Transforming Tourism and Hospitality Education: Insights on Virtual Internships from Malaysian University Students in the Post-COVID-19 Era

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant changes to educational practices within the tourism and hospitality sectors, necessitating the widespread adoption of virtual internships as an alternative to traditional in-person experiences. While virtual internships offer flexibility and accessibility, concerns have emerged regarding their effectiveness in providing students with the industry-specific exposure and hands-on skill development essential for success in tourism and hospitality careers. The shift to virtual internships raises critical questions about their ability to adequately prepare students for real-world industry challenges. Unlike traditional internships, which provide direct, engaging experiences in physical workplaces, virtual internships allow students to gain professional experience remotely, typically from home (Park & Jones, 2021). There is a growing need to assess whether these remote experiences equip students with the deep understanding and practical competencies required in the tourism and hospitality fields. Virtual internships are structured as remote work arrangements that enable students to engage in professional activities from a distance. This format, though offering advantages such as flexibility and cost-effectiveness, may lack the immersive learning environment of traditional internships. Recent studies emphasize the importance of gathering insights from students and universities about virtual internships to enhance educational practices, prepare students for future opportunities, and ensure integration with industry demands (Reid, Butler, Comfort & Potter, 2023).

Keywords: virtual internships, skills, post-pandemic tourism and hospitality education, COVID-19, digital skills, post-pandemic