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Does employability increase with internship satisfaction? Enhanced employability and internship satisfaction in a hospitality program

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ABSTRACT

A primary goal common across hospitality internship programs is to make students more employable. This study investigates enhanced competencies in employability leading to student satisfaction with an internship program and the relationship to key stakeholders in the program. The school and the student's own self-commitment show positive effect on employability, however satisfaction with the employer was not significant suggesting areas for improvement. The research identified the correlation between internship satisfaction, employability, and the stakeholders with a goal to improving internship programs and enhancing employability for future talent in the hospitality industry.

1. Research background and objectives

In the face of increasing competition in the labor market Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are called upon to better prepare graduates with employable skills. One commonly used path to enhancing employability is through an internship program. In Taiwan, the Ministry of Education's policy is to promote internships to give students experience in a workplace environment with a goal to bolster their competitiveness (Wan, Yang, Cheng, & Su, 2013).

Internships have been well received by scholars, students, and industry alike and shown to have many benefits (Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller, 2015; Busby, Brunt, & Baber, 1997; Chen & Shen, 2012; Yiu & Law, 2012; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012). These benefits range through connecting classroom learning to the work environment; developing valuable practical experience; giving students greater familiarity with the workplace; opportunities to communicate and establish connections with supervisors within the industry and helping to clarify career expectations. These advantages exist across countries and industries and the hospitality industry is a fertile ground for internships which are seen as important for many hospitality and tourism-related majors (Beggs, Ross, & Goodwin, 2008; Binder et al., 2015; Cho, 2006; Kay & DeVeau, 2003). As a result, within tertiary level hospitality education internships have been included as compulsory courses for many undergraduate programs.

Enhancing employability is one of the known benefits from internships for graduating students (Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016), however there is still a need for more research on understanding the elements of an internship program that contribute to the desired employability (O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2015).

Crossman and Clarke (2010) defined employability in general terms as, 'having the skills and abilities to find employment, remain

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in employment or obtain new employment as, and when, required'. A precursor to finding employment in the industry is that students are sufficiently satisfied with their internship to want to continue in the industry, as opposed to being disillusioned by the experience and voting to exit. Zopiatis and Theocharous (2013) consolidated internship programs in individual countries to explore pre-internship psychological readiness and willingness to continue with the current job during and after internship. They indicated that successful internship experiences encourage students to remain in the tourism and hospitality industry; whereas mediocre internship programs can shatter the dreams of young people. This indicates the importance of internship program design and consultations provided during the process. The individual commitment of interns, arrangements made by schools, or company assistance and fair treatment influences a student's satisfaction with the internship and their decision to remain in the same industry in the future (Chen & Shen, 2011, 2012).

This paper argues that employability is an important goal for students undertaking an internship and that programs that enhance student's employability will increase student's overall satisfaction with the internship program. At the same time, there is a need to illuminate how satisfaction with the elements of an internship program, the school, the employer, and student, serve to enhance graduate employability. This study uses SEM to investigate these relationships.

2. Literature review

2.1. Internship research

Internships are a practicum-based education experience that are seen as a valuable step in integrating classroom-based learning with real world exposure. They are very commonly found as an integral part of hospitality and tourism programs (Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2016). The focus of much research, they have been shown to be well received by HEIs, employers and students alike.

Scholars believe there are several benefits from incorporating internships into an HEI program. An internship offers practical work experience in a way that connects to classroom learning (Stansbie, Nash, & Chang, 2016) and allows students to become more familiar with the work place (Ruhanen, Robinson, & Breakey, 2013a). At the same time, it is challenging for an HEI to arrange and coordinate an effective internship program (Lam & Ching, 2007; Zopiatis, 2007). Zopiatis (2007) outlined that good internship experiences must be customized, interesting, and empower students; students must be assigned meaningful tasks and qualified supervisors, and that the company's organization must be favorable for the development of interns. As outlined by Stansbie, Nash, and Jack (2013) internships can be of benefit to all stakeholders, however, they need to be well structured.

From an industry operator's perspective, a well-educated and skilled workforce adds to market success and internships allow students to demonstrate earnest learning attitudes and professional competencies at the same time (Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin, & Zehner, 2013). Industry is aware of the advantages of an effective internship (Lam & Ching, 2007) and aware that graduates' employability skills often fail to meet the requirements of the industry (Yang, Cheung, & Fang, 2015).

For students, internships can be a helpful step in preparing for the industry by giving them an opportunity to understand working conditions and to develop relationships with hospitality workers and supervisors (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013). After completing their internships, there is a vast improvement in students' ability and confidence to work with people, their knowledge of how the industry works, their ability to adapt to changes, their leadership, and their financial management competency (Lam & Ching, 2007). Students can also gain insights into their careers to make better informed decisions about opportunities available to them (Wang, Chiang et al., 2014), and for many the internship can be a spring board into full time employment (Collins, 2002).

The three stakeholders in the internship process, HEIs, employers and students appear united that there are positive benefits to be obtained from an effective internship program, and this makes internships the focus of this study. Following on from this we will examine how the internships serve to enhance employability.

2.2. Content and dimensions of employability

Research on employability has been gaining prominence in recent years (Eurico, da Silva, & do Valle, 2015) and there is indication that enhancing the employability of students is of the utmost priority. At its core, employability is seen as the qualities within a graduate that equips him or her with skills to attain and remain in employment (Asonitou, 2015; Yorke & Knight, 2006). However, within this slightly circular definition lies the difficulties in its definition and measurement. Generally, employability is seen as a multi-dimensional construct which several scholars have remarked upon as having definitional challenges (Harvey, 2001; Huang, 2013).

In a prominent paper in the field Harvey (2001) observed that one measure of employability loved of governments is a count of how many graduates achieve employment. This measure no doubt has the attraction of some simplicity, but as Harvey describes it is a distorting, 'pseudo measure.' Instead Harvey's summary of definitions of employability in the literature includes five elements: 1. Job type, 2. Timing, 3. Attributes on recruitment, 4. Continuing education, 5. Employability skills. This list has been expanded to include soft skills, such as willingness, attitude, motivation for competency training, and flexibility at work (Misra & Mishra, 2011). Arguably, participating in an internship programs is a sound approach to improving these kind of skills, including the ability to communicate and interact with people, morality, critical thinking, leadership, lifelong learning and problem-solving capabilities, adaptability, and flexibility (Blackwell, Bowes, Harvey, Hesketh, & Knight, 2001). Other scholars have expanded these models to include areas such as emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, reflection and evaluation and life experience (Pool & Sewell, 2007). Whilst there are no doubt strong arguments for the inclusion of many of these items and for a broad spread of dimensions this is perhaps at the risk of effective

operationalization. In addition, if a model of employability is to aid HEIs in developing curricula to enhance employability then the inclusion of personality traits is debatable as these might be outside the influence of tertiary education.

Other studies have pursued a list of employment competencies through quantitative and qualitative techniques, such as [Finch et al.'s \(2013\)](#) list of 17 competencies, [Yorke and Knight \(2006\)](#) UK's Skills Plus program list of 39 perspectives or [Moolman and Wilkinson \(2014\)](#) consolidation of 90 competencies. This list of competencies adds to the burgeoning proliferation of competing models for employability.

In examining these competency-based models some studies have proposed two components of employability: core skills and specific skills ([Wang & Tsai, 2014](#)). In these models specific skills are the professional abilities or subject skills that are peculiar to particular industries or professions, as may be applicable in the hospitality and tourism field. Whilst some research indicates that it is useful to consider professional skills in industry, overweighting this consideration can be at the expense of considering the graduates' general employability. This is important as studies show that a significant proportion of interns in hospitality elect to leave the industry upon graduation. [Lu and Adler \(2009\)](#) found that 32% of hospitality students in China did not intend to enter the industry and similarly a study in Hong Kong found 33% of students first job was outside of the industry ([Chang & Tse, 2015](#)). This may be for many reasons some of which relating to satisfaction will be explored below, and others may be simply related to remuneration or opportunities. In Taiwan, for example, the starting pay in the hospitality industry is significantly lower than that of the national average for graduate pay. Also, an important goal of hospitality training is to install a service attitude and it is likely that this attitude is a highly employable skill for a range of careers. For these reasons this study does not restrict its operationalization of employability to the hospitality industry.

Whilst there are difficulties in defining and operationalizing employability as outlined above, there are a few directions that stand out. Returning to Harvey, he says that any measure should indicate areas of improvement. Further, scholars have indicated that there is reason to believe that some components of employability may be country specific ([Emerging Reveler les talents, 2016](#); [Huang, Turner, & Chen, 2014](#)). This is also reflected by several nationally promoted researches into employability, e.g. The [Australian National Training Authority \(2003\)](#), and The [National Association of Colleges and Employers \(2016\)](#).

In Taiwan part of a significant government funded study ([Liu, Qiu, & Hu, 2006](#)) introduced a domestic core career prospect enhancement framework that consists of four categories: 1. General Competencies; 2. Professional competencies; 3. Attitude towards work and 4. Career Planning and Confidence with substantial content including 19 career competencies. This questionnaire was applied to universities throughout Taiwan and is a suitable questionnaire for investigating the employability for the young graduates in Taiwan.

2.3. Internships and employability

Internships have been found to be the most useful of the possible experiential learning activities to enhance employability ([Yang, Cheung, & Song, 2016](#)) and have been shown to be an effective approach to bridge the gap between education and employment demands, which is the essence of employability ([Sapp & Zhang, 2009](#)). Studies have shown that internships have significant benefits in improving employability among students ([Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016](#)) and students report being 2.5 times more confident in their employability following on from their internship ([Qenani, MacDougall, & Sexton, 2014](#)). Completion of internships effectively increases the chances of students landing a job and businesses generally prefer graduates with prior internship experience. The experiences gained in internships have also been found to bolster management competencies preparing new entrants to progress in the hospitality management ([Jack, Stansbie, & Sciarini, 2017](#)) and to help to increase salary levels and work satisfaction. In the contrary position, students who do not participate in internship programs ultimately find themselves at a disadvantage ([Binder et al., 2015](#); [Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000](#); [Lam & Ching, 2007](#); [Narayanan, Olk, & Fukami, 2010](#)). This indicates the value of this study in investigating the underlying factors of internship programs which exert such profound influence on enhancing employability. At the same time, whilst studies indicate that internships will enhance employability, there is a deficiency in research on which employability competencies are most influenced by an internship program.

[Ring, Dickinger, and Wöber \(2008\)](#) indicated in their research that internship programs are the biggest contributor to the employability of students and a prominent training method in terms of enhancing competencies to better the chances of graduates in landing a job. However, they also mentioned that the homogeneity of tourism and hospitality programs may inhibit students' flexibility, innovation, and creativity. Similarly, studies indicate poorly managed internship programs can have a negative effect on students' intention to continue in the industry and possible negative effects on employability. Indeed, the students' perception of the internship experience, and his or her satisfaction with that experience can strongly influence the internship outcomes.

2.4. Internship satisfaction

Satisfaction with internships helps to effectively forecast post-graduation career inclinations and studies suggest that satisfaction with an internship is related to how well it prepares the students for their entry into the world of work.

[Eurico et al. \(2015\)](#) argued that identifying and satisfying the needs of students will enhance their employability skills. Previous work indicated that if student expectations were consistent with actual conditions then students would be satisfied ([Kim & Park, 2013](#); [Ruhanen, Robinson, & Breakey, 2013b](#); [Siu, Cheung, & Law, 2012](#)). However, this omits the factors that go up to make a successful internship program and there is a need for researchers to investigate these factors ([Fong, Luk, & Law, 2014](#)). As outlined above, management of a successful internship program requires the meeting of expectations, and also the integration of different parties, chiefly, the HEL, the employer and the students. [Ruhanen et al. \(2013b\)](#) looked at several of these dimensions relating to

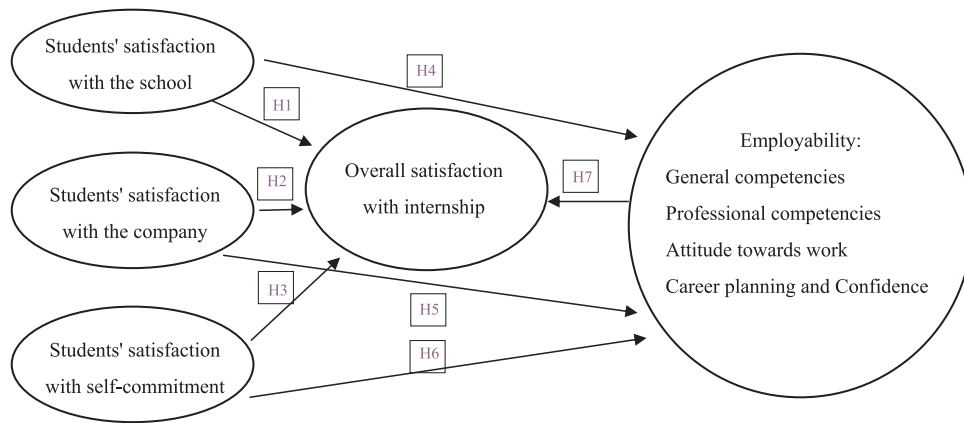


Fig. 1. Conceptual model and research hypotheses.

internships. For the HEI they argued that one of the key drivers of a successful internship program was the coordinating academic staff. On the part of the employer students frequently critiqued the employer for not providing a useful and coordinated program, suggesting that some employers, ‘didn’t really know what to do with us.’ Conversely, [Harvey \(2001\)](#) found that the addition of responsibilities, supervisory or decision making added to the student's satisfaction.

Thus, this study argues that enhancing student employability will influence student satisfaction with the internships. At the same time satisfaction with internships involves the arrangement of HEI, employer and intern, and there is a need to understand their interaction with the overall goal to understanding routes to enhance student's employability.

3. Research design

3.1. Hypothesis

Based on the above, seven hypotheses are made for this research. It is assumed that during an internship, students' satisfaction with school, with company, and with self-achievement will positively influence the overall satisfaction with the internship. It is hypothesized that satisfaction with school, with company, and with self-achievement will positively enhance student's employability. Further, that enhanced employability will influence student's overall satisfaction with the internships. These seven hypotheses are listed as follows (Fig. 1):

- H₁:** Students' satisfaction with the school during an internship program will positively influence internship satisfaction.
- H₂:** Students' satisfaction with the company during an internship program will positively influence internship satisfaction.
- H₃:** Students' satisfaction with their self-achievement during an internship program will positively influence internship satisfaction.
- H₄:** Students' satisfaction with the school during an internship program will positively influence their employability.
- H₅:** Students' satisfaction with the company during internship programs will positively influence their employability.
- H₆:** Students' satisfaction with their self-commitment during internship programs will positively influence their employability.
- H₇:** Students' employability will positively influence their overall satisfaction with their internship program.

3.2. Questionnaire design

To test the hypotheses firstly the internship satisfaction scale designed in [Chen and Shen \(2011\)](#) research was adopted. The questionnaire includes three major categories, eight dimensions, with a total of 37 questions. The three major categories are: 1. School's internship system and administration; 2. Company's cooperation and assistance; 3. Student's self-commitment. There was an additional question on overall satisfaction. The above questions used a 5-point Likert scale (1 implies very dissatisfied while 5 implies very satisfied). For employability, the scale designed by [Liu et al. \(2006\)](#) for tertiary students was adopted. The questions focus on improved employability and include four major dimensions: 1. General Competencies; 2. Professional Competencies; 3. Attitude towards work; 4. Confidence in career planning. The four dimensions include 19 occupational skills. A 5-point Likert scale was also adopted for the rating scale (1 implies greatly disagree while 5 implies greatly agree).

3.3. Data collection

After the questionnaire was designed, 50 students were invited for a pre-test. No significant issues were found in the pre-test and an official questionnaire was eventually produced.

Students from different hospitality-related departments were surveyed to enhance the usefulness of the study and increase its

Table 1
Internship satisfaction and employability reliability analysis.

	Factors and dimensions	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's α
Satisfaction with School	X1 Internship Planning	3.43	0.66	0.86
	X2 Internship Assignment	3.48	0.63	0.70
	X3 Administrative Support and Assistance	3.32	0.73	0.82
	X4 Performance Evaluation	3.35	0.64	0.74
Satisfaction with Company	X5 Educational Training	3.31	0.80	0.85
	X6 Reasonable Conduct	3.35	0.72	0.87
Satisfaction with Self Commitment	X7 Dedication to Work	4.02	0.66	0.80
	X8 Dedication to Learning	3.75	0.72	0.64
Employability	Y2 General Competencies	3.76	0.58	0.88
	Y3 Professional Competencies	3.66	0.64	0.81
	Y4 Attitude Towards Work	3.87	0.65	0.87
	Y5 Career Planning and Confidence	3.85	0.67	0.78

reference value. The questionnaire was handed out to senior students at a public hospitality and tourism university during the first month after completion of their internships and return to school; a total of 550 copies were distributed. The purposive sampling approach was adopted for the survey. The respondents were chosen because they attended internship programs during the entirety of their third-year study. They came from a total of ten departments and completed internships in a diverse range of industries, including tourism and hospitality-related industries. The students were interviewed by industry partners for positions and while not all students were able to get their first choice of location, all students took internships in their field of study. All internships were paid and were full time. The majority of industry partners are large chains which provide industry standard orientation and training. Amongst the 550 copies of the questionnaire distributed, a total of 533 were recovered. After discounting 74 invalid and incomplete copies, 459 were found to be valid and usable, making an effective recovery rate of 83.5%. Gender wise, most of the respondents were female accounting for 335 recovered copies, or 73.0% of all valid copies while 118 copies, 27%, were recovered from male respondents. As far as their subject major is concerned, the largest group were students from the food service management department, accounting for 56 copies, or 12.2%, followed by travel management, accounting for 51 copies, or 11.1%, and then airline and transport service, accounting for 50 copies or 10.9%. Most of the interns surveyed were assigned to the dining-restaurant guest service department during their internship, accounting for 125 copies or 27.2%, followed by dining-kitchen staff, with 117 copies or 25.2%, and finally others, with 111 copies or 24.2%.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Reliability analysis

A reliability analysis of the factors in the student's satisfaction (Table 1) showed Cronbach's α ranging from 0.64 to 0.87. Of these factors, the Student's Dedication to Work, a dimension of Satisfaction with Self-commitment showed the highest mean (4.02) and Educational Training, a dimension of Satisfaction with Company showed the lowest mean (3.31).

With regards to Employability Cronbach's α fell between 0.78 and 0.88 and the most significant improvement amongst the dimensions of employability was seen in the Attitude towards Work at (3.87) and the lowest for Professional Competencies (3.66).

4.2. Analysis of students' enhanced employability through internship

The top three competencies for Employability as reported by the students are emotional control and tolerance with pressure (4.05), the ability to adapt to changes (3.98), and better knowledge of the hospitality industry to help with future choice of work (3.96). The bottom ranked three competencies are confidence in working in the hospitality industry upon graduation (3.57), innovation (3.56) and the ability to use a computer (3.33) (See Appendix A). The above results indicate that the genuine working environment experienced during the internship improved students' ability to adapt to the changing workplace and effectively boosted their ability in emotional control and workplace knowledge. On the other hand, computer skills, amongst other professional competencies, were not effectively improved during the internship and innovation showed the least improvement amongst General Competencies.

It is worth taking note that, with regard to Career Planning and Confidence, confidence in staying in the hospitality industry was relatively low. This finding was similar to that of the research and investigation conducted by Chen and Shen (2011) which also found the willingness to remain in the industry after internship can be influenced by internship satisfaction. This dimension is also at odds with the other factors of the dimensions of Career Planning and Confidence indicating that internship programs can offer a better understanding of the industry, even if it leads them to subsequently seek employment in other fields. Regardless of whether they will or will not stay in this industry, internships have a positive influence on young people's career planning.

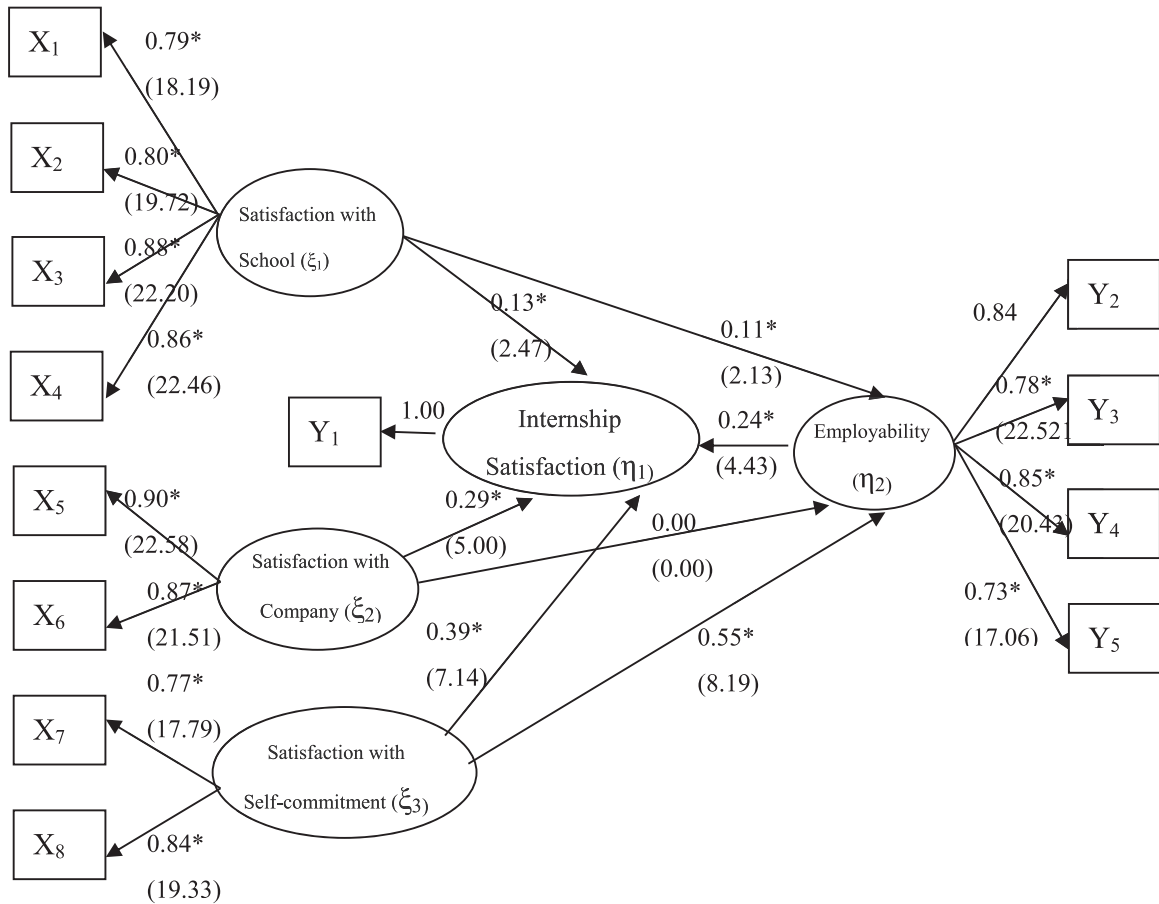


Fig. 2. Relational model students' satisfaction with internship and its influence on the enhanced employability.

4.3. Structural model of students' internship satisfaction and its influence on enhanced employability

To analyze the correlation between enhanced employability and students' internship satisfaction linear structural equation modelling was established for this research. Latent independent variables are Satisfaction with School (ξ_1), Satisfaction with Company (ξ_2), and Satisfaction with Self-commitment (ξ_3), and Satisfaction with Internship (η_1) and Employability (η_2) are latent dependent variables. Results obtained through the linear structural equation model analysis software LISREL8.52 for the internship satisfaction and enhanced employability model established in this research are shown in Fig. 2. The numbers represent path coefficients while those enclosed in brackets represent the t-values of the coefficients.

4.4. Goodness of fit test for models

The observed variables within the structural model of internship satisfaction and its influence on employability were found to have significant factor loadings with the exception of General Competencies. The coefficients fell between 0.71 and 0.89, implying a favorable fitness range. Except for General Competencies, t-values of measures for respective dimensions were all greater than 1.96, without negative error variance and with significant error variances, indicating that the fitness model was favorable. For more data please see Appendix B.

The model fit indices (χ^2 ratio = 2.54, GFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.06; AGFI = 0.93 NFI = 0.98; CFI = 0.99) indicated the model fit the data well. Among the parsimonious fit measures, the RMR value was 0.04, which was smaller than 0.1; the PGFI value was 0.56; and the PNFI value was 0.67; all were between 0 and 1, meeting ideal standards.

The internal structural fitness aims to examine the significance of the estimate parameter value within the model and the reliability of respective indicators and latent variables. In other words, it is a gauge of the model's quality. Internal structural fitness indicators are shown in Appendix B. The reliability of observed variables to latent variables was between 0.57 and 0.81 while that of latent variables was between 0.64 and 0.78. All were at acceptable levels, indicating that the internal structural fitness of the model was already at an acceptable level.

4.5. Testing the research hypotheses

Results of path coefficients among individual latent variables in Fig. 2 show that Satisfaction with School, with Company, and with Self-commitment bore significant influences on the overall Satisfaction with Internship as did Employability. Satisfaction with Self-commitment, had the largest influence, followed sequentially by Satisfaction with Company and with School.

Satisfaction with School and with Self-commitment had a significant positive influence on Employability, Satisfaction with Self-commitment, being the largest. Satisfaction with Company, on the other hand, did not show a positive association with Employability. Thus, all hypotheses, except for H5, were supported during the verification process.

Amongst the observed variables of Satisfaction with School, Administrative Support and Assistance, and Performance Evaluation were relatively important. Amongst the observed variables of Satisfaction with Company, Educational Training was relatively important. Amongst the observed variables of Satisfaction with Self Commitment, Dedication to Learning was relatively important. Amongst observed variables of Employability, the improvement of Attitude to Work and Career Planning and Confidence were relatively important.

5. Discussion

This study explores the relationship of employability and student satisfaction with the major stakeholders involved in internships through linear structure equation analysis. Employability was found to be an influencer of overall satisfaction with the internship and the model of satisfaction looked at three key elements, the satisfaction with the school program, the student's own commitment, and with the company. The first two elements were found to have a significant influence on employability. The results also furthered information on the concept of enhanced employability and this section will discuss each element of the model in turn before discussing implications for other internship programs.

5.1. Enhanced employability

The literature strongly argues that internships lead to positive outcomes on employability as regarded by employer, institution, and student alike, and the student's perception indicated by this study appear to support this. As Yang et al. (2016) have reported from their research, employability skills are highly valued by employers looking to recruit quality graduates and internships serve to provide valuable real-world work experience and enhance employability skills. The finding of this research shows further detail about what category of employability will be enhanced as a result of the internship.

In this study students took an internship in their third year prior to returning to school for a final year and so the study investigates their perception of how their employability has changed. As this is largely positive, it indicates their employability has been enhanced. However, of the four dimensions of Employability: General Competencies, Professional Competencies, Attitude towards Work, and Career Planning and Confidence it is interesting that General Competencies did not show a significant result. The positive relationship for the other dimensions suggest the students come out of the experience more prepared with professional skills and an understanding of career needs, but not so for General Competencies.

General Competencies includes items such as teamwork and leadership skills, language skills and time management skills. It would be expected that a year's exposure to the real world of work would add to these skills, yet the students did not appear to consider them to be significantly related to enhanced employability. Of these, industry reports that development of leadership skills are very important and other studies have looked at this area resulting from internships and have some contradictory results. As will be discussed below, the results here might be an artifact of the local industry and related to company training.

As reported, overall it appears that students felt that the internship had been beneficial and enhanced their employability. It could be said that internships are not always an easy path for students as they are generally an entry level position, yet students report being motivated to join an internship in the hope of improving employability. This study appears to support this contention as students reporting greater enhancement in employability appear to be more satisfied with their internships. This is a reassuring result and invites investigation into what elements they were satisfied with.

5.2. Satisfaction with self-commitment and its influence on employability

The effectiveness of Satisfaction with Self-commitments was 0.55, indicating that students' dedication to their work and learning during internships effectively improved their employability. This is very inspiring news. Internships are meaningful in that interns get to learn from their work. When students are willing to dedicate themselves to work and learning, their various career prospect indicators can be effectively improved. This finding falls in line with the opinions held by Binder et al. (2015). Kong and Yan (2014) also proved that dedication to learning will contribute to better employability.

Closer examination of the dimensions in Satisfaction with Self-commitment found that relatively speaking, Dedication to Learning was the most important followed by Dedication to Work. Dedication to Learning encompassed two factors, 'content of work during internship helps improve my competency at work' and 'I was able to complete the internship report assiduously.' Dedication to Work, on the other hand, encompassed in sequential order the factors 'I was able to give full dedication to work during my internship' and 'I had a good time getting along with colleagues.' Earlier studies have also noted that the social relationships developed on the internship can have a large influence on the student's perceptions and satisfaction (Robinson et al., 2016).

As suggested by Chen and Shen (2012) and Zopiatis (2007), companies welcome students with a proactive attitude and a mindset

that portrays their willingness to learn. As such, it is suggested that students should dedicate themselves to learning during internship programs so that they can apply what they have learned and improve their employability.

5.3. Satisfaction with school and its influence on employability

Although statistical results show significance with regard to Satisfaction with School, the effectiveness index was only 0.15 and hence should not be over interpreted. The two dimensions under it, Administrative Support and Assistance and Performance Evaluation, were the most important compared to the other dimensions with regard to their influence on student's employability. This finding resonates with the proposal made by [Ju, Emenheiser, Clayton, and Reynolds \(1998\)](#) that internships should be supported by school teachers and administration and should be evaluated under a reasonable process. Within this dimension Administrative Support and Assistance encompasses indices such as 'guidelines of internship programs, regular visits by instructors', and 'faculty support for dispute resolution'. Other scholars have also raised the importance of the relationship with the faculty support ([Ruhanen et al., 2013b](#); [Wan et al., 2013](#); [Zopiatis, 2007](#)) and indicates this is an area that needs attention from the HEI.

Another important factor is the Performance Evaluation, which included indices such as 'work performance evaluation', 'guidelines for compiling internship report' and the 'alignment of internship objectives with performance evaluation'. This matches the opinions expressed by [Zopiatis and Theocharous \(2013\)](#) that curriculum support and evaluation at educational institutions are also an area for the HEI to focus on.

In sum, the study supports the results mentioned by [Lam and Ching \(2007\)](#), [Zopiatis and Theocharous \(2013\)](#) that a planned school internship system can help improve employability and individual professional competencies of students.

5.4. Satisfaction with Company and its influence on employability

As far as Satisfaction with Company is concerned, its influence on employability was not significant in this research, indicating that satisfaction of students at the company level does not help in enhancing students' employability. This would suggest an area of concern as one of the purported reasons to join an internship would be to learn from the company.

Examination of the two variables encompassed within Satisfaction with Company, Educational Training, and Reasonable Conduct, offers some clues to this response. Many companies that offer internships do not have much experience with interns. As a result, they assign students to entry-level positions that sometimes remain unchanged or fail to provide the students with advanced training. Scenarios occur where students have become familiar with their position and understand their roles, but do not receive any further or advanced training. In this study that can be for the whole 12-month duration of the internship. In cases such as these students may feel that they are being treated as a form of cheap labor. [Pool and Sewell \(2007\)](#) indicated solutions to this showing that students involved in meaningful projects during their internship showed more satisfaction overall.

Further, [Yiu & Law \(2012, p. 391\)](#) observed there can be an alarming "imbalance between the expectations of students and employers regarding internships." [Austin \(2002, p. 95\)](#) noted in a study that some students felt themselves "deserving of better positions," whereas they were, as is common with hospitality, given entry level positions. This mismatch might be of a similar nature in this study.

With regards to the second of the two dimensions to Satisfaction with the Company, Reasonable Conduct, some interns stay at a company for an entire year, but their intern position does not provide them with the various benefits and promotions available to full-time employees. The interns may find they are doing exactly the same job as the full-time employees, but at a significantly lower salary and without the benefits. As a result, they feel that they are not being treated fairly.

[Zopiatis and Theocharous \(2013\)](#) mentioned that supervision and training provided by supervisors during an internship has a huge influence on the student's perceived benefits of the internship, but this fact is often ignored by companies ([Lam & Ching, 2007](#); [Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012](#)). [Kong and Yan \(2014\)](#) indicated that the only win-win strategy is to have companies and employees dedicate themselves to learning at the same time.

Elite internship programs established by some hotels emphasizing more company training during the internship have been established precisely to tackle this issue. Students who are already equipped with fundamental skills can adapt and learn in a new environment relatively easily and have access to advanced learning. Companies, on the other hand, stand to enjoy benefits including enhanced productivity and customer satisfaction. However, hotels that are willing to offer such programs, are relatively few.

5.5. Implications on enhancing employability and satisfaction

This study suggests that internships can indeed meet the goal of enhancing the student's employability and has implications for other internship programs. Students were not satisfied with all the elements or each of the stakeholders in the program which impacted on their employability. However, as other authors have expressed, this suggests that integration of the three stakeholders in the internship program can offset areas of deficiency or dissatisfaction.

Firstly, as observed before, the school needs to manage student expectations before the internship. However, this study indicated students were satisfied with their own efforts and so the students should be encouraged to take ownership of their own progress and gain advantages from these efforts.

Secondly, the hospitality industry is one often characterized by high turnover and staff shortage which can make it difficult to offer interns a well-constructed training experience. However, this is an important element in student satisfaction and in enhancing employability and the employer needs to furnish meaningful and varied work opportunities. The school's role here is to clarify the

goals of the internship program and to assist the employer in creating training programs. Another option, as suggested by Fong et al. (2014), is that schools could establish their own regular operating internship institutions (hotels or restaurants) to better fulfil the educational objectives of an internship.

Finally, students did not report much progress in general competencies and schools can move to fill this gap after the internship. HEI's should follow up on the internship experience with opportunities for reflection and sharing. Frequently institutions will have another cohort preparing for an internship experience and the returning interns should be part of this process. This not only imparts useful real-world experience but requires the returning students to process their own reflections. Other observations from this study also suggest that HEIs can offer courses upon returning to school for some areas to be further enhanced. Leadership skills, or language courses being examples.

6. Conclusion

This research offered some interesting results that can be of value to HEIs in planning and organizing hospitality internship programs. Firstly, the study falls in line with the general understanding of the importance of internships. As Yang et al. (2016) reported from their research, employability skills are highly valued by employers looking to recruit quality graduates. To this end internships provide valuable real-world work experience and enhancing employability skills leads to greater student satisfaction with the program. The finding of this research offered some further detail about what category of employability will be enhanced after internship. In particular it suggested that some of general competencies, such as leadership, team work or even language skills, did not show significant improvement. This leads to opportunities for the HEI to meet some of these needs when internship students return to campus.

The lack of significant correlation between student satisfaction with the company and with employability might also indicate the student's awareness of their progress in the areas of general competencies and might also indicate issues with the company's role in the program. There is a suggestion of a lack of training, job rotation opportunities, or simply negative feelings when compared to full time employees that might hinder the advancement of some skill areas that the industry claims to be highly important in their recruiting. Since the internship period can be described as a 'try before you buy' period for the company (Yiu & Law, 2012) there is a need for better in-company internship programs. Companies should look beyond the short-term cost saving use of interns and work to invest management time and training opportunities.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that some of the issues could be due to a discrepancy between student and company expectations. Again, these are opportunities for the HEI to improve their internship programs. Firstly, to manage expectations of both parties, and secondly, to work with partner companies in an effort to bring more training and opportunities for the students into the internship programs. Schools need to not only prepare and mentor the students but need to attempt to do the same with industry partners. This is a difficult reach for both sides, but academia needs to search for opportunities to offer support that is of value to the internship company.

A positive result from the study indicated that overall the students were happy with the HEI's management of the internship program and that this contributed to the improvement in employability. In particular the students appeared to feel they had the support from academic or institution liaison and support, which also highlights the importance of this aspect.

Finally, it is interesting to observe that some of the strongest correlations to enhanced employability arose from the student's satisfaction with their own performance. With all the efforts HEIs and companies put into developing their internship programs, the student's perception is that they reap the greatest benefits from their own efforts. This might be an encouraging observation: students who put in the most efforts are those that are more employable and perhaps this is as it should be.

As Harvey observed (2001), "any evaluation of employability needs clearly to indicate areas for improvement" and this study has looked at the satisfaction of the students with the three main stakeholders, the HEI, the company and their own efforts and offers some suggestions to each stakeholder. In agreement with Pauzé, Johnson, and Miller (1989), a well-planned internship program involving the three stakeholders can serve to maximize the satisfaction of internship students and serve to enhance their employability. Improvements in internships should assist in a higher retention of graduates in the hospitality industry and serve to provide a better and more motivated pool of graduates for the hospitality industry.

As with other studies, this study is not without its limitations. The sample of this research consists of students from different departments at the same educational institution and was purposive sampling in nature. As such, although hypotheses introduced were validated, results of the research should not be over interpreted and may have limited generalizability. It is suggested samples should be sourced from different institutes and random sampling can be used to infer situations throughout Taiwan.

Also, in order to focus on competencies enhanced during internship, the questionnaire did not investigate the personal traits of students as far as the issue of employability is concerned. Future researchers are reminded to seek improvement in the future in this regard.

Appendix A. Enhanced employability following internship

Item		Mean (Sequential order)	Standard deviation
General Competencies	My ability to express myself and to communicate with others has improved after internship	3.92 (7)	0.72
	My ability to manage time has improved after internship	3.75 (11)	0.73
	My leadership capabilities have improved after internship	3.67 (13)	0.78
	My ability to innovate has improved after internship	3.56 (18)	0.79
	My ability to work with others as a team has improved after internship	3.93 (6)	0.73
	My native language proficiency has improved after internship	3.58 (16)	0.88
	My professional hospitality-related foreign language proficiency has improved after internship	3.59 (15)	0.93
Professional Competencies	My emotional control and tolerance of pressure has improved after internship	4.05 (1)	0.74
	My professional hospitality knowledge and skills have improved after internship	3.85 (9)	0.77
	My basic computer application skills have improved after internship	3.33 (19)	0.90
	My ability to apply theory to actual work has improved after internship	3.65 (14)	0.80
Attitude Towards Work	My ability to discover and solve problems has improved after internship	3.79 (10)	0.73
	My willingness to learn has increased after internship	3.75 (11)	0.78
	My ability to adapt to changes has improved after internship	3.98 (2)	0.67
Career Planning and Confidence	My dedication to work has increased significantly after internship	3.88 (8)	0.72
	Internship helps me understand and plan my career	3.95 (4)	0.79
	Internship gives me a further understanding of the hospitality industry and benefits me when choosing my job in the future	3.96 (3)	0.74
	Internship enhances my ability to land a job in the future	3.94 (5)	0.78
	I will continue to stay in the hospitality industry upon completion of internship	3.57 (17)	0.91

Appendix B. Internal structural fitness indicators for the relational model of internship satisfaction and its association with employability

Latent variable	Observed variable	Estimated parameter value	Reliability of the individual item	Reliability of the latent variable
Satisfaction with School	Internship Planning	0.75	0.57	0.68
	Internship Assignment	0.80	0.63	
	Administrative Support and Assistance	0.88	0.78	
Satisfaction with Company	Performance Evaluation	0.86	0.76	0.78
	Educational Training	0.90	0.81	
Satisfaction with Self Commitment	Reasonable Conduct	0.87	0.75	0.64
	Dedication to Work	0.77	0.6	
Employability	Dedication to Learning	0.83	0.69	0.65
	General Competencies	0.89	0.71	
	Professional Competencies	0.78	0.61	
	Attitude towards Work	0.85	0.72	
	Career Planning and Confidence	0.73	0.53	

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