

A Narrative Analysis of Internship Experience of Filipinos in the US

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Abstract—Internship is part of hospitality management curriculum that aims to provide actual work-experience among students who have just graduated from the program. This research determined the lived practicum experiences of Hotel and Restaurant Management students of Columban College who had their internship in the United States of America. The phenomenological design of qualitative research with narrative analysis was used and data were gathered through in-depth interview, document analysis and focus group discussion of eight (8) purposively selected participants.

Data were thematically analyzed to describe their lived experiences in their practicum abroad. Results show that they have experienced (1) deprivation of rights and discrimination, (2) enhanced self-esteem and independence, (3) support of significant others, (4) being challenged, determined and focused to work; and (5) positivism. Problems were also identified based on their experiences and need to be addressed by the partner agencies and school authorities.

Keywords— hospitality management, internship in the US, qualitative -phenomenological study, narrative analysis, lived experience

I. INTRODUCTION

The internship plays a major role in bridging “theory and practice”. Essentially, educational practicum is a supervised on-site work experiences that allow students to practice and demonstrate their developing skills and competencies in their chosen career. These are field experiences that allow a student to observe and document how working professionals perform their job responsibilities. Students will also participate to a limited extent in performing tasks under supervision by program professors and on-site supervisor.

The Cultural Exchange Programs – Internship in the USA of the US State Department allows current full-time university students or recent graduates to enter the US, meet new friends and learn about US culture while working in a private company. It is intended for students or college graduates within one (1) year of their graduation. This is a 6-12 month program with all year-round placements. The DS 2019 Form, the official document issued in order to complete the requirements for the J1 Trainee visa for each applicant, defines the start and end dates of the program. [1]

Internship in Hotel and Restaurant Management is a structured work experience designed to be a capstone requirement after most of the coursework has been completed. It is as a form of experiential learning usually is a course or

student exercise involving practical experience in a work setting (whether paid or unpaid) as well as theoretical study, including supervised experience as part of professional pre-service education [2].

The internship is one of the most effective models of experiential learning in hospitality education. However, to be successful, it requires the cooperation of students, employers, and educators. [3]

General characteristics of internship include: shadowing one or more assigned employees who will guide the on-site experience, observing and correlating practices in the field with theories and methods previously studied, recording data or assisting with tasks as directed by on-site personnel or supervisor, completing work assignments.

Specific objectives of internship are to gain practical experience based on the understanding and application of theoretical knowledge; to observe the analysis of and solutions to problems arising in professional work settings, to interact with colleagues in a professional work environment, to participate in a representative range of professional activities in the work setting, and to develop a professional self-awareness and work values. [4]

Many hospitality curricula incorporate some form of industry-based experiential learning to complement the classroom environment. Many of these previously documented benefits of experiential learning and identified new learning outcomes or benefits for students who participate in experiential learning, such as an increased understanding of how organizations function, increased ability to view career expectations realistically, an increased network of professional contacts, increased ability to take initiative, increased. [5]

There has been an increase in the popularity of among Filipino hospitality students to have their internship or practicum abroad in order to widen their experience in handling international guests and gain an edge over those students having their internship locally. According to the study, students who work abroad as interns are better prepared than their non-participating peers to face some of the challenges they will encounter in the increasingly globalized hospitality industry of tomorrow [6]. Students who study abroad may have greater intercultural proficiency, increased openness to cultural diversity, and become more globally minded than those students remaining in a traditional campus setting [7]. However, international practicum is not the only way to interact with foreign guests. This is also possible in local practicum venues because there is a continued increase in intraregional travel among Asia-Pacific residents because of continued economic growth and the willingness of governments to open their countries to foreigners and to allow their own nationals to travel freely abroad [8].

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Comparatively, practicum abroad provides greater professional experience than many domestic opportunities because companies are smaller and thus interns are exposed to a wider variety of job duties. Living in a foreign country and being immersed in a new culture strengthens resume even further by giving skills such as problem solving, independence, and critical thinking enhancing professional development [9]. Learning from locals provides an intimate view of not only the true beauty of the culture and customs in your host country, but also the challenges and issues that surround the region. Interning abroad lends a realworld understanding of diversity and multiculturalism, which cannot always be achieved through travel and study alone [10].

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This research determined the lived experiences of Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates of Columban College who had their internship in the United States of America (USA) (through the Work and Travel Abroad J-1 Visa Program in coordination with partner-agencies, Dream Search and HR International) within the period June 2015 to August 2017.

Specific questions asked include: (1) What motivated them to avail the Program?; (2) How do the participants describe/narrate their lived experience in USA and what themes could describe their lived experience?; and (3) What interventions could be recommended to those who will avail the same Program in the future?

III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was chosen as the research method for this study. The process of research involves empirical work being carried out with the collection of data which can concur, refute or contest theories which in turn allows for understanding and clarification for different observations [11].

It utilized a phenomenological design with narratology or narrative analysis that incorporated in-depth interviewing of individual life history or lived experience. It also utilized focused interviewing of participants. Phenomenological orientation provided the opportunity for the narrator, namely the individual who has lived that experience, to create meaning of the lived experience through language and storytelling.[12]

There were 8 purposively selected participants in this study who were graduates of Hotel and Restaurant Management and who successfully finished one-year Internship Program in the US and voluntarily signed the Informed Consent.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Motivating Factors for Practicum Abroad

A. Looking for a Different and New Experience

Three (3) of the participants wanted to have a “different” kind of internship experience which they believed could not be provided by the local companies.

“I was expecting a different training experience compared to those who will be trained in local companies.” (Participant 3)

“New environment, new experience abroad and working will be so exciting I thought.” (Participant 6)

“A whole new world with interesting new experience different was my primary reason for applying in the Program.” (Participant 7)

Having internship outside one’s country will bring new experience and journey of learning. It brings exciting memories and these new experience is brings new perspectives on the job and profession[13]. New experience brought by exposure abroad could make the person more open-minded, could easily adopt to change and different people and the new experience creates new idea and practices [14].

B. Building Competitive Advantage in a New Environment

Participants 1, 3 and 8 said that the Program will provide them competitive edge if they will apply for actual work while Participant 2 said she wanted to work in a totally new environment. Competitiveness in one’s profession can be developed and enhanced if a person will work outside of his comfort zone and if he explores different possibilities and opportunities outside of his normal work environment [15].

“Having OJT abroad, I believed makes me more competitive if I will apply later on for a job.” (Participant 1)

“Magiging mas magaling ako kasi ma-eexpose ako sa kung ano ang talagang work sa abroad. Ang mga skills na alam ko ay mas ma-iimprove ko. Iba pag ang boss mo ay foreigner at expert, mstuturuan ka talaga ng maayos (I will be more competitive because I will be exposed to what is being done abroad, and I know my skills will be improved. It is different if your boss is a foreigner and an expert, he can mentor and coach you effectively). (Participant 3)

“Bago ako nag-apply sa Program, alam ko na mas magiging magaling pa ako pag sa US ako nag-OJT. (Before I apply for the Program, I knew that I will be more competitive and better if I will have my OJT in the US.)” (Participant 8)

“Working in a new environment will make me a better person and make me competitive in my future job as hotel worker.” (Participant 2)

C. Seeking for Independence

Participants 2 and 5 also said they wanted to be independent and work without the supervision and care of their parents. The Program according to them will make them stand on their own feet and will make them more matured and self-reliant.

“I want to be away from the supervision of my parents and want to be more independent like a mature person.” (Participant 2)

“Gusto kong tumayo sa sarili kong mga paa, matuto sa sarili ko, gawin ang mga bagay na walang gaanong nagdidikta at walang hassle, mag-explore ng mga bagay na walang tumutulong kundi sarili ko lamang. (I wanted to stand on my own feet, do things for myself without other people telling me to do so and without hassles, and explore things without help from others.) (Participant 5)

D. Short-Cut to Get US Work Visa

Participants 4 and 7 mentioned that it is the fastest way to get work visa in the US. These participants are still looking forward to work in the US after they finished the Program. They want to stay there because of better opportunities and challenge.

“Gusto kong bumalik sa US after kong grumadweyt sa College. Pag sa US ako mag-OJT, mas madali na akong

makakabalik duon kasi may record na nanggaling na ako duon. Di na rin ako mahihirapan mag-adjust kasi naggaling na ako duon. (I want to go back in the US after I graduate. If I have my OJT in the US, it would be easier for me to go back in the US since I have already a record that I went there. Also, it would not be hard for me to adjust since I have been there once.) (Participant 7)

Those who have tried having their Practicum in the US still wanted to work there since their employers are willing to absorb them in work especially if they performed well. It is easier to recruit people outside the US for employment if they have a record of stay in the US. Work Visa application will not be that difficult [16]. Majority of those who have tried staying in the US do not want to go back despite of better opportunities because of the work stress, cultural diversity and difficulty of working away from families [17] in the Philippines.

E. Other Minor Reasons: Learning New Culture, Bigger Allowance/Work Pay and Reunion with their Relatives

Other reasons include: they wanted to see their close relatives in the US and to explore another part of the world, to learn other cultures and to earn bigger allowance which the local companies are not providing for trainees.

“Mas maganda mag OJT sa US kasi may allowance na malaki. Kikita ka pa at mababawi mo naman ang magagastos mo. Di gaya dito sa Pilipinas, wala halos allowance mga OJT – minsan meal or free transportation lang. (It is better to have OJT in the US because they give bigger allowance. You will earn more and you could get back the money you will invest for the Program. Unlike in the Philippines, most of the OJT’s do not get an allowance, others just get free meal and free transportation service.) (Participant 8)

“Having OJT abroad will expose me to diverse culture. I could learn from them.” Participant 1.

“I want to learn working with Americans and deal with people of different cultures, beliefs, ideals and practices.” (Participant 4)

“Gusto ko makita mga tita at lola ko. (I want to see my aunt and my grandmother.)” (Participant 5)

“Makikita ko na rin ang mga pinsan ko and mga tito at tita na matagal ko ng di nakikita. (I could see now my cousins, my aunts and uncles whom I have not seen for so long.” (Participant 7)

“ I can be my long lost father who works in the US.” (Participant 6)

2. Themes Describing the Lived Practicum Experience Abroad

A. Deprivation of Rights and Discrimination

Participants 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 felt they have been discriminated in the workplace. American employers showed favoritism among American and European trainees over Asian trainees. They observed that they were not given the right to change work schedules and were given more tasks than the others.

“Me and my fellow Filipinos were not allowed to change work schedules and I observed that we were given more work loads. I do not know if they trust us enough because they see that Filipinos are hardworking and responsible or the other way around.” (Participant 8)

All the participants have experienced being discriminated by customers and guests. Participant 3 was called “idiot” for mistakenly serving the food of a customer, she was embarrassed in public and she was slapped with table napkin. Participant 1 was denied to enter a shopping center and was asked to show his identification card because according to the security officer, there were records of Filipinos doing shoplifting in the store.

“The security officer did not allow me to enter without showing my ID or my passport. He treated me like a terrorist on his watch list.” (Participant 1)

One customer knew that Participant 6 came from Subic, Philippines and was given the remarks, “That is where the former US Naval Facilities located, place of many prostitutes. Are you one of them?” Case of sexual abuses was also observed. Participants 2, 5 and 7 experienced customers who touched their hands and butt with malice and were offered for a date. The participants did not take any action on these cases knowing that they are just foreigners to that country and it might affect their status at work.

“There was a guest who offered to take us out for a date and bluntly said I am beautiful and sexy. He touched my left hand and caressed my back. He said if I have a boyfriend and still virgin. I just ignored his remarks because I was afraid to lose my job.” (Participant 5)

B. Enhanced Self-Esteem and Independence

All participants agreed that they became independent while staying in the US. They learned how to stand by themselves without the assistance of their parents or relatives. They cooked their food, washed their clothes, and cleaned their dormitories, among others.

“I have learned to wash clothes and cook food for myself which I did not usually do at home (in the Philippines). At first, I felt like going back to the Philippines because of this.” (Participant 3)

“I felt the true meaning of being independent.” (Participant 4)

Some participants said they have learned to budget their allowance and to save money.

“We now value the value of money earned through hardships.” (Participants 3, 6 and 7)

Majority of them feel that their self-esteem was enhanced since they have proven that they have worth as individuals and that they can live independently.

“I knew myself better now – what I can do. I am proud of my accomplishment and I know that I am a better person now.” (Participant 7)

“My self-esteem and confidence were boosted and I can now face any stranger or foreigner.” (Participant 8)

“Learning to stand with my own feet make me feel more confident about myself.” (Participant 1)

C. Support of Significant Others

Participants drew their strength to new friends and acquaintances in the dormitories they stayed in and in their workplace. Participants 3, 4 and 8 experienced shortage in allowance during their first month but fortunate enough to borrow some amount to other Filipino-trainees from other universities. Participant 4 commented: “Kaming mga Filipino

rin ang nagtutulungan duon pag may nangangailangan (We, Filipinos are the ones helping each other in case of emergency).” In times of sickness or illness, Participants 2, 5 and 7 experienced that they were reared and cared of by new friends. Close relatives of Participants 1, 2, 3 and 6 who are living nearby visited them twice to check their conditions. They were toured around the state. Parent of all the participants call them or chat with them regularly for updates of their status in the US.

“I felt the care of new friends in times of financial problems and sickness.” (Participant 1)

“My roommates in the dormitory were very dependable and helpful. They provided me the encouragement not to give up.” (Participant 8)

“My relatives keep on monitoring my status and condition. They care so much that they frequently visit me in my dormitory.” (Participant 3)

“Kung may problem ako, tumatawag ako sa tita ko na malapit lang ang bahay at pupunta kaagad sya sa akin sa dorm. (If I had a problem, I just called my aunt who are living nearby and she will immediately go to my dormitory).” (Participant 6)

D. Challenged, Determined and Focused to Work

All participants said they work hard to meet the expectations of their employers. They were challenged, determined and focused in their work. They all promised to themselves that they should finish the Program and they exerted their best to impress their supervisors and customers. They were all excited to work at the start but as days passed by they found their work to be difficult and challenging.

“Our boss was so happy to our work performance. They keep on saying “Good job guys.” Our employers were sad when they knew that our contract will end and said they are willing to absorb us if we will work in the US after the internship.” (Participant 2)

“Ginawa ko talaga ng maayos ang trabaho ko kasi kailangan ko maimpress ang mga employers ko at mga customers. Di ako nagpunta duon para gumala or maglaro. Naduon ako para magwork kaya nagseryoso ako. (I did my best in my work to impress my employers and our customers. I was not there to stray around nor to play. I was there to work and I was serious about it.)” (Participant 5)

“I focused on my job and tasks. I need to get a good performance rating which will be an advantage when I apply for future job.” (Participant 3)

Majority of them have experienced “homesick” and wished to go back in the Philippines after a month. Participants 2, 3, 6 and 8 found it difficult to adjust in their new environment specially communicating using the second language.

“The first few weeks were difficult adjustments. We missed our parents at home. It is difficult to adjust and work with other nationalities.” (Participants 1, 5 and 8)

“Nosebleed ako sa pag-iinglis. (I found it difficult to speak in English.)” (Participant 3)

“Pagdating to duon, namiss ko agad ang Pilipinas. (As soon as I arrived there, I already missed the Philippines)” (Participant 6)

Despite of so many temptations to go out and enjoy, Participants 3, 5, and 7 preferred to focus their attention in their work and preferred to do over time and part-time jobs. They

said they were determined to earn more money so that they could pay back their parents for the expenses incurred in the application to the Program. Participants 1, 2, 4, 6 and 10 have experienced going out during their free time to explore the place and to relax with new friends yet they never set aside their work.

“Gumagala ako kasama mga dorm mates ko pag free. Duon man lang matanggal lungkot at pangungulila kahit paano. (I roamed around with my dorm mates during rest day or free time just to lessen sadness and emptiness.)” (Participant 1)

“I enjoyed beautiful places in Las Vegas especially the night life. But when it comes to work, I was focused” (Participant 4)

“During my free time, I did some part-time work to earn extra money instead of going around for leisure.” (Participant 3)

“I had a part-time job in a convenient store during rest days and holidays. That was another learning experience.” (Participant 7)

E. Positivism

They all were optimistic at the start to get good performance rating and to finish the Program successfully. They were all positive that they made the right decision to have their practicum abroad. All of them thought that the Program made them better persons and better employees in the future. They said they have learned many practical things which were not thought to them inside the classroom.

“We are optimistic that we did our best and we made the school proud of us.” (Participants 2 and 7)

“We made the right decision to have our internship abroad. We feel more enriched and competent.” (Participants 5 and 8)

“I learned a lot from my internship experience.” (Participant 3)

“I never regret any single moment staying in the US for the internship. It brought a lot of learning and new experiences.” (Participant 1)

Participants 3, 4, 5, and 8 said they realized the applications of theories learned in school particularly on work values and ethics, working with culturally diverse environment, working in a team, among others. They all agreed that they became more knowledgeable, skillful, competent, independent, and work-oriented after finishing the Program. All were proud of this accomplishment and they believed that their parents were also happy for this.

“I believed that all of us learned the right work values, attitudes in working in a diverse work environment not only the skills and knowledge we need.” (Participant 5)

“I learned how to value time, money, work and other people.” (Participant 8)

“I am proud that I successfully finished the Program with pride and honor.” (Participant 5)

3. Interventions in the Implementation of the Program

Analysis of their responses resulted to the following interventions or actions: (1) focus the curriculum implementation on the acquisition of work values and positive attitude towards work and their profession, working independently, working in a culturally diverse environment, and working in a team; (2) develop a more intensive orientation

program for those who want to have their practicum abroad focusing on what to expect and the possible problems and struggles that they could encounter; (3) close monitoring of the trainees abroad in coordination with the partner agencies; (4) establish open communication with practicum coordinator for reporting of problems and provision of support system; (5) conduct debriefing after they have availed the Program to further study the problems and struggles they have met; and (6) provide reward system to those who successfully finished the Program.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Majority of the participants were motivated to experience different kind of practicum experience abroad to gain competitive advantage for actual employment, to be independent, to learn new culture and to easily apply for working visa abroad once graduated.

Almost all participants have experienced discrimination and deprivation of rights such as favoritism of employers and verbal and sexual abuses. All participants agreed that they became independent while staying in the US. They learned how to stand by themselves without the assistance of their parents or relatives, thus enhanced their self-esteem. Participants drew their strength to new friends and acquaintances. All participants said they work hard to meet the expectations of their employers. They were challenged, determined and focused in their work. They all promised to themselves that they should finish the Program and they exerted their best to impress their supervisors and customers. They were all positive that they made the right decision to have their practicum abroad. All of them thought that the Program made them better persons and better employees in the future.

Possible interventions and actions could be done to enhance the implementation of the Work and Travel Abroad (J1 Visa) Program of the school to better address the struggles and problems identified.

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