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Applying Action-Oriented Learning Approach on Campus Practicum

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discuss how Action-Oriented Learning (AOL) approach could be applied on campus practicum of Hotel Management Major in University. The practicum was designed to meet the needs of hotel industry by following the principles of AOL. This study helps the lecturers to understand the steps of helping students to polish their service skills and develop service abilities in groups. Firstly, through literature review to identify prompt indicators applied by AOL. Secondly, the indicators are summarized as "Lecturers' Actions", "Practicum and Members Arrangements" and "Expected Results of Students" after interviews with experts. Research results applied AOL on campus practicum of the hotel management major of NKUHT, which provides a reference of practical teaching for the hospitality education.

Keywords: On-campus practicum; Action-oriented learning; Training hotel; Hospitality education

General Background and Motivation

The implementation of technical and vocational education provide students chances to meet the needs of their individual employment after graduation in the process of learning, which is beneficial to the development of personal growth and livelihood. A comprehensive technical and vocational education even help to raise the national competitiveness [1]. Hospitality education is an important ring of technical and vocational education. Since National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism (NKUHT) was established in 1995, hospitality education has gradually considered more important in Taiwan. Nowadays, with the development of tourism industry and the rise of labor power demand, the hospitality education not only plays an important role in personnel training, but gradually becomes the most major subjects in technical an vocational education.

For hospitality related majors, it is an important mission to train students with practical abilities which help them to meet the future job standards. However, the tourism industry is a highly service-oriented industry, so the employees must prepare professional service skills in order to meet various consumers' satisfactions. For the reasons above, students of hotel management major who eager to have bright future in the industry, should also develop practical hotel operation skills while learning theory in the campus. The most effective way to develop practical skills is through repeating practice, and then the theory and practical knowledge would interact to reach the goal of "Learning by Doing" [2]. Nevertheless, even with the idea of repeating practice, the lack of practical environment and integrated program situation would let the direction of practice differ from reality, and so to affect students to develop the abilities would use in the future.

Therefore, the plan of on-campus practicum and the support of "Training hotel" in the campus provide optimal solution for students major in hotel management to develop practical skills.

The main purpose of on-campus practicum is to provide students with similar situation to industry, so to create "The world of work" for them [3], the students would experience real service of workplace during school time and realize the true meaning of hospitality service during operation. Thus, students would be able to check what they have learned from classes. The feedback from the guests would help

the students understand what they are lack of, and further would motivate themselves to learn more. On-campus practicum for hotel management major students does have its practical value, and it is filled with educational meaning of being taught and inspired.

However, in the field of hospitality education, if the proper equipment and space is lacked, it would be unfortunate that practical operation practicum will lead to merely formality. Therefore, this study is attempting to apply Action-Oriented Learning (AOL) approach with "training hotel" to plan the on-campus practicum of hotel management major in NKUHT, so that students could learn from the environment of the world of work that arranged by the lecturers. In that case they are actually learning by doing, in the mean time learning how to learn as well. While applying AOL, it not only trains students' reactions on the instant when facing real cases, but also helps students to review what they have learned, understand what they are lack of for future study motivation.

Action-Oriented Learning

Action-oriented Learning (AOL) is a kind of approach that students lead by lecturers to learn in a team in order to achieve common goal in practical situations. It places importance on students' active learning and the ability of reflection. AOL involves both Action Learning (AL) and Service Learning (SL), which means active learning, experiential learning and the importance of reflection [4]. Action Learning (AL) is advocated by Reg Revans in 1940s, referring to the process which involves working on real challenges, using the knowledge and skills of a small group of people combined with questioning spiritto re-interpret known and familiar concepts and to generate new ideas [5]. Service

Learning (SL) is originated from the United States, initially applied to community service, and later because of its combination of academic programs, service supported by the government and advocated by schools, it gradually extended to all around the world [6].

Action learning (AL)

Action Learning (AL) involves working on real problems, focusing on learning and actually implementing solutions. It is a form of learning by doing [7]. It produces new solutions to persistent problems without anyone telling you what to do as Bligh says [5]. Based on Revans [8], learning comes about experience, people learned how to face new things from searching similar situations in mind. In the process of action learning, members working and learning together as a team, holding regularly meetings so that they could reflect on issues faced, and to balance the conflict between job and academic knowledge [9]. In addition, AL emphasizes members on completing task under warm and harmonious atmosphere, and then a four to eight members team could enhance creativity and diversity [10]. When operating, lecturers should not over-dominate members, but rather help establish standards, so that members can discuss and work by themselves. Lecturers should also help members to learn how to learn.

During Action Learning process, members being open to share ideas and experience learning in the actual workplace [11]. Team members could use their own expertise to effectively help each other. Therefore, AL is considered effective learning model to train job related leadership. Members could apply the experience gained to future similar situations [12]. As a result, this study is based on the role of lecturers, composition of team members, learning environment, and so on, which would be summarized as establishing learning-related program, simulating practical working environment and forming diverse team members [8,10,11].

Service learning (SL)

Service Learning (SL) is originated from the United States' community service programs, which aimed at combining students' social development and community needs. SL would have students acquire knowledge and principles in class and convert into the ability to solve social issues [6]. It means that Service Learning is not simply just community service, also includes the reflection to problems and solutions. Feng's [13] study noted that service learning is different from community service due to the fact that links with academic mission. Students must combine their learning objectives with service work, so that SL would deeper effect to learning in class. Service learning is an efficient way of learning, to enhance students' professional competence, academic performance, writing skills, critical thinking skills and understanding of course content [14,15].

Service learning is a holistic education, promoting one's professional growth, and enhancing ability to explore career development [16]. Therefore, Service Learning is suitable for community service, and it could also be applied to any proper courses. The learning process could promote students self-interpersonal relationship and cultivate the responsibility to surrounding environment [17]. Feng's [16] another study points out that to boost service shall set up a dedicated research unit and a service office. Service learning office must provide students with relevant training to improve service learning effectiveness. Therefore, this study considered training arranging, relationships promoting, career explore abilities developing and dedicated office setting as very important elements [13-17].

Action-oriented learning dimensions

The study combines the elements of Action Learning (AL) and Service Learning (SL), through interviews with academic experts who are teaching in the hospitality education for 15 to 20 years, and were invited to talk about the relevance and validity of this study. After interviews, we discovered these summaries in three dimensions, which are "Lecturers' actions", "Program and Members Arrangements" and "Expected Results of Students" (Table 1).

The comparison between traditional teaching and action-oriented learning

Chen [18] while designing library information utilization course, traditional teaching and problem-oriented learning are compared with these nine elements, "teaching objectives", "course design", "course method" , "lecturers' role", "student numbers", "relevant support", "learning outcomes", "advantage" and "disadvantage" in the study of "Problem Oriented Learning". This study try to use "teaching objectives", "teaching situation", "student numbers", "lecturers' role", "practicum advantage", and "practicum disadvantage "to be the elements to compare while teaching in traditional and Action-Oriented Learning modes of campus internship program.

Teaching objectives

- Traditional mode make students role play to pretend they are in the hotel and facing guests, so to think the cases that might happen in the real industry, and generate solution when encountering obstacles in the future.

AOL Dimensions	Referred Elements		Reference
Lecturers' Actions	(1)	Provide related training	Fong [16]
	(2)	Establish learning procedure	Chiu [20]
	(3)	Simulate practical working environment	Zuber-Skerritt [11] Chiu [20]
Practicum and Members Arrangements	(1)	Combined with teaching objective	Fong [13] Chiu [20]
	(2)	Compose diverse team members	Ting [10]
	(3)	Set up service learning office	Fong [16]
Expected Results of Students	(1)	Improve interpersonal relations	Schaffer [14] Coffey and Lavery [15] Chiu [20] Marquardt [12]
	(2)	Develop abilities to explore future career	Revans [8] Feng [16] Marquardt [12]

Table 1: AOL dimensions in teaching activities.

- AOL mode use training hotel to make students understand the actual case happened in the industry, and learn to face guests directly for better service skill.

Teaching situation

- Under the traditional mode, lecturers or students design the similar situation to hotel industry, students split in groups to do role-play as service staffs and guests, and try to solve problems they have created.

- With AOL mode, students are staffs serving in training hotel, provide check-in, check-out, breakfast, bell and concierge service, answering calls for 24 hours a day while senior students are the supervisors leading the team to meet guests' satisfactions.

Student numbers

- Traditional teaching considers class as a unit for lecturer to control. In NKUHT, there are about 50 students in one class.

- With AOL, students split in teams. In the hotel management major of NKUHT, there are about 400 to 450 students taking the practicum in total.

Lecturers' role

- In the traditional mode of teaching, lecturers control the course content, schedule, situational setting and other projects.

- With AOL, lecturers are assistants, setting course rules, observing students responding guests, and giving practical advice.

Practicum advantage

- In traditional teaching, the whole class is taught in the same time. Lecturers could easily share ideas with students and could grade students according to their individual performance.

- With AOL, students face guests directly and understand guests' needs, and enhance service ability by satisfying guests. Students would be in teams to complete tasks together, and to experience team spirit.

Practicum disadvantage

- In traditional teaching, most situations are simulated, and it is still far from real. Students have few opportunities to practice. When facing guests directly in the future, that is another story.

- With AOL, since the practicum is taught in practical, lecturers care not only about students' performance, but paying attention to guests' reaction. There are about 400 to 450 students, and due to its twenty-four hour operation, lecturers could not grade students in detail. The grading could only refer to service hour. Students might escape from the learning opportunities, and the score might not be completely fair.

Apply Action-Oriented Learning on Campus Practicum

"On-campus Practicum" is a required course of hotel management major in NKUHT, to enable the course of meeting practical teaching objectives, AOL is applied to practicum content. "Course founding reasons and objectives" and "The application of action-oriented learning on campus practicum" is discussed as followed.

Course founding reasons and objectives

Hotel Management Major of NKUHT is the first hotel management major in Taiwan. "Training hotel" and "on-campus practicum" had been set up since the founding of department in 1995.Course objectives are for students to transit service concept into service abilities. Training hotel enables students to understand hotel operation and experience delicate service [19]. In addition, students are expected to practice hospitality services, and experience workplace in real industrial area.

"On-campus Practicum" of NKUHT hotel management major is an integrated course. Students take the courses of hotel management, hospitality management, front office operation, housekeeping operation, hotel marketing management, service management, hotel safety and sanitation management, hotel IT system, hotel customer complaints handling, concierge operation to learn academic knowledge and practical skills to experience service spirit [20].

For better use of "training hotel" space, while making "on-campus practicum "course more practical, The authors of this study were thinking how to plan the practicum base on its twenty-four-hour operation to enable students to fit into a more practical situation.

From Action Learning (AL) and Service Learning (SL) elements, practical operation has being the main idea of program, emphasizing on "Learning by doing", fits with the course spirit of "on-campus practicum" of hotel management major. Thus, this study applied action-oriented learning (AOL) to on campus practicum of NKUHT hotel management major.

Application of action-oriented learning on campus practicum

This study attempts to apply action-oriented learning to on-campus practicum of hotel management major in NKUHT. "Teacher Action", "Practicum and members arrangements" and "Expected results of students" will be discussed below,

Lecturers' action dimension

- ***Provide related training:*** By considering the training hotel in NKUHT as a stage, students played the role of service staffs to practice what they have learned. In the process, students are learning in team but from different class and grade. Besides, "Hotel Introduction" and "Bed making practice" course will also be added to help students to enhance professional skills.

- ***Establish learning procedure:*** Due to the big numbers of student in "on-campus practicum", lecturers should set up regulations for them. Rules include compliment and punishment standards and which would be reviewed at the end of each semester to see if adjustments need to be applied. Practicum regulations are:

a) On-campus practicum regulations, including grading , on and off duty rules

b) Appearance code, showing the proper uniform of each duty to the students.

- ***Simulate practical working environment***

a) For offering better services, a hotel is normally divided into "Front of the house" and "Back of the house" divisions in the real world. In order to simulate on-campus practicum to be "The world of work", front of the house and back of the house is also applied to training hotel.

b) Whereas front of the house including suite, twin and single rooms; back of the house includes linen, pantry room, room service area, and training hotel office.

c) In summary, the "on-campus practicum" applied with AOL could achieve "Lecturers' Action" dimension by providing related

training, establishing learning procedure, and simulating practical working environment.

Practicum and members arrangements

- **Combined with teaching objective:** The course objective of "On-campus Practicum" is that students could learn service concept and convert into their service abilities. Therefore, students have the opportunities to learn how to provider services, and experience workplace in "training hotel." Also, students are expected to have the abilities to work in the industry before graduating.

- **Compose diverse team members:** The students of "on-campus practicum" were from different grades and different classes. In order to simulate real hotel work pattern, students were teamed up in four to five members to achieve better learning results. Team members must work well together, so they could cover one another for better services.

- **Set up service learning office:** For smoothly running the "on-campus practicum", a "training hotel" office should be set up, and would have one lecturer in charge and at least one teaching assistant to help students with course affairs. Students could obtain group list, job assignment, scheduling, reservation guests list, visiting guests list from the office.

In summary, the "on-campus practicum" applied with AOL could achieve "Practicum and members arrangement" dimension by combining with teaching objective, composing diverse team members, and setting up a service-learning office.

Expected results of students

- **Improve interpersonal relations:** Since the "on-campus practicum" service team is composed of diverse groups, team members would have the opportunities to know seniors and underclassmen from the same department, so that students could expand interpersonal networks in school and after graduation.

- **Develop abilities to explore future career:** When participating in "on-campus practicum", students were assigned to duties such as reception, housekeeping, public area cleaning, or back office affairs according to one's capability. Thus, students would have the opportunities to experience all kinds of work while in internship.

In summary, applying AOL to "on-campus practicum" could achieve "Expected results of Students" dimension by enhancing interpersonal relationship, and developing ability to cultivate career abilities.

Questions and Discussion of Applying Action-Oriented Learning

In order to make the practicum smoothly, lecturers should notice their roles and obstacles to be overcome. Discussions are followed as below,

Lecturers' role and precautions

When applying AOL to "on-campus practicum", lecturers need to teach and also manage on-site service, and it would be slightly different than regular teaching. On one hand, lecturers should care about students' performance; on the other hand, lecturers still need to pay attention on guests' demand. In addition, students from different grades provide services at the same time. Thus, lecturers' role is extremely important which would be distinguished into "Before teaching", "During teaching" and "After teaching". These three phases are explained as follows,

Before teaching

- Lecturers should set up teaching objectives, course syllabus and content according to different grades of students and their learning progress.

- Lecturers should know total student numbers of each semester to divide them into teams. Giving the tasks as "duty manager", "shift supervisor"," breakfast preparing service" and "on-site duties".

- Lecturers should have class regulations, including clothing, appearance, on and off duty rules, equipment using regulations and etc.

- Lecturers should explain class pattern before students participating in service learning on the basis of class. (Complete in the first week of each semester)

- Lecturers should have meetings with duty managers and shift supervisors to fully explain tasks. (Complete in the first week of each semester)

- Lecturers should have teaching assistant to prepare for a variety of service, such as amenities, mineral water, ingredients for breakfast, welcome fruit, etc. (Weekly).

During teaching

- Lecturers should dress formally to be a model for students.

- Lecturers should have meetings with duty managers regularly, and keep in contact.

- Lecturers should have meetings with shift supervisors regularly, to discover and solve problems.

- Lecturers should often visit training facility, to observe students' performance and to encourage them.

- Lecturers should pay attention to guests and things at training area in order to maintain the best condition of service.

- Lecturers should interact with guests to set up examples for students.

After teaching

- Lecturers should help students to solve problems about the practicum.

- Lecturers should help students with future career guidance.

- Lecturers should assess course of each semester, to see whether there is any adjustment should be made for next semester.

- Lecturers should summarize total hours of students' training, to assess students' final grade (Complete in the last week of each semester).

Challenges of applying action-oriented learning

Challenges of implementing cross-class practice integrated practicum: The operation value of hotel industry is to meet guests' accommodation-related satisfactions, featuring twenty-four-hour operation to meet a variety of needs, and no matter when of the travelers' visit, the service should maintain consistency in order to have great reputation. However, these things had been taken for granted in the industry, it becomes highly difficult when transited to education. Therefore, to minimize the gap between industry and education, the "on-campus practicum" should still be based on the things discussed above to reach teaching effectiveness.

Therefore, the service offered by students should be consistent and nonstop for 24 hours, thus, we should firstly break the barriers of classes and grades, set the schedule rotation system, consider the ability of team members in order to cover each other, and then to have complete regulations for smooth operation.

- **Challenges of lecturers' industrial knowledge:** The "on-campus practicum "try to cultivate students to be fond of the industry in the future. Therefore, lecturers shall have industrial experience. Besides industrial service experience and management capability, lecturers should be able to teach industrial skills, but to catch course-related issues.

- **Challenges of department co-worker support:** The "on-campus practicum" program helps the students to learn practical operation skills as well as to provide services to meet the guests' needs, students experience the spirit of "learning by doing", so it is inevitable that students make mistakes. The appropriate approach is to encourage students to seize the opportunity to polish service skills. Making mistakes is considered as a good opportunity to make oneself better, therefore the co-workers from the same department should do the same way to strengthen students' confidence.

Conclusion and Suggestion

"On-campus practicum" has been wildly set up in recent years in hospitality education. For technical and vocational universities that value theory and practical, the "on-campus practicum" is the best way to train students' operation abilities. Students learn theories in classrooms, and polish skills in practicum.

The theory relies on lecturers' teaching; meanwhile, the skills require students to practice repeatedly, both of them are indispensable. Therefore, it has become an important issue on how to integrate lecturers' teaching with training hotel into students' service learning training mode. This study takes "on-campus practicum" of NKUHT Hotel Management Major for example, based on hospitality education theory" learning by doing," combined with "training hotel." This study applies AOL to plan the "on-campus practicum" and discusses lecturers' role and challenges may encounter in order to make the course meet the objectives.

Action-Oriented Learning is the concept of hospitality education emphasized on "learning by doing". With lecturers' guidance, students offer services in practice, experience working procedure, and would seamless link with future career. Therefore, AOL is very suitable for "on-campus practicum" but has not been wildly used in the domestic hospitality education. To find out the reason, it may be because the complexity on operation of the course. This study expresses practical experience in implementing educational reference for hospitality. If the challenges could be overcome, it is believed that AOL could provide lecturers a proper way to design practicums that close to practical.

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