

Student satisfaction and expectations from internships in Greece: A comparison between Greek and International students.

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Abstract

The hospitality internship experience can be viewed as the critical turning point in which students decide whether to stay or leave the industry. The aim of this paper is to identify the factors that contribute to student satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) from this working and learning experience by comparing experiences between Greek and International students. A survey among 172 students was conducted. The findings suggest that overall students demonstrated a favourable perception towards their internship experience. There were no significant differences between Greek and International students on the internship expectations. The most important factors contributing to students' satisfaction were the real working conditions and the learning experience. Greek students' expectations were focused on learning in a professional environment, whereas international students on the career prospects. All participants acknowledged the long working hours, poor pay and lack of coordination as the key challenges. This study proposes that hospitality management undergraduate programmes should offer internships in order to increase their students' awareness, industry exposure and employability, which should be carefully planned, organised and closely monitored. Students should be familiarised with the local working conditions and culture in the country where the internship takes place.

Keywords: Hospitality management education, Internships, Student satisfaction, employability, Greece,

Introduction

Currently courses in hospitality and tourism management emphasize the importance of practical training and offer internship programmes for students (Hsu 2012). Internships help students understand the industry, obtain practical experience and make connections at the workplace. Students may have a positive or negative perception of their internships depending on their experiences. This perception may influence the relationship they will have in the future with the industry and their decision to engage and pursue a career or quit.

Hospitality internship programmes have long been established in Greece. In the mid 1950s the first students attended their practical training in hotels in Rhodes and other tourism destinations in the country, mainly at the state-owned Xenia hotels. After graduation those students progressed to becoming general managers in hotels in the country, as until 25 years ago only graduates from the hotel school in Rhodes could hold such positions. In the mid 1980s the government funded vocational institutions providing tourism education, what are today's Technological Educational Institutes. In the 1990s the first graduates from Greek private educational institutions entered the market after having completed an internship. More recently, Greece has become a popular destination for students to conduct their internship especially for Eastern European countries (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou 2013). Internships provide multiple benefits to students, employers and institutions. Practical training is a first class opportunity for students to acquire and exercise managerial competencies by observation and practice (Tse 2010). Practical training has been found by Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2013) to increase student satisfaction and enhance their learning experience.

The aim of this paper is to investigate students' level of satisfaction with their internship experience, as well as to identify the factors that contribute to their satisfaction and the elements of the internship they value most. In view to this, a comparison is used to explore any differences of opinions between Greek students who have studied hospitality management in Greek institutions and International students who have studied in their home countries.

Literature Review

Many hospitality and tourism courses offer internship programmes to students, which are considerably promoted during student recruitment. From the beginning, the experiential form of learning was viewed as an excellent opportunity for students to integrate their thinking and action (Davies 1990). Various definitions are provided on the concept of an internship. Agheorghiesei and Prodan (2011) propose that an internship is a systematic way for students to learn at work by interacting with others, and learning by observation, reflection, analysis and communication. Students learn in a professional context where they understand the theoretical concepts and how they apply in practice (Beggs et al. 2008; Busby 2005). There are mainly three key stakeholders, students, employers and higher education institutions (Busby 2005), and all contribute to the internship programme and experience (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou 2013).

Many studies have identified advantages and disadvantages of internships for students. Internships are found to prepare students for successful and fulfilling careers (Chen et al. 2011). Incorporating practical experiences in the hospitality curriculum

provide numerous advantages (Lam and Ching 2007). On the one hand, benefits have been identified. Firstly, internships contribute to students' learning in a real environment. They are given the opportunity to reflect on the knowledge acquired during their studies (Kim and Park 2013; Chen and Shen 2012). Interestingly, internships provide students with the opportunity to develop clear understanding of the context of work in the hospitality industry and be aware of all the realities. For many students an internship is the first step in their careers (Kauffman 2010; Ko 2007) and a way to test their strengths and weaknesses in the workplace (Busby 2005; Daugherty 2001), it is also a process that requires students to be flexible and adaptable. Mihail (2006) in his study proposes that internships help students develop critical skills required for a career in hospitality such as communication, time management, and self-motivation.

On the other hand there is some criticism on the effectiveness of this approach to learning. Various factors have been found to create dissatisfaction and decreased motivation. Jaszay and Dunk (2003) claim that if the mentors-managers or student supervisors lack experience and efficiency, then students' experience will be limited. Agheorghiesei and Prodan (2011) suggest that an internship may be ambiguous as they students are not very clear on how much they may be involved in practical work and/or other jobs. Kim and Park (2013) suggest that unfair promotions, unsatisfactory pay and benefits, inappropriate behaviour of co-workers can contribute to unfavourable conditions that shape negatively students' perceptions of the industry. Furthermore, Taylor (2004) proposes that students assign a share of responsibility for problems at their internships to the employers and the receiving company. Their main concern is that they are used as cheap labour. Others claim that companies are not prepared to

enhance and contribute to the overall student experience (Roney and Oztin 2007). At the same time, students blame their institutions for inadequately preparing students to cope with the challenges of the industry.

Some studies propose that students are not appropriately prepared and have unrealistic expectations regarding work and employment in the sector (Dickerson 2009). Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) propose that often students find discrepancies between what they are taught in the classroom and what is practiced in hotels. Nevertheless, they suggest that still some educational institutions adequately prepare students to adapt to actual work environment, as they are confronted with operational issues and practices during their studies.

Many studies propose that ineffective design of the internship programme, wage discrepancies, poor treatment of students may cause them to leave the industry after their internship (Richardson 2008; Roney and Oztin 2007; Ko 2007; Zopiatis 2007; Wu and Wu 2006). Internship programmes that fail to meet students' expectations discourage them to enter the industry after graduation (Chen and Shen 2012). This experience should provide students with suitable career factors, such as job satisfaction, job security, reasonable salaries and workloads (Kim and Park 2013). Many studies propose that the internship should be structured, planned and organised to provide students with a challenging experience. They should also provide students with the opportunity to feel they play a significant role in the organisation, and have a sense of fulfilment (Edwards 2010). Zopiatis (2007) suggests that the organisations that host interns should be aware of the adult learning styles, they should share their knowledge and skills and encourage interns to learn as well as solve problems.

Hospitality organisations expect students to demonstrate an understanding of the industry, interpersonal skills, work ethic, teamwork, problem handling, and good communication (Daugherty 2001).

Many studies on internship satisfaction and challenges have been conducted in different cultural settings i.e. Australia (Richardson 2009), Cyprus (Zopiatis 2007), Greece (Christou 1999), Hong Kong (Lam and Ching 2007), Malaysia (Austin 2002), Taiwan (Chen and Shen 2012), South Korea (Kim and Park 2013), the Netherlands (Akomaning et al. 2011), and Turkey (Collins 2002). In their study, Agheorghiesei and Prodan (2011, p.61) claim that in *'Romania organisations do not have trained personnel to coordinate the internship'*. There is no provision for any kind of compensation for students. Host organisations are not paid as well and there is no proper planning and coordination. Most of the placements are conducted based on the tutors' acquaintances, where in most case they may not impose any rules or contracts. Hence, students are employed in difficult situations, without in most cases receiving proper training which results to dissatisfaction from their internships. They propose that universities should prepare students with the required knowledge, host organisations with developing skills and competences and the students should be motivated to learn and engage.

Despite the cultural dichotomy that divides the individualistic western world from the largely collective eastern cultures (Vant Klooster et al. 2008), hospitality students have been found to face common challenges during their placements at hotels regardless their background. Hospitality students are concerned with the capitalisation of their internship in an effort to find jobs (Collins 2002), with the working conditions

(Richardson 2009), their relationships with their co-workers and supervisors (Kim and Park 2013) and preparing themselves for the reality of work in the industry (Zopiatis 2007). This paper argues that measuring and understanding students' perceptions and expectations of their internship is of paramount importance. The hospitality sector is continuously growing which raises the demand for talent, which can stem from new graduates entering this market (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou 2013). There is paucity of research in this area despite the long history of hospitality and tourism education in Greece. Hospitality and tourism play an important role in the country's economy thus qualified and well-trained employees are required to provide a series of services. Hospitality organisations operate in a turbulent, global environment that constantly changes, hence internships may provide the context to train the future workforce. Therefore, students conducting their internships in Greek hotels were studied for this research paper to identify their expectations, perceptions and overall satisfaction towards these internships.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach with data gathered through self-administered questionnaires among hospitality and tourism students who were doing their internships in Greek hotels. The internships took place during the summer months as they started from April until the end of September. In Greece, summer is the peak season for hospitality and tourism businesses, so many organisations take advantage of the internship programmes to make up sufficient labour force (Zopiatis 2007). The population was divided between international students (63) and Greek students (109). It included individuals employed in four and five star hotels in major tourism areas in Greece such as Rhodes, Athens, Thessaloniki, Kos, Cyclades and Crete. In total 172

responses were collected in a period of four months. Convenience sampling was used as the questionnaire was distributed to students after having completed their internships in private (two) and public (two) higher educational institutions in Greece. It was also distributed to international students at the end of their internships at the hotels of their placement.

The questionnaire was based on an extensive review of the literature on student satisfaction and expectations from internships. Zopiatis' (2007) survey questionnaire was used, which was adapted to the objective of this study. The questionnaire was piloted with 10 students who had just completed their internship. Minor changes were done in the order of the questions and one open-ended question was added to explore other views on the topic. Content validity (Zikmund 2002) was employed to examine items and provide feedback for greater clarity and alignment with construct dimensions in the study. Five sections were included in the questionnaire. The first included questions on demographic information. In section two, students were asked to rate certain aspects of their experience during the internship on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from "*Always (1)*" to "*Never (5)*". Section three examined the student's employability options and section four measured the overall internship experience with a single-item instrument developed by Van de Ven and Ferry (1980) on a 10-point scale ranging from "*Terrible (1)*" to "*Excellent (10)*". Section four measured students' likes, dislikes, and expectations from their internships, in which students were required to choose their most preferred one among a list of factors that emerged from the literature review. In order to identify any other factors that were not included in the previous sections, section five asked the students to comment on their internship experience. These qualitative data were cross tabulated with the findings of the

quantitative data.

Findings and Analysis

The sample consisted of 109 (63.4%) Greek and 63 (36.6%) International students. The sample included a balanced participation regarding gender with as Greek male students were 54.1% and female 45.9%, whereas the International male students were 41.3% and female were 58.7%. Since the participants were all undergraduate students between 18 and 24 years old, it was decided not to include age in demographics. Participation from private and public institutions was almost equal, with the latter providing slightly more participants (46.8%) among Greek students and 100% among International. Most students were on the first or second year of study (during their internship). Table 1 shows the demographic data of the participants in the study.

Table 1: Sample demographics

Variable	Frequency (%)	
	Greek (n=109)	International (n=63)
Gender		
Male	59 (54.1)	26 (41.3)
Female	50 (45.9)	37 (58.7)
Institution		
University	51 (46.8)	63 (100)
TEI	20 (18.3)	0
ASTER	30 (34.9)	0
Year of Study		
1	34 (31.2)	17 (27)
2	41 (37.6)	25 (39.7)
3	14 (12.8)	13 (20.6)
4	20 (18.3)	8 (12.7)

In order to assess whether there were differences between Greek and International students in terms of their internship experience, independent sample t-tests were performed.

Table 2: Independent sample t-tests – Internship experience

Internship experience	Lavene's test of Equality of variances		T test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-Tailed)
5a. Meaningful tasks	1.096	.297	-.421	170	.674
5b. Relevant to academic course	1.247	.266	-1.841	170	.067
5c. Relevant to interests	1.962	.163	-2.232*	170	.027
5d. Regular supervision and guidance from supervisor	.455	.501	2.850*	169	.005
5e. Supervisor and staff are available	1.052	.307	-2.013*	170	.046
5f. New knowledge	5.653*	.019	-1.123	169	.263
5g. New skills	2.038	.155	-.722	170	.471
5h. Something new about myself	1.402	.238	-2.783*	170	.006

*indicates significance level .05

Lavene's test demonstrated that the variability in the two samples was about the same in all elements of the internship experience except for 5f new knowledge ($p=.019$). There was no significant difference in the scores for Greek and International students for 5a meaningful tasks ($M=1.8$, $SD=.911$) and ($M=1.86$, $SD=.840$), for 5b relevant to the academic course ($M=1.96$, $SD=1.009$) and ($M=2.24$, $SD=.817$), for 5f new knowledge ($M=1.82$, $SD=1.090$) and ($M=2.00$, $SD=.905$), and 5g something new about myself ($M=1.97$, $SD=1.126$) and ($M=2.10$, $SD=.979$). Nevertheless, there was significant difference in the scores for Greek and International students for 5c relevant to interests ($M=1.86$, $SD=.967$) and ($M=2.19$, $SD=.859$), for 5d regular supervision and

guidance from supervisor (M=1.95, SD=1.036) and (M=1.51, SD=.896), for 5e supervisor and staff were available (M=1.53, SD=.877) and (M=1.81, SD=.859), and for 5h new knowledge (M=1.97, SD=1.126) and (M=2.10, SD=.979).

In view to the above findings, the authors conducted multiple response frequencies to identify the students' motivation/demotivation factors and the qualities they value most of their internship for Greek and International students separately as well as all as a group. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Multiple responses – Motivators, demotivators and expectations comparisons

Motivators	Freq. (%)			Demotivators	Freq. (%)			Expectations	Freq. (%)		
	GR (n=109)	INT (n=63)	ALL (n=172)		GR (n=109)	INT (n=63)	ALL (n=172)		GR (n=109)	INT (n=63)	ALL (n=172)
Made good money	22.0	12.7	18.6	Too much work	19.3	39.7	26.7	Like co workers	20.2	22.2	20.9
Professional environment	46.8	27	39.5	Didn't learn anything	8.3	7.9	8.1	Professional environment	49.5	54	51.2
Made valuable contacts	25.7	34.9	29.1	Disconnected from co-workers	6.4	4.8	5.8	Make good money	10.1	30.2	17.4
Felt like part of the team	25.7	44.4	32.6	Not enough supervision	11	3.2	8.1	Receive school credit	12.8	6.3	10.5
Flexible schedule	8.3	17.5	11.6	Not paid well	24.8	55.6	36	Feel like part of the team	34.9	52.4	41.3
Interesting work	38.5	25.4	33.7	Disorganised work environment	18.3	22.2	19.8	Receive a job offer	18.3	15.9	17.4
Learned a lot	45	41.3	43.6	Work was boring or menial	11	3.2	8.1	Interesting work	31.2	36.5	33.1
Liked co-workers	20.2	15.9	18.6	Work was not well defined	8.3	14.3	10.5	Make valuable contacts	35.8	31.7	34.3
Good supervisor	30.3	41.3	34.3	Not enough to do	12.8	6.3	10.5	Good supervisor	25.7	57.1	37.2
								Learn a lot	56	54	55.2

It is evident from the above that Greek students valued the professional environment (46.8%) and the opportunity to work in real hospitality organisations, whereas the International students put priority in the fact that they learned a lot (41.3%), but when looking at the whole sample together the learning was mostly valued (43.6%). This study affirms Roney and Öztin (2007) who claim that students value their internship

experience in forming perceptions for their future in the industry. The least motivator for Greek students was the flexible schedule (8.3%), similarly for the whole group (11.6%), due to the fact that work in the hospitality industry requires long hours and there is lack of flexibility to work especially during the high season when these students did their internships. For International students, the least important was making good money (12.7%). Dickerson (2009) and Girard (1999) similarly found that low pay and long working hours are less valued by interns. Roney and Öztin (2007, p.13) affirm this and state *“irregular working hours is a well-known negative characteristic of tourism employment”*. Although Riley et al. (2002) propose that there are occupations in tourism that are well paid, this study proposes that internships are not among these as students did not like their pay.

In terms of demotivators, the most important factor for Greek students was the pay (24.8%), similarly for International students (55.6%) and when seen as a group (36%). This view is in agreement with Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) as students are not highly paid during their internships, and they do not approve of the existing working conditions. Students suggest that pay during their internship does not reflect the amount of work they are required to do.

The least important issue for Greek students was the disconnection with colleagues (6.4%), as well as for all (5.8%), for International students the inadequate supervision (3.2%) and the work that was boring (3.2%). Students during their internships perform routinized tasks (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2013), as they are not always given the opportunity to make decisions as according to Lam and Ching (2007, p.348) *“managers are reluctant to empower decision-making authority to students as they are*

afraid of taking the risk of complaints from customers". Finally, to learn a lot from their internships was the most important expectation for Greek students (56%), for International students (54%) and for all as a group (55.2%). The findings affirm Collins (2002) who suggests that internship programs provide students with knowledge and skills necessary to pursue a career in the industry. The least important quality of an internship was to make money (10.1%) for Greek students, to receive good credit (6.3%) for International students and when grouped together.

In order to test any correlation of internship satisfaction with expectation in general, the dependent variable overall satisfaction was regressed on all seven items measuring students' internship satisfaction. There were no significant relations to any of the items when the test were performed separately to each group. When the same test was done to the whole sample, the data showed that only item 5g (learned new things at my internship) significantly ($p = .002 < .005$) related to the overall satisfaction. The R^2 of .128 indicated that 12.8 per cent of the observed variability in the dependent variable satisfaction was explained by this dimension of internship experience. This test confirmed the findings from the multiple responses analysis. This study proposes that students were satisfied when they believed they learned from this experience in agreement to Bohlander and Snell (2010, p. 225) who claim that students during their internships become 'employees' and are given the opportunity to learn at the workplace and acquire hands-on experience, as well as Kim and Park (2013). Interestingly 136 (79.1%) of the respondents would recommend the place of internship to others compared to 32 (18.6%). Similar results were identified when the samples were separately tested.

Finally, overall satisfaction was grouped into four main categories: bad (1-3), fair (4-6), very good (7-8), and excellent (9-10). The majority of Greek students evaluated their overall experience with 8 (very good, 56.9%) and 9 (excellent, 36.7%), only one of the participants evaluated the experience as 1 (bad, 0.9%). Similar results were evident among the International students as 19 (30.2%) evaluated the internship experience as excellent and only 6 (9.5%) as bad. When the internship experience and satisfaction were measured with the whole sample 59 (34.3%) found the experience as excellent, 86 (50%) as very good, 20 (11.6%) as fair and only 7 (4.1%) as bad of which 6 were International students. Evidently, the overall experience was very good. The qualitative question also affirmed this finding, as for example, one of the students stated "*That was such a brilliant work experience actually we had the opportunity to learn enough and the team spirit was so open mind and helped me improve my abilities*". Another reply was "*My experience of the hotel gave me the footsteps to achieve my expectations to fulfil my career! The hotel environment is the root to accomplish my professional dreams*".

Conclusions

This paper provided empirical evidence on internship programmes focusing on factors that contribute to students' satisfaction from their internships. Although some discrepancies were found between students' expectations and actual perceptions of their internships, this paper suggests that this learning approach enables students to comprehend the industry, put their academic knowledge into practice and decide whether they will follow a career in hospitality in the future. The paper proposes that there are no significant differences between Greek and International students in terms of their internship satisfaction and experience supporting no context and cultural

differences. Evidently the context, the background or the place of origin does not seem to make any difference in students' views. In general, hospitality students value their internship experience, as they believe they have the opportunity to learn, develop themselves, their knowledge and their networks. Pay is not considerably important as hospitality students place more value to the experience of work in a real professional environment, regardless the challenges in the working environment which include long hours and low wages.

The authors propose that managers in the industry should add value to the internship programmes offered at their hotels by considering students' expectations. They should provide them with clear organisational structure, vision and mission, objectives of their job, requirements to perform their tasks, obligations and rights (i.e. in terms of payment, working hours etc), methods of evaluation. Employers should be involved in curriculum design in order to strengthen the internship programmes offered by educational institutions (Chang and Hsu 2010; Liam and Ching 2007). By providing employment they help students obtain the skills required for a career in the industry. Moreover, students should also prepare for their internship by developing the necessary skills and competences, as well as attitudes required for the sector. They should understand that this is a process for learning to overcome problems. Finally, educational institutions should consider students' expectations and opinions on their internship experience (Tse 2010). Designated internship coordinators should be monitoring the internship, should liaise with employers, identify potential problems, offer consultation to both students and employers and provide support. The internship programmes should include training prior to the internship, on-going consultation and support during the internship and post-internship review, where students may be required to reflect with

a report on their experience and learning. Although, some dissatisfaction factors were identified, internships play a vital role in students' learning, experience from the industry, and their decisions to pursue a career in the sector.

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