

Influences of Prolonged Internships on University Students' Attitudinal Shifts within the Hospitality and Tourism Sectors - Insights and Implications from Survey Data -

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Abstract

This research presents an analytical exploration of the effects of extended internships on the vocational interests and self-assurance of university students within the hospitality sector. Employing a questionnaire-based survey methodology, this study captures the perspectives of students engaged in year-long internships at lodging establishments. The findings reveal a significant increase in interest towards the accommodation and tourism industries post-internship, with 88.9% of participants reporting enhanced enthusiasm. Remarkably, all respondents indicated an elevated sense of confidence in their professional capabilities. The study further examines the interns' post-graduation career intentions and their self-reported proficiency in English within a workplace context, with the outcomes underscoring the valuable role that long-duration internships play in the preparatory stages of hospitality industry careers.

Keywords: Accommodation industry, positive impact of long-term internships, changes in participants' confidence

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Purpose and Background

This study situates itself within the context of the global tourism industry's recovery trajectory post-pandemic, as forecasted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) [1]. It is anticipated that international tourist numbers will rebound to 88% of their pre-pandemic levels by 2023, with a complete resurgence expected by the subsequent year. Corroborating this optimism, the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) recorded a notable increase in foreign visitation in December 2023, surpassing figures from the same month in 2019 [2], signifying a robust recovery of both domestic and international tourism sectors.

Conversely, the resurgence faces a constraining factor: a labor deficit, acutely present within the accommodation and food service industries, attributed to the sectors' high employee turnover rates. Figure 1 presents data sourced from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, illustrating that the average turnover rate for new university graduates within the first three years of employment was at 51% during the period from March 2003 to March 2019 [3], significantly surpassing the aggregate industrial average of 30.6%. The turnover phenomenon prompts scrutiny into the industry's employment dynamics, with career progression within individual hotels often prompting transitions to alternate establishments, as noted by Tamura (2019) [4]. However, Fujiwara

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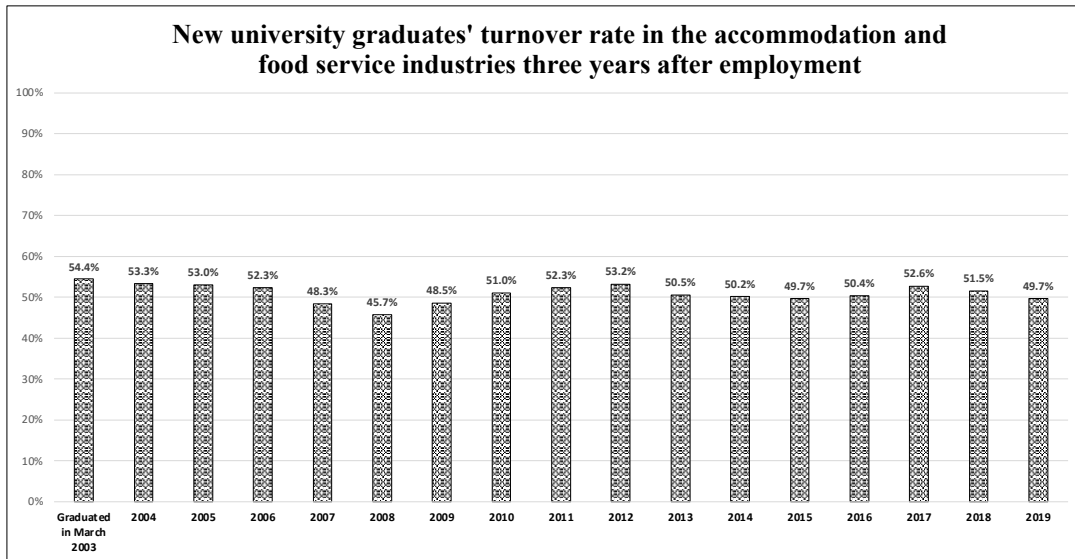


Figure 1: “New university graduates employed within 3 years after employment by industry classification,” cited from Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Japan)

(2023) notes a downturn in re-entry into the lodging and food service sector, postulating an employment landscape that is not unequivocally favorable [5]. Against this backdrop, this research delves into the efficacy of long-term internships as a potential remedy for the incongruity between new graduates’ expectations and occupational realities. By surveying university students who have undergone a one-year internship within the hospitality sector, we aim to elucidate shifts in their industry interest and professional self-efficacy, thereby assessing the practical impact of extended internship experiences.

1.2 Research Question

The research question in this study is to investigate the extent to which long-term internships influence university students’ interest in, and confidence toward, the hospitality and tourism industry.

2 Literature Review

In June 2022, the collaborative efforts of Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare; and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry led to a strategic revision of the “Basic Policy on Promoting Internships” [6]. The updated policy, termed the “three-ministerial agreement,” articulates a comprehensive framework for the conduct of internships, fostering partnerships between academic institutions and the corporate sector to support student career development. It emphasizes the provision of practical work experiences that align with students’ academic pursuits and professional aspirations, tailored to their educational stage. The internships examined in this study align with these newly stipulated directives. Despite the stipulation of a minimum duration for internships—five days for short-term and two weeks for long-term engagements—the lodging industry necessitates

a more extended period to garner substantial knowledge and skills, thus justifying the need for longer internships beyond these minimum requirements.

A nationwide survey conducted in 2019 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology [7] revealed that a significant portion of university programs (72.7%) offer short-duration internships, typically less than two weeks, and a majority (89.5%) last less than a month. The Employment White Paper (2024) further highlights that most internships for university and graduate students culminating in March 2024 lasted only half a day to a day [8]. These durations are not indicative of the accommodation industry specifically, but suggest a predominance of brief internships across Japanese universities. This is at odds with the varied durations witnessed in Japan's lodging sector, where the length of internships fluctuates based on the host entity and the university involved.

Previous literature has critiqued the brevity of these standard internships. Negi et al. (2013) argued that the typical two to four-week training period is insufficient to facilitate meaningful career development rooted in academic learning [9]. Hirao and Tanaka (2017) added that such short stints often fail to provide substantive professional responsibilities, resulting in experiences that barely progress beyond observational learning [10]. Moreover, Ishitani's (2023) investigation among university students partaking in a one-month summer internship uncovered a decline in industry interest post-internship, with 30.8% of participants reporting diminished enthusiasm for the lodging sector [11].

In contrast to Japan, Western counterparts such as the Lausanne Hotel School in Switzerland mandate considerably longer internships of six months, integrated with extensive coursework, reflecting the depth and range of skills necessary within the accommodation sector [12]. In addition, the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University in the United States also requires students to complete 800 hours of mandatory coursework by the time of graduation [13]. Scholars like Negi and Orito (2015) underscore the gap between Japan's brief internships and the comprehensive programs in Europe and America, advocating for a transition towards obligatory, extended internships [14]. Building upon this foundation, Ishitani (2024) explored the relationship between internship duration and self-efficacy, finding that a two-month internship fostered a significant rise in student confidence [15]. This study extends the inquiry to evaluate the psychological impact of year-long internships on participants' perspectives before and after their engagement in the lodging industry.

3 Research Method

3.1 Data Collection

This study engaged in a longitudinal analysis of the professional development of nine first-year university students—comprising four males and five females—from the Department of Tourism at a quadrennial university in Chiba Prefecture, Japan. The participants were enrolled from April 2023 to March 2024 and partook in compensated internship programs at two distinctive hotel brands in proximity to Narita International Airport—one indigenous and the other international. The interns worked in rotational shifts, amounting to approximately 70 hours monthly, which allowed for an extensive exposure to various operational domains. Specifically, the experiential learning process entailed a six-monthly rotation between the accommodation and the food and beverage departments, aiming to furnish the interns with a comprehensive skill set pertinent to the hospitality industry.

To ascertain the evolution in the interns' vocational interests and confidence levels, the study

utilized both pre-internship and post-internship surveys. These surveys were designed to gauge the interns' enthusiasm for and assurance in the hospitality and tourism sectors before and after the completion of their internship experience.

Table 1: Interest Levels in the Accommodation and Tourism Industry

Q: Please select the statement that best describes your current feelings. (n=9)

#	Answers	Respondents	Percentage
1	I have become more interested in the accommodation industry than before.	3	33.3%
2	I have lost interest in the accommodation industry compared to before.	0	0.0%
3	I have become more interested in the tourism industry compared to before.	5	55.6%
4	I have lost interest in the tourism industry compared to before.	0	0.0%
5	There has been no significant change in my feelings or mindset before and after the internship	1	11.1%

Table 2: Career Paths and Opportunities in the Accommodation Industry for University Graduates

Q: Please select the statement that best describes your current feelings. (n=9)

#	Answers	Respondents	Percentage
1	I hadn't previously considered the accommodation industry as a potential employment option, but it has now become one of my prospective job opportunities.	3	33.3%
2	I have been considering the accommodation industry as a potential employment option since before, and now my interest in it has grown even stronger.	1	11.1%
3	I used to consider the accommodation industry as a potential career option, but currently, I am not considering it.	1	11.1%
4	I have not been considering the accommodation industry as a potential employment option since before, and my feelings remain unchanged at present.	1	11.1%
5	I still don't know yet.	1	11.1%

Q. To those who previously answered "I used to consider the hospitality industry as a potential career option, but currently, I am not considering it," Could you please provide specific reasons for this change?

A. "While I enjoy the work and find the idea of being a hotelier admirable, hearing about the employees' experiences made me realize that there isn't a fair balance between labor and compensation. However, it remains one of the career options I am considering."

Table 3: Career Paths and Opportunities in the Tourism Industry for University Graduates

Q: Please select the statement that best describes your current feelings. (n=9)

#	Answers	Respondents	Percentage
1	I hadn't previously considered the tourism industry as a potential employment option, but it has now become one of my prospective job opportunities.	2	22.2%
2	I have been considering the tourism industry as a potential employment option since before, and now my interest in it has grown even stronger.	4	44.4%
3	I used to consider the tourism industry as a potential employment option, but currently, I am not considering it.	0	0.0%
4	I have not been considering the tourism industry as a potential employment option since before, and my feelings remain unchanged at present.	1	11.1%
5	I still don't know yet.	2	22.2%

Table 4: Confidence in Working On-Site

Q. Please select the statement that best describes how your confidence in working in the field has changed. (n=9)

#	Answers	Respondents	Percentage
1	Gained confidence.	3	33.3%
2	Gained some confidence.	6	66.7%
3	Not sure either way.	0	0.0%
4	Did not gain much confidence.	0	0.0%
5	Did not gain any confidence.	0	0.0%

Table 5: Confidence in Using English

Q. Please select the statement that best describes how your confidence in English has changed. (n=9)

#	Answers	Respondents	Percentage
1	Gained confidence.	1	11.1%
2	Gained some confidence.	4	44.4%
3	Not sure either way.	3	33.3%
4	Did not gain much confidence.	1	11.1%
5	Did not gain any confidence.	0	0.0%

Table 6: Components Influencing English Proficiency Improvement

Q. Please select the English proficiency element that you believe you have improved most during the internship. (n=9)

#	Answers	Respondents	Percentage
1	Speaking	2	22.2%
2	Listening	7	77.8%
3	Reading	0	0.0%
4	Writing	0	0.0%
5	Other	0	0.0%

3.2 Data Interpretation and Discussion

In the assessment of vocational interest facilitated by Table 1, 55.6% of respondents reported a heightened interest in the tourism sector since commencing the internship, while 33.3% indicated an increased interest in the accommodation sector specifically. 11.1% of participants observed no significant change in their attitude post-internship. Collectively, a substantial 88.9% of respondents expressed an augmented interest in both lodging and tourism sectors post-internship. Table 2 explored the perception of the accommodation industry as a viable post-graduation career path. A notable 33.3% of participants, who had not previously considered the accommodation industry as a career prospect, identified it as a potential employment avenue post-internship. When considering those who already viewed the sector more favorably, the proportion rises to 44.4%. However, a minority remained unchanged in their perspective or became disinclined due to perceived imbalances between labor exertion and compensation, as highlighted by current employees during the internship experience (For details, please refer to the question and response below Table 2). Further inquiry into the broader tourism sector through Table 3 revealed that 44.4% of respondents maintained or strengthened their pre-existing intent to pursue a career in tourism, while an additional 22.2% adopted this stance as a result of their internship experience, culminating in 66.6% considering tourism as a future career field. Table 4 focused on self-assurance in professional capacities, indicating a universal increase in confidence among participants;

33.3% reported a significant boost, while 66.7% acknowledged a moderate increase in confidence after their year-long internship, resulting in 100% of the participants feeling some kind of confidence. Table 5 examined the impact of the internship on English language proficiency within the workplace. It found that 55.5% of interns felt more confident in their English abilities to varying degrees, whereas the remaining 44.4% either experienced uncertainty or minimal confidence gains. Lastly, Table 6 queries respondents regarding the “elements of English proficiency that they perceive as most enhanced” during their extended internship. Prior to the internship, all respondents identified “speaking” as the skill they most desired to improve. The responses post-internship, however, indicated a significant shift in perceived skill acquisition; 22.2% of respondents identified “speaking” as the English proficiency element most improved, whereas a substantial 77.8% indicated “listening” as their most developed skill. These findings suggest that a one-year internship in the hospitality industry may predominantly bolster listening skills over speaking skills.

These results collectively suggest that long-term internships may indeed bolster interest in the hospitality and tourism sectors, influence career considerations, and enhance both professional confidence and English language competency, albeit with nuanced variations among individuals.

4 Conclusion

This inquiry examined the influence of one-year internships on university students’ engagement with the accommodation and tourism sectors, assessing shifts in their sector-specific interest and self-assurance within the professional domain. The results were telling: a majority (88.9%) reported a burgeoning interest in these fields post-internship, and nearly half (44.4%) are now contemplating careers in accommodation, with a significant 66.6% considering the tourism industry more broadly. It emerged that some reconsiderations of career intentions were due to perceptions of a disconnect between job demands and compensation, as conveyed by incumbent employees. This underscores the depth of insight that long-term internships can afford, potentially shaping career trajectories through both positive and negative revelations.

All respondents unanimously reported a boost in confidence regarding their professional skills following the internship, with a notable 55.5% also reporting heightened confidence in their English language use in a professional context. Remarkably, nearly 80% attributed this improvement to their enhanced listening abilities, a testament to the effective language acquisition facilitated by the one-year hotel training program. Excluding the aspect of English proficiency, these findings concur with Ishitani’s (2024) study, which noted a comparable rise in confidence after a two-month internship. While there was only a modest uptick in interest towards the industry after the internship, this becomes particularly significant in light of Ishitani’s (2023) observation of waning industry interest subsequent to shorter internships. The contrast in these findings may indicate that the duration of exposure to the industry during internships can exert a substantial influence on students’ attitudes and professional outlooks.

The instructional value of this study is recognized, yet its broader applicability is constrained by a small sample size and the uniformity of participants, who are all from the same academic discipline. Consequently, the conclusions drawn provide only an initial insight into how the length of internships might influence career interests and self-assurance. Pusiran et al. (2020) observed that students with enriching internship experiences showed a propensity to continue in the tourism field post-graduation, in contrast to those with favorable internships who surprisingly opted out of the industry [16]. To extract a deeper understanding of the complex interrelations between internship experiences and subsequent student career choices in tourism, further

research incorporating a larger and more heterogeneous sample is vital. Such research endeavors would be instrumental in refining internship frameworks to ensure they more accurately reflect the demands of the industry, thereby improving the preparedness and career development of hospitality students.

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