



INTERNSHIP-TO-EMPLOYMENT PIPELINE: HOW INTERNSHIP STRUCTURE PREDICTS LONG-TERM RETENTION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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Abstract:

Internships are a vital bridge between academic preparation and professional employment, especially within the fast-paced hotel industry. Effective internship and training experiences—paired with strong intern motivation—lead to higher satisfaction, stronger skill readiness, deeper organizational loyalty, and ultimately, improved long-term retention. This study examines how the design and quality of internship programs influence interns' transition into full-time hotel careers. Using mixed methods data from hotel interns, training managers, and HR professionals, the research evaluates key components such as supervision quality, task relevance, training duration, feedback systems, institutional support, and motivational drivers. Findings reveal that well-structured internships with clear objectives, consistent mentorship, meaningful hands-on tasks, and visible career development pathways significantly enhance the likelihood of post-internship employment and sustained retention in the hotel sector. In contrast, poorly planned or weakly supervised internships reduce motivation, create disengagement, and contribute to higher turnover. Overall, the study highlights the need to redesign internship models not only as academic requirements but as strategic talent-development pipelines that align motivational factors with organizational workforce needs. Recommendations are provided for hospitality institutions and industry employers to strengthen internship systems, support intern motivation, and build a more committed and long-lasting hospitality workforce.

Keywords: Internship, Training experience, motivation, hotel industry, professionalism

Introduction

Internships represent short-term employment opportunities, either part-time or full-time, that allow students and recent graduates to gain hands-on exposure to professional work environments. They serve as a transitional stage between classroom learning and career development, enabling individuals to build technical competencies, interpersonal communication, industry familiarity, and professional networks. In the hotel industry, internships are particularly significant, as the industry relies heavily on service skills, adaptability, and practical experience in real-world operations. These programs are usually facilitated by universities, private companies, public organizations, and non-profit institutions to prepare students for sustained career growth.



Scholars have examined both the strengths and challenges of hospitality internships. **Kukreti and Dani (2020)** observed that interns maintained a positive attitude toward operational tasks when internships were structured with fixed working hours, preventing overwork and creating a supportive environment. **Lugosi and Jameson (2017)** argued that many hotel interns focus primarily on academic achievement, often neglecting the deeper challenges associated with experiential learning during internship programs. Meanwhile, hospitality research has revealed common high-performance work practices including decentralized decision-making; transparency and open communication; employee empowerment through training and education; flexible work assignments; attitude assessment; performance appraisal; selection, recruitment, and grievance procedures; rewards and incentives; and engagement programs (**Sharma & Gursoy, 2018**). **Mohsin et al. (2013)** identified that extended working hours, combined with high levels of pressure and workplace stress, negatively affect employee retention in the hotel industry. Similarly, **Rehman and Mubashar (2017)** emphasized that employee turnover continues to be a global challenge in the hotel industry. Adding to these concerns, **Bufquin et al. (2021)** found that psychological distress significantly increases turnover intentions, thereby widening the divide between academic preparation and professional realities. Employee turnover in the hospitality industry is often driven by dissatisfaction. **Narkhede (2014)** posits that dissatisfaction can stem from poor relationships with supervisors, unfavourable working conditions, irregular work schedules, heavy workloads, unappealing job tasks, and inadequate pay or benefits. High turnover is a major challenge in the hotel industry, (**Karatepe & Kilic, 2007**).

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the need to view internships not simply as short-term training but as a key determinant of long-term employment outcomes. This research focus on long-term retention explores the factors that contribute to career choice of hotel interns and the role of institutional support and industry practices that shape career decisions and retention in the hotel industry. Two key factors include internship/training experience and motivation.

By investigating how the design and structure of internships influence long-term retention, this study aims to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice. The findings will provide valuable insights for universities, policymakers, education institutions and the hotel industry to create internship programs that function as effective pipelines from education to sustained employment.

Review of Literature

The hospitality industry is widely recognized for its high employee turnover, which makes the workforce stability a continuous challenge (**Goh and Li, 2018**). One approach that has given considerable attention is integration of structured internship programs. Beyond offering experienced learning, these internships are designed to act as career pipelines, students in long-term employment infections (**Chen and Shane, 2012**). Since internships are often the first direct encounter between students and industry, they play an important role in shaping perceptions, impressing career options and establishing a foundation for future employment (**KO, 2012**). However, while the immediate benefits of internship on the intentions of satisfaction and career



are well documented, research providing longitudinal evidence that combines internship structure with real retention results, remains limited (*Richardson, 2008; Goh and Li, 2018*).

A major challenge for hospitality graduates lies in mismatch between educational preparation and industry demands. Many students struggle with insufficient mutual skills, limited technical ability and experience on insufficient hands. *Omar and Raju (2016)* highlighted that the minimum risk for weak communication, lack of soft skills, and professional settings often obstruct graduate degrees to secure lined jobs with their aspirations. Similarly, *Masturah et al. (2013)* observed that the use of poor professional language and ineffective self-expression often results in an unsuccessful job interview. *Arumugam et al. (2014)* further emphasized that weak language proficiency remains a hindrance for employment in the hotel industry.

The internship has been identified as a powerful mechanism to remove these intervals by developing mutual and professional competencies. *Harast et al. (2012)* reported that the internship enhances oral and non-verbal communication, improves written correspondence, and creates confidence and inspiration. Additionally, the internship produces professional awareness and a positive task attitude, which are important for the development of career (*Decorson, 2009; Zopiyatis, 2007*). *Inson (2010)* also insisted that the Internship enables students to work together as learners and as temporary employees, providing an authentic preview of workplace realities.

Such practical risk not only improves student skills, but also affects the decisions of long-term career. Wang and *Chen (2015)* found that the internship enforces the undergraduate with a professional environment, which helps them to create an informed career option. Similarly, *Kim and Park (2013)* emphasized that the internship gives a significant shape to students' 'careers' orientation and professional identity.

By reducing the difference between theoretical knowledge and industry practice, internships provide realistic understanding of job expectations. While students often start their programs with class-based beliefs, practical engagement allows them to understand the complications of the hospitality profession (*Barnet, 2012*). *Farmaki (2018)* demonstrated that internship experience directly affects career paths by increasing employment, confidence and networking opportunities. *Chen and Shane (2012)* found that the structured internship, which promotes employment benefits, strengthened the intentions of the students to remain in hospitality - a discovery supported by *KO (2012)*, which confirmed the reason link between structured internships, skills acquisition and career decision.

In addition, internship programs are considered important for rapid job market readiness and long-term professional development (*Spraldin, 2009*). In the hotel industry, these programs typically combine structured training with on-the-job learning, ensuring that the intern not only receive technical and service-oriented skills, but also develop the necessary adaptability for diverse operating roles.

Another important dimension of hospitality internship lies under his influence on the intention of the turnover. The high attraction is a frequent challenge in the field, and internship experiences often shape students' commitment to long-term career. *Kushaluvan and*



Kushaluvan (2000) highlighted that negative internship experiences - as being assigned to repeat, is facing excessive charge, or the supervisor is experiencing a lack of support - may discourage students from chasing the hospitality. Similarly, **Richardson (2008)** found that students' perceptions about poor working conditions, irregular schedule and limited advancement opportunities during internship contribute to strong turnover intentions, often motivating them to switch industries after graduation. These findings outline the importance of designing auxiliary and meaningful internships that promote the expectations of a positive career.

In addition to shaping individual career decisions, the internship serves as an important platform to align educational institutions and industry needs. **Airey and Tribe (2005)** argued what universities teach and what employers expect, there is a frequent difference between it. When internship programs are integrated into the curriculum carefully, they provide an Avenue for universities that optimize learning results for real -world industry practices. **Zopiatis and Theocharous (2013)** further observed that structured cooperation between educational institutions and hotels enhances the relevance of training, skill reduces mismatches, and graduation strengthens readiness. This institutional-industry coordination not only improves employment, but also contributes to long-term workforce stability in hospitality.

The structure and supervision of internship programs also play an important role in determining their success. **YIU and Law (2012)** emphasized that well-structured internships- clear learning objectives, regular reactions and rotation in departments- described by rotational risk- enhance skill acquisition and enhance job satisfaction. Conversely, loosely designed programs resulted in high intentions for disappointment, limited learning and leaving industry. Studies of **and Kim & Park (2013)** also support this approach, given that patrons are central to create guidance and creative supervision professional identity and reduce the attraction among young graduates.

Changes in global perspective reveal how internship affects employment. For example, **Lam and Ching (2007)** found that internships in Asian hospitality schools are often more operational focused, which equip students with technical skills but sometimes limit their strategic management risk. In contrast, European models emphasize both technical and managerial competencies, preparing students for leadership roles. Such cross-cultural findings highlight the need for a balanced approach that ensures both practical and managerial readiness. **Farmaki (2018)** has given that international internships provide students with mutual capacity and global networking opportunities, which are rapidly important in today's tourism-managed economies.

In addition, the psychological results of the internship are considered rapidly important. According to **Jiang and AlexCice (2017)**, the experiences of positive internships not only create technical abilities, but also self-efficiency, career confidence, and affectionate commitment- factories are strongly combined with low turnover intentions. On the other hand, negative experiences may cause disillusionment, stress and career return, especially when students experience violations in a psychological contract between their expectations and organizational practices. It aligns with the social exchange theory, which suggests that supporting and rewarding internships encourage students to interacted through loyalty and long -term engagement in the industry.



Finally, the internship also contributes to employer branding and organizational reputation. The study by the back, *Dawson, and Abbott (2011)* suggests that students who complete the structured and auxiliary internships are more likely to see the host organization positively and consider returning as full-time employees. This not only strengthens the talent pipeline, but also reduces the recruitment costs for hotels. With hospitality facing the lack of labour worldwide, the internship programs serve as a learning mechanism for students and a strategic human resource equipment for employers.

Research Gap

Most existing research focuses on aspects such as internship satisfaction, skill acquisition, and immediate employability, rather than the long-term impact on employee retention within the hospitality sector. Empirical evidence directly linking the structure of internships to career stability remains scarce.

Objective

1. To identify the factors that contribute in career choice of hospitality interns.
2. To identify the role of institutional support and industry practices in shaping interns' long-term retention.

Research Methodology

This study compiled both primary and secondary methods of data collection.

Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data was synthesized from peer-reviewed journals, books, and prior empirical studies on internships, work experience, motivation, and training in the hotel sector. The literature review was carefully filtered to specifically emphasize internship programs within the hospitality industry. A total of 32 research papers were reviewed to establish the theoretical foundation and support the objectives of this study. The focus of the review was not only on immediate employability outcomes but also on developing a conceptual ground for current research regarding internship effectiveness in the hotel management sector.

Primary Data Collection

The primary fieldwork was undertaken in hotel management institutions located in Gwalior, Bhopal, and Indore, selected on the basis of random and convenient sampling method. Data was collected through group discussions and interviews. Group discussions were conducted in cities Bhopal, Gwalior and Indore with interns from hotel management institutions. Interview conducted for faculties and employees for hotel industry. In total, 168 respondents participated in the study, comprising 47 from Gwalior, 63 from Bhopal, and 73 from Indore. A nonstructured questionnaire was used.

The data collection process presented significant challenges. Many hotel management institutions and hotels were initially reluctant to share information, citing concerns about protecting their institutional or organizational image. And many faculty members do not join this



interview for unknown reason after persistent requests; they eventually permitted limited group discussions and interview which enabled the researcher to obtain valuable insights.

Some questions thrown for students in-group discussions are

- Did you receive internship/training that you found helpful to related with career choice?
- Did you receive internship/training that you found unnecessary or not helpful related with career choice?
- Did your internship provide you a clear understanding of the daily tasks and responsibilities in your field of interest?
- Did your Educational institution/organisation assist in any initial challenges/problems you faced during the internship?
- Do you want to continue in the hotel industry after your internship?
- How well did the support from your mentors align with the goals you had for your internship?

Some questions thrown for faculties are:

- Did educational institution help to overcome challenges/problems faced by the interns during the internship?
- In your opinion, are the current internship programs aligned with industry expectations and standards?
- Do you think the internship duration is sufficient for students to gain practical exposure?
- Are there mechanisms in place for collecting and acting upon feedback from interns and industry supervisors?

Some questions thrown for hotel HR managers are:

- Did interns have sufficient theoretical knowledge about hotel industry?
- Did your hotel conduct discussion panel to solve intern problems during the internship?
- Did your hotel conduct feedback session for interns after completed their internship?
- Did you make any changes in your system after the feedback of interns?

Discussion

Analysis of the collected data suggests that, among several contextual variables—including language, distance from hometown, gender, safety and security, and financial considerations—the most influential determinants shaping the career intentions of interns are the quality of their training experiences and their motivation.

1. Training Experience

Internships are structured, short-term work experiences that serve as a bridge between academic study and professional practice. They provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings while developing essential practical skills. Beyond technical



training, internships also foster soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving, which are crucial for employability. For many students, internships represent the first significant step toward full-time employment, offering not only hands-on exposure but also professional networking opportunities that can influence long-term career growth.

In the hospitality context, internships are particularly valuable in strengthening collaboration among students, faculty members, and industry professionals. To maximize benefits, industry partners are encouraged to design programmes that promote active engagement with supervisors and colleagues, while academic institutions must ensure continuous improvement and alignment with evolving industry needs (*Kim & Park, 2013*). When students perceive their internships as meaningful and development-oriented, they are more likely to choose career paths that align with their long-term aspirations.

High-quality internship experiences are often associated with several key elements: clarity in career direction, effective supervision, professionalism, belongingness, productivity, learning, and skill development. Such experiences create a sense of inclusion within professional networks, which in turn reinforces students' career commitment (*Wiseman & Page, 2001*). Moreover, scholars argue for the redesign of hospitality curricula to reflect the shared expectations of students, educators, and industry professionals. A curriculum that integrates academic theory with practical skills not only meets stakeholder needs but also prepares graduates to succeed in an increasingly competitive industry (*Lashley, 2011*).

2. Motivation

Motivation is another critical factor shaping interns' career intentions. It refers to the internal drive that pushes individuals to set goals and take purposeful action. In professional development, motivation sustains persistence, focus, and a positive attitude even when challenges arise. For hospitality interns, motivation is the key force that inspires them to maximize learning opportunities, strengthen skills, and convert internship experiences into long-term career growth.

Defined broadly as the willingness to engage in specific activities, motivation serves as the driving energy behind individual effort and behaviour (*Farajzade, Jodat&Saadatjo, 2013*). Of particular importance is intrinsic motivation, which stems from the satisfaction of psychological needs such as competence and autonomy. When these needs are met, individuals report higher enjoyment and engagement, often expressed through sentiments such as "I find this interesting" or "I enjoy doing this" (*Riu, 2014*).

Motivation also plays a decisive role in shaping academic and career outcomes. It explains why students with similar cognitive abilities may achieve different results: those with stronger motivation are more engaged, more creative, and less anxious, leading to better performance overall (*Hasanzade, 2006; Asadzadeh, Mostafazadeh&Sadeqi, 2012*). Furthermore, students' perception of the relevance and value of learning outcomes directly influences their motivational levels and the effort they invest in their goals (*Pintrich & Schrauben, 2012*).



In summary, motivation is central to learning, career development, and personal growth. It not only explains why individuals pursue certain paths but also determines the persistence and effort invested in achieving success. Both internal and external influences contribute to motivational levels, which are strongly tied to students' ability to realize personal aspirations and build sustainable careers in the hospitality industry (*Delir, Shoja'iyen & Khodabandelou, 2009*). The effectiveness of an internship programme is significantly influenced by three interrelated factors: training experience, motivation, and a well-structured training experience provides interns with relevant, hands-on tasks and meaningful supervision, which helps in the development of practical skills and professional competence. This kind of experiential learning ensures that students are not only observing but actively contributing, making the internship more impactful. Motivation also plays a crucial role—interns who are self-driven, career-oriented, and eager to learn tend to engage more fully, making the most of their opportunities regardless of challenges. High levels of motivation often translate into better performance and learning outcomes. Institutional support from the academic side, such as career guidance, pre-placement training, and consistent faculty mentorship, further strengthens the internship programme. When institutions build strong partnerships with industry and provide continuous support, students feel more prepared and confident, which enhances the overall internship experience. Together, these factors create a supportive environment that maximizes the benefits of internships for student learning and future career development.

Extrinsic motivation is an activator for action that is coming by external rewards. These can be intangible, such as power, fame and praise, unlike intrinsic motivation, which arises from within the individual, or tangible, such as promotion, bonuses, prize, perks, grades or money. Extrinsic motivation focuses purely on outside rewards. Intrinsic motivation is defined as an engaging activity for its own sake, especially the pleasure and self-satisfaction derived from doing, such as knowledge, curiosity, passion or personal fulfilment.

A process model of the motivation and internship/training experience in hotel industry

Table 85

Internship/ Training experience	Motivation to take the career in hotel management	
	High Motivation	Low Motivation
Good experience	<i>Contentment & Comfort</i>	<i>Switching & Opportunism</i>
Bad experience	<i>Enterprising</i>	<i>Immoderate</i>



The success of interns or early-career employees in the hotel industry is influenced by two main factors: the quality of their internship or training experience and their personal level of motivation. Training experiences may be good experience, involving structured learning, supportive mentors, skill development, and motivating tasks, or negative, characterized by poor supervision, monotonous assignments, lack of guidance, and sometimes exploitation. Likewise, interns may demonstrate either high motivation, reflected in ambition, resilience, and career orientation, or low motivation, marked by indifference, discouragement, and limited drive. The way these two dimensions interact results in four possible outcomes.

When training is positive and interns are highly motivated, the result is **contentment and comfort**. In this situation, interns find their career choice rewarding because their enthusiasm matches the opportunities provided. They usually develop loyalty to the organization, remain in their jobs longer, and actively pursue growth within the same hotel, achieving both job satisfaction and emotional balance. By contrast, if training is good but motivation is low, interns often show **switching or opportunistic** tendencies. While they may enjoy the learning experience, they do not commit to long-term goals. Instead, they frequently move between departments, such as from front office to food and beverage or housekeeping, or remain in a role only until a better opportunity with higher pay or benefits arises.

On the other hand, poor training combined with strong motivation tends to encourage **enterprising** behaviour. Highly driven interns are unwilling to accept unfair treatment or lack of learning opportunities. Rather than staying discouraged, they turn their dissatisfaction into innovation by starting entrepreneurial ventures—such as catering, restaurants, or event planning—or by moving to more progressive organizations. Finally, when both training quality and motivation are low, interns often exhibit **immoderate** or negative behaviours. They may feel frustrated and disengaged, leading to irregular work habits, absenteeism, low-quality service, or even withdrawal from the industry altogether. These individuals often take jobs for survival rather than career growth, contributing to high turnover, dissatisfaction, and burnout within the hospitality sector

Recommendations for hotel industry

1. **Mentorship and Supervision** – Hotels should assign trained supervisors or mentors who can guide interns effectively and provide constructive feedback.
2. **Skill Utilization** – Interns should be given opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in real tasks rather than being restricted to monotonous work.
3. **Recognition and Encouragement** – Acknowledging interns' contributions and offering small incentives or appreciation can enhance their motivation.
4. **Career Pathway Clarity** – Providing interns with a clear vision of potential career growth within the organization can reduce opportunistic behaviour and improve retention.
5. **Healthy Work Environment** – Ensuring fair treatment, manageable workloads, and supportive culture prevents disengagement and negative behaviours.



Recommendations for Educational Institutions

1. Invite industry professionals for guest lectures, workshops, and mentoring sessions to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
2. Maintain regular contact with hotel mentors and internship coordinators to monitor student progress and resolve issues promptly.
3. Introduce a feedback loop where students can share their internship experiences and suggestions for program improvement.
4. Create a strong alumni network to mentor current students and offer insights into career progression in the hospitality sector.
5. Organize annual industry–student networking events for exposure to employment trends and opportunities

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that internship and training experiences along with motivation are significant determinants influencing the career choices of hospitality interns. Furthermore, the study underscores the crucial role of institutional support and industry practices in shaping interns' long-term retention and commitment within the hospitality sector. Strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and the industry can thus enhance career preparedness, satisfaction, and sustained employment among future hospitality professionals.

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