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Abstract. *The purpose of this paper to gather insights on students' experiences during their overseas internship program. This paper discusses the difficulties faced by the students during their overseas internship program and their approaches to overcome them. Insights might be useful as feedback and lesson learned for education institutions. This paper employs a qualitative approach. The data collected were secondary data. 12 (twelve) students' internship reports were gathered with purposive sampling method. A thematic data analysis was employed. The results suggest that difficulties encountered by the students in three areas: cultural difference, language and communication, and task management. This paper offers insights on the students' approach to overcome the difficulties. Educational institutions need to better understand the needs and expectations of the parties involved, to better prepare the students, and monitor the program from the beginning until its completion.*

Keywords : Internship, Hospitality, Overseas, Students

INTRODUCTION

⁵ Internship which is defined as “a structured and career relevant supervised professional work / learning experiences, ¹⁸ paid or unpaid within an approved organization under the supervision of professional and ¹⁶ faculty member for students to earn academic credits” (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012). Internships ¹¹ play a pivotal role in the vocational education of students pursuing careers in the hospitality industry. Through hands-on experience and exposure to real-world scenarios, internships ¹¹ bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge gained in classrooms and practical skills required in professional settings. This introduction delves into the significance of internships within hospitality vocational education.

In the dynamic and multifaceted realm of hospitality, theoretical knowledge alone often proves insufficient to prepare students for the complexities of the industry. The invaluable role of internships provides students with a comprehensive understanding of hospitality operations. For instance, a study by Xu, et al (2022) emphasizes that internships are crucial for students to gain practical experience and develop essential skills such as customer service, team work and problem-solving.

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Moreover, internships serve as incubators for professional growth, allowing students to explore their interests, refine their career goals, and build networks within the industry. Internships offer a unique opportunity for students to test their theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, thereby enhancing their confidence and competence (Tsai et al, 2024). Additionally, exposure to different facets of the hospitality industry during internships enables students to make informed decisions about their career paths, whether in hotel management, event planning, or food and beverage operations.

Furthermore, a symbiotic relationship occurs between educational institutions and hospitality establishments in facilitating internships. Collaborations between academia and industry not only provide students with experiential learning opportunities but also enable businesses to identify and nurture talent. Tsai et al (2024) emphasizes that internships play a vital role in talent development within the hospitality industry, serving as a bridge between education and employment.

Internships can serve as indispensable platforms for students to acquire practical skills, explore career paths, and forge connections within the industry. By embracing internships as integral components of their educational journey, aspiring hospitality professionals can embark on a pathway toward success grounded in experiential learning and industry immersion. An overview of the literature in Pietro (2022) indicates that international internship program is beneficial in developing the participants' intrapersonal skills (i.e. open mindedness, self-confidence), gain of practical knowledge, language proficiency. The study also indicates less evidence on whether international internship increases cognitive and leadership skills. Other advantages have also been pointed out in Windawaty (2023) that states that overseas internship allows students' gain new knowledge, add professional experience, apply learned theory, and increase network.

National policy of Kampus Merdeka, also known as the Merdeka Campus program or MBKM (Kampus Merdeka), is an initiative launched by the Indonesian government aimed at reforming higher education and promoting lifelong learning. The program emphasizes student-centred learning, competency-based education, and flexible pathways for academic and professional development. Internships play a crucial role within the framework of Kampus Merdeka by providing students with practical, hands-on experience and opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

Internships play a central role in the Kampus Merdeka program by providing students with valuable learning experiences, fostering industry-relevant skills, and preparing them for

successful careers in their chosen fields. By integrating internships into the curriculum and promoting collaboration between academia and industry, Kampus Merdeka aims to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in Indonesia and empower students to achieve their full potential. Generally, vocational students are to undergo internship programs as part of the curriculum requirements. Students are allowed to take 2 semesters internship activity in the industry which equals to maximum 20 course credits (Kemdikbud, 2020).

Internship for vocational program has some issues concerned, particularly related to the lack of law and regulations that protect the education institution and interns. Internship is under the manpower department Law No. 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower and Labor, by the Ministry of Manpower, Ministry Decree No.6 Year 2020 regarding domestic internship, and No.8 Year 2008 regarding permit for international internship. It appears that internship falls under general law that is not specifically regulated in terms of working hours or amount of compensation, even though agreement typically be made between the parties, the industry, the student, and the education institution.

In addition, the fact the quota and placement availability for internship is decided by the need of the industry that may not match with the education institutions other concerns related to internship program is perceived exploitation of young people or interns seen as “cheap labour” that only benefiting employers. While interns may perform equal to the staffs, their status as intern do not provide the benefit as the same as the staffs. According to Vo et al (2022) Hospitality internship also have some challenges that preparation is needed to prepare the students to tackle problems related to building self-confidence, communication, adaptation to long work hours, physical requirements, supervisions, and problem solving.

Due to the importance of internship and inadequate ¹⁷research, the purpose of this paper is to gather insights on the students' experiences on overseas internship program ¹in the hospitality industry. This study aims to answer what are the difficulties faced by the students and how the students tackled their difficulties.

RESEARCH METHOD

³ *Background of Internship*

The students majoring in Hospitality and Tourism at a vocational college are obliged to conduct 6(six) months to 1(one) year internship opportunities. However, overseas internship is optional but encouraged. Students may choose internship in Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, or Japan. The internships were arranged by the college. ³ The goal set for the students were to earn practical experience within the industry and familiarize with foreign culture and language.

Internship Placement

The college conducted recruitment for students interested to take overseas internship. Prior to placement in the industry, students were ensured that they were physically healthy, and academically and mentally fit to work in the industry. To prepare them, students were equipped with intensive foreign language training (i.e. Chinese and Japanese) and career enrichment workshops. The internship period was taken in the period of 2023 to 2024. The students were to write an internship report and present them after the completion of their internship.

Participants

The participants of this study ages between 19 – 21 years old. The participants in total were 12 participants, in which comprises of 3 students from each of overseas internship countries, including Taiwan, Thailand Malaysia, and Japan. The participants were purposively included in this research.

Table 1. Profiles of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Position	Host Company
A. Malaysia			
Participant 1	Female	Kitchen	Hard Rock
Participant 2	Male	FB Service	Hompton
Participant 3	Female	Front Office	Mercure
B. Thailand			
Participant 1	Male	FB Service	Pulman
Participant 2	Female	Kitchen	JW Marriott
Participant 3	Male	Sports and Recreation	Pulman
C. Taiwan			
Participant 1	Female	Kitchen	Lakeshore
Participant 2	Female	Kitchen	Lakeshore
Participant 3	Male	Housekeeping	Lakeshore
D. Japan			
Participant 1	Male	Kitchen	Green Plaza
Participant 2	Female	Kitchen	Green Plaza
Participant 3	Female	Kitchen	Green Plaza

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis was conducted to analyse students' overseas experiences. Thematic analysis involves noting relationship, similarities, and differences in data (Ravitch, 2019). The analysis will generate a generate features or a theme out of a set of data. The process includes coding the synonymous terms in the same category and then aspects mostly mentioned were captured into themes and sub-themes.

Data Collections

The students had to write a report on their internship experiences. The content of report includes a description of the job or task, host organization profiles, benefits and difficulties encountered by the students during the internship program. Internship reports included a reflection on the theory they learned in college and practical experiences they had in the industry. Then, the students' reports were analysed to answer the questions asked in this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Cultural Differences

This study employs a qualitative approach to gauge insights on the students' experiences during international internships. International internship program gave several advantages that students do not get from the college. A student mentioned cultural differences as one of challenges he faced.

"...How to handle guests, talk to guests and staff, especially using other foreign languages, namely Mandarin and then different work cultures compared to in Indonesia, making relationships between staff with different backgrounds, handling unexpected events when preparing food where ability problems solving students are tested and the knowledge and knowledge gained is very diverse which is not fully obtained in lectures in the Kitchen Department"

Cultural challenges apart from communication faced by the students, such that food. These challenges typically come from Moslem students that were reluctant to handle non-halal food or to consume halal food outside the industry premises. Thus, the ability to adapt in different cultural environment may build students' cultural intellectual that benefit them in their future career.

Language and Communication

It is found that language and communication mastery is an advantage but also is an issue faced by trainees when they were doing the internship. To overcome the situation, trainees had to practice the foreign language by continuously using the language with other staffs or local people to improve their language and communication skills. In addition, it is recommended that students need to prepare their language ability prior to their internship program

"The obstacle I face is that there are still difficulties communicating especially in Chinese so there is sometimes miscommunication between trainees and other staffs"

Task Management

Working in the hotel industry requires discipline and confidence in performing tasks. It is found that trainees may be assigned to new tasks that were not taught in the college, these requires adaptation and confidence in performing such tasks. During internship, trainees sometimes were in contact with guests and received complaints which they did not find in the college. Students tackled the problem by maintaining a positive relation and learning from other staff members and supervisors.

“Me and other students get good and bad experiences firsthand and can handle them with good responsibility. Getting to know colleagues from other campuses and chefs and employees from other departments certainly adds experience and relationships that are very helpful later when going to work”

In addition, trainees were also required to do multi-tasking or flexible in doing their tasks. This is because hotel has limited quota in certain departments. During their 6 months training, they could be rotated in two departments (i.e. fb service and kitchen). Lack of staffs were also a problem faced in the industry, typically when the hotel was busy or had high occupancy. This also relates to the importance of the students to manage their time so that they could complete their task according to the hotel standard.

“The occupancy can reach until 100%. It makes the operational of the hotel sometimes a bit slow-service especially about it takes a very long time for guest to wait for their rooms to be ready on time. Hotel can maintain this problem by hiring more staff or daily workers when the hotel is almost full occupancy to avoid guest waiting for such a long time”

As to Vo et al (2022) that internship allows the opportunity to have real experiences that would enhance their efficacy and problem solving in the workplace environment. Thus, it is expected it builds the students self-confidence upon their completion of their internship.

CONCLUSIONS

Internship program is crucial in producing qualified graduates to operate in the industry. In terms of internship placement, education institution needs to understand the needs and expectations of the industry and the students. Collaborations are needed to link and match the supply of human resources and job market. It is important not only to provide the students workplace experience opportunities, but also how to provide the opportunities that are inline with background of education of the students, prepare the students with the appropriate knowledge and skills, and supervision from time to time of the internship process from the beginning to the end to ensure the needs and expectations of the parties involved are met.

Overseas internships can be more challenging for the students compared to the local internship programs. Three major themes identified from the students related to the difficulties faced by the students include cultural difference, language and communication, and task management. Adaptation and flexibility of the students to new environment is key to the students' success completing the internship. The difficulties faced by the students are opportunities for the students to promote their personal and professional development. This

research adds insights on the practice of overseas internship program in Indonesia's vocational higher education institution context.

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