

**BUSINESS ENGLISH INTERNSHIP IN THAILAND: A CASE STUDY OF
ST THERESA INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Boonruang Chunsuvimol*¹, Ma. Arlen Forro Arellado², Ampon Dhamacharoen³

St Theresa International College, Nakhonnayok, Thailand

*Corresponding Author, Email: boonroung@stic.ac.th

ABSTRACT

This is a case study of the Business English intern students' exploration of their internship experience and their supervisors' evaluation. The respondents consisted of 25 year-four students majoring in Business English Program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, St. Theresa International College, Nakhon Nayok, Thailand, during the second semester of academic year 2022. They worked in eight different job categories, at fourteen job organizations, involving eighteen supervisors. The data were gathered from online interviews of the interns by the researchers, the interns' submitted written report, and the supervisors' evaluation of their internship performance using the juror validated questionnaire, during the three-month tenure. Purposive sampling was used as all of the trainees were included in the study. Results showed that more than half of the interns fell under the "Outstanding" and "Very Good" categories in their visit interview; more than half wrote "Outstanding" internship report; and supervisors' evaluation also fell under "Outstanding" and "Very Good" categories. Researchers observed that most of them learned new knowledge and skills in facing problems encountered in the workplace, but with the mentor's close supervision, they were able to handle the challenges encountered; the real life work experience bridged the gap between theory and practice. As to supervisors' point of view, they were satisfied with the interns' capabilities and efficiencies, although they still needed to improve further in terms of their English communication skills and computer expertise. Research results are of value to Business English Program learning management and improvement.

Keywords: internship in Thailand, Business English in higher education, supervisors' perspectives on internship

Introduction

One important aspect of learning management in higher education is to develop learner's essential and adequate competencies to live in the twenty-first century. The competencies concerned are the English language and professional competency in the international context. (Bhatia & Bremmer, 2012; Agnieszka, 2014; Puncreobutr, 2014)

Internship is a professional learning task that students can integrate and apply their knowledge, skills and experience to the real working world. (Hergert, 2011; Khalil, 2015) It gives students an opportunity for career exploration and development, and to learn new knowledge and skills. At the same time, it offers employers an opportunity to train or develop interns who potentially may become their employees in the future. (Chen et. al., 2011; Green & Farazmand, 2012)

Like other undergraduate students at St Theresa International College, Nakhon Nayok Province, Thailand, students majoring in Business English (BE) are required to take an internship of 450 hours in the second semester of their fourth year. (Arellado, 2020) During their internship, they work under the guidance of their mentors assigned to them by the organizations. Working in the real world context for the first time, they are naturally faced with challenges, difficulties or problems. One question is what these challenges and problems are and how they learn and solve them. On the other hand, their mentors are there to help or guide them, and eventually evaluate their performance. Their evaluation of the interns is also of importance as far as learning management and the study program improvements are concerned. (Dobratz, Singh, & Abbey, 2014; Maertz, Stoeberl, & Marks, 2014; Bunchutrakun et. al., 2017)

This study was anchored on the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) which provided a holistic model of the learning process and a multi-linear model of adult development, both of which were consistent with how people learn, grow, and develop. This theory emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process (Sternberg & Zhang, 2000).

Some recent research projects on BE internship elsewhere (for example, Nusantara (2019), Amelia (2018) and Ardianto (2014), aimed to investigate the difficulties or problems faced by the interns and what approach they took to solve them. Samples involved had their internship in various departments of hotels like housekeeping and front office. The result of Nusantara's study found seven problems experienced by students and four solutions that were considered capable of solving the problems. These included:

(1) time schedule, (2) background knowledge, (3) trainer problem, (4) personal problem with HRD, (5) location, (6) regulation problem, and (7) speaking skill. The problems experienced by students were classified; establishing good communication and negotiation skills, reading and asking other employees, waking up early and making a good preparation, and actively communicating with the employee.

This present research paper, however, aims to investigate the BE students' internship performance and their mentors' evaluation. Results of analysis will be of great value to improvement of the course.

Objectives of the study

The present study had the following objectives:

1. To find out the BE interns' personal exploration of their internship experience
2. To ascertain the researchers' and mentor's evaluation of students' internship

Method

This study used the qualitative method of research with an aim to find out BE interns' performance as well as their mentors' evaluation of their internship.

Respondents

The respondents in this research project consisted of 25 year-four students (2 males, 23 females) majoring in Business English Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, St. Theresa International College, Nakhon Nayok, Thailand. They were required to do the approximately 450 hours of internship in the second semester of their fourth year. They chose their own places of internship in consultation and with final approval from the College. One important requirement of their internship was their jobs had to be concerned with the use of English in communication within and/or outside the organization. Table 1 below shows details of number of respondents classified by job categories, with the number of organizations and supervisors acting as mentors to the interns.

Table 1

Students' Internship Organizations by Job Categories and Number of Respondents, Organizations and Mentors

Job categories	Number of Respondents	Number of organizations	Number of mentors
1. Media relations	6	2	4
2. Logistics	5	3	3
3. Hotel human resources	3	1	2
4. Airport	2	1	1
5. Intergovernmental organization	3	1	2
6. Food	2	2	2
7. Travel, education and translation	2	2	2
8. Brand name product	2	2	2
Total	25	14	18

Table 1 show that the respondents had their internship in 8 job categories, involving 14 organizations and 18 mentors. The number of mentors was less than that of the respondents, as two or three respondents working at the same place were under the supervision of only one mentor. For example, two respondents got their internship at an international airport and were supervised by the same mentor. The majority of places of internship were in Bangkok, capital of Thailand. Only three worked in two provinces.

Design

There were three data gathering instruments as follows:

1. Online interviews together with their mentors.

2. Questionnaires filled in by mentors evaluating students' work performance.
3. Written reports submitted by student interns after their completion of internship contract.

Their internship started in October 2021 and ended in January 2022. Due to Covid-19 pandemic which caused many health restrictions, instead of visiting them face-to-face, the researchers interviewed the respondents, individually or as a group, if they worked at the same place, together with their mentors online at their mutually convenient time during office hours. There were altogether 5 days of such online interviews in December 2021. Each interview took about 20 minutes.

Interview topics mainly covered their perspectives on internship, challenges, problems and solutions, followed by information or comments by mentors.

Information elicited from the interviews formed part of the data used in the present study.

Towards the end of their internship, each respondent gave an oral presentation of what they had done, followed by submission of their final written report. The presentation of individual or as a group of the same place of internship, took two days in January 2022. As for mentors, they were requested to evaluate their interns' performance by answering a twenty-item questionnaire, including four open-ended questions sent by email to the researchers.

It is worth noting that usually BE interns of the College are unpaid; this year, however, one respondent received a subsistence allowance during her internship.

Results

Tabular Description of Respondents' Performance

The following tables show the description of the interns' performance based on internship visit interview, submitted written reports and mentors' evaluation.

Table 2 BE Interns' Performance When Classified as to Internship Visit Interview

Performance Level	Full Marks: 50	Number of Interns	
Outstanding	41-50	10	40 %
Very Good	31-40	10	40 %
Average	21-30	5	20 %
Marginal	11-20	-	-
Unsatisfactory	1-10	-	-
Total		25	100 %

Table 2 shows that majority of the interns did well in their internship visit interviews . Ten of them (40%) received 'Outstanding' performance and an equal number of ten (40%) did 'Very Good'. The remaining five interns (20%) performed only 'Average'. Those evaluated

highly were able to express themselves very well, whereas the ones with average performance still had some difficulty in English language communication.

Table 3 BE Interns' Performance Based on Submitted Written Report

Performance Level	Full Marks: 20	Number of Interns	Performance Level
Outstanding	17-20	13	52 %
Very Good	13-16	8	32 %
Average	9-12	4	16 %
Marginal	5-8	-	-
Unsatisfactory	1-4	-	9
Total		25	100 %

Data in Table 3 reveals that thirteen interns or more than half of them (52%) wrote a high quality or 'Outstanding' report of internship submitted at the end of the course. Eight interns (32%) received 'Very Good', and the other four (16%) had an 'Average' performance.

Table 4 Supervisors' Evaluation of BE Interns' Performance

Performance Level	Full Marks: 20	Number of Intern	
Outstanding	17-20	11	44 %
Very Good	13-16	10	40 %
Average	9-12	4	16 %
Marginal	5-8	-	-
Unsatisfactory	1-4	-	-
Total		25	100 %

As shown in Table 4, most of the supervisors' evaluation of their interns falls on 'Outstanding' at 44%, followed by 'Very Good' at 40%, and 'Average' accounting for only 16%.

Qualitative Description

Researchers' Evaluation Based on Observation

1. English Communication Skills

Generally, this group of BE interns could speak well the English language. Some had good command of the language. Only a few could hardly express the message they really wanted to convey.

2. Challenges Encountered and Coping Mechanisms

Mentioned difficulties encountered especially at the start of the internship period were as follows: the mixing up of documents submitted - too much to handle for novice interns; documenting exact data, as a little mistake would bring disaster to both the company and the clients; memorizing workplace terminologies; supervisors' strictly counterchecking the veracity of the passenger's documents; stressed due to customers' complaints; systematizing records following office protocols; translating information according to context – Thai to English and vice versa; paying attention to details of assigned tasks; difficulty working on the Google sheet which resulted in missing or misplacing applicant's data; dealing with international customers due to language barriers; volumes of computer work each day, as some were assigned as research assistants - consolidating data, feedback, and comments; using apps did not learn during college years.

To cope with these challenges, interns studied office procedures and were quick to admit their mistakes; learned terminologies related to the business, self-studied to improve their speaking and computer skills, were rescued by their team, and closely supervised by their immediate supervisors and co-employees for further monitoring of work output. Many used apps to translate office terminologies and in dealing with international clients.

3. Classroom and Real Work Experiences

Most of the students were generally amazed at the difference between their theoretical classroom experiences and the real world of work.

Varied reactions were shared. A few said, they were not stressed at work, as almost everybody was very accommodating in the workplace.

Interns had varied reasons for choosing the office they would like to be trained. Some opted office work close to their heart; Others just applied for convenience, like near their home place; some related to their skill. A few remarked that no formal training on some aspects of the job was provided to them.

Others experienced very challenging jobs, like news writing and graphic presentations, which were never a part of their course curriculum; they also dealt with supervisors and managers of different companies. They tackled tough jobs, at the recognition of their supervisors. Working with a team, one intern complained that there were employees who were not that adept with their work skills; she had to edit their outputs, especially that the nature of the job was her forte, editing the script and videos.

Supervisor's Views

The following scripts were a summary of the Supervisor's Evaluation categorized as to interns' strengths and weaknesses, improvement of their work performance, ways to improve their managerial and supervising abilities, and recommendations to meet industry demand.

1. Strengths and weaknesses

Generally, interns followed instructions. They were polite, had positive attitude, excellent in time management, submitted well-prepared assignments before the deadline, fast learners, willing to learn, creative, had initiative in conceptualizing info graphics to represent

consolidated data, put a lot of effort in achieving various tasks, appreciated teamwork, independent thinker, problem solver with creative technique using technology, and had positive attitude towards work. Many had good written communication skills, good teamwork and social etiquette. Practicing multi-tasking skill helped prioritize urgent tasks at hand. Being hard workers, most of them were capable of working under pressure. One intern was spotted to do work almost perfectly - worked fast, very knowledgeable and responsible, creative and always willing to learn and try new ideas. Her primary strength was her very good command of the English language. They were a great help in checking the documents in the office.

2. Improvement of students' work performance

Overall comments were as follows: Interns needed to be appreciated even during the first two weeks of internship because of these qualities: Some were naturally entertaining in handling customers; One's audacity helped him confront problems met; They studied the intricacies of the work and followed protocols expected of an employee as supervisors closely monitored their performance. They figured out ahead office routines before jumping to work; hence, by organizing and prioritizing tasks, they managed to submit documents on time. Generally, they were passionate about work, though minor mistakes were committed; they were highly resilient and flexible in getting tasks done.

3. Improvement of managerial and supervising abilities

Those already with excellent skills in handling the intricacies of office work had built-in well-developed personalities. These coincided with one's outstanding performance and skill in controlling his emotions when things went wrong. Mostly, trainees learned from their mistakes, initiated solutions to problems encountered, and coordinated with co-workers to get things done. Some were provoked by their willingness to conquer challenges in the workplace by planning, managing assigned tasks, and beating the deadline for submission. They needed more mastery skills to cope with the demands of their job. Further, they needed to be adept in technology. Above all, higher authorities in the workplace demanded they should be armed with English communication skills along with critical thinking skills.

4. Recommendations to meet industry demand

Improved English communication skills, being creative and innovative, confidence both in speaking and in writing, along with IT literacy, were essential in any workplace; hence, basically required. It had become a life skill, an asset in the job market. Multi-tasking, with the administrators' hands-on monitoring, collaboration with co-employees already expert in the protocols of the system, extra careful in performing sensitive tasks, and honesty in telling the supervisors difficulties encountered were appreciated by the management. One student with outstanding performance was pointed out by the Supervisor: "To have a great student like her is the best thing I could ever ask. I really appreciate students eager to learn and improve them".

Discussion

Data analysis has shown that, based on different evaluation criteria, the performance of most of the interns were highly rated by both supervisors and the researchers. They learned and tried to carry out the work assigned to them, and with guidance or advice from their supervisors; they were able to get through. On the other hand, some interns were faced with problems beyond their knowledge or ability as they had not studied such courses before like some computer programs or accounting. Most interns were happy with the challenges and work experience, and likewise, most supervisors had a high opinion of their interns.

Conclusion

The capstone involvement in the workplace bridges academia to practice. Neophytes' knowledge in the real world of work set them ready to face the realities of the tasks that lie ahead. Using their initiatives, the interns are humbled by the insights from their supervisors. Many worked without counting the cost. Most of them were fast learners, adept at technology so they worked fast, did things while underway to mastering their respective skills. Difficult tasks for them were a challenge. They were open to suggestions, sensitive to the needs of overworked employees who needed a helping hand. Some supervisors were satisfied with their interns to the extent that they wanted to hire them in the future. As a matter of fact, one intern was immediately hired at the same place right after internship, and a few others got their employment related to their internship training, such as logistics, media relations, but in another company. All of these points to the fact that a few years of study using English as the medium of instruction can lead to success to a certain extent in internship as evidenced by supervisors and the researchers' evaluation. That, in turn, leads to success of employment after their internship. On the other hand, results of the present study showing that there were some interns with just 'Average' will be of value to the improvement of Program learning management.

Recommendations

The present study may be the first attempt to analyze BE internship performance from the perspectives of supervisors and the researchers. Admittedly it has limitations, and still a wide range of topics or questions are open for investigation. Further research can be done and some are recommended here. For example, to what extent do interns prepare themselves prior to their actual internship, and how?

Another topic that may warrant further study is to analyze data collected from similar respondents in other Thai universities to see whether it will yield the same result. As far as teaching of English is concerned, there should be an in depth analysis of relationship of interns' English language learning behavior and their English courses performance, the results of which can help enhance their English proficiency and prepare them more readily for internship.

References

- Agnieszka, D. (2014). Business English in The Eyes of Economics and Management Students at The University of Bialystok. *Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric*. 38(51): 83-102.
- Amelia, R. (2018). *The difficulties faced by Business English apprentices in charge at front office department* [undergraduate thesis]. University of Muhammadiyah Malang.

- Ardianto, Y. (2014). *The difficulties in doing apprenticeship at housekeeping department in hotels faced by Business English students of English Department at University of Muhammadiyah Malang* [undergraduate thesis]. University of Muhammadiyah Malang.
- Arellado, M. A. F. (2020). The Competencies of Business English for Communications Graduates According to the Requirements by Companies in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, Thailand. *Elementary Education Online*. 19(4): 8162-8173.
- Bhatia, V. K. & Bremmer, S. (2012). English for Business Communication. *Language Teaching*. 45(4): 410-445.
- Bunchutrakun, C., Lieungnapar, A., Aeka, A., Akkarathankul, P. (2017). Different Views from Different Positions Toward the Preferable Qualifications of Business English Graduates. *International Journal of Management and Applied Science*. 3(10): 17-21.
- Chen, C., Hu, J., Wang, C., Chen, C. (2011). A Study of The Effects of Internship Experiences on The Behavioural Intentions of College Students Majoring in Leisure Management in Taiwan. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education*. 10(2): 61-73.
- Dobratz, C. L., Singh, R. P., & Abbey, A. (2014). Using Formal Internships to Improve Entrepreneurship Education Programs. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Education: Arden*. 17(2): 62-76.
- Green, R. D., & Farazmand, F. A. (2012). Experiential Learning: The Internship and Live-Case Study Relationship. *Business Education & Accreditation*. 4(1): 13-23.
- Hergert, M. (2011). Student Perceptions of the Internships in Business Education. *American Journal of Business Education*. 2(8): 9-14.
- Khalil, O. E. M. (2015). Students' Experiences with the Business Internship Program at Kuwait University. *The International Journal of Management Education*. 13(2015): 202-217.
- Maertz, C., Stoeberl, P., & Marks, J. (2014). Building Successful Internships: Lessons from the Research for Interns, Schools, and Employers. *Career Development International*. 19(1): 123-142.
- Nusantara, D. Sukma Fitria. (2019). *The problems faced by Business English students at the internship program* [undergraduate thesis]. University of Muhammadiyah Malang.
- Puncreobutr, V. (2014). Professional and Cross-cultural Competences of Thai Graduates to Work in ASEAN Context. *Journal of Community Development and Life Quality*. 2(3): 225-232.

Sternberg, R. J., & Zhang, L. F. (eds.). (2000). *Perspectives on cognitive, learning, and thinking styles*. Lawrence Erlbaum.