



Internship Experience and Career Aspirations of Fresh Graduates from the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management Program: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

John Vincent G. De La Cruz
Gordon College, Olongapo City, Philippines
Corresponding Author: John Vincent G. De La Cruz
delacruz.johnvincent@gordoncollege.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how internship experiences influence the career aspirations of fresh graduates from the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) program. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework, the research explores how three internship-related constructs Clear Goals (CG), Menial Tasks (MT), and Support for Learning (SFL) predict three types of career aspirations: Leadership Aspirations (LA), Achievement Aspirations (AA), and Educational Aspirations (EA). Data were collected from 80 fresh graduates and analyzed using WarpPLS version 8. Results indicate that CG significantly predicts three aspiration dimensions, while SFL influences both LA and EA. Interestingly, MT negatively affects EA. The model showed good fit and reliability, underscoring the critical role of meaningful internship experiences in shaping the future trajectories of hospitality graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions, in general, provide students with theoretical knowledge that must be applied in the real world, and internships can be one of the tools for transforming that theoretical knowledge into a real-world experience that allows students to gain hands-on experience in the operations of their relevant industry (Alharethi et al., 2025). Internships are considered immersive experiences (Poltimäe et al., 2023), in which theoretical information and lessons learnt are applied in a real-world context, resulting in students' increased exposure to changing work dynamics.

An internship program is important because it provides students with a work-integrated learning experience, which helps them advance in their careers (Silva et al., 2016). An internship is "a short-term period of practical work experience wherein students receive training as well as gaining invaluable job experience in a specific field or potential career of their interest" (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013). Understanding tourism and hospitality students' intentions to join the business is critical for both educators and practitioners. Internships are important for students because they provide work experience in addition to academic coursework. A good internship contributes significantly to the development of critical managerial competencies in students, thereby fulfilling their professional goals (Dahanayake et al., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Industrial training programs significantly influence undergraduate career aspirations by integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills (Sewwandi and Sanjeewa, 2024). Khampirat (2020) discusses how long-term professional aims reflect career aspirations, rooted in personal interests and hobbies. Individuals often choose careers aligning with their values, skills, or interests, shaping their work-related goals and motivations, crucial in the realms of psychology and professional development.

Considering the rapid rise of the global hospitality and tourist (H&T) industries, there has been a growing need for tourism practitioners in multiple countries, resulting in the rapid development of tourism education (Unguren & Huseyinli, 2020). A critical issue for the H&T industry is how to portray itself as an ideal job for young people (Chang & Tse, 2015). In relation to the aforementioned, educational settings provide students with theoretical and bookish knowledge that is required to be employed and experienced in the actual industry, and through internship experience, students can practice theoretical knowledge in a real-world setting, allowing them to develop and then adopt new skills that are required for better job performance (Leuferand Cleary-Holdforth, 2020). According to research, internships allow recent graduates to build and deepen their professional networks, learn new skills, expand their job knowledge, and explore for work opportunities (Anjum,2020).

The use of quantitative methodologies to evaluate students' work-integrated learning experiences is a frequent practice in higher education. Existing studies that evaluate students' internship experiences tend to focus on different characteristics or dimensions of their internship experience (Luk and Chan, 2020) which includes clear goals, menial tasks, and support for learning.

Internship experiences serve as a vital bridge between academic preparation and professional practice, especially in vocationally oriented programs such as the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM). Internships offer students real-world exposure, the opportunity to develop professional competencies, and insight into future career trajectories. However, not all internships are equally beneficial. Some interns are relegated to menial tasks that contribute little to professional growth, while others receive structured support and clear developmental goals.

Clear goals refer to students' perceptions of clear intended learning outcomes and evaluation criteria, which help them understand what they are expected to perform and learn throughout their internship. Communicating the expectation of an internship to students are frequently stressed in the creation of an effective WIL curriculum because clear, precise goals drive students to work toward the goal of an assigned assignment and continue in their efforts over time (Schunk, 2012).

Ren and McKercher 2021 stated that practical training programs aim to prepare hospitality students for future employment. Students gain cognitive and professional abilities through the "learning by doing" component of hospitality curriculum, and their careers progress easily afterward. It is vital for industry partners to provide tasks similar with the actual responsibilities of their employees.

Luk and Chan (2020) further discussed that an academic supervisor, often known as the training manager or internship coordinator, provides the majority of learning support at the university. Support from the academic supervisor can be included in the design of the internship course, preparing students for the internship during the induction process, monitoring students' performance, communicating with the company when challenges arise during the period of internship, and providing opportunities for students to reflect on their experience after the internship (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016).

Aspirations are one of the most powerful motivators of human behavior; they direct the learning process and an individual's creative ambitions, and they have a significant impact on innovative activities aimed at self-improvement and altering the environment (Wosik-Kawala & Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2025). Bartczak (2019) discussed that aspirations are dynamic and subject to change. They are influenced by both character traits and environmental variables. This study places a strong emphasis on career aspirations, which are frequently explored as a predictor of subjective job success. Career aspirations are defined as a person's desire for professional success, leadership possibilities, additional education, and personal development (Hartman & Barber, 2020).

Career aspirations—including the drive to pursue leadership roles, achieve professional excellence, or continue education—are shaped not only by individual traits but also by contextual experiences such as internships. Drawing from career development theories and workplace learning literature, this study seeks to understand how three dimensions of internship experiences—Clear Goals (CG), Menial Tasks (MT), and Support for Learning (SFL)—influence three

distinct career aspirations: Leadership Aspirations (LA), Achievement Aspirations (AA), and Educational Aspirations (EA).

The hospitality and tourist business is noted for being dynamic and depending on the performance of its personnel. As a result, it is critical to foster and develop students pursuing this degree so that they can become future industry assets. One of the most significant aspects of learning hospitality and tourism is through on-the-job training. This is where students will realize their career goals and determine where they stand as future hospitality and tourism ambassadors.

By applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this research aims to model these relationships and provide empirical evidence to inform curriculum designers, internship coordinators, and industry partners about optimizing internship design. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate and explore how internship experience of fresh graduates from the BSHM program influence their career aspirations. The study revolves around the hypotheses below and can be seen on the figure 1:

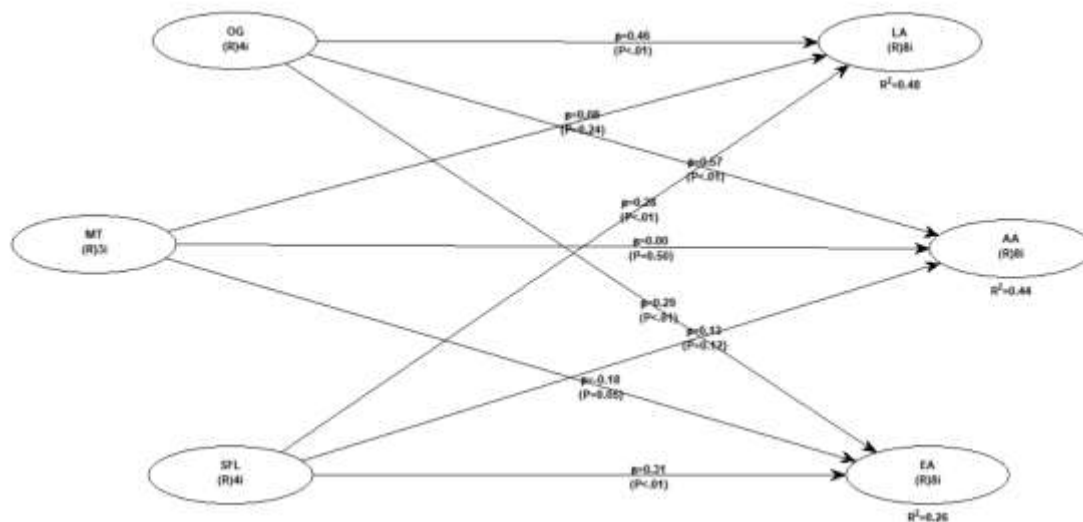


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative correlational research design using Partial Least Square - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS - SEM) to examine the influence of internship experiences on the career aspirations of BSHM graduates. Eighty (80) fresh graduates from the BSHM program participated in this study. Participants had recently completed their internships and were surveyed regarding their experiences and aspirations. The adopted survey instrument from Luk and Chan (2020) contains indicators about their work experience based on the Work Experience Questionnaire (WEQ). Meanwhile, the other part of the adopted questionnaire from Gregor and O'Brien (2016) focuses on indicators measuring career aspirations. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The constructs' reliability and validity were established using Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Data were analyzed using WarpPLS version 8. Model fit indices, path coefficients, and validity tests were evaluated to assess the adequacy of the model

RESEARCH RESULT

The model fit and quality indices of the structural equation model was calculated. The average path coefficient (APC) [0.255, $p < 0.05$], average r-squared (ARS) [0.389 $p < 0.05$], and adjusted average r-squared (AARS) [0.370 $p < 0.05$] all had p-values less than the acceptable 0.05. The average block VIF (AVIF) [1.229] and average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF) [1.231] of the model indicates acceptable multi-collinearity. Causal directionality of the model was supported with NLBCDR = 1.000.

Table 1. Model Fit and Quality Indices

Model Fit and Quality Indices	Value Acceptable if
APC (Average Path Coefficient)	0.255 $p < 0.05$
ARS (Average R-squared)	0.389 $p < 0.05$
AARS (Adjusted Average R-squared)	0.370 $p < 0.05$
AVIF (Average Variance Inflation Factor)	1.229 < 5 (ideal < 3.3)
AFVIF (Average Full Collinearity VIF)	1.231 < 5 (ideal < 3.3)
GoF (Tenenhaus Goodness of Fit Index)	0.494 > 0.36
SPR (Sympson’s Paradox Ratio)	1.000 > 0.7
RSCR (R-squared Contribution Ratio)	1.000 > 0.9
SSR (Statistical Suppression Ratio)	1.000 > 0.7
NLBCDR (Nonlinear Bivariate Causality Direction Ratio)	1.000 > 0.7

The result on table 3 shows the study’s measuring model was examined by determining the latent variable’s reliability and validity. Clear goals (CG) [CR = 0.906, CA = 0.860], menial tasks (MT) [CR = 0.798, CA = 0.613], support for learning (SFL) [CR = 0.924, CA = 0.890], leadership aspirations (LA) [CR = 0.864, CA = 0.832], achievement aspirations (AA) [CR = 0.867, CA = 0.825], and educational aspirations (EA) [CR = 0.951, CA = 0.941] exceeded the minimum permissible value of 0.70 (Kock, 2014).

Each indicators validity was identified by calculating factor loading and calculating average variance (AVE). All indicators’ loading were found to be significant (> 0.50) which implies a link between the indicators and the constructs (Kock, 2017b) as the result of all variables surpassed the minimum requirement of 0.5.

Table 2. Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Explained Variance of Latent Constructs

Latent Variable	Composite Reliability (pc)	Cronbach’s α	AVE	R ² (Adjusted)	Q ²
CG	0.906	0.860	0.708	–	–
MT	0.798	0.613	0.619	–	–
SFL	0.924	0.890	0.752	–	–
LA	0.864	0.832	0.501	0.28 (0.28)	0.400

Latent Variable	Composite Reliability (ρ_c)	Cronbach's α	AVE	R ² (Adjusted)	Q ²
AA	0.867	0.825	0.476	0.35 (0.35)	0.438
EA	0.951	0.941	0.708	0.40 (0.40)	0.451

Note: AVE = average variance extracted; Q² = Stone-Geisser predictive relevance; values in parentheses are adjusted R². Bold reliability values exceed desired thresholds ($\rho_c \geq .70$; $\alpha \geq .70$).

Results revealed that clear goals significantly predicts leadership aspirations ($\beta = 0.463$, $p = <0.001$) and achievement aspirations ($\beta = 0.575$, $p < 0.001$) of students with a large effect size of 0.283 and 0.374, respectively. Clear goals was also found to significantly predict educational aspirations ($\beta = 0.293$) of the students with a moderate effect (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.172$), thus, H1 is supported. Results show that menial tasks ($\beta = -0.178$, $p = 0.049$) negatively predicts educational aspirations of the students with a small negative effect (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.096$). Menial tasks, on the other hand, were shown to have no significant negative effect with leadership aspirations and achievement aspirations ($p = >0.05$), thus, H2 is not supported. For the support for learning ($\beta = 0.276$, $p = 0.004$), it significantly predicts leadership aspirations (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.155$) and educational aspirations (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.179$), both with moderate effect. In contrast, support for learning was found to have no significant effect to achievement aspirations ($p = >0.05$), thus, H3 is not supported.

Table 3. Structural path coefficients, significance, and effect sizes

Endogenous → Outcome	β (path coefficient)	SE	p-value	f ² (effect size)	Interpretation
CG → LA	0.463	0.097	< .001	0.283	large effect
CG → AA	0.575	0.094	< .001	0.374	large effect
CG → EA	0.293	0.102	.003	0.172	moderate effect
SFL → LA	0.276	0.103	.004	0.155	moderate effect
SFL → EA	0.305	0.102	.002	0.179	moderate effect
MT → EA	-0.178	0.106	.049	0.096	small neg effect
MT → LA or AA; SFL → AA	ns	—	> .05	—	not significant

Note: CG = Clear Goals; SFL = Support for Learning; MT = Menial Tasks; LA = Leadership Aspirations; AA = Achievement Aspiration; EA = Educational Aspiration; ns = non-significant.

DISCUSSION

The results affirm that internship clarity (CG) plays a pivotal role in shaping various dimensions of career aspirations among BSHM graduates. Specifically, CG significantly predicted leadership aspirations, achievement motivations, and educational pursuits. These findings support prior literature suggesting that clearly defined goals contribute to student motivation, engagement, and long-term career planning. The result implies that students clearly understand the purpose, expectations, and outcomes of their internship. When this clarity is present, it plays a pivotal role in shaping different dimensions of their career aspirations

Support for learning (SFL) was also found to significantly enhance both leadership and educational aspirations. These results underscore the importance of mentorship and structured learning opportunities within internship programs. When fresh graduates receive support for learning (from mentors, supervisors, peers, or institutions), they gain the confidence to apply knowledge and take initiative. This confidence fosters leadership aspirations, since they feel more capable of guiding others, making decisions, and managing responsibilities. It also raises educational aspirations, as they believe they are capable of pursuing advanced studies or specialized training.

Interestingly, menial tasks (MT) negatively affected educational aspirations. Fresh graduates often enter the workforce hoping to apply their academic learning. When assigned mainly to menial tasks (e.g., photocopying, serving coffee, cleaning, filing), they may feel their education is undervalued. This mismatch leads to frustration and discouragement, lowering their motivation to pursue further studies since they question its usefulness. Thus, the result implies that repetitive or non-developmental tasks may deter interns from pursuing further academic development, possibly due to perceived stagnation or demotivation. This highlights the need for balanced task assignment in internships.

Beyond methodological reliability, the results highlight the importance of experiential components in molding graduates' paths to employment. Internships provide important platforms for applying, testing, and refining academic knowledge in real-world environments. However, the statement stipulates that these benefits are only realized when internships are properly structured. Clear objectives, meaningful tasks, guidance, and reflective opportunities elevate internships from academic requirements to intentional career-shaping experiences. In contrast, poorly organized placements that subject students to monotonous or repeated duties may lessen the value of internships, lowering motivation and career goals.

Taken together, the findings confirm that internships are more than just transitory career opportunities; they represent formative moments in professional identity development. Institutions and industry partners can help graduates achieve more career clarity, leadership ambitions, and educational goals by including organized, experiential components. This research emphasizes the broader conclusion that investing in outstanding internship

design benefits students while also strengthening the future talent pipeline for the hospitality sector and beyond.

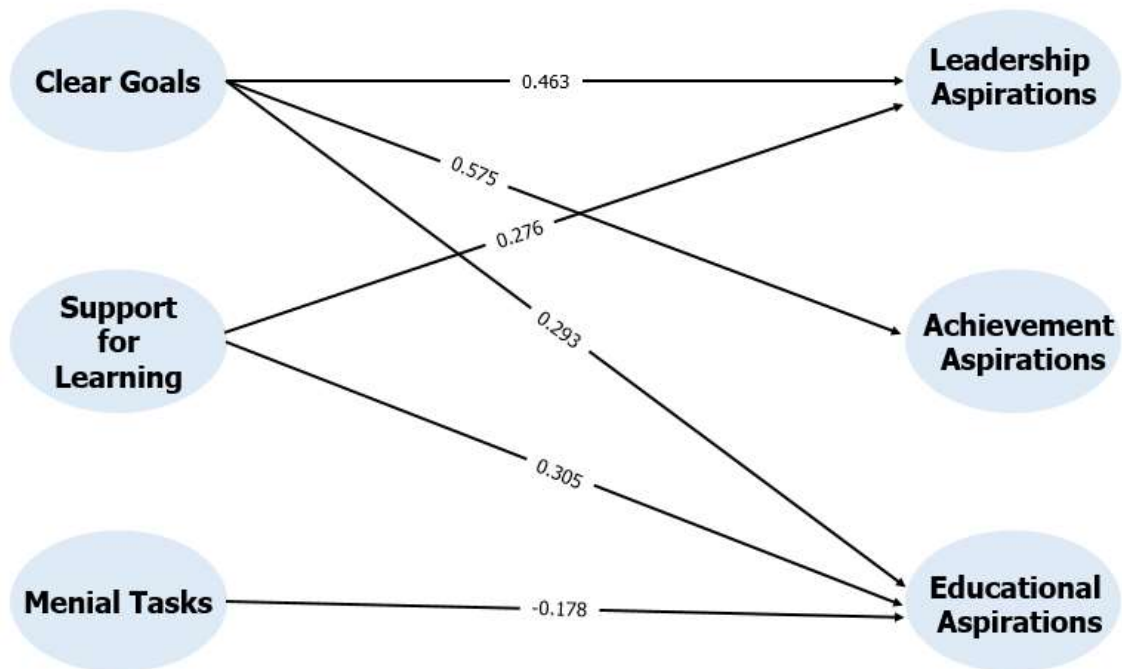


Figure 3. SEM Path Diagram

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides empirical support for the significance of internship experiences—particularly clarity of goals and learning support—in fostering desirable career aspirations among hospitality management graduates. The data show that internships, when well designed and reinforced with experiential learning components, have a significant impact on graduates' future paths. The model's good fit and dependability not only validate the strength of the identified relationships, but also demonstrate internships' transformative potential as more than just academic responsibilities. Instead, they emerge as key developmental stages in which students begin to solidify their professional identity, clarify their career goals, and foresee future paths for leadership and education. The negative effect of menial tasks on educational pursuits calls for careful internship design that avoids relegating students to low-value roles.

These results highlight the importance of collaboration between academic institutions and industry partners in designing internships that go beyond regular activities and instead foster meaningful learning experiences. Internships can help to bridge the gap between theory and practice, boost graduates' confidence in their chosen sector, and contribute to the long-term progress of both individual careers and the larger professional community.

Thus, the study would recommend the following:

1. Educators should collaborate with industry partners to ensure goal-oriented internship placements.
2. Internship programs should integrate mentorship to enhance leadership and academic growth.

3. Menial tasks should be minimized or supplemented with learning-oriented responsibilities.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This research is limited to the graduates of BSHM program only. For further studies, other researchers may consider applying this study to different collegiate programs in order to determine the internship experiences and aspirations of their graduates. Future studies may also incorporate other variable which could help the investigation and exploration of the research topic.

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