

SUSTAINABLE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS: THE ROLE OF PRE-INTERNSHIP EXPECTATIONS AMONG LANGKAWI TOURISM ACADEMY @ KOLEJ KOMUNITI LANGKAWI STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of pre-internship expectations in shaping sustainable personal development pathways among students of Langkawi Tourism Academy @ Kolej Komuniti Langkawi. As the tourism and hospitality sector plays a key role in Malaysia's economy, preparing graduates with appropriate skills, attitudes, and awareness is vital for long-term industry growth.

Research Method: A quantitative survey method is proposed, using a questionnaire adapted from previous studies (Khalib et al., 2022; Robitschek et al., 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2013).

Findings: The study demonstrates that pre-internship expectations significantly influence internship satisfaction, personal growth, self-efficacy, and employability among tourism students, explaining 62–84% of the variance. High mean scores indicate students' optimism and motivation. Findings emphasize the importance of structured pre-internship preparation, reflective learning, and mentorship to enhance sustainable personal and professional development. Educators, industry partners, and policymakers are encouraged to align internship programs with student expectations to foster skill development, confidence, and career readiness in Malaysia's tourism sector.

Originality: This study contributes to the body of literature by providing a fresh viewpoint on how students' expectations affect their self-efficacy, employability, and long-term development by tying together ideas of work-integrated learning, career preparedness, and sustainable education. Additionally, the study offers useful information that policymakers, business partners, and educators may use to create internship preparation programs that promote sustainable human capital development in Malaysia's tourism industry.

Keywords: Pre-internship expectations, Sustainable personal development, Employability, Sustainable tourism education

1. INTRODUCTION

A key component of tourism and hospitality education is internships, which connect classroom instruction with real-world experience. They provide an organized setting for fostering professionalism, employability, and sustainable learning behavior within Malaysia's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system, particularly at Langkawi Tourism Academy @ Kolej Komuniti Langkawi (LTA@KKLK). According to the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, the tourism industry continues to make a significant contribution to Malaysia's GDP, necessitating graduates with both technical expertise and adaptable soft skills. Students' self-efficacy, motivation, and learning satisfaction are greatly impacted by their pre-internship expectations, or assumptions about what they will encounter in business settings (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013). Unrealistic expectations, however, might lead to disengagement, performance anxiety, or frustration (Khalib et al., 2022).

Therefore, enhancing work-integrated learning (WIL) frameworks requires an understanding of how expectations impact professional and personal development. The proposed study explores how LTA@KKLK students' sustainable personal growth is impacted by pre-internship expectations and how structured orientation and mentorship might match expectations with the realities of working in the hospitality industry. Despite the acknowledged value of internships, many students studying hospitality and tourism find that their expectations and the reality of their placements don't match. Unrealistic expectations can lead to limited learning results, decreased motivation, and unhappiness (Khalib et al., 2022). Additionally, not much research has been done on the role expectations have in long-term personal growth, especially in Malaysian community colleges. This gap emphasizes the necessity of investigating the ways in which pre-internship expectations impact career paths, employability, and long-term professional sustainability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 PRE-INTERNSHIP EXPECTATIONS

Pre-internship expectations are students' views, assumptions, and predictions about what they would encounter throughout their industrial training. In tourism and hospitality education, these expectations frequently include supervision quality, skill development possibilities, career promotion, and workplace culture (Zopiatis et al., 2013; Sultoni et al., 2018). Students often join internships intending to apply theoretical knowledge, receive supervisor assistance, and build competencies relevant to industry demands. However, a mismatch between expectations and actual experiences might result in dissatisfaction or disengagement (Beggs et al., 2008).

Previous work experience, peer discussions, and institutional briefings all contribute to the formation of expectations. According to (Khalib et al., 2022) students who attend systematic pre-internship orientations have more realistic expectations, allowing for easier adaptation to professional demands. Aligning expectations with industry standards is especially important in Malaysia because the tourism industry is service-driven, requiring students to demonstrate both technical proficiency and interpersonal skills. As a result, educational institutions are advised to manage expectations through mentorship and pre-placement briefings to reduce anxiety and increase preparedness.

When students believe that their expectations are met, such as through helpful supervision, appropriate work, and professional exposure, they report higher levels of pleasure and engagement. On the other hand, learning and confidence may be affected by unfulfilled expectations, such as repetitious work or a lack of feedback. According to Sultoni et al. (2018) managing pre-internship expectations is therefore crucial for fostering positive learning experiences and enhancing long-term employability.

2.2 INTERNSHIP SATISFACTION AND PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY

Internship satisfaction is a student's overall evaluation of their internship experience, which includes learning opportunities, supervisor assistance, and workplace climate. Stronger career goals, higher perceived employability, and enhanced academic motivation are frequently the outcomes of high levels of pleasure (Collins, 2002). Internships in the hospitality and tourism sectors allow students to experience the realities of service delivery and organizational management by bridging the gap between academic theory and professional practice (Cho, 2006).

According to research, supervision quality, autonomy, workload, and task diversity all have an impact on employee satisfaction. Students' satisfaction and learning outcomes increase when they get fair treatment, consistent supervision, and opportunities for meaningful contribution (Zopiatis et al., 2013). Additionally, happy interns believe they are more marketable since they acquire industry-relevant skills and confidence via practical experience (Wilton, 2012).

The term "perceived employability" describes students' confidence in their capacity to find and keep a job. Employability perceptions are greatly improved by positive internship experiences, especially those that improve teamwork, communication, and problem-solving abilities (Khalib et al., 2022). Close cooperation between industry partners and higher education institutions in Malaysia guarantees that internship placements offer real exposure, enhancing graduates' job preparation and happiness.

2.3 PERSONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Internships provide not just professional growth chances, but also personal development experiences that promote self-confidence, adaptability, and interpersonal maturity. Students gain essential abilities that go beyond technical proficiency by actively participating in real-world work environments and learning how to manage challenging social and professional contexts (Saks & Gruman, 2018).

According to Sultoni et al. (2018) students can improve their communication and conflict resolution abilities through engagement with clients, managers, and coworkers, which fosters resilience and self-awareness. According to Zopiatis et al. (2013) students who are exposed to a variety of workplace cultures develop a broader viewpoint and a higher level of cultural intelligence, which is a crucial quality for hospitality workers working in international environments.

The hospitality sector in Malaysia places a high value on teamwork, professionalism, and excellent customer service. According to Khalib et al. (2022) internships that include organized reflection and feedback sessions help students evaluate themselves and make improvements over time. These experiences foster personal development by assisting students in acquiring initiative, self-control, and ethical awareness—skills that are essential for long-term professional success and employment.

2.4 SELF-EFFICACY

According to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy is a belief that one can plan and carry out the actions required to accomplish particular objectives. Self-efficacy influences how students respond to challenges, complete assignments, and take advantage of learning opportunities during an internship. While low self-efficacy can lead to anxiety and avoidance behavior, high self-efficacy improves mental toughness, problem-solving, and flexibility (Lent et al., 2016).

Strong self-efficacy increases the likelihood that students would engage in workplace activities, speak with supervisors with assurance, and offer consumers high-quality service in the hospitality and tourism industry (Sultoni et al., 2018). Students can effectively manage professional problems when they have this self-belief reinforced by supportive supervision, constructive criticism, and successful task completion during internships (Cho, 2006).

According to Khalib et al. (2022) Malaysian hospitality students who participate in well-designed internship programs that offer opportunity for reflection and mentoring have higher levels of professional self-efficacy. In addition to improving task performance, this increased confidence enhances long-term career commitment. As a result, developing self-efficacy has to be a primary objective of internship programs in order to equip students for the demanding and competitive nature of the hospitality sector.

2.5 RESEARCH GAP AND CONCEPTUAL IMPLICATION

Even though there are more studies investigating internships in tourism and hospitality education (Robitschek et al., 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2013; Azmi Khalib et al., 2022) there are still a lot of research gaps. Firstly, pre-internship expectations have gotten very little attention in the literature, with the majority of studies focusing on

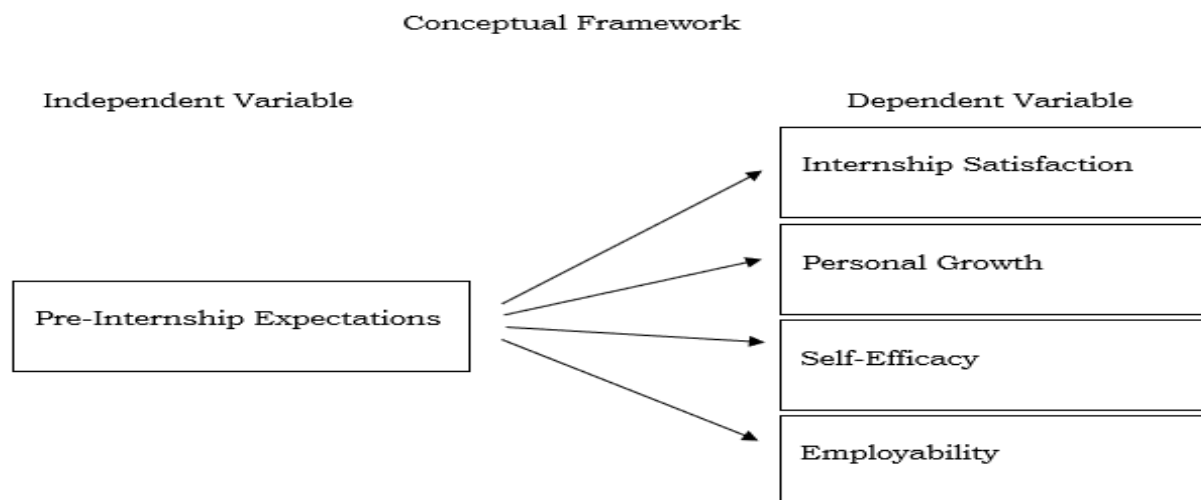
students' post-internship happiness and employability results. Students must understand their expectations before entering the workforce since these influences how they view and interact with their educational experiences (Beggs et al., 2008).

Second, there is still lack of research done in Malaysia, especially in hospitality programs at the community college and diploma levels. According to Khalib et al. (2022) the majority of research has concentrated on university students or large-scale tourism establishments, ignoring smaller educational settings that play a significant role in the country's tourism workforce. Understanding how institutional support and cultural context affect internship results is limited by the absence of specific information.

Third, whereas previous research has looked at employability and satisfaction independently, less has looked at the relationship between these constructs and self-efficacy and personal development. Little is known about the relationship between students' psychological growth, self-assurance, and preparedness for the workforce. The gap points to the need for a more comprehensive model that connects perceived employability to pre-internship expectations, satisfaction, personal development, and self-efficacy.

In order to fill these gaps, this study looks at how pre-internship expectations affect internship satisfaction, self-efficacy, and personal growth among Malaysian hospitality students, as well as how these elements work together to improve perceived employability.

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Source: Adapted from (Khalib et al., 2022; Robitschek et al., 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2013).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.7 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To investigate the relationship between pre-internship expectations and internship satisfaction in hospitality and tourism students. To investigate the impact of pre-internship expectations on students' personal and professional development during their internship experiences. To determine the relationship between pre-internship expectations and students' self-efficacy in dealing with workplace challenges experienced during the internship. To determine the impact of pre-internship expectations on students' perceived employability after their internship.

2.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What is the relationship between pre-internship expectations and internship satisfaction among hospitality and tourism students? RQ2: How do pre-internship expectations affect students' personal and professional development during internships? RQ3: What is the correlation between pre-internship expectations and students' self-efficacy in dealing with workplace challenges? RQ4: To what extent do pre-internship expectations influence students' perceived employability after they complete their internship?

2.9 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H1: Pre-internship expectations have a significant positive relationship with internship satisfaction among hospitality and tourism students.

H2: Pre-internship expectations significantly influence students' personal growth and professional maturity during internships.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between pre-internship expectations and students' self-efficacy in managing workplace challenges.

H4: Pre-internship expectations significantly affect students' perceived employability after internship completion.

3. METHODOLOGY

Using a survey technique, this study employed a quantitative research design involving students from Langkawi Tourism Academy at Kolej Komuniti Langkawi. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) quantitative approaches were appropriate because they enabled the systematic assessment of awareness levels, the identification of affecting factors, and the statistical testing of correlations between variables. To ensure uniformity across all responders, a structured questionnaire was developed to gather standardized data.

The study's target population consisted of students from the Langkawi Tourism Academy @ Kolej Komuniti Langkawi, who were preparing for their internship. The study group comprised 60 semester 3 students enrolled in the Personal Development course who are pursuing a Certificate in Food and Beverage Services, Culinary Arts, and Recreational Tourism. The Krejcie and Morgan Table, the required sample size was 52 respondents. A simple random sampling method was adopted to ensure that each student had an equal opportunity to participate. Additionally, ten students participated in a pilot study to assess the reliability and clarity of the research instrument. For the main study, 60 questionnaires were distributed randomly, and 46 complete responses, representing 77% of the total population, were collected and analyzed.

The instrument for the study incorporated items on skill expectations, supervisor support, career preparedness, and self-efficacy and were adapted from previous studies (Robitschek et al., 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2013; Khalib et al., 2022). Regression analysis, reliability tests, and descriptive statistics will all be used to evaluate the data using SPSS. The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which produced a high level of reliability value of 0.9 across 21 items. This result indicated that the instrument was reliable and suitable for assessing the intended constructs.

The questionnaire comprised five main sections: Demographic information, pre-internship expectations, internship outcomes and satisfaction, personal growth initiative, and general self-efficacy. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree").

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 PRE-INTERNSHIP EXPECTATIONS

The findings indicate that students expressed very positive perceptions toward their upcoming internships. All nine categories had mean ratings ranging from 4.13 to 4.43, suggesting that students are generally optimistic about their future internships. The statement "Overall, I expect this internship to be a positive learning experience" had the highest mean ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.935$), indicating a high level of optimism about the internship's possible advantages.

"I expect to become more confident in a workplace setting" ($M = 4.37$) and "I expect the internship will help me decide on my career path" ($M = 4.37$) are two other high-scoring items. This implies that students view the internship as a chance to define their personal and professional lives in addition to gaining real-world experience.

Table 1: Summary of dimensions and interpretation

| Dimension | Mean Range | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--|
| Pre-internship expectations | 4.13 – 4.43 | Very high expectations; positive and motivated mindset |
| Employability and satisfaction | 4.17 – 4.28 | Strong belief in internship value for career development |
| Personal growth | 4.26 – 4.39 | High self-improvement and goal-setting orientation |
| Self-efficacy | 4.07 – 4.15 | High confidence and problem-solving ability |

4.2 INTERNSHIP SATISFACTION

The mean scores for internship satisfaction were also notably high, ranging between 4.17 and 4.28, indicating that students recognize internships are crucial for improving employability and career clarity. With the highest mean ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.834$), the statement "The internship will enhance my future employability" highlighted the anticipated connection between internship experience and future employment opportunities.

Table 2: Internship Satisfaction

| Model Summary | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .916 ^a | .839 | .835 | 1.05613 | .839 | 218.217 | 1 | 42 | .000 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), PreInternship_EXP

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|-------------------------|-------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Tolerance | VIF |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.394 | .785 | | 1.776 | .083 | | |
| | PreInterns | .292 | .020 | .916 | 14.77 | .000 | 1.00 | 1.000 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|--|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| | hip_EXP | | | | 2 | | 0 | |
| a. Dependent Variable: Internship_Satisfaction | | | | | | | | |

The regression analysis showed that pre-internship expectations significantly influenced internship satisfaction ($R = 0.916$, $R^2 = 0.839$, $F(1,42) = 218.217$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that students' pre-internship expectations contribute for about 83.9% of the variation in internship satisfaction, confirming a strong predictive relationship. The close values of R^2 (0.839) and adjusted R^2 (0.835) demonstrate the model's stability, while a low standard error of estimate (1.056) suggests accurate prediction of satisfaction outcomes.

4.3 PERSONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Students also reported high motivation for personal improvement, with the averages of the five items in this section range from 4.26 to 4.39. The item with the highest rating, "I have a plan to improve myself" ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.930$), demonstrates proactive self-management.

Table 3: Personal Growth and Development

| Model Summary | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .788 ^a | .621 | .612 | 2.95958 | .621 | 68.770 | 1 | 42 | .000 |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), PreInternship_EXP | | | | | | | | | |

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|-------------------------|-----------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |
| | | B | Std. Error | | | | Beta | Tolerance |
| 1 | (Constant) | 3.886 | 2.200 | | 1.766 | .085 | | |
| | PreInternship_EXP | .459 | .055 | .788 | 8.293 | .000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Personal_Growth_Dev | | | | | | | | |

Regression analysis was used to determine how much pre-internship expectations affect students' personal development and growth during the internship. The findings show that the two variables have a relatively strong and statistically significant relationship ($R = 0.788$, $R^2 = 0.621$, $F(1,42) = 68.770$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that pre-internship expectations account for 62.1% of the variation in personal growth and development. The model appears to be stable and generalizable based on the updated R^2 value (0.612), which is close to the original R^2 . The projected values of personal growth are fairly similar to the observed values, according to the standard error of estimation (2.959).

4.4 SELF-EFFICACY

Strong confidence in their ability to solve problems and cope is again demonstrated by the mean scores for self-efficacy measures, which range from 4.07 to 4.15. "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough" had the highest mean ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.894$).

Table 4: Self-Efficacy

| Model Summary | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .793 ^a | .628 | .619 | 2.17801 | .628 | 69.344 | 1 | 41 | .000 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), PreInternship_EXP

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|-------|------|-------------------------|-------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |
| | | B | Std. Error | | | | Tolerance | VIF |
| 1 | (Constant) | 3.028 | 1.672 | | 1.811 | .077 | | |
| | PreInternship_EXP | .348 | .042 | .793 | 8.327 | .000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Self_Efficacy

The regression model found a significant effect of pre-internship expectations on self-efficacy ($R = 0.793$, $R^2 = 0.628$, $F(1,41) = 69.344$, $p < 0.001$). Expectations explained 62.8% of self-efficacy variance, with adjusted R^2 (0.619) showing strong model consistency. A standard error of 2.178 indicates good predictive accuracy.

4.5 EMPLOYABILITY

Table 5: Employability

| Model Summary | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .848 ^a | .718 | .712 | .44512 | .718 | 107.120 | 1 | 42 | .000 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), PreInternship_EXP

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------|---|------|-------------------------|--|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |

| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Tolerance | VIF |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|------|------------|------|--------|------|-----------|-------|
| 1 | (Constant) | .965 | .331 | | 2.917 | .006 | | |
| | PreInternship_EXP | .086 | .008 | .848 | 10.350 | .000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Employability | | | | | | | | |

The regression results also confirmed that pre-internship expectations strongly influenced employability ($R = 0.848$, $R^2 = 0.718$, $F(1,42) = 107.120$, $p < 0.001$). This means expectations accounted for 71.8% of employability outcomes. The model's stability (adjusted $R^2 = 0.712$) and small standard error (0.445) support its robustness. These results suggest that students who entered internships with clear, positive expectations tended to perceive greater employability benefits.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings align with Zopiatis et al. (2013) who observed that pre-internship expectations strongly shape student satisfaction and career direction in the hospitality sector. Consistent with Khalib et al. (2022) Malaysian hospitality students viewed internships as opportunities to enhance confidence, career readiness, and employability. The high mean values across dimensions in this study reinforce that belief.

These findings show that students who have well-defined and reasonable expectations before beginning their internships are more likely to experience personal growth and self-development during the internship. Students are more likely to exhibit flexibility, self-assurance, and reflective learning—qualities that advance their professional maturity—when they are mentally and emotionally ready for the realities of the workplace. This lends belief to the idea that pre-internship preparation classes like Personal Development are essential for developing self-awareness, goal-setting, and a professional identity. Because they can improve both personal and professional outcomes, educational institutions should keep strengthening these preparatory programs by adding reflective learning exercises, expectation alignment seminars, and mentorship sessions (Clarke, 2018; Bates et al., 2019).

Moreover, the results mirror Robitschek et al. (2012) highlighted that personal growth initiative is a self-directed process that results in favorable psychological and professional outcomes, which is consistent with the high levels of self-efficacy and personal development tendencies seen in this study. The results are also consistent with Teixeira and Ferreira's (2019) research, which indicated internships have a major impact on students' employability skills and sustainable career routes.

This study stands out because to its contextual focus on Langkawi tourism academy@Kolej Komuniti Langkawi students, an area that is closely related to Malaysia's tourism industry. Given that the majority of earlier research concentrated on university-level tourism programs, this context offers a useful viewpoint. Thus, by emphasizing how vocational-level students view and get ready for long-term personal and professional growth in the tourism and hospitality sector, this study expands to the body of literature.

The findings have various practical implications. First, program directors and educators can make pre-internship preparation efforts stronger, especially through the Personal Development course, which is especially created to give students the skills and mentality they need to be prepared for an internship. This course provides an essential means of connecting classroom instruction with practical application. In order to assist students, match their expectations with actual professional experiences, it should include focused activities, including expectation management workshops, reflective goal-setting exercises, and mentorship programs.

Second, industry partners have to be urged to offer students meaningful and structured internship experiences that align with their academic backgrounds and

aspirations for personal growth. Industry and educational institutions working together can guarantee that students have access to real-world, skill-building experiences that boost their self-esteem and employability.

Finally, policymakers and curriculum developers need to think about including learning objectives with a sustainability focus in courses that prepare students for internships. In keeping with Malaysia's goal of having an established and globally competitive tourism sector, this strategy will guarantee that tourism and hospitality education keep fostering the development of sustainable human capital.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the discussion shows that before their internships, Langkawi Tourism Academy students have high self-efficacy, high aspirations, and proactive attitudes toward personal growth. These results provide evidence to the theoretical idea that expectations serve as a basis for long-term learning and the development of employability. Thus, by providing insights that can direct improvements in curriculum design and internship management within Malaysia's tourism education system, the study advances our understanding of how pre-internship expectations impact sustainable personal development pathways.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to convey their heartfelt appreciation to Langkawi Tourism Academy @ Kolej Komuniti Langkawi for their ongoing academic help in preparing this study. Additionally, the RIS Scientific Academy is thanked for providing the venue for the presentation and publication of this study. Colleagues and students from the Certificate in Food and Beverage Services, Culinary Arts, and Recreational Tourism programs also contributed to the preparation of this work, and the authors would like to thank them for their thoughts and observations.

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