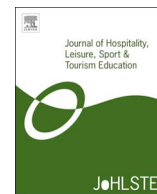


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhlste

Career decision self-efficacy plays a crucial role in hospitality undergraduates' internship efficacy and career preparation

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Internship efficacy
Career decision self-efficacy
Career preparation
Learning motivation
Hospitality undergraduates

ABSTRACT

Efficient student internships are essential for appropriate career preparations to ensure a smooth transition to their professions after graduation. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relationship among the students' learning motivation, off-campus internship efficacy, career decision self-efficacy, and career preparations. Stratified sampling was used to recruit graduating university students from Taiwan as participants and 613 valid questionnaires were returned. The results indicate that students' learning motivation positively and significantly influenced internship efficacy, and that career decision self-efficacy exerts a complete mediating effect between internship efficacy and career preparation. Practical implementations and suggestions are also addressed at the end of the article.

1. Introduction

The thriving tourism industry in Taiwan has led to recent rapid increases in the demand for manpower in the hospitality and catering industries. Hence, school programs for training personnel for these industries have become increasingly popular in Taiwan, and the number of schools offering such programs has also increased. To satisfy industry expectations, most of these programs require their students to participate in off-campus internships, which will train them to apply the knowledge, attitude, and professional skills they learned at school to a real workplace. Thus, students are expected to further improve their expertise and experience and thereby become familiar with industry processes and business management. Moreover, students are expected to develop outlooks suitable to their profession, the skills to interact with people, and the ability to observe, appraise, and gather information in various situations. Such training provides them with insight into their industries and shortens the time needed for adapting to their jobs after graduation (Lee & Chao, 2013; Wang, Chiang, & Lee, 2014). Furthermore, Hsiao, Baum and Teng (2009) noted that any type or length of internship can facilitate students' winning the recognition of employers and improve their chance of securing a job immediately following graduation.

Some studies have indicated that intern experience can actually cause students to become uncertain of their career paths or even leave the hospitality and catering industries altogether (Fidgeon, 2010; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005), possibly due to the negative aspects of the industries such as labor-intensity, low pay, and long working hours (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011) or mismanagement by some their employers (Lam & Ching, 2007). Studies have found that when interns in the hotel industry discover that their actual working experience is the direct opposite of what they expected they form misconceptions about the industry and feel lost regarding

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Received 9 March 2017; Received in revised form 7 May 2017; Accepted 8 August 2017

1473-8376/© 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

their career paths (Lu & Adler, 2009; Roney & Oztin, 2007). However, another study reported that, undergoing the same internship, some students were able to improve their employability, professional core competencies, communication skills, time management, and confidence, and thereby develop proper demeanors and appropriate outlooks (Chiu, 2012). This finding concurs with that of a further study, which suggested that internships can strengthen students' critical thinking ability, improve their dedication to their chosen career, and provide them with an opportunity to learn and gain practical experience (Assante, Huffman, & Harp, 2010). Numerous studies have indicated that students with a proactive drive to learn exhibit relatively high learning performance (Schick & Phillipson, 2009; Wang, Peng, Huang, Hou, & Wang, 2008; Wiczerkowski & Prado, 1993). Therefore, in the same environment, those students who exhibit a positive attitude, proactive drive to learn, and perform favorably in their internship are more likely to receive an offer from the employer hosting the internship (Collins, 2002; Salas-Velasco, 2007). This not only raises students' performance and confidence but also positively influences their future career paths (Ko, 2008).

Although internships in the hospitality and catering industries can help students understand the actual workplace environment and improve their ability to apply their knowledge, Zopiatis (2007) noted that a considerable proportion of interns remain unable to formulate a career plan with a clearly identifiable goal at the conclusion of their internship. Choi and Kim (2013) found that students who had high exam grades tended to be more capable of making proactive preparations for their career goals, and were also less likely to switch to another industry. Hence, students who learned more proactively were the more likely to become more knowledgeable and skillful through their internships, which in turn provided them with higher confidence and the job satisfaction to advance themselves (Ko, 2008). Successful work experience can positively influence and strengthen students' willingness to pursue a career in the hospitality and catering industries (Wan, Yang, Cheng, & Su, 2013). Moreover, students with a thorough understanding of themselves often also possess clear career goals (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). The intern experience can enhance students' confidence, maturity, and dedication, enabling them to hone their professional abilities and—above all—their market value upon graduation (Busby & Gibson, 2010; Gibson & Busby, 2009). Therefore, students must rely on their inner drive for proactive learning to achieve high learning efficacy in off-campus internships, thereby accumulating the necessary confidence and ability for their chosen career, eventually influencing their career path. However, most hospitality or catering students still depend on career coaching programs and others' opinions regarding their career plans (Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010). To reduce the possibilities of such students switching industries or feeling lost upon graduation, proper guidance throughout the curriculum and during the internship, including career planning, is essential to understand the factors affecting their career plans and provide appropriate career counseling (Solnet, Kralj, Kay, & DeVeau, 2009).

Hackett and Betz (1981) developed the theory of career decision self-efficacy, arguing that attitude and behaviors pertaining to self-efficacy can sway an individual's career decisions and can directly and indirectly explain that the effects and functions that lead to certain behaviors (Zimmerman, 2000) have important effects on career development. However, most studies have focused on the learning satisfaction of students and predicting their career choices (Ju, Emenheiser, Clayton, & Reynolds, 1998; Lam & Ching, 2007; Lee & Chao, 2008; Tse, 2010), and few have emphasized the efficacy of off-campus internships (Wan et al., 2013). Moreover, although several studies have discussed the relationship between learning motivation and self-efficacy regarding career planning (Choi & Kim, 2013), they have not considered whether the efficacy of off-campus internships mediates the relationship between learning motivation and career planning self-efficacy, as well as related preparations. Therefore, the present study used structural equation modeling to investigate the relationship between learning motivation and the efficacy of off-campus internships among university students graduating from hospitality and catering programs, as well as the relationship between their career preparation and their career planning self-efficacy.

2. Literature review

In education, motivating students to acquire favorable learning efficacy has always been a key research emphasis. Amabile, Hill, Hennessey and Tighe (1994) identified two types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to the performance of an activity as a result of an internal desire for pleasure and comfort (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci, 1975). Extrinsic motivation refers to the external rewards or incentives that indirectly satisfy an individual when certain actions are performed, and thus provide the motivation for such actions (Chen & Jang, 2010). Learning motivation do not simply affect the quality of learning efficacy, but actually exercise a significant positive influence on learning efficacy. In other words, the greater the learning motivation is, the higher the learning efficacy is, and vice versa (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Hicks, 1983). Currently, for hospitality- and catering-related programs, off-campus internships are a critical link for learning. Thus, students' learning motivation are a key factor determining their learning efficacy during this process. Off-campus internships help students to adapt to the industries of their choice, increase their insight into these industries (Lee, Chen, Hung, & Chen, 2011), gain practical experience, hone their communication and professional skills (Barrows & Johan, 2008), build up social networks (Tse, 2010), improve problem-solving abilities and motivations for career planning (Busby & Gibson, 2010), develop autonomy and related skills (McManus & Feinstein, 2014), and combine academic knowledge with practical experience (Busby, Brunt, & Baber, 1997). Therefore, similar to during classroom stud, well-motivated students can achieve high levels of learning efficacy in off-campus internships and considerably advance their career path.

The off-campus internship allows students to observe the similarities and differences between their school curriculum and practical experience, thereby preparing them for the challenges they will encounter in the hospitality and catering industries, the practical application of knowledge, and the available choices for their career paths (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). According to Dressler and Keeling (2004), career preparation should be conducted on the basis of a thorough understanding of available options, using multiple perspectives that can be gleaned from various media (e.g., trends in the job market, wage levels, potential career developments, and possible job vacancies), as well as by seeking professional advice through career counseling services (Blau, 1993; Choi & Kim, 2013;

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