

**CHALLENGES CONFRONT BY TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY
UNDERGRADUATES DURING INDUSTRIAL TRAINING PROGRAMS: A STUDY
ON CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND INTENTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

The tourism and hospitality sector is a major contributor to Sri Lanka's economy, requiring graduates who can smoothly enter the industry from academia. Industrial training programs significantly influence undergraduate career aspirations by integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills. However, the challenges in these programs can hinder students' professional growth. While existing research explores the impact of industrial training on career development, few studies have focused on the Sri Lankan context, with most findings rooted in Western settings, which may not fully address local challenges. The present study aims to investigate the existing issues confronting undergraduates during their industrial training and how these challenges affect their career decisions. The study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the experiences of Sri Lankan undergraduates undergoing industrial training in the tourism and hospitality sector, gaining a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and challenges. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility to probe deeper into specific issues, while maintaining consistency across interviews. A purposive sampling method was used to select 15 undergraduates from three universities offering Tourism and Hospitality Management degree programs. These universities were chosen to ensure diversity in the experiences captured. Each interview lasted between 25 and 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews were transcribed for analysis, and thematic analysis was used to identify key themes related to students' challenges, expectations, and career aspirations. The phenomenological approach ensured that the findings remained grounded in the personal experiences of the participants, allowing for a rich and nuanced understanding of the role of industrial training in their career development. This revealed that inadequate workplace support, excessive working hours, insufficient mentorship, and a mismatch between what is taught in academia and what is expected at work become challenging for undergraduates. Furthermore, many students reported a disconnection between their classroom learning and the skills required in actual work settings, leading to diminished enthusiasm for pursuing careers in this sector. This paper suggests enhancing collaboration between industry and academia, refining curriculum and support systems, and improving training programs to better prepare students for the realities of the industry.

Keywords: Career aspirations, career intentions, industrial training programs, tourism and hospitality industry, undergraduates