

# Influence of Internships on the motivation of hospitality students to continue career paths within the Hospitality Industry

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**Influence of Internships on the motivation of hospitality students to continue career paths  
within the Hospitality Industry**

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## **Abstract**

In the recent years the hospitality industry has experienced quite a lot of challenges that added up to its notorious reputation that is built upon culture of overwork, low salaries and difficulties associated with career enhancements. Thus it does not come as a surprise that a lot of workers are deciding to disengage from the industry in question, and if the negative trend continues to evolve simply there will be no employees to drive the industry. Therefore it is important to solve this issue by potentially focusing on the talent pool of the young hospitality explorers who get to know the industry through their internships. This research was conducted in order to examine the potential issues that can occur during the internship, and thus act as the discouraging factors to pursue career in Hospitality in the future. Additionally, the research was also aimed at discovering whether the international students experience more challenges during their experiences when compared to local students. The research was done by distributing an online survey to hospitality students studying in RIT Croatia, Dubrovnik and University of Dubrovnik. The results suggested that the majority of students feel uncertain in regards to their future careers within the hospitality because of the issues/challenges they have faced. However due to this research it was possible to identify the areas causing dissatisfaction and thus the findings could be used as possible ideas that once implemented can help to slow down the potential employee turnover among the young workforce.

*Keywords: hospitality internships, hospitality students, motivation, employee engagement, challenges, working environment, hospitality industry, international students, local students.*

The Hospitality and Tourism industry has been challenged profusely in recent years. The causes of these challenges vary from the implementation of technology, introducing more sustainable practices of leading business, adapting to the new norms commanded by the pandemic to the constantly changing demands and growing purchasing power of the customers, as well as high attrition rates (Impos Blogpost, 2021). The enumerated challenges are not to be assigned the grades of a more important or a less important issue to deal with. However, this research paper will mainly refer to the issues of the high attrition rates. The reasoning behind that is the fact the challenge in question has a direct correlation with the hospitality employees that are one of the crucial variables driving the existence of the industry. According to Economist's recent article "Why workers are fleeing the hospitality sector" (2021), the previous year was rough. Approximately 700,000 workers pursuing a career in hospitality quitted their jobs on average each month in the last year. If this anti-trend continues progressing there is a probability that the hospitality industry how it is known nowadays will be associated with an unpopular career choice and in the long run might fall into obscurity provided there are no employees to run it.

Taking into consideration the seriousness of the situation, it is of absolute importance to focus on the sources of the hospitality talent "supply" as well as to identify the factors that can potentially make them not pursue a career in the hospitality sector. This research paper will primarily focus on the fresh hospitality talent presented by the students who get to know the industry through internships representing an integral part of the Hospitality and Tourism academic programs. And while internships are perceived as a gateway from the classroom to the real world, paradoxically they can also become a source of apathy that put off students from becoming Hospitality professionals (Wang, 2021; Mensah et al., 2020).

**The overall importance of the internships in the context of Hospitality Education. Key players and stages involved in the internship programs**

Before delving into the specifics regarding the role internships play when it comes to hospitality students' experiences, it is important to state there are three main parties involved who make cooperative education happen: students, employers, and educational establishments. All of the three parties involved are governed by the industry demands as well as more personal goals and motivations that if aligned will result in effective collaboration and eventually a successful internship experience. Besides, all parties have certain benefits they can gain from the vocational training in question (Chen, 2012).

Students' perspective: Without a doubt, some students approach the idea of cooperative education as an obligatory activity that will allow them to collect a required number of credits and complete the course. But other students see the internship as a brilliant opportunity to apply their acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations, build a network and gain new hands-on experience, learn to work as team players, learn to be accountable and confident, and acquire specific industry-based skills. All of these learning opportunities and potential outcomes can be translated into a competitive advantage in the student's future career aspirations and will help to land a desirable job placement (Rahman et al., 2015; Donina, 2015).

Employers: While students get a chance to enhance their skills in a more active mode of learning, the employers who provide students with internship placements also have what to benefit from. They can enjoy the influx of fresh ideas, the vision that can lead to improvement and innovation; receive extra help at the hectic times of the high season as well as think more proactively and start investing in the interns whom they can hire later on as their permanent workers (Chen, 2018; Donina, 2015).

Educational Establishments: Internships can be seen as leeway for the academic institutions to build solid networks with the leaders of the industry who will not only guarantee potential job placements for the students but will also share valuable industry insights that can be implemented in the curriculum. Thus, the universities will get a chance to increase their value

propositions to the current as well as future students and thus will enhance the competitiveness (Donina, 2015).

The abovementioned parties embrace three stages of internship: planning, organizing, and controlling. As Donina (2015) states the role of every party involved varies depending on the stage of the internship. During the initial stages, the students have to express their willingness and their zeal for learning. Speaking of the employers, their main role pertains to identifying their main goals and thus establishing hiring needs and designing internship programs that will be based upon these very goals. When it comes to educational establishments, their main goal is to ensure cooperating with trustworthy employers who are genuinely interested in the development of the future talent and are ready to go the extra mile in achieving it. Additionally, universities are responsible for controlling the stage as they are also responsible for ensuring that the students are working but are also satisfied with their experience. Providing that the educational establishments are in charge of collecting feedback and coming up with ways of improving the internship programs they have on offer. Notably, the importance of collaboration and communication among the parties is of the utmost importance for the internship to be qualified as an effective and satisfactory cooperative learning experience (Puri, 2017; Sihombing, 2021).

### **Factors affecting students` internship satisfaction**

It may seem that the internship process and the stages involved in its execution do not present too many challenges for the parties involved thus making it relatively simple to ensure students have a positive internship experience. And yet the hospitality industry is constantly challenged by the lack of talent while hospitality students decide to take different career paths (Belhassen et al., 2020).

Speaking of effective internships, it should be stated that there are three main categories of factors that influence the students' satisfaction with the internship processes and thus could either mean career development or a complete detour from the hospitality path.

The first and foremost category is called **working environment** which can be seen as the basis on which students' internships are developing. The working environment is also referred to as the organizational environment seeing as it pertains to the overall organizational culture comprising colleagues the interns will get a chance to work alongside with and build effective communication; general learning and growing opportunities presented during the experiential learning as well as the company's perception and dedication to providing its employees with a chance to advance in their careers (Kukreti & Dani, 2021).

It should be noted that interactions and cooperation with colleagues could be perceived as the most fundamental element of the working environment. Once the students manage to establish any connection with their co-workers it can contribute to a positive working environment and in the long run can lead to higher team performance (Mensah et al., 2020). Besides, most interns are characterized by a somewhat unclear perception of their professional self-worth and thus could experience a lack of confidence. Consequently, building relationship with colleagues that is based on support, appreciation, readiness to share knowledge, and stay approachable could contribute to more effective integration of newbies into the working environment (Mensah et al., 2020).

The second category is called **contextual factors** as far as it encompasses the aspects that surround the experiential learning process: location; a need/absence of a need to commute; working hours; fixed tenure training; payment. Provided students get to do their internship at a prime location that either doesn't require any commuting or the company takes care of this aspect by providing transportation can increase chances of students' satisfaction with their job placement. Moreover, flexible working hours could also benefit students' satisfaction with the

internships but at the same time couldn't be considered quite relevant seeing as the hospitality industry is mostly characterized by fixed schedules and defined working hours. However, while many students might prefer to have relative freedom when it comes to working schedules, most of them still stress the need for having a fixed tenure training as they believe it could make them more disciplined and provide more opportunities for learning to see as the fixed tenure training implies sequential learning, or, to put it simply, a rotation in different departments. Provided students are aware of the duration of each sequence/time they will spend in a certain department they will feel more enthusiastic about learning opportunities and thus will be more satisfied with the internship (Kukreti & Dani, 2021).

Yet, the most valuable constituent within the contextual factors is presented by the financial compensation. The very essence of internships presupposes somewhat a lower salary range but in any case, most of the students would prefer to get at least some financial incentive that could only add to the overall satisfaction with the internship experience (Kukreti & Dani, 2021). The desire of students to be paid could be explained through the so-called "give" component that they sacrifice or have already sacrificed to get to the job placement they hold during the experiential learning process. On the one hand, students believe that while sacrificing their time to commute, making an effort at work, devoting their energy, and also investing into their education it would be just logical to at least get some monetary reward (Rivera et al., 2018).

Last but not the least category is referred to as **task characteristics**. While acquiring internship experience within a specific working environment that is supported by a certain context students are performing various tasks that not only represent the core of their experience but can also be seen as the essence of the overall internship experience. To ensure that students are satisfied with the internship they must receive clear tasks that correspond with the job description of their positions; provide a chance to practice employee empowerment, or in other words, provide relative freedom to make decisions; dedicate to the overall productivity of the organization and



could be translated into tangible results in the long run that could be utilized by the company even after the internship comes to an end (Kukreti & Dani, 2021).

### **Additional Factors influencing students' satisfaction with the internships: perceived supervisor support & students' expectations**

Earlier it has been mentioned that colleagues are perceived as one of the main constituents of the working environment that can set the tone of the whole internship experience. However, supervisors are not to be overseen as an additional element of the working environment that presumably can have an even bigger impact on the students' satisfaction with the cooperative learning experience. It has to be stated that supervisors are regarded as the representatives of the companies and the quality of relationships they manage to establish with their subordinates can serve either as a motivation to reach even more significant results while thriving in positive working attitudes or be discouraged because of the toxic surroundings (Mensah et al., 2020). Interns are not an exception and positive relationships established with the supervisors could be a major factor of students' motivation. Hospitality newbies need to know that their efforts are noticed and appreciated; that they can count on the support and approachability of the supervisor; but also they respect the supervisor and see them as a role model they want to learn from (Mensah et al., 2020).

Students' expectations from the internships are equally important as they can be regarded as the "default settings" with which the young labor force is approaching their experiential learning processes. Students who are more realistic and more inclined towards positive thinking are more likely to be more satisfied with the internships. It should be also mentioned that academic preparedness is seen as an aspect that determines the extent to which students can benefit from transferring the skills they learned in an academic domain to a real working environment (Koc *et al.*, 2014; Sihombing, 2021). Besides, having command of certain theoretical knowledge can

help students to act more bravely and be in charge of their experiential learning process due to taking initiative and not simply waiting for the supervisor's instructions.

However, there are certain pitfalls associated with students' expectations that are based on their self-perception and thus can lead to a negative internship experience. At times because of attending higher educational establishments and learning about hospitality in theory students tend to perceive themselves as "highly educated" individuals who can aim for more significant positions (e.g. management trainees, Marketing & Sales assistants, HR interns, etc.) But in reality, students face an awakening discrepancy as they get job offers for mainly operational positions (Pusiran et al., 2020). Some students find it particularly hard to accept and embrace the reality and thus enter the internship program with already negative perceptions. Although, while students' ambitions for the higher positions are quite comprehensible it is advisable to keep in mind that in case students are just entering the hospitality sphere they have to stay more humble and try to appreciate opportunities that will help to translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills.

Seeing as there are so many factors and components that constitute the internship programs there is a high possibility of arising challenges, be it unregulated working hours, unhealthy working environment, unstructured tasks, or absence of financial compensation that can influence students' satisfaction with the experiential learning process and in the long run, can result into the decision not to pursue hospitality career. On the other hand, in case students don't experience any major issues as pertains to the abovementioned factors and thus are satisfied with the overall experiential learning process, it is likely to enhance the chances of their career progression within hospitality (Farmaki, 2018).

### **Globalization of workforce**

More and more businesses are getting interested in the international workforce seeing as employees from overseas have a lot to offer, starting from bringing a fresh perspective to

allowing the companies to cut the costs of employment (Rivera et al., 2018). However, to employ international workers, companies should keep in mind that without prior exposure to the working scene abroad several associated challenges can decrease the number of employees who would like to embark on tasks abroad. Considering employees have never had any experience of working outside of their country they might be unwilling to leave their comfort zone and immerse into a new culture. One of the possible solutions to this challenge is introducing and promoting internships overseas as the primary stepping stones in one's career that will cultivate necessary habits and will make individuals ready to work in foreign countries. The hospitality industry is a bright example of following this exact scenario.

It is believed that students who have experienced study abroad internships tend to be more open to international experiences in their careers while being more valued by the companies as they are considered to be more skilled, knowledgeable, and possessing a holistic perspective (Rivera et al., 2018). Students are ready to embrace internships abroad because they believe that this very cultural enrichment will grant them better chances of employment once they graduate and enter a competitive and harsh working scene (Farmaki, 2018).

When choosing to go through internships abroad international students require the same factors to be satisfied with their experience. Similarly, they are likely to get disappointed and unsatisfied as a result of failures associated with the abovementioned factors, be it working environment, contextual factors, tasks characteristics, perceived supervisor support, and expectations. However, when it comes to students going on internships abroad some additional social factors can either benefit or serve as supplemental discouragement. These social factors include language, culture, the rhythm of life, currency, the way people are used to doing business, etc.

Thus, this research paper is aimed at testing the following hypothesis: International students are exposed to a higher level of challenges/stress factors when it comes to internships and thus are more likely to be discouraged to pursue their future in the Hospitality Industry.

## **Method**

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this research was to analyze how certain categories, namely working environment, contextual job characteristics, task characteristics, perceived supervisor support and students' motivation that constitute the internship programs can affect the overall satisfaction of students with their cooperative education experience and in the long run shape students' motivation to proceed with their careers in the hospitality sector or change the direction of their potential professional development considering they were not satisfied with their internships. Additionally, the research was aimed at identifying whether the foreign hospitality students pursuing internship overseas are exposed to more challenges and thus are more likely to disembark from the hospitality career journey in comparison to the local interns.

### ***Participants***

There were 52 participants who responded to the survey. The majority of the respondents were female (56%) and the rest were male (37%) and non-binary (6%). The respondents of the research were the foreign and local hospitality students from two educational establishments, namely RIT Croatia, Dubrovnik and University of Dubrovnik who are attending these universities either full-time or because of the Erasmus program. Additionally, the respondents taking part in the survey were required to have had at least one experience in terms of the cooperative education. The questionnaire was distributed amongst the students in electronic format.

### ***Instrument***

The distributed questionnaire comprised twenty-six questions, twenty-one of which pertained to the factors that constitute five groups of categories that come with the internship experience: working environment, contextual job characteristics, task characteristics, perceived supervisor

support and students' expectations as well as complementary set of questions aimed at identifying further motivations of students when it comes to a career in Hospitality Industry. Additional four questions were aimed at identifying demographics of the participants. The survey was completed by an open-ended question that the respondents could answer in order to provide any additional or share their thoughts when it comes to other factors that could have influenced their cooperative education experience. Nineteen questions were presented through a 5-Likert scale, which tested the level of students' agreement with the questions that were presented through statements, for example: "I think that internship program is essential part of the learning process." The rest of the questions were multiple choice and required students to either answer simple "yes" or "no" questions or choose the corresponding options e.g. indicating the quantity of internship experiences as well as departments students have had internships within. Seeing most participants of the survey were foreign students all of the questions were presented in English. The survey was distributed online via Google Forms.

### ***Results***

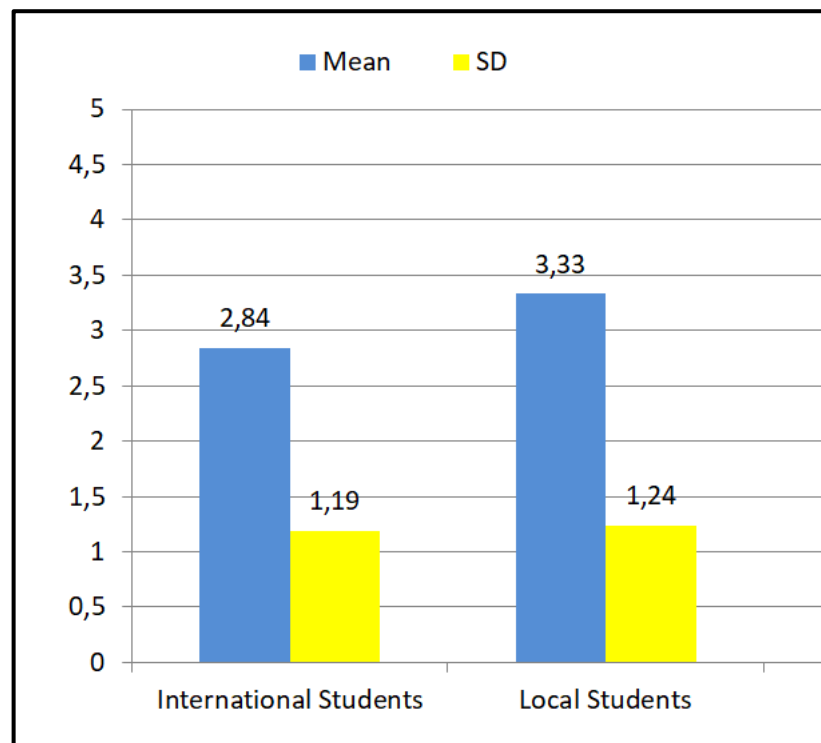
The data from the survey was primarily collected from the foreign hospitality students and later on from local hospitality students in order to analyze and determine the key factors influencing hospitality students' satisfaction with internships and in the long run their motivation to continue climbing hospitality career ladder or not. Later on the obtained data from foreign hospitality students and local hospitality students was compared in order to identify whether foreign students encountered more challenges during their internships in a foreign setting.

When it came to the working environment factors both local and foreign hospitality students claimed that they were generally satisfied with the organizational culture they found themselves working within (M=3.54 international students) and (M=3.65 local students).

Speaking of contextual factors both categories of hospitality students were paid, however they admitted to not a quite fair monetary compensation which can be proved by the following data (M=2.84, SD=1.19 international students) and (M=3.33, SD= 1,24 local students).

**Figure 1**

*Perception of the fairness of monetary compensation as a part of contextual factors influencing students` internship satisfaction*

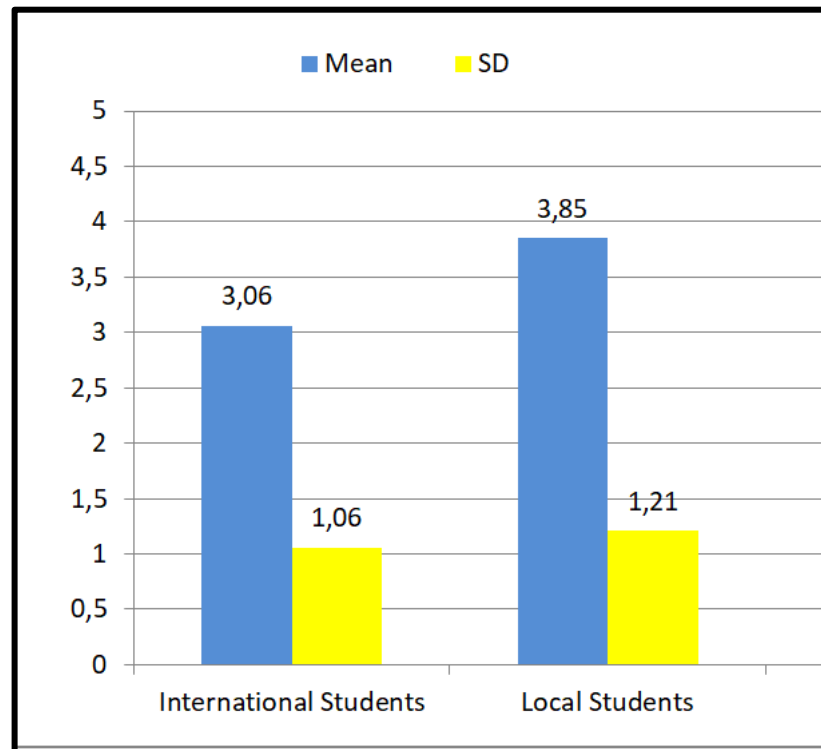


As for the task characteristics foreign and local hospitality students have stated they were satisfied with the way their responsibilities were organized provided that they were trained and explained how to perform their job so that through the internship they would have a chance to be empowered and perform tasks independently (M=3.51 international students) and (M=3.75 local students).

Perceived supervisory support has proved to be more pronounced through the local hospitality students` internship experiences when compared to the experiences of interns from abroad (M=3.06, SD=1.06 international students) and (M=3.85, SD=1,21 local students).

**Figure 2**

*Comparison of perceived supervisory support towards local hospitality interns and interns from abroad*



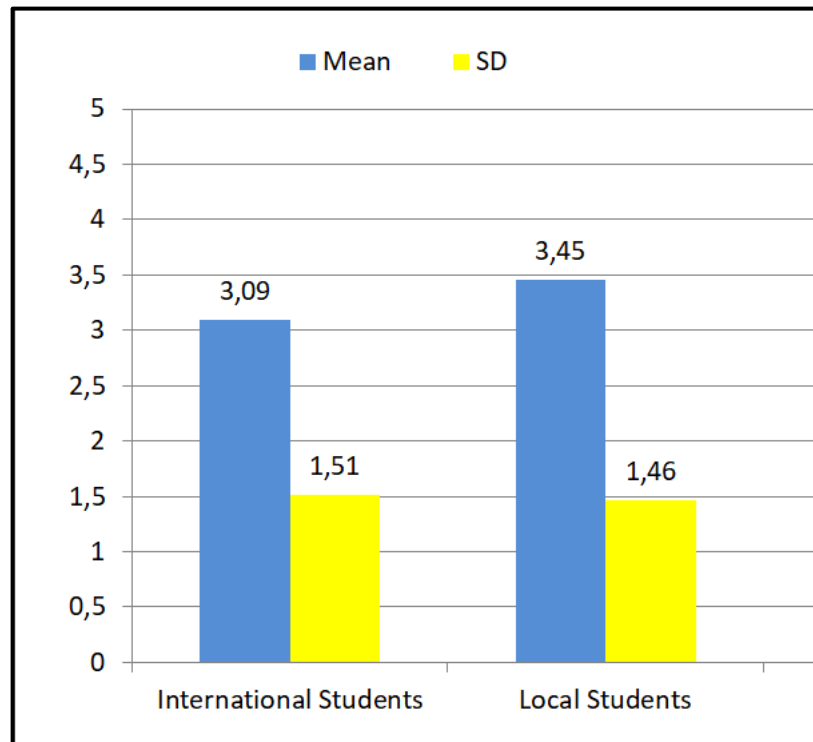
Students' perception of the hospitality internships has shown to be an influential factor on the overall satisfaction with the cooperative education experiences seeing as most of the students, foreign and local alike, claimed to embark on their hands-on experiences with a positive attitude believing that internship are essential elements of the learning process when speaking about Hospitality Industry in general (M=4.03 international students) and (M=3.75 local students). Moreover, both international and local hospitality students stated that they believe that these experiential learning opportunities provide them with better chances of landing a job in the future (M=3.64 international students) and (M= 3.40 local students).

Regardless of the positive results mentioned above both foreign and local students when asked whether they are going to pursue their career in the Hospitality Industry upon the completion of the cooperative education, majority of the students from both categories found themselves

somewhere in-between when answering this question which can be proved by (M=3.09, SD=1.51 international students) and (M=3.45, SD=1.46 local students).

**Figure 3**

*Motivation of international and local students to continue their career in the Hospitality Industry*



This level of discouragement could potentially be explained by one of the peculiarities of the hospitality internships that have to do with the long working hours that at times necessitate students to overwork and thus follow unfixed schedules. Interns from overseas as well as locals have admitted to not having balanced working hours which can be proved by the following data (M= 1.3, SD=0.47 international students) and (M=1.4, SD=0.50 local students).

Besides, a portion of dissatisfaction can potentially come from the students' approach to their cooperative education experiences as the majority of students has admitted to rarely asking for the feedback about their performance which can be tracked back to the idea that presumably when not asking and thus not receiving feedback students were not always sure whether they were on the right track and thus whether they were doing a good job (M=2.80 international



students). However, it is interesting to mention that the local students have claimed to ask for the feedback more frequently ( $M=3.33$  local students).

Considering the abovementioned results it can be stated that both foreign and local students are facing similar challenges and thus have somewhat similar experiences the only difference being the fact that locals do feel more at ease which again can be proved by their ability to ask for feedback and have a better support from the supervisor. Apparently, the most crucial element that could equalize the conditions for both categories of students is the foreign students' command of the local language. Data has showed that not knowing the local language is a significant barrier that foreign interns face during their cooperative experiences ( $M=3.80$ ).

When it comes to analysis of open-ended questions it should be mentioned that some students, foreign and local alike, have mentioned that the duration of the internship plays a crucial role and has a significant influence on the overall satisfaction with the internships, seeing as the average internship duration is approximately three months. According to respondents this time period is not enough for acquiring the internship experience to its full extent because usually these very three months are needed just for the adjustment to the new working place. Besides, interns who have gone through multiple internships have mentioned that their motivation to stay within the hospitality industry is decreasing with each next consecutive internship because of the poor variety of the job positions that mainly pertain to entry level positions and thus don't allow interns to grow professionally.

## **Discussion**

The results have shown that the overall motivation of the hospitality students, international and local alike, is decreasing, seeing as the international students admitted to almost being certain about disengaging from the hospitality careers, while the locals are not completely sure yet but are likely to choose other industries for the future career development. This negative findings can be explained by the fact that international students do face more challenges when compared to

the local students, that primarily arise from the inability to communicate in the local language and thus to build effective communication with their peers, colleagues and supervisors. Therefore, the absence of the effective communication leads to other challenges that are connected to acquiring learning and development opportunities that become at times impossible as the students might feel discouraged to even ask for the feedback from their supervisor.

Speaking of the local students, they have also admitted to rarely asking their supervisors for feedback, which can be explained due to them feeling as hospitality newbies who are not ready to own their experiences and be able to stay engaged while driving the internship experience.

On the positive note, both local and international students have claimed to be actively involved in volunteering activities and thus seeking additional learning opportunities from time to time.

The findings have also shown that both groups of hospitality students admitted to embarking on their internships with the positive attitude that comes as a result of their academic preparedness and excitement about the potential working experience that in the long run could be translated into more opportunities to land better jobs.

However, as it was mentioned above throughout the internships students did face certain challenges that eventually decreased their level of motivation. These challenges mainly pertained to the working environment and contextual factors, specifically the monetary compensation and the ability to build relationships with the colleagues who at times can display hostile behavior as they might see interns as the competitors.

Taking the above stated in consideration it should be stated that the research has its limitations, specifically the fact that of the interns (respondents of the survey) have gone so far only through one internship and thus were basing their responses on their single experience. Consequently, they are somewhat biased as in case their experience turned out to be negative, they are more likely to provide negative comments and additionally to state that they would like to disengage

from the industry. Moreover, the research and some questions presented to the respondents can be under toned by subjectivity, as, for example, what one student considers a fair monetary compensation will be seen unfair in the eyes of others.

Speaking of the suggestions for the future research it has to be noted that more research should be done specifically in the areas connected to the factors accompanying internships that are likely to cause students' dissatisfaction, specifically factors pertaining to working environment and task characteristics that should be designed to drive employee/intern engagement and thus improve their experiences that in the long run will increase their motivation to continue their professional journeys in the hospitality industry.

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## Appendix

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I was provided with instructions about the tasks I was given. \*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

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I was given enough autonomy in my daily operations. \*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

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I felt discouraged if I had to commute to work. \*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree