

Online Practicum Program during the Pandemic among COB Students of the Systems Plus College Foundation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of the online practicum program on students' professional development, personal growth, skills, and abilities at the College of Business, Systems Plus College Foundation in Angeles City, Philippines during the pandemic. The study included 28 practicum students from the College of Business of Systems Plus College Foundation, Angeles City, Philippines, who were studying Bachelor of Science in Accountancy and Bachelor of Science in Customs Administration. The research employed a structured questionnaire of 28 closed-ended items rated on a 5-point Likert scale on gender, course pursuing, reason and expectation from the practicum, and influence of practicum on the professional development, personal growth, skill, and abilities of the respondents. The gender, course pursuing, reasons, and expectations of respondents were analyzed using descriptive analysis. A reliability scale through Cronbach Alpha was used to assess the questionnaire's reliability. Normality was evaluated employing univariate and multivariate normality of skewness and kurtosis, and a non-parametric test through Mann-Whitney test was used to calculate the p-value measuring the evidence against the null hypothesis. The evaluation on the influence of online practicum among the respondents was carried out through a non-parametric test using Mann-Whitney test. The study's findings show the influence of internship programs on the professional and personal growth and skills of COB-SPCF business students.

Keywords: Online, practicum, Pandemic, development, growth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed on us not only e-learning with higher education providers, but also triggered considerable difficulties in organization internships. In early 2020, the World Health Organization announced a global health crisis known as COVID-19 which made the Philippine government declare a state of public emergency in March 2020. The immediate action was to stop work, suspend classes, and the general population was ordered to stay home. The CHED (Commission on Higher Education) had initiated measures following the order of the Philippine government. Higher education institutions were mandated to shift to flexible learning and had issued CHED CMO Bo. 04 S 2020 to prepare HEI for ay 2020-2021. In February 2021, a joint memorandum

circular of the Department of Health and Commission on Higher Education was issued about limited face-to-face classes including guidelines related to the virtual or online internship. The COVID 19 had impacted Higher education institutions in the Philippines including internship or practicum programs. In this regard, the College of Business of the Systems Plus College Foundation had explored alternative internship programs by CMO No. 104, s. 2017 and to CMO No. 4, s. 2020. In these conditions, the COB had initiated virtual or online internships to ensure the provision of opportunities to complement the formal learning with practical knowledge, skills, and expected graduate attributes and gain sufficient experience amidst the pandemic. The COB had tried to simulate the working environment similar to the real working conditions in

response to its commitment to producing competent, ethical, and service-oriented graduates and professionals. An alternative internship/practicum program of the COB was developed that implemented the assumptions of active learning.

The faculty members of the College of Business, industry partners, students, alumni, and other stakeholders were consulted in crafting the practicum program. Moreover, benchmarking and sharing of practices with other higher education institutions were carried out. Hence, the College of Business had designed the practicum program with the Practicum Plan and requirement for the weekly practicum delivery plan. The practicum program was comprised of the following requirement to meet the requirement and achieve the desired result based on the requirement of the academic programs: a) trainee portfolio that includes comprehensive CV, video of the mock interview, essay on the prospects and challenges of their respective program during the pandemic and beyond; b) Virtual training/webinar relevant to the field of discipline, professional development, and soft skills training with a written report on each training attended; c) prepare any of the following plan: marketing plan, business plan, feasibility study, inventory management plan, export plan, warehousing plan, and other plan related to the field of specialization; and d) attend on the required supplementary class webinar session in resume writing, job interview essentials, and workplace ethics.

Work-related learning and practical training in the form of online practicum programs are vital for students of the College of Business for their personal and professional development and to build their strong connections with the leading business organizations. However, most of the research works until recently have focused on the advancement of students' knowledge and the advantages of an internship program after its completion. There is a limited amount of research work on how online practicum (internship or OJT) programs assist in the professional and personal growth and skills of business students particularly in the Philippines. The practicum programs provide the opportunity for business students to gain fruitful experience by implementing their classroom concepts in real work settings [Beenan, *et al.* 2010].

This study aimed to evaluate the online practicum offered by the College of Business, Systems Plus College Foundation during Pandemic COVID-19. Mixed research was conducted among the practicum students during semester 1, the academic year 2021-2022 held between September 2021–December 2021. Students agreed with the significance of the online practicum to complete the requirement needed to finish their respective program on time, and they stated serious obstacles that they faced during the online practicum. The College of Business had crafted the

various activities to simulate the workplace environment and provide supplementary learning activities to enhance the learning gained by the students before the practicum program. The objectives of the study are:

- To determine how the online practicum during the pandemic impact the professional development, personal growth, skills, and abilities of the students in the College of Business
- To determine how strong or weak the online practicum was during the pandemic among business students of the Systems Plus College Foundation, Angeles City.

This study will give an overview of internship pros to the business students of the College of Business of the Systems Plus College Foundation and student trainees in the Philippines.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

- H1: Online Practicum programs influence the professional development of COB students.
 H2: Online Practicum programs have an impact on the professional skills of COB students.
 H3: Online Practicum programs have an impact on the personal growth of COB students.
 H4: Online Practicum programs have an impact on the personal capabilities of COB students.

This study provides valuable recommendations to the industry, educational institutions, and students to develop the practicum program amid an emergency or critical situation such as the pandemic to improve the personal skills, professional growth, leadership skills, and work-related experience of Filipino students.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to evaluate the impact of internship programs on the professional and personal development and skills of the business students of COB. The data of the study comprised 27 business students of 4-year degree programs from the COB. The research employed a structured questionnaire of 28 closed-ended items rated on a 5-point Likert scale on gender and basic academic, reason and expectation from the practicum, and influence of practicum on the professional development, personal growth, skill, and abilities of the respondents. The study employed descriptive analysis to evaluate demographic information and measured central tendencies using mean and standard deviation to evaluate the nature of the responses of the participants. Furthermore, scale measurement analysis was made to check the normality of the distribution of the study data and the reliability of the questionnaire.

The study collected primary data from the final year business students of 4-year degree programs who did internships during the pandemic covering Semester 1, AY 2021-2022. The data were collected in January 2022. The survey questionnaire was floated using google forms to generate data which comprised demographic information, reasons, and expectation in the practicum, professional development, personal growth, skills improvement, and ability enhancement with 28 close-ended questions. The questionnaires were distributed and collected electronically using Google Forms. The OJT students of the College of Business during Semester 1, AY 2021-2022 were considered as the population of the study.

This study used quantitative and qualitative research to better comprehend the strengths and weaknesses of the online practicum programs at the College of Business. The study employed both descriptive and statistical analyses to evaluate the influence of the online practicum programs on the professional and personal growth and skills of the COB students. The descriptive technique of the study consisted of percentage and frequency analysis of demographic characteristics of the participants and central tendency measurement of their responses, whereas statistical technique comprised of scale analysis including normality and reliability tests. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and normality was evaluated employing univariate and multivariate normality of skewness and kurtosis and non-parametric test through Mann-Whitney test used to calculate the p-value measuring the evidence against the null hypothesis. Reliability test results using Cronbach's coefficient alpha must exceed 0.70 to be reliable. The acceptable skewness range is ± 3 with an acceptable kurtosis range of ± 10 . The data of the study will be normally distributed if values of kurtosis and skewness fall within this range. Structured questionnaire technique was used, comprising demographic information, reasons, and expectation in the practicum, professional development, personal growth, skills improvement, and ability enhancement with 28 close-ended questions. Each variable of the questionnaire was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 strongly disagrees, 2 disagrees, 3 is neutral, 4 agrees and 5 strongly agrees.

3. RESULTS

The results show that among respondents, 20 (74.1%) were females and 7 (25.9%) were males. 21 (77.8%) were students of the BSA program and 6 (22.1%) were from the BSCA program. The results depict that 16 (59.3%) respondents participated in a practicum program since it is a course requirement, 10 (37%) to gain practical experience, and 1 (3.7%) since it was advised. There are 14 (51.9%) who expected that the practicum program will prepare them for life after

college, 12 (44.4%) expected that the practicum program is an application of classroom learning to the work environment.

The results reveal that the highest mean and highest standard deviation (SD) for professional development (PD) are 4.333 and 0.9337, respectively. The lowest mean and lowest SD for PD are 3.555 and 0.6794, respectively. The range of mean 3.555–4.333 shows that the responses among PD items are between 'neutral' to 'strongly agree'. The lowest and highest means for professional skills (PDS) are 4.1852 and 4.2593, while the lowest SD and highest SD are 0.55726 and 0.665590, respectively. The mean range 4.1852 - 4.2593 shows positive responses to all the items of PDS ranging from agreeing to strongly agree. The lowest mean and lowest SD for personal growth (PR) are 3.7778 and 0.62017, whereas the highest mean and highest SD are 4.3333 and 0.89156, respectively. The mean range 3.7778 –4.3333 indicates that business students "agreed" with all the items of PG. The lowest and highest means for personal capabilities (PRS) are 4.2222 and 4.4444, the while lowest SD and highest SD are 0.56488 and 0.72403, respectively. The mean range 4.222–4.444 shows positive responses between agreeing and strongly agreeing for personal ability.

The acceptable skewness range is ± 3 with an acceptable kurtosis range of ± 10 . The data of the study will be normally distributed if values of kurtosis and skewness fall within this range. The results show that critical values of kurtosis range from -1.040 (PD1) to 1.102 (PR3), whereas critical values of skewness range from -0.933 (PD4) to 0.000 (PD1). The results indicate that all the values of kurtosis and skewness fall in the acceptable range; therefore, the data of the study are normally distributed.

Table 2: Skewness and kurtosis test

	Skewness	Kurtosis
PD1	.000	-1.040
PD4	-.933	.497
PR3	-.777	1.102

The results show that online practicum positively impacts the students on professional development, application on what had learned from the classroom, preparation to overcome challenges, career goals, practical work experience, focus on skills, improved teamwork and collaboration, critical thinking, computer skills, communication/interpersonal, and decision making/problem-solving. The results further show that practicum students positively responded that the online practicum resulted in professional and personal maturity, changed interest, time management, improved concept understanding, changed personal goals and aspirations, and improved passion and commitment.

Table 2.1: Mann-Whitney Test (PD -professional development and PDS – professional development skills)

	PD1	PD2	PD3	PD4	PD5	PD6	PDS1	PDS2	PDS3	PDS4	PDS5	PDS6
Mann-Whitney U	33	31	46.5	20.5	28.5	40.5	29	25.5	37	38	50.5	25
Wilcoxon W	54	52	67.5	41.5	49.5	61.5	50	46.5	58	59	71.5	46
Z	-1.893	-2.042	-1.05	-2.67	-2.22	-1.38	-2.14	-2.4	-1.69	-1.76	-0.833	-2.46
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.058	0.041	0.294	0.008	0.03	0.167	0.032	0.016	0.092	0.079	0.405	0.014
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.085b	.065b	.345b	.010b	.042b	.195b	.049b	.026b	.140b	.157b	.476b	.026b

Table 2.2: Mann-Whitney Test (PR – personal growth and PRS – personal capabilities)

	PR1	PR2	PR3	PR4	PR5	PR6	PRS1	PRS2	PRS3	PRS4	PRS5	PRS6
Mann-Whitney U	35.5	22	33	40.5	44.5	23	27	20	46	19.5	21	16.5
Wilcoxon W	56.5	43	54	61.5	65.5	44	48	41	67	40.5	42	37.5
Z	-1.75	-2.597	-1.953	-1.473	-1.185	-2.575	-2.381	-2.844	-1.136	-2.776	-2.698	-2.955
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.081	0.009	0.051	0.141	0.236	0.01	0.017	0.004	0.256	0.006	0.007	0.003
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.110b	.015b	.085b	.195b	.289b	.018b	.036b	.010b	.345b	.008b	.012b	.004b

Reliability test

The reliability of the questionnaire is checked using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Nunnally and Bernstein described that if Cronbach's coefficient alpha is above 0.70, then the questionnaire becomes reliable.

The results show that values of Cronbach's coefficient alpha range from 0.869 to 0.943. As critical values fall in an acceptable range, the questionnaire of the study is reliable.

Table 4: Reliability analysis

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Professional development	6	0.869
Professional skills	6	0.898
Personal growth	6	0.886
Personal ability	6	0.943

4. CONCLUSION

The response of respondents suggest the following key points about the strengths of the online practicum at the COB: (1) positively impact the students in their professional, personal, skills, and capability building; (2) the active participation in the various stages and requirements to complete the practicum program renders positive impact to the learning expectation and learning outcomes; and (3) the individual portfolio, supplementary soft skill webinar training, and the preparation of various plan related to the field of specialization results to the rigid application of what had been learned in the classroom. On the other hand, the direct exposure to the workplace environment and interaction with future employers had been a point of interest to the students to participate in an onsite practicum. Furthermore, feedback and interaction with industry partners is a missing element for the practicum students which will add value in the development of work ethics, work attitude and behavior, and confidence in dealing with real work situations.

The practicum program link classroom knowledge with the workplace realities provide an experimental experience to the students and enable them to take their place in the dynamic job market of this modern era. The study will help and encourage the students of COB to focus more on gaining experimental

knowledge from the real world of the work so that they can easily get their first job and future job promotions. It will also assist institutions to develop proper strategies and plan for the promotion of the practicum program. It will also help the companies to offer relevant practicum programs, training, and learning environment to their trainee that will result in lesser recruitment and training costs to hires. Future studies can also be conducted by comparing online practicum programs different HEI.

The results of central tendency measurement indicate neutral to strongly agree with responses of the participants for all the items of the questionnaire. Normality test results show that critical values of kurtosis range from These results show that critical values of kurtosis range from -1.040 (PD1) to 1.102 (PR3), whereas critical values of skewness range from -0.933 (PD4) to 0.000 (PD1). As critical values of kurtosis and skewness fall within the acceptable range, the data of the study are normally distributed. The non-parametric test using Mann-Whitney test shows the p-value accepts the hypothesis that online practicum results positively on professional development, learned from the classroom, preparation to overcome challenges, career goals, practical work experience, focus on skills, improve teamwork and collaboration, critical thinking, computer skills, communication/interpersonal, and

decision making/problem-solving. The results further show that practicum students positively responded that the online practicum resulted in professional and personal maturity, changed interest, time management, improved concept understanding, changed personal goals and aspirations, and improved passion and commitment. Moreover, reliability test results using Cronbach's coefficient alpha indicate that all critical values of Cronbach's alpha exceed 0.70, so the questionnaire of the study is reliable. The overall results depict that the online practicum program has an impact on the professional growth and skills of the students of COB, affecting their personal development, skills, and capabilities.

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