

TVET Graduates as a Feeder for Hospitality Workforce Bubble: A disruption in culinary workforce supply chain

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Abstract

Internships play a significant role in students' development as they help to prepare the student for real-life work experience. This research is carried out using a quantitative method, and data are collected from culinary art students before and after their internship, and the differences are recorded. A total of 70 students are involved in this study, and to ensure the validity of the findings, the same group of students is required to answer the survey. Findings indicate significant differences in students' intentions after the internship due to problems related to bullying, sexual harassment, long working hours, and hijab discrimination.

Keywords: Internship; Students' Career; Hospitality Industry, Culinary Arts

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1.0 Introduction

The hotel industry is one of the main contributors to the Malaysian economy, as more than 25.95 million tourists visited Malaysia based on 2017 data alone (Mansor, 2018). This figure constitutes 80.96% of the country's population, as shown by the Ministry of Statistics (Mahidin, 2017). The industry also met 15.2% of Malaysia's GDP in 2018, surpassing the 14.1% recorded for the previous year (Liat, Mansori, Abu & Seng, 2020). Therefore, the hotel industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, which could attract many people to be part of this expanding industry (Sinhala & Srinivasan, 2020). According to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2018), the food and beverages industry recorded a staggering amount of RM 82.8 billion in gross profit output in 2017.

Despite the importance of this industry to the nation's economy, the hospitality industry is still facing a workforce problem and a never-ending struggle with employee retention (Albattat, Som & Helalat, 2014). The hospitality industry is painted with a negative image of high turnover employees and a waste of the reputation of well-trained personnel because it generates poorly paid jobs, unsociable working hours, and low job satisfaction (Anandhwanlert & Wattanasan, 2016). Such problems led to a skilled and specialized workforce shortage, creating a constant problem in the hospitality industry. Currently, the hospitality industry workforce consists of Generation X and Y and will soon slowly be replaced entirely by the younger generation or Generation Z (Mostafa, 2022). The first group of Generation Z has already entered the hospitality workforce, but some are still in school, including culinary and hospitality schools (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Differences in a generation are noticeable in various sectors, including human resources (Lorgulescu, 2016). Therefore, ongoing research to address workforce issues is imperative due to the changes in a generation. Understanding the future workforce needs will help highlight the loopholes in the workforce supply chain.

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To fulfil the demand-supply gap in Malaysia's various industries, the government has introduced the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector as the primary provider in preparing highly skilled human resources. Hence, TVET is a crucial component and driver of high-income nations (Rasul et al., 2015). One of the TVET sections in education is hospitality education, which consists of culinary and gastronomy education, food service, hotel, and tourism management. Despite the popularity of hospitality courses, however, graduates are found to be reluctant to enter the industry after graduation (Richardson, 2008). Many factors led to this problem; one of them is due to the existing problem in the industry that consistently persists, including long working hours, low pay, toxic working culture, and employee incivility (Rasool et al., 2021). There is a strong indication that the industry refused to change and expects a new generation of workforce to accept the situation. Unfortunately, there is a sign that the younger generation has started to shy away from this industry, which can lead to a severe workforce shortage and impede industrial growth (Richardson, 2008; Goh & Okumus, 2020).

Generation Z often possessed false expectations of the industry, where they expected a bright future and could probably imagine a leisurely working environment (Sinhala & Srinivasan, 2020). Furthermore, exposure to food-related programs on television has created a new interest in culinary program education and the chef profession in general (Caraher et al., 2000). In reality, high-paying "celebrity chef" does exist but only represent a small fraction of the chef in the industry; hence, when entering the industry, they are faced with low pay, and graduates are increasingly voicing their dissatisfaction with their often-expensive culinary educations (Severson, 2007).

Therefore, this study aims to identify culinary arts students' perceptions of working in the hospitality industry before and after the internship. The data for this study was collected before students went to their internship, and another round of data collection was carried out after the students returned from their internship. The reason why data was collected at two different points in time is to see whether the experience from the internship will encourage more students to join the industry, hence indicating that workforce supply will continue to flow as these students will continue to become highly skilled chefs that will contribute toward the growth of this industry. However, unrealistic culinary students' expectations of the industry can become a real challenge to these students, and despite these students are trained to be a chef and have gone through their training in culinary school for two years, the training sometimes does not reflect the reality and challenges that they need to face in the actual world. The inability to cope with the challenges could lead to a disruption in the culinary workforce supply chain, as students are not interested in joining the hospitality industry workforce, which results in a lose-lose situation as the industry will lose a highly skilled future workforce.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Intention to work in the hospitality industry

Studies on career intentions following internship program outcomes have resulted in positive and negative impacts. As indicated by the theory of Gong (2017), students' intention toward the hospitality industry can be formed and affected if they have had it before starting their career and facing challenges while working in the industry. Progress through an individual's life is best to explain the definition of their career and how it develops an interest in further exploring the hospitality industry (Gong, 2017). Consequently, some students will love to stay in the hotel industry, but some will no longer be keen to stay in the industry. Fundamentally, when students enter any related course, they will have their initial intention or expectation related to the knowledge or the idea of what the course will be and what the skills imply in terms of technical and social skills (Sinhala & Srinivasan, 2020).

2.2 Level of Interest and Commitment

Students' level of interest comes from their experience, and it would be determined whether students are keen to work in the hospitality industry after entering an internship (Rosyidi, 2021). Thus, to fit the demand for more leisure and commitment toward a career, there is the possibility of redefining the work practices and lifestyle in the hospitality industry (Zahari, 2004). Previous research pointed out that most students have career expectations before going for an internship (Rosyidi, 2021; Kim, 2008). An internship aims to expose students to management competencies and become one of the platforms for the student to enhance practical skills with experience, as it means exposing students to fundamental industry practices (Walo, 2000). Unfortunately, despite the advantages offered by internships, students are found to be less committed towards a career in the hospitality field after internships (Zahari, 2004).

2.3 Internship Experiences and Participants' Career Decision-Making

An internship can be defined as a practical activity that will improve performance by gaining new knowledge and developing skills through instructions from the internship place (Lestari & Mahbubah, 2019). In addition, the term internship experience can be defined as the student's previous event during the internship and experience related to work placement (Muller et al., 2019). Most students may have career decisions for their future before and after the internship. Some students may face difficulties developing their interpersonal or managerial skills during the internship, and this experience from the internship will be a significant factor for students to decide to remain in the hospitality industry or vice versa (Kim, 2008; Eren & Aydin, 2020). Thus, it indicates that the internship experience is essential to guide the career's decision-making as it prepares students for a career future.

2.4 Employability Opportunity for TVET Students

Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) is an initiative of governments to produce a certificate workforce in that respective area of hospitality. In other words, in TVET, students could learn from basic to advanced levels across various institutional and work settings, including social life (Rahman, 2010). The transformation of TVET is a determination to rebuild the existing vocational education

system and contribute to the high-income county. It aims to cultivate a general human capital capable of facing any challenge, whether national or global and of providing a well-trained workforce to meet the country's needs in the labour market. Self-actualisation is one of TVET education objectives as it helps to realise and fulfil one's talents and potential; TVET education helps to achieve that through developing technical and cognitive elements embedded in TVET (Rasul et al., 2015). Culinary arts are one of the branches of TVET education as they equip students with real-world problem-solving skills besides the fundamental knowledge and cooking skills to meet industrial demand (Techanamurty et al., 2015). TVET graduates often have more advantages in terms of employability opportunities than other graduates due to the skills and knowledge they possess through training, as each TVET curriculum is designed specifically based on the needs of the industry.

3.0 Methodology

This research uses a quantitative methodology as the aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the research area using a large-scale survey (Kumar et al., 2013). Data will be collected using the survey, and the instrument for this study was adapted from Zahari's (2004) works, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Instrument Source

Variables	Source
<u>Industrial Perception</u>	Zahari (2004)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I strongly believe men have more opportunities to get ahead than women in the hospitality industry. • I believe all ethnic groups are treated equally in the Malaysian hospitality industry. • The hospitality industry is an exciting and challenging environment to work in. • Jobs in the hospitality industry involve harder work than I previously realized. • Customers respect hospitality staff and appreciate the effort that they make. • Customers respect hospitality staff and appreciate the effort that they make. • I think hospitality provides greater promotional opportunities than other industries. • I believe the hospitality industry provides more employment opportunities than other industries. 	
<u>Intention to Work in Hospitality Industry</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am committed to a career in hospitality. • I expect to work in the hospitality industry most of my working life. • I will stay in this industry if it provides me with the best career option. • I will accept almost any job to stay in the hospitality industry. • I will readily take a job in another industry if it offers slightly more money. • I am still as keen to work in the industry as when I first chose this training program. • I am very satisfied with my choice of career in hospitality. • At the time I decided to train for hospitality there were other occupations I could have easily chosen. 	

The original work from Zahari (2004) was based on a cross-sectional approach; however, current research is taking a different approach in order to fully understand the effect of internship on culinary arts students' motivation to work in the hospitality industry. Therefore, this study uses the longitudinal approach, where data are collected at two points in time. This study uses a single-group pre and post-test research design, which allows for the data to be collected twice, before and after the internship (Marsden & Torgerson, 2012). Hence, the changes of intention before and after the internship will provide a clear indication of students' future motivation and the attractiveness of the hospitality industry careers for future culinary arts students.

Simple random sampling has been used to obtain the data as the target population only includes the final semester students of the Diploma in Culinary Arts who are about to go out for their internship; hence, the data collection process will be carried out twice before and after the internship. This group of students also belongs to the Generation Z population. The same group of students was to be thoroughly studied, and the process would take at least two semesters over one academic year, and one semester consists of at least five to six months of the internship. For this study, a total of 70 respondents were selected using simple random sampling.

In single-group pre and post-test research design, testing the same group of students is crucial to ensure the findings' validity, as the comparison of perception before and after internships needs to be carried towards the same groups (Stratton, 2019). To ensure the internal reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the Instrument (Brown, 2002). The same set of instruments in Table 1 is also used for both pre and post-tests to ensure the validity of the findings. Instruments are distributed using online survey Google Forms as it is much more convenient for researchers to obtain the data from respondents due to the issues of accessibility as all respondents are scattered in different states doing their internship.

Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 software. Paired sample T-Test is used in this research as it allowed for analysis and comparison of data pre-and post-test. Descriptive statistics were also carried out to analyze demographic data and the underlying factors in the open-ended section.

4.0 Result and Analysis

4.1 Paired Sample T-Test

Table 2 shows a study on the number of students' perceptions and intentions before and after internship. Through the paired-sample t-test, researchers want to determine whether there is a significant difference between the two means. This test yields a value of 4.047 for culinary students' perception before and after the internship, which was significant at the 0.05 level ($p=0.000$), implying that from the point of view of statistics, the student's perception towards working in the hospitality industry before and after the internship was significantly different. Next, this test yields a value of 7.048 for the intention to work in the hospitality industry before and after internship which was significant at the 0.05 level ($p=0.000$).

Table 2. Paired Sample T-Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Perception_before - Perception_After	.33571	.69403	.08295	.17023	.50120	4.047	70	.000
Pair 2	Intention_before - Intention_after	.98393	1.16794	.13960	.70544	1.26242	7.048	70	.000

This result shows that the student's perceptions and intentions changed after they experienced an internship in the hospitality industry. Students are much more eager to work in the industry before an internship, which indicates that there are challenges faced by students as the initial perception is no longer congruent with the post-internship.

4.2 Underlying causes

Table 3 shows the underlying causes that led to the student's decision not to pursue a career in the hospitality industry. The highest percentage of the factors that students agree there was some problem faced during their internship are long working hours (81.4%) followed by non-supportive working environment (65.7%), bullying (57.1%), sexual harassment (45.7%) and discrimination of hijab (31.4%).

Table 3. Underlying Causes

		Gender (N=70)		Percentage
		Female	Male	
Bullying	No	22	8	42.9
	Yes	27	13	57.1
Total		49	21	
Sexual Harassment	No	25	13	54.3
	Yes	24	13	45.7
Total		49	21	
Hijab Discrimination	No	33	15	68.6
	Yes	16	6	31.4
Total		49	21	
Long Working Hours	No	11	2	18.6
	Yes	38	19	81.4
Total		49	21	
Non-supportive Working Environment	No	18	6	34.3
	Yes	31	15	65.7
Total		49	21	

Both male and female respondents agreed that the main factor that led to decreases in their intention to pursue a career in the hospitality industry was the long working hours. Followed by a non-supportive working environment, bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination against hijab. Male students reported fewer negative experiences compared to female students as some of the complaints, such as hijab discrimination and sexual harassment, are much more prevalent among female trainees compared to male counterparts.

5.0 Discussion and Implication

Findings from this study indicate a significant difference in intention and perception toward a chef's career before and after the internships. This study closely resembles previous research in Melbourne and Hong Kong. However, the underlying causes for this problem should have been adequately discussed in previous research. Using single group pre and post-test research design has allowed the researcher to investigate the changes in the perception among culinary students, and the significant changes before and after the internship reveal the severity of this problem. The hospitality industry is notoriously known for its turnover problem, and based on the findings of this research, such problems are still persistent. The implication of this problem will continuously plague this industry if the industry continues with this current practice. It is shameful that the industry will continuously lose trained and high-value human capital that will help with its future development.

Bullying and sexual harassment are common problems in this industry and continuously become cancer that spreads within the industry (Sinha & Srinivasan, 2020). Apart from that, discrimination towards hijab should not be happening, especially for the back-of-the-house trainee who does not have direct contact with guests. Specific regulation still strongly upheld by the industry is no longer relevant, especially when dealing with discrimination in an era that upholds the value of freedom of differences. This problem is commonly seen in five-star international hotels as the employer must follow the headquarters that set the rules and regulations. Thus, the regulators must set policies to adhere to their religious and work requirements (Chong, 2017). Hijab discrimination by right should not happen in a country that claims to be an Islamic country, such as Malaysia; such action is not acceptable in other secular countries and is viewed as a breach of human rights.

Moreover, the public sector and business owners must critically examine long working hours, low salaries, and poor working conditions (Amo, 2019). A worker's rest day should be respected, and employers should provide a break of at least 30 minutes every five hours over eight hours of working. All employers, including international companies, must uphold these labour laws and working conditions. Human rights in the workplace, such as bullying, discrimination, and gender inequality, should be enforced by the law. If allowed to continue, the long working hours could result in terrible employee health and disrupt family relationships (Salem et al. (2014). Any organization that fails to follow the guidelines must be reported to the relevant authorities for further action.

To solve and improve this issue, attracting students with a proper working environment would build their interest in working in the industry. An example of a proper working environment would be offering them positive vibes during their internship. A study previously stated that the industry should offer positive factors during internships as it will lead to students' perceptions of their choice of career (Richardson, 2009). Mentorship is another commonly used strategy for career development supported by alumni that gives potential benefits to students in the hospitality industry. The previous study shows that schools and industry should collaborate closely to attract graduate students to start their careers in the hospitality industry (Lam & Ching, 2007). Both alumni and students should focus on sharing and nurturing to promote professional and knowledge information. Utilizing alumni is a wide-scale, low-cost approach with a substantial rate of return. Engaging alumni to give talks, tours, share experiences, record interviews, and network linkage will cost the university little but nothing apart from the alumni's time and positive working attractions (Santellano, 2019).

It had become the industry's culture when they treated the trainee or students as free labour instead of a new generation of a professional chef (Sinha & Srinivasan, 2020). Trainees can contribute to the business's success when trained to perform their jobs according to industry standards; however, the industry often expects new trainees to learn on the job from supervisors and older employees. Thus, to save time, management often delegates tasks to older employees. However, the older employees still need to finish their jobs, leaving the new trainee to do everything themselves. Hence, the production rate is low when trainees need more knowledge and skills to perform their jobs confidently, leading to low morale among trainees and employee turnover (Amo, 2019).

6.0 Conclusion

The discrepancy between intention before and after training is significant despite the culinary school's continuous efforts in preparing students to face the industry. From the culinary education standpoint, continuous improvement is often made periodically to ensure that the graduate produce meets current industry standards and expectations. To create holistic graduates, students today are exposed to hard and soft skills, which are supposed to prepare them to face future challenges. The hospitality industry has a long-standing reputation for being too harsh towards interns; however, common complaint such as long working hours indicates bullying or students are not prepared to face the harsh reality of working in the industry. Before stepping into the industry, students are still stuck with the same mindset of being a student; hence, an internship is viewed as an opportunity to learn, but the industry sometimes cannot cater to this need due to various constraints and challenges. This stuck mindset can be seen from the complaint about a non-supportive working environment. It indicates either the unfriendly culture towards interns or the interns themselves needing to develop a working relationship and rapport, especially when dealing with senior staff. Hence, a lack of communication will create a strong barrier for students to learn and continuously feel alienated by the staff members. Apart from that, a lack of tolerance towards others' cultures and core beliefs should be considered discrimination and should not be allowed to happen in any industry or organization. Regardless of the problems caused by interns or the organization, all the negativities can become the push factors for the potential interns to come back to the organization and make matters worse if the negative experience pushes these interns away from servicing the hospitality industry. If this is the case, the industry will lose talented individuals who are potentially served and contribute towards the development of the industry. This research has its limitations as the finding is based on the single-group pre and post-test; thus, the findings might not reflect the overall culinary students in other institutions, especially on the underlying causes. Future research should look into how the current curriculum really prepares and equips Generation Z to face the challenges in the industry and what changes need to be made in order for future TVET students.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper's contribution lies in the underlying causes that lead to the disruption in the culinary workforce supply chain, highlighting the core problem that needs to be overcome by the industry immediately. Even though the problem has been highlighted by previous research, this research needs to highlight the underlying causes that lead to the issues in the Malaysian setting, as some are unique to Malaysia. These problems have persisted long enough, and the time has come for the industry to revise its guidelines related to the internship program to ensure that the hospitality career is seen as attractive among culinary school graduates.

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