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# Exploring The Characters and Values Developed from Psychology Students' Experiential Learning During Internship at Psychiatry Clinic

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## Introduction

Psychology internships serve as a transformative bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application by providing hands-on experience to psychology students. This research aims to explore the character development and values gained by psychology students through their written reflections that were submitted at the end of their internship.

## Methods

Using grounded theory approach, data was collected through the document analysis of written reflections submitted by nine final-year psychology degree students and second-year clinical psychology master's students from various Malaysian universities (which lasted from 3-6 months throughout 2018-2023). The sample size was determined through theoretical sampling, with data collection continuing until theoretical saturation was achieved.

## Results

Three major themes emerged from the students' reflections in this study: A nurturing workplace environment, empowerment through experiential learning, and personal growth through client engagement.

1

### A nurturing workplace environment

A safe and inclusive workplace environment positively influences students' learning experiences during their internships. Feeling supported by other staff encourages them to step out of their comfort zones and approach situations with greater compassion and flexibility. A student described her relationship with other staff, **"It was clear that we were more than just colleagues, we took care of one another and helped one another. I like that I was able to vent out my frustrations to them when I had to deal with difficulties, and they provided their feedback and output, which was resourceful because I got to see things not only from different perspectives but also from a more compassionate and flexible view."** (P07)

Witnessing the collaboration of different professionals in managing complex cases emphasizes the importance of teamwork in effective patient care, as experienced by one of the students, **"We also got to witness how different professionals from different departments worked together in a case... Felt amazing witnessing professionals from other fields showing empathy and being compassionate in helping these children."** (P03)

2

### Empowerment gained from experiential learning

Experiential learning during internship affects students positively by providing them with practical and reflective skills; combining learning through hands-on with reflections, which will result in them growing professionally and more confident. One student reflected on how mindfulness, a skill they had learned during their studies, became crucial in managing anxiety and staying focused in challenging situations. The student shared, **"It's a good thing that I learned about mindfulness, otherwise I wouldn't apply it and everything would go haywire. It really helped that I acknowledge that the distressful thoughts and emotions are just that, they are only negative thoughts and emotions. I don't need to act on them."** (P06)

As part of their learning journey, students actively reflected on the experiences they observed, leading to deeper personal and professional insights. One student mentioned, **"From here on now, I will make a routine of things. I will make a list of things, put them as a reminder. I might try to put in more effort with other people. I am going to journal more just so that I can keep my mind on track and reflect. I am going to make an effort to learn more by taking opportunities to attend events that are available."** (P07)

3

### Personal growth through client engagement

Students engaging directly with the clients during their internship is essential to the students for their development of interpersonal skills. However, the benefits of the students learning all that beforehand are not only beneficial to the clients but also to themselves as this will improve their professional skills and help them to improve their mental well-being as one student shared, **"I have to learn new therapy techniques (...) depending on their condition. In order to be an effective therapist, I always take it upon myself to try these techniques on my own to test the effectiveness of these therapies. As expected, whenever I try these techniques (...), it is extremely helpful"** (P06)

## Conclusion

Internship at the psychiatry clinic has helped psychology interns to enhance their clinical skills alongside emotional resilience through a nurturing environment, experiential learning, and client engagement that is essential for the future career path that they pursue later. The findings also emphasizes the importance for internship supervisors to provide students with structured experiential learning practice and opportunities for real-world client interaction that will provide insights into the development of more comprehensive internship programs to nurture well-rounded professionals.

