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INVESTIGATING CAREER INTENTION AMONG HOSPITALITY INTERNS: THE INFLUENCE OF CAREER BARRIERS

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Abstract:

This research investigates career barriers and career intentions among hospitality interns. The growing hotel and tourism industry has led to increased employment opportunities and expanded hospitality and tourism courses. Despite internships aiming to enhance, personal and social barriers hinder career intentions. The study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional approach with 111 hospitality interns. Data from an online survey was analyzed to explore relationships between career barriers and career intention. The research has been able to identify the best predictor on career intention among hospitality interns. By examining the variables, this study aims to provide insights for academic and practical improvements in career preparation for emerging hospitality professionals.

Keywords:

Career Intention, Career Barriers, Hospitality and Tourism, Internship



Introduction

Tourism plays a vital role in global economic growth, driven by increasing demand for services such as transportation, lodging, food, and entertainment (Naseem, 2021). Among these, accommodation services are particularly critical, as they provide the essential infrastructure for tourist experiences (Nicolau et al., 2024). The rapid expansion of the hospitality and tourism industry has led to a growing demand for skilled professionals, prompting higher education institutions to introduce specialized academic programs (Sampaio et al., 2024). Despite this expansion, many hospitality interns face career barriers that affect their career intentions. While higher education emphasizes theoretical knowledge, the industry often prioritizes practical skills, creating a disconnect between graduate capabilities and employer expectations. Internships serve as a bridge to address this gap by developing students' self-awareness, interpersonal communication, and industry-related competencies (Avleeva et al., 2025).

However, various deterrents continue to affect students' career decisions, including the demanding nature of hospitality work, social perceptions, and perceived job instability (Liu et al., 2022). A persistent challenge is the mismatch between the increasing number of graduates and limited high-quality employment opportunities. Studies have identified barriers such as low professional identity, poor job satisfaction, and limited advancement opportunities as contributors to low retention and unclear career intentions among hospitality students (Zhu et al., 2024). However, most of the existing literature is centered on Western and East Asian contexts, with limited research addressing the unique challenges faced by Malaysian hospitality interns. Considering the global concern around talent retention in hospitality due to young generation unemployment and negative career perceptions, this study aims to investigate how career barriers influence career intentions among hospitality interns in Malaysian context. Specifically, the study investigates the relationships between personal and social career barriers and the career intentions of interns, with the goal of identifying key factor that shape their professional trajectories in the hospitality sector.

Literature Review

Overview of Hospitality Internship

Hospitality, rooted in universal traditions of guest protection and social bonding, now encompasses commercial activities in lodging, food, and beverage sectors, with service quality measured by guests' sense of belonging (Han, 2021). Internships bridge academic theory and industry practice, enabling students to refine skills, gain experience, and explore career pathways (Aljohani et al., 2022). Employers, in turn, benefit from access to trained talent. The internship outcomes significantly shape career intentions, as demonstrated in Cyprus, where program design, mentorship, and industry collaboration were pivotal (Papageorgiou et al., 2024). Effective communication between students, educators, and industry leaders further enhances preparedness. These findings underscore the dual role of internships: fostering student competency and addressing sector-wide talent retention challenges.

Hospitality Internship at UiTM

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) is a leading Malaysian public university with a strong emphasis on practical education, particularly in hospitality and tourism. The Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management (FHTM), established in 1967, offers a range of diploma and degree programs across multiple campuses, including Puncak Alam, Penang, and Kota Kinabalu. The program been offered such as Hotel Management, Culinary Arts, Tourism Management, and Food Science that combine academic rigor with industry-relevant training to prepare students for careers in hospitality. Internships are a mandatory component of UiTM's hospitality curriculum, providing students with hands-on experience in sectors like food and beverage, hotel operations, tourism agencies, and catering. This aligns with global trends, where internships are recognized as critical for bridging theoretical knowledge and practical skills in hospitality education (Pantaruk et al., 2025). Through these placements, students gain exposure to real-world industry challenges, enhancing their employability and career readiness.

Students may complete their internship at a wide range of hospitality and tourism-related establishments, including hotels and resorts, restaurants, cafés, hospital foodservices, travel agencies, event management firms, airlines, spa and wellness centers, tourism boards, marketing organizations, and theme or recreational parks. Each intern is assigned a site supervisor from the host organization to provide guidance throughout the internship period, which spans approximately 14 to 17 weeks depending on the program which is equivalent to 600 to 680 hours of combined academic and industry engagement. The faculty employs a structured evaluation system to assess students' performance, involving both industry supervisors and faculty members. This assessment includes overall performance evaluation, oral presentation, internship logbook review, and submission of a final report.

Hospitality Career Intentions

The hospitality industry offers diverse entry-level opportunities, from chefs to hotel managers, making it accessible even without advanced qualifications. However, despite its low barriers to entry, the sector struggles with a shortage of university-educated professionals (Zickafoose et al., 2024). Negative perceptions of the industry such as poor work conditions, inadequate training, and disproportionate rewards had deterred graduates from pursuing long-term careers. This reluctance exacerbates talent gaps, potentially compromising service quality and organizational performance (Khan & Jin, 2024).

Social Career Barrier

Social career barriers emerge from external influences shaping graduates' career choices, including workplace conditions, family expectations, peer relationships, and financial considerations (Pham et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that parental and peer attachments significantly influence students' career decision-making confidence and academic self-efficacy (Xie et al., 2025). Organizational reward systems further impact career trajectories, as compensation and promotion structures directly affect employee retention and performance (Kamselem et al., 2022). These barriers can lead to career indecision, hesitation to enter the industry, or opting for alternative career paths outside the hospitality sector. Addressing these social influences through targeted career support and mentoring can help graduates make more informed and confident career choices.

Personal Career Barrier

Personal characteristics significantly shape hospitality students' career decisions, with age, gender, academic performance, and personality traits playing crucial roles (Anthony et al., 2021). Research highlights job-person fit as particularly influential in career persistence, affecting both professional satisfaction and long-term intentions (Alarifi et al., 2024). Additionally, students' perceptions of industry professionals' friendliness emerge as another key determinant in career choices (Demirtaş & Hatipoğlu, 2025). Moreover, positive motivations have been shown to strongly influence students' confidence in pursuing hospitality careers. When students believe in their abilities and feel internally driven, they are more likely to remain committed to the industry despite potential challenges.

Conceptual Framework & Hypothesis Development

Conceptual Framework

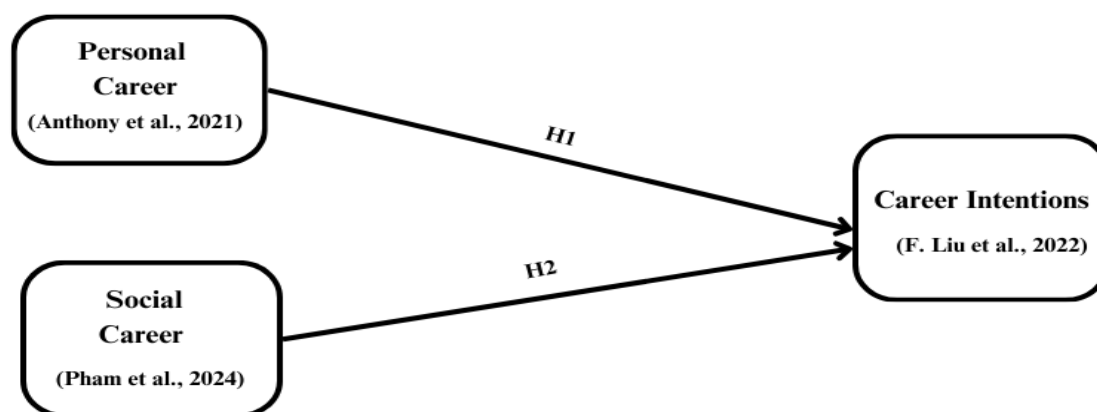


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Anthony et al. (2021)

Personal Career Barriers and Career Intention

In this research, one of the things that affects a student's profession choice and desire is their behavior, temperament, and interests. The research found that while personal interests did affect employment choice in the hospitality business, gender had little bearing on that decision (Anthony et al., 2021). Also, students who believed they possessed the necessary skills for the field were more certain of sticking with it. Furthermore, it has been discovered that first-year and continuing students have different motivations for pursuing employment in the sector, first-year students, particularly women, appear to have a more favourable perception of the sector (Chapman et al., 2023). According to Pham et al. (2024), a person's perceptions of their own capacity to influence their job success, career interest, and behavior in making career decisions are referred to as career self-efficacy beliefs. Thus, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: There is a significant negative relationship between personal career barriers and career intention.

Social Career Barriers and Career Intention

This section examines the relationship between social career barriers and career intention. Liu et al. (2022) stated that there are three out of six parental influence variables that are found to be significant predictors of students' hospitality and tourism career choice intentions. These factors were developed from 22 qualities. According to Anthony et al. (2021), people interact with numerous aspects of the environment in which they live. Depending on the individual, the effects of the factors may have varied degrees of influence on them. The social and academic settings are the source of environmental elements that have an impact on students' career decisions (Pham et al., 2024). Working without receiving the anticipated financial rewards (wages/salary) could be discouraging (Anthony et al., 2021). Further, most individuals consider a career to be the foundation for a higher standard of living. Whether to pursue a career in the subject of study or work in a different field will depend on external elements that are present in our environment. Social status was found to have a very significant link, indicating that it is the main barrier that could influence students to get into business for themselves (Rocha et al., 2024). Therefore, this study hypothesizes as follow:

H2: There is a significant negative relationship between social career barriers and career intention.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to systematically examine the relationships between personal and social career barriers and career intention among hospitality internship students. The use of measurable data allowed for objective analysis and hypothesis testing. The research was conducted at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Puncak Alam Campus, Selangor, Malaysia, specifically targeting the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management. This location was selected due to its large enrolment of hospitality students actively engaged in internship placements, making it a relevant and accessible site for exploring career-related decision-making processes.

Data collection was carried out over a period of four weeks in October 2023. This study was conducted in compliance with ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Reference No: FPHP/FREC/474/2023). All respondents were provided with clear information regarding the purpose of the study, their rights to anonymity and voluntary participation, and informed consent was obtained before they proceeded with the questionnaire.

The target population comprised hospitality students undergoing internships at the time of the study. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was adopted. A power analysis using G*Power software determined that a minimum sample size of 107 was required to detect a medium effect size with 80% power at a 5% significance level. A total of 111 valid responses were successfully collected via online survey platforms, exceeding the minimum threshold and providing a sufficient basis for robust statistical analysis.

The survey instrument consisted of four sections, primarily measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"), except for demographic questions. Table 1 provides a breakdown of constructs, sources of measurement, and number of items for each section. Data were analysed using SPSS version 27. Prior to conducting inferential statistical analysis, the data was assessed for internal consistency using reliability analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic profile of respondents.

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships between personal and social career barriers and career intention. To identify the most significant predictor, multiple regression analysis was conducted. All statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of 0.05.

Table 1: Instrumentation of Study

Variable (s)	Number of Items	Source
Career Intention	4	(Liu et al., 2022)
Personal Career Barrier	6	(Anthony et al., 2021)
Social Career Barrier	5	(Pham et al., 2024)
Demographic	5	Researcher

Reliability Analysis

The reliability values obtained in this study are considered good to excellent, based on the benchmark guidelines proposed by George and Mallery (2003). According to their criteria, a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 is regarded as acceptable, values above 0.80 are considered good, and values exceeding 0.90 are deemed excellent. These results indicate that the measurement instruments used in this study demonstrated strong internal consistency, thus supporting the reliability of the dimensions measured. The following table displays the reliability coefficient of each dimension.

Table 2: Reliability Coefficient

Dimension	Number of items	Alpha Value
Personal Career Barrier	6	.912
Social Career Barrier	5	.826
Career Intention	4	.911

Findings

Demographic Profiles

In the section of demographic profile, there are five questions such as gender, programme, internship place, reason for choosing the internship place, and allowance. The result is presented in the following table. The survey included 111 participants, predominantly female (76.6%, N=85) and from HM242 - Foodservice Management (72.1%, N=80). Most interns worked in restaurants/cafés (36.9%, N=41) and their primary reason for choosing an internship company because the internship company was close to where they live (38.7%, N=44). Regarding allowances, majority of the interns (36.9%) responded that they received below RM500.

Table 3: Distribute of Respondents' Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	26	23.4
	Female	85	76.6
Programme	HM 242	80	72.1
	HM 252	11	9.9
	HM 240	6	5.4
	HM 241	12	10.8
	HM 245	3	1.8
Internship Place	Restaurant / Cafe	41	36.9
	Hotel / Resort	22	19.8
	Hospital	12	10.8
	Government office	9	8.1
	Tourism agency	6	5.4
	Residential college	3	2.7
	Others	18	16.2
Reason for choosing the internship place	Near to house	44	38.7
	High allowance	12	10.8
	Recommendation by others	10	9.0
	Following friends	2	1.8
	Well known company	13	11.7
	Accommodation provided	7	6.3
	The only option left after getting rejected many times	6	5.4
	The place looks interesting to work	17	15.3
Allowance	None	15	13.5
	Below RM500	41	36.9
	RM501 - RM1000	36	32.4

RM1001 - RM1500	17	15.3
More than RM1501	2	1.8

Pearson Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation analysis (Table 4) revealed statistically significant relationships among all variables at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). A very strong positive correlation was found between social and personal career barriers ($r = .770$, $p < .01$), which exceeds Cohen's (1988) large effect size threshold ($r \geq .50$), indicating these barrier types substantially co-occur. Both types of barriers showed significant negative correlations with career intention, though with different magnitudes. Personal career barriers demonstrated a large negative correlation ($r = -.544$, $p < .01$), surpassing Cohen's large effect benchmark, while social career barriers exhibited a medium negative correlation ($r = -.407$, $p < .01$), meeting Cohen's medium effect threshold ($r = .30$ to $.49$). These results suggest that while both internal (personal) and external (social) barriers are associated with reduced career intentions, personal barriers show a markedly stronger relationship. The very strong intercorrelation between the two barrier types ($r = .770$) further indicates they may function as interrelated components of a broader barrier construct. According to Cohen's (1988) conventions for Pearson's r , correlations of .10 to .29 represent small effects, .30 to .49 medium effects, and $\geq .50$ large effects. All observed correlations in this study were statistically reliable and ranged from medium to very large in magnitude.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Variable	1	2	3
Personal Career Barriers	-	-	-
Social Career Barriers	.770**	-	-
Career Intention	-.544**	-.407**	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Multiple Regression

The study employed standard multiple regression analysis to evaluate how personal and social career barriers influence career intention. Results indicated the full model accounted for a statistically significant 29.6% of variance in career intention scores ($R^2 = 0.296$, $p < .001$), demonstrating these barrier variables collectively explain a meaningful portion of career intention differences among respondents. Analysis of individual predictors revealed distinct patterns. Personal career barriers showed a strong, statistically significant negative relationship with career intention ($\beta = -0.564$, $p < .001$). This substantial standardized coefficient indicates that for each standard deviation increase in personal barriers, career intention decreases by 0.564 standard deviations when holding social barriers constant. The robust effect size suggests internal obstacles like self-doubt, perceived inadequacy, or lack of confidence substantially undermine professional aspirations.

In contrast, social career barriers failed to demonstrate significant predictive value ($\beta = 0.027$, $p > .05$) when controlling for personal barriers. The negligible coefficient and non-significant p-value indicate external factors like industry perceptions or networking challenges do not

independently influence career intentions after accounting for internal barriers. The model's constant term (4.736) represents the expected career intention score for individuals reporting no personal or social career barriers. These findings carry important practical implications. The dominant role of personal barriers suggests career development programs should prioritize interventions targeting self-efficacy, competence beliefs, and psychological readiness. While social barriers may exist in the professional environment, their non-significant effect in this analysis indicates internal factors represent the more critical intervention point for enhancing career motivation and commitment. The results underscore the need for educational and organizational strategies that specifically address students' or employees' personal career-related concerns and self-perceptions.

Table 5: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

Items	B	SE B	β
Constant	4.736	.187	
Personal Career Barrier	-.534	.120	-.564
Social Career Barrier	.027	.124	.027

Note: $R^2 = 0.296$, * $p < .001$

Hypothesis Testing

All the hypotheses of the study were supported. The results confirmed a significant relationship between personal career barriers and career intention (H1), as well as between social career barriers and career intention (H2). These findings suggest that both personal and social barriers play a crucial role in influencing the career intentions of hospitality interns. The following table summarize the findings.

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Result (Sig.)	Correlation Coefficient	Remark
H1: There is a significant negative relationship between personal career barriers and career intention	$p < .001$	$r = -.544^{**}$	Supported
H2: There is a significant negative relationship between social career barriers and career intention	$p < .001$	$r = -.407^{**}$	Supported

Analysis Outcome

All the research objectives have been successfully achieved. The study investigated the relationship between personal career barriers and career intention among hospitality interns, and a significant association was found. Similarly, the analysis revealed a meaningful relationship between social career barriers and career intention. Among the variables examined, the findings identified the most influential predictor of career intention, providing valuable

insights into the key factors shaping interns' career decisions within the hospitality industry. The following table provides the analysis outcome.

Table 7: Analysis Outcome

RO	Objectives	Result	Remarks
RO1	Investigate the relationship between personal career barriers and career intention among hospitality interns	$r = -.544^{**}$	Significant negative relationship (large effect size) *
RO2	Determine the relationship between social career barriers and career intention among hospitality interns	$r = -.407^{**}$	Significant negative relationship (medium effect size) *
RO3	Identify the best predictor on career intention among hospitality interns	PCB ($\beta = -.564$) SCB ($\beta = .027$)	PCB is the best predictor

Notes: Effect size Interpretation based on thresholds (Cohen, 1988): $0.10 < r < 0.29$ as weak association; $0.30 < r < 0.49$ as moderate association; $r > 0.50$ as strong association.

Discussions, Contributions, and Conclusions

Discussion (Personal Career Barrier & Career Intention)

The findings of this study confirm a significant negative relationship between personal career barriers and career intention among hospitality interns. Personal factors such as lack of interest, inadequate skills, low confidence, and misalignment with the hospitality field were found to substantially influence interns' willingness to pursue a career in the industry. This supports previous research indicating that self-perception, motivation, and skill fit are critical determinants of career persistence (Anthony et al., 2021).

Many interns reported difficulty completing tasks due to limited capabilities or perceived inadequacies, leading to disinterest in continuing within the field. Furthermore, some students recognized during their internships that the hospitality curriculum did not align with their personal aspirations or strengths, reinforcing their intention to seek alternative career paths. These findings are consistent with earlier literature suggesting that personal barriers, such as psychological readiness and perceived lack of achievement, hinder long-term career engagement (Marini et al., 2023).

Given that personal career barriers emerged as the strongest predictor of career intention in this study, targeted interventions are essential. Institutions should incorporate interactive teaching methods, comprehensive skill-building programs, and structured mentorship to support interns' professional development. Career counseling and flexible learning opportunities can assist students in aligning their personal interests with the demands of the industry. Confidence-building initiatives, such as leadership workshops and industry engagement, can further enhance students' sense of purpose and belonging within the field (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024; Ghani et al., 2023). These strategies are crucial for improving students' perceptions of the industry and fostering more positive and sustained career intentions.

Discussion (Social Career Barrier & Career Intention)

This study identified a moderate but significant negative correlation between social career barriers and career intention among hospitality interns. Factors such as family expectations, societal norms, and financial pressures were shown to influence career consideration. However, regression analysis revealed that when personal career barriers were accounted for, social barriers were not a significant predictor of career intention. This indicates that while social influences affect perceptions, they do not independently determine career intentions when compared to personal factors.

Previous literature supports the notion that family and societal expectations shape students' career decisions. Parental influence, vocational guidance, and encouragement play pivotal roles in career development (Liang et al., 2023). Conversely, discouragement or pressure to conform to family traditions can impede autonomous decision-making and negatively affect career clarity. However, this study suggests that these social influences may primarily reinforce or interact with personal beliefs rather than directly drive career intentions.

To address the impact of social barriers, hospitality programs should enhance students' awareness of industry realities and career options. Providing accurate information about career pathways, advancement opportunities, and working conditions can help students and their families make informed decisions (Pham et al., 2024). Educational institutions should also collaborate with industry stakeholders to promote inclusive career guidance and encourage open family dialogue. Creating platforms that support students' autonomy, such as work-life balance initiatives and career exploration workshops, may help mitigate the indirect effects of social pressures (Pan et al., 2023). By empowering students with both knowledge and agency, institutions can help them navigate social expectations while making confident, self-directed career choices.

Contributions

This study provides several important contributions. Academically, it deepens the understanding of career decision-making among hospitality students by identifying personal career barriers such as confidence, interest alignment, and perceived competency as the most significant predictor of career intention. These insights contribute to the growing body of literature on career development and hospitality education, particularly in the Malaysian context.

For the industry, the findings stress the importance of providing structured and supportive internship environments. Hospitality organizations are encouraged to cultivate welcoming, inclusive, and professionally enriching internship experiences that align with students' interests and boost their confidence, thereby improving talent retention in the sector.

At the national level, this study supports ongoing efforts to strengthen graduate employability and workforce readiness under Malaysia's higher education blueprint. By identifying key psychological and environmental factors influencing career intention, the findings can inform policy decisions on curriculum design, internship program structure, and youth employment strategies, especially within the growing tourism and hospitality sector, which plays a critical role in Malaysia's economic development.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between social career barriers and career intentions among hospitality interns. The findings reinforce existing literature by highlighting key challenges such as discouragement from social circles, lack of mentorship and industry networks, and negative societal perceptions of the hospitality sector, the factors that collectively hinder career motivation. Despite these barriers, supportive peers and educators were found to play a crucial role in fostering resilience and reinforcing career aspirations among interns. These insights underscore the importance of comprehensive career guidance programs and stronger university-industry collaborations to provide mentorship, exposure, and inclusive opportunities for aspiring professionals. Moving forward, future research should explore factors such as internship quality and cultural context to better understand how social influences shape hospitality students' career trajectories. Addressing these challenges will help create a more supportive and sustainable pathway for future hospitality talent.

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