

STUDENT PRACTICUM PROGRAM: THE WORK EXPERIENCES OF TOURISM ALUMNI IN DLSU-D

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Abstract. An internship or Student Practicum is a program offered in universities that gives students an opportunity to experience the professional environment of their chosen fields. The researchers identified the demographic profile, benefits, and satisfactory levels of alumni in De La Salle University-Dasmariñas under the Tourism Management Department who underwent their practicum abroad. To fill in the gaps, this research study investigated the program's areas for improvement and the issues the respondents ran into throughout their practicum. This will provide the DLSU-D institution with a framework for how to manage students who will participate in practicum programs. The research design used in this study is a descriptive survey because this research design combines quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviation were used to determine the satisfaction level in the Practicum Program. The survey conducted by the researchers found that the practicum program has advantages for employability, knowledge, and skill development, the respondents were generally happy with the practicum program's learning outcomes and working conditions, and the respondents said there were several issues with the practicum program. The perceived problems were not significant enough to negatively impact their overall experience with the program.

Keywords: *tourism, practicum program, career readiness, descriptive research design, experiential learning theory*

Introduction

Student Practicum or Internship is an official program offered by universities or organizations that allows students to have professional experience related to their chosen fields. It requires students to demonstrate skills related to their field of study that would be an application to their future work environment. Students are offered numerous opportunities to gain industrial experience and acquire practical knowledge and skills for operational and managerial positions in their respective fields. Practicum also contributes to strengthening resumes which is helpful for future employment. According to Gautam (2017), Practicum is a tool to help students gain knowledge and enhance skills such as communication, leadership, time management, and confidence. It acts as a guide for gaining the skills required for a career and turning those skills into employment. In the study of Carpio et al. (2018), students' perspectives are widened by engaging in a Student Practicum Program. It allows students to engage with members of other cultures while learning about their customs. With the goal to succeed in their future employment and increase their competitiveness, students can enhance their skills, learn new things, and gain experience in this program. According to their research, increased ease, and competency in a multilevel cultural setting results from access to great decision-making in the workplace. According to Abou ElAzm (2020), internships offer improved job and professional advancement chances and the opportunity to network within the business by making personal contacts. Internships can assist students

in training self-confidence and getting experience in determining whether their chosen vocation is a good fit for their interests and personality. Internships, on the other hand, may have a negative aspect. Internship programs that are poorly designed, firms that mistreat interns, and compensation disparities may force students to leave the industry after their internship. An example of this situation is when a tourism student opts for an office job unrelated to their field of choice instead of being in the tourism industry.

De La Salle University-Dasmariñas offers bona fide students practicum programs in compliance with the Commission of Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum No. 104, Series of 2017 under R.A 1777 or the Higher Education Act of 1994. Tourism students at De La Salle University-Dasmariñas (DLSU-D) must comply with the university's practicum program locally or internationally, hence the different experiences in the workplace environment, like culture shock, time-management conflicts, and homesickness. The primary objective of this descriptive-survey research is to determine the perceived benefits of the practicum program for Tourism Management Alumni who completed their Practicum Program during the A.Y. 2017-2018. This also aimed to understand the satisfaction level of the practicum program. Another objective is to determine the perceived satisfaction levels of the services rendered by the Tourism Management Department of DLSU-D. This research study investigated the areas of improvement in the program and what problems the respondents encountered during their practicum to address the gaps. This will serve as a basis for the DLSU-D institution in handling students who will undergo practicum programs in the future and give them ample time to reevaluate their existing policies and guidelines. Based on the said statements, this research study sought to answer the questions: (1) demographic profile (age, gender, practicum venue); (2) the perceived benefits of the Practicum Program (employability, knowledge, improvement of skills); and (3) the perceived satisfaction levels with the Practicum Program (learning outcomes, work environment).

This study focused on tourism students' lived travel and training experiences at De La Salle University-Dasmariñas. The researchers limited the survey to 40 students who completed their practicum program in the Academic Year of 2017-2018. The findings from the research study are particularly relevant to the administration, students, and De La Salle University-Dasmariñas. In addition to the DLSU-D administration and students, this study's findings may interest future researchers. This research shows promising growth in the near future and gives tourism students real-life insights into exchange programs. This research may be used to improve the recommendations to bridge gaps in the program if deemed necessary. Future researchers may find this helpful study as a source of both conceptual and research literature when conducting research on the same subject.

Literature review and theoretical framework

The researchers used the Experiential Learning Theory for this descriptive study. In addition to his other learning styles model, Kolb et al. (2014) published the Experiential Learning Theory in 1984, which allowed him to create his learning style inventory. The Kolb theory of experiential learning operates on two levels, including a four-stage learning cycle and four different learning styles. The idea also emphasizes the significance of experiences for learning and their function in a person's learning process. This theory was created to differentiate experiential learning from cognitive and behavioral learning theories, which focus on cognition over affection and learning that denies any role for subjective experience. Many studies used the Experiential Learning

Theory as its framework to look into the effectiveness of the learning process. In their study "Experiential Learning: Its Effects on Achievement and Scientific Process Skills," Alkan (2016) applied the theory to examine the experiential learning model's effects on students' chemistry achievement and how they process their scientific skills. According to Alkan (2016), students were able to recognize their professional identities, assess their actions, and understand the importance of their suspicions thanks to the experiential learning stage. Moreover, Lai et al. (2007), which explores the influence of technology on experiential learning, employed ELT as the theoretical framework. The result of their research presented that the use of the four-stage process, as seen in *Figure 1*, became an aid for students to refine their knowledge. The model of ELT or Experiential Learning Theory, as seen in *Figure 1*, exhibits the process and sequence of experiential learning along with its concepts, constructs, and propositions. Furthermore, *Figure 2* shows Kolb's experiential cycle consisting of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.



Figure 1. Model of experiential learning theory.

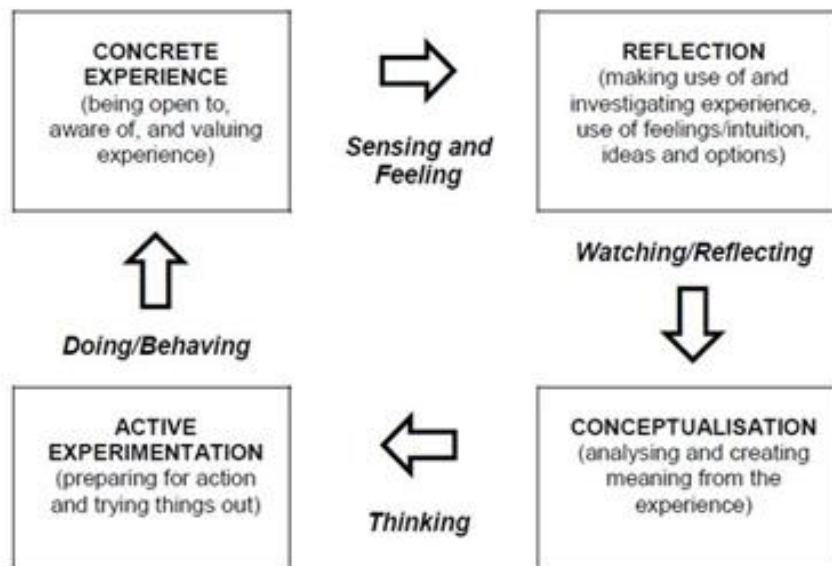


Figure 2. Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

Therefore, this theory was seen by the researchers as the best fit for this descriptive study which evaluated the students' learning through their experience with their practicum program. This study aimed to analyze the factors that shape and influence the learning styles of tourism students at De La Salle University-Dasmariñas in connection with the Experiential Learning Theory. According to CHED Memorandum Order No. 104, Section 1 of 2017, an internship program provides students an opportunity to acquire skills, practical knowledge, and advantageous characteristics complementary to their formal learning. The two primary objectives of the student internship program, as outlined in Section 6, are to familiarize students with the workplace and foster a working relationship between the higher education institution and the host training enterprises. Furthermore, an internship is a requirement for all HEIs that follow the SIPP curriculum. As cited by Lokkesmoe et al. (2017), practicum programs are believed to be integral to forming cross-cultural competence in higher-level education. The researchers recently investigated the effectiveness of immersion programs abroad in terms of cross-cultural understanding. According to the findings, despite comprehensive pre-departure training and cultural immersion, the research subjects were unable to demonstrate intercultural comprehension. As stated in their research, there is a need for carefully designed interventions and well-supported mentorships before sending undergraduates overseas for their practicum program.

Studies have shown that students can have positive and negative experiences or perceptions based on their performance during their practicum program. Ulvik et al. (2018) indicated that practicum should be integral to a student teacher's education. Correspondingly, this statement also applies to students belonging to other industries or professions. The findings demonstrate that students experience differences when learning from companies related to opportunities, mentoring, support, and attitudes. As stated by Tangaro et al. (2018), an internship program is an essential component for graduates' employment. It is a good training ground for students to experience the actual workplace. The study's goal was to find out what the student interns thought of the internship program so that it may be enhanced or improved. According to Ferreras-Garcia et al. (2020), the students who took internships improved their competencies.

The researchers carried out questionnaires administered to the students' supervisors, resulting in enhanced competencies. Correspondingly, it varies what competencies are achieved depending on the students. Based on the study, universities can adapt the training and will have information on learning during internships. As cited in the study of Trinidad (2020), his findings show that students exhibit improved competencies in the workplace scenario. However, the respondents had gaps in industry-wide competencies when assessed. Practicum programs supplement undergraduates' formal learning with handy information and aptitudes. Tourism and Hospitality students experience negative factors in their internship. Despite the assumed benefits, it is clear that issues arise when working in the field, minimizing the likelihood of pursuing a career in the industry. The findings show that most students who underwent local or international practicum experienced challenges inherent to the internship and expressed their satisfaction.

The relevance of training and development in the competitive environment we now live in, and the significance of skill acquisition cannot be overstated. In a study conducted by Mejia (2017), the knowledge, skills, and personality of undergraduate students from the Philippines differed from high school students' performance as evaluated by business partners. In order to further enhance the internship programs for the students studying cruise line management, a training plan was therefore recommended.

Materials and Methods

The research design that was applied in this study is the Descriptive Survey. In order to deliver accurate and timely information, descriptive survey research integrates quantitative and qualitative data. It assists in achieving the goal of analyzing the frequency and identifying patterns in survey responses. The respondents of the study are selected Tourism Management Alumni from De La Salle University-Dasmariñas who completed their Practicum Program in 2018. A sample of forty (40) respondents was utilized in this study drawn from a convenience sampling method with the following criteria: a Tourism Management Alumni from De La Salle-Dasmariñas who completed their Practicum Program in 2018. A research survey form was utilized through Google Forms to determine the perceived benefits of the practicum program. The research survey is divided into three parts: the first part includes the demographic of the respondents in terms of age, gender, and practicum venue; the second part includes the perceived benefits of the Practicum Program in terms of employability, knowledge, and improvement of skills; the last part included the perceived satisfaction levels with the Practicum Program in terms of learning outcomes and work environment. The multiple-choice type of questions using a 4-point Likert scale was used in this study. It was divided into five interpretations such as "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." Frequency distribution was used to summarize the demographic of the respondents. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviation were used to determine the satisfaction level in the Practicum Program. The ANOVA analysis and T-test were utilized to determine the difference between the perceived benefits and satisfaction levels of tourism students who underwent their practicum abroad and locally.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal the age distribution of respondents in a survey comprising a total of 40 individuals. The age group (*Table 1*) with the highest frequency is 25, encompassing 23 respondents, representing a significant proportion of 57.5%. Following closely is the age group of 24, with seven respondents, accounting for 17.5% of the total. The age group of 26 has six respondents, making up 15% of the participants. Furthermore, the age group of 27 comprises two respondents, constituting 5% of the sample. Lastly, the age groups of 28 and 30, as well as one respondent each, contribute 2.5% individually. Overall, these results demonstrate a concentration of respondents in the 24-27 age range, collectively making up the majority of the participants, while the remaining age groups have comparatively smaller proportions. The gender distribution reveals that the majority of participants (*Table 2*), representing 67.5% of the sample, identified as female. In contrast, males constituted 32.5% of the participants. These results suggest a notable gender imbalance within the study population, with a higher representation of females.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents (in ages).

Age	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
24	7	17.5
25	23	57.5
26	6	15
27	2	5
28	1	2.5
30	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Table 2. Distribution of respondents (in gender).

Gender	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Female	27	67.5
Male	13	32.5
Total	40	100

Based on the survey results in *Table 3*, the perceived benefits of the practicum program are generally positive. The mean and weighted mean scores for all items are below 2.0, demonstrating that the respondents generally agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. In terms of employability, the respondents strongly agreed that the practicum program allowed them to apply their work knowledge to their current job and pursue a job that was in line with their course. They also agreed that the program provided an opportunity to improve their credentials and enhance their vocational development. The weighted mean score for employability is 1.43, which suggests that the respondents strongly agreed with the statements. Regarding knowledge, the respondents strongly agreed that the practicum program helped them gain knowledge not taught in school and honed their critical thinking abilities. They also agreed that rotation opportunities are essential for enhancing one's knowledge and abilities in the industry and that they were able to collaborate effectively. The weighted mean score for knowledge is 1.48, which implies that the respondents strongly agreed with the statements. In terms of improvement of skills, the respondents strongly agreed that the practicum program strengthened their abilities and improved their values and helped them develop work ethics. However, there were some respondents who believed that

participating in the program was solely for the purpose of earning credits and completing academic requirements. The weighted mean score for improvement of skills is 1.47, which reveals that the respondents strongly agreed with the statements. Overall, the results suggest that the practicum program has perceived benefits in terms of employability, knowledge, and improvement of skills. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, indicating that the program is effective in providing valuable experiences and learning opportunities for the students. The total weighted mean score for all items is 1.46, which shows that the respondents strongly agreed with the overall statement that the practicum program has perceived benefits.

Table 3. *The perceived benefits of the practicum program.*

Category	Mean	Weighted mean	Description
Employability			
I am able to apply my work knowledge to my current job.	1.47	1.43	Strongly agree
It made me pursue a job that was in line with my course.	1.48		
I had the opportunity to improve my credentials.	1.40		
I am able to change my vocational development.	1.38		
Knowledge			
I gained knowledge that was not taught in school.	1.50	1.48	Strongly agree
My critical thinking abilities have been honed (problem-solving, reasoning, etc.)	1.48		
I was able to collaborate effectively.	1.43		
Rotation opportunities are essential for enhancing one's knowledge and abilities in the field.	1.50		
Improvement of skills			
The practicum strengthened my own abilities and improved my values.	1.38	1.47	Strongly agree
The practicum reinforced my capability to work and learn independently.	1.20		
Participating in the practicum program was solely for the purpose of earning credits and completing academic requirements.	1.92		
I am able to develop a work ethic.	1.38		
	Total	1.46	Strongly agree

Based on the survey results in *Table 4*, the perceived satisfaction levels with the practicum program are generally high, as most of the mean and weighted mean scores are below 2.0, indicating agreement or strong agreement with the statements. In terms of learning outcomes, overall, the respondents of the study were highly satisfied with the practicum experience (mean: 1.43) and felt that they gained experience that they could apply in a real-world situation (mean: 1.45). They also strongly agreed that the practicum enabled them to apply what they had learned in class (mean: 1.53). Additionally, most of the respondents recommended that others work in the tourism and hospitality industry sector after completing their practicum (mean: 1.58). On the other

hand, in terms of work environment, some respondents had a negative experience as some of them could not adjust to the workplace culture of the practicum site (mean: 2.67), and some agreed that the college department should let their interns find their own practicum venue (mean: 2.03). However, most of the respondents felt secure in the workplace establishment where they had their internship (mean: 1.43). Overall, the total mean score of 1.73 indicates that the respondents agreed with the statements regarding the practicum program's satisfaction levels. However, some areas may need improvement to provide a more positive experience for the students.

Table 4. *The perceived satisfaction levels with the practicum program.*

Category	Mean	Weighted mean	Description
Learning outcomes			
Overall, I was satisfied with my practicum experience.	1.43	1.57	Strongly agree
Because of the practicum, I was able to demonstrate the abilities I had learnt in class.	1.53		
I am still willing to work in the field where I received my practicum training if given the opportunity.	1.95		
I gained experience that I can apply in a real-world situation.	1.45		
After completing my practicum experience, I recommend that others work in the tourism and hospitality sector.	1.58		
Because of the practicum program, I felt wholly committed to my work.	1.43		
Work environment			
I was unable to adjust to the workplace culture of the practicum site.	2.67	1.90	Agree
The college department should just let their interns find their own practicum venue.	2.03		
The college department should organize seminars to prepare the student interns.	1.45		
I felt secure in the workplace establishment where I had my internship.	1.43		
	Total	1.73	Agree

Based on the survey results in *Table 5*, the respondents perceived several problems encountered in the practicum program. The weighted mean for the total responses was 2.50, which indicates a disagreement with the problems encountered. Specifically, the respondents disagreed with the idea that the length of the practicum program was inappropriate. However, they generally agreed that the practicum program did not contribute significantly to increasing their confidence, competence, and dedication. The respondents also felt that the practicum program was stressful and exhausting and that it felt like simple work that did not provide much opportunity for learning. In addition, the respondents believed that universities should introduce professionals in the industry and host seminars for student interns, and faculty support is necessary when resolving disagreements and other issues between the intern and the establishment. Overall, the

findings suggest that while the practicum program has some perceived benefits, there are still areas for improvement to enhance the overall experience for the students.

Table 5. *The perception of the respondents on the problems encountered in the practicum program.*

Category	Mean	Weighted mean	Description
The length of the practicum program was inappropriate.	3.07	2.50	Disagree
The practicum program did not contribute to a large extent to increasing my confidence, competence and dedication.	3.15		
I did not feel like I could learn anything from the practicum program, and it was simple work.	3.23		
The practicum program was stressful and exhausting.	2.48		
Universities should introduce professionals in the industry and host seminars for student interns.	1.62		
When resolving disagreements and other issues between the intern and the establishment, faculty support is necessary.	1.44		
	Total	2.50	Disagree

Conclusion

The majority of participants in the study were in the 24-27 age range, with 25 being the most frequent age group, and the majority of participants identified as female. This demographic information provides insight into the sample of students who participated in the study. The findings suggest that the practicum program has benefits in terms of employability, knowledge, and improvement of skills. The high weighted mean scores for these categories indicate that the respondents strongly agreed with the statements, indicating that the practicum program is effective in providing valuable learning opportunities and experiences for students. The results indicate that the respondents were generally satisfied with the learning outcomes and work environment of the practicum program. The high weighted mean scores for both categories suggest that the respondents agreed with the statements regarding these aspects of the program. The respondents perceived several problems encountered in the practicum program. However, the weighted mean score for the total responses indicated that the respondents disagreed with these problems, which suggests that the perceived problems were not significant enough to negatively impact their overall experience with the program.

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Conflict of interest

The researchers confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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