of internship placement chosen by students for their training places which indicates hotel is the highest training places enrolled by students with 130 (43.0%), followed by restaurant with 25 (8.3%), catering with 19 (6.3%), fast food with 22 (7.3%), and others with 72 (23.8%).

#### 4.1.6 Salary or allowances

Table 6: Salary or allowances

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	No salary	50	16.6	16.8	16.8
	Less than RM199	33	10.9	11.1	27.9
	RM200- RM399	112	37.1	37.6	65.4
	RM400- RM599	64	21.2	21.5	86.9
	RM600- RM799	29	9.6	9.7	96.6
	Others	10	3.3	3.4	100.0
	Total	298	98.7	100.0	
<b>Missing</b>	System	4	1.3		
<b>Total</b>		302	100.0		

Table 6 shows the range of salary or allowances respondents gained from their internship employers which indicates the highest salary they were paid was RM200- RM399 with 112 (37.1%) of the respondents, followed by RM400- RM599 with 64

(21.2%) respondents, no salary with 50 (16.6%), less than RM199 with 33 (10.9%), RM600-RM799 with 29 (9.6%), and others with 10 (3.3%).

## 4.2 Multiple regression analysis

### 4.2.1 Model summary

Table 7: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.630 <sup>a</sup>	.397	.391	.45178

- Predictors: (Constant), Average Summated Score of contextual factors, organizational environment, and job characteristics.
- Dependent Variable: Average Summated Scores of Internship Satisfaction

Table 7 shows that the correlation coefficient (R-value) between the independent variables and the dependent variable is 0.630. The R<sup>2</sup> for this model is 0.397. It indicates that the independent variables (job characteristics, organizational environment, and contextual factors) define 39.70% of the variance in the dependent variable (internship satisfaction). The other 60.3% is explained by other factors.

### 4.2.2 Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Table 8: Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.123	3	13.374	65.525	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	60.824	298	.204		
	Total	100.947	301			

- Predictors: (Constant), Average Summated Score of contextual factors, organizational environment, and job characteristics.
- Dependent Variable: Average Summated Scores of Internship Satisfaction.

Table 8 shows that the significance level is 0.000, while the F value is 65.525. Hence, the overall model of this study is a good descriptor in explaining the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The three predictor variables can very well explain the variation or changes in internship satisfaction.

#### 4.2.3 Summary of coefficients for multiple regression model

Table 9: Summary of coefficients for multiple regression model

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.060	.252		.238	.812
	Job Characteristics	.366	.072	.287	5.100	.000
	Organizational Environment	.480	.072	.372	6.650	.000
	Contextual Factors	.113	.047	.113	.113	.016

a. Dependent Variable: Internship Satisfaction

Out of all other independent variables constant, the organizational environment has the highest significant impact on internship satisfaction with (Beta,  $\beta = 0.480$ ), followed by job characteristics (Beta,  $\beta = 0.366$ ), and contextual factors with (Beta,  $\beta = 0.113$ ).

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examines the correlation of each independent variable (job characteristics, organizational environment, and contextual factors) with internship satisfaction among hospitality undergraduates from public universities in Malaysia. The organizational environment is indicated as the most significant impact on internship satisfaction, followed by job characteristics, and contextual factors.

Future research should consider involving the moderator or mediator variables, not only the standard independent and dependent variables. With the presence of a mediator or moderator, it enables a systematic representation of the study and in identifying the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables.

Future research may extend this study to all local and private universities, particularly in Malaysia, to obtain a broad view of the nature of internship satisfaction in the Malaysian context.

## 6 About the authors

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