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The Study on Challenges Faced by Undergraduate Students in the Hotel Industry Internships

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Background: The hospitality sector is a highly customer-focused industry. As part of the compulsory internship requirements, undergraduates in tourism and hospitality management programs often work as trainees in the hotel industry. Many undergraduates face considerable challenges during their hotel industry internships, which can negatively impact both their learning outcomes and career readiness. Understanding these challenges is crucial for improving internship experiences and strengthening the future workforce in the hotel sector.

Objective: The general objective of this study is to identify the challenges faced by undergraduate students in hotel industry internships. The specific objective is to explore effective strategies to address these challenges.

Methods: This research comprises 20 respondents from Rajarata University, Sabaragamuwa University, and the University of Kelaniya, utilising a qualitative approach to gather and analyse data. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with undergraduates. The secondary data was sourced from academic literature, reports and journal articles.

Results: The study's findings revealed that individual challenges, including communication difficulties, poor work-life balance, health issues, and a lack of confidence, significantly impacted students' internship experiences. Organisational challenges, including insufficient supervision, excessive working hours, an inflexible work environment and a mismatch between academic training and industry expectations, further complicate the internship process.

Conclusion: To address these issues, the study recommends strengthening pre-internship training programs, fostering closer collaboration between universities and the hotel industry, implementing mentoring systems, and creating more supportive and flexible work environments. Establishing organised feedback sessions during internships can help students engage in self-reflection and foster their career development. By adopting these strategies, universities and hotels can enhance the internship experience, better preparing students for their future roles in the dynamic hospitality industry. This study emphasises the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure that internships provide meaningful learning opportunities and contribute to the development of a skilled and resilient workforce.

Keywords: Challenges, Hotel Industry, Internships, Undergraduate students