www.unibulletin.com
UNIVERSITEPARK BULTEN | BULLETIN
ISSN 2147-351X | e-ISSN 2564-8039
Copyright © 2022| ÜNİVERSİTEPARK

UNIVERSITEPARK bülten bulletin

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Students' Authentic Experiences of On-the-job Training Programs

Chi Hong Nguyen · Vi Thanh Tran Thach

Received April 26, 2022
Accepted July 7, 2022

CORRESPONDENCE
Chi Hong Nguyen
chinh6@fe.edu.vn
English Department, FPT University, Vietnam.

AUTHOR DETAILS
Additional information about the authors is available at the end of the article.

To cite this article: *Nguyen, C. H., & Thach, V. T. T. (2022). Students' Authentic Experiences of On-the-job Training Programs. Üniversitepark Bülten, 11(1): 7-23.*

OPEN ACCESS

Copyright © 2022 by the author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC-BY-4.0), where it is permissible to download and share the work provided it is properly cited.

ABSTRACT

Background/purpose – While current research has focused on the potentials and limitations of on-the-job-training (OJT) programs from higher education administrators, as well as employers' and teachers' perspectives, this study takes those of students' on board. It extends the conventional conceptualization of students' satisfaction of OJT as mere psychology.

Materials/methods – By using Wilt et al.'s (2019) concept of (in)authenticity, this study employed in-depth interviews with 18 students at a private university in Vietnam.

Results – The study found that students' authentic experiences of OJT comprise four interrelated elements; students' self-esteem and confidence, psychological changes, collegiality, and realization of possibilities and opportunities that arise from their failure.

Conclusion – This article points out that students authentically experience this program as part of their lives rather than separate entities that are often marked in OJT evaluative frameworks. The way they find their OJT experiences authentic goes beyond their awareness of learning that is forged by OJT evaluative frameworks or supervisors' instructions to how they make sense of their present experiences in relation to their interactions with others in the workplace to fulfill their future aspirations for work and life.

Keywords – Authenticity, on-the-job training (OJT), higher education, authentic experiences, learning, students' confidence, students' psychology.

To link to this article– https://dx.doi.org/10.22521/unibulletin.2022.111.1

1. INTRODUCTION

Laboratory Technology is an applied science-based program of academic study which trains students to acquire the diverse techniques and knowledge needed to operate within various types of laboratories in industry, academia, government, and also private research institutions (Delgado Community College, n.d.; University of Cape Coast, n.d.).

This article explores FPT University students' experiences of on-the-job-training (OJT) programs. This private university in Vietnam, which is owned by the FPT Corporation, has five campuses in the cities of Ha Noi, Da Nang, Binh Dinh, Ho Chi Minh City, and Can Tho. It offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in the areas of information technology, automotive engineering, business, and languages. Students study approximately 40 courses within nine semesters. In the sixth semester, they must take an OJT program at a business that has relations with the university. The purposes of these OJT programs are to allow students to be exposed to real working environments where they can learn and understand what has been theoretically taught at university by doing real work.

OJT normally involves learning processes that happen through work. The researcher questioned how students experience their learning and how they find their experiences useful and true to what they aspire to be. Students taking OJT programs are policy-doers whose experiences need to be voiced. In fact, there has been a growing body of research in higher education that focuses on exploring the impacts of OJT on students. Most studies are concentrated in the fields of learning processes (e.g., Hascher et al., 2004), student-teacher attributes (e.g., Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005), learning outcomes (e.g., Jamil et al., 2013; Toohey et al., 1996), authentic experience (e.g., Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Hughes, 1998), administration (e.g., Billett et al., 2016; Coiacetto, 2004), and employer's perspectives (e.g., Bernardo et al., 2014). These studies have a separate focus on exploring the benefits that OJT programs offer students, evaluation frameworks created by universities, limitations that these programs can pose to students' expectations of enhancing life skills and knowledge, as well as preparation and implementation processes. The findings of these studies shed light on how OJT programs are actually conducted and challenged. They focus on factors that contribute to successful OJT, and students' perceptions and experiences that can help administrators improve OJT programs. However, they do not really place a strong focus on exploring how students experience their industry-based training programs that truly reflect who they are and what they want to become.

By taking students' perspectives on their experiences of OJT programs, this study aims to add nuance to this space by arguing that students experience both inauthentic experiences (when they do not find the experience true to themselves) and authentic experiences (where they find the experience true and valid to their expectations). This paper argues that students' (in)authentic experiences are encountered and reformed through their engagement with institutional and sociocultural norms and people at various domains of life. (In)authentic experiences are felt more than just a mere accumulation of experiences, chances, or struggles. They are the result of students' negotiations of their interactions with others in various social milieus.

Based on Wilt et al.'s (2019) conceptual framework, the researcher arrived at the following research questions to guide the study:

1. How confident are students with their ability to learn through their OJT programs?
2. Have students experienced psychological changes during their OJT programs? If not, why not? If so, what brought about these changes?
3. How do students feel about their learning experiences during their OJT programs? What do they think they learned or not learned as a result?
4. How have students social and professional relationships been improved or downgraded during their OJT programs?
5. How have students psychologically adapted to their OJT programs?

This set of five research questions is aimed to unpack the (in)authentic experiences that students encounter through their personal temperaments and engagement in the world of work where their learning processes occur.

This study intersects with the bodies of research on students' learning processes, students' experiences, as well as industries' and universities' evaluative frameworks. It extends the concept of students' (in)authentic experiences that have already been explored in extant research (e.g., Ducan et al., 2011; Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Hughes, 1998; Pulakos et al., 2015; Trianasari & Rahmawati, 2021; Wood, 2004) by arguing that these experiences are constituted by students' personalities and aspirations to find values that are true to themselves. It does so by raising students' voices in framing evaluative models that, to date, have only included employers' and institutions' perspectives.

Another contribution that the current study aims to make is to extend Wilt et al.'s (2019) conceptual model of authentic experiences. According to Wilt et al. (2019), students' psychology, which matters in terms of how they can shape and reshape their authentic experiences, consists of self-esteem, positive psychological conditions, improvement in social and professional relationships, positive emotions and feelings, as well as positive psychological adaptations. Authentic experiences can be equated with optimism and positive attitudes, i.e., the more students feel positive psychologically, the more meaningful and true their OJT program can be perceived by them. This point has been somewhat confirmed in several studies (e.g., Billet et al., 2016; Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Wood, 2004); however, our psychology manifests through our actions. This means that how students find their OJT programs, as being authentic or inauthentic, can only be observed and explored through examining how they feel and what they have actually done. What they have done makes sense through their encounters with their professional and social milieus. Extending the conceptual model of psychological authenticity to lived experiences can be seen as the next step to be followed in order to challenge the conventional theorization of authenticity as mere psychology.

In addition, most current studies (e.g., Billett et al., 2016; Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Hascher et al., 2004; Jamil et al., 2013; Wood, 2004) consider that students' learning processes happen under institutional directives through fixed evaluative frameworks and scoring boards. Instead, the current study argues that students' experiences of OJT programs are diverse, unfixed, and based on emotion. This argument is vital, as students should be seen as embodied subjects of any academic modules, rather than disembodied subjects of administration. Emotionality, as this paper argues, is a felt dimension that needs to be further explored, as it is the nature of humans that influences how we can establish what we do as being true to ourselves, and our dignity and values, or not as the case may be.

Finally, there seems to be a tendency in recent research that conceptualizes OJT students' experiences in separate domains of their learning mechanisms (e.g., Bernardo et al., 2014; Jamil et al., 2013; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Toohey et al., 1996). The current study theorizes their experiences as interrelated lived experiences of their sharing the academic world and tasks with others whom they find important to their social world. In this sense, a student's academic world is always intersected with their social milieu, where they can also learn from others. Learning, as such, cannot be simply capsulated in the OJT program per se, but it is extended to a wider range of interactions with others. This theorization challenges the conventional models of evaluation that limit students' capacities in learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 (In)authenticity in OJT programs

According to Varga and Guignon (2020), the concept of "authenticity" has evolved from sincerity, honesty in following social and individual expectations as well as social ethos, to autonomy, one's self-governing capacity and autonomy to make decisions. It has been then referred to the self that can rationally distinguish what is central and what is peripheral to one's dignity and values. Heidegger (1962) considered authenticity as a mode of being, in which we step back from how we follow social norms to make sense of what we do. In psychology, Newman (2019) suggested three kinds of authenticity: historical, categorical, and values. Historical authenticity refers to one's evaluation of the history or origin of objects through physical connections that are established by one's observations of outside criteria. Categorical authenticity stems from one's internal judgment of how a phenomenon or an object is true to its type or genre. Values authenticity assesses the consistency between the outside expressions of a phenomenon or an object and its internal states.

These various definitions enable the researcher to conceptualize authenticity as one's experiences that are formed through engagement with the world, which is based on a self-awareness of who they are and what they can do. This self-esteem influences their psychological conditions and emotions in either a negative or positive way. In the process of making sense of their experiences in engaging with the world, one may have to adapt their states of mind and psychology in order to achieve what they want to do and who they want to become. When they fail to follow one or some of these processes, they encounter inauthentic experiences.

This conceptualization is in line with Wilt et al.'s (2019) framework of authentic experiences in OJT. Accordingly, being authentic is based on the components of self-esteem, psychological well-being, positive feelings and emotions, relationship quality, and positive psychological adaptation. In the current study, this theoretical framing is used because the researcher believes that how students experience OJT programs is dependent upon their personality, psychology, and emotionality that are contributed to according to their interactions with others. This belief has, in some sense, been reflected in previous research as well.

Wilt et al. (2019) specified that self-esteem refers to students' levels of confidence in their ability to learn through OJT programs. During such training, they expect to maintain stable psychological conditions that can enhance their learning processes. Such a state of mind is then either downgraded or improved upon based on their engagement in tasks with student peers from the OJT program, work peers, supervisors, and even their lecturers or instructors. If their confidence levels are maintained and their psychological well-being is

reached, they can realize positive emotions towards their practicum training. These positive feelings enable students to improve the quality of their relationships with others at work, which is one of the most important conditions for them to authentically experience the values of practicum training. Authentic experiences of such values help contribute to their willingness to change, and to redirect and adapt their positive readiness to complete the tasks assigned to them during the OJT programs. In this way, their learning outcomes can be met. In other words, these concepts have a causal relationship, with each enabling the others to happen so that students can find that their OJT experiences truly reflect who they are and what they expect to achieve. However, should one, some, or all of these processes fail, they will realize an inauthentic experience.

2.2 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is often defined as students' belief and confidence in their own abilities and values (e.g., Grant-Smith, 2017; Jackson, 2014; Trianasari & Rahmawati, 2021; Wilt et al., 2019). Jackson (2014) analyzed survey data from 131 undergraduates studying diverse disciplines at an Australian higher education institution to explore the impacts of OJT design and content on student employability skills. The study backed the importance of work-integrated learning (WIL) programs in students' skill acquisition. It outlined the characteristics of undergraduate courses which effectively prepare and support students in their WIL experience. This also means that students' self-esteem can be established and enhanced through a clear and planned OJT program, and with courses that can meet the desired learning outcomes set by the university.

In terms of students' own self-esteem development, the work by Grant-Smith et al. (2017) showed that most participants in their study responded that the best thing when undertaking a WIL placement is the opportunity to practice, and to gain real-world experience and professional development. This point was similar to that mentioned in Jackson's earlier study (2014). Accordingly, OJT training, coaching, and mentoring are particularly beneficial to students of all disciplines, where they are given the opportunity to study in a real-world setting where they can put their newly acquired knowledge and skills into practice.

Another avenue for students to obtain authentic experiences is through their self-belief in their own capacity to achieve the work outcomes they are expected to achieve. Coiacetto (2004) proposed a formal, structured framework for work placement whose purpose was to attain more than one goal. These goals include promoting practice by placing student trainees on a course aimed at creating a professional collegial culture in order to improve their self-belief. Bernardo et al. (2014) found that employers continuously look for graduates who can communicate well in both writing as well as orally. To address the major issues and requirements posed by today's industries, students must further improve upon and enhance their communication skills and confidence. They can do so by taking part in additional verbal communication activities that should be perceived just another teaching and learning activity. Bernardo et al. (2014) also suggested that the more confidently that students can communicate, the more confident they will be in an OJT program, and thereby the more likely they will be to achieve better learning outcomes. Further, Grubb and Lazerson (2005) showed that students' confidence in giving critical feedback on OJT programs can be seen as a component of their self-esteem.

However, these studies seem to neglect the students' confidence in what they can do to achieve what they want to learn. The researcher therefore questions to what extent students

develop self-esteem, and how self-awareness of their capabilities can help or impede them in achieving what they want out of their OJT learning.

2.3 Psychological well-being and emotions

Hascher et al. (2004) found that student teachers, at the start of the practicum, are often at the beginning of a new life, complete with all its struggles and opportunities. A well-maintained psychological condition is therefore necessary for them to thrive within the new context. Similarly, Coiacetto (2004), Hascher et al. (2004), and Wilt et al. (2019) have consistently shown that OJT participation with high-self-esteem helps in one's preparation to face the upcoming challenges related to the type and quality of work to be expected, as well as in dealing with professional relationships. Hascher et al. (2004) inferred that success and development in becoming a teacher are associated with having a good experience as student teachers.

However, anxiety about work pressures and schedules is commonplace among those who have been forced to relocate to new areas. Here it can be inferred that a student's geographical location compared to their home town matters to them experiencing anxiety or feeling worried; hence, the author aims to combine Wilt et al.'s (2019) concept of psychological well-being with feelings and emotions. Limited personal finances and paid work commitments are considered to impact the most on OJT placements. For example, Ducan et al. (2011) and Grant-Smith et al. (2017) stated that students may encounter financial stress as a result of undertaking unpaid work during WIL programs. They reported that although students may work as much or as hard as the employees, they do not receive any salary or financial incentive. They also have to purchase appropriate work clothing, food, and cover their own transportation costs. As such, these kinds of problems may make some feel that their OJT programs are inauthentic – as in not true to what they expected. However, Trianasari and Rahmawati (2021) found that OJT students may employ direct action and internalizing strategies in order to cope with stress; whilst empowerment can be seen as one way for OJT managers and supervisors to help decrease students' stress levels.

2.4 Relationship quality

The quality of collegiality that students can realize from their practicums is mentioned sporadically in the extant body of research. For example, Hughes (1998) stated that practicum programs are aimed at enabling students to gain authentic experience of work and workplace learning. Students, in this sense, are supposed to establish trust with their employers and co-workers. The current study acknowledges that trust is significant, but it is also a two-way process in which students need to establish trust with their supervisors and peers/colleagues, whilst at the same time these same people also need to establish trust with the practicum students.

Coiacetto (2004) and Trianasari and Rahmawati (2021) assessed the influence of empowerment on promoting students' energetic participatory work. By creating teamwork and reflective practices, practicum affords trainees an advantage by helping them to prepare through learning on the job. For example, as shown in Smith and Lev-Ari's (2005) study, during practicum, school principals were told to be unsupportive of student teachers, and tended not to view the school-based education (OJT) of student teachers as part of their professional responsibility. As a result, the teacher students were reported to develop a degree of skepticism about the work of educational administrators and how they could help them complete their practicum assignments. In other words, the student teachers perceived their teaching as being quite separate from the school's administration. As Billett et al. (2016)

and Pulakos et al. (2015) discovered, students want to establish interactions with and be guided by authoritative others. They will often seek out and expect positive feedback from their work-based supervisors, as positive remarks with regards to their development are seen as a kind of professional feedback related to their future employment. This type of performance management is connected with behaviors expected in their day-to-day work, which requires constant communication of expectations and informal feedback in real time (Pulakos et al., 2015).

2.5 Psychological adaptation

Some studies have pointed out that students improve upon their learning skills and knowledge by not only following a prescribed teaching and evaluative model, but is also dependent on their ability to change and fit their psychological state to meet the demands of the work environment (e.g., Hascher et al., 2004; Toohey et al., 1996; Wilt et al., 2019). Toohey et al. (1996) further revealed that students should learn how to adapt to an enterprise's requirements in order to improve their OJT experience.

However, student learning can only happen when they have a positive attitude towards completing the required learning tasks (even when they face hurdles or challenges, so long as they remain positive). Wilt et al. (2019) argued that students undergo positive changes in their attitudes and psychology in order to complete their assigned tasks with maximal effort. Whilst learning and teaching models are effective, they only form the necessary conditions for learning to happen. The most important condition is that students themselves need to change, fix, and adapt their own psychological state to be more dynamic and optimistic.

Students can also perceive their OJT experiences to be authentic when they are able to change their psychological condition from being unnecessarily stressed by way of seeking out feedback and practical lessons in order to handle such pressures as a part of their professional training. Jamil et al. (2013) examined if a change in knowledge, skills, and attitudes was experienced among trainees. According to their study, employers evaluated two main components; students' cognitive outcomes and skills improvement outcomes. At the same time, they also found that students could gain important job-based knowledge, demonstrate solid working skills, and exhibit appropriate attitudes in the workplace after having managed concerns or anxieties caused by workload pressures and from being evaluated, and developing more productive energy that better helps them to achieve what had been set out for them in the evaluation criteria.

3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the theorized concepts of authenticity proposed by Wilt et al. (2019), the researcher in the current study designed a qualitative approach to the research with an interview questionnaire that covered the four aspects of this concept. As such, the researcher developed a 43-item questionnaire to be applied in separate participant interviews.

A purposive snowball sampling method was used for participant recruitment, with only students selected who had studied at FPT University and had completed their OJT program. The researcher also aimed to reach some students who failed their OJT in order to explore how their (in)authentic experiences may have contributed to their failure, but the number of successful students was found to be considerably more than those who were unsuccessful. The researcher was informed by staff at the university's enterprise relations office that the rate of successful was high, often around 99%.

This sampling technique enabled the researcher to identify three additional prospective participants through social and academic relationships, and in turn they introduced the researcher to another 15 former students. After having identified these additional prospective participants, the researcher contacted each of them via email or phone in order to inform them of the research, and to seek their agreement to participate in the study.

All of the study's participants were assigned pseudonyms, and these were used throughout the reporting of the study.

The researcher had initially aimed to recruit 30 participants. However, after conducting conversations with 18 participants (10 male and eight female), the researcher found that the information obtained was being repeated among the participants' various answers. The information seemed to have reached the point of saturation, with only similar themes being identified, and therefore no further interviews took place.

The interviewed participants were each aged 21 or 22 years old. Due to the social distancing protocols in place at the time of conducting the research, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher used Google Meet in order to conduct the interviews with the participants remotely.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a discussion of the study's results and analyzes them against the backdrop of the current literature and Wilt et al.'s (2019) framework of authenticity.

4.1 Relationship between self-esteem and confidence

The analysis of the conversational interview data allowed the researcher to discover that five aspects influenced the participants' choice of OJT workplace. They are temporal factors based on the students' expectations at the present and for the future. As mentioned previously, earlier research has discussed the importance of institutional preparation for students' departure for practicums with regards to placements suitably matched against students' abilities and future job expectations (Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Jackson, 2014; Wilt et al., 2019). Bernado et al. (2014) also added that fluent written and oral communication skills can enhance students' confidence in undertaking their OJT. Supervisor feedback is seen as contributory to either increasing or decreasing students' confidence levels (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Pulakos et al., 2015). These findings show that there is a progressive relationship between self-esteem and confidence. The more that students are aware of their abilities, placement, and personality, the more confident they are likely to be. As such, students' confidence emerges as a result of both their self-awareness of their own abilities and expectations, and the industries' interference with their practice.

The findings suggest that there is generally a causal relationship between self-esteem and confidence. When students have higher self-awareness of their own abilities and aspirations, they become more confident prior to and during their OJT. At the same time, this relationship can be contributed by factors other than the combination of both self-awareness and industry interference. These factors consist of five interrelated aspects; (1) students' perceptions of their own personality, (2) the brand or company worked in which results in a sense of pride, (3) the value placed on OJT certification from these companies, (4) placement suitable for the students' abilities, being geographically acceptable, and which resulted in a comfortable feeling, and (5) students' readiness for OJT formed through familiarization with the enterprise's regulations. If these factors are met, a student's level of confidence would likely increase; however, if one or more of these factors are not met, their level of confidence

would likely decrease. These factors appear to be contributors to student confidence, rather than separate entities accorded with their confidence.

For example, seven participants chose the companies they wanted to work for based on self-awareness of their personality. Van Son accepted a job outside of his direct field of study because he was interested in taking care of children. He said:

> *At first, I wanted to do a job that was related to teaching. I was informed that I would have to do many other tasks including taking care of children. Although they were not related to the majors, I still felt happy because I love children and love working in that environment.* [Van Son]

Tran Dai similarly expressed that traveling was his hobby, which quickly formed his decision to work for a resort on a famous island in Vietnam:

> *My hobby is traveling and exploring. The resort where I chose is located in Phu Quoc, a tourist destination. This matched my desire to spend time traveling outside of my working times. I also enjoyed parties by the shore on my days off.* [Tran Dai]

Quang Minh experienced this kind of influence in relation to the company's brand and entry selection process. He said that he chose a software company because of its "global partnerships with other companies" that could prove useful later for his résumé. In this vein, the students' confidence was manifest in both their present being and future becoming. The relationship between self-esteem and confidence, therefore, is considered temporal. An enterprise's brand, however, did not seem to be the sole influencer that increased students' confidence prior to their OJT. Self-awareness of their own personality also acted as another influencer. The brand of a company was considered influential in shaping the confidence of nine of the participants, which helped them reflect on what kind of person they were and what future jobs they wanted to do. Geographical convenience was also found to be important to the participants' choice of OJT workplace. For example:

> *I chose this company* [one of the biggest software services companies in Vietnam] *because the company has undertaken many good projects. The cost of living here is also lower than in other districts.* [Nhat Truong]

The researcher became engaged with Nhat Truong's personal accounts about geographical factors, and realized that he admitted himself to be an "economical" man who "calculated every coin that could make up something bigger." In addition, the participants' personalities and companies' brands were seen as being in close relation to the certification of their future jobs. For example:

> *At first, I was aiming for another company, but FPT University recommended alternative logistics companies to me. This company* [a leading Vietnamese container port operator] *often runs training courses and grants certificates to trainees after completion of the course. I believe that the certificate has its own value since this is a large corporation, so I agreed to spend my internship there.* [Trong Phuc]

As Grant-Smith et al. (2017) and Jackson (2014) confirmed, the influence of placement on students' choices of work for their practicum, and the empirical material from the current study showed that task orientation quality was a determinant for the students' preference in choosing their OJT company. All the students agreed that they chose companies based on matching their major to the task-orientation quality.

> *At first, I wanted to work at this* [foreign language] *center because I was looking forward to teaching instead of some customer service job. However, I failed their*

> *interview because they were clearly just looking for customer service staff as opposed to teachers or teaching assistants.* [Tuan Anh]

Tuan Anh (an English language student) believed he was an introvert who often wanted to do some kind of a "noble" job in which people enjoyed listening to his lectures rather than taking care of other people. His personality was perceived in relation to a match between his field of study and a future job at his first OJT company, though his attempt failed. In slight contrast, Thao Nguyen always wanted to "learn and learn," so she felt confident when being able to choose to work in a company that fitted both her field of study and a hobby of learning:

> *I chose to intern here because I wanted to learn many new areas of work and experiences that could be related to my teaching major.* [Thao Nguyen]

Some of the other participants similarly showed a link between their personality, expectations to work in the same field as their studies, and the friendliness of the OJT placement. For example:

> *At that time, I had a lot of choices for enterprises, but I chose this company* [the biggest software services company in Vietnam] *in Ho Chi Minh City as it was recommended by the university. I decided to choose this placement because of my major, my ability, and my expectations from the system.* [Hung Anh]

The confluences mentioned so far were experienced together with the students' readiness for OJT, which was formed by their familiarization with the enterprises' regulations. The participants felt more confident after they had been able to obtain basic information about the companies' rules, history, and organizational culture, and found that it fitted with their personality and aspirations in terms of the value of the work. They obtained this information through the companies' websites, from friends, and from their own prior knowledge of the work. When the students were able to fulfill these interrelated aspirations, which were futuristic in nature, they felt more confident with the knowledge they had already obtained and the communication skills they wanted to improve upon. Seven of the participants self-evaluated being able to communicate effectively, whilst nine expressed that they grew up in terms of reshaping their prior knowledge and forming new professional knowledge. These developments enabled them to feel more confident during their practicum training.

These excerpts prove the influence of these five factors on the students' confidence level. This finding coincides with the work by Wilt et al. (2019) which unpacked the dynamic influences between the work environment and students' confidence and expectations. However, these factors were always experienced in tandem with at least one other factor; so none were experienced in isolation.

4.2 Psychological conditions and emotionality

The interview conversations with the participants revealed their positive psychological condition during their OJT. In particular, the participants changed from having worries to forming an optimistic attitude when they received increasing levels of acknowledgement from their supervisors. One example on this was as follows:

> *The feedback was quite helpful. At first, I couldn't understand what I was doing. My supervisor knew what I was going wrong with, what I was missing, and what I was supposed to improve upon. I didn't feel upset because she possessed good common*

sense. She was also gentle and elegant. This supervisor could help me feel comfortable at work. [Ngoc Loan]

These examples are similar to the linear relationship between students' self-esteem and improvements in their learning that can unlock their previous psychological problems, which was also reported by Hascher et al. (2004). What is more, some of the participants in the current study stated that they had changed "ways of seeing life" [Thao Nguyen] by having been able to reduce stress caused by time pressure, whilst others expressed that there "seemed to be something newer growing inside" [Quang Minh] when they could achieve the task outcomes under their work affiliates' support in teaching them concrete steps to do the work. For example:

I was happy to be able to work on real projects. I participated in one project and the start of another. I learned how a project works and how to complete subtasks and instructions. My contribution to the projects was not enormous at all, but I put my effort into it, so I felt very happy. [Quang Minh]

The excerpts confirm the findings of Coiacetto (2004), Hascher et al. (2004), and Wilt et al. (2019), who each posited that students' psychological conditions could be changed from being hopeless and desperate into optimistic and positive once tasks were fully completed. The current study's findings further show that these psychological states included positive emotionality that both resulted in the achievement of the tasks and initiated more positive attitudes towards the OJT programs as a whole. These changes were supported by colleagues' constructive feedback on their work performance, the extension of their professional and social relationships, and their ability to learn from doing. Most of the participants also believed that having such a positive attitude towards their OJT was just part of the "bigger picture" [Quang Minh] of how they thought about life and work.

However, not everything was rosy. The researcher noted that 14 of the study's participants experienced some form of negative psychological experience caused by out-of-major tasks, deadlines, organizational culture, or professional relationships.

I was stressed when being assigned a telesales task which I had never done before. I felt pressure when listening to a customer with a boss standing next to me, and sometimes being scolded by the customer. I was extremely worried about being late in meeting the deadline. [Trung Giau]

I felt bad with the poor communication at my workplace, disappointed with the company's culture, and bored with the working environment. I felt discouraged because the OJT program was going as well as I had expected. When the OJT program ended, I found out that I was in fact not that suited to the translation field. [Thu Huong]

Three participants disclosed that there were some aspects that they did not feel happy with, but that they found their OJT experience to be satisfactory overall. Their satisfaction was formed and reinforced by the social relationships they had established with their colleagues, and their ability to confront challenges posed by factors that they felt unhappy with. Some referred to the ability to learn as an "inner fire that kept them going on with the task assignment" [Thu Ngan] and "a forever issue of life" [Thu Huong] that enabled them to know how to deal with social issues. In this sense, learning during OJT programs could also include the students' capacity to face challenges and to resolve them by realizing other possibilities that could arise from encounters with their colleagues.

4.3 Influences of collegiality on learning experiences

All of the participants agreed that two-way trust at work is important to their performance. The result is similar to Hughes' (1998) discussion on the dynamics of trust-building and scope of learning that can be facilitated at work with the support of co-workers as learning facilitators.

> *I followed my supervisors to observe and learn from their practical experience. We established two-way trust as they were willing to share many secrets with us pertinent to this field.* [Trong Phuc]
>
> *The boss trusted me in assigning work to me. He even assigned big projects to our team even though we couldn't manage to complete them all.* [Thanh Kieu]

Collegiality was appreciated as an enabler for the participants to authentically experience their OJT programs. The issue of empowerment was encountered as an initiator for students to establish mutual trust with their co-workers and supervisors. This finding shares some commonality with the research published by Coiacetto (2004) and also Smith and Lev-Ari (2005), who posited that a close-knit relationship and autonomy in the workplace enables trainees to acquire positive teamwork as a quality. The current study showed that the participants appreciated collegiality and guidance at the same time; an issue similarly reflected in the research by Billett et al. (2016). The current study's participants expected to obtain both mutual trust and professional teaching so as to enable them to attain professional knowledge in a "professional and friendly manner" [Thanh Kieu]. They participants described these "professional and friendly" attributes as follows:

> *When it came to specialized jobs, the supervisor was willing to help me with difficult tasks*. [Thao Nguyen]

The participants seemed eager to produce a long list of positive traits that contributed to the quality of collegiality. In contrast, five expressed having experienced insufficient collegial support; reporting that they had rarely received feedback from their supervisors. The lack of constructive feedback from their supervisors/mentors created a certain degree of distrust in the evaluation process.

> *I was guided on how to do the tasks and given suggestions, but I felt that our supervisors were not enthusiastic. They just did it to fulfil their basic responsibility.* [Thu Huong]

All of the participants agreed that collegial relationships could be used for future jobs and to improve their individual standing in the future job market. For example:

> *I value the feedback I received as it helped me know more about the job. If I ever need to look for a job, I feel that I could contact them as they are certainly recognized professionals in the field.* [Trong Phuc]

These excerpts show that collegiality could be formed through constructive and valuable feedback regarding the students' work performance which, in turn, enhanced their ability to learn. This finding adds more nuance to the current body of research on the (in)effectiveness of supervisory feedback on trainees' work assignments in that collegiality was shaped by a mutual trust which was positively or negatively affected by a supervisor's/mentor's feedback, and that collegiality could be perceived as an enabler that fulfilled trainees' aspirations for future jobs.

4.4 Psychological adjustment and growth

Previous research has confirmed that learning through practicum training can only happen when students are ready to make psychological adaptations to a new environment (e.g., Hascher et al., 2004; Toohey et al., 1996; Wilt et al., 2019). Students have a need to extend their interpersonal and social skills, which they can then use them to facilitate positive psychological changes in their life.

The findings from the current study have similarly shown that the students' ability to improve their social and professional skills and knowledge could enable them to positively change their attitude and thinking about their OJT programs. The participants also added that feelings of failure which had created a degree of pressure and tension had sometimes enabled them to realize their potential, and to achieve possibilities and opportunities that were reached through their relationships with others. For example, five of the participants emphasized that being a trainee in a company that was their second choice had actually proved better in the long run. Ngoc Loan said that she had not succeeded in applying to a "very big company" where she had anticipated being able to obtain more "prestigious lessons." However, her subsequent feelings of depression actually helped her to "stand up and grab any opportunity that came along," hence she accepted a position at a company recommended by her university. The researcher asked her why she decided to "stand up" after her initial failure, to which she responded that her family was "extremely sad" about the situation, but that she realized an urgent call within herself to fulfill her duty as a "good daughter," one who could not make her parents feel upset or hopeless about her future. She immediately sought out help from the university and they provided her with a list of companies that offered positions aligned to her major. Similar stories were reported by Minh Khang, Quang Minh, Ngoc Anh, and also Van Son, who had each initially been rejected in their interviews with their first choice of OJT company. Realizing that failure to obtain a pass for the OJT semester would impede them from moving on to take the next semester at university, Quang Minh and Ngoc Anh started to ask their friends, lecturers, and other staff members at the FPT University for help with other companies as their second option. They reportedly changed from feeling being "completely dead" [Ngoc Anh] to that of "feeling optimistic."

Nine of the participants who were not second-chance trainees (i.e., had taken their OJT at a company of their first choice) expressed their willingness to change, fix, or adapt their own psychological condition to a new environment. Minh Khang stated that he was shocked by the informality in the culture of writing emails at his company, as he had believed that journalists' writing at his newspaper office would be far more formal in their work approach. He said that he quickly learned about the prevalent work culture by reading his colleagues' emails, with their permission, and trying to write in a way that was almost "similar to what they [did]." Quang Minh reportedly felt "extremely shocked" with a largescale project that he was asked to get involved with alongside a few of his colleagues. His feeling "shocked and scared" was then overcome by his enthusiastic colleagues, who offered continuous help and guidance through until the completion of the project. Ngoc Anh had always expected her OJT program to "end soon," but the longer she went on, the more she found that she liked her job because she had "wonderful sisters and brothers [colleagues] at the company." These participants' accounts suggest that the realization of opportunities and possibilities which allowed them to complete and experience their OJT programs as being meaningful were made through their encounters with people that they knew at the institution where they studied, at home, or at work. This realization enabled them to grow and make sense of their practicum experience as a part of life.

This psychological adjustment was also observed in the ways that Minh Khang, Trung Giau, Phuong Trinh, and Trong Phuc learned how to control their emotions at work, through the following of their hobbies. For instance:

> *When facing pressure, I often adjusted my mood by ordering food and drink. Eating helped me to release stress and get back to work. I also called my friends after work.* [Minh Khang]

Further, Hascher et al. (2004), Toohey et al. (1996), and Wood (2004) discussed the effects of practicum training on students' communication skills. The results seen from the current study have shown that the ability to learn communication skills made the OJT programs more meaningful and useful. For example:

> *I went around the resort and actively communicated with foreign customers in order to improve my language skills, and also to learn many new things about the cultures from all over the world. Confidence and my communication skills were therefore essential.* [Tran Dai]

All of the study's participants reported having become more responsible and mature through learning "how to work" rather than "how to learn" [Tran Dai]. This idea was also mentioned in the other participants' accounts in several expressions such as "know[ing] how to do the job instead of filling myself with boredom or complaints" [Trong Phuc] or "fix[ing] yourself through fixing your attitudes to be optimistic and collaborative" [Thanh Kieu]. However, six of the participants reported having felt offended and stressed by their supervisors' feedback with regards to their knowledge and expertise, but that this feeling was seen as motivation to correct their flaws:

> *I was upset when I received feedback about my pronunciation, but I then saw it as a motivation to improve myself.* [Tuan Anh]

The participants' experiences in adjusting their own psychological condition demonstrated that they encountered a diverse web of feelings, but which motivated them to seek out various possibilities that lay beyond the workplace context to their social milieus. Their having the ability to adjust their own psychological state may have occurred by chance or perhaps through their own intention and willingness to change, and which were then supported by their colleagues, family members, and their educational institution.

5. CONCLUSION

This article sought to understand what OJT experiences were authentic by assessing them based on Wilt et al.'s (2019) framework of authentic experiences. The researcher focused on exploring if students felt confident in their own ability to learn, how they underwent psychological changes, what they could learn from their OJT, how they improve their social and professional rapport, and how they could adjust their own psychological condition in the workplace. The findings have shown that the participant students' authentic experiences of their OJT programs were comprised of the following interrelated features.

First, the study explicated a causal relationship between the students' self-esteem and confidence. The participant students' awareness of their own capabilities and dreams related to their future work produced a certain level of confidence from their practicum training experience. This relationship may be created and affected by the students' own self-perception about their personality, the reputation and branding of the enterprise they worked for bringing practical value to a student's future work applications, suitable

placement process conducted by both the university and the relevant enterprise, and their own familiarization with regulations pertaining to the company.

Second, this relationship was shown to be temporal, in the sense that how students perceive their own present being can affect their future work prospects. Once these factors are met, students are likely to increase in confidence, and vice versa where they are not met. Accordingly, this paper conceptualizes these factors as contributors to students' confidence instead of treating them as separate entities that simply accompany their confidence.

Third, students undergo some level of psychological changes that are affected by the receipt of feedback from their colleagues with regards to their work performance, insofar as their professional and social rapport results in mutual (dis)trust, and their capacity to learn through their work. Collegiality can be experienced as both an enabler and an impeder to students' progress during their OJT, and may be formed and/or eroded by their supervisors' feedback, the students' relationships, as well as the students' personalities and emotions. Emotionality adds color to the authentic experiences that students may encounter, and this paper conceptualizes this as a felt dimension that still leaves some area for further exploration.

Fourth, authentic experiences are encountered through students' own psychological adjustments, which are facilitated based upon their ability to identify and realize possibilities and opportunities as opposed to failure. The issue of standing up and seeking out secondary opportunities can be theorized as students' ability to understand who they are. This means that students possess the ability to perceive their own personality as they see it, what they want to do in the future, what they can do in the present, and why they want to follow certain work pursuits and not others. These issues are representative of their inner abilities, and in realizing these abilities, they can discover several methods and solutions to challenge, develop, and/or conquer the difficulties they face by seeking out opportunities that arise from their immersion in the social milieus. Using the inside-out ability (the use of their inner ability) enables them to create inventories to change themselves with the support of colleagues, relatives, and their university. In deploying this ability prior to and during their OJT also allows them to experience their practicum training time as an interwoven aspect of life, work, and study.

6. SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study suggest that exploring students' authentic experiences of practicum training or OJT begin from their social and academic lives, rather than by seeing their experiences as mere psychological aspects that could either enhance or limit their learning. While this study has focused mainly on how authentically students encountered their OJT, further research may examine the interwoven or interrelated aspects of how inauthentically students experience OJT in relation to their engagement in social milieus. This may add a greater understanding to the way in which learning can happen according to a student's attempt to make the most of possibilities that emerge from struggling against challenges experienced during their OJT.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contributions Chi Hong Nguyen: Designing the research, shaping the literature review, constructing the research tools, analyzing the data, writing the conclusion, and reviewing the article. Thach Tran Thanh Vi: Conducting interviews, analyzing the material, writing the introduction, and researching the literature.

Conflicts of Interest There is no conflict of interest in this paper.

Funding This study received no funding.

Ethical Approval This ethics of this study were approved by Head of the English Department, FPT University, Can Tho Campus, on October 22, 2021.

Data Availability Statement Access to the interviews can be granted upon request (https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1B_aJ0Ck9i0cWLuns_yRjH28o1Z-CkSdC).

Acknowledgments The authors would like to thank Nguyen Thuy Ngan, Tran Thi Cam Tu, Huynh Thi Cam Tien, and Huynh Phuoc Ven for helping with the research data collection processes.

REFERENCES

Bernardo, A., Landicho, A., & Laguador, J. M. (2014). On-the-job training performance of students from AB Paralegal Studies for SY 2013-2014. *Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities, 1*(4), 122-129. https://10.6007/MAJESS/v2-i2/1388

Billett, S., Cain, M., & Le, A. H. (2016). Augmenting higher education students' work experiences: preferred purposes and processes. *Studies in Higher Education*, *43*(7), 1279-1294. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1250073

Coiacetto, E. (2004). The value of a structured planning practicum program. *Australian Planner*, *41*(2), 74-82. https://doi.org/10.1080/07293682.2004.9982357

Ducan, H., Range, B., & Scherz, S. (2011). From professional preparation to on-the-job development: What do beginning principals need? *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 6*(3). https://www.ncpeapublications.org/index.php/volume-6-number-3-july-september-2011/393-from-professional-preparation-to-on-the-job-development

Grant-Smith, D., Gillett-Swan, J., & Chapman, R. (2017). *WIL well-being: Exploring the impacts of unpaid practicum on student wellbeing.* The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Curtin University, Australia.

Grubb, W. N., & Lazerson, M. (2005). Vocationalism in higher education: The triumph of the education gospel. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *76*(1), 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2005.0007

Hascher, T., Cocard, Y., & Moser, P. (2004). Forget about theory - practice is all? Student teachers' learning in practicum. *Teachers and Teaching*, *10*(6), 623-637. https://doi.org/10.1080/1354060042000304800

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans). SCM Press.

Hughes, C. (1998). Practicum learning: Perils of the authentic workplace. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *17*(2), 207-227. https://doi.org/10.1080/0729436980170206

Jackson, D. (2014). Employability skill development in work-integrated learning: Barriers and best practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, *40*(2), 350-367. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.842221

Jamil, N. A., Shariff, S. M., & Abu, Z. (2013). Students' practicum performance of industrial internship program. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 90*, 513-521. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.07.121

Newman, G. E. (2019). The psychology of authenticity. *Review of General Psychology, 23*(1), 8-18. https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000158

Pulakos, E. D., Hanson, R. M., Arad, S., & Moye, N. (2015). Performance management can be fixed: An on-the-job experiential learning approach for complex behavior change. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 8*(1), 51-76. https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2014.2

Smith, K., & Lev-Ari, L. (2005). The place of the practicum in pre-service teacher education: the voice of the students. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *33*(3), 289-302. https://doi.org/10.1080/13598660500286333

Toohey, S., Ryan, G., & Hughes, C. (1996). Assessing the practicum. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, *21*(3), 215-227. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260293960210302

Trianasari, N., & Rahmawati, P. I. (2021). Should I quit? Understanding job stress and coping strategies among hospitality students during on the job training program. In A. Permanasari (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 5th Asian Education Symposium 2020* (pp. 494-498). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210715.101

Varga, S., & Guignon, C. (2020). Authenticity. In *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy.* https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/authenticity/

Wilt, J. A., Thomas, S., & McAdams, D. P. (2019). Authenticity and inauthenticity in narrative identity. *Heliyon, 5*(7), 3-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e02178

Wood, S. (2004). *Fully on-the-job training: Experiences and steps ahead.* National Centre for Vocational Education Research. https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/fully-on-the-job-training-experiences-and-steps-ahead

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Chi Hong Nguyen, PhD, is Head of the English Department, FPT University, Can Tho Campus, Vietnam. His research focuses on transnational mobilities, skilled migration, international education, and issues in educational leadership and administration.
Email: chinh6@fe.edu.vn
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8380-2727

Vi Thanh Tran Thach earned her Bachelor's degree in English Language at FPT University in 2021 and is currently an independent researcher.
Email: vitttca140647@fpt.edu.vn

Publisher's Note: *ÜNİVERSİTEPARK Limited remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.*