



Tourism and hospitality undergraduates' internship experience, their satisfaction and impact on future career intention

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Abstract

Tourism and Hospitality Industry generates and offers a wide spectrum of career opportunities both nationally and internationally giving a sensible solution to the unemployment problem especially for the developing countries. Having identified the significance of tourism and hospitality industry as one of the labor intensive industries, many universities and educational institutes in Sri Lanka are focusing on developing competent human resources that cater industry requirements. Recognizing the importance of improving employability skills along with developing knowledge and inculcating positive attitudes of the tourism and hospitality undergraduates, the national universities have integrated student internship experience in to their tourism and hospitality curricula, creating a solid platform for a better career prospects of the undergraduates. Hence, this study attempts to examine the satisfaction level of the tourism undergraduates with the internship experience and its impact on their future career intention. A structured questionnaire was utilized to collect data from tourism and hospitality undergraduates of two state Universities in Sri Lanka, who have minimum two months' internship experience. The population of the study consists of 139 undergraduates, whom had undergone an internship program in two state Universities in their 3rd and 4th year, out of which only 79 has responded. Training program, nature of work, supervisors, facilities, and coworkers are the concerned areas in measuring the satisfaction level. The result reveals that the tourism undergraduates are satisfied with their internship experience. Further, the result indicates that all the tourism undergraduates intend to work in the industry after graduation. The finding also shows that the tourism undergraduates' satisfaction with respect to the nature of the job and the training program significantly impact on their intention to work in the tourism industry in the future.

Keywords: Future career intention, internship experience, satisfaction, tourism undergraduates.

1. Introduction

The accomplishment of tourism and hospitality industry is exceedingly rely on its skillful, enthusiastic and committed work-force (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Attracting and retaining such skillful, knowledgeable and competent employees has become a crucial challenge for the industry as a result of socio-economic and political uncertainty, constant changes in global economy and increasing the global mobility of employees (Baum, 2007; Kim, 2014; Teng, 2013). Thus the necessity of increasing the graduate employability has become an attentive requirement that leads the universities to arise its attention towards addressing this issue by embedding skill-development elements into curricula (Wilton, 2012). With this scenario, an internship program plays a vital role by giving a work-integrated learning experience for the students facilitating them for better career prospects (Silva et al., 2016).

An internship is “a short-term period of practical work experience wherein students receive training as well as gaining invaluable job experience in a specific field or potential career of their interest” (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013). According to Hergert (2009) an internship plays a vital role in assisting the students to connect their traditional coursework and the actual workplace. Yiu and Law (2012) reveal that the internships are expedient mechanism for students in developing diverse skills. Moreover, it relates to experiential learning by means of enriching students’ individual and professional growth (Simons et al., 2012). Numerous studies have revealed the advantages of undergraduates’ internship programs. According to Ko (2008) and Nelson (1994) the internship programs facilitate undergraduates to identify their future careers, as well as to settle on a career of their choice. Some undergraduates depend on their internship program in selecting their career path, whereas their experience in the internship program will solidify their intention towards the tourism and hospitality industry (Tse, 2010). In contrast, Fox (2001) specified that a destructive internship experience could lead to turn an undergraduate away from the industry. This argument has been affirmed by Busby (2003) stating that the bad internship experiences may negatively impact the undergraduates’ image and may discourage them in their decisions to retaining in the tourism and hospitality industry after graduation.

Having identified the significance of the internship programs, Sri Lankan universities that offer tourism and hospitality degree programs have incorporated a compulsory practical exposure for their undergraduates, facilitating in-class learning. However, it is paramount important to identify whether these internship programs assist the undergraduates in determining their career aspirations. Though there are ample number of researches done determining how student internship experience impacts on their self-improvement and the extent to which internship experience influences undergraduates’ future career professionalism, there is a dearth of literature in Sri Lankan context. Thus this study focuses on investigating the tourism and hospitality undergraduates’ satisfaction towards the internship experience and its impact on their future career intention.

2. Literature review

An internship can be defined as a kind of experiential learning where students take the opportunity to apply their learned theories from schools in the real world situation, and it provides an opportunity for students to integrate and consolidate thinking and action (Davies, 1990). According to Kusluvan, Kusluvan and Eren (2003) student work experience is also known as industrial placement, industrial experience, cooperative education, student's placements, supervised work experience internship or sandwich courses, which involve a certain period of work experience practical training in the industry. The duration of the placement can be ranged from few weeks to a one year (Barren, 1999).

For many students the first contact point with the industry is through the internship, where students receive first hand realistic experience of working life and the atmosphere. According to McMahon and Quinn (1999, p. 13) student work experience placement is one of the most vital experience on which graduate base their career choices.

Ko, Chun, and Murdy (2007) argue that internship programs enable students to examine their future careers, to understand it and to settle on a career of their choice. Some students are dependent on the internship program and their intention towards the hospitality industry may depend on their experience in the program (Tse, 2010). Lee and Chao (2013) argue that the negative experiences of students from the internship programs are significant determinants of students' decision to seek and accept a job position within the specific business sector.

Barron and Maxwell (1993) investigated the post placement impression of 482 students from seven Scottish higher educational institutions, which offer hospitality courses. The findings reveal that the students have negative image of the industry after the work experience. According to the student work experience, it is stated that the staff were poorly treated in the industry, efforts overweight non-financial rewards, and there were little or no training to the employees.

Callen (1997) conducted a study on experience, operation and value of student work placement by surveying 53 of international hotel management students of Manchester Metropolitan University, who had completed the internship in UK and Europe. The study reveals that majority of the students (85%) had not been provided with detailed training program and the students had no opportunity to exercise responsibility at work. Furthermore, students have indicated that the disillusionment with the working environment and conditions. The impact of student work experience has also examined and the results reveal that even though the students are not willing to quit the industry, they have become less enthusiastic about the industry after the internship.

Barren (1999) carried out a research on students industrial training placement period from the perspective of hospitality management students at the University of Queensland in Australia. The majority of the students were satisfied with their internship. Yet, the students were neither satisfied with the induction program nor the amount of training,

they have received. Students were satisfied with the co-workers, management and the positive atmosphere of the workplace.

Leslie (1999) studied the student opinion with regard internship experience. The data were collected from the students of nine universities in Great Britain, which offer tourism undergraduate programs. The finding indicates that the potential benefits of the internship have not been fully realized and some areas of the student work experience were neglected such as induction, training, opportunities for managerial/ supervisory experience.

According to the study carried out by Kozak (1999) at the vocational school of Anatolia University, Turkey, students liked the profession in the tourism and hospitality industry and satisfied with the promotion opportunities. However, students were discontent with the interpersonal relationship with the host organization, working hours, and the time spared by the supervisors for students and training.

Few empirical studies have been carried out to investigate the impact of tourism and hospitality students' satisfaction with internship programs and its impact on their future career intention. For example, Christou (1999) examined the hospitality management student's evaluation on industrial training placement. The results show that the unsatisfactory working conditions and lack of management training reduced the motivation of respondents to pursue career in the hospitality industry.

Kusluyan, Kusluyan, and Eren (2003) observed that the following internship qualities are related to satisfaction with the internship in tourism and hospitality industry: Training program, nature of work, supervisors, facilities, and coworkers. The study reveals that 69% of the students are not satisfied with students' work experience and majority of the students stated that the students thoughts and feelings relating to working in the tourism industry changed in a negative direction after the training.

Ko (2008) conducted a study to investigate the factors associated with hospitality students' satisfaction with internship programs and the relationships between training, job satisfaction, and confidence about future careers. The results revealed that satisfaction with the internship program plays a positive role as a predictor of participants' job satisfaction and confidence about future careers. Furthermore, the regression analysis showed that training satisfaction played a positive role as a predictor of participants' confidence about future careers.

The study conducted by Kipreos (2016) examined the level of students' satisfaction with the internship program provided by the Department of Sport Management, University of Peloponnese in Greece. The study revealed that 60% of respondents were satisfied with the internship program and more than 65% believe that the experiences gained from the internship will be significant for their future employment.

Building on the findings of the existing literature, scholars concluded that negative internship experiences lead to make the students decide to exit the tourism and hospitality industry and/or pursue another career path. (Chen and Shen, 2012; Ko, 2008; Lu and Adler, 2009; Richardson, 2008).

3. Methodology

Quantitative approach has been employed to this study. The population of this study consists of the tourism and hospitality undergraduates, who have completed the internship program. Therefore, tourism and hospitality undergraduates of two states universities in Sri Lanka have selected for this study, namely Rajarata University of Sri Lanka and Uwa Wellassa University. There were total of 139 undergraduates from both Rajarata University (40 undergraduates in the 3rd year and 49 undergraduates in the 4th Year) and Uwa Wellassa University (50 undergraduates in the 4th year) who had minimum two month's working experience.

In order to examine the satisfaction level of the tourism undergraduates with the internship experience and its impact on their future career intention, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire consists of three parts. In the first part, questions related to the demographic profile and general information associated with internship included. In the second part of the questionnaire, questions were included to measure the satisfaction level of the students with regard to the internship program including training program, nature of the job, supervisors, facilities, and coworkers. The dimensions and the items measuring the dimensions have been extracted from the literature (Barron and Maxwell, 1993; Callan, 1997; Christou, 1999; Leslie, 1999; Kusluvan, Kusluvan, and Eren, 2003). Each item was measured using five point Likert scale from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied. The third part of the questionnaire consists of the questions related to the future career intention of the students, which were developed based on the study conducted by Kusluvan, Kusluvan, and Eren (2003).

In order to confirm the internal consistency of the dimensions used for the study, Cronbach's alpha test has been conducted. Accordingly, the Cronbach's alpha values exceed the 0.70 level, showing that the Likert scale items are following uni-direction (Table 1). Consequently, all the corresponding variables could be operationalized and the reliability of the measurements was achieved as recommended by Nunnally (1978).

The questionnaire was sent to the Industrial Training Coordinators of the universities to be distributed in the classroom and out of 139 questionnaires distributed, 79 responses were returned for the analysis. Gathered data were analyzed by means of both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Table 1
Reliability analysis

Dimensions	Items	Cronbach's alpha
Training Program	Orientation /induction program in the organization	0.861
	On the job training and development	
	Knowledge given about how to do your job properly	
	Quality of the training provided	
	Opportunity to work in different departments	
Nature of the Job	Sufficient amount of hours worked daily	0.859
	Proper Working shifts	
	Opportunity to use your knowledge and skills	
	Availability of equipment for your job	
	Manageable workload per day	
Supervisors	the level of involvement in your job	0.850
	good communication between you & managers	
	fairness	
	passing on vocational knowledge and skills	
Facilities	Dining facilities	0.912
	Meals	
	Accommodation facilities	
	Bathroom / washroom facilities	
	Transportation services provided	
Co- workers	Level of cooperation with you	0.850
	Communication between you and coworkers	
	Friendliness	
	Sharing and passing vocational knowledge	
Future Career intention	After the training my thoughts and feelings changed in a positive direction with regard to working in the industry	0.872
	My desire to work in the industry is increased after the internship training	
	I will definitely work in the industry after the graduation	
	I am happy to have chosen the same industry as a career	

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Profile of respondents

The characteristics of the respondents are shown in the Table 2. The majority of the respondents are female (53.2%) and the percentage of male respondents is 46.8. Most of the undergraduates have undergone their internship in the fields of Travel and Tourism (45.6%), Food and Beverage (26.6%) and Accommodation industry (25.3%). Majority of the respondents have found their placements by themselves.

Table 2
Profile of respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	37	46.8
Female	42	53.2
Training organization		
Accommodation	20	25.3
F&B	21	26.6
Transportation industry	1	1.3
Travel and Tourism	36	45.6
Tourism administration	1	1.3
Finding Internship Placement		
Through relatives and friends	22	27.8
Self	41	51.9
Through Industrial coordinator	11	13.9
other	5	6.3

4.2 Student satisfaction with the internship experience

The level of tourism and hospitality undergraduates' satisfaction towards the internship experience is presented in the Table 3. The mean value of all the variables are ranging from 3.6 to 4.0 indicating that the students are satisfied with the internship experience and they are willing to pursue a career in the tourism industry after graduation. Highest standard deviation that is 0.85 belongs to future career intention. Thus relatively responses of future career intention are more deviated. Minimum standard deviation belongs to coworkers that is 0.64 which indicates a less variance. All the co-efficient of skewness are between -1 and +1 therefore, data are approximately normally distributed.

Table 3
Descriptive analysis

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Training program	4.0101	.66325	-.574
Nature of the job	3.8582	.71694	-.458
Supervisors	3.9209	.72782	-.602
Facilities	3.6405	.77220	-.025
Coworkers	4.0316	.64843	-.306
Future Career Intention	4.0475	.85492	-.699

The similar results have been reported from the study conducted by Kipreos (2016), that the majority of the respondents (60%) were satisfied with the internship program. The study conducted by Barren (1999) in Australia also found that the majority of the students are satisfied with their internship including co-workers, management and the positive atmosphere of the workplace. However, in the same study, it was found that the students are not satisfied with the training program. There are also studies, which show that the students are dissatisfied with the internship experience (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, and Eren, 2003) According to the studies, the students showed dissatisfaction with the training program (Christou, 1999; Leslie, 1999; Barren, 1999), working conditions or the nature of the job (Christou, 1999; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Kozak, 1999), and managers or supervisors (Leslie, 1999; Kozak, 1999). By analysing these study findings, it is clear that the students in defferant countires hold different level of satisfaction with regrad to their internship program. However, it can be determined that in Sri Lankan context students are satisfied with their internship experience.

4.3 Impact of internship experience of students on future career intention

The effect of the student satisfaction with internship experience on their future career intention was analyzed by applying multiple regression model. Result of the model summary, shown in Table 4 reveals that the co-efficient of determination is 0.605 indicating that 60.5% of the future career intention has been explained by the regression model. As the value is more than 60% model is nicely fitted with an adjusted R squared of 57.8%. Multiple correlation is 0.778 this means that internship experience of students is strongly correlated jointly with their future career intention. Hence, the model is appropriate. Durbin-Watson test statistic is between 1.5 and 2.5. Therefore, residuals are independent and model is valid. The Regression ANOVA result is provided by Table 5.

Table 4

Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.778 ^a	.605	.578	.55546	2.175

Table 5

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	34.487	5	6.897	22.355	.000 ^b
Residual	22.523	73	.309		
Total	57.009	78			

Table 6
Regression coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error				Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.189	.456		-.413	.681		
	Training_program	.409	.162	.317	2.516	.014	.341	2.936
	Nature_of_the_job	.542	.142	.454	3.804	.000	.380	2.634
	Supervisors	-.045	.177	-.039	-.255	.799	.238	4.208
	Facilities	-.017	.096	-.015	-.178	.859	.721	1.387
	Coworkers	.185	.155	.140	1.193	.237	.391	2.560

a. Dependent Variable: Future_Career_Intention

In Regression ANOVA, probability of F test statistics is 0.000, this is highly significance revealing that the model is jointly significant. Therefore, Training program, Nature of the job, Supervisors, Facilities, and Coworkers jointly influence on students future career intention.

Table 6 shows the individual effect of the students' satisfaction with internship experience on their future career intention. Accordingly, P value of the nature of the job is 0.000, which is highly significant with an individual beta value of 0.542. Thus the nature of the job significantly influences on the future career intention of the students positively. Probability and individual beta value of training program are 0.014 and 0.409 respectively. This indicates that the training programs also significantly influence on students' future career intention positively. The probabilities of the rest of the independent variables are more than 0.05. Thus, they are individually insignificant, stating that they do not influence individually yet they influence jointly on future career intention. According to Standardized Coefficients of beta, the highest value is represented by nature of the job which is the most influencing factor, second influencing factor is the training program.

As the Diagnostic tests for regression results, researcher tested several assumptions. These assumptions have been tested as diagnostic tests to decide the validity of regression results. In the model summary, D-W test is in the accepted level and residuals are independent. All the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) are less than 10 and it indicates that independent factors are not highly or perfectly correlated. Therefore, there is no multicollinearity problem in the regression model. Accordingly, regression model is highly valid.

This study confirm that nature of the job and training program are the most influencing factors predicting students' future career intention. The study conducted by Ko (2008) shows the similar findings indicating that training satisfaction plays a positive role as a predictor of participants' confidence about future careers. Another study conducted by Christou (1999) also confirm the findings of this study indicating that the unsatisfactory

working conditions and lack of management training reduced the motivation of respondents to pursue career in the hospitality industry. Accordingly, it is evidenced that nature of the job and training program are the most influencing factors predicting students' future career intention.

5. Conclusion

Understanding the tourism and hospitality students' intention to join to the industry is imperative to both educators and practitioners. Internships play a vital role in providing work experience to the students besides their academic coursework. A good internship does make an important contribution to developing key management competencies among students which ultimately fulfils their career aspirations. Thus the study focuses on identifying the tourism and hospitality undergraduates' satisfaction on their internship experience and also to investigate the impact of the internship experience on their future career intention. The result indicates that the students are satisfied with their internship experience and they are willing to pursue a career in the tourism and hospitality industry after graduation.

The findings of this study further disclose that the nature of the job is the most influential factor in determining the students' future career intention. The literature reviewed also suggests that the nature of the job and the structure of the internship position may have an influence on the types of management skills a student could develop and to determine their future career aspirations. Hence it is recommended to give a due emphasis on the nature of the job when students select an internship position. Further the results indicate that the training programs also significantly influence on students' future career intention. Thus the industry must focus on to ensure students are receiving positive experiences through a proper training program and gaining positive perceptions of the industry.

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