

Internship Away From Home: A Case Study in a State University

Luzviminda P. Relon

University of Northern Philippines
luzpadios@yahoo.com

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Abstract –Educating citizens that will comprise the labor force is a requisite in establishing a favourable environment towards the attainment of economic and sustainable development across countries. Obviously, citizens must be capacitated to perform indispensable roles in the transformation of communities. Undeniably, higher education institutions (HEIs) in the 21st century have been faced with evolving and more demanding environment, including the challenges of internationalization. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of the student-interns of the College of Teacher Education, University of Northern Philippines (CTE-UNP) who were carefully chosen to pursue their internship in Vietnam and Thailand. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological- case study approach was utilized. Interview was conducted with the four-pioneer student interns of CTE. The data were also substantiated through a narrative analysis derived from the submitted portfolio. It was disclosed that interns who were exposed in a non-English speaking institution tend to experience more socio-cultural challenges as compared to interns in English-speaking institution. Internship abroad would likely contribute to the holistic development of a globally competent future educator amidst the presence of socio-cultural difficulties. Thus, prior to international academic exposure, the students should be provided with opportunities to be familiar with the culture and language of the host foreign country. It is also suggested that a thorough study may be conducted whether the exposure abroad of the interns could really contribute, both for personal and academic development.

Keywords –ASEAN, Education, Excellence, Internationalization, Internship

INTRODUCTION

Preparing citizens that will comprise the labor force is indeed a challenge because of the stiff competition in the international labor market. The quick-phased socio-cultural developments and inescapable increasing educational needs have ushered educational institutions towards exploring new pedagogical approaches to ensure producing quality graduates. Graduates with well-rounded personality, technologically-prepared, and can work in fast phase workplaces are definitely indispensable. Hence, the different tertiary schools need to keep abreast with these challenges and thus, quickly respond to the needs of the dynamic labor market. These changes have required them to become adaptive and flexible. Voukelatou [1] mentioned that the teacher-centered assimilative learning of traditional teaching is gradually being abandoned and it is being replaced by the learner-centered active/participative learning experience. Hence, internship plays a major role in bridging —theory and practice. Essentially, educational practicum is a supervised on-site work experiences that allow students to practice and

demonstrate their developing skills and competencies in their chosen career as emphasized by Matriano [2].

The HEIs are duty-bound to perform their functions to guarantee that their graduates would be able to compete in an increasingly global market place. Several educational reforms have been instituted. However, these reforms will only be enough if HEIs are keeping pace to and embrace changes to set higher educational standards, not just contented with what is minimum requirement. Considering the multifarious needs of the labor market, there is really an immediate need of responding to improve the quality of education they offer as stressed by Conchada and Tiongco [3].

Indeed, there is a multitude of reasons for HEIs to cooperate internationally, including pedagogical, economic, socio-cultural, academic, and political reasons. Several ideas on internationalization were shared by Van den Hoven &Walenkamp [4] such as: internationalization is believed to contribute to the quality of education, as well as the international and social profile of a university; provides institutions with a competitive advantage when attracting foreign

students, and counterbalances demographic developments; addresses the needs and wishes of students and staff. In other words, there are several incentives for internationalization, and it is often not particularly clear exactly which incentive brings about which activity and with which objective. The main rationale for internationalization in universities of applied sciences is in producing graduates who are world citizens: who possess the set of international competencies needed to function well in international and multicultural work and social environments. Through internationalization, universities hope to deliver graduates who are open and respectful towards other cultures and ideas, who have knowledge of their profession on an international level, who are familiar with their own culture and those of others, who know other countries, are multilingual and have the ability to listen, observe, analyze, relate and reflect. They have learned how to behave appropriately and are able to communicate effectively in other cultural settings. These were all common observations derived from the study of Van den Hoven and Walenkamp [4].

It is very important that while future teachers are still pursuing their degrees, they are exposed with different activities, be provided with opportunities in which they will be able to develop and hone their teaching skills. These can be started inside the classroom, with emphasis on the methods and strategies of the teachers. One strategy which may allow the students to develop their utmost potential is through experiential learning. Internship or practice teaching is an example of experiential learning. Advocates of experiential learning like Kolb[5] emphasized that it is a holistic approach that incorporates experiences, logic, emotions, senses, active experimentation, critical reflection, connections and intelligence, which leads to metacognition. In their formulation of transformational teaching, Slavich and Zimbardo [6] described the multidimensional importance of experience in learning: Experiential lessons provide students with an opportunity to experience concepts first-hand and, as such, give students a richer, more meaningful understanding of course concepts and of how they operate in the real world. Moreover, David [7] elucidated that experiential learning "provides opportunities for the students to take what they learn in the classroom and apply it in a real world setting where they grapple with real-world problems, discover and test solutions, and interact with others.

The exposure of students in a new environment may provide them with profound experiences. Stronkhorst [8] for instance, concluded that the greatest value of a stay abroad, according to students, was the element of fun and adventure, followed by personal development. Academic and professional development scored significantly lower. As cited by Brooks and Waters [9] the educative effects of a stay abroad mostly lie in personal, social and cultural development and to a significantly lesser extent in academic and professional development. They further mentioned that the added educative value can mainly be found in extracurricular, social and cultural areas. However, according to the same study, this does not imply that the international experience, the increased autonomy and foreign language skills cannot have a positive effect on the employability of students.

Sharma and Phillion [10] observed that teacher educators beginning to respond to the 21st century shift of internationalizing teacher education have been developing new perspectives, frameworks and strategies aimed at preparing teachers who are globally relevant and competitive, on one hand, and committed to social justice by addressing the academic needs of diverse student population, on the other hand.

A recent Erasmus Impact Study by Nilsson and Ripmeester [11] again gives the "effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalization of higher education institutions". They stressed that the advantage of studying abroad provides a better chance on labor market chances, thus seems to be an edge of mobile students as compared to those who pursued within the country.

With the move of internationalizing higher education, there are many things that sending higher education institutions need to address. As mentioned by Bhandar and Blumenthal [12] the mobility of international students is also influenced by the ability of the institution to determine eligibility and that international Office personnel will be required to provide highly specialized services due to the diversity of students who would like to be exposed in foreign schools.

The assessment of learning outcome is also another utmost concern. Deardorff and Jones [13] stressed that outcomes assessment is indispensable in higher education, and within international education, international competence has become an emerging focus globally. This dilemma or scenario does not exclude the HEIs in the Philippines.

CTE-UNP has always considered practice teaching as a capstone experience of the teacher preparation program. Notably, the College was able to establish a reputation at par with other Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the region. It was designated as Center of Development in Teacher Education in 2015 and has attained an accreditation Level III, Phase 2 by the Accrediting Agency of the Colleges and Universities of the Philippines, Inc. (AACCUP). These two achievements served as solid evidences as to the quality of education that the college offers. It also inspired the college in continuously improving its system. It opened doors for more opportunities of developing globally competitive graduates. It collaborated with reputable educational institutions for moulding and equipping future teachers who are prepared with the challenges of Education 4.0 and Industrial Revolution 4.0.

The realization of such collaboration commenced when four student-interns, two from the Bachelor of Secondary Education- English went to Vietnam in 2016 and another two from the Bachelor of Elementary Education, with specializations in Early Childhood Education and General Education, headed to Thailand in 2017. These students, considered pioneer student interns, were able to surpass with flying colors the challenges of internship abroad. Consequently, the result of this study may provide inputs for the College in improving its internship abroad program. The experiences shared by the interns would serve as basis in revisiting its internship policies instrumental in responding the needs and demands of the internationalization of education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences of the student-teachers of CTE-UNP who had their internship in educational institutions in Vietnam and Thailand.

The study is being guided by the following specific objectives: describe the pre-deployment preparations and expectations of the student-interns; determine the assistance provided by the home and host institutions prior and during the internship; describe the academic, intercultural and personal experiences of the student-interns; how internship abroad contributes to their personal development, intercultural, and academic competencies; and determine the difficulties and challenges met during the entire duration of their internship.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological-case study approach was utilized in this study. It explored the lived experiences of the four participant-respondents. The researcher described their experiences from the pre-deployment phase to the Pull-Out/Coming Home phase.

Participants

The researcher employed total enumeration in determining the number of respondents. The respondents were: two Bachelor of Elementary Education students deployed in Plookpanya School, Nakhon Rachatsima, Thailand, and another two Bachelor of Secondary Education, English majors deployed at Tan Trao University (TTU), Tuyen Quang City, Vietnam. These were the first ever set of student-interns from CTE-UNP who pursued their practice teaching in foreign countries.

Instrumentation

The main instrument utilized by the researcher was an interview guide to gather the profound lived experiences of the students during their internship in the two Asian countries. Specifically, the interview guide included questions about the pre-deployment preparations and internship expectations; assistance provided by CTE-UNP and the educational institutions in Vietnam and Thailand; their academic, social, and personal experiences, lessons learned as well as the challenges and difficulties met. To elicit substantial information, probing was also employed. The interview guide was subjected for validation by experts in the field of education and research at UNP and also underwent pre-testing.

Interview is one of the most important methods in qualitative research. It was highly chosen because the researcher considered it as the most appropriate tool giving due recognition to the purpose and objectives of this research. Cohen and Crabtree [14] pointed out that semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing in order to allow the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions. The data generated from the responses of the student-interns on their narrative and reflection papers submitted during their actual internship abroad were also scrutinized. This was cross-validated with

the observations of the researcher during the actual internship of the four students in the two countries.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the administration, particularly at CTE, prior the conduct of the study. The research proposal underwent an extensive review at the University Research Office of UNP. It was also submitted at the Center for Gender and Development (CGAD) to check if the research considered the Harmonized Gender and Development Guidelines (HGDG).

In gathering the data, the researcher set an appointment with the participants and agreed on the location of the semi-structured interview during their most convenient time. Prior the conduct of interview, the researcher also explained vividly the intention and purpose of the study. Hence, consent forms were filled up by the participants. It was also emphasized that they may decline answering a question should they feel uncomfortable with.

Other than the interview, narrative analysis of their submitted Portfolio was also done. Responses were content analysed and evaluated, where themes were generated, as presented in the Conceptual map of this study. To further substantiate the narrative analysis, the researcher did a triangulation, utilized unstructured observation, and scrutinized available official document at the CTE like The Practice Teaching Manual. The unstructured observation was done when the researcher personally witnessed the classes of the interns in both Vietnam and Thailand. The notes of the researcher were

In presenting the cases, the student-interns were identified through coding such as SI 1, SI 2, SI 3, and SI 4. The SI stand for Student Intern.

Ethical Considerations

The conduct of this study has employed various ethical considerations.

The respondents were provided with sufficient information regarding the intent and purpose of the study. Their participation was voluntary, accorded them with due respect and assured of their anonymity and their answers would be solely utilized to satisfy the objectives of this research. Permission from concerned authorities was sought and informed consent was also provided.

The research was purposely done to establish a clear picture of the internship program of CTE and to generate substantial information for the improvement

of the program. Likewise, the results may provide helpful inputs that would warrant the continuous offering of internship abroad to interested and qualified education students. The results will be disseminated to target beneficiaries of CTE-UNP.

Data Analysis

After carefully analysing the narratives of each participant, both during the interview and from the submitted internship portfolio, the conceptual map was derived. Their responses were further categorized into 3, first: their personal preparations and expectations from the program before heading to the host country; second: their challenges and difficulties met in the entire duration of their internship; and third: the impact of the mobility in lives personally, socially and academically.

The qualitative method permitted the researcher to gather and infer evidences, circumstances, experiences, sentiments, ideas, and opinions of the respondents and to comprehend the social influences which surrounded them. Probing during interviews allowed the researcher with the chance to disclose and elaborate extensively about the circumstances. The answers during the interview were transcribed and content analysed.

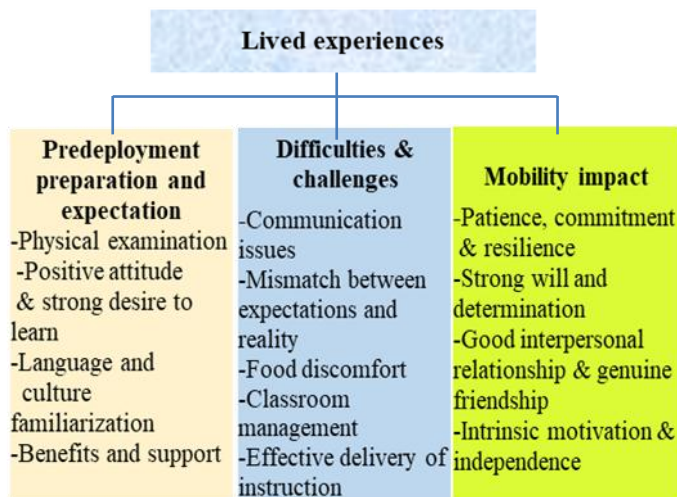


Fig 1. Conceptual map

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the narrative, reflection papers of the four student-interns, with content analysis and discussion.

A. Pre-Deployment Preparation and Expectations

Along the pre-deployment preparation as well as expectations in the actual world of teaching, the

following were shared by the student-interns: possession of positive attitude, strong desire to learn, underwent physical/medical examination, eagerness to learn the language and culture.

CTE is duty bound to ensure that all student interns are prepared physically, mentally and academically. The Practice Teaching Manual for Internship Abroad Program, the so-called Bible of the program, explicitly requires all students to undergo Medical Examination. This undertaking ensures that the interns are fitted physically to go abroad and to avoid unnecessary health concerns during the internship phase which may incapacitate them to enjoy the best experience. This supports the study of Van den Hoven and Walenkamp [4] that an international experience unaccompanied by preparation and supervision specifically aimed at intercultural development will achieve only limited effects.

A.1 Physical Examination

The student interns submitted themselves immediately for the physical examination because they strongly believed that they would be having tiresome and sleepless nights preparing lessons and activities in their host institutions. Thus, the need to ensure that they were indeed ready for the tasks ahead.

One of them mentioned that:

“We were required to undergo Medical Examination, this is one of the requirements of the Commission on Higher Education, as explained to us by our Coordinator during the orientation with our parents. We all had our Physical Examination, X-Ray, Urinalysis, ECG, and other required Laboratory tests.”

The unanimous response of the student-interns would imply that the College strictly implements the policy indicated in the Manual that the student-interns must have taken and passed the Medical Examination Requirements as certified by DOH accredited clinics and hospitals.

A.2 Positive Attitude and Strong Desire to Learn

It can be inferred from the narration of the interns their display of positive attitude and their intense desire to pursue their dream to become professional teachers. These served as their weapons in facing the sudden shift of events in their lives as future teachers. As cited by Garbati and Rothschild [15] students who

genuinely believe in the possibility of personal growth benefit the most from their experiences abroad.

Upon knowing that they qualified for the internship abroad program, the interns displayed mixed emotions.

One intern exclaimed:

“I exclaimed when I came to know the news. I never imagined to have my internship in another country! However, I was also quite unhappy because I would be missing my family for months. But told myself, I have to do this, for my family and school.”

Their responses disclosed the positive attitude and eagerness to learn. This is further validated by the following statements of the interns:

“My dream may not have been fully built but I am already sure how it may look, how it may beautifully constructed. I maybe short physically to everybody’s eyes but I got the big heart to do, to work, and to teach.”

One intern also added:

“An international internship is an excellent opportunity to gain professional working experience. Through this internship, I got a valuable experience in Field Study. More than that, it was a single chance to acquire new skills, while exploring a foreign culture and its tradition.”

A.3 Language and Culture Familiarization

The interns displayed that they were willing to equip themselves with profound experiences. Though this way, they would be enabled to handle adversarial situations effectively amidst pressure which may arise later from socio-cultural, emotional or personal difficulties. This affirms the observations of Van den Hoven and Walenkamp [4] that alumni equipped with those competencies are able to function better and more easily in a globalized world and a multicultural environment for they have learned how to behave appropriately and are able to communicate effectively in other cultural settings. Similarly, Kinginger [16] suggests that language learning, "whether it is defined in terms of general constructs such as proficiency or fluency, in terms of skills, or in terms of components of communicative competence, such as strategic or discourse abilities," can improve during one's study abroad.

One student intern narrated that:

“While waiting for our deployment outside the country, I came to realize that I would be exposed to new people with strange culture and language. I was quite worried, I might not be able to communicate well. But I have to help myself. So, I and my fellow intern spent our vacant time reading the culture of the Vietnamese including their food. We did consult Google for this including how to speak their language. We needed to learn even just conversational words like how to say hello, thank you, and goodbye.”

One also mentioned that:

“I read that Thais are fond of eating spicy food. I am not really into eating spicy food but I convinced myself that I would get use to eat. My fellow intern and I agreed that we would bring noodles and canned goods so that during our first few weeks, while adjusting with their cuisine, at least we have something familiar for us to eat.”

Based on responses of the interns, their positive attitude and desire to learn served as their motivation in hurdling internship abroad. Accepting wholeheartedly the academic and emotional challenges is very evident.

These findings also affirm the study of Van den Hoven and Walenkamp [4] that in some cases, the language did actually form a barrier, predominantly in situations where English was not the national language, but where students had expected it to be the language of communication at their internship. Consequently, these students experienced tremendous difficulties in completing their tasks and communicating with the target group. Therefore, familiarity of the language and culture lessens the burdens of being exposed in a new environment. Moro and Jacobone [17] pointed out that the importance of the development of language skills may potentially open doors to the development of new relationships, bridging gaps through conversing on a wide range of topics.

A.4. Benefits and Support by the Home and Host Institutions

Van den Hoven and Walenkamp [4] shared that an important condition for the development of international competencies is an adequate support

system provided by the home institution before, during and after a stay abroad. The interns generously narrated their experiences as to the assistance provided by CTE-UNP and the host institutions. There are also indispensable take-aways of international internship. Pinto and Pereira [18] mentioned that benefits for trainees include work-related outcomes (e.g. job skills), networking/employability advantages (e.g. widen awareness of career paths) and career success (e.g. lower unemployment levels, higher salaries and job satisfaction). Maertz et.al [19] cited that the benefits to HEIs are also substantial in terms of visibility and reputation, since the formal assessment required to progress in the educational rankings benefit from the connections with the business community and potential funders.

They shared that:

“The UNP administration was very supportive to us, mentally, emotionally and financially. The positive comments further boosted our self-confidence. We’re also very thankful for the financial assistance given by the Parent-Teachers Association of the College. It helped us a lot.”

“TTU provided us a home away from home. We were provided with free air conditioned studio-type room. Other than the comfortable room equipped with Wifi connection. We also received monthly allowance for the entire duration of our stay. We were very happy because we had the chance to earn and to save somehow. Our parents did not need to worry our monthly allowance.”

The interns in Thailand also validated the same experiences accorded to them. They added:

“We were very grateful to CTE-UNP for all the opportunity and assistance from the very beginning. We were given free airfare and accommodation. When we arrived in Thailand, we were very happy to see our fully furnished apartment prepared by Plookpanya School.”

The responses of the participants manifested that CTE ensured that the provisions of the Memoranda of Agreements (MOAs) were strictly followed. As stipulated in the MOAs, partner-institution like TTU, shall provide the roundtrip airfare, transport, accommodation and subsistence daily allowance of no less than 2,500,000 Dong per month (P8,000.00) and arranged and provided extended visas for them. On

the other hand, Plookpanya School provided free accommodation and free meals for the two-month duration of the internship while CTE-UNP shouldered their roundtrip airfare. This affirms the findings of Bhandar and Blumenthal [8] the mobility of international students is also influenced by the ability of the institution to determine eligibility and that international Office personnel will be required to provide highly specialized services due to the diversity of students who would like to be exposed in foreign schools.

B. Difficulties and Challenges Met During the Internship

Being exposed in a new environment with different cultural practices and language, is indeed a challenge. This could be an academic dilemma, handling students with diverse backgrounds, in a totally new environment. This findings jibe with Voukelatou [1] stressing the significant impact of experiential learning on acquiring knowledge and developing social skills and students' attitudes, while contributing to the promotion of cultural heritage and the values of tradition.

B.1 Communication Issues

The academic experiences of the four interns were varied because they were exposed with different types of learners in two different countries, a non-English speaking and a country with exposure to a British curriculum like Thailand. Within the last five years, TTU administration has opened its doors in partnering with Universities in the Philippines, that may be useful in exposing their students in using the English language. In the case of Thailand, especially in Nakhon Rachatsima province, many private schools have adopted British curriculum, thus, have included English as a subject or as a medium of instruction starting from the pre-school. Moro and Jacobone [17] affirmatively cited that living with difference and in contact with other languages and cultures also provides an excellent opportunity to foster the development of intercultural communicative competence, the complex of abilities needed in order to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different.

One intern in Vietnam shared that:

"I was pressured and at the same time challenged, handling different kinds of students; city, secondary, and doctors were kind of heavy

for me. I have to prepare different engaging games for the three. I have to think of ways on how to teach a lesson the easiest way for them. I have to speak slower, repeated things from time to time, and others. But, the fulfilling part, the positive response of my students motivated me to continue doing well."

B.2 Mismatched Between Expectations versus Reality

The other intern in Vietnam manifested several challenges, her expectations deviated with the realities in the actual classroom situations in the host school. She was expecting only to handle secondary students. However, the MOA did not specify the grade level of learners they would be handling. Consequently, the host University had prepared several classes for them in various levels. They believed that the interns would have more opportunities of gaining first hand experiences. Notably, before the exposure of the interns, somehow, they have already set of beliefs about the new experience based on what they have read, heard or observed. This situation was clearly implied in the study of Moro and Jacobone [17] stating that the efficacy beliefs are not, however, simply products, but also producers of experience, since the patterns of the self (existing prior to the performance) affect the way in which the actual situation will be managed and, furthermore, reconstructed in memory. Once formed, efficacy beliefs regulate aspirations, behavioural choices, the maintenance of commitment and affective reactions.

She lamented that:

"We were welcomed warmly in the university and got the chance to meet the teachers. We received our class schedules and teaching loads. So it's not grammar or literature. Here we were, starting to build their foundation, speaking slowly, trying to learn basic Vietnamese terms, using pictures, and inhaling patience like breath. We also taught in different levels- in primary, secondary, college and even professionals who have different levels of proficiency, the bigger part of the challenge."

On the other hand, the future elementary teacher interns in Thailand seemed to have easily adjusted in teaching because of the welcoming atmosphere with the presence of fellow Filipino teachers who were employed in the said school. Other than the language

barrier, it can be noted that they were ready to face the students.

The interns in Thailand narrated that:

“I did not expect that my pupils were good in speaking English. They were not allowed to speak in Thai in their English and Science classes. The first time I taught, some were responsive. They had bright questions and I answered the best I could. I did respect their curriculum wholeheartedly. I admired their approach in teaching.”

B.3. Classroom Management Issues

However, they also disclosed their problem on classroom management, similar with the challenges met by the practice teachers deployed in the public schools in the Philippines.

One admitted that:

“I had a problem with regards to classroom management. At times, it was very hard to discipline mischievous children but tried my best to overcome this kind of problem. This was really of my tough challenges as a future teacher. The displayed behavior may have rooted at home. When they're in school, I just thought, they found a free life at school, and behaved like an animal released from a chain.”

The interns unanimously answered that number one problem was the inability to speak the language of the host country. This limited then, their acquaintances during their early stay.

One also added that:

“I was really hard-up in understanding their language. When Thai teachers talked to me, I just listened to them and tried to understand them by acting or getting a thing to show what I understood.”

B.4. Food Discomfort

In the study of Van den Hoven and Walenkamp [4] disclosed the need to have a clear picture of the local living and working conditions prior to departure. Solid preparation generates insights and understanding and allows students to recognize their experiences while abroad.

Other than communication problem and classroom management issues, there was also food discontentment experience. The Vietnamese cuisine, a different one, as compared to what they used to eat in the Philippines. One intern shared that:

“It was really hard to adjust to a new environment where people spoke another language, foods cooked and served in utmost peculiarity. It was pretty hard one, from washing clothes to cooking foods. I barely ate, and most of the time, I slept with stomach insatiable which provoked thoughts to long for home and family. I thought, I have mastered the art of paying no attention to it but, there were times, it kept me awake all night.”

B.5 Effective Delivery of Instruction

CTE-UNP ensured that the interns were prepared prior their deployment. The first three years were meant to inculcate in them the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and strategies and methodologies to effectively deliver instruction. Hence, the combination of institutional learning and practical work experience is necessary to develop technical and problem-solving skills as validated by Galloway et al. [20]. They unanimously mentioned that they were able to apply what they have learned.

One of the interns shared that:

“When I caught someone who was playing around or doing something during discussion, I usually talked to that child after the session. Also, whenever they were not paying attention, I stopped talking until they became quiet. I gave rewards to those who were behaving well. These were only some of my techniques which I've learned from my classes and from my cooperating teacher.”

Their exposure in the actual world of teaching is a realization of what they often times heard from their teachers before. Teaching is not easy, yet it is indeed a rewarding experience. Anjum [21] further validated in his study that internship programs link classroom knowledge with the workplace realities and provide an experimental experience to the students and enable them to make their place in the dynamic job market of this modern era. Internships are useful for developing soft skills and interpersonal skills, such as professionalism, cultural sensitivity, time management and integrity, that are not generally part of the formal tertiary education curriculum as cited by Holyoak [22] and Shoenfelt et al. [23].

Quoting the intern in Thailand:

“It was a very tiring week, I've been a teacher in nursery for 4 times in a week, a pre-nursery teacher and a kindergarten teacher. I

used instructional materials like the paper train, in my Kindergarten class to present the vocabularies. However, I was really hard up in understanding their language. There were instances when Thai teachers talked to me, I just listened to them and tried to understand them by acting [or getting a thing to point out.]”

C. Mobility Impact along academic, intercultural and personal aspects; and how internship away from home contributed to their personal development, intercultural, and academic competencies

The primary reason of deploying student-interns is to apply all their learning within the four walls of classroom and most importantly to develop further their teaching skills in the real world of teaching. Anjum [21] stated that internship programs not only improve students’ personal skills but also polish their professional growth and experience. Tan and Alan [24] also emphasized that an experience abroad does not only contribute to the development of their foreign language skills, but the ‘culture shock’ also forces participants to look at their experiences and behavior, and their professional development, from different perspectives.

Being chosen to handle classes in a foreign school is totally a different story. While they would be applying the theories and principles of teaching, another challenge awaited them, academic and social challenges were realities they had to deal with. The interns graciously and sincerely narrated their lessons learned. Several positive qualities of future teachers were showcased during their internship. Findings reveal that it jibes with that of Van den Hoven and Walenkamp [4] that almost all students indicate to have grown on a personal level. They have become more assertive, more independent, more proactive/outgoing, and have gained more insight into their own behaviour and mindset.

C.1 Patience, Resilience, and Commitment

Attitudes, according to Deardorff [25] form the basis for all other aspects of intercultural competence. A fundamentally positive attitude towards intercultural situations is the first step: respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity, an open, curious, non-judgmental attitude towards people of different cultural backgrounds, and being open to insecurity and unfamiliar, uncertain situations.

On intern admitted that she was strengthened by her dream of becoming an effective teacher despite of her limitations. She displayed resilience and commitment to her chosen profession and at the same patience in dealing with tough situations.

She wittingly said that:

“Though, the coordinator kept on telling me that I should improve my methods like giving them more activities, I still have the difficulty because the problem was in handling and communicating with the kids. But I did try to reach out. I did what’s best for my students. I put in mind that teaching requires a lot of time, effort and adjustments. As a practice teacher, I needed to prepare myself, be more ready because teaching in the real world is far different from the training inside the classroom. And I could not also predict nor choose the learners I would handle.”

“Some challenges that I’ve encountered were making of lesson plans, socializing and coping up different attitudes of the students and the many task or requirements given by our principal and subject teachers. I almost gave up because of tiredness, weariness and hopelessness. It was really a test of character.”

“Providentially, I was able to surpass all those challenges due to my fortitude and with the guidance and assistance showered by my very supportive parents and kind cooperating teachers.”

One intern also happily shared her realization that:

“This time I’ve realized that teaching is not about the salary, it’s about commitment, the passion to teach. That’s the main tool in order to achieve the goal.”

A positive attitude and resiliency also become the weapons of the interns as they were confronted with the challenges of classroom teaching.

One admitted that:

“The second week had been great; we were taking our work slowly for we were adjusting still. We took over a class for days already with all crafts and instructional materials. The week maybe tiring still but I was happy to teach children, it’s just so overwhelming looking, talking, and listening to them. The staff has been very humble and friendly to us, whenever we needed help, they extended their best to make it through. They did not pressure us but they made us comfortable and let us be ourselves.”

C.2 Strong Will and Determination

Months of stay in foreign countries taught them the realities of life both inside and outside the four walls of the classrooms. Their strong will and determination to pursue their dream, resilience in dealing with various situations and their independence as well, helped them so much in living thousands of miles away from their families. These findings are similar with Garbati and Rothschild [15] stressing that study abroad experiences have directly shaped the decisions of the interns about education and careers, have influenced their understanding of language learning and teaching, increased cultural awareness, and led to the development of our identities.

An intern shared that:

“I thought coming and teaching in a foreign country would be something I regret, but I was wrong. Teaching was an opportunity. I learned to do things on my own, be independent. I met wonderful people whom I considered new found friends. My circle of friends was not only limited in the Philippines but in Vietnam, too.”

C.3 Good Interpersonal Relationship and Genuine Friendship

Izmail [26] noted that interns develop interpersonal skills, team-working skills, professionalism and customer management experience. Students also improve their communication, confidence and self-efficacy. The effects of establishing good interpersonal relationship and genuine friendship were also manifested as days went by.

The intern happily narrated her experiences:

“During break times, my students always volunteer to buy me foods. They would also approach me and asked permission to borrow my phone, chose a song to listen to. I wanted them to feel that other than being their teacher, I would also be a friend.”

The same experience was further validated by another intern. She said that:

“There were teachers whose hospitality eased the pains of surviving daily, and have served as mentors and great inspirations. We also became friends with some locals especially the vendors. We definitely had the difficulty understanding each other but we never felt the indifference because they gave us the impression that certainly lasted until we left.”

The host country indeed displayed a welcoming and friendly atmosphere for the interns in both

countries. The Filipinos are historically known to be friendly and resilient. The four interns have proven such traits in the foreign lands. They were able to get along well with people despite the language barrier especially those in Vietnam. They took the opportunity to establish friendship as shown in their genuine dealings with the people. All these experiences of the interns affirmed the study cited by Brooks and Waters [9] that the educative effects of a stay abroad mostly lie in personal, social and cultural development and to a significantly lesser extent in academic and professional development.

On the other hand, in accepting the challenge of internship abroad, the student interns have given more importance on their academic development. Fun/enjoyment was just a plus factor for them. The intern shared that:

“Despite the struggle that I went through, this journey has opened and heartened more my willpower to become a teacher. Yes, I have witnessed and experienced circumstances where I felt discouraged in pursuit of teaching and even got million reasons to give up and walk away. But I became strongly determined in pursuing my vocation. The thought of being able to make a change in the lives of young ones inspired me more.”

The development of genuine friendship and close relationship made the goodbyes more difficult when the internship came to end. All the interns were very grateful for their rare experience of practicing their future profession in a place away from home which provided them the opportunity to meet different people, it is indeed a humbling experience. Undeniably, their stay enabled them to visit also different places while teaching abroad. These findings are somehow corollary to the conclusion of Stronkhorst [8] that the greatest value of a stay abroad, according to students, was the element of fun and adventure, followed by personal development. Similarly, Horakova [27] pointed out that the position of graduates has changed dramatically in recent years. Especially university graduates face stronger competition from other graduates when seeking employment.

Two interns mentioned that:

“An international internship is an excellent opportunity to gain professional working experience abroad. Through the Internship experience in Thailand, I got a valuable experience in my field of study. More than that, it's an opportune time to

acquire new skills, while exploring a foreign culture and its traditions. I also have the opportunity to meet new people, learned a different language and gained experience that would make a difference in the competitive work market.”

C.4 Intrinsically-Motivated and Independent Future Teachers

It can be inferred that the interns unanimously showed similar realizations, felt the true meaning of a teacher. Their exposure in the actual world of teaching in a foreign land made them realize further the value of a teacher in moulding the lives of the young learners. The qualities of teachers which they used to read only like patience, commitment, compassionate, creativity, and strong character have proven to be the best weapons to make learning fun and fulfilling. Illeris [28] argues that in the learning process the learning content, the motivation of students to participate actively in the learning process, and the environment that unfolds the educational process interact with each other. He believes that learning is the result of internal changes and the rendering of different meanings in his life. The intense desire to become teachers is undeniably the reason why the interns were able to surmount the challenges of living away from their family. Truly, they displayed the qualities of intrinsically-motivated and independent future teachers.

Similar findings were disclosed in the study of Van den Hoven and Walenkamp [4] that the majority of students felt they had learned enough and that going abroad was an experience that mostly exceeded their expectations, and which they would not have wanted to miss.

One narrated that:

“I got used with the idea that teaching requires a lot of time, effort and adjustments. As a teacher, I needed to prepare myself, became more ready because teaching in the real world was far different from the training inside the classroom. Especially I could not also predict nor choose the learners I handled.”

The sense of fulfilment was also felt by the interns:

“After my demonstration final teaching, I realized that teaching is not an easy profession. One must have to sacrifice the comfort to fulfil the needs of the learners. I also realized that my heart is on the teaching profession.”

“Finally, I completed the two-month International internship in Thailand. It gave me unforgettable experiences for a lifetime. I considered this as precious as a diamond due to its priceless value. We were also motivated by the principal that their school is open should we wish to work in Thailand.”

The remarks of the school administrator suggest that the interns grew competently, thus were able to meet their standards as international teachers. It validates therefore the study of Nilsson and Ripmeester [11] that studying abroad provides a better chance on labor market chances, thus seems to be an edge of mobile students as compared to those who pursued within the country

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The student interns tend to have prepared and complied strictly with the set requirements. Assistance and moral support accorded to them by the educational institutions and stakeholders were contributory in making their lives easier while in foreign countries. Experiential learning through internship is indeed designed to develop further their academic competencies as well as their personal and intercultural competencies. The interns were prepared academically to handle classes and the fulfilment of their dream to become successful teachers strengthened them while surmounting the challenges especially the sociocultural barriers. Hence, social challenges outweigh the academic difficulties.

It is hereby recommended that, prior to the exposure of the interns in their assigned country of internship, ample time should be devoted in learning the culture and the language. A needs assessment must be conducted first which would warrant the formal institutionalization of programs of activities. Socio-cultural orientation should be a top priority initiated by either the concerned College or University. This way, it is expected that students will be better equipped in dealing with the challenges of internationalization and in living away from home. The researcher further suggests for a thorough study whether the exposure abroad of the future teachers could really contribute, both for their personal and academic development.

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