

Internship Satisfaction Post-Pandemic: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Internships play a crucial role in addressing the talent shortage in the hospitality industry following the COVID-19 pandemic. While a successful internship can positively influence students' attitude toward staying in the industry, a less-than-positive experience may deter them from pursuing a career in the field. This PRISMA-guided systematic literature review reviews and synthesizes the literature published since the COVID-19 pandemic to identify the factors that influence internship satisfaction. From the initial identification of 73 articles, 20 articles published from business and hospitality-related literature between 2020 and 2025 were analysed. The review found that satisfaction was associated with actions taken by all three primary internship stakeholders: the education institution, the host organisation, and the students themselves. Support and curriculum design were considered key responsibilities of the educational institution, while working conditions, working environment, job characteristics, social support, and achievement impacted student satisfaction in the host organisation. At an individual level, expectations, preparation, development, and sacrifices also had a major impact. The review emphasizes the importance of fostering and maintaining collaborative relationships among all three stakeholders to enhance students' satisfaction with their internship experience. It also extends pre-pandemic research by demonstrating how post-pandemic changes, including digitalization, increased autonomy, and trade-off perceptions, have reshaped the determinants of internship satisfaction. While satisfaction has been studied extensively, this review focuses specifically on articles published after the COVID-19 pandemic to capture potential changes that may have occurred since the outbreak.

Zufriedenheit mit Praktika nach der Pandemie: Eine systematische Literaturübersicht

Praktika spielen eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Bewältigung des Fachkräftemangels im Gastgewerbe nach der COVID-19-Pandemie. Ein erfolgreiches Praktikum kann die Bereitschaft von Studenten, in der Branche zu verbleiben, deutlich stärken, während negative Erfahrungen häufig dazu führen, dass eine Karriere im Gastgewerbe nicht weiterverfolgt wird. Diese systematische Literaturübersicht, durchgeführt nach den PRISMA-Richtlinien, untersucht die seit Beginn der Pandemie veröffentlichte Forschung, um zentrale Einflussfaktoren auf die Zufriedenheit mit Praktika zu identifizieren. Ausgehend von 73 Publikationen wurden 20 einschlägige Studien aus den Jahren 2020 bis 2025 in die Analyse einbezogen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Zufriedenheit von Praktikanten durch das Zusammenspiel von drei zentralen Akteursgruppen geprägt wird: Bildungsinstitutionen, Praktikumsbetriebe und Studenten selbst. Auf institutioneller Ebene wirken vor allem Betreuung, Begleitung und Curriculumsdesign. In den Betrieben beeinflussen Arbeitsbedingungen, Arbeitsumfeld, Aufgabenmerkmale, soziale Unterstützung sowie Anerkennung die Zufriedenheit. Auf individueller Ebene sind Erwartungen, Vorbereitung, Kompetenzentwicklung und persönliche Aufwendungen entscheidend. Die Analyse verdeutlicht, dass eine enge Zusammenarbeit aller drei Akteursgruppen notwendig ist, um positive Praktikumserfah-

#Keywords

**Internship satisfaction;
Hospitality education;
Hospitality
internships; Post-
pandemic careers;
COVID-19 pandemic;
Work-integrated
learning; Talent
retention in hospitality.**

doi:10.2440/018-0008

rungen zu fördern. Sie erweitert zudem die vorpandemische Forschung, indem gezeigt wird, wie pandemiebedingte Veränderungen – insbesondere Digitalisierung, höhere Eigenverantwortung der Studenten sowie veränderte Kosten-Nutzen-Abwägungen – die Determinanten der Praktikumszufriedenheit neu definiert haben. Während das Thema bereits umfassend untersucht wurde, richtet sich diese Übersicht gezielt auf Arbeiten nach Ausbruch der COVID-19-Pandemie, um mögliche Veränderungen seitdem zu erfassen.

「疫情后实习满意度：系统文献综述」

实习在新冠疫情之后的酒店业中，对缓解人才短缺起着重要作用。一次成功的实习可以让学生更愿意留在这个行业，而一次负面的经历可能会使他们放弃相关职业。本文根据 PRISMA 指南，系统性回顾并综合了疫情以来发表的研究，以找出影响实习满意度的主要因素。研究最初找到 73 篇相关文章，最后选取了 2020 年至 2025 年间发表的 20 篇与酒店和商科相关的实证研究进行分析。结果显示，实习满意度与三个主要参与方的行动密切相关：教育机构、实习单位以及学生个人。教育机构的关键责任在于提供支持和合理的课程设计；在实习单位中，工作条件、工作环境、岗位特征、社会支持和认可对学生满意度有显著影响；在个人层面，期望、准备、能力发展以及个人付出也是重要因素。本研究强调，三方的合作与沟通对于提升学生的实习体验至关重要。同时，本研究也扩展了疫情前的研究，表明数字化、学生自主性提高以及对“付出与收获”的重新认识，已经重新塑造了影响实习满意度的关键因素。尽管有关实习满意度的研究很多，但本文特别关注疫情之后发表的文献，以捕捉自疫情以来可能出现的变化。

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is experiencing an acute labour shortage, partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, during which many workers left the industry, never to return. Yet, as Chen and Shen (2012) note, the intern of today becomes the practitioner of tomorrow, clearly and succinctly demonstrating the importance of internships in addressing labour market gaps and building a pipeline for future talent in the industry.

Nowadays, internships play an integral role in hospitality education programs (Zopiatis et al., 2021). Internships offer students the opportunity to experience the realities of working in the hospitality field, while also providing employers with a chance to attract potential future talent (Pusiran et al., 2020). Overall, all three key stakeholders, such as students,

employers, and educational institutions, view internships as a positive component of the hospitality curriculum, helping students build a professional career (Gosling, 2024). While research has shown that students have a positive attitude towards their internship experience, allowing them to consolidate their knowledge and enhance their professional skills (Nghia & Duyen, 2017) and encourage personal development (Seyitoğlu, 2019), some studies note the students do not always perceive the internship as a beneficial experience and may result in students preferring to leave the hospitality industry (Xu et al., 2022). In particular, satisfaction with internships has been shown to influence career decision-making strongly (Chen & Shen, 2012; Chen et al., 2018), and it is considered a key variable in evaluating the effectiveness of internship programs (Farmaki, 2018).

Internship satisfaction can be understood through broader job satisfaction theories such as Locke's (1976) value-percept theory and Spector's (1997) affective perspective. Building on these, Mensah et al. (2021) define internship satisfaction as "an emotional state or feeling interns go through when they equate their expectation and actual outcome of experiences" (p. 32). Studies have shown that satisfaction is influenced by several factors, including individual attributes, the organisational environment, work, and working relationships (Nevison, 2018; Zhu, 2013). In the specific context of student internships, Hussien and La Lopa (2018) also highlight the critical role academic institutions play in contributing to internship satisfaction. Overall, there is recognition that cooperation between students, educators, and industry partners is necessary for building positive internship experiences (Nevison et al., 2018); therefore, it remains essential to monitor student satisfaction in a post-pandemic world.

Among recent research studies, Zopiatis et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of the literature on internships in hospitality up to March 2020, noting that satisfaction was a recurring theme in the literature. Similarly, Mensah et al. (2024) conducted a bibliometric review to enhance the understanding of the growth and patterns of research in hospitality and tourism internships, noting that a core research area has been internship satisfaction. These reviews, however, focused on articles published between 1986 and 2020. No review has yet examined how the post-pandemic context reshaped stakeholder responsibilities or how satisfaction factors evolved under new conditions of digitalization, uncertainty, and labor shortages. This study, therefore, fills this research gap.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped hospitality practices, thus warranting a review of the literature since this time. This has resulted in companies having to adapt and innovate rapidly, leading to changes in HR training, particularly

through internship programs. The increased use of digital tools, for example, has impacted communication patterns, allowing interns to feel more valued and supported. As a result, interns have been able to take more control over their own learning experience and receive greater support and cooperation from their supervisors and teams (Yfantidou et al., 2024).

At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted the fragility of the hospitality industry, leading students to identify less with it (Birtch et al., 2021) and reconsider their career choices (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). As internships impact career choice (Liu et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023), both educational institutions and industry partners need to understand what drives internship satisfaction post-pandemic (Collins & Pearlman, 2023). Overall, given the tremendous impact of COVID-19 on the industry and its potential to shape new internship practices, this review aims to extend the research undertaken in previous reviews to examine satisfaction with internships since 2020.

Given the continued emphasis on talent acquisition and the fact that internships play a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes towards pursuing a career in the hospitality industry (Wang, 2021), internship satisfaction remains an important area for continued research. Collins and Pearlman (2023) argue that as companies struggle to acquire talent, "it has never been more important to ensure highly satisfying internship experiences" (p. 562). This review systematically analyzes the factors influencing internship satisfaction in the hospitality industry during the period following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (papers published 2020–2025) and how, or whether, the three stakeholders are involved.

2. Methods

To achieve these objectives, the study employed the literature review method, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Neubert, 2022). The search took place in March 2025, reviewing peer-review-

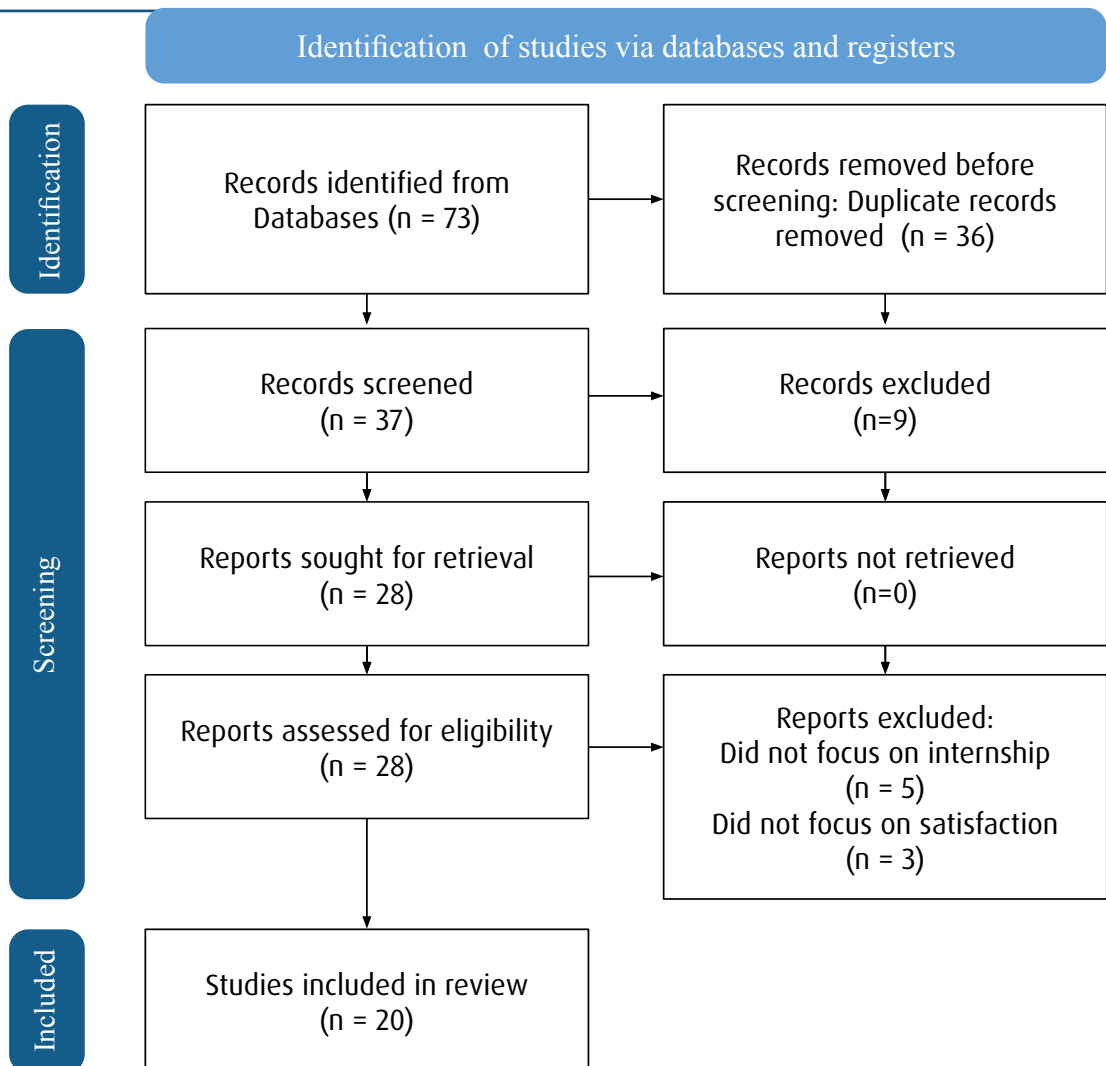
Table 1:
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
published since 2020	published before 2020
published in English	published in other languages
peer-reviewed	literature reviews
primary research	no focus on internship or satisfaction
qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods	duplicate articles
full-text	Focus on employees/school leavers
Focus on students	
Focus on internships and satisfaction.	

ed, full-text articles in the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science, EBS-CO, Taylor & Francis, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study are shown in Table 1 above. For the search string, and using the Boolean

operators AND/OR, the keywords “internship” OR “placement” AND “hospitality” OR “hotel” AND “satisfaction” had to be present in the title, abstract, or keywords, with a filter being added to retain articles published between 2020 and 2025.

Figure 1:
PRISMA Flowchart



To evaluate methodological rigor, the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018) was applied to included studies. No articles were excluded based on appraisal, but this step enhanced transparency in reporting study quality. The search yielded a total of 73 articles. After duplicates were removed, articles were screened based on title and relevance. In a subsequent step, the remaining articles were retrieved and then assessed for eligibility. Articles that did not focus on students, the internship experience, or determinants of satisfaction were then excluded from the process. The final review focused on 20 articles. An overview of the process is shown in Figure 1 above.

Although this systematic literature review aims to minimize bias, such as in the details of the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to avoid selection bias, it is not error-free. Two reviewers conducted screening; disagreements were resolved through discussion. This process reduced selection bias. In terms of publication bias, it is acknowledged that studies showing significant findings are more likely to be published. In fact, research has shown that only around half of the studies undertaken are published

(Drucker, 2016). As the review is based on the findings of other researchers, it is also subject to outcome reporting bias, since primary studies do not always report all their findings, but rather a subset that suits the researcher's interests (Chan et al., 2014). Furthermore, as the reporting of study findings often occurred without the inclusion of data collection time periods, some findings may, in fact, be based on studies conducted before the pandemic.

3. Results

The following results were obtained by reviewing relevant studies and synthesizing the main themes related to internship satisfaction. Of the 20 articles studied, the overwhelming majority were based on quantitative research, with only two adopting a mixed methods approach. Over half the studies were conducted in Asia. The articles reviewed are presented in Appendix A.

As shown in Figure 2 below, the final selection revealed a relatively even spread of publications per year, with a slight increase in 2021, possibly due to heightened interest in the state of internships following the pandemic.

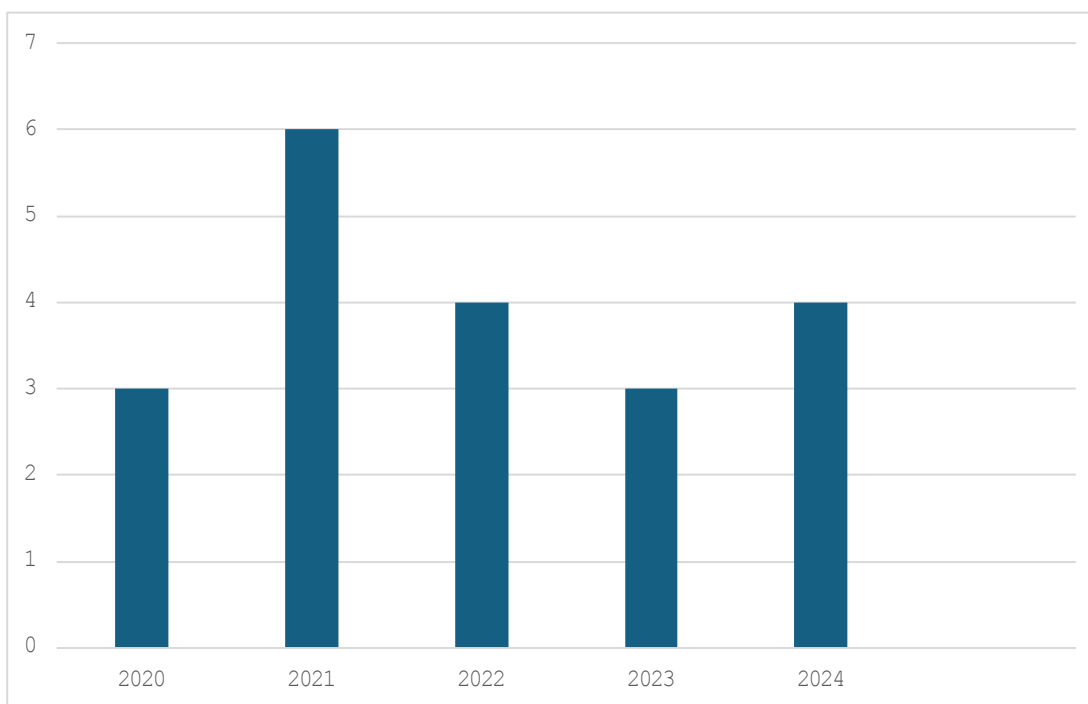


Figure 2:
Publications per Year

In examining the factors related to student satisfaction with their internship, the overwhelming majority of the studies focused on the organisational setting. While several of those studies considered the academic environment and/or individual characteristics and attitudes of interns, only one study, undertaken

by Sihombing (2021), focused almost exclusively on the influence of individual factors on satisfaction. No study focused entirely on the actions of the educational institution. Figure 3 below presents an overview of the key themes highlighted per stakeholder group.

Figure 3:
Themes Identified

Internship Satisfaction		
Educational Institution	Student Intern	Host Organisation
Support	Beliefs vs. Experience	Working Conditions
Mentorship	Gap	Pay
Supervision	Preparation	Hours
Curriculum Design	Academic Readiness	Stressors
Pre-Internship Seminars	Attitude	Working Environment
Consultations	Parental Support	Supervisor Support
Assessment	Skill Development	Hotel Features
Reflective Tools	Soft Skills	Job Characteristics
Skill Recognition	Technical Expertise	Autonomy
Theory vs. Practice	Self-Preparation	Feedback
Mismatch	Confidence	Role Requirements
	Identity	Social Support
	Sacrifices	Mentorship
	Costs vs. Benefits	Leadership
		Peer Interactions
		Achievement
		Recognition
		Career Development

Regional patterns were notable: Asian studies emphasized structural factors (pay, hours, workload), while European studies highlighted value perceptions and recognition (Zhong et al., 2022; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2021). African studies more often explored stressors and support (Mensah et al., 2020; Armah & Armah, 2021). These differences suggest that cultural and economic contexts shape internship satisfaction.

3.1 The educational institution

Ten studies examined the role that the university or college plays in the satisfaction of interns, both before, during, and after an internship placement. While the support and management of the internship process, as well as the curriculum design, were considered key elements, students were not always as satisfied with their experience.

Amer et al. (2024) emphasised institutional responsibility and support for organising and supervising internships. In terms of specific actions, Shetu and Sayeda (2020) and Qu et al. (2021) found that faculty guidance and mentorship were crucial, with Yu et al. (2020) noting that teacher support had a positive impact on experiences. In further studies, Vukić et al. (2022) and Zhong et al. (2022) reported dissatisfaction with institutional communication, support, and assistance. Specifically, in an examination of the value of international internships for students in terms of what they 'give' and 'get' from the experience, Zhong et al. (2022) found that student perceptions of the conditional value of internships, which included aspects such as study materials and campus support during the internship were not rated as highly as other value they received.

Vo (2023) suggested holding workshops to develop self-confidence and communication skills, as well as surveying student expectations before the internship and gathering alumni feedback, to enhance student satisfaction. Shetu and Sayeda (2020) emphasized the value of pre-internship seminars and discussions with former interns, while Qu et al. (2021) suggested that universities should clarify the importance of internships and develop internship plans for students. Both Amer et al. (2024) and Qu et al. (2021) advocated for meaningful internship assessments beyond simple grades, with the latter emphasizing the need to help students recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. Sihombing (2021) noted that curriculum compatibility enhances satisfaction, although a mismatch between academic preparation and workplace demands was evident. Vukić et al. (2022) also found that perceived curriculum alignment strengthens satisfaction.

In contrast to such findings on the importance of the educational institution practices, Armah and Armah (2021) found university support to be insignificant for hospitality students in Ghana,

while Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023a) suggested that applying theory to practice was less important to some students, indicating a limited need for additional academic resources in this area.

3.2 The individual student/intern

Eleven of the reviewed articles discussed individual-level components of internship satisfaction, with three key themes recurring: expectations, preparation, and skill and self-development. While the focus was almost exclusively on the benefits or the challenges to satisfaction, Zhong et al. (2022) added a unique perspective by considering the trade-offs interns make, including sacrifices alongside benefits.

Pre-internship expectations significantly influence satisfaction. Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023a) found that expectations in areas such as job importance, relationships, skill development, and résumé building exceeded actual experiences. Yu et al. (2020) noted that dissatisfaction stemmed from a gap between expectations and reality regarding the improvement of practical skills and employability. Qu et al. (2021) emphasised a need to form reasonable expectations and acknowledge the shift from 'student' to 'employee' identity, while Yu et al. (2020) and Vukić et al. (2022) recommended pre-internship training and realistic industry insights to manage expectations, including discussion on the difficulties of working in the sector (Vukić et al., 2022). Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023b) and Sihombing (2021) emphasized the role of host organizations in setting reasonable expectations before the placement. Sihombing (2021) noted that when students have more sensible and positive expectations about the internship, they are more likely to experience greater levels of satisfaction.

Academic preparedness, positive attitude, and proactiveness were found to positively affect satisfaction (Armah & Armah, 2021; Sihombing, 2021). Sihom-

bing (2021) also noted that perceived internship importance, such as skills building, resumé building, and networking, mediated these effects. Parental support has been shown to foster a positive attitude, leading to a better person-organisation fit, and thereby enhancing internship quality (Xu et al., 2023).

Vo (2023) highlighted the importance of soft skills, identifying self-confidence, entering the internship, communication, and conduct, as well as problem-solving skills, as key challenges. Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023a) found that expectations for self-development were often unmet, resulting in significant dissatisfaction. However, students still valued the experience for enabling them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, as well as for developing technical skills. The importance of soft skills was reinforced by Qu et al. (2021) and Collins and Pearlman (2023), who linked skills such as cognitive, social, and creative skills to satisfaction, while Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023b) noted disappointment due to unmet skill improvement aligned with industry standards and high expectations on competitive training.

Viewing internship satisfaction simply in terms of either benefits or challenges was challenged by Zhong et al. (2022), who proposed viewing internship value as a trade-off. In their study, students acknowledged a need for sacrifices, such as time away from family, but monetary costs (e.g., tuition, living abroad) had a greater impact on their evaluation. Overall, these sacrifices were still considered worthwhile when perceived benefits outweighed the costs.

3.3 The internship host organisation

All studies considered host organisation factors contributing to satisfactory internship experiences. While some addressed dissatisfaction, only two focused specifically on the negative aspects, namely stressors (Mensah et al., 2021) and challenges (Vo et al., 2022).

Internship satisfaction in the hospitality industry is often shaped by factors such as pay, working hours, and scheduling. Vo (2023) identified working hours as the most influential factor, while Kukreit and Dani (2021) emphasised payment and internship duration. Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2021) found that long hours, low pay, and poor organisation were key challenges for both Greek and EU students in their comparative study. Similarly, Amer et al. (2024) reported that long hours, heavy workload, and low pay negatively affected satisfaction, with night shifts and disorganisation also impacting health. Stress was also a recurring theme. Mensah et al. (2020) found that hospitality students experienced more stress than marketing students, particularly due to excessive workload, limited leisure time, and late shifts. Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023a) highlighted stable shifts as key to a positive experience.

Interestingly, not all studies agreed on the significance of pay and hours. Qu et al. (2021) reported no notable effect from compensation, whereas Armah and Armah (2021) found that contextual factors, such as pay and commuting, had a limited impact. Vukić et al. (2022) found no difference in satisfaction between interns who worked overtime and those who did not. However, for those who did, recognition in terms of payment or hours worked resulted in more satisfied interns than when overtime was not rewarded.

The quality of the work environment also played a crucial role. Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023b) noted a gap between student expectations and actual experiences, resulting in disappointment and dissatisfaction. Kukreit and Dani (2021) emphasized the importance of a supportive and encouraging environment, while also noting that a hotel's location can influence satisfaction. Drawing from service quality literature, Ghosh and Jhamb (2021) found that hotel internships with modern equipment, appealing facilities, and an attractive en-

vironment enhanced satisfaction. Zhong et al. (2022) added that the perceived image and reputation of the host organisation positively influenced student experiences. In contrast, Qu et al. (2021) found that hotel features such as star rating did not significantly affect satisfaction.

Lam et al. (2024) found that job characteristics, including skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, have a positive influence on job satisfaction. Additionally, job involvement, which encompasses attachment and importance, also has a positive influence on satisfaction. Kukreit and Dani (2021) similarly noted that task clarity, supervisor support, and feedback enhanced satisfaction. On its own, autonomy has been linked to satisfaction (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023b), while repetitive tasks have been identified as stressors (Mensah et al., 2021). In line with these findings, Collins and Pearlman (2023) highlighted the relevance of task variety, independence, authority, and alignment with interns' abilities, as well as drawing attention to the significance of social status and being able to serve others in impacting satisfaction. Amer et al. (2024) also found that low social status, particularly in waiting roles, was associated with reduced satisfaction. Despite such findings, not all studies were in agreement. Armah and Armah (2021) reported no significant effect of job characteristics on satisfaction. Likewise, Collins and Pearlman (2023) found that psychological empowerment, defined as competence and influence, had no significant impact on satisfaction.

Zhong et al. (2022) identified social value, including networking, peer relationships, feedback, and recognition, as a key benefit of internships. Ghosh and Jhamb (2021) emphasised supervisor guidance, communication, employee support, and trust as critical to an intern's learning and satisfaction. Mensah et al. (2020) found that organisational, supervisor, and coworker support signifi-

cantly enhanced satisfaction, implying that caring environments and welcoming, helpful colleagues are crucial. Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023a) noted that feeling part of a team was vital, while neglect or undervaluation by other hotel employees was a major stressor. Yu et al. (2020) and Amer et al. (2024) also linked social aspects such as employee attitudes and supervisor care to intern satisfaction. A mismatch between expected and actual supervisory support led to dissatisfaction (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023b).

Liu et al. (2024) found that mentoring offered by supervisors and senior colleagues, including psychosocial support, career development, and role modelling, positively influenced internship satisfaction. However, interns' thriving traits moderated this effect; passionate and adaptable students may feel over-supported, which can lead to reduced satisfaction. This highlights the importance of addressing individual intern needs. Collins and Pearlman (2023) also emphasised individual differences through an examination of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. While a strong LMX relationship with supervisors predicted satisfaction, it was not always necessary; some interns reported high satisfaction despite weak LMX ties, and vice versa. The temporary nature of internships may lead students to adopt a pragmatic "what is in it for me?" approach (Collins & Pearlman, 2023, p. 578).

Although social support was often linked to satisfaction, some studies suggested its impact may be limited. Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023a), using importance-performance analysis, found that appreciation from managers, peer relationships, and team spirit may be "possible overkill" (p. 915), requiring no extra investment in organisations. Similarly, Collins and Pearlman (2023) found coworker relationships were not significant predictors of satisfaction. Qu et al. (2021) also reported no significant effect from relationships with supervisors, hotel staff, or fellow interns.

Findings from the reviewed studies also highlighted growth, recognition, and reward as central to internship satisfaction. Training and rotation opportunities enhanced skill development and created positive perceptions (Shetu & Sayeda, 2021), while supportive cultures and learning environments significantly contributed to satisfaction (Armah & Armah, 2021; Yu et al., 2020). In an examination of internship achievements, Qu et al. (2021) highlighted the value of gaining experience and a deeper understanding of the industry through well-structured hotel internship programs that included training, recognition, rewards, and a sense of achievement. Collins and Pearlman (2023) further found that feeling appreciated and valued, through opportunities for advancement, recognition, and achievement, had the most substantial impact on overall satisfaction.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this systematic literature review was to examine the factors associated with student satisfaction with internships in the hospitality industry since 2020. Findings suggest that all three primary stakeholders contribute to making the experience worthwhile for students or, conversely, making it less than satisfactory, which might ultimately drive them away from the industry, thereby exacerbating the talent shortage.

Findings across the reviewed studies align with job satisfaction theory (Locke, 1976; Spector, 1997), showing that satisfaction depends on the congruence between expectations and experiences. Expectancy Theory further explains the recurring gap between what students anticipate and what they encounter during internships. Educational establishments play a vital role in driving internship satisfaction. The support they offer through supervision, mentorship, and program design was consistently linked to positive outcomes (Amer et al., 2024; Qu et al., 2021; Shetu & Sayeda, 2020). At the same time, dissatisfaction often stemmed from perceived gaps in com-

munication and support (Vukić et al., 2022; Zhong et al., 2022), suggesting that institutions must be both proactive and responsive to student needs. Curriculum design emerged as a key contributing factor, suggesting that universities and colleges must carefully review their curricula in light of employer expectations following the pandemic. Studies have highlighted the importance of pre-internship seminars, career consultations, and reflective assessments (Qu et al., 2021; Vo, 2023), suggesting that institutions should invest more effort in designing both pre- and post-internship programs. A recurring theme was the mismatch between academic preparation and workplace demands (Sihombing, 2021), highlighting the need for curricula that better integrate transferable skills to meet industry expectations more effectively. Interestingly, a few studies have challenged the significance of support provided by universities and colleges, suggesting that its influence may not be a primary concern for some (Armah & Armah, 2021; Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023a). Given that the pandemic caused many more students to become more autonomous and self-reliant (Lopes et al., 2021; Stankovska et al., 2021), these findings suggest that further in-depth analysis of the internship support offered by institutes, before, during and after internships, could be undertaken, particularly as the institutional focus has not been a primary research focus in internship study.

The review also highlighted how internship satisfaction is shaped by individual factors, including a student's own expectations, preparation, and skill/self-development. The gap between expectations and actual experiences was a constant source of dissatisfaction (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023a; Yu et al., 2020), emphasising the importance of realistic pre-internship orientation and expectation management, and, in doing so, also highlighting a need for greater collaboration between educational institutions and host organisations to accomplish this. Preparation, both academic

and in attitude, was positively associated with satisfaction (Armah & Armah, 2021; Sihombing, 2021), with parental support also playing a role (Xu et al., 2023). This suggests that satisfaction is not only determined by work-related factors but also by a student's individual circumstances and support network. Recognising these elements and integrating them into internship planning could help to improve the effectiveness of the program.

Soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and self-confidence were identified as both challenges and opportunities for growth (Collins & Pearlman, 2023; Vo, 2023), illustrating the critical role the organisation plays in an intern's personal development, making it vital to provide feedback and guidance, rather than take a 'sink or swim' approach. The more novel contribution from Zhong et al. (2022) on perceiving the internship value as a trade-off between what students give and receive encourages both educators and organisations to take a more holistic view of the internship experience, accounting for the individual sacrifices students make, not least the emotional and financial costs, and thus opening up discussions on student well-being.

The prominence of host organisation factors, particularly working conditions, job characteristics, and the work environment, across the reviewed studies highlights their strong influence on internship satisfaction. Consistent concerns around pay, long hours, and scheduling reflect broader structural issues within the hospitality industry, where such conditions are often normalised. While these challenges may be expected, they continue to undermine the internship experience and indicate a need for a fairer, more student-centred internship design. However, contradictions emerged regarding the role of pay and working hours. While some studies have found that compensation and scheduling are central to satisfaction (Vo, 2023; Amer et al., 2024), others have reported

a minimal impact (Qu et al., 2021; Armah & Armah, 2021). These inconsistencies may reflect cultural norms around hospitality work or methodological differences in measurement.

Positive job characteristics, such as autonomy, task variety, and constructive feedback, were generally associated with higher job satisfaction (Kukreit & Dani, 2021; Lam et al., 2024). However, the inconsistency in some findings suggests that these factors may not operate uniformly across all situations. As Collins and Pearlman (2023) suggest, the temporary nature of internships may affect how interns perceive and respond to these aspects. For some interns, short-term exposure to basic work tasks and responsibilities may be tolerated if the internship is seen as a stepping stone. In contrast, for others, it may significantly impact their overall experience.

Similarly, although social support from supervisors, peers, and the wider community was widely recognised as a key contributor to satisfaction (Ghosh & Jhamb, 2021; Mensah et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2022), several studies cautioned against assuming that more support is always better (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023a; Qu et al., 2021) and that mentoring and a strong LMX relationship is always needed (Collins & Pearlman (2023). The concept of "possible overkill" (Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan, 2023a, p. 915) suggests that interns may prioritize certain types of support, such as receiving guidance and feedback, over others, like building friendships, due to the short-term nature of the placement. This pattern is consistent with Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that supportive interactions build perceptions of reciprocity and fairness. However, some studies caution against assuming that 'more is always better,' indicating that interns evaluate support pragmatically, given the short-term nature of internships. At the very least, such findings highlight the need to tailor support to an individual's personal needs and expectations.

Finally, achievement and recognition were closely linked with satisfaction levels. Opportunities for growth, skill development, and appreciation were consistently related to positive internship experiences (Collins & Pearlman, 2023; Shetu & Sayeda, 2021), emphasising the importance of designing a well-structured internship with plentiful opportunities for learning and development, rather than just as a work placement. This also aligns with educational goals, where an internship is considered a bridge between academic learning and industry practice (Hamrah et al., 2023).

While this systematic literature review adheres to the PRISMA guidelines to minimize bias and enhance transparency, several limitations persist. Firstly, although the articles reviewed were published after the COVID-19 pandemic, the actual data collection may have been conducted before 2020 and therefore cannot be directly associated with internship experiences post-pandemic. Secondly, the concept of satisfaction is described differently in various studies, with some taking a broader, internship-wide perspective, while others are more focused, linking primarily to the job. Thirdly, the review is based on the interpretations of different researchers, resulting in a lack of consistency in the chosen factors that constitute working conditions versus the working environment. Fourthly, some articles do not provide a breakdown of the factors being considered within those constructs, making it more challenging to identify patterns in the data.

Furthermore, the methodologies are not always described in sufficient detail to determine whether students are undertaking paid or unpaid internships, which could impact the accuracy of the findings. Moreover, due to the use of the specific search strings, other pertinent studies on internship satisfaction may have been missed. Finally, the dominance of quantitative studies in the review limits the depth of insight into

lived experiences, underscoring the need for more qualitative and longitudinal research.”

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the review indicates that student satisfaction with internships is a combination of actions taken by the interns themselves, their educational institutions, and the internship host organisations. It is also evident that satisfaction begins before an internship even starts and is closely linked to the expectations that are set.

As shown in Table 2 below, several recommendations can be made for both research and practice. As the review highlighted the reliance on quantitative research studies to study internship satisfaction, it is recommended that future research should consider adopting alternative methodologies. Qualitative research could allow researchers to explore in depth the causes of internship satisfaction or dissatisfaction for students and their own lived experiences. Similarly, more longitudinal research is needed to examine satisfaction at different time periods. On the whole, studies that examined student expectations versus actual experiences collected data in the same time period. Gathering data before and after internships would be more beneficial for examining the gap between expectations and experiences. Zopiatis et al. (2021) note that studies on the discrepancies between expectations and experience are reaching a saturation point; rather than continuing to identify existing gaps, studies could, for example, examine more closely how educational institution supervisors and mentors shape students' expectations before the internship. While the selected studies focused on satisfaction as perceived by interns, it is recommended that further research consider the perspectives of both host organisations and educational institutions. Understanding the expectations of these stakeholders could help to iden-

tify potential mismatches in priorities. It is also suggested that future research be based on well-defined variables, taking into account whether internships are paid or unpaid in their analysis.

To enhance student satisfaction with their internship experience, this review highlights several aspects that both educational institutions and host organisations should consider. Given the resources and budget constraints of educational establishments, it is not always feasible to allocate a supervisor to each student before and/or during their internships. However, at a minimum, there should be one supervisor to oversee the internship program, including serving as the primary point of contact for students participating in the internship. Greater collaboration is needed between educational institutions and host organisations to ensure students receive a more realistic picture of the work they will be doing. This could be through workshops or guest lectures, as well as greater transparency in the internship hiring process. Internship alumni could also be involved in such activities. Learning contracts should be considered to ensure expectations are set and that students are developing needed skills for the industry, rather than being seen as “cheap labour” or a convenient “stop gap” to address the talent shortage, whereby students may experience repetitive work, offering limited or no skill development or responsibilities beyond their abilities, with little or no training or support. Following the internship, educational institutions should be prepared to address potential quality shortfalls with their industry partners, allowing for necessary changes to be made. Feedback should also be gathered from host organisations to address potential gaps between what is taught and what is needed in the industry, and to enhance curriculum design. Suppose organisations believe that internships are a way to attract talent to the industry and their organisation. In that case, they also need to ensure a well-organised internship program that provides structured learning and development

opportunities for interns. Clear tasks and responsibilities should be defined in advance and communicated to the interns. Feedback and guidance should be provided regularly, and the support of workers should be strengthened, such as by identifying a peer mentor or “buddy” for the intern.

Networking opportunities should also be considered, as well as regular check-ins with interns to discuss their individual needs and expectations. Given the importance of the internship to career choice, it is recommended that organisations discuss potential career paths with their interns, such as through “lunch and learn” discussions with managers and/or employees who have progressed in their careers in the organisation. Students are aware that pay, working hours, and shift work are among the most common issues in the hospitality industry; yet, they still require recognition and reward for their efforts. Structured learning opportunities and career development support can help. Additionally, given the importance of flexibility to Generation Z (Febriana & Mujib, 2024), greater emphasis needs to be placed on rotational assignments and scheduling. The latter would also help to address concerns around well-being. Hospitality establishments may be somewhat slow to adopt new working practices; yet, where students welcome alternative work schedules (Holmes et al., 2021), greater effort needs to be placed in this area. If educational institutions and their industry partners could extend their practices, this would not only help create a better balance between students’ expectations and their experience, but also help them prepare and build positive attitudes towards the work and the industry, thus enhancing overall satisfaction and encouraging students to remain in the hospitality sector. By synthesizing post-pandemic literature, this review contributes new evidence on which factors shape internship satisfaction, offering both theoretical and practical implications for rethinking hospitality internships.

Table 2:
*Recommendations
for Research and
Practice*

<i>Implications</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
Research	Methodology	Adopt qualitative methods to explore lived experiences and causes of satisfaction/dissatisfaction.
	Research design	Conduct longitudinal studies with pre- and post-internship data.
	Stakeholder perspectives	Include host organisations and educational institutions in future studies.
	Study variables	Use clear, well-defined variables; include the paid/unpaid status of internships
Practice	Supervision	Assign at least one university/college supervisor to oversee internship programs.
	Expectation setting	Utilize workshops, guest lectures, and alumni to help form realistic expectations, as well as throughout the hiring process.
	Learning contracts	Implement contracts to define tasks and skill development goals.
	Assessment	Address shortfalls in internship quality and industry requirements, as well as the need for reflective assessment
	Feedback & support	Provide regular feedback, peer mentors, and check-ins.
	Career development	Discuss career paths through structured activities, such as 'lunch and learn' sessions and networking opportunities.
	Respect	Offer recognition, structured learning opportunities, rotational assignments, and flexible scheduling.

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Declarations

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Conflict of (Competing) Interest

The author declares that he has no (competing) financial or non-financial interests related to this study.

Funding

The author self-funded the research, and no external funding was obtained for its completion.

Author Contributions (CRediT taxonomy):

Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing: Alison Donnelly.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Prof. Dr. Michael Neubert's (EIM) support in conceptualizing and proofreading this paper.

Data Availability and Supplementary Material

All data generated and analyzed during this study and the supplementary material are available upon reasonable request.

Prior Publication

The author confirms that this research has not been published previously and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Ethics Statement

This study complies with the ethical guidelines of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and adheres to the GDPR requirements for data protection. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of EIM, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Responsible AI Ethics Statement

This study used artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support tasks such as identifying relevant literature, and editing textual content. These tools were employed solely to enhance efficiency, and their outputs were critically reviewed to ensure alignment with research objectives. The use of AI adheres to ethical principles outlined in the EU AI Act, the OECD AI Principles, and the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, emphasizing transparency, fairness, and accountability. The authors made all final decisions and retain full responsibility for the integrity, rigor, and conclusions of this research.

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Appendix A

Reviewed Literature

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Methodology (sample size)</i>	
Amer et al. (2024)	The impact of internship programs' effectiveness on students' satisfaction and career choice	Middle East/ North Africa	Quantitative (344)	
Ghosh & Jhamb (2021)	How is the influence of hotel internship service quality a measurable factor in student interns' behavioral intentions? Mediating role of interns' satisfaction	South Asia	Quantitative (140)	
Armaha & Armahb (2021).	Internship satisfaction of tourism and hospitality management students	West Africa	Quantitative (80)	
Collins & Pearlman (2023)	Quality internships in the hospitality industry: A way to help address the labor shortage	USA	Quantitative (283)	
Kukreti & Dani (2021)	Determining the role of working environment, contextual factors, and task characteristics in internship satisfaction of hospitality undergraduates	South Asia	Quantitative (120)	
Lam et al. (2024)	The impact of internship job characteristics on students' hospitality careers: students' and employers' perspectives	East Asia	Mixed Methods (Quantitative 184 Qualitative 7)	
Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan (2023a)	Hospitality and tourism internship programme: Expectation versus reality	South Asia	Quantitative (228)	
Lingadkar & Sankaranarayanan (2023b)	Students' expectations and perceptions towards the tourism and hospitality internship program	South Asia	Quantitative (324)	

	<i>Study Justification</i>	<i>Main Findings</i>
	Lack of attention on the variables influencing hospitality interns' satisfaction during internships, and how satisfaction influences career choice	Interns experienced dissatisfaction due to long working hours, heavy workloads, inadequate financial compensation, night shifts, a lack of sufficient support from supervisors, disorganized internship structures, and negative societal attitudes toward hotel employees. As a result, students' interest in pursuing careers in the hotel industry was low following their internship experience.
	Limited research on internship service quality and its influence on satisfaction, career choice, and word-of-mouth	The service quality provided during hotel internships did not have a direct positive influence on interns' behavioral intentions. However, service quality significantly enhanced intern satisfaction. Satisfaction was found to play a key mediating role in the relationship between service quality and interns' willingness to share positive word-of-mouth.
	There is a gap in understanding and practice regarding how well internship programs meet student needs and expectations.	The organisational environment and individual factors emerged as the most significant factors for overall satisfaction.
	Need to examine what drives intern satisfaction post-pandemic Intern's expectations may differ from a traditional employment relationship	Interns were more satisfied when host organisations encouraged creativity, made them feel valued, and helped them explore long-term career opportunities. While mentorship through strong LMX relationships could enhance satisfaction, such relationships were not necessarily required for interns to feel satisfied.
	Builds on specific research on the importance of working environment, contextual factors, and task characteristics for hospitality students in India	Several factors influenced the internship satisfaction of hospitality management students, including the working environment, contextual elements, and task characteristics. The role of the supervisor was vital within the working environment.
	Lack of research on the job characteristics of interns and their satisfaction	Job characteristics had a positive influence on job satisfaction and job involvement. Job satisfaction and job involvement were also significantly associated with the students' future career intentions.
	Lack of research in the Indian hospitality sector	Students were generally satisfied with their experience, although the overall level of satisfaction was relatively low. Stable work shifts, opportunities for self-development, and a sense of being part of a team were the three critical aspects that required immediate attention.
	Lack of research in the Indian hospitality sector	While students expressed satisfaction with certain aspects of the internship program, their overall satisfaction was low. Two key factors, namely supervisory guidance and the organizational environment, as well as future employment opportunities, were identified as significant predictors of students' overall satisfaction.

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Methodology (sample size)</i>	
Liu et al. (2024)	The impact of mentorship on internship satisfaction among hospitality interns: The moderating role of thriving at work	East Asia	Quantitative (489)	
Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou (2021)	Hotel internships and student satisfaction as key determinants of career intention	Europe	Quantitative (172)	
Mensah et al. (2020).	Work-based social support and hospitality internship satisfaction	West Africa	Quantitative (151)	
Mensah et al. (2021)	Internship work-related stress: A comparative study between hospitality and marketing students	West Africa	Quantitative (286)	
Qu et al. (2021)	Factors affecting hotel interns' satisfaction with internship experience and career intention in China	East Asia	Quantitative (207)	
Shetu & Sayeda (2020)	An investigation into students' perception and expectations of the hospitality internship program in Dhaka	South Asia	Quantitative (50)	
Sihombing (2021)	The influence of individual factors on hospitality students' internship Satisfaction: The mediation role of perceived importance	South East Asia	Quantitative (178)	
Vo et al. (2022)	Challenges for the student satisfaction internship program in the hospitality and tourism industry in Vietnam	South East Asia	Mixed Methods (Qualitative 5, Quantitative 400)	
Vukic et al. (2022).	Students' perspective of internship in vocational higher education	Europe	Quantitative (189)	

	<i>Study Justification</i>	<i>Main Findings</i>
	Lack of attention on the influence of situational factors, specifically thriving at work, and how it may impact mentorship and satisfaction	Vertical and horizontal mentoring had a significantly positive impact on internship satisfaction, while learning and vitality moderated the relationship between these two types of mentoring.
	Limited understanding of students' perspectives on challenges associated with delivering hospitality management education, including internships	The most significant factors contributing to student satisfaction were the real working conditions and the quality of the learning experience. Lack of coordination, long working hours, and poor pay were identified as key challenges.
	Lack of investigation into the relationship between social support and hospitality internship satisfaction	Results indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between organisational, supervisor, and co-worker support and interns' satisfaction.
	Lack of research on the internship stress experiences Focuses on stressors from a developing country perspective. Limited attention on individuals' subjective experiences, such as internship satisfaction	Sources of work-related stress were most commonly related to lack of compensation, repetitive tasks, transportation difficulties, inconsistent expectations from supervisors, and long working hours. Hospitality students reported more stressors than marketing students. High stress was linked to lower internship satisfaction and increased intentions to leave the industry.
	Limited and outdated research on Chinese hospitality students Need to consider the unique work culture in China and the potential influence of national culture	Internship achievements, mentorship and assessment, interpersonal relationships, compensation, hotel features, hotel internship programming, and curriculum requirements influenced interns' satisfaction and their career intentions.
	Limited research on students' perceptions and expectations of internship programs in Bangladesh It is necessary to consider factors related to intern, university, and industry involvement.	Students placed significant value on the planning and training aspects of their programs. Completing the internship had a profoundly positive influence on their future careers in the hospitality industry. However, dissatisfaction arose due to the hierarchy and long working hours.
	Lack of attention to the individual factors that result in internship satisfaction	Individual factors had a positive and significant impact on internship job satisfaction, and they also positively influenced students' perception of the internship's importance. Perceived importance significantly contributed to job satisfaction and influenced individual factors in overall job satisfaction.
	Lack of research on the impact of working in English for students who are not yet fluent in a second language Need to consider individual challenges rather than just organisational support. Limited research in Vietnam	Significant challenges faced by interns included communication and conduct issues, long working hours, limited problem-solving skills, low self-confidence, inadequate supervision, and an overall unfavorable working environment.
	Lack of research examining students' motivations for hospitality and tourism programs, particularly in Europe	Students expressed the most excellent satisfaction with the objectivity of mentor evaluations, and the least satisfaction with the support provided by their schools during the internship. Overall satisfaction was also influenced by better alignment of theory and practice, fair compensation for overtime, and being assigned tasks relevant to their training.

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Methodology (sample size)</i>	
Xu et al. (2022)	The intersection of parental support and abusive supervision: A multi-wave design	East Asia	Quantitative (251)	
Yu et al. (2020)	Perceptual analysis of internship satisfaction and employment tendency in the hotel industry	East Asia	Quantitative (286)	
Zhong et al. (2022)	A European student's perspective on international internship value	Europe	Quantitative 112)	

	<i>Study Justification</i>	<i>Main Findings</i>
	<p>Lack of attention on how parental support may influence employee outcomes Little is known about an intern's perceptions of person-organisation fit The issue of abusive supervision in hospitality needs examination</p>	<p>Parental support influenced internship satisfaction and commitment to the industry through person-organization fit and the perceived quality of the internship. A cross-domain buffering effect was found, indicating that abusive supervision could erode the positive impact of family support and weaken the connection between parental support and person-organization fit.</p>
	<p>Hospitality and tourism internship experiences are underexplored, particularly in terms of quantitative analysis and model-based investigations.</p>	<p>Interns' perceptions of university management, support from hotel staff, and the overall hotel environment positively influenced their satisfaction. In contrast, their initial expectations had a negative impact on satisfaction. Students' intention to pursue employment in the industry was strengthened by their positive perceptions of hotel work support, hotel environment, and overall internship satisfaction.</p>
	<p>Broad and inconsistent concepts of value European hospitality internship experience is less explored</p>	<p>European students' perception of value played a key role in forming their satisfaction and loyalty intentions. While both the benefits they received and the sacrifices they made influenced this perception, the benefits had a greater impact on their overall evaluation.</p>