



Educational Hotel Visits as Non-Internship Strategy in Vocational Learning: Identifying Best Practices

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ABSTRACT

Educational visits to hotels provide contextual, out-of-classroom learning experiences that are highly relevant within vocational education, particularly for students in hospitality programs. These visits bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and real-world application, offering an alternative to internship programs that are often limited to the final year of study. Through direct exposure to hotel environments, students begin to develop essential soft skills such as communication, professionalism, and service orientation. These competencies are crucial for enhancing students' work readiness and preparing them for future careers in the hospitality industry. A qualitative approach was used in this study, incorporating literature review, field observations, and semi-structured interviews. Data were gathered from vocational teachers and hospitality industry practitioners to explore how educational visits are conducted and what impact they have on student development. The findings show that educational hotel visits significantly improve students' workplace readiness and strengthen collaboration between vocational schools and the hospitality sector. Program success depends on thorough planning, the use of structured learning tools, and cross-sector cooperation. These visits offer a practical and strategic method to align vocational education with industry needs and to support students' transition into the workforce.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The article titled *Educational Hotel Visits as Non-Internship Strategy in Vocational Learning: Identifying Best Practices* explores an alternative approach to bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical experience in vocational education. Vocational high schools are designed to equip students with industry-relevant competencies; however, many students experience limited exposure to real workplace environments until their final year, when internship programs are commonly introduced.

Students in grades ten and eleven often engage in predominantly classroom-based learning, resulting in a disconnect between academic content and industry realities. This can lead to decreased motivation, delayed adaptation to professional environments, and lower psychological readiness during internships or after graduation (Rogers et al., 2021). National policies on vocational education emphasize the importance of strengthening the link and match between schools and the industry to ensure graduates meet workforce demands (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

To address this issue, this study examines educational hotel visits as a non-internship learning strategy that can be introduced earlier in the curriculum. Previous research highlights the positive impact of such visits on student motivation and understanding of hospitality operations (Ismail et al., 2015). These visits provide concrete learning experiences that support both academic understanding and personal development.

Unlike prior studies that focus on internships as the main form of industry exposure, this research proposes a structured, early-stage hotel visit model that offers comparable educational value. The novelty of this study lies in positioning hotel visits as a strategic and scalable model that complements existing vocational curricula while enhancing soft skills such as communication, independence, and professionalism. As stated by Dewey (1938), “education is not preparation for life; education is life itself,” highlighting the importance of direct engagement with real-world settings to foster holistic student development. By integrating hotel visits early in the educational process, students are exposed to authentic industry practices, which can stimulate motivation and provide context for their classroom learning (Billett, 2011).

This study is grounded in the broader effort to revitalize vocational education by promoting more contextual and experiential forms of learning. Recent research confirms that experiential learning models significantly enhance practical skills and student engagement in vocational education, as well as motivation and understanding of the material (Supriyadi et al., 2022; Lee & Kim, 2021). Kolb’s experiential learning theory remains highly relevant, emphasizing that knowledge is constructed through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Educational visits to hotels offer students the opportunity to directly engage with real-world environments, reflect on their observations, and connect them with the theoretical concepts they learn in school. This approach not only leads to deeper and more lasting understanding compared to traditional classroom instruction, but also equips students with essential real-world skills needed for workforce readiness in today’s industry (Rahman et al., 2023; Zhang & Liu, 2020).

Furthermore, the integration of soft skills into vocational learning has become increasingly essential in the 21st century. Beyond technical proficiency, industries today demand employees who possess adaptability, problem-solving abilities, emotional intelligence, and communication skills (McGrath & Yamada, 2023). Hotel visits, when designed with structured learning objectives and reflective tools, serve as a platform to foster these skills early. By interacting with professionals, observing service delivery, and participating in simulated tasks,

students begin to internalize workplace behaviors and expectations, which cannot be fully taught through textbooks alone.

The implementation of educational visits also contributes to strengthening institutional collaboration between vocational schools and the hospitality industry. These visits act as a low-risk entry point for partnerships, often paving the way for future joint programs, curriculum alignment, or internship placements. They align with the national agenda of improving school industry synergy (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), and respond to the practical limitations many schools face in offering full-scale internships for underclassmen. Therefore, this research not only fills a gap in existing literature by focusing on non internship alternatives but also provides practical recommendations for scalable implementation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Urgency of Educational Visits in Vocational Education

Educational visits serve as an out-of-class learning medium that provides students with contextual and interactive experiences. This type of learning allows students to directly observe how the knowledge acquired at school is applied in real-world settings (Mir et al., 2024). Students can observe technologies, work procedures, and organizational cultures across various industrial sectors (Li & Liang, 2020).

Experiential learning has a positive effect on enhancing material comprehension, learning interest, and preparedness for entering the workforce (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). In addition, educational visits promote social interaction and the development of communication and teamwork skills (Chau, 2021).

2.2 Educational Visits to Hotels and the Revitalization of Vocational Education

In the context of vocational education revitalization, activities such as educational visits, industrial internships, and teaching factories serve as essential bridges between schools and industry (Zhang & Tavitiyaman, 2022). One of the key priorities in this revitalization is the integration of contextual learning—an approach that connects academic content with real-world applications to ensure students develop relevant competencies.

According to Kolb's experiential learning theory, meaningful learning occurs when students are directly involved in real-life experiences and engage in reflection to construct knowledge (Kolb, 1984). Educational visits to hotels align with this model by providing hospitality students with firsthand exposure to the actual work environment. They can observe how departments such as front office, housekeeping, food and beverage, and marketing operate within an integrated system. These experiences allow students to witness service standards, guest interactions, and professional routines that are difficult to replicate in classroom simulations.

In addition to cognitive understanding, these visits also foster 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and sustainability awareness (McGrath & Yamada, 2023). The opportunity to explore real roles within the hospitality industry not only inspires students but also helps cultivate a professional attitude and greater career clarity. Early exposure to the work culture builds students' familiarity with industry expectations and enhances their readiness for internships and future employment.

Moreover, this practice supports the national policy of strengthening link and match between vocational institutions and the business sector (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), ensuring that vocational learning outcomes align with labor market needs. Thus, educational hotel visits serve as both a pedagogical and strategic tool for preparing students to thrive in a dynamic and service-oriented industry.

3. METHOD

The research method used in this study was descriptive qualitative. The study aimed to formulate concepts and solutions for educational visits to hotels as an alternative form of practical learning for vocational high school students outside of internships. Data collection was carried out from February to April 2025 using three techniques: literature review, document analysis, and interviews.

A purposive sampling technique was applied to select key informants who had experience and relevance to the topic. A total of 10informants were interviewed, consisting of 3 vocational teachers, 3 hotel managers from different regions in West Java and 2 Stakeholders. The interviews were conducted semi-structurally and focused on the needs, opportunities, and challenges in implementing educational hotel visits. Document analysis was conducted on five implementation reports of educational visits obtained from vocational schools, as well as curriculum documents and related government policies.

To ensure data validity, source triangulation and peer checking were used. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative techniques involving data reduction, coding, and thematic categorization. Since this is a conceptual study, the results consist of a preliminary design and implementation recommendations for educational hotel visits, which are expected to guide future field trials and practical applications.

Table 1. Summary of Data Collection Techniques

| Technique | Data Source | Quantity | Purpose |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Literature Review | Journal articles, policies, curriculum | 20+ documents | Conceptual framework, policy context |
| Document Analysis | Educational visit reports from SMKs | 5 reports | Identify implementation patterns and practices |
| Interviews | Vocational teachers, edotel managers | 8 informants | Capture practical insights and challenges |

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Strategy for Implementing Educational Visits to Hotels

To ensure that educational visits to hotels provide optimal benefits for vocational high school students, the planning and execution of activities must align with the competency needs in the hospitality field. Educational visits to hotels are not merely sightseeing tours—they are designed to offer contextual learning experiences, reinforce practical skills, and foster students' motivation to pursue careers in the hospitality industry.

Key considerations for implementing educational hotel visits include:

1. Visit Timing (Low Operational Periods)

Visits should ideally be scheduled during low operational periods, not during high season or peak times. During these times, hotel occupancy is lower, allowing educational activities to proceed effectively without disrupting core hotel operations. Moreover, hotel staff can provide more personalized attention to students, facilitating more meaningful educational interactions. low operations periods or low season Only ranges between 40% to 50%. This situation indicates tight competition in the hospitality industry, especially during low operations periods, where hotel managers must work hard to survive with the right strategies (Atmadji, Eko, 2022).

2. Participant Numbers and Group Division

The number of participants should be limited and divided into small groups. This small group discussion allows participants to learn more effectively from each other and from the instructor (Syafitri, Nita et. Al, 2024). This ensures more intensive interaction between students and hotel staff, allows students to focus better while observing or engaging in tasks across departments, and avoids overcrowding that might interfere with hotel operations.

3. Appropriate Facilities and Infrastructure

Select hotels with facilities relevant to the curriculum, such as front office areas, housekeeping sections, kitchens, and meeting rooms. Comprehensive facilities support students in understanding real work processes in alignment with industry standards.

4. Guidance and Supervision

Students should be accompanied by supervising teachers and hotel staff to ensure the learning process remains structured, safe, and disciplined. Guidance is also crucial for ensuring students truly understand the roles and responsibilities in each hotel department.

5. Interactive and Participatory Activities

The educational visit should not be limited to passive observation but should involve students in real-world task simulations or role-based challenges in various hotel departments. It emphasizes that the use of simulation in hospitality education greatly assists students in developing decision-making skills, problem-solving abilities, knowledge integration, teamwork, and connecting theory to practice. This method is considered more enjoyable and effective compared to passive learning approaches (Deale, Bae, & Lee, 2021). Hands-on and creative activities have proven to be more effective in enhancing understanding and skills.

6. Efficient Duration

The duration of the visit should be managed carefully so it's not too long, thus avoiding disruption to hotel operations while maintaining student focus. A duration of 2–4 hours is generally ideal to introduce the hotel environment, engage in discussions, and carry out brief practice sessions.

7. Coordination with the Hotel

Detailed coordination with hotel management is essential prior to the visit, including discussing the agenda, accessible areas, safety protocols, and the readiness of hotel staff to guide the students. Proper coordination helps ensure the activity runs smoothly and as planned. A study by Suarez et al. (2017) emphasizes that in implementing educational tours to hotels, thorough planning and coordination with the hotel are essential to ensure learning objectives are achieved and students have an optimal experience. One of the recommendations in this study is the need for clear communication between organizers and hotel representatives regarding activity details and participants' needs.

8. Implementation of Safety Protocols and Etiquette

Students should be briefed on appropriate conduct during hotel visits, including maintaining order, dressing neatly, and adhering to the rules and safety protocols of the hotel environment.



Figure 1. Strategy for Implementing Educational Visits to Hotel

Source: Author's elaboration, 2025

Core activities during low operational periods can include introductions to one or more departments, profession-focused discussions with hotel staff, sharing sessions and Q&A with hotel practitioners, as well as student reflection and presentations. These reflections aim to deepen understanding, connect field experience with classroom theory, and strengthen students' critical thinking and communication skills. This approach is in line with Kolb's experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through active engagement and reflective observation (Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, Deale, Bae, and Lee (2021) argue that simulation-based and reflective activities in hospitality education help students develop higher-order thinking skills, such as decision-making, teamwork, and the ability to apply theory to practice—demonstrating the pedagogical strength of participatory and context-based learning environments.

4.2 Observation and Reflection Instruments

In the implementation of educational visits to hotels, guided hotel area tours serve as a core component designed to give students firsthand experience of the hospitality work environment. To ensure the activity is well-structured and purposeful, observation and supervision instruments are needed for both teachers and students:

1. **Observation Sheet:** Used to document the areas visited, staff tasks, tools and equipment observed, and workplace values demonstrated.
2. **Reflection Sheet:** Encourages students to analyze their experience, identify the most interesting aspects, and connect them with classroom theory.
3. **Teacher's Supervision Checklist:** Used to evaluate the flow of the activity, student behavior and etiquette, time management, and the hotel's preparedness.

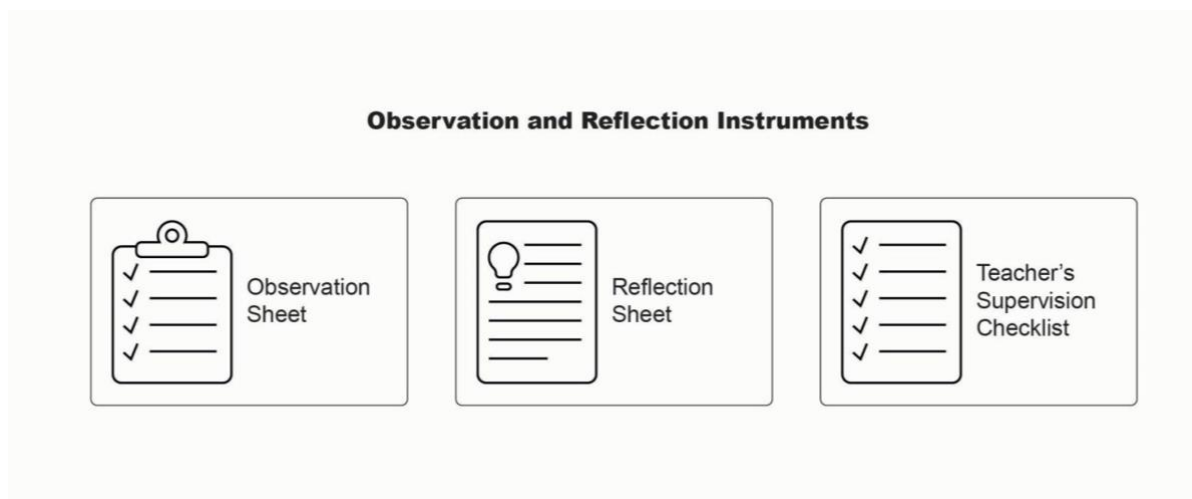


Figure 2. Observation and Reflection Instruments

Source: Author's elaboration, 2025

These instruments help turn hotel visits into a structured and reflective learning process.

4.3 Contextual and Collaborative Learning

Well-planned and collaborative educational visits can significantly impact the quality of vocational learning, particularly in hospitality. The following are key developments from the existing points:

1. Fostering Early Career Interest in the Hospitality Industry

By visiting hotels directly, students are introduced not only to various roles within the hospitality industry but also to the working dynamics, service standards, and available career opportunities. This real-life exposure enhances intrinsic motivation and broadens students' perspectives on the range of professions within the tourism and hospitality sector, making them more enthusiastic and better prepared to plan their career paths. This aligns with the findings of Jacqueline E. Uy (2021), Educational tours are a learning experience. They are vital for tourism students because through this, they acquired authentic experience and gained valuable knowledge that they can utilize in their future endeavors.

2. Acting as a Link and Match Between Schools and Industry

Educational visits function as a bridge connecting the world of education with the world of work. Through collaboration with the industry such as signing MoUs between vocational schools and hotels, curricula can be aligned with industry needs. Students benefit from project-based learning and are given opportunities for internships or hands-on practice at hotels. This ensures that the competencies taught in school remain relevant to labor market demands. The collaboration between schools and the business and industrial sectors serves as both a learning and business strategy that offers mutual benefits. For schools, such partnerships can enhance the quality of graduates, better preparing them to enter the world of business and industry (Basri, Hasan et al., 2023). On the other hand, businesses—particularly those in the hospitality sector can benefit from early talent identification, workforce development, and the opportunity to shape future professionals according to industry standards. This collaboration also supports corporate social responsibility and strengthens industry-academia relations.

3. **Enhancing Confidence, Soft Skills, and Awareness of Industry Standards**

Students are trained to communicate with guests, colleagues, and hotel staff, which helps them practice workplace etiquette, develop professional communication skills, and build self-confidence in real-world situations. Moreover, soft skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving are strengthened—these are essential 21st-century competencies highly sought after in the hospitality industry. Thus, students graduate not only with technical proficiency but also with strong character and professional attitudes. This aligns with findings from Malaysian vocational and hospitality education research, where employers consistently report that communication, interpersonal interaction, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills are among the most highly valued competencies by industry stakeholders (Bakar, Mohamed, & Hanafi, 2007; Makhbul et al., 2015). By embedding structured reflection and interactive Q&A sessions during hotel visits, students are provided with authentic contexts to exercise and internalize these essential soft skills, thereby bridging the often-cited gap between theoretical instruction and real-world workplace expectations.

4. **Providing Real-World Experiences That Support Core Curriculum Competencies**

Through observation, simulation, and direct practice in hotel environments, students can apply classroom theories in real situations. These experiences may include facility tours, table manner practice, and guest service activities—all of which contribute to achieving core competencies outlined in the vocational school curriculum. Additionally, the program trains students in discipline, responsibility, and adaptability to the workplace environment.

4.4 Relevance to the Revitalization of Vocational Education

All the benefits mentioned above are strongly aligned with the broader goals of vocational education revitalization, which promotes not only the mastery of technical skills but also the cultivation of lifelong learning habits, adaptability, and responsiveness to the rapidly evolving demands of the industry. In the current era of technological disruption and global competition, vocational education must be more than just a training ground for specific jobs—it must become a dynamic system that prepares students to learn, unlearn, and relearn throughout their careers.

Contextual and collaborative vocational education plays a vital role in this transformation. By integrating real-world experiences, such as educational visits to hotels, into the curriculum, schools can bridge the gap between theory and practice. These experiences allow students to witness firsthand how hospitality operations function, how customer service is delivered, and how professionalism and attention to detail are critical in real settings. More importantly, students gain insight into the expectations and culture of the industry, which can be difficult to fully grasp through classroom learning alone.

Moreover, such initiatives foster the development of key 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and flexibility attributes that are increasingly valued by employers across all sectors. Employers in the hospitality sector highly value graduates who demonstrate problem-solving ability, communication skills, teamwork, and adaptability, as these are essential for effective service delivery in a dynamic environment (Zehrer, Anita, & Mössenlechner, Claudia, 2009). In particular, the hotel industry provides a rich learning environment where students can observe how different departments

collaborate, how service standards are maintained, and how employees respond to guests' needs with efficiency and empathy.

Thus, educational visits to hotels should not be viewed as mere supplementary activities, but as a strategic and integral part of vocational pedagogy. They represent a forward-thinking approach to education that values experiential learning, industry relevance, and student engagement. By immersing students in authentic work environments, schools help them develop a professional mindset and a deeper understanding of their chosen field.

Ultimately, this strategy contributes to the creation of a more relevant, agile, and competitive vocational education ecosystem—one that not only produces technically skilled graduates but also well-rounded individuals who are capable of thriving in a fast-changing world. In doing so, it supports the vision of vocational education as a pathway to personal growth, social mobility, and national economic resilience.

4.5 Benefits for Hotels in Educational Hotel Visits as a Non-Internship Learning Strategy

In the wake of ongoing challenges faced by the hospitality industry, ranging from fluctuating occupancy rates to workforce shortages there is a growing need for mutually beneficial partnerships that support both recovery and long-term resilience. Educational hotel visits, when framed as a non-internship learning strategy for vocational high school students, offer such potential.

While these visits provide students with meaningful exposure to real-world hospitality settings, they also bring strategic advantages to the participating hotels. Rather than being a one-sided initiative, this model supports the revitalization of vocational education while simultaneously offering tangible benefits to the hotels involved. Industry stakeholders must understand and address these challenges to remain competitive and relevant in a rapidly changing global market (Kumar, Sanjeev et al, 2024). The following outlines the key advantages for hotels engaging in this collaborative approach:

1. Enhanced Institutional Branding

Educational tours offer hotels the opportunity to present themselves as professional and education-oriented institutions. By allowing students and educators to experience the hotel's service standards, operations, and core values, hotels can reinforce their brand image within the education sector.

2. Indirect Promotion and Positive Publicity

The exposure gained from educational visits often extends beyond the immediate participants. Students and teachers frequently share their experiences through social media and personal networks, resulting in organic word-of-mouth promotion. This informal publicity increases hotel visibility within school communities and among local stakeholders.

3. Development of Educational Partnerships

Collaborating with vocational schools through educational visits can lay the groundwork for sustained relationships. These may evolve into internship programs, teacher training initiatives, joint educational events, or curriculum development efforts, positioning the hotel as a key contributor to vocational education.

4. Product Diversification through Educational Tourism

Hotels can design tailored packages for educational institutions, including guided tours, operational simulations (e.g., front office or housekeeping), and culinary demonstrations.

These offerings enhance learning experiences and serve as alternative revenue streams, especially during off-peak periods.

5. Support for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Involvement in educational programs aligns with CSR efforts focused on youth development and community engagement. Highlighting such activities in sustainability reports or public relations materials can strengthen the hotel's reputation among stakeholders and regulatory agencies.

6. Early Talent Identification and Workforce Development

Educational visits provide a platform for hotel management to observe students' communication skills, attitudes, and professionalism. This informal evaluation can help identify promising candidates for future internships or employment, contributing to long-term HR planning.

7. Alignment with Human Resource and Community Engagement Goals

Such involvement reflects the hotel's commitment to sustainable tourism and inclusive community development. It supports the creation of a skilled talent pipeline and fosters meaningful connections with the local educational ecosystem.

Table 2. Benefits of Hotel Involvement in Educational Tours

| Benefit | Description |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Enhanced Branding | Promotes the hotel as a professional and education-friendly establishment. |
| Increased Public Exposure | Gains organic publicity through social media and word-of-mouth from students and educators. |
| Educational Collaboration | Opens pathways for partnerships with vocational schools in areas like internships or guest lectures. |
| New Service Opportunities | Enables development of educational tour packages such as guided visits, simulations, and demonstrations. |
| Social Contribution | Supports youth education and skills development as part of corporate social responsibility. |
| Talent Identification | Provides opportunities to observe potential future interns or employees in real settings. |
| Workforce and Community Support | Contributes to workforce readiness and strengthens the hotel's community engagement efforts. |

5. CONCLUSION

Educational visits to hotels represent a relevant, contextual, and effective out-of-classroom learning strategy for vocational high school students. When implemented with careful planning and strong collaboration between schools and the hospitality industry, such visits can significantly enhance students' motivation, soft skills, and work readiness. This study concludes that best practices for implementation include appropriate scheduling, organizing students into small groups, engaging professional facilitators, and utilizing structured tools for observation and reflection. These findings contribute to positioning educational visits as a strategic non-internship learning model that strengthens the connection between vocational

education and the real-world demands of the hospitality sector. This study is limited by its conceptual nature and the absence of large-scale field trials. Future research should empirically test the effectiveness of this model through implementation in diverse school and industry settings.

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