

Learnt And Perceived Professional Role: A Focus Group Discussion of Tourism Students' Internship In A Hotel In Indonesia

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Abstract

The internship program provides students with a good experience developing their potential to prepare themselves to work in the future. This paper focuses on looking at students' experiences in carrying out internships in a hotel in rural areas far from the center of the crowd. This qualitative study aims to examine the experiences of undergraduate tourism students conducting an internship program which approximately three months to see the reality of world work at a hotel. The study was designed with a descriptive qualitative method to study the participants' experiences. This study conducted the data through focus group discussions and a semi-structured interview. The data obtained were analyzed through transcribing, coding, managing, and interpreting. This study involved four undergraduate tourism students aged twenty-one to twenty-three years old. This study revealed the benefits and the challenges they got through the internship program at the hotel. The benefits include learning disciplines, self-development, and gaining new skills. The challenges include adaptation to the skills required in work, such as responsibility, teamwork, and communication, limited days off, and limited public transportation around the internship site. This study concluded that students learned various skills and knowledge at the internship site through guidance from the supervisor and team. As a result, they achieve self-development and skills useful for their career in the future.

Keywords: Internship; Higher Education; Qualitative

Abstrak

Program magang memberikan pengalaman yang baik bagi mahasiswa dalam mengembangkan potensi diri untuk mempersiapkan diri untuk bekerja dimasa yang akan datang. Penelitian ini berfokus untuk melihat pengalaman mahasiswa dalam melaksanakan magang di sebuah hotel di daerah pedesaan yang jauh dari pusat keramaian. Penelitian kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengalaman mahasiswa sarjana pariwisata melakukan program magang yang kurang lebih tiga bulan untuk melihat realitas dunia kerja di sebuah hotel. Penelitian ini dirancang dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk mempelajari pengalaman partisipan. Data penelitian ini dilakukan melalui diskusi kelompok terfokus dan wawancara semi terstruktur. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis melalui transkrip, pengkodean, pengelolaan, dan interpretasi. Penelitian ini melibatkan empat mahasiswa sarjana pariwisata berusia dua puluh satu hingga dua puluh tiga tahun. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan manfaat dan tantangan yang mereka dapatkan melalui program magang di hotel. Manfaatnya antara lain belajar disiplin, pengembangan diri, dan memperoleh keterampilan baru. Tantangannya meliputi adaptasi terhadap keterampilan yang dibutuhkan dalam pekerjaan, seperti tanggung jawab, kerja tim, dan komunikasi, hari libur yang terbatas, dan transportasi

umum yang terbatas di sekitar lokasi magang. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa mahasiswa mempelajari berbagai keterampilan dan pengetahuan di tempat magang melalui bimbingan dari pembimbing dan tim. Hasilnya, mereka mencapai pengembangan diri dan keterampilan yang berguna untuk karir mereka di masa depan.

Kata Kunci: Magang; Pendidikan Tinggi; Kualitatif

Introduction

Currently, the fierce competition for jobs in the marketplace is increased. The university level internship program is needed to prepare students with better skills and understanding before applying for the job. Its program can hone the critical component of the students in preparing themselves to face the situation of the world of work in the future (Stratta, 2004). Therefore, the university arranges this program as part of the graduation requirements for bachelor degree. This program is an opportunity for students to apply all the knowledge learned in the classroom and learn details about the ins and outs of professional work standards in an internship site. Indeed, the interns need time to deal with the adjustment to a new internship environment. They are challenged to have adaptability in the new environment of internship site (Beck & Halim, 2008), such as adjustment to the character of teamwork; workloads are challenging to complete effectively and efficiently because supervisors are too busy to be creative with interns (Bukaliya, 2012); working under pressure; computer skills; regulations that apply in the internship place and working hours in carrying out work in internships is also an initial challenge that must be adjusted because there is no previous experience of students working in a professional environment (Vo, Le, & Lam, 2021).

On the other hand, the implementation of the internship program positively contributes to interns even though this program is carried out within a couple of months. The students can increase relationships at a professional level and get more opportunities to learn expertise in a field. In this context, the interns directly socialize with colleagues in the work circle because mingling among classmates during college is very different from working with colleagues, which needs professionalism. These interaction activities can simultaneously improve the intern's ability in mind mapping, public speaking, and controlling emotions when working. In conclusion, the internship program can improve the quality of students who are better prepared for the world of work (Daugherty, 2011) with various skills (Cho, 2006), competencies such as leadership and work team (Chen, Shen, & Gosling, Does employability increase with internship satisfaction? Enhanced employability and internship satisfaction in a hospital program, 2018).

The interns can gain practical experiences at the internship site. The intern can learn the expertise directly and be guided by a supervisor as an expert at the internship site. If they learn through practice seriously, they can be recruited to work at that internship site after completing their internship program. In addition, the interns learn a lot from case-hardened mentors to get other great options, such as getting business partners, inspiration and being a problem solver (Bukaliya, 2012). The experience during the internship can impact on tourism students to promotes job satisfaction in the industry (Fong, Lee, Luk, & Law, 2014). It might open their minds to see the realities and expectations in the hospitality world, such as communication skills that include body language and expand their multicultural perspectives (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). Through this program, interns can know the dynamics of the natural world of work (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008) which can be used as an idea choosing a job in the future. Although, the

success of the internship program can be evaluated based on three components that relate to each other, namely academic institutions, students, and organizations (Cho, 2006). Knouse et al., as cited in (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008), fathom the benefits of the internship program as “enhanced employability” that offers more motivation in finding a job faster; since have learnt new skills (Bodicoat & O’Connor, 2016). The internship also is associated with career-oriented work, career planning and confidence (Cheng, Im, Doe, & Douglas, 2021). Besides, the certificate is proof that internship experience is one of the positive values for recruiters. It also shows they can be more ready to work in their proficiency (Bodicoat & O’Connor, 2016). In conclusion, it helps students idea to have a smooth transition from the on-campus environment to the work environment that is useful for future life (Muhamad, Yahya, Shahimi, & Mahzan, 2009).

Various scholars have researched student internships, including their experiences and evaluations of activities during the internship program. However, this paper describes students' experiences when carrying out internship programs in rural areas. The internship location is far from the center of the crowd because the hotel is located in a mountainous region that can be reached by private vehicle. However, its area is surrounded by settlements of residents, plantations, and rice fields. So the participants do not have the opportunity and experience other than activities in the hotel. Moreover, they do not have private vehicles such as bicycles and motorbikes, so they always borrow them from residents if they go to the local market for daily shopping needs, about 3 km away.

The university students must undertake an internship program in their third year and have passed a minimum of 120 credits required by the university. Usually, it is carried out for approximately four months in an affiliated institution. The univerisy regulates the location of the internship and the team of interns. Before leaving for the internship, students are briefed by the chairperson of the study program, which contains the rights and obligations of students while carrying out an internship at the affiliated institution. In addition, they must also complete the documents for registration, such as identification and registration form. After the student completes the administrative procedure, the field assistant lecturer arranges a meeting schedule with the manager of the internship place for the handover of students who take part in the program. Conversely, if students have finished carrying out the internship program activities, the field assistant lecturer visits to hand over students from the internship place. In this context, the interns are assigned to write an internship report that describes the activities during the Internship and then present it to the university officially. Besides, students are also expected to comply with the company and the university's work schedule and other conditions. Finally, the university expects the internship program to have three core objectives that students achieve during this program: applying knowledge, improving problem-solving abilities, and developing soft skills.

Due to the background aforementioned, the purpose of this study was to examine the students' activities during the internship program. The results of this study are expected to provide a new picture of the college experience and when implementing an internship program in rural areas. The researchers involved these four participants because they were placed in the same internship location with different division task. Then each experience can provide rich information about the implementation of the internship program activities. The researchers raise research questions: What do the students learn through the Internship Program? And What are the students' challenges during the internship program?

Method

The participants of this study are selected four undergraduate students who major in tourism. They are four-year students who enrolled in the Internship program in a hotel started November to January in a northern part of Indonesia. The age of the participants ranged from 21-23 years old. They were placed in the same internship site, YP hotel, but assigned to the front office, kitchen, food and beverage, and housekeeping divisions. Indeed, they have never had experience working or serving in this kind of place before. It is their first experience working in a professional area.

This study explored the tourism primary students' experiences while doing internship programs in a hotel with a descriptive qualitative P3gn. This study employs the qualitative method to give the participants freedom to tell their experiences in their way (Stratta, 2004). Focus group discussions were conducted among the participants; ten meetings of FGDs were started from early November 2021 till January 2022. The researchers and the four participants gathered in a quiet and safe place to carry out the FGDs. The meeting schedule was adjusted with their availability. The semi-structured interview approach was P3gned to let the participants share their experiences during the internship comfortably. The interview procedure is carried out with a guide to question items posed by the researchers that address the students' expectations for doing an internship, the challenges, and anxieties in relationship with supervisor and team. It aims to guide the interview process smoothly and purposefully. It also directs the participants to tell their experiences more accessible. This descriptive qualitative assumes that meaning and knowledge are constructed in a social context. The data has been collected as transcribed, coded, and analyzed through managing, analyzing, and interpreting data.



Figure 1. The process of collecting and analysis data

Results And Discussion

This study was conducted to explore the students' experiences carried out internship program. The interns were placed in different divisions such as the front office, kitchen, food and beverage, and housekeeping. It reveals two themes of students' experiences, both benefits and challenges who experienced at the hotel simultaneously.

1. Benefits

The interns gain various skills and improve personal quality through the internship program (Muthaura, Khamis, Ahmed, & Hussain, 2015) for a couple of months. Table 1 depicts the students' benefits during the internship program in three general categories such as discipline, self-development, and skill, and six codes within these broad categories for the research questions.

Table 1. The Students' Benefits During Internship Program

General Categories	Codes	F
Discipline	Time management	4
	Self-discipline	4
Self-development	Neatness	4
	Cleanliness	4
Skill	Hospitality	4

At first, they were warmly welcomed by the institution team, such as the general manager and supervisor. The meeting gave a very motivational impression to carry out an internship at that place; notably, they shared knowledge about the hospitality industry and expressed a statement that considered the interns the same as the employees there without any differences. Further, the manager assigns the interns' duties into different divisions such as the front office, kitchen, food and beverage and housekeeping. Finally, they begin to communicate and get job guidance from each supervisor. The intern P2 testified:

On the first day, we were advised by the Manager. On the same day, we were immediately placed in different divisions

The interns are trained to be disciplined in carrying out their duties starting from arriving at the office every weekday at 07.00 am for the front office division, and 08.00 am for the other divisions. At first, they thought they were assigned to the same division with the same working hours. So they can go and work together at the hotel. In fact, the interns immediately carried out their duties differently; they started to work about thirty minutes after that enjoy the breakfast provided by the office everyday. Therefore, the interns have to wake up at 06.00 am to shower, dress up, and be ready to leave. As interns declared:

I wake up early to take a shower and prepare to go to the Internship. I tried to arrive at the location at 07.00 am. I work efficiently and care about time. If I work slowly, it will affect the team. So I have to be able to discipline myself in time.

P3 and P4 added:

I have to work carefully in the kitchen because our main job is to prepare all the food, such as breakfast, lunch and dinner, for guests and employees. So if you are late, it will be a big problem for the reputation of the hotel.

I always come on time to provide service at the front office because in the morning some guests are already there who will check out or extend the night of their stay. So I try to keep my working hours always on time for customer service.

Intern students have started to be trained in time discipline in carrying out their respective divisional tasks during the internship program. It aims to embed a disciplined character within the internals through direct practices in the field. It was a good start for the interns to get ready for work in the future. The interns declared:

At 08.00 am, we gathered in the laundry room to dry laundries such as bath mat, towel, pillowcase, bedsheet, and linen. Then, we have approximately thirty minutes

for breakfast and lunchtime from 12.15 to 13.00. While at 17.00, we reorganized the tools we used in the warehouse and got ready to go home. P1

While P2 also said

The interns and employees have to arrive thirty minutes earlier to prepare the things needed. In the second week, I had the opportunity to work the night shift starting at 15.00". P3 also said, "The first week, I had a schedule every day. Still, since the second week, I was given one day off for a week.

Meanwhile, P4 added,

I have to come in at 07.00 am every day because I have to prepare breakfast for the employees and guests.

Thus, the predefined schedule settings encourage the intern to build their self-discipline to do duties. And they are also getting used to self-regulation to be disciplined in time management, which will impact their future working attitude. Since, discipline is essential to balance the educational curriculum, especially in practical activities at the higher education level (O'Leary, 2016).

In terms of marketing, cleanliness is one of the characteristics that guests consider when booking a hotel (Jeong & Jeon, 2008). The supervisor always reminds interns to pay attention to cleanliness when housekeeping at the hotel. The interns are also given the freedom to develop themselves regarding neatness and cleanness in carrying out duties at the internship site. It is an excellent opportunity to learn independently and practice creativity at work. However, supervisors still provide direction to carry out their duties properly. They work and provide services to customers in hotels; each division offers new bits of knowledge about tidiness, such as arranging guest rooms, dining tables, kitchen arrangements, and providing guest services at the front office. The interns declared:

- P1 I am in the housekeeping division charged to prepare, dusting, sweeping and mopping floors position which is required to love cleanliness more as hotel standards. Especially in the dusting section to clean rooms including beds, glass, TV, chair tables, curtains. If the supervisor finds a hair on the bed, he will be furious. I am required to arrange the guest kit neatly and install the bed neatly according to hotel standards. My supervisor also always reminds me to pay attention to the neatness of putting things in the guest room and storage. So simultaneously, I became a more detailed person in terms of cleanliness,
- P2 I have to pay attention to the food and drinks that before served as hygienic as we can because this is related to the reputation of the hotel. So I was trained to be more passionate about my work in terms of cleanliness. It shaped my personality who loves cleanliness more. Oneday, a friend from one division and I set up a table and beautiful cutlery for a birthday celebration that a guest had ordered. I learned a lot about neatness while preparing this table setting.
- P3 Before I do work every day, the first we make sure the ingredients and kitchen cooking utensils are clean and neatly well arranged. Even before we go home, we have to clean the whole cafe site, whether sweeping, wiping the tables, mopping the floor, washing dirty dishes. I was trained to pay attention to neatness in distributing food boxes to employees and buffets for guests.

- P4 I am expected to pay attention to the cleanliness of the front office so that guests are comfortable when checking out and checking in at the customer service desk. I try to put all stationery and small items in the customer service in the right place so that it looks beautiful and easy to find when guests and I will use it.

This aspect can improve the hotel's excellent quality of service that attract customer interest in coming back (Kariru, Fellow, & Aloo, Customers' perceptions and expectations of service quality in hotels in western tourism circuit, Kenya, 2014); (Chu & Choi, 2000). Therefore, it aims to encourage interns to work carefully to achieve hotel service target standards. In addition, it trains the interns' spirit of responsibility at work. This self-development is very useful in preparing oneself to enter the world of work in the future.

The interns provide appropriate services to practice hospitality at the internship site (Felicien, Rasa, Sumanga, & Buted, 2014). They are trained to interact with guests and people by expressing hospitality in service. They introduced implementing hospitality by giving greetings such as: welcome, see you, enjoy, thank you. At first, they had difficulty implementing hospitality in guest service. It is due to unusual and forgetfulness, but due to the guidance and support from supervisors. They even remind each other among interns; eventually, they get used to it and start to feel comfortable implementing hospitality since it is the main point in serving guests, especially in the hotel area. The interns declared:

I trained to greet guests and employees more often when carrying out the internship program. I get into the habit of saying "thank you" after the guest makes an order and "enjoy the food" after serving food at the guest table, P1.

Indeed, the interns must appreciate the simple thing about guest interaction to make guests feel comfortable and appreciated. For example, the intern in charge of P3's front office testified,

I sometimes forgot to say "Welcome, good luck, and see you soon" when providing services to guests who will check-in and checkout. However, after the second week, I got used to it and automatically greeted the guests.

Even the intern who worked in the housekeeping division, P1, states that:

We are expected to communicate with courteous words and body language. If we pass by guests recommended to give greetings and smiles to give a good impression to guests.

On the other hand, students feel satisfied because they can learn new skills during the internship (Hussien & Lopa, 2018). The interns can learn to be responsible in working through computer-based management systems such as setting up a room booking system, employee schedule arrangement, greeting the guests, and responding to guests via telephone. The intern is taught repeatedly to be able to understand its task. Improving the internship ability in doing hotel work can facilitate the mobility of hotel performance which has a positive impact on hotel services (Xue, Lin, Chen, Lee, & Hsu, 2021). Those experiences taught interns to work by applying technology; moreover, this era of technology might help the work system get faster. These simple things build interns' personalities to understand and love themselves more and care about their performance in public moreover, for those on duty at the front office. It is supposed to give a positive impression to guests to improve the quality of hotel service. The interns who work in other divisions such as kitchen, food and beverage, and housekeeping are also trained to

practice hospitality to customers and fellow work teams in the internship environment. Simultaneously, the interns expand their insight about cross-cultural differences through interaction with guests.

2. The Challenges

The interns gain new knowledge and skills through the challenges faced during the internship program at the hotel. Table 2 depicts the interns' challenges that describes in three general categories such as skills, day off and Access.

Table 2. The Studens' Challenges During Internship Program

General Categories	Codes	F
Skill	Responsibility	3
	Team work	4
	Communication	2
Day off	Quality time	4
Access	Transportation	4

The internship program allows students to develop communicative skills useful for future employment (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). At the beginning, the interns faced communication difficulties with supervisors because they understood the duties quickly and felt pressure to understand the duties load and tutorial. It caused of the supervisor talks loudly sometimes, as his habit. The supervisor pursued working targets and served customers with high quality. It encouraged those interns to do their best to do those duties, although sometimes they asked the employees once in a while about the procedures. It was the first month; they did not fully understand yet. The next day, they wrote some notes about their duties to work wisely and adequately as the supervisor taught. They find a way to figure out their obstacles in the internship division. Because basically, the communication challenges are found in the workplace social environment (Sheri, Vine, Gurnham , Paynter, & Leiter, 2019), including the hotel. Communication can be started in the context of interpersonal communication, such as getting to know each other (Cheng, Im, Doe, & Douglas, 2021). It might relieve the atmosphere to start work communication. This working situation gradually stimulates their personality to be more responsible for their authorized tasks. The interns declared:

Indeed, I admit, there are some shortcomings in my work like names of objects, tools and functions. I don't know, so I made a separate note. To facilitate my work without spending time asking my supervisor or other friends. In addition, we also immediately prepared all the equipment and supplies to clean the room for the next day. In the third week, I have also been trusted to input data for the rooms we will have cleaned, P1.

Besides, P3 also declared,

I was in charge of the front office to give service for the guest, thoroughly and regularly served to feel comfortable when in customer service.

The same thing too, P2 said,

I have to work more focused on inputting orders from customers because if I make a mistake, it disrupts the next order process. Therefore, it affects the convenience of the customer. In addition, Fitri also said, "I must be able to be more active and initiative in doing work without having to be ordered by a supervisor such as sweeping, mopping floors and tidying kitchen utensils.

Communication is the main challenge in carrying out activities at the internship place; it happens because they meet new partners, including employees, customers and the community involved (Vo, Le, & Lam, 2021). They experienced communication challenges between internal and supervisor while adapting the implementation of duties at the internship site. The supervisors always remind them to communicate politely, be more open with supervisors if they have difficulty completing responsibilities during the program, and dress up neatly when carrying out their duties. However, this communication process also shapes their character to work as a team. It becomes the key to interns' success in making their internship at this hotel a success. It is a positive value they get while carrying out the internship program in the field (Lack & Cartmill, 2005). On the other hand, the interns get extra money from the supervisor if the hotel sales increases. It is also a good way of promotion for workers in increasing employee attitudes and behaviour at work, improving work performance, increasing business commitment (Xue, Lin, Chen, Lee, & Hsu, 2021). The interns declared:

When I finish my part and help other friends to do the same. Although in the beginning, I'm also still confused whether I'm silent waiting for friends who haven't finished or I'm helping out. In the end, I helped because I thought there was nothing wrong with being helped instead of staying silent. Which someday be trapped by a situation where I felt I wasn't working and calmed down. Unfortunately, I was always said to be slow in front of other friends, which fault was only mine. I learned to mature myself in responding to situations when working in a team, P1.

Meanwhile, P4 said,

The supervisors foster us to have better understand each other's working areas and remind each other without having to wait for each other. If we work well and the customer advance, the supervisor often gives extra money for us as a reward for cooperation in serving customers.

In contrast, P2, who was assigned to the cafe division, stated that

Our team are required to sell bouquets and food as attractively as possible with the best possible service and prioritize guests by giving more attention to attracting guests feel comfortable and appreciated. My supervisor encourages me to work together for the sake of improving performance and hotel standards. Even he gave us extra money if our sales exceeded the target.

Besides, P3 also said:

I started to socialize more often with employees in the front office and even other divisions to improve my insight about the job. And also for communication "supervisor always teaches us both employees and other practice interns especially me in a high tone voice. I have to get used to the way the supervisor talks.

P4 who worked in the kitchen division added:

I often get complaints from employees who don't have enough fish, too few vegetables, even though they cook a lot of food sometimes they don't finish their food and often the food served doesn't run out, it's even wasted.

Furthermore, Implementing the internship program is time-consuming for planning and implementing the program (Hite & Bellizzi, 2015). So the interns have to come to terms with the situation to reduce quality time while implementing this program. They should reduce quality time such as worship, meeting family and shopping downtown. At certain moments, they feel sad. They have to miss worship because they have to complete their responsibilities at the internship. Besides, they only meet with their families during national holidays such as Christmas and New Year's day. It causes the supervisors to

schedule their multiple tasks and responsibilities in internships. Although they have tried to communicate these challenges, they are experiencing their supervisors. The supervisor states that they are better off following the rules that have been set for the excellent running of this internship program. They try to recharge the spirit to be able to complete this internship program by mingling with the local community. They usually interact with the local community in the afternoon after returning from their internship. These interactions inspire them personally to further their potential in such a quiet place. In addition, they frequently collaborate with the community to carry out environmental hygiene, which makes them more connected and cares for each other. The interns declared:

I still had the opportunity to do Sunday service in the first week. However, I did not have the day off on Sundays from the second week. So I could not worship even though I had tried to discuss this with my supervisor. However, I didn't get a solution. He said there were very high bookings for guest rooms on weekends, so the internal staff needed to do housekeeping, P1”.

P2 also said that

I have to attend online worship using a headset while working.

P4 also said that

I did not have time to meet with my family except on national holidays while carrying out this internship program. Therefore, in the beginning, I hope that the supervisor will give me time off or permission when my family needs my presence or visit my parents at home. However, I still follow the regulations while carrying out this program.

Furthermore, P3 said that

I did not have the opportunity to go shopping downtown because of my residence's remote location limited transportation, and I did not get a day off”. I spent my spare time with the local community rather than going to downtown because of the limited transportation". If we go downtown, we borrow a motorcycle from local people or staff from the hotel; it is because of the limited bus reach our place.

The present research revealed some noteworthy findings. The result of the data obtained from the interviewed sections establishes that the majority of the interns find some advantages to building their skills and personal development that enhance employability of the interns as an asset for their future carrier. They are trained to work attitude includes good attitude, teamwork and work ethics, career planning and management provides a willingness to learn, understanding of the industry and applied professional knowledge has communication, problem-solving and Information Technology (IT) skill.

Conclusion

This research offered some exciting results that can be of value to interns in planning and conducting internship programs in the hotel site, integrating their theoretical knowledge with practical experience gained in the internship program during a couple of months. Firstly, this study reveals the importance of an internship program for students' self-development, encouraging discipline, improving skills, and a responsible attitude at work. Its impact on the intern as personally might build the self-confidence and work attitude at work in the future since it is the central aspect that must have at work. Secondly, the study shows the students' effort to adjust to facing some challenges while conducting the internship program. For instance, they identify communication challenges and adapt

to a new environment during internship programs. At the same time, they realize that the transparency in communication at the internship site must be acknowledged to get work outcomes maximally. In conclusion, the internship program improves the quality of the graduates who are better prepared to work in the future.

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