CAREER INTENTIONS IN HOSPITALITY EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC SCOPING REVIEW

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Abstract. The hospitality industry continues to face difficulty attracting and retaining qualified talent despite sustained investment in hospitality education. This scoping review maps factors influencing career intentions across hospitality education and the transition into employment, with personal interest and intrinsic passion examined as part of a wider system of influences. The review followed the Arksey and O'Malley framework and was reported with reference to PRISMA-ScR. It was restricted to peer-reviewed, English-language empirical literature published from 2015 to 2025. Searches of Scopus, Consensus, and Google Scholar identified 515 records; 440 remained after deduplication, 29 full-text articles were assessed, and 20 studies were included. Thematic synthesis identified three interconnected themes: psychological and motivational drivers, industry and workplace perceptions, and educational and institutional influences. Passion and self-efficacy supported initial career attraction, but low starting salaries, irregular schedules, limited work-life balance, and uncertain progression often weakened longer-term intentions. Internship quality, curriculum relevance, and career support also shaped readiness and occupational expectations. The evidence base is international; Malaysia is used as a contextual lens for implications rather than as the empirical boundary of the review.
Keywords: *hospitality education, career intentions, intrinsic motivation, scoping review, workforce retention*

Introduction

The hospitality and tourism industry contributes substantially to economic development and employment across developed and developing economies. Tourism growth stimulates demand for accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation, recreation, and related service activities (Nguyen et al., 2025; Cárdenas-García et al., 2015). Continued expansion nevertheless depends on the industry's ability to attract, develop, and retain a skilled workforce. Persistent labour shortages, employee turnover, demanding service conditions, and limited perceptions of long-term career value continue to weaken the hospitality talent pipeline (Morosan and Bowen, 2022; Baum, 2019). Malaysia provides an important contextual lens because workforce retention and graduate employability remain concerns within its service and hospitality sectors. Organisational support, working conditions, career opportunities, and employee expectations influence whether individuals remain in service employment (Norizan et al., 2022; Zainal et al., 2022). At the same time, hospitality education increasingly emphasises workplace readiness, communication, critical thinking, and transferable competencies (Stangl et al., 2024; Shariff and Abd Razak, 2022). The review itself,

however, is international rather than Malaysia-specific, and Malaysian implications are interpreted cautiously against this wider evidence base.

Completing a hospitality qualification does not guarantee entry into or continued employment within the industry. Hospitality and tourism graduates can transfer communication, customer-service, managerial, and problem-solving skills to other sectors (Hwang et al., 2024; Tolkach and Tung, 2019). Career intention therefore reflects more than academic specialisation. It develops through personal characteristics, social influence, educational experience, and evaluations of industry employment conditions (Liu et al., 2022; Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010). Personal interest and intrinsic passion may attract students to hospitality work, while self-efficacy influences whether they believe they can manage customer expectations, teamwork, and workplace pressure (Ryan and Deci, 2020; Bandura, 1997). Yet salary, irregular schedules, work-life balance, occupational image, job security, management practices, and advancement opportunities can weaken intention when employment is perceived as unattractive (Liu et al., 2022; Goh and Okumus, 2020). Internships provide direct evidence of these conditions. Supportive supervision, meaningful duties, and feedback can improve work readiness and intention to remain in hospitality, whereas poorly managed placements may weaken it (Alharethi et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021).

A scoping review was selected because this evidence base is heterogeneous in study design, dispersed across several theoretical frameworks, and still developing across the 2015-2025 period. Scoping review methods are therefore appropriate for mapping the breadth of evidence and clarifying how psychological, educational, and workplace factors are represented without implying a pooled causal effect (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Tricco et al., 2018). The review addresses two questions: (1) What thematic drivers of career intention emerge from research on hospitality education? (2) How are personal interest and passion described in relation to intentions to pursue hospitality careers?

Literature review

The Theory of Planned Behavior explains intention through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). In hospitality education, these constructs correspond to students' evaluations of hospitality work, perceived approval from influential people, and confidence in their ability to obtain and perform such work. A student may therefore value hospitality but show weak career intention when social approval, employment conditions, or perceived control is low. Self-Determination Theory distinguishes autonomous motivation, which develops from interest and personal value, from controlled motivation driven by external pressure or reward (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Students who enjoy guest interaction, food service, cultural exchange, travel, or event work may form strong initial intentions. However, intrinsic motivation can weaken when workplace realities repeatedly obstruct the autonomy, competence, and satisfaction expected from a career. Social Cognitive Theory adds the role of self-efficacy, or belief in one's capacity to organise and perform actions required to achieve an outcome (Bandura, 1997). Hospitality students with stronger occupational self-efficacy may feel better able to manage service failures, teamwork, emotional labour, and customer demands. Perceived skills also support career adaptability and employability (Tavitiyaman et al., 2025). Career orientations are further influenced by how individuals align work with personal goals and manage their career development over time (Hirschi and Koen, 2021).

Industry perceptions provide the strongest external comparison. Students evaluate salary, employment security, work-life balance, occupational prestige, managerial support, and progression opportunities. Hospitality organisations have struggled to attract younger workers when employment is perceived as demanding but insufficiently rewarding (Goh and Okumus, 2020; Baum, 2019). Graduate mobility similarly shows that hospitality competencies can be transferred to alternative sectors that offer different employment arrangements (Hwang et al., 2024; Tolkach and Tung, 2019). Educational experience influences career readiness and industry suitability. Programmes that integrate technical competency, employability skills, and realistic workplace exposure can strengthen confidence (Shariff and Abd Razak, 2022; Kim and Jeong, 2018). Internships are particularly influential because they allow students to test expectations against actual organisational practices. Positive placements improve role clarity and commitment, whereas poor supervision, repetitive duties, and excessive demands can discourage industry entry (Alharethi et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021). The literature therefore portrays career intention as multidimensional, supporting a scoping synthesis of how internal motivation interacts with educational and workplace conditions.

Materials and Methods

Review protocol

This study employed a scoping review design to map evidence on factors influencing career intentions in hospitality education. The review followed the five-stage framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005): identifying the research questions, identifying relevant studies, selecting eligible studies, charting the data, and collating and reporting the results. Reporting was guided by PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018). The design was selected because the evidence base combines heterogeneous research methods, dispersed theoretical approaches, and an emerging body of literature across 2015-2025.

Identification

Relevant publications were searched in Scopus, Consensus, and Google Scholar for the period 2015-2025. The review was restricted to peer-reviewed, English-language empirical studies. Scopus functioned as the primary structured bibliographic source, while Consensus and Google Scholar were used as supplementary discovery sources. The source documentation retained for this manuscript does not record a single exact final search date. Accordingly, the review reports the publication window and search sources without claiming a search date that cannot be verified. Because Consensus and Google Scholar use algorithmic ranking that may change over time, their use reduces exact reproducibility compared with a structured bibliographic database. The reported search concepts combined hospitality/tourism student terms with career-intention terms. *Table 1* presents a field-tagged Scopus formulation based on those reported concepts as a reproducibility aid. The original reported terms did not explicitly include 'graduate*'; the revised title and population framing therefore use hospitality education rather than graduates as the sole population boundary.

***Table 1**. Search sources, roles, and reported search strategy.*

Source	Role	Search strategy / reproducibility note
Scopus	Primary	Field-tagged formulation based on the reported concepts: TITLE-ABS-KEY(("hospitality

	structured bibliographic source	student*" OR "tourism student*" OR "hospitality undergraduate*") AND ("career intention*" OR "career choice*" OR "career decision*" OR "intention to work")). The original Scopus search history was not retained with the manuscript files.
Consensus	Supplementary discovery source	Equivalent concept search adapted to platform syntax; dynamic ranking means the exact result set may vary by date.
Google Scholar	Supplementary discovery source	Equivalent concept search adapted to platform syntax; algorithmic ranking and result volatility limit exact replication.

Screening and eligibility

After duplicates were removed, 440 unique records remained. Eleven clearly unsuitable records were removed before screening, leaving 429 titles and abstracts. Four hundred records were excluded because they did not focus on the review population, did not examine career intention as a principal construct, or did not report empirical evidence. Twenty-nine articles proceeded to full-text assessment and nine were excluded, leaving 20 included studies. Titles and abstracts were assessed against the predefined eligibility criteria, followed by full-text assessment of potentially relevant articles. Uncertain cases were rechecked against the same inclusion and exclusion criteria before the final eligibility decision. The retained source documentation does not specify the number of reviewers involved at each screening or data-extraction stage. No claim of independent dual screening or a formal disagreement-resolution procedure is therefore made (*Table 2*).

Table 2. *Inclusion and exclusion criteria.*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Hospitality/tourism students, interns, and graduates where career intention concerned the education-to-work transition	Unrelated students, employees without an education-to-career focus, or other populations
Focus	Career intention, career choice, commitment, or intention to work in hospitality/tourism	No central career-intention outcome
Study type	Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method empirical study	Conceptual papers, editorials, opinions, reviews, and grey literature
Language	English	Non-English
Period	2015-2025	Published before 2015

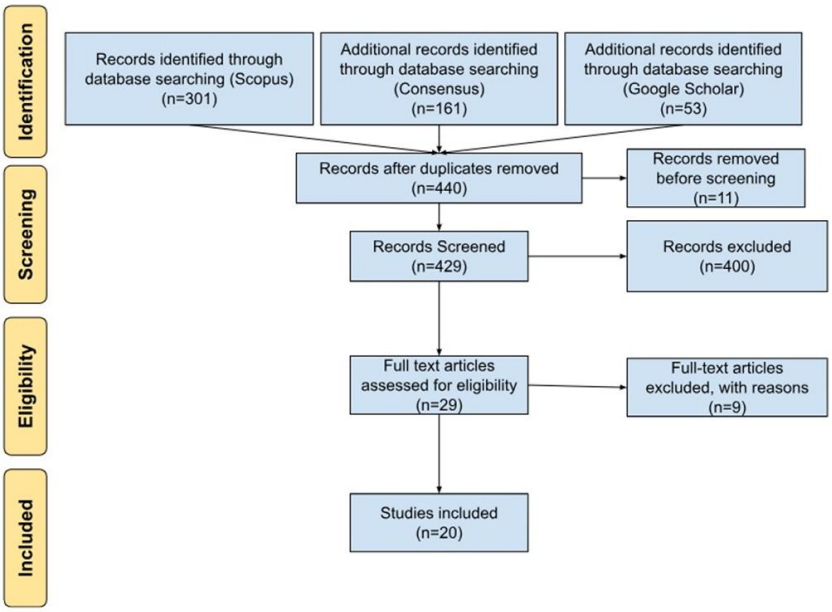


Figure 1. *PRISMA flow diagram of the scoping review process.*

Data charting and analysis

Data were charted in Microsoft Excel using author, year, country, aim, design, participants, career-intention constructs, main findings, limitations, and initial codes. Extracted findings were analysed thematically. Similar codes were grouped, reviewed, and refined into three themes: psychological and motivational drivers, industry and workplace perceptions, and educational and institutional influences. Publication year, location, population, and research design were summarised descriptively, while narrative synthesis examined how the themes interacted. No pooled effect sizes were calculated because the purpose was evidence mapping rather than causal estimation. Methodological boundaries were considered when interpreting the synthesis. The review did not include a field-specific database such as EBSCO Hospitality & Tourism Complete, and the supplementary use of Consensus and Google Scholar may have affected both coverage and reproducibility. These constraints do not invalidate the evidence map, but they limit claims of exhaustive retrieval. The findings are therefore interpreted as a structured mapping of the literature identified through the reported search process rather than a complete census of all hospitality career-intention research.

Results and Discussion

Background and characteristics of selected studies

The selection process produced 20 included studies from 515 initial records. The studies were published between 2015 and 2025 and represented several international settings, including Malaysia, China, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Publication activity increased after 2020. Quantitative survey designs accounted for approximately 60% of the studies, qualitative research for 25%, and mixed-method designs for 15%. This distribution supported identification of recurring associations but provided limited evidence on how intentions changed during internships, graduation, and early employment. The original thesis states that the 20 included studies were charted in Microsoft Excel by author, year, country, study aim, method, participants, and main findings. The complete study-level extraction matrix is not contained in the manuscript files supplied for this revision. To avoid reconstructing individual study characteristics from citations and risking misclassification, *Table 3* reports only characteristics explicitly documented in the source thesis. This limitation is acknowledged when interpreting the transparency of the evidence base (*Table 4*).

***Table 3**. Characteristics reported for the included evidence base.*

Characteristic	Reported evidence
Publication period	2015-2025
Geographical settings reported	Malaysia, China, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Australia, with additional international evidence represented in the wider synthesis.
Research design distribution	Approximately 60% quantitative survey designs, 25% qualitative studies, and 15% mixed-method studies.
Population scope	Hospitality/tourism students, interns, and graduates where the study addressed the education-to-work transition and career intention.
Main evidence domains	Psychological and motivational drivers; industry and workplace perceptions; educational and institutional influences.

***Table 4**. Summary of the developed themes.*

Theme	Main factors	Overall influence
Psychological and motivational	Interest, self-efficacy, career goals, emotional readiness	Strengthened attraction and perceived capability
Industry and workplace	Salary, hours, work-life balance, status,	Strengthened or weakened intention

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	progression, culture	according to perceived job quality
Educational and institutional	Curriculum, internships, career guidance, industry collaboration	Shaped readiness and realistic understanding of work

Psychological and motivational drivers

Personal interest, self-efficacy, career goals, and emotional readiness formed the internal basis of career intention. Students who believed they could manage customer interactions, teamwork, operational problems, and service pressure were more likely to view hospitality as attainable. This pattern is consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, which links self-efficacy with goal choice and persistence (Bandura, 1997), and with evidence that perceived skills support career adaptability and employability (Tavitiyaman et al., 2025). Intrinsic motivation and passion encouraged initial attraction to hospitality. Students valued guest interaction, service creation, food-related work, and culturally diverse environments. The evidence did not show, however, that passion independently guaranteed long-term commitment. Interest was repeatedly tested by remuneration, schedules, management, and progression. Passion is therefore better interpreted as an initiating influence whose effect depends on educational and workplace experience.

Industry and workplace perceptions

Industry perceptions represented the main external constraint. Low starting salaries, extended working hours, unstable schedules, limited work-life balance, weak occupational status, and uncertain progression reduced the attractiveness of long-term hospitality careers. These findings align with evidence that younger workers may avoid hospitality when demanding employment is not matched by credible rewards or development opportunities (Liu et al., 2022; Goh and Okumus, 2020). The same conditions help explain cross-industry mobility. Hospitality graduates possess transferable skills that can be applied in sectors offering clearer advancement or more predictable work (Hwang et al., 2024; Stangl et al., 2024). Moving outside hospitality should therefore not be interpreted simply as lack of interest. It may reflect a rational comparison between available career alternatives.

Educational and institutional influences

Curriculum relevance, practical learning, career guidance, and industry engagement influenced both readiness and occupational understanding. Programmes aligned with current workplace competencies strengthened students' confidence, whereas overly theoretical programmes could leave students uncertain about professional roles (Kenayathulla et al., 2019; Kim and Jeong, 2018). Internships were the most prominent educational influence. Mentorship, meaningful responsibility, constructive feedback, and visible career pathways reinforced self-efficacy and intention to remain in hospitality (Alharethi et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021). Menial duties, weak supervision, and excessive demands produced the opposite effect. Internships therefore functioned as career-validation experiences rather than merely academic requirements.

Integrated interpretation and contextual boundaries

The three themes functioned as an interconnected system. Motivation shaped initial attraction, education influenced competence and occupational knowledge, and workplace perceptions determined whether hospitality appeared sustainable. Strong passion and effective training could still result in weak intention when students expected low pay, unstable schedules, or limited advancement. The review therefore supports an interactional interpretation in which passion matters, but its influence is conditional on employment quality and career opportunity. The evidence base remained concentrated on undergraduates and cross-sectional designs. Diploma, vocational, and postgraduate students received less attention, and geographical representation was uneven. These limits are important when interpreting the Malaysian context. Although family interdependence and collective wellbeing are relevant features of Malaysian social life (Sumari et al., 2020), the included review evidence does not establish family influence as a strong or generalisable Malaysian determinant of hospitality career intention. Evidence that family support relates to hospitality career commitment across career stages (Zhu et al., 2024) should therefore be treated as contextual rather than as proof of a Malaysia-specific moderating effect.

Digitalisation, automation, sustainability, and changing Generation Z expectations were also insufficiently examined. Generational diversity and post-pandemic changes are reshaping hospitality work (Yepez and Leimgruber, 2024; Sakdiyakorn and Wattanacharoensil, 2018), but the present evidence base does not support strong causal conclusions about these emerging influences.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings support an interactional explanation of hospitality career intention. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains how attitudes, social expectations, and perceived control contribute to intention (Ajzen, 1991). Social Cognitive Theory explains how perceived capability influences persistence (Bandura, 1997), while Self-Determination Theory clarifies why autonomous interest is more sustainable when competence, personal meaning, and choice are supported (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Together, these perspectives indicate that no single psychological variable is sufficient to explain career decisions. For educational institutions, the implication is to strengthen current technical content, employability competencies, career counselling, and structured reflection around internships. Such preparation can improve role clarity and confidence (Pang et al., 2025; Shariff and Abd Razak, 2022; Fahimirad et al., 2019). Employers, however, control many of the conditions that determine whether this confidence converts into retention. Recruitment and retention strategies should therefore address remuneration, scheduling, work-life balance, supervisor behaviour, employee wellbeing, and transparent progression (Norizan et al., 2022; Zainal et al., 2022; Goh and Okumus, 2020).

University-industry collaboration is the main shared leverage point. Joint curriculum review, internship agreements, mentoring, and realistic career communication can align student expectations with operational requirements (Esangbedo et al., 2023). Collaboration will have limited effect, however, if placements and entry-level jobs continue to reproduce the employment conditions that students already perceive as barriers. Future research should follow students across education, internships, graduation, and early employment. Longitudinal and mixed-method designs would distinguish temporary intentions from durable occupational commitment, while broader samples should include diploma, vocational, and postgraduate populations. Comparative

research across Malaysia and other national settings is also needed to separate broadly shared influences from those that depend on labour-market structures or sociocultural expectations.

Limitations of the review

The review included only peer-reviewed English-language empirical publications from 2015 to 2025 and relied on Scopus plus two algorithmic discovery sources, Consensus and Google Scholar. The latter can return dynamic results, which reduces reproducibility. A field-specific database such as EBSCO Hospitality & Tourism Complete was not searched, so the review should not be described as exhaustive. The reported search terms also omitted 'graduate*', even though some graduate-focused literature informed interpretation. The evidence base was small and methodologically diverse, with cross-sectional self-report studies dominating. Such designs cannot establish causal relationships or determine whether reported intentions persist after graduation. Geographical concentration further restricts transferability because labour-market conditions, wage structures, family expectations, and the social status of hospitality work differ across national settings. Finally, thematic synthesis involves interpretive judgement. The boundaries between psychological, workplace, and educational influences are not absolute, and the review did not estimate pooled effect sizes or establish a hierarchy of determinants. Findings should therefore be interpreted as an evidence map that guides subsequent hypothesis testing rather than as proof that any single factor universally determines career entry or retention.

Conclusion

Core Takeaway: Career intention in hospitality education is shaped by the interaction of psychological motivation, educational experience, and perceived job quality. Personal interest and self-efficacy can initiate attraction to hospitality, but they do not guarantee long-term commitment when employment conditions are perceived as unattractive. Decision Boundary: Educational institutions can strengthen readiness through current curricula, career guidance, and well-managed placements, but they do not control many of the employment conditions that ultimately influence retention. The evidence therefore does not support expecting education alone to resolve hospitality workforce leakage. Primary Strategic Leverage Point: University-industry collaboration should focus on internship quality and the transition into entry-level employment. Employers must modernise remuneration, scheduling, work-life balance, supervision, and visible career pathways if student confidence is to translate into sustained workforce participation. Final Synthesis: The review maps an international evidence base and uses Malaysia as a contextual lens rather than as the empirical boundary. Future longitudinal and mixed-method research should test how intentions change from education through early employment and should examine broader educational levels, emerging technologies, sustainability values, and sociocultural influences with greater precision.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest involving any parties in relation to this research study.

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