

English Students' Perceptions towards Internship in Hotel Industry: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract. Internship program plays a vital role in exposing students to real activities. During an internship program, a study program needs to develop the 'link and match' between curriculum and industries. Hotel industry absorbs a great number of English department graduates; however, data showed a quite significant decrease in the number of students conducting internship program in hotel industries. Through a qualitative inquiry, this study examined students' perceptions on their internship program at hotel industries. Using purposeful sampling, twenty-three sixth-semester students who had conducted their internships in hotel industries were selected as the participants. An online, structured, closed-ended questionnaire was distributed, followed by a semi structured interview with six out of the twenty-three participants. Data were analysed thematically. The findings of this study are expected to minimize the gap between education and the workplace and improve the implementation of internship program, particularly, in English study program.

Keywords: *English students, perception, internship, hotel industry*

1 Introduction

Education is considered one of the integral systems in society. It is highly essential in shaping new ideas, knowledge, hard skills and soft skills needed by students for their future [1]. To reach the aims of education, higher education institutions have set various teaching and learning activities for students as lecture, practice, practicum, projects and others. On top of those teaching and learning activities, they also design an internship program in their curricula.

Internship is a training program designed for student interns to develop hard skills and soft skills needed for their future career. Additionally, an internship program as an initial stage that bridges student interns to industries, in which they can get actual insights and experiences about the workplace, working patterns and working environment [2]. Besides helping students in career preparation, an internship program also brings such other benefits for them as

strengthening students' self-esteem, self-actualization and self-satisfaction in their lifelong learning process [3]. In virtue of the disruptive development in industries and the growing demand of competent and adaptive graduates, most academic and vocational higher education institutions in Indonesia have paid special attention to industrial internship programs for their students. One of them is Politeknik Negeri Jember.

Politeknik Negeri Jember, located in East Java, is one of the leading state polytechnics in Indonesia which requires the students to take an industrial internship program. As a program of study within the umbrella organization of Politeknik Negeri Jember, English study program Politeknik Negeri Jember (in Indonesian version: Program Studi Bahasa Inggris, and further abbreviated as PSBI) has set up an industrial internship for the students in their fifth semester. One of the industry categories where the students of PSBI have their internship program is hospitality industry, especially hotels.

In 2021, the data from the implementation of PSBI internship program showed that hotel industry had the second highest number of student interns from PSBI, reaching 33% out of 70 students. Meanwhile, the place that had the highest number of PSBI students conducting an internship program in 2021, approximately 46% out of 70 PSBI student interns, was government tourism office. In 2022, the number of PSBI students who conducted their internships in hotel industry decreased quite significantly compared to the previous year. Interestingly, although hotel industry does not have the highest number of PSBI student interns, the results of PSBI tracer study have shown that a significant number of PSBI graduates work in hotel industry. This interesting phenomenon needs to be further explored. Thus, in this study, the authors explored the gap between the decrease of PSBI student interns in hotel industry and the high rate of PSBI graduate absorption in hotel industry. This study focused on exploring the PSBI students' perceptions on the effectiveness of their internship programs in hotel industry.

Perception is one of the fundamental ways of coming upon reality; thus, the way reality is captured or how the meeting with it is constructed should be explored if there is a need to learn something about a certain reality [4]. Seen from a cognitive dimension, perception is the process by which meaning is considerably attached to certain experiences [5]. Students' perception is closely related to gaining information from their learning experience [6]. It means that perception can be constructed and be taken into account in evaluating certain things when an individual has experienced or known the things. By exploring the students' perceptions, this study is expected to minimize the gap between the decrease of PSBI student interns in hotel industry and the high rate of graduate absorption and the high demand of graduates majoring English from hospitality industry, especially hotels.

A previous study about students' perception on the effectiveness of an industrial internship program was conducted in the Department of Textile in University of Moratuwa Sri Lanka in 2019 [7]. The researchers, through certain literature references, constructed a conceptual model of the factors affecting the effectiveness of the industrial internship program. It contains two main variables: independent and dependent variables. The following diagram presents a clear look on the proposed conceptual framework.

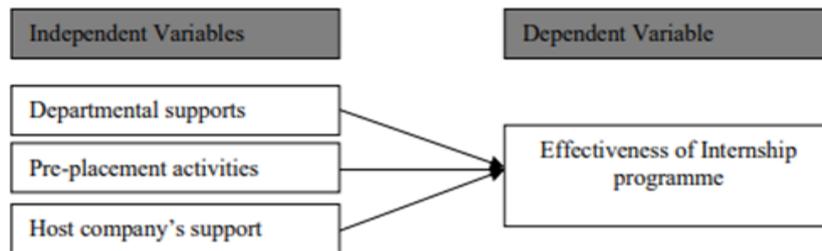


Fig. 1. The Conceptual Model by Karunaratne & Pierra (2019)

The above-shown diagram shows that there are three main factors on which the effectiveness of an industrial internship program depends. They are departmental support, efficiency of the pre-placement activities, and the host company's support. Departmental support is the kind of support provided by the internship unit staff for the students in conducting the industrial internship program. Then, pre-placement activities refer to an orientation program provided by a university internship unit prior to sending student interns. The last independent variable, host company's support, highlights the relationship between the academic institute and the host company of an industrial internship program [7].

In this study, the authors modified the above-explained conceptual model by adding an additional independent variable: curricular activities. To this extent, curricular activities refer to the teaching and learning activities within the courses provided by the study program prior to an industrial internship program. Due that curricular activities that the students took from the first semester would considerably shape their knowledge and skills development, the authors suggested that they are also taken into account in investigating the effectiveness of an industrial internship program. Therefore, in this study, the conceptual framework used to explore the students' perceptions towards the industrial internship program in hotel industry can be shown as follows.

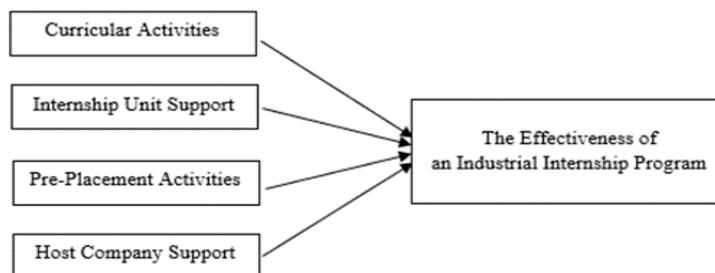


Fig. 2. The Modified Conceptual Model of the Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness of an Industrial Internship Program

2 Method

Within a qualitative approach, this study adopts a case study design because it focuses on one particular case. In a case study, researchers conduct in-depth exploration on such certain bound systems as individuals, activities, events, or processes based on various data collection methods [8].

The data were taken from the sixth semester students of PSBI Politeknik Negeri Jember in academic year 2021/2022 who have conducted their internships at hotel industries. After gathering information, the researchers got twenty-three students who met the criteria. They conducted the internship program at hotel industries in the odd semester of academic year 2021/2022. A purposeful sampling technique was used in this study since it is widely used in qualitative research for identifying and getting information-rich cases and for making the most effective use of limited resources [9].

Data were collected by distributing an online, structured, closed-ended questionnaire in a five-point Likert scale to the twenty-three selected participants. The questionnaire items were adapted from those created by the previous research [7]. There were twenty statement items divided into four main categories in the questionnaire. Then, the data collection method was continued by an online semi-structured interview with six participants who were willing to join the interview. Then, the data collected from the questionnaire and interview were analyzed thematically based on the modified conceptual model of the factors contributing to the effectiveness of an industrial internship program.

3 Findings and Discussion

The data resulted from the five Likert scale questionnaire were analysed thematically based on the four categories, i.e., curricular activities, internship unit support, pre-placement activities, and host company support. The percentage presented in the following tables of each category was derived from the total number of options 'agree' and 'strongly agree' answered by the participants in the questionnaire. The data presentation and discussion are shown in the following subsections.

3.1 Curricular Activities

This category was included in the questionnaire for exploring the students' perceptions towards internship in hotel industry that they had conducted because students' knowledge, insights and skills were developed and trained through curricular activities in the curriculum of a study program. The following table is the result of the questionnaire for the curricular activities category.

Table 1. Questionnaire results for curricular activities

Curricular Activities	Students
The study program provides course(s) supporting the preparations for an internship program in hotel industry.	96%

The materials presented in the course(s) are in line with the competencies needed for an internship program in hotel industry.	43%
The practice conducted in the course(s) is industry-focused.	39%
Teaching-learning media in the course(s) fulfill the hotel industry standards.	22%
Industry lecturer(s) in the course(s) are needed to enhance the competencies needed for an internship program in hotel industry.	91%

The data above showed that the students had positive views towards the courses in PSBI curriculum, in which there were courses supporting students in preparing their internship program in hotel industry. However, this positive view could not be taken for granted as the success of the courses, due that the students tended to have negative views related to the curricular activities in the courses. Through a follow-up interview conducted, the students stated that what they faced during their internship program in hotel industry was way different from what they had learned and got in the courses. The students further agreed that the existence of industry lecturer(s) was highly needed in curricular activities prior to an industrial internship program to bridge the education setting and the workplace reality. The gap that the students felt between curricular activities and internship program needs to be minimized in order to provide well-structured internship program for PSBI students. A well-structured internship program will help students get a suitable job within six months upon their graduation [10].

3.2 Internship Unit Support

The following table showed the results of the questionnaire especially about the support form the internship unit in PSBI.

Table 2. Questionnaire results for internship unit support

Internship Unit Support	Students
The internship unit provides clear initial information about an internship program in hotel industry.	65%
The internship unit sets a clear agreement about the industrial internship program with the hotels as the host company.	39%
The internship unit coordinator and staff are always available when required.	74%
The internship unit coordinator and staff are always helpful.	87%
The internship unit coordinator and staff attend to arising issue promptly.	57%

The data showed that the students mostly had positive attitude towards the internship unit of PSBI. However, there was one item deviated in the data. It is about a clear agreement with

hotel industry. The results of the follow-up interview revealed that some of the students who did their internship program at certain hotel industry felt that the internship unit had not set a clear agreement related to working hours of the student interns. Some of them experienced overtime and work overload. Therefore, they were questioning about whether the internship unit had set any agreement with the host company prior to the industrial internship program.

3.3 Pre-Placement Activities

Before starting an industrial internship program, the students need to carry out certain pre-placement activities, from registration to briefing. This set of activities is usually held within three to four months prior to the schedule of industrial internship program. The following table showed the results of the students' perceptions related to pre-placement activities conducted in PSBI, especially related to hotel industry internship.

Table 3. Questionnaire results for pre-placement activities

Pre-Placement Activities	Students
Comprehensive guideline about internship registration in hotel industry is provided by the internship unit.	83%
An efficient placement procedure is carried out to select internship places.	87%
A rigorous selection is carried out by the internship unit and hotel industry.	70%
The briefing given by the internship unit is sufficient and informative.	47%
The briefing given by the internship unit helps the students interns prepare the internship in hotel industry.	43%

It is shown in the table that the scores for the briefing activity given by the internship unit were not as high as the three other items. Although the scores were not relatively small, they still showed the tendency of dissatisfaction from the students. Further exploration from the semi structured interview revealed that the students who did their internship program in hotel industry felt that the briefing given prior to the internship implementation had not covered detailed preparataion for conducting an internship in hotel industry.

3.4 Host Company Support

Hotel as the host company for the student interns in conducting their industrial internship plays a pivotal role in the success of the internship program. The following table showed the data that provide information on how the students viewed the hotel company in which they conducted the internship.

Table 4. Questionnaire results for host company support

Host Company Support	Students
The hotel industry provides real job and workplace experience.	96%

The hotel industry provides well-structured training to cover all areas in the company.	87%
The hotel industry carries out an evaluation upon the completion of the industrial internship program.	78%
The hotel industry is supportive in providing transport/meal/allowance for student interns.	35%
The hotel industry sets standard working hours for student interns.	70%

The data from the first questionnaire item in this section indicated that the students mostly had the same exposure on real job and workplace experience although they conducted the internship program in six different hotel industries. This is most likely due to the good implementation of standard operating procedure (SOP) for every position and division in hotel industries. Even though the detailed steps of SOP for certain positions and divisions may vary from one hotel to another, they still have the same standardized rules. This is also supported by the data from the interview which provided information that the student interns needed to learn the SOP details for the positions they would have in certain hotel divisions.

The results of the interview provided further information about the fourth item in the questionnaire section about host company support. The students who conducted the internship in hotel A stated that they got lunch meals in their host company while the other students in different hotels informed that they did not get any transport, meal or allowance. It seems that the policy related to the provision of transportation, meal, or allowance for student interns in a hotel cannot be generalized. Therefore, the percentage of this item in the questionnaire was the smallest of all.

Since the percentage of the questionnaire item about standard working hours was not as high as the other three items, the authors tried to explore more information about the standard working hours in the student interns' host company. From the interview, it is concealed that some of the students had experienced overtime working hours.

Conclusion

To conclude, the gap between curricular or teaching-learning activities and work-based learning activities in hotel industry, the lack of hotel-related exploration during pre-placement activities, and the overtime working hours may result in the decreasing number of PSBI students who conducted their internship in hotel industry, apart from the quite high absorbance of English study program graduates in the hotel industry. Thus, a comprehensive support and improvement in the curricular activities, the internship unit, and the university-industry relationship need to be conducted and reviewed periodically for improving the quality of internship programs and further optimizing the employment of graduates.

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