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Virtual Internship and Work-Integrated Learning Outcomes of the Hospitality Management Students

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ABSTRACT

To adapt to the current pandemic, the higher education system in hospitality management must shift away from traditional classroom to online classroom settings. Successful hospitality management education requires internship experiences as it eases the students' transition between education and employment. However, delivering it through virtual channels presents special challenges. Thus, this research aimed to assess how hospitality management students view the virtual internship (VI) and work-integrated learning (WIL) outcomes during pandemic. This study employed descriptive method to identify the different variables of the study and presents quantitative research that utilized online survey method to gather data. The respondents of the study were the fourth year Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) students (n=35) from the College of Business and Management of the Mindoro State University-Calapan City Campus who undertaken the virtual internship for the second semester of AY 2021-2022. Results of the study showed that VI was the best alternative to face-to-face internship as the students felt secured and less exposed on the threats of COVID-19, however, the VI felt short of the means for them to ask questions and clarify difficulties as well as failing to form networking opportunities. Students also believed it enhanced their skills and have advanced in their practical knowledge but somehow, they lack in creating opportunity to work in a genuine hospitality industry setting. It is recommended to conduct a hybrid internship, both virtual and on-site, to create a chance for the hospitality management students to have an authentic workplace setting.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on every aspect of our lives and society. The higher education system in hospitality management must adapt to the current pandemic by shifting away from traditional classroom settings and toward online classrooms. This unprecedented change affects many aspects of the student learning environment, particularly courses that include field experiences, such as student internship programs. This is when in early the first months of 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared corona virus disease 2019 (CoViD-19) outbreak triggered by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-COV 2) with an approximately 2.1% mortality rate (World Health Organization (2020). The COVID-19, a highly contagious respiratory illness, spreads through contact with other infected individuals with symptoms such as fever, cough, and respiratory distress (Oran & Topol, 2020).

The pandemic disruptively influenced about 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents (Psacharopoulos *et al.*, 2021); universities in the global aspect closed campuses to avoid the spread of virus and advanced to online or hybrid classes through online platforms (UNICEF, 2021). COVID-19 had a severe impact on internships programs as required by higher education institutions. Internships help students develop critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills, which are considered essential

components of a good education (Seyitoğlu & Yirik, 2015). These are intended to connect the classroom to the industry by allowing students to apply what they have learned in the context of a variety of businesses and gain hands-on experience working for businesses in the hospitality industry (Enghagen, 2018; Kim & Jeong, 2018; Sonnenschein *et al.*, 2019). However, due to the pandemic, for nearly couple of years, most higher education institutions refrain from offering internships. Instead, university administrations encourage students to write "*research-based papers*." Some universities conduct internships, but only through virtual means, where students face the same challenges. Students must attend online meetings, video conferences, and maintain social media relationships on occasion. In this regard, a number of universities have altered their policies and adopted the "*new normal*" system. In lieu of internship, a wide array of multiple segments were believed to compensate for the internship's shortcomings and cover the items students may not attain offline such as online surveys, projects, research papers, review papers, and other types (Khan *et al.*, 2022).

In a Glassdoor research undertaking, it was revealed that half of all internships in the United States (52%) were canceled in the early months of the year since the coronavirus outbreak began. While all industries saw a drop in internship openings in this period, the hospitality industries manifested a 92% drop since the first quarter of 2020 (Stansell, 2020). Many businesses

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canceled internships due to budget constraints or an inability to transition to an online format. Almost fourths of employers in the US have cancelled their internship programs, including major companies such as Yelp, Disney, Geico and American Airlines (Moreno, 2020; Lumpkin, 2020; Yaffe-Bellany, 2020). Others resorted to virtual or remote internships as a substitute. According to a National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) poll conducted in the second quarter of 2020 (Yaffe-Bellany, 2020), 42% of employers said they were transitioning internships to a virtual format. Internships and practicums in hospitality programs in the United States had to be converted to virtual ones as well.

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued several memorandum orders that allows to adapt with the new normal education system and has allotted around Php15 billion to ensure that the provision of financial support to state-led initiatives to continuously lessen the effects of the pandemic to the higher education students (CHED, 2020) under the Republic Act No. 11469 or the *"Bayaniban to Heal as One Act"*. This action was done to meet the needs of students, particularly the 3.5 million tertiary-level students enrolled in approximately 2,400 HEIs, certain HEIs in the country have implemented proactive policies to ensure that education will not be disrupted despite the closure (Joaquin *et al.*, 2020). Among the memoranda that were issued by CHED were CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 18, series of 2021 that stipulates the guidelines on the conduct of Practicum activities for Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSTM) in consonance with the health protocols imposed by the Inter-agency Task Force (IATF) reflective of the Joint Memorandum Circular 2021-01 and CMO No.4, series of 2020 (CHED, 2021).

In this scenario, virtual internship (VI) is among the options given to the students of higher education institutions in the Philippines. This does not only assist interns in achieving higher-level learning outcomes, but also provide additional educational benefits, such as increased academic achievement, a series of attainable goals in the real world, greater organizational and interpersonal cultural awareness, and a more optimistic attitude (Park & Jones, 2021). It can assist interns in gaining more knowledge with employers of their choice regardless of their location, any limitations that may limit their mobility, or other responsibilities (Feldman, 2021). Virtual internships, according to Raina & Srivastava (2020), provide better knowledge and experience with regard to technical tools and communication programs that employers expect from applicants. Carlton (2021) emphasized that VI make previously unattainable opportunities possible with students from a rural origin can intern at large companies without migrating, and undergrads can pursue their preferred company even if it is not located in their hometown.

The VI is one among the elements to achieve work-integrated learning (WIL) outcomes. Work Integrated

Learning (WIL), also known as active learning or experiential learning, is a widely used term that refers to students spending time in a workplace setting as part of the curriculum of a course or program. This bridges the gap between theoretical classroom learning and applied workplace learning. Apprenticeships, field placements, practicums, co-ops, internships, applied research projects, and service learning are all examples of WIL (Peters *et al.*, 2014). Companies and institutions consistently advocate for degrees in higher education institutions that provide students with the skills, knowledge, and attributes they need to perform well in the workplace and continue to develop through further applied learning (Wilson-Mah & Thomlinson, 2014). Differences between employers' expectations and evaluations of tertiary education graduates' enterprise capabilities continue to drive university curriculum to be reviewed especially during pandemic (Jackson *et al.*, 2022). Work-integrated learning (WIL), a spectrum of industry-student engagement activities that provide valuable opportunities for developing and applying skills and knowledge, including enterprise capabilities, is a particular focus.

The VI and WIL can be anchored on the experiential pedagogical principles that necessitate reflective learning and active engagement over passive listening (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) and embody a hierarchical yet iterative learning taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) into virtual or online learning environments that may be either asynchronous and consumptive; asynchronous and interactive or blended online and face to face such as engaging in different three-dimensional Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) as cited by Bilsland, Nagy and Smith (2020). This was a contradiction to the statements by Dalgarno and Lee (2010), that there was a non-existence of a *"fully immersive nor provide a true 3D experience"* in an online education environment where each institution and students use common technological tools.

This research study was conducted to address the gap on the correlation of the virtual internship and the attainment of work-integrated learning outcomes that it provides during pandemic where mobility and access remains as a challenge in the education system. Though there were some studies undertaken in the event of pandemic to measure the effectiveness and extent of virtual internship (Park & Jones, 2021; Feldman, 2021; Alghamdi, 2022; Dent & Jo White, 2020; Hora *et al.*, 2021; Saitta & Kentor, 2021) as well as the in the aspect of work-integrated learning (Jackson *et al.*, 2022, Alanson *et al.*, 2020; Hodges & Martin, 2020; Ipinge & Batholmeus, 2020) and the approaches of VI and WIL in higher education (Bilsland *et al.*, 2020), there were no published study on the relationship of VI and WIL outcomes as perceived by the Hospitality Management students.

The study sought to measure how hospitality management students view the virtual internship and work-integrated learning outcomes during pandemic. Specifically, the study aimed to: (1) assess the virtual internship experiences; (2) identify the different work-integrated learning outcomes

that the Hospitality Management students believed they acquired through the virtual internship; and (3) correlate the virtual internship experiences and the work-integrated learning outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling

The research study employed descriptive method to identify the different variables of the study and presents quantitative research that utilized online survey method to gather data information from the respondents.

The respondents of the study were the fourth year (4th) year Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) students from the College of Business and Management of the Mindoro State University-Calapan City Campus who undertaken the virtual internship for the second semester of AY 2020-2021. This is one among the components of the 500-hour practicum program requirement comprised of 350 hours for the options on research writing, home-based entrepreneurial, business activities and virtual internship or face-to-face on-the-job training, 150 hours for National certificate training assessment and 100 hours for in-campus training. The respondents were among the identified students who participated in the survey via www.menti.com a week after the start of classes. The actual data were thirty-five (35) out of the forty (40) officially enrolled students in Google classroom for the component on virtual internship. They were tapped through a created Facebook messenger group chat to easily convey the necessary details for the conduct of the study.

Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made online survey questionnaire using Google forms with a close-ended 4-point Likert scale statements (quantitative data) after critically looking for literature review related to Virtual Internship and Work-Integrated Learning outcomes with description: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Agree (3) and Strongly Agree (4). Statements in the questionnaire were categorized into two (2) main domains as follows:

- The first part (10 items) assessed the views of the students on their virtual internship experiences; and
- The second part (10 items) was on the perception of the students on the work-integrated learning outcomes that they believed they acquired through the virtual internship.

Validity and Reliability

The inter-rate approach was followed by the study, where agreement between raters and agreement of repeated measures will be performed (Gwet, 2012) so that presentations of the statements can be controlled (Hallgren, 2012). The online survey questionnaire was presented to three experts on virtual internship and work-integrated learning through electronic mail in order to ensure its validity. The reliability of the study was determined after administration to ten (10) students who

were not included in the study (from other programs who undertaken the virtual internship) and the instrument was found reliable with Cronbach alpha's reliability of 0.88 ($p < 0.05$). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each domain were above 0.8, which was considered satisfactory.

Data Collection

The data were collected among the forty (40) fourth year BSHM who undertaken the virtual internship component of the Practicum. An online survey questionnaire was created through Google Forms (Google LLC, Mountain View, California) and respondents were provided with a link in Google Classroom sent to a closed-group Facebook Messenger chatroom. They were notified a week prior to the administration of the online survey with consideration to some barriers or issues that affected the number of responses from the students, as expected from online surveys, only thirty-five (35) participated in the survey in a span of a week were included in the study that covered 90% of the identified student respondents.

Ethical Consideration

Before the study was conducted, the respondents received a briefing and key information about the purpose of the study. Through informed consent, the respondents willingly decided to take part in the study. In order to guarantee anonymity, secrecy, and the avoidance of potential harm, all information was held and handled with the utmost confidentiality in accordance with RA 10173, generally known as the Data Privacy Act.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hospitality Management Students' Perception on Virtual Internship Experience

The student respondents perceived that the virtual internship was the best alternative to face-to-face internship which was manifested that they felt self-assured that they were secured and less exposed on the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic ($M=3.58$) this be parallel to the findings shown in the study of Saitta and Kentor (2021) that faced with uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, other means of attaining their goals may be the best choice in support to the belief of the students that even if campuses and other establishments closed, learning needs to be continuous (Nguyen & Pham, 2020). Though this contradicts with the study of Hora *et al.* (2021) which revealed that online internship fills an important gap in providing access to online positions, as in-person positions were widely cancelled.

The result revealed that the student respondents viewed that through the virtual internship they were able to practice new skills and apply new knowledge throughout the program ($M=3.29$) and reflect on their experiences and recognize their strengths and weaknesses ($M=3.18$). This can be attributed to the diversified activities and task given to them as evidenced by the result of the study of Bilsland *et al.* (2020) that through observation, conversation, and the accomplishment of activities

associated with the role of a hospitality professional, students working as interns may acquire the identity and attitudes of professionals in the field, such skill-based learning outcomes assist the intern in blending theory with actual workplace experience (Bayerlein & Jeske, 2018). However, the results of the study are in contrast with the findings of Sykes and Roy (2017) that internships are necessary for successful hospitality and tourism education, but delivering an internship experience through virtual channels brings unique problems.

On the other hand, the students felt that they were not able to ask questions and clarify difficulties ($M=2.42$) and failed to form connections with other interns and obtained networking opportunity ($M=2.45$). This

connotes that the clarifications of the students were not answered completely by the virtual trainer. This be parallel to the findings shown in the study of Bayerlein and Jeske (2018) that although virtual internship programs help students improve their communication, relationship-building, and understanding of ideas and concepts related to the workplace, they can also be technically challenging for some students. Conversely, the results oppose the findings of Zhong *et al.* (2021) that student's engagement experience is positive despite the crisis. The results also contradict the assertion of Richardson *et al.* (2013) who suggested that through virtual internships, collaboration or engagement between students and their peers as well as between students and instructors can be improved.

Table 1: Hospitality Management Students' Perception on Virtual Internship Experience

Item Number	Through virtual internship	Mean	Description
1	I felt self-assured that I am secured and less exposed on the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic.	3.58	Strongly Agree
2	I was able to reflect on my experiences and recognize my strengths and weaknesses.	3.18	Agree
3	I felt the preparedness of the internship site	3.00	Agree
4	I have acquired concrete skills that could not be obtained in on-site internship.	2.97	Agree
5	I was able to ask questions and clarify difficulties.	2.42	Disagree
6	I have formed connections with other interns and obtained networking opportunity.	2.45	Disagree
7	I felt that the amount of task and workloads are enough and well-designed.	3.02	Agree
8	I was given an opportunity to articulate what I have learned through diversified activities.	3.18	Agree
9	I was able to practice new skills and apply new knowledge throughout the program.	3.29	Agree
10	I have received helpful guidance and assistance from the trainers and the internship site.	3.24	Agree
	Overall Mean	3.03	Agree

Hospitality Management Students on Work-Integrated Learning Outcomes

The student respondents perceived that the virtual internship enhanced their skills and advanced their practical knowledge ($M=3.74$) this be parallel to the findings shown in the study of Sykes and Roy (2017) that the student's expertise is strengthened and their readiness for future work conditions is improved by virtually learning the ins and outs of an industry through modern internship methods. The results are also connected with the study of Bilsland *et al.* (2020) that a virtual internship offers structured learning opportunities within a lifelike virtual setting that mimics the real world. In contrast, the results contradict with the assertion of Le (2017) who pronounced that the university graduates are dissatisfied with virtual internship programs and are more inclined to abandon the industry.

Results also showed that student respondents viewed

that virtual internship helped them manage their future career aspirations and decisions ($M=3.47$), increased their awareness of global challenges and hospitality industry issues and learned a lot about the importance of teamwork and cooperation ($M=3.45$), respectively. This is in relation with the study of Kim and Park (2013) that one of the most important indicators in determining the quality of undergraduate hospitality management programs would be student internships. Similarly, students are more likely to pursue careers in the hospitality industry, once they recognize the work values, they desire are evident in the industry (Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010). Nonetheless, Salatan (2015) affirmed that virtual internship may not be enough because it is vital for students to experience real job situation so that their expectations about their future career are fairly realistic. On the other hand, the student respondents viewed that the virtual internship created opportunity to work in a

genuine hospitality industry setting ($M=2.42$) and enable them to bring solutions to real-world problems in the hospitality industry setting ($M=2.47$). This entails that virtual internship did not provide student interns the real experience of being in a hospitality industry setting. The results may be associated with the argument of Chen and Shen (2012) who stated that students would be discourage to enter the tourism and hospitality industry after graduation when an internship program fails to

meet the students' expectations. Relatively, experiencing real job situations are important for students so that their expectations about their future career are fairly realistic (2007). In contrast, the results contradict with the study of Bovill *et al.*, (2016) that through co-creation in the context of a virtual internship, students would be able to develop the creative skills that the hospitality industries would require in the future and contribute to the reform of educational institutions' curricula.

Table 2: Hospitality Management Students' Perception on Work-Integrated Learning Outcomes

Item Number	Through virtual internship the following are Work-Integrated Learning outcomes:	Mean	Description
1	Created opportunity to work in a genuine hospitality industry setting.	2.42	Disagree
2	Developed my sense and awareness of workplace culture.	3.39	Agree
3	Enhanced my skills and advance my practical knowledge.	3.74	Strongly Agree
4	Helped manage my future career aspirations and decisions.	3.47	Agree
5	Boosted my employment prospects.	3.42	Agree
6	Increased my awareness of global challenges and hospitality industry issues.	3.45	Agree
7	Learned a lot about the importance of teamwork and cooperation.	3.45	Agree
8	Able to bring solutions to real-world problems in the hospitality industry setting.	2.47	Disagree
9	Gained a real sense of appreciation of the nature of hospitality.	3.42	Agree
10	Advanced my technological skills and web-based capacity.	3.37	Agree
	Overall Mean	3.26	Agree

Correlation of the Perception on Virtual Internship and the Work-Integrated Learning Outcomes

The study revealed in Table 3 that there is a moderate negative correlation between the virtual internship

experiences of the Hospitality Management students and the work-integrated learning outcomes. This means that there is a relationship between the VI and the WIL outcomes, though may not primarily mean that one

Table 3: Correlation of the Perception on Virtual Internship and the Work-Integrated Learning Outcomes

Variables	Correlation (r-value)	Interpretation
Virtual Internship and Work-Integrated Learning Outcomes	-0.5108	Moderate negative correlation

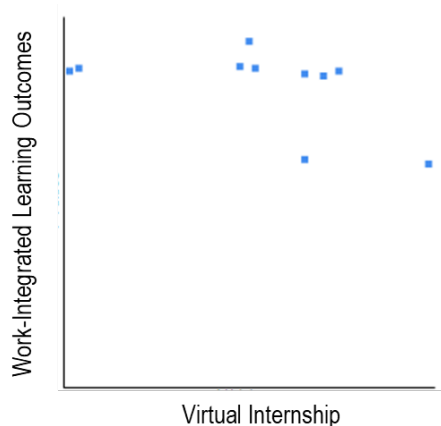


Figure 1: Graphical representation of the Correlation of the Perception on VI and the WIL Outcomes

variable decreases as the other increases as illustrated by Figure 1. This might be the effect of the pandemic to the learning experiences of the students that were conducted mostly virtual. This could explain that relatively the virtual internship experiences of the student respondents have a moderate effect on their acquired work-integrated learning. This is supported by the study of Alanson *et al.* (2020) that the availability of traditional WIL options for students lessened as commercial partners implemented diverse measures to survive in the business through different strategies, thus, options for conduct of face-to-face internship is also affected. This is argued by the findings of Bist *et al.* (2020) most interns lack the required work-integrated learning preparedness which are necessary in the workplace that could possibly not covered through virtual internships.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on three-folds, the perception of the Hospitality Management students on their virtual internship experiences, the different work-integrated learning outcomes that they believed they acquired through the virtual internship; and the correlation between the VI and WIL. Based on the results of the study it can be concluded that the student respondents' perception on their VI experiences was that, overall, virtual internship was the best alternative to face-to-face internship by which they felt secured and less exposed on the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the VI felt short of the means for them to ask questions and clarify difficulties as well as they failed to form connections with other interns and obtained networking opportunity. In terms of their perceived acquisition of WIL outcomes, as a whole, they believed that they have gained enough from the experience and that it enhanced their skills and have advanced in their practical knowledge. On the other hand, due to its virtual nature, they viewed that this somehow to lack to create opportunity to work in a genuine hospitality industry setting and that they were not able to bring solutions to real-world problems in the hospitality industry setting. Thus, this revealed that there was a moderate negative correlation between the VI experiences of the students and the WIL outcomes they have acquired.

With the aforementioned conclusions, the researchers therefore recommend that virtual internship may still be considered as a part of the work-integrated learnings of the students, specifically, with the fact that the unknown foe of health risks are at large. We can also recommend hybrid conduct of internship, both virtual and on-site, this is to address the weakness of the activity on opportunities to building connections among fellow interns and be able to ask queries and clarifications in real time. The hybrid internship could also create the chance for the Hospitality Management students to have authentic workplace setting that will push them to analytical and logically solve actual challenges and conflicts brought about by the pressures of task given to them. It is further recommended that for future researchers, they may conduct a qualitative approach as a replication of this study to acquire spontaneity and candid responses from the respondents.

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