Tourism and Hospitality Management Students undergoing US Work and Travel Program: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Abstract

Tourism professionals expect universities to produce graduates who could deliver and perform functions based on industry standards. Universities have long integrated International Placements to heighten student competencies, bridge the gap between theoretical awareness and industry practice, and meet the expectations of the practitioners. However, there have been reports of unfavorable encounters of students on placement abroad such as being homesick, feeling out of place, and difficulty in reconciling expectation-reality gaps. These are the key issues that hinder students from optimizing international exposure programs and compromise the quality of their learning. A phenomenological study was used to examine the lived experiences of the tourism and hospitality management students on international placement. An in-depth interview was conducted as the primary source of data collection. The data were coded and analyzed according to the research questions. The research resulted in three (3) major themes which emerged out of the experiences shared by the student interns: 1.) struggles experienced in foreign country; 2.) skills/strategies to cope with the adversities; 3.) interns communication practices. The results of this study served as the basis in enhancing the e monitoring support system for the internship coordinator in the home university.

Keywords: International Internship, international placement, on-line media, computer-mediated conferencing, internship experiences

1.0 Introduction

The challenge of preparing graduates that for the demands of the industry while maintaining the academic rigour and underlying philosophy associated with a university education is assuaged through constant monitoring and feedbacking.

Internship is an integral part of hospitality studies as it bridges the gap between formal education and practical work experience. Owing to the nature of hospitality management programs, internship becomes an important mechanism in providing students with real work experiences (Beggs et al., 2008). While on internship, students are able to discover more about the different facets of the profession. Interns gain practical experience while simultaneously being able to reflect and internalize on the theories that were taught to them in school during internship. With a movement towards the globalization of the hospitality and tourism business, a lot of hospitality and tourism management programs are already being designed to include an international work exposure to prepare students to become globally competitive. To prepare students with their future hospitality career, it is imperative that they will assimilate diversity issues and challenges,

emerging technologies, innovations in service procedures early on with their academic training. Students from around the world come to this international hub of business and hospitality to learn and experience firsthand what customers want, need, and are going to demand in today's global economy.

To optimize student internship experiences, it is important that there is constant monitoring and communication between the interns and the internship coordinators of the home universities (Wilkinson, 2008). The ability of the internship coordinator to link up with his interns undergoing international internship is imperative, particularly when the former encounters challenging issues and situations that require immediate solutions. In local internships, monitoring of interns' experiences could easily be done through a regular classroom feedbacking sessions between interns and coordinators. However, the task of monitoring interns becomes a challenge in the case of international internships considering the physical distance and time zone differences. It is in this context where the internet and online platforms could help negate the monitoring limitations of the coordinator as far as physical checking and monitoring of interns is concerned.

The current literatures were unanimous that there was a need to support students while undertaking a period of work experience. However, after an extensive search of several databases, there was no study yet that focused specifically on the e-monitoring system for the students undergoing international internship program. There is still little empirical research on the effective monitoring and supervision of students at a distance (Gerken et.al, 2012). In particular, only a few research articles on internship monitoring have provided

in-depth understanding on how school internship coordinators could help monitor students with their work activities, personal and work challenges, process any gaps between the theories that they have learned in school vis-a -vis with their practical work experiences. To generate the best outcomes of an internship program, internship officers and industry practitioners should to understand interns' reflections of their experiences (Fong et al., 2013).

In the past twenty years or so, there has been an increased recognition in the use of technology as a learning platform (Alexander and Boud, 2001; Mcgugan and Peacock, 2005) for students at a distance. Technology allowed for the delivery of learning contents as well as the connection between higher education institutions and students.

While the increasing value and functionality afforded by online and internet platforms in delivering learning content have been well documented, the current use of internet platforms and social networking sites in internship monitoring is limited(Chu et al., 2012). Only a few studies have addressed how information technology can be optimized to help support, monitor as well as process the experiences of student interns while undergoing internship in another country.

In a study conducted by Gerke et al. (2012), only four articles have specially mentioned the role of information communication technology (ICT) tools in internship supervision. The researchers pointed out that there is limited understanding in the literature on the support of internships through ICT and Computer-Supported Collaborative Leaning (CSCL) (Gerken et al., 2012).

Thus, the main thrust of this study is to obtain a "first person perspective" about the work

learning experiences of the tourism and hospitality management students undergoing internship, identifying their competencies in a diverse life situations, and how they communicated the experiences to their support circle and to their internship coordinator.

2.0 Related Studies

Academic internships are defined as "an opportunity to integrate work-related experience into graduate education by participating in scheduled and supervised work" (Gault et al., 2010). In this study, the term internship is used solely to refer to undergraduate students undergoing academic internship. While undertaking an internship, students are given real work opportunities which will allow them to gain practical knowledge, generic and specific skills required to jumpstart their professional career (Gerken et al., 2012). Prior research have also shown that internship improves students' academic performance as well as their professional performance (Knouse et al., 1999) provides students the opportunities to practice what they have learned in the classroom, allows students to gain a broad understanding of the industries' requirements, test career choices by giving the student realistic expectations on the field as well as check for good fit between the student and the career (Callanan and Benzing, 2004) and develop important hands-on workplace skills (Barron, 1999; Barron and Maxwell, 1993; Emenheiser et al., as cited by Walo, 2001; Petrillose and Montgomery, 1998).

The goals of the international experience, in addition to an internship, are to help participants understand different cultures, identify local and international issues impacting the new culture, to experience interaction with other students with different nationalities, for providing a world class education. The experiences that student participants gain through this program are real, and they provide unique opportunities that would not be otherwise available in local internships.

Development of Life Skills

Internship provides the opportunity to hone the skills needed in a workplace. According to World Health Organization, the development of these skills are very important to enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Moreover, UNICEF defines these life skills as "a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills". The UNICEF definition is based on research evidence that suggests that shifts in risk behaviour are unlikely if knowledge, attitudinal and skills based competency are not addressed. Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life.

Furthermore, UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO list the ten core life skill strategies and techniques as: problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence are essential tools for understanding one's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, the individual is able to discern available opportunities and prepare to face possible threats. This leads to the development of social awareness of the concerns of one's family and society. Subsequently, it is possible to identify problems that arise within both the family

and society. With life skills, one is able to explore alternatives, weigh pros and cons and make rational decisions in solving each problem or issue as it arises. It also entails being able to establish productive interpersonal relationships with others.

Challenges of International Internship

Previous studies have established that international interns undergo phases of adjustments with their new work environment and living cultures which can lead to emotional upheaval and periods of self-doubt but can be minimized through a good internship preparation (Cullen, 2010) as well as proper monitoring of their experiences while students are in their host countries.

Although the current pieces of literature were unanimous that there was a need to support students while undertaking a period of work experience, there is still little empirical research on the effective monitoring and supervision of students at a distance (Gerken et.al, 2012). In particular, only a few research articles on internship monitoring have provided in-depth understanding on how school internship coordinators could help monitor students with their work activities, personal and work challenges, process any gaps between the theories that they have learned in school vis a-vis with their practical work experiences

INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIP MONITORING AND FEEDBACK

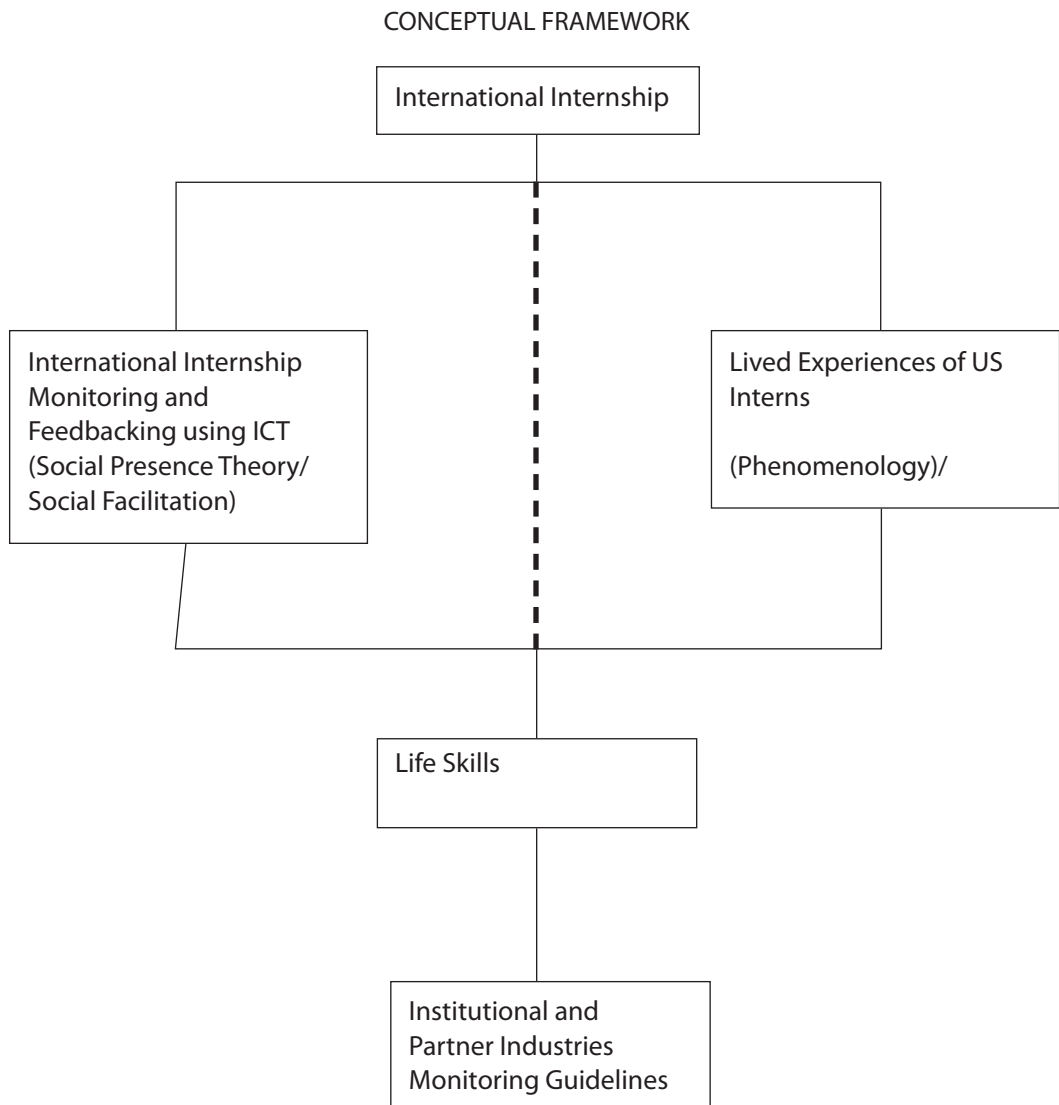**International Internship Communication and Support**

The functions and possibilities afforded by social networking sites have been suggested to be relevant to learning and information management. Its increasing use in the business and education sectors is documented, but its current use in internship monitoring is limited. Several authors suggested that electronic tools may improve communication between learners on placement, their institution and peers (Gerken et al., 2012; bin Saud, 2013). In a research conducted by Wilkinson (2008), researchers posit that technology can be used to assess and engage students as well as to facilitate the connection between higher education institutions and internship sites, with the use of both by asynchronous and synchronous tools. From the perspective of internship coordinators, such technologies offer a lot of communication conveniences particularly in sharing as well as monitoring the experiences of interns placed abroad. Hence, the availability of social networking sites such as Facebook and Skype make it very convenient for both interns and internship coordinators to communicate and interact in real time.

Considering the distance between the intern and internship coordinators in international placement, online social networking sites such as Facebook may be used as a platform in communicating their work experiences, problems and challenges that they encountered in their respective host establishments. With its accessibility and popularity among students, Facebook, being a free and open electronic communication platform, provides a useful connection between interns and internship coordinators to discuss with students issues with more immediacy regarding certain situations. In a study conducted among tourism and hotel management students in Taiwan, regarding the college students' internship experience sharing behavior on the internet, the results revealed that "students tended to share their

internship experience through online-personal media like social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and others (Fong et al., 2013). However, no prior study has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of online social networking site such as Facebook as a platform in monitoring the internship experiences of college interns undergoing international internship (placements). As pointed out in the research of Gerken et al. (2012), future research direction will focus on how internship coordinators could create a connection with student interns in online environments due to the isolated nature of these instructional settings; how to develop an online community program in order to assess whether students benefit from internship supervision at a distance through CSCL.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIP

The value of internship in preparing students for actual work has been well documented. Universities from around the world are already redesigning program curriculums to include internship even in almost all academic programs. In fact, a lot of universities have already redesigned their academic programs to include an international work exposure preparing students to become globally competitive and better prepare them for their future career as it adds important components to a student's academic and personal experiences (Van Hoof, 2000).

Students get the most out of their internship experience when they receive sufficient and relevant feedback from their internship supervisors (Narayanan et al., 2010). It has been argued in a research done by Panos (as cited by Wilkinson, 2008) that in the past, students placed internationally felt very isolated.

International Internship Monitoring and Feedbacking using ICT (Social Presence Theory/ Social Facilitation)

In order to enhance the learning experiences of students while at internships, both companies and hospitality schools have to find a way to effectively support, facilitate, and supervise students while they take and complete internship (Gerken et al., 2012).

To generate the best outcomes of an internship program, internship officers and industry practitioners are necessitated to understand interns' reflections of their experiences (Fong et al., 2013).

Murray-Harvey (2001) investigated sources of student support from teachers during a training program; the findings revealed that students placed a high value on emotional support from teachers, as well as collaboration and feedback from the teachers. In many cases, it is difficult to provide support on a face-to-face basis due to time constraints and geographical dispersion. Some studies have explored the use of information technology for providing support during students' internship. These studies examined web-based asynchronous discussions (Doering, Hughes, & Huffman, 2003), email communications (Graf & Stebnicki, 2002), and the use of video-conferencing (Nasiopoulos & Ward, 2002).

It is apparent that the potential of blogging as a resource for information and knowledge sharing has been examined substantially in both business organizations and conventional education settings. However, little is known about the use of blogs as a supportive tool during internship. Using the framework of collaborative learning, this study utilized blogging as a platform for reflections during the internship of undergraduate students in the B.Sc. in Information Management (BScIM) programme of the University of Hong Kong. Building on the growing evidence that supports the suitability of blogging for constructivist learning approaches, we explored the potential of blogging during internship with focus on information and knowledge sharing, as well as social support.

SOCIAL PRESENCE

Social Presence Theory, which was originally developed by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976), has been used to provide the theoretical foundations for the interaction and reaction within internship experiences together with Teacher Immediacy Theory. It is premised on the idea that the medium's social effects are primarily brought about by the degree of social

presence that it provides to its users. In computer-mediated communications, for instance, social presence is established when a communicator has felt a sense of awareness of the presence of his interaction partner. Short et al. (1976) regards this as an important process by which man will come to know and think about other persons, their characteristics, qualities and inner states. However, Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) put it most simply when they say that social presence is "the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication". Thus, increased presence leads to a better person perception. The social presence theory was later introduced as an online concept due to its combination of concepts of social presence with teaching presence (Anagnostopoulos et al., as cited in Wilkinson, 2008).

In Teacher Immediacy Theory, Richardson and Swan (2003, as cited in Sunmonu and Tijani, 2013) defines it as the "measure of the psychological distance that a communicator puts between themselves and the object. Combining social presence with teacher immediacy addresses the number of personal contacts needed between learner and instructor. As pointed out by Gunawardena and Zittle (1997), both students and mentors involved in computer-mediated communication develop their own immediacy 'rules' that create their own 'social presence' (Richardson & Swan, 2003).

Another theory that will support the research in the use of technology and internship, the social informatics theory is defined as "the trans-disciplinary study of the design, deployment and uses of information and communication technologies (ICT) that account for their interaction with institutional and cultural contexts including

organizations and society" (Sawyer, as cited by Wilkinson, 2008). The theory, which focuses on what is seen as 'normal communications' in an online environment, addresses the norms, rules, and practices of people along with the necessary computer hardware and software (Sawyer, 2005).

Be it online or face-to-face learning interactions, the primary purpose of establishing social presence in any learning environment is to build a level of comfort between the instructor and students that will foster spontaneous and enriching interactions. It will be utterly difficult to achieve the goals of the learning environment for both teachers and learners if social presence had not been properly established. As Whiteman (as cited by Wilkinson, 2008) states, "People feel more comfortable around us when they believe we share a kinship and common values" (as cited by Aragon, 2003). When the environment is devoid of social presence, the participants see it as impersonal and, in turn, the amount of information shared with others decreases (Leh, 2001).

SOCIAL FACILITATION

Social facilitation can be defined as 'an improvement in performance produced by the mere presence of others'. There are two types of social facilitation: co-action effects and audience effect. The mere presence of another has been found to have an effect on a participant's task performance. This effect has been termed social facilitation (Zajonc, 1965). Social facilitation effects are observed by examining the performance of participants performing simple and complex tasks. Performance and accuracy are facilitated for simple tasks and inhibited for complex tasks when a participant is in the presence of another, compared to when a participant is alone. Various explanations

exist for social facilitation effects. Studies on social facilitation concern the extent to which a given piece of an individual's behavior is affected by the real, imagined or implied presence of others.

According to Cottrell (1968), it's not the presence of other people that is important for social facilitation to occur but the apprehension about being evaluated by them. We know that approval and disapproval are often dependent on others' evaluations and so the presence of others triggers an acquired arousal drive based on evaluation anxiety.

Social facilitation has traditionally been defined as the influence of the presence of others on an individual's task performance. Social presence has been shown to either facilitate or impair performance based on various moderating variables, including the more recent investigation of individual differences, but researchers have yet to extend social facilitation theory to the domain of decision-making. (Wallace, 2011)

Researchers have studied social facilitation effects induced by a person teleconferencing and being monitored via computer network, terming these effects as electronic presence (Aiello & Svec, 1993). Aiello and Svec had participants perform a task on a computer with their performance monitored by the researcher in another room. In the present study, we seek to examine social facilitation when a person works alone on a computer, thereby examining the compatibility of the Computers As Social Actors (CASA) paradigm with social facilitation (Hall and Henningsen, 2008).

Wilkinson (2008) argued that the concept and use of information communication tools (ICTs) could both facilitate and hinder social actions and relationships Wilkinson, 2008). For some, ICTs may bridge communication exchanges. For others,

it may be taken as limiting factor to genuine communication (Kling, Rosenbaum, & Sawyer, 2005). The meta-analysis supports mere presence as the primary explanation for social facilitation. As Guerin (1993) notes, all explanations of social facilitation effects, such as evaluation apprehension or distraction, inherently include mere presence. In this respect, mere presence is considered the most parsimonious explanation of social facilitation effects. Mere presence continues to be employed as a prominent framework for understanding social facilitation (e.g., Grant & Dajee, 2003; Platania & Moran, 2001).

3.0 Design and Methods

This is a qualitative method of study that utilizes phenomenology to explore the learning experiences of the tourism and hospitality management interns on international placement.

Of the fifteen participants of the International Internship program during summer 2014, there were a total of 10 participants who agreed to be interviewed and shared their learning experiences during their internship abroad. Study participants were invited based on two criteria: They are tourism and hospitality management interns who were deployed within summer of 2014, and were utilizing online communication tools in giving updates of their encounters to their support circle. Based upon the two criteria, there were two male and seven female interns who participated in the study. As shown in Table 1, six of the participants were nineteen years old at the time of deployment, while the rest were on their early twenties. The interview took place in one of the multifunction rooms in the campus.

Table 1   Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

	Age	Gender	Course
1	21	Male	Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management Major in Food and Beverage
2	22	Female	Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management-General Course
3	19	Female	Bachelor of Science in Tourism
4	19	Female	Bachelor of Science in Tourism
5	19	Female	Bachelor of Science in Tourism
6	19	Female	Bachelor of Science in Tourism
7	21	Female	Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management-General Course
8	20	Female	Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management-General Course
9	19	Male	Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management Major in Food and Beverage
10	19	Female	Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management-General Course

Much care was taken to ensure that students' description of their lived experience during the internship was being upheld. Prior to the participants' interview schedule, the researchers went through a bracketing consultation intended to bring to surface their set of realities considering that both have been internship coordinators and have been through industry immersion programs. The discussion was facilitated by another member of the research team skilled in phenomenological interviewing. Bracketing is an attempt to determine and temporarily set aside one's prior knowledge about a certain phenomenon to actively listen to the interviewees' responses (Creswell, 2013).

After obtaining informed consent, the researchers conducted a phenomenological interview as a primary method of data collection with all the 10 participants. The participant described his or her experiences of the phenomenon. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes.

All interviews were audio recorded and were transcribed within 24 hours. During the data collection, the researchers took turns in noting any manifestation of nonverbal and paralinguistic communication. A preliminary interview was conducted to test the interview schedule. It involved two graduates who participated in the International internship program in the previous years. Both participants appeared to be comfortable and positive in sharing their internship experiences. They openly described their work-related and personal challenges during their internship abroad.

Much of this phenomenological research was influenced by Moustakas's (1994) approach as presented in Creswell (2013) as presented in the following figure found on the next page.
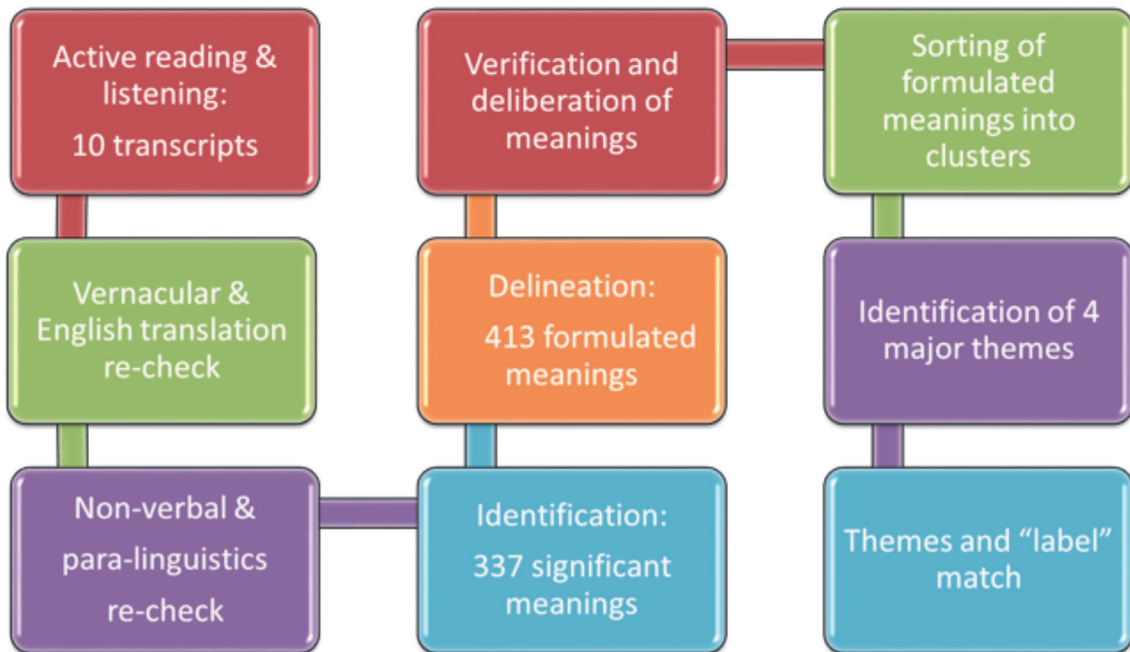
Figure 1: Flow of Data Explication

The procedure involved active listening to the recorded interview as well as reading the transcription several times to be familiar with the overall flow. The researchers sought the help of teachers handling English subjects to translate the responses expressed in the vernacular to English. Once the written transcripts were ready, the researchers dissected responses of participants during the interview and identified sentences that have significant connotations as they shed light on how the tourism and hospitality management students experienced internship in another country. Meanings are then formulated from significant statements. There were constant checking and rechecking of the entries in vernacular to make sure that the meanings are reflective of the context of the sentences. A review of formulated meanings flagged emerging clusters of each transcription that paved way to the identification of themes common to all of the interns' interview records.

4.0 Results and Discussion

From the verbatim transcripts, significant statements were extracted and meanings were formulated. The formulated meanings were sorted into clusters that resulted to three (3) major themes. The themes convey the dynamic nature of the interaction of students with co-interns on site, work supervisors, and with their support circle back home. The three themes were labelled with the same words that were used by the study participants (Davis et al, 2004) to stay as close as possible to their own description of meaningful experiences and the skills manifested in coping with their day to day challenges and the internship communication tools used by the interns.

THEMES:

1. Struggles in the workplace.
2. Skills/Strategies in coping with the adversities
3. Online communication

A. STRUGGLES IN THE WORKPLACE
Bias, inequality and harsh remarks

This theme emerged when they were describing their struggles in dealing with their co-workers and customers during their internship program. They experienced bias, inequality, and harsh remarks in the workplace. Study participants described their situation of biases and discontentment of receiving lesser rates, differences of working hours and insensitive comments in the following terms:

The first three excerpts deal with the issue of biases in terms of the salary received, number of working hours and their places of accommodation.

"I had shared to my fellow Filipino interns our hourly rates. I don't know why Filipinos received S8.50 while Ukrainian and Ecuadorian received S15 per hour. We worked 40 hours a week while they worked 70 hours per week. They received more earnings than we do. They don't have concerns with the guests and treated them rudely. We are better workers. (P1)

"On the other hand, in the house where we were staying, Filipinos usually prepare their food. However, if there are kitchen items that are lost we are blamed for any missing items and asked to pay it by deducting the amount from our salary." (P2)

"We encountered problems with our workmates with higher position in the company. They decided to transfer us to another hotel that was quite small and far from our workplace. The reason for doing it was to give priority to the Ukrainian under the WAT program and didn't want to adjust in the workplace. There's nothing we could do. We just transferred. We tried reaching FPI but they don't have a Face book page. Once we complained, it took them a long period of time to take necessary actions. So, we just agreed to

transfer to that smaller hotel " (P5)

There were also incidents that they received harsh comments from their supervisor and customers, but had learned to understand the diversity of cultures.

"I was a slide attendant, colored American guests insisted on what they want. One guest would like her child to play with the water slide without a life vest. I didn't allow it because I will be reprimanded by our supervisor. The guest insisted and scolded me. She said. " I am a guest here. Would you like to be reported to your supervisor?" I know I was right and should implement the house rules. When they went to the slide, she gave me a fuck sign. I was so embarrassed to the other guests and felt humiliated. When I went home, I was crying." (P6)

Furthermore, the participant also came across a situation with his supervisor and added;

"I had this hard-hearted encounter with my supervisor with this whistle sign. It was not my fault but the supervisor blamed and told me, "incompetent, feeble-minded, etc. " I guess it's casual for her to say those words because my supervisor is of my age."

Apprehension, Termination of work and Deportation

The participants described their fears of leaving home, anxiety in their work and people they had met. Wearily, the participants conveyed their emotions of anxiety for unfamiliar things that they came upon.

Participant 7 described her experience of anxiety.

"I want to back out because it was my first time to travel long distance and I got scared. The feeling

of being scared because you are a stranger in a new place; you do not know where to go. My companion has the same fears that I have, that is the fear of getting lost in unfamiliar place. Although, I didn't personally know my companion (fellow intern), as Filipinos, we felt that we should help each other, look after each other's needs, giving each other reminders. When we arrived in Japan, we were like twin lizards that never split up until we arrived in Wisconsin so that we won't get lost. " (P7)

The dread of no place to stay because she and her companion arrived early than their schedule added to her apprehension.

" I felt hopeless because I was afraid where to stay because there is no room available yet in the house and more. . . I have no money. I have only P800.00 left and need to pay for our accommodation. My companion and I went to Motel 6 and allowed to stay one night because all rooms were reserved. I really have to budget my money because I have to make an advance payment for the training and for the housing and books. For three (3) consecutive days, I was only eating noodles and never went out because I have no money and afraid of getting lost.

" I love swimming but I felt nervous because I might panic reaching the deep part of the pool. We were all first-timers and exposed to the different situations as a lifeguard. Another thing, I felt uneasy because I am not familiar with the area yet." (P7)

Other participants experienced fear caused by misunderstanding of gestures.

"I was shocked that these Russian men who were intoxicated with alcohol just open the door immediately without knocking it and then they attempted to touch me. We thought that it was just a friendly gesture, like the usual introduction because they just newly arrived. So I reported the

incident."(P5)

Study participants described their experiences of apprehension in leaving home, the risk of their jobs, termination in work and the possibility of deportation back to the Philippines.

" I felt nervous because it was my first time to be away from my family. And then, it was also my first time to experience heavy work and I have no idea what is it like to be working as a lifeguard. I thought that the job of a lifeguard is quite risky." (P6)

"I was so worried because they told me that I could be deported. A guest called and told the in-charge that she left her jewellery and other things in the room. The supervisor asked me because I was the last person who entered the room. I saw the things and put it in the cart but wasn't able to give it directly because I was in a hurry to go to the office. We put the cart straight to the parking lot instead in the office and forget about it the following day because it was my day off from work. We never heard of her for a week and I thought that she forget about it. After two weeks, I got a call from my supervisor asking about the items left in the room. After the incident, I was so worried because they told me that I could be deported."

Feeling Homesick, Depression and Stress

A common theme in participant narratives during their internship program was the feeling of homesickness and their desire to express their fears and needs with their family. The study participants were nostalgic and wish to be home.

For most of the participants, it was their first time to stay away from their parents. The study participants described their longing to be home with their parents, the feelings of homesickness, loneliness and difficulties and the only way to

express these needs is to communicate with their family. Keeping good relations with the family members are very important as the family is also the source of social support.

" I felt homesick during my first week in US. I always cry when I talk to my mother, I wanted to go home because I was so exhausted with my work." (P6)

Moreover, her dependence of household chores on her mother made her realize the importance of her family especially her mother.

" I frequently woke up with my family in the early hours in the morning. I missed my Mama because I am not used to cook my own food and wash my clothes. When I arrived in the house from work and I am too tired. I have no clothes to wear because I was not able to wash my clothes. . . that is why I called my Mama every day".

Adjusting to a new environment and new people with diverse culture made the participant restless, lonely and worried in their work. It made them feel homesick and yearn for their parents.

"With my first roommates, I had not encountered any problems, they were really okay. When their program had ended, I transferred to another room with new set of roommates. My roommates loved to go to the parties and I cannot relate to them. Most of the time I am left alone. I felt bad being alone and nobody to talk to. I missed my mother so much" (P3)

"I was tensed at first because I was the only Filipino staff and the rest were Mexicans. They had different attitude compared to Americans. I had difficulty adjusting during my first month. It was quite difficult to find friends whom you can share your problems so I have to call my parents. "(P4)

Other participants were also experiencing accident, depression and stress due to the demands in the workplace and push them to think of going home and seek refuge with their families by means of communication.

"I miss my family so much. I called my parents once a week but I called my aunt everyday especially during the time that I was depressed."(P5)

"I was assigned as a lifeguard and we had an examination from time to time. If we fail on the examination, our salary will also be downgraded. I tried to be energetic and vigorous in work. I was not used to be scolded too. It seems I lost my enthusiasm and didn't feel like reporting to work. . . . I wanted to go home."(P6)

The words of Participant 1 summarize this theme. The feeling of being homesick is common to most us. It makes us appreciate and realize the importance of our family. No matter what, where, and when you are away from home, we always think of coming back home because there is no place like home and the means to overcome this need is to keep in touch with the people at home.

"I felt homesick in the later part of my internship in US. I was about to leave and all I think is going home to my family." (P1)

Difficulty in expressing oneself

The interns had also experienced negative remarks of the language spoken and their difficulty in expressing oneself.

"In work, some of my co-workers discriminated us. They said that Filipinos don't know how to speak English. My supervisor said it during a heated discussion because I had difficulty of expressing myself with the language." (P6)

"I had a hard time understanding the black Americans. They spoke to us in American slang. Sometimes, I can't grasp what they were talking about and told them to speak simple English. I

struggle to comprehend the language of black Americans." (P1)

B. LIFE SKILLS

1 COPING AND SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS
Flexibility/Adaptability

The study participants also showed flexibility with their work and the people they are with. The different challenges they had encountered taught them the abilities to adapt and be positive with their behaviour to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life, managed their emotions and continue to motivate themselves.

"If I arrived late in work, I am assigned as a slide attendant. I assisted the customer in putting on their life vest and entertain them. I worked as a lifeguard and looking for the guest's safety." (P6)

"As a slide attendant, we must ensure that the guests were in proper position in the water tube in order for them not to hit their head on the side. I am also assigned as a park attendant and I am responsible monitoring and cleaning the park. (P2)

"It is too boring at the water park and then you will not be able to look after your spot. Plus, the music at the outdoor water park is ideal for sleeping. At the near end of my internship, at the outdoor water park, the child drowned because I had been careless, that is why I really felt guilty." (P5)

Responsibility

At the workplace, we need people around who can appreciate the hard work and motivate people from time to time. It is essential to have trustworthy co-workers who not only appreciate when people do good, but also tell their mistakes. A pat on the back goes a long way in extracting the best out of individuals.

"One time we had family guests. After they were seated, the father accidentally spilled the water, so I helped them dry the table. Then another family member did the same and still helped them. After the main course was served, another member of the family again spilled the water accidentally. So I had to dry the table three (3) times. Before the family left, they approached and thanked me for what I did. They informed the manager for the excellent service I extended to them."(P10)

"I would share my experience especially during my earlier weeks when there was no supervisor. There were some miscommunications that led the others to be absent. That was also the time when a new batch of interns arrived. Since I had familiarized already the operation, I was given the opportunity to lead the interns and be a supervisor in-charge. It was really nerve-wracking but was able to manage it. (P1)

Another student participant mentioned that aside from the fulfilling experience of saving a child's life, she also received commendation from her supervisor in providing exemplary assistance to elder guests.

"I had that enormous fulfilment when I was told by my supervisor that I did a good job for keeping the elder guests safe when they tried the slide. (P7)

2 Interpersonal Relationship

It is important for individuals working together to share a special bond to deliver their best and being honest with each other creates a healthy interpersonal relationship and positive ambience at the workplace.

"We only ignored those negative comments in order to have a peaceful place to work with." (P2)

It cannot be avoided that because of language and cultural diversity, conflict may arise among

people in the organization. However, the study participant added that;

"We had our in-service training every week and then we became groupmates. We had little conversation and that's how our friendship started."(P2)

On the other hand, a student participant believes that making good relationship with her supervisor would prevent his annoyance on her. She befriended her supervisor because she didn't want her supervisor to be upset on her.

I "befriended" my supervisor in order for him not to antagonize and always checked on me (P6)

An individual working in isolation is more prone to stress and anxiety and may find the job monotonous. We need friends around us and people to talk and share our feelings. Study participants described their relationship with other nationalities.

"I met new friends from Argentina, Russia, Thailand, Ecuador, Jamaica and America. They are so friendly and fun with."(P5)

"I was able to meet different kinds of people, different nationalities and we became friends."(P2)

3 Decision making

The student interns encountered situations where they had to deal with significant problems in the workplace. The ability to deal constructively with the problems they had experienced made them feel fulfilled. Participants described their lifetime experience that not everybody will have the chance to experience.

"There were three children trapped in the tube, we had pulled out two (2) children and the other one was left in the tube. The current of the water was so fast in which we slip and we're not able to hold the slide anymore. The child left in the tube

was traumatized that's why I ran immediately to the kid and said, "it's alright, you're safe now." I got cuts but what is important is the child's safety. It was a fulfilling experience for me. The guest was very grateful for what I did." (P7)

On the other hand, other study participants experienced desperation from their work but despite of the lapses done, one participant mentioned that she cheered up herself by working so hard and stated her eagerness to learn in the work.

"I won't let someone's opinion affect me. Anyway, that was my first day and I have the opportunity to impress my supervisor." (P5)

Furthermore, she considered it as a challenge and did the work well.

"I consider it as a challenge. When my supervisor assigned me a room to be cleaned, it should be finished on time because there are guests waiting to check-in. It was a bit of a challenge on my part because I have to make the bed, clean the bathroom, sweep the floor and a lot more. However, we were trained for a week to learn easier methods to save time in cleaning." (P5)

"It took me few days to learn how to carry and arrange the plates. At first, it's difficult to carry a large tray and large plate when you are not used to it. It's quite heavy. Almost the same size as what we have here but their plate is huge like a platter. It's difficult but I was able to adjust after few servings." (P10)

One student intern experienced being admonished by the guest but persisted to do what she believes is right. Compliance to the house rules made her firm in her decision despite of the guest intimidation.

"The guest insisted and scolded me, she said " I am a guest here, would you like to be reported to

your supervisor?" But I know I was right and should implement the house rules.(P6)

4 Collaboration

Collaboration in the workplace allows businesses to meet the customer needs and initiatives in a more efficient manner. With multiple individuals involved, work can be efficiently done to those who have the time and expertise.

A student participant revealed that they assessed their performance with the tip given and the comment card for a work well done from the guests.

"We also rated our performance based on how much tip we received from the guest. One time, I and my colleagues received 100 dollar tip from a table of six for our good performance. The guests will also rate our performance through the comment card that they will fill up before they leave. Some guests would even approach us personally to extend their gratitude for a service well done.

Study participants also received admiration from their superiors and colleagues for a commendable effort.

"Most of my workmates told me that they can rely on me to work in that station. Among the eleven (11) interns who were assigned to the kitchen station, I was the one who performed well with the job. When the General Manager assigned me to another station, my previous kitchen manager told me that he needed me to be back if given the chance. They like me because I have good memory and a fast learner. I diligently followed all their instructions." (P10)

5 Communication practices

The study participants used the new technology "internet" in communicating with the internship coordinator, family members and friends. Private message was the ICT tool utilized by the study participants.

I sent private message to my coordinator when I was made as a supervisor. I did not post it in the group page because I don't want others to be reading and I know there will be a lot of questions which sometimes annoys me. I wanted to share my experience to my coordinator so that he will know everything. That some opportunities may happen only once and I was able to overcome it.(P1)

"I sent a private message to my coordinator during my stay in US. The heater in our room was not functioning and it was very cold and seems we were frozen already. There were nights that we can't sleep because it was so cold. We requested a heater but nothing came until it was spring time. (P5)

"I have concerns with my enrolment because I was not able to leave an authorization to my family. I asked my coordinator to help me with my problem." (P7)

"I requested my coordinator to send a soft copy for the evaluation and I intended to privately message the coordinator because I don't want others to read it and their might be a lot of questions about it. (P1)

"I prefer private chat than public post for the following: I'm a shy person, others might negatively say something about us and others may not like what I had posted." (P2)

Other than the private message, the participant also used facebook group page. His excitement urged him to post it in the group page.

"I also posted in FB when I felt so happy when my employer told me that he was very glad with my performance and wants me to go back and

work in the company".(P1)

It really helps people to connect and know their whereabouts. In our case, it allows us to know the experiences of the interns in the US because this program is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.(P5)

Other participants also expressed their preferences with facebook.

"I prefer to chat with them rather than posting pictures in public because I am not familiar with other people in the group page. I know some but I'm not comfortable of posting. I am troubled that they might say negative things about me." (P2)

I prefer Facebook because they are always online compared to Skype."(P2)

Study participants also mentioned their preferences with skype.

"When I was in US, Skype was more convenient to use than facebook because you can see the other person whom you are talking to when you video call and really sure that the person is really there. I didn't have much time to share and summarize my experiences with the facebook group for interns and coordinators. I prefer to use Skype because you get an immediate response compared to face book.(P6)

"I talked to him in Skype because we can easily understand each other. He gave advice but warned me to be cautious in dealing with them.   I can't share my anxieties to my fellow interns because we were all adjusting to our new environment." (P1)

Furthermore, the study participants suggested the communication technology to be used and other concerns in the monitoring system.

"If posting of experiences is a requirement, I would be happy to post it in the facebook group page at least 3 times a week and find time to do it." (P6)

"I think they should also be online always in Facebook. If they can do it everyday to check on us." (P2)

"Maybe once a week because every week you have different experiences, so we need to report it that week.**"**(P5)

"The school coordinator should always have constant communication with the interns because there will be times that they will need advice."(P3)

"I used Skype and Facebook in communicating to my family but I didn't communicate to the coordinator because I was busy and I also thought that the coordinator is busy. Well, I prefer Facebook because they are always online compared to Skype."(P2)

Discussion

The study has sought to explore the learning experiences of interns abroad as a means to enhance an e-monitoring support for the internship coordinators at the home university. It aimed to identify the skills and competencies of the students while in a foreign country. Only by knowing their stories we can understand what they went through in a real workplace and how they dealt with the intricacies of their day to day encounters with their work and the people they were with. This understanding can help us develop the propose mechanism to enhance support for interns abroad and to prepare the students for this new global society.

In this study, the student participants encounter struggles and work-related adversaries such as inequality, bias, harsh remarks, apprehension, termination of work and stress with people of diverse culture, work values and leadership styles. On the other hand expressing their thoughts clearly and articulating their opinions was a hindrance of the student participants as

they had shared in the study. Verbal and non verbal communication with other cultures was a problem mentioned by the study participants. The hospitality industry is a diverse mosaic of people from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, it is not an option, but a necessity to interact and communicate successfully with people of all racial, ethnic, cultural and religious heritages. Language differences complicate communication in the workplace. It may result to miscommunication and misunderstanding. Cultural background influenced language structure especially non-verbal communication behaviours such sign language and the use of slang terms. Thus, it takes a great deal of patience, understanding, respect and learning to communicate effectively in places where there is a language differences, social and conversational customs differences.

Coping with the demands and challenges in everyday life and managing one's emotions are important skills that were identified during their internship program. They had shared how they constantly battled the feelings of distress, anxiety and other emotions. However, these challenges they had experienced, had made them bounce back quickly in life's setbacks and upset. Others were able to get into the "flow" state that enables them to do outstanding performances in the workplace. Many student participants received commendations for their good performance, mostly attributed by their hard work, openness to new assignments, and exemplary customer care.

Skills such as thinking critically, applying knowledge to new situations, analyzing information, comprehending new ideas, communicating, collaborating, solving problems, and making decisions were also manifested with the study participants in dealing with their diverse

life situation. Students who have undergone international internships have learned the life-molding lessons of the challenges that they have encountered by just being far from their families, relatives and the rest of their support circle back home.

Despite of the challenges and the distance, other student participants have temporarily eased such problems by communicating their ordeals and sharing their experiences on-line with the use of ICT tools that were conveniently available to them. They convey the advantages and disadvantages for each ICT tools. The choice of computer mediated communication used by the study participants is an affirmation of social presence established when a communicator has felt a sense of awareness of the presence of his interaction partner. It is an important process by which man will come to know and think about other persons, their characteristics, qualities and inner states (Short, et al, 1976).

However, another common finding is that students on placement do not perceive support of coordinators as being that important unless something goes wrong or there is an emergency. The authors admonished to reflect on the circumstances of the students work placement to ensure that the expectation for keeping in touch is realistic before deciding on the type of format and frequency demand of the support from school coordinators.

As part of the effort to add credibility to the findings of the study and to seek additional solutions to the problem, a summary of findings of this study were submitted to a group of experts from the industry and from outside the industry including: a psychologist, I.T. expert, human resource manager, practicum coordinator,

recruitment agency, previous interns (US on job trainees), overseas foreign workers, alumni and industry practitioners. Like the individual interviewing, this group is purposely selected as they know and understand the topic very well. The members of this focus group were asked to read the findings of the study to determine the credibility and provide suggestions with regard to this topic.

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendation

The study has identified valuable insights to the live-in experiences of interns on placement abroad. While international internship had given the tourism and hospitality management students an avenue to reach their aspirations on being independent and earning their own money, and had exposed them to practices of the tourism and hospitality industry in global arena, there are realities surrounding during their internship period. To meet the most of their work learning experiences, interns had to cope with and withstand these challenging situations by leveraging on the support of their family, friends and internship coordinator. Considering the geographical distance, participants were able to continue their relations with the significant others through their preferred ICT tools.

An understanding of the problem areas and how the interns were able to manage these issues to complete the international internship program have provided the researchers a working knowledge to enhance support thereby minimizing their discouragement and increasing their chances of survival overseas. The documentation of interns' experiences must be continued to create a databank on the practices of host companies abroad which will eventually be used in the selection of host establishments or organizations in the future. More units on managing cultural diversity should be allocated in the tourism and hospitality management curriculum to strengthen their concept of self vis-a-vis practices of foreign co-interns. To encourage more interaction between interns and coordinators, the facilitator during the orientation of the internship program must put emphasis on the students' open access to the internship coordinators despite time differences and nature of issues. Following the students' practices when engaging on-line with their friends and relatives, internship coordinator must ensure that there is a provision for a group video conferencing in addition to one-on-one calls, group page comments, chat and private messaging.

Findings of this study can also be used to inform decisions relative to proposed internship programs in other countries. In addition, a separate study focusing on the international interns who were not able to finish their program may be advanced to shed light on the factors influencing such fate.

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