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Skill Development Journey through Hospitality: An In-Depth Study of Trainee Experiences in Malaysia

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Abstract

On-the-job training abroad offers students an opportunity to acquire practical knowledge and skills in a recognized foreign host establishment, enhancing their global competitiveness through exposure and acculturation in a foreign country. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Student Internship Abroad Program in Malaysia, addressing the empirical gap or evaluation void gap for hotel and restaurant technology students. The study followed the descriptive phenomenological method in the qualitative research approach, utilizing Colaizzi's model as described by Shosha (2012), using the experiential learning theory, proposed by David Kolb. Interviews through focus group discussions (FGD) were employed. The extracted narrative accounts were organized into five thematic categories, Enhanced skills and learning encounters in the workplace; Received respect, acceptance, and appreciation from the host establishment; Accommodations, meals, and incentives were provided by the host establishment; and Overseas challenges encountered. Likewise, the outcomes of this learning will provide healthier perceptions, indulgence, and inspiration to the diverse field of specializations and others on the importance of on-the-job training in the program and curriculum, particularly for students planning to pursue hospitality studies.

Keywords: Hospitality trainee, Phenomenology, Colaizzi's model, Internship abroad

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Introduction

In recent years, the hospitality industry has undergone profound changes, largely driven by globalization, technological advancements, and evolving consumer preferences (Rapp, 2024; Bents, 2023). Globalization has opened new markets and increased competition, necessitating that hospitality professionals possess a broader skill set and cultural understanding. Technological advancements, such as online booking platforms and smart room technologies, have revolutionized the industry, requiring professionals to stay updated. Additionally, evolving consumer preferences have created a demand for personalized experiences, leading hospitality businesses to adapt their offerings and services.

This evolution has highlighted the critical importance of practical training and experiential learning for individuals aspiring to enter the hospitality field. Hospitality management students are increasingly recognizing the value of gaining hands-on experience and industry insights to prepare for their future careers (Pursio et al., 2023). By participating in internships programs, and industry

placements, students can develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and network to succeed in this dynamic and competitive industry.

The student internship abroad program stands out as a significant avenue offering valuable experiential learning opportunities for hospitality management students. These programs provide students with immersive experiences in diverse cultural contexts, enabling them to develop cross-cultural competencies and gain practical skills in hospitality operations (Mulyati et al., 2023). Malaysia, renowned for its rich cultural heritage, diverse cuisine, and thriving hospitality sector, serves as an ideal destination for such internships. The program offers participants a unique and enriching experience, allowing them to not only enhance their academic knowledge but also gain practical insights into the global hospitality industry.

Despite the increasing popularity of international internship programs among hospitality management students, there is a noticeable gap in empirical research focusing on the experiences of trainees in Malaysia's hospitality industry (Bents et al., 2022). This gap, also known as the Evaluation Void Gap, highlights the need for further investigation to improve our understanding of trainees' encounters within this context. Addressing this gap is crucial as it can provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by trainees during their internship experiences in Malaysia. By gaining a deeper understanding of these experiences, stakeholders can enhance training programs, improve support systems, and better prepare trainees for their future careers in the hospitality industry.

The lack of empirical research on trainees' experiences in Malaysia's hospitality sector has significant implications for hospitality management education. Primarily, it restricts a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities that hospitality management students encounter during their international internship experiences (Pan, 2023). This understanding is essential for refining training programs to effectively meet participants' needs and expectations (Nielsen, 2024). Furthermore, addressing this gap can enrich the field's knowledge base and provide valuable insights for shaping future research, policies, and educational strategies within the hospitality sector (Bollwerk, 2024). By bridging this gap, educators and policymakers can better prepare students for the dynamic and competitive nature of the hospitality industry, ultimately enhancing the quality of hospitality management education and its impact on the industry.

To address the empirical gap regarding trainees' experiences in Malaysia's hospitality sector, the study "Journey through Hospitality: An In-Depth Study of Trainee Experiences in Malaysia" focuses on exploring the lived experiences of hospitality management students participating in the student internship abroad program. The study aims to delve into the motivations driving students to join the program and to identify the professional opportunities stemming from international on-the-job training in Malaysia. By doing so, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of trainees' experiences in the country's hospitality sector (Muahmmad, 2022). Therefore, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- a) What were the students' lived experiences in the student internship abroad program in Malaysia?
- b) What motivates students to participate in the student internship abroad program in Malaysia?

The study intends to contribute valuable insights that can inform decision-making processes and advance the field of hospitality management (Leite & Azevedo, 2022). Through this research, the study aims to fill the existing gap in empirical research and provide a foundation for future studies and developments in the field.

Literature Review

Experiences in the Student Internship Abroad Program

The participation of students in international internship programs provides valuable insights into their personal and professional development. Research has explored various aspects of these experiences, including students' interactions with local cultures, perceptions of host country work environments, and challenges faced when adapting to new surroundings. Studies have highlighted the positive outcomes of international internships, emphasizing the improvement of cultural awareness, language skills, and employability prospects (Sitorus & Silalahi, 2023; Haeg & Siver, 2023).

Internships are crucial for equipping students with practical skills and competencies essential for their future careers. For example, in the field of tourism, students have been shown to acquire diverse skills and knowledge during internships under the guidance of supervisors and teams (Sitorus & Silalahi, 2023; Armada & Armada, 2023). Similarly, in nursing, internships have played a significant role in enhancing students' caring abilities, technical skills, and bridging the gap between theory and practice (Xie et al., 2023). The effectiveness of immersive learning experiences in training programs offers innovative approaches to skill development (Sanzana, 2024).

The impact of internships goes beyond individual skill development to broader educational and career implications. By offering real-world exposure and hands-on experience, internships allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, enhancing their preparedness for the workforce (Zhu, 2023). Moreover, internships have been linked to increased self-confidence, independence, and technical skill training, further highlighting their importance in preparing students for professional roles (Deng & Shi, 2023).

In the field of education, internships act as a link between academic learning and practical application, providing students with insights into industry practices and workplace dynamics. Through structured internship programs, students can develop essential competencies, refine their professional identities, and cultivate valuable skills necessary for their future careers (Indrastana et al., 2023). Additionally, internships contribute to students' career development by offering hands-on learning opportunities and industry exposure, shaping their career paths (Jain et al., 2023). International internship experiences not only foster personal and professional growth but also play a crucial role in enhancing students' skills, competencies, and readiness for the workforce.

Motivation for participation in the Student Internship Abroad Program

Students' motivation to participate in international internship programs is influenced by various factors. The opportunity to gain practical experience in a foreign country, enhance intercultural skills, and improve employability prospects are significant motivators for students seeking international internship opportunities (Canet, L., et al. 2020) ;(Davidson & Garas, 2023). Additionally, the desire for personal growth, development, adventure, and new experiences plays a crucial role in driving students towards international internships (Lobo, J. (2022).

The motivation for participation in student internship abroad programs extends beyond individual skill development to encompass broader educational and career aspirations. Students are driven by the prospect of acquiring diverse skills and knowledge, enhancing their professional competence, and expanding their global outlook through international internship experiences (Hall, 2023; Reardon et al., 2022). Furthermore, the transformative potential of study abroad programs in fostering cultural understanding, linguistic proficiency, and personal growth serves as a compelling motivator for students (Kaneria et al., 2022; Strunc et al., 2022).

The role of internships in nurturing leadership efficacy, educational leadership skills, and applied learning opportunities further underscores the significance of these programs in shaping students' career tracks (Jach & Trolan, 2023). Moreover, the development of culturally responsive leadership, the exploration of employer participation in internships, and the impact of cultural intelligence on short-term study abroad experiences highlight the multifaceted benefits that motivate students to engage in international internship programs.

Students' motivation to participate in student internship abroad programs is driven by a combination of factors, including the desire for practical experience, intercultural competence, personal growth, and career advancement. These motivations feature the value of international internships in providing students with transformative learning experiences and preparing them for success in a globalized world.

Challenges encountered during training

Challenges encountered in an international internship program can significantly impact students' experiences and outcomes. Research has identified various obstacles faced by students during their internships abroad, including cultural differences, language barriers, homesickness, and adjustment to new work environments (Hu et al., 2022). These challenges can create significant stress and discomfort for students, affecting their ability to fully engage and benefit from the internship experience.

In addition to cultural and social challenges, logistical issues such as accommodation, transportation, and financial constraints can also pose significant hurdles for students participating in international internships (Nicolas et al., 2022). Navigating unfamiliar systems and environments can be overwhelming, particularly when students are far from their support networks and familiar resources. These practical challenges can add an extra layer of complexity to the internship experience, requiring students to adapt quickly and problem-solve effectively.

Moreover, the nature of the internship itself can present challenges, such as fulfilling the expectations of the host organization (Achmad et al., 2023). Balancing academic responsibilities with practical training demands can be demanding, especially when students are required to demonstrate specific competencies and skills within a limited timeframe. Overcoming these challenges requires resilience, adaptability, and effective communication with supervisors and mentors.

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Furthermore, the impact of the internship context on students' employability and skill development has been a subject of interest in recent research (Saidani et al., 2022). Understanding how the internship experience influences students' readiness for the workforce is crucial for designing effective internship programs that address the challenges students may encounter during their training.

Challenges encountered during international internships can range from cultural and logistical barriers to academic and professional demands. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, institutions can better support students in navigating the complexities of international internship experiences and maximizing the benefits of such programs for their personal and professional growth.

Opportunities arising from participation in international on-the-job-training

Participating in international on-the-job training offers students various opportunities for personal and professional growth. International internships have been shown to enhance students' cross-cultural communication skills, increase their cultural awareness and sensitivity, and improve their ability to work effectively in diverse teams (Lapoint, 2023). These experiences not only broaden students' perspectives but also equip them with valuable skills essential in today's globalized workforce.

Moreover, international internships provide students with unique networking opportunities and exposure to different business practices and work cultures, significantly enhancing their future career prospects (Monogaran & Subramaniam, 2023). By immersing themselves in international

work environments, students gain firsthand experience in navigating diverse professional settings, fostering adaptability and intercultural competence.

Research has also highlighted the importance of skills acquisition and employability among interns in various fields. Studies have shown that internships play a crucial role in preparing students for the realities of the job market, bridging the gap between academic learning and practical application (Ananda et al., 2022). By engaging in internships, students can acquire industry-specific skills, enhance their employability, and gain valuable insights into their chosen career paths.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of internships in different disciplines, such as tourism, hospitality, education, and medicine, has been a subject of interest. Studies have demonstrated that internships contribute to self-development, skill acquisition, and career readiness among students in diverse fields (Pietro, 2022; Patil & Sharma, 2022). These experiences not only provide students with hands-on learning opportunities but also shape their professional identities and prepare them for future roles in their respective industries.

International on-the-job training offers students a transformative learning experience that goes beyond traditional classroom education. By engaging in internships, students can develop essential skills, expand their professional networks, and gain valuable insights into global work environments, ultimately enhancing their personal and professional growth.

Factors influencing on-the-job training

The effectiveness of on-the-job training in Malaysia is influenced by various factors that play a crucial role in shaping training outcomes. Key factors include the quality of supervision and mentoring, the relevance of training to students' academic and career goals, and the level of organizational support (Rohiat et al., 2023). Effective supervision and mentoring provide students with guidance, support, and feedback essential for their learning and development.

The cultural and regulatory environment in Malaysia, along with the availability of resources and infrastructure, also significantly influence the outcomes of on-the-job training programs (Mat & Omar, 2022). Adapting training programs to align with Malaysia's cultural context and regulatory requirements can enhance their effectiveness. Moreover, ensuring access to adequate resources and infrastructure is essential for delivering high-quality training experiences to students.

(Ogbuanya, 2022) mention that implementing best practices, such as those observed in organizations like fast-food chain in Malaysia, can positively impact the effectiveness of on-the-job training programs. By promoting best practices and aligning training programs with industry standards, organizations can optimize learning outcomes for students undergoing on-the-job training.

Furthermore, the role of mentoring, supervision, coaching, and instruction in professional identity formation has been highlighted as a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of on-the-job training programs (Luca et al., 2022). Effective mentorship and supervision contribute to the development of essential skills, knowledge, and competencies among trainees, enhancing their job performance and satisfaction.

Factors such as the quality of supervision, relevance of training, organizational support, cultural context, and mentoring play pivotal roles in influencing the effectiveness of on-the-job training programs in Malaysia. By addressing these factors and implementing best practices, organizations can create impactful training experiences that contribute to the personal and professional growth of trainees.

Methodology

The study investigating the experiences of on-the-job trainees in Malaysia, with a specific focus on 4th-year hospitality management students from Eastern Visayas State University (EVSU), Philippines who completed their OJT in Malaysia, utilized a descriptive phenomenology approach within the qualitative research paradigm.

Employing Colaizzi's technique for thematic analysis, the research delved into the trainees' experiences through focus group discussions (FGDs) held at EVSU, Philippines, ensuring that the data collected was comprehensive and aligned with the research objectives. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants capable of providing relevant insights, and the data collection process involved conducting FGDs with these participants using an interview guide to maintain focus and relevance. To ensure all pertinent information was captured, an audio recorder was utilized during the discussions.

The data analysis adhered to Colaizzi's phenomenological data analysis approach, which included multiple readings of transcripts to extract significant statements related to the trainees' experiences in Malaysia. These significant statements were then formulated with meaning, and the formulated meanings were clustered into themes to identify common themes, leading to the identification of meaningful emergent themes. This thorough approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the trainees' lived experiences in Malaysia, providing valuable insights for the study (Kantos et al., 2022).

Research Participants

In this study, there were nine participants who were 4th-year college students pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Technology and had undergone OJT through the Student Internship Program Abroad (SIAP) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, between the ages of 20 to 25.

Table 1 Profile of the participants

Participants	Age	Address	Deployment
Participants 1	22	Tacloban City	
Participants 2	24	Sta. Rita, Samar	
Participants 3	20	Tacloban City	Grand Millennium
Participants 4	20	Tacloban City	Kuala Lumpur,
Participants 5	25	Palo, Leyte	Malaysia.
Participants 6	22	Tacloban City	
Participants 7	20	Tacloban City	
Participants 8	20	Basey, Samar	
Participants 9	21	Babatongon, Leyte	

Ethical considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards regarding the confidentiality of the interviewees' identities. Prior to conducting interviews or focus group discussions, the interviewees were assured that their participation would not have any negative repercussions on them. They were informed that the study aimed to highlight the positive aspects of experience of OJT in Malaysia, and they consented to participate under these conditions.

Results and Discussion

The content presented here primarily comes from the responses of the research participants. This information aims to provide a categorical understanding of the experiences of hospitality management trainees during their on-the-job training in Malaysia. The study synthesized the participants' individual perspectives, concerns, and other important details through thorough analysis and reflection. Table 2 presents the four (4) emergent themes that arose from the data analysis.

Table II. Emergent themes

Theme 1. Enhanced skills and learning encounters in the workplace.	Theme 2. Received respect, acceptance, and appreciation from the host establishment.
Theme 3. Accommodations, meals, and incentives were provided by the host establishment.	Theme 4. Overseas challenges encountered.

The findings of the study consist of the thematic presentation of data collected from the participants. The discussions of these themes are presented in accordance with the formulated research questions.

Theme 1: Enhanced skills and learning encounters in the workplace.

Graduates with international internships gain a competitive edge in job searches (Westra, 2024). They develop vital skills like effective communication and socialization with diverse individuals, critical in the hospitality industry. Workplace learning enhances skills and knowledge acquisition (Beno et al., 2022). Professional engagement is crucial across fields for problem-solving and organizational success (Saadia & Naveed, 2023). The leadership support and organizational culture is important in the success of hospitality education (Quttainah, 2024). Aligning leadership education with business needs bridges management education and industry demands (Fulmore et al., 2022). Fostering future workforces requires continuous learning (Torresan, 2023; Ketchiwou et al., 2022), which can be valuable for enhancing learning experiences (Khalil, 2024). Likewise, interviewed participant stated that:

“It was difficult to socialize because of the different culture and language but I learned how to handle certain problems when it comes to the attitude of the guests and my co-employees.”

“Being a trainee in the reception for six months is quite challenging of course we face different nationality, different culture, and different people with different attitude.”

“When there’s a problem, I think about the reason why I am here and my priorities in life and also about my future.”

“I just remain patient even though I was being reprimanded.”

Internships abroad offer students invaluable cultural immersion and skill development opportunities, preparing them for future job challenges. These experiences enhance professional competencies and global understanding (Pietro, 2022). Workplace learning, crucial for skill acquisition (Lierop et al., 2022), Integrating workplace learning with academics’ bridges theory and practice, enhancing employability (Ruthanam, 2023). Such integration allows for hands-on experiences, preparing students for professional roles (Kagawa et al., 2022). Internships and workplace learning shape students' skills and readiness for the workforce, fostering personal and professional growth. As affirmed by interviewed participants:

“Being in a workplace, especially in a foreign land dealing with people with different attitudes can’t be avoided so we really need to have patience.”

“Even though some of my co-workers and superiors underestimated me I showed them that I can do the things they can do.”

In the study conducted by (Akinwumi et al., 2022) The findings revealed that overseas training program has proven to be invaluable for trainees, exposing them to field challenges and enhancing their intercultural communication skills. Trainees have developed skills in navigating

interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering patience and resilience in managing challenging situations, including errors and workplace discrimination. This exposure has motivated them to continuously improve, demonstrating competence in the face of doubt, contributing to their personal and professional growth.

Furthermore, incorporating internships into academic programs is acknowledged as a critical element in improving students' career readiness and employability. Employers value the hands-on experience gained through internships, enhancing students' attractiveness to the job market and employment opportunities (Gee & Shackman, 2023). (Sitorus & Silalahi, 2023) Indicates that educational travel experiences, such as internships abroad, have a positive impact on students' cognitive abilities and creative thinking.

The enhanced skills and learning experiences in the workplace are crucial, as it highlights the transformative impact of practical experiences on skill development and professional growth. the study highlights the importance of internships, workplace learning, and professional engagement in nurturing skills such as effective communication and problem-solving, which are essential in the diverse hospitality industry. It's also emphasized the importance of aligning leadership education with industry demands, signaling a shift towards practical learning. By focusing on specific workplace challenges, our research provides insights into skill enhancement that are valuable for academia and industry. Overall, the findings offer new perspectives on how workplace experiences contribute to improved skills, highlighting the importance of continuous learning in the hospitality sector.

Theme 2: Received respect, acceptance, and appreciation from the host establishment.

The process of cultural adaptation for trainees in Malaysia, initially challenged by differences in language, customs, and beliefs, gradually evolved into a journey of growth and integration. Over time, they learned to navigate interactions with foreign nationals, becoming more comfortable with the new environment and diverse cultural landscape. Despite initial struggles, the host establishment embraced them as equals to local employees, fostering inclusivity and respect. Research highlights the significance of cultural adaptation, emphasizing factors like intercultural experience, language proficiency, and cultural intelligence in successful cross-cultural integration. Effective communication, understanding diverse cultural norms, and adaptability are essential skills for excelling in multicultural environments (Zhang & Li, 2022). Cultural adaptation is transformative, involving overcoming hurdles to thrive in new settings. Exposure to diverse cultures helps develop skills and mindset for navigating cross-cultural interactions and succeeding in globalized environments. Likewise, a participant testified:

"My co-employees treated me well especially my seniors. We were like a one big happy diverse family."

"There were other managers that mingled with us. Overall, they treated us very well."

"They treated us fairly even though we were trainees."

Cultural adaptation for trainees in Malaysia involves developing cross-cultural relationships, including the ability to maintain and adapt interpersonal connections with individuals from the host culture. This process requires a willingness to adjust to diverse communication styles, social customs, and others' emotions (Benko, 2023). Cross-cultural respect and acceptance are cultivated not only by student trainees but also by local trainees and employees, fostering cultural awareness, understanding, improved communication skills, and social flexibility (Carter et al., 2023).

The success of internships depends on trainees' language and cultural adaptability, as well as the host establishment's capacity to train and manage employees with varying characteristics and principles (Suwanto, 2023). Harmonious interaction between both parties is essential for enhancing trainees' knowledge and skills and ensuring the host establishment's success in training competent professionals capable of delivering world-class services (Sampson, 2023). Participants expressed

gratitude for the accommodating and supportive environment provided by their host establishment during the internship, as they have stated:

“Our training was good; the staffs were very hospitable, and they became our friends during the training.”

Initiating friendship and domain-tutoring practices at the onset of internships, such as sharing preferences and helping, enhances interns' comfort and expertise in field-specific tasks. Guiding trainees to understand internship objectives, embrace their tasks, and seek opportunities to enhance intercultural competence and professional knowledge leads to accepting routine tasks, adjusting expectations, and enjoying job responsibilities (Ha & Dakich, 2022).

“There was a lot of staff that were helping each one of us. They taught us the things we need to know.”

The integration of social practices and training significantly improves interns' learning outcomes, particularly in foreign language skills, cultural empathy, self-efficacy, and intercultural competencies. Effective collaboration between trainees and host establishments can help interns transition to working independently with confidence and professionalism, gaining recognition and trust from the host organization. International internships in vocational education are recognized as opportunities for students to expand their skills acquired in school and develop language and social skills (Iwacewicz-Orłowska, 2022), highlighting the importance of practical experiences alongside theoretical knowledge.

“After a few months, we already know how to handle things even when we're on our own and we felt that they have already trusted us.”

“They saw that my performance was good, and they complemented me for it. It felt wonderful for my hard works to be appreciated.”

Fostering a friendly atmosphere with employees, alongside maintaining professionalism, can lead to improved performance. Simply instructing employees to work better may not yield optimal results; they are motivated by fair, respectful treatment and feeling valued. Cultivating mutual trust and respect, even amidst cultural diversity, in the workplace benefits both employees and the establishment, paving the way for business success and enhancing the performance of both employees and trainees.

The theme of receiving respect, acceptance, and appreciation from the host establishment emerges as a crucial aspect in our findings, highlighting the positive outcomes of international internships in the hospitality industry. The study reveals that these elements significantly contribute to interns' overall experience and skill development. Respect and acceptance from colleagues and supervisors in the host establishment can boost interns' confidence and motivation, leading to improved performance and learning outcomes. Moreover, appreciation for their work validates interns' efforts and motivates them to further enhance their skills. This positive feedback loop nurtures a supportive learning environment, where interns feel valued and empowered to tackle new challenges. Additionally, being respected and accepted in a foreign work environment enhances interns' intercultural competence and adaptability, which are vital skills in the globalized hospitality industry.

Theme 3: Accommodations, meals, and incentives were provided by the host establishment.

Various internship programs have emerged to meet the demand for highly skilled workers. For example, the Structured Internship Program (SIP) in Malaysia aims to improve internship quality in Malaysian firms and enhance students' understanding of internship objectives (Sinyuk et al., 2022). In the Philippines, the Student Internship Abroad Program collaborates with agencies to place students in Malaysia, offering training opportunities and incentives from host establishments.

The success of such programs highlights the importance of cultivating mutual trust and respect in culturally diverse workplaces, benefiting both employees and organizations (Diantari, 2023).

Additionally, in the study of (Diantari's, 2023) emphasizes the impact of training and motivation on employee performance, mediated by job satisfaction, highlighting the significance of investing in employee development. Furthermore, (Adula et al., 2023) explore the effects of HRM practices on organizational performance, mediated by employee work attitudes, emphasizing the importance of aligning human resource strategies with organizational goals. In addition, learning and development, indicating the importance of a supportive work environment for skill enhancement (Birhanu, 2024).

The influence of non-financial rewards on employee performance, revealing the role of incentives beyond monetary compensation in driving employee motivation and performance. The participant's stated that they received a monthly allowance from their host establishment:

"We received an allowance for about 500 ringgit per month."

Accommodation and meals are also provided by the host establishment, as confirmed by the participants:

"The place we lived was decent enough."

"Regarding our living quarters it was okay for me."

"The hotel was walking distance away from our house."

"About the food it was free, and we ate very well."

The provision of accommodations, meals, and incentives by the host establishment is crucial, as our findings indicate. These amenities not only meet interns' basic needs but also greatly enhance their overall experience and performance. By offering these essentials, the host establishment demonstrates its dedication to supporting interns, creating a positive and conducive learning environment. This support boosts interns' motivation, allowing them to concentrate more on their tasks and learning goals. Additionally, these provisions can be viewed as acts of respect and appreciation, strengthening the positive rapport between interns and the host establishment.

Theme 4: Overseas challenges encountered.

Overseas internships bring unique challenges that individuals must overcome as part of their learning experience. While these challenges can be demanding, they should be viewed as opportunities for personal and professional growth, inherent in the daily work routine. Trainees in international on-the-job training often face communication difficulties, especially due to language barriers. For instance, a study noted that Malaysians' lack of fluency in English can lead to frustration and disappointment among trainees, affecting their overall training experience and underscoring the importance of effective communication strategies.

Furthermore, in the study of (Joy, 2022) explores strategies for promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion in medical school admissions, highlighting the need to address social disparities in educational opportunities. Understanding and mitigating these challenges are vital for fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Additionally, (Uy et al., 2022) identify gaps in comprehensive training for professionals working with rehabilitation patients, emphasizing the need to enhance training to ensure quality care for individuals with disabilities and advance the field of rehabilitation psychology.

Moreover, (Soffi et al., 2020) examine challenges in implementing successful hospitality internship programs in Malaysian public universities, emphasizing the complexities of program design and management. Addressing these challenges can enhance the quality and effectiveness of internship programs. Additionally, (Alshammari et al., 2023) investigates how cultural identity and a sense of belonging influence the psychological adjustment of international students, highlighting common challenges such as culture shock, financial difficulties, and discrimination. Understanding

these factors is crucial for supporting the well-being and academic success of international students in diverse educational settings. Some participants prompt to affirm that:

“The language barrier was hard to overcome because some Malaysians are not fluent in English, so we had to adjust specially when communicating with them.”
“They do not really know how to speak English they use their language which is Bahasa.”
“During our first month, especially on our first week, we really had to adjust in terms of communicating with the locals.”

Another challenges that they encounter is being far away from their families. One of the Filipino customs is being a family oriented. As confirm by some participants:

“The first problem that I encountered was that I felt homesick.”
“I really felt homesick because it was the first time I was away with my family.”
“I really missed my family, I really couldn't bear being away from them.”

They were offered to return after their training to work in their respective host establishment, but there is a government policy regarding the prioritization of local employee. Some participants noted this as saying:

“They had problems regarding the VISA because their priority was to hire locals in Malaysia rather than foreigners.”
“It will be difficult because their government is strict regarding the issues in VISA.”

Regardless of the difficulty of the task, we can still perform and complete it within the allotted time. One of the most important attributes for this is being responsible. The hospitality management trainee is capable of handling overlapping tasks. This was confirmed by some participants:

As a receptionist, I did not only check in and check out guests. I also had to do bartending, check the inventory, and set the buffet in the morning and evening guests.”

“I was assigned as a bartender, cashier, barista and then in the morning in the room service department.”

In spirit, OJT abroad needs to consider as an educational activity to improve students' knowledge, competence, responsibility, and confidence to mend being people oriented without any hesitation. OJT are vital for suitable career training to safeguard suave shift to their profession after completion of education.

Overseas challenges encountered is crucial in the findings as it highlights the unique difficulties and obstacles that hospitality and tourism management students face during their international On-the-Job Training (OJT) experiences. These challenges can include cultural differences, language barriers, adaptation to new environments, and unfamiliar work practices. Understanding these challenges is important because it sheds light on the complexity of international OJT programs and provides insights into how students can better prepare for and navigate such experiences in the future. Additionally, it contributes to the existing literature by providing a deeper understanding of the impact of international OJT on students' personal and professional development.

Theoretical Implication

"Journey through Hospitality: An In-Depth Study of Trainee Experiences in Malaysia" utilizes Experiential Learning Theory by Kolb and holds significant promise for enhancing the skills and knowledge of hospitality management students from Eastern Visayas State University (EVSU). Through the lens of Experiential Learning Theory, the study sheds light on how these students' real-life experiences in the hospitality industry are crucial to their professional development. By actively participating in practical experiences like on-the-job training abroad, students are immersed in authentic learning environments that facilitate the acquisition and refinement of skills essential for success in the field. As they navigate various roles and responsibilities within hospitality establishments, students are likely to improve their communication, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. They may also develop a deeper understanding of customer service, cultural sensitivity, and business operations, all of which are essential competencies in the hospitality industry.

Furthermore, Experiential Learning Theory suggests that learning is an ongoing process that involves concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Thus, the study implies that students can enhance their skills and knowledge by reflecting on their experiences, making connections to theoretical concepts, and applying their learning in new contexts. This cyclical process of learning through experience can lead to continuous improvement and growth in their professional competencies.

Additionally, the study's findings may have broader implications for the design and implementation of hospitality management education programs at EVSU and beyond. By recognizing the value of experiential learning, educators can prioritize hands-on experiences that bridge the gap between theory and practice. This approach can better equip students for the demands of the hospitality industry, ensuring that they are not only academically proficient but also capable of thriving in real-world settings.

Overall, the theoretical implications of this study highlight the transformative potential of experiential learning in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and professional development of hospitality management students, ultimately shaping them into competent and effective professionals in the hospitality industry.

Implication of the study

The study's findings offer encouraging implications for the field of hospitality management and international training programs. The observed enhancement in skills and learning encounters among trainees underscore the effectiveness of international On-the-Job Training (OJT) programs, suggesting that such initiatives can greatly benefit aspiring professionals in the hospitality industry. This highlights the potential for OJT programs to not only impart practical knowledge but also cultivate a deeper understanding of the industry's dynamics. The positive experiences of trainees in receiving respect, acceptance, and appreciation from host establishments indicate a conducive and supportive work environment. This emphasizes the importance of fostering positive relationships between trainees and host establishments, which can contribute to a more enriching training experience. Moreover, the provision of accommodations, meals, and incentives by host establishments demonstrates a commitment to the well-being and development of trainees, suggesting that comprehensive support structures can significantly enhance the overall OJT experience. Overall, the study's implications highlight the potential of well-organized and supportive OJT programs to positively impact the development and preparedness of future hospitality professionals, ultimately contributing to the growth and success of the industry.

Research Limitations and Future Direction

The study's findings, while promising, are subject to several limitations. Firstly, the sample size and diversity of the participants, limited to hospitality management trainees in Malaysia, may restrict the generalizability of the results to a broader population or different geographical contexts.

Secondly, the data's subjective nature, relying on self-reported experiences and perceptions, introduces the possibility of bias or inaccuracies. The context-specific nature of the study, focusing on Malaysia's hospitality industry, may limit the applicability of the findings to other industries or regions.

Moving forward, researchers could consider longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of international On-the-Job Training (OJT) programs on trainees' professional development. Comparative studies across different countries or regions could illuminate cross-cultural differences in training effectiveness and support structures. Additionally, incorporating qualitative and mixed-methods approaches could provide deeper insights into trainees' experiences. Future research could also focus on improving OJT programs, such as enhancing coordination between agencies and host establishments, and investigating the impact of hosting OJT programs on host establishments.

Conclusion

After exploring the valuable insights into the experiences of hospitality management trainees during their international On-the-Job Training (OJT). The study revealed that trainees experienced significant enhancement in skills and learning encounters in the workplace, indicating the effectiveness of the OJT program in Malaysia. Moreover, the trainees reported receiving respect, acceptance, and appreciation from the host establishments, which contributed to a positive work environment. The provision of accommodations, meals, and incentives by the host establishment was also noted, highlighting the importance of these factors in supporting trainees during their OJT. Additionally, trainees faced various challenges while overseas, such as cultural differences and language barriers, which tested their adaptability and resilience. Overall, the study give emphasis to the importance of well-organized and supportive OJT programs in enhancing the learning experiences of hospitality management trainees.

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