

Narratives of occupational therapy students from the Philippines on virtual internship

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Abstract: Virtual internships (VI) became an alternative learning method for the continuity of education affected by the pandemic. This transition had an impact on the internship experience of Filipino students, particularly the occupational therapy (OT) students, in delivering services. This study aims to explore the experiences of Filipino OT interns during VI. A phenomenological study approach was utilized. Six OT interns participated in the study. Data collected were analyzed through thematic analysis. Five themes emerged: (1) preparation for VI through bridging programs; (2) positive experiences, attitudes, and practices in VI; (3) perceived advantages and disadvantages of VI; (4) challenges and additional demands in VI; and (5) preview of real OT through virtual internship. The findings of this study can potentially address improvement and implementation of VI both during and post-pandemic.

Keywords: qualitative; online internship; occupational therapy; Philippines

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Introduction

Due to the alarming cases and uncontrollable transmission of COVID-19, an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus called 'severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2' or SARS-CoV-2 (Cennimo, 2021), the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic in March 2020. This declaration alarmed the governments of different countries worldwide who immediately imposed health and safety protocols. Following this, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted major aspects of national and global society (Kuhfeld et al., 2020), causing uncertainty for higher education. Educational institutions have been exploring and implementing alternative strategies to deliver continuous education (UNICEF Data and Analytics, 2020).

An internship is a period of professional experience (Graduate Advantage, 2020) that allows students to experience the work environment firsthand. Students can learn in a variety of settings, and they can gain knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). According to Anthony (2021), a learning experience adds value to the learner and improves the performance and productivity of the learner. However, as part of the higher education sector affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, many internships have been canceled, postponed, or moved online. As of July 2021, face-to-face internships are no longer available for most of the courses since the pandemic started (Lane, 2021). Thus, virtual internships have become an alternative work-based learning opportunity for students.

In accordance with the changes, the Philippine Academy of Occupational Therapists, Inc. (PAOT), an organization of occupational therapists in the country, published the '*Interim Guidelines on the Practice of Occupational Therapy amidst the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Situation in the Philippines*,' suggesting the utilization of alternative strategies and service provisions to continue the practice of occupational therapy (OT) in consideration of the implemented safety measures and protocols. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) considered the possibility of flexible internship programs for students to complete their academic programs (San Juan, 2020) to ensure continuity of education despite the pandemic. Flexible learning and internships were required from the start of the school year 2020–2021 in response to the closures of universities in the country. CHED and other stakeholders required memorandums regarding flexible learning and internships for health care programs, including Respiratory Therapy (RT) and Speech-Language Pathology (SLP). RT, SLP and OT have

the same aim as OT in establishing plans and goals to achieve a patient's maximum potential (Miller-Keane Encyclopedia, 2003) and are all part of the rehabilitation team (Bellendir et al., 2021). The clinical rotation of RT interns can be conducted online, in blended learning scenarios, or with other flexible learning strategies. On the other hand, the memorandum for SLP indicates that the different components of SLP internship programs may be delivered virtually. Hence, virtual delivery of OT internship programs can be considered for the continuity of OT education.

With virtual internships, occupational therapy students will not have face-to-face experience working with clients, communities, and organizations. The clinical hours of the compulsory internship program are affected by the lower patient load in the institutions (All India Occupational Therapists' Association, 2020). According to Target Jobs (2021), virtual internships are a way of undertaking work experience with an employer but carried out digitally and remotely rather than in person. With the sudden transition to virtual internships, students were anxious, hopeful not to miss out on the networking opportunities and career development associated with the internship (Maurer, 2020). College Reaction (2020) indicated that internships that were canceled, moved to remote locations, or delayed caused quite a disruption nationwide as many students had anticipated the social interaction and structure of the physical workplace. Students in many different programs, especially OT students, were greatly affected by the implementation of virtual internships because there are difficulty in evaluating some of the skills of the interns. This is because it is hard to assess the interns' skills, especially when it comes to how they interact with clients and use the tools in the facility (DePriest, 2020).

Following the cited circumstances, the study aimed to explore the experiences of OT students from CALABARZON on virtual internships.

Context

The Covid-19 pandemic caused school closures that brought significant changes to education. School closures gave rise to e-learning as an alternative medium of acquiring education whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms (Lalani & Li, 2020). Medical students also reported that they are concerned about how e-learning could be utilized to provide clinical experience, especially in the final year of medical school, which

depends heavily on bedside teaching (Alsoufi et al., 2020). To still provide education despite the pandemic, part of this e-learning is the transition from face-to-face internships to virtual internships. Face-to-face internships are no longer available for most of the courses since the pandemic started. Thus, virtual internships have become a work-based learning option for students.

Wildana et al. (2020) conducted a study with various students from different universities who are undergoing an online learning process in the early pandemic. From the study, there are regulatory factors that are the most critical factors in realizing online learning. Well-planned and designed virtual internships can be an empowering learning experience and can be a good option for student internship programs (Jones & Park, 2021). The study by Jones & Park (2021) also implied in the study that heavy dependence on digital technology poses some challenges for virtual internships. This study indicated that virtual internships may not be suitable for all students because the virtual internships are harder for interns to gain on-the-job training.

A study by Cortesão et al. (2015) regarding virtual internships as innovative learning revealed that despite interns' physical or financial limitations, students utilizing technology perceive virtual internships as a vital and innovative approach for an effective method of applying the academic knowledge of the students in a modern corporate environment. In terms of workplace competencies, in a multi-site case study by Hora et al. (2021), participation in internships was low throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with interns roughly split 50/50 between online and in-person modalities. In this study, it is said that online interns from colleges and universities have lower satisfaction, developmental value, 21st-century skills, professional network development, and high-skill tasks than in-person interns

In terms of supervision and mentorship, virtual internships share similar core characteristics, and the role of the supervisor appears to be critical to success. With the limited interactions and feedback, most of the interns faced uncertainty and isolation. Thus, the study results implied that supervisors play a key role in shaping online relationships. OT internships provide interns with hands-on experience and expose them to a real clinical setting (Therapy Abroad, 2022). Interns typically work in a clinic, hospital, or rehabilitation facility to gain clinical skills working with patients, develop treatment programs, and utilize the proper procedures to assist patients to acquire the skills they need (ZipRecruiter, 2022). Furthermore, the study by Jeske & Linehan (2020) from the school of applied psychology

emphasized the importance of mentoring for the skill development of e-interns. Mentored e-interns had opportunities to share their knowledge and experience with co-interns. Hence, mentoring during e-internships leads to skills development and opportunities (Jeske & Linehan, 2020). In relation to the medical field, the study by Woller et al. (2021) revealed that medical students were unable to assess the domains of physical examination, build rapport with patients, and show compassion during the virtual clerkship. It indicated that recording patients' information was harder to assess online. All the conducted research studies highlight the significance to the researchers of knowing the narratives of the occupational therapists about their experiences in virtual internships.

In line with these advantages and disadvantages of shifting to virtual internships, the researchers sought to explore the experiences of occupational therapy interns from CALABARZON who recently experienced virtual internships due to the pandemic.

Methodology

A qualitative study was conducted to thoroughly identify the narratives of occupational therapy interns from CALABARZON regarding virtual internships. CALABARZON is a region in the Philippines consisting of the provinces of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon (OCHA, 2017). According to the Calabarzon Regional Development Research Agenda (2018), among all the regions in the country, it was anticipated that the CALABARZON would profit the most from the demographic portion due to its large population and suitable health and education programs for children and youth by increasing the skills, knowledge, and experience of the population. Carol (2016) stated that qualitative research uses analysis to delve deeper into problems, aiding in the discovery of new ideas and individual points of view. This method was commonly used to gain an understanding of other people's points of view and perceptions. Qualitative research approaches provided a deeper understanding of the OT interns' experiences from CALABARZON, as they were given the opportunity to share their stories and insights from their experiences during virtual internships. The phenomenological study approach in this qualitative study best highlights the intention of the researchers to know the experiences of OT interns from different universities regarding virtual internships.

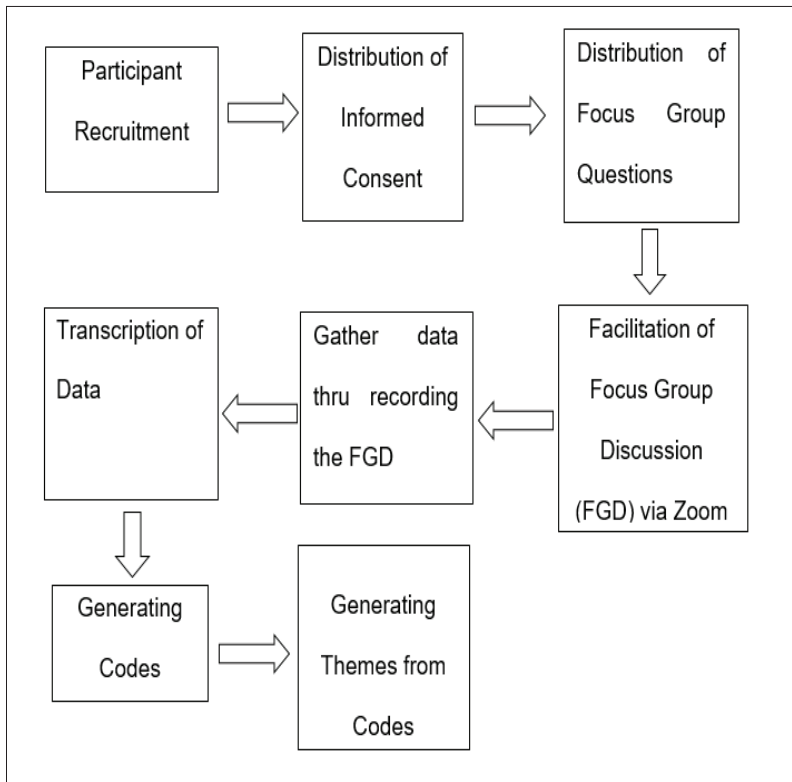
According to Arslan et al. (2015), the main goals of the phenomenological study are to seek reality from individuals' narratives of their experiences and feelings and produce in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon. The researchers facilitated a focus group discussion (FGD) to gather the relevant data. FGD is a discussion by a group of people from similar backgrounds or experiences (ODI, 2009) that enables the discovery of new aspects and information about the research. Participants were provided with guide questions during the FGD. The draft of the focus group questions was referenced and adapted from the Wittenberg University - Intern Evaluation of Internship Site. It was slightly modified to cover all aspects of the statement of the problem to understand it from the viewpoint of the participants and answer all the specific questions under the statement of the problem. Focus group questions are shown in Figure 2. The first four authors were present during the FGD. One author facilitated the discussion while the other observed and took notes.

Figure 1

- FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

 1. How does the university prepare and “phased-you-in” into a virtual internship?
 2. How about you? What self-preparation did you do for yourself before this virtual internship?
 3. How does virtual internship helped you in terms of:
 - a. Learning experience;
 - b. Workplace attitude; and
 - c. Workplace skills
 4. How was your experience during your virtual internship?
 5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a virtual internship in terms of preparation for handling clients?
 6. What are the challenges you’ve encountered during your virtual internship? Do you think you are to experience the same challenges again once you are already in an actual clinical setting?
 7. How did the virtual internship experience in your current setting provide you a realistic preview of the occupational therapy field?

Figure 2.
Methodology



Ethical considerations

The study began following approval by the Department of Occupational Therapy at the University of Batangas College of Allied Medical Sciences. Ethical considerations were made and selected Occupational Therapy Interns from School A and School B who registered to be part of the study received an invitation letter and were asked to sign an informed consent form before participating in the FGD. The importance of maintaining confidentiality and the right to withdraw from any part of the study was emphasized. The researchers preserved the confidentiality of all recordings

and data gathered.

Participant recruitment

The researchers conducted purposive sampling. The study was able to gather a set of six (6) OT students within the universities in the CALABARZON region, namely School A and School B. The participants that were included had a virtual internship with at least one clinical rotation to guarantee that all participants had enough involvement and could provide sufficient insights in their experienced clinical setting. Even if there is no empirical data or study that specifies the length of time necessary for a beneficial internship, the duration of the internship should be sufficient to achieve the internship's goals. (Albashiry, Voogt, & Pieters, 2011; Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007; McGowan, 2018, as cited in Nauman & Nasreen, 2020).

Data collection

The FGD was used to gather the needed data. An informed consent form was sent by email before the group discussion. The FGD was facilitated through Zoom, a video conferencing platform that can be used to meet with others virtually, either by video or audio-only, or both (Tillman, 2021). Zoom can be utilized through a computer desktop or mobile app (ie, Webwise), and it is user-friendly even on first exposure, and there are no security concerns or privacy breaches (Archibald et al., 2019). The FGD lasted for an hour and a half, with the researchers present as facilitators. It is often difficult to completely explore the topic of the discussion if the FGD is shorter than 60 minutes (Garcia & Prasad, 2017). The entire group discussion was recorded, and all the collected data was transcribed, analyzed, and considered in determining the aims of the research paper.

Data analysis

The researchers provided an accurate transcription and verified the collected data from the group discussion. The first three authors transcribed, and

the fourth author verified the data. The gathered data was analyzed using thematic analysis. According to Caulfield (2020), thematic analysis is a good approach for trying to discover and understand people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, or values from a set of qualitative data. The analysis was done by (1) familiarizing the data, (2) assigning codes, (3) identifying the patterns or themes, and lastly, (5) reviewing and naming the themes (Mortensen, 2020). All authors contributed and agreed to the final themes

Findings and discussion

Demographic profile

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

University	Age	Gender	Clinical Setting
School A	22	F	Pediatrics
School A	21	F	Physical Dysfunction
School A	22	M	Physical Dysfunction
School A	21	M	Pediatrics
School B	22	F	Psychosocial
School B	25	F	Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR)

The study engaged occupational therapy students from CALABARZON who experienced delivering services through the virtual internship. A total of six (6) occupational therapy interns participated in this study. The researchers identified the respondents' profiles shown in Table 1 in terms of university enrollment and clinical setting of the CALABARZON OT Interns.

Experiences of occupational therapy students on virtual internship

This study focused on exploring the experiences of virtual internships among OT interns. Overall, the study revealed that the virtual internship had a significant impact on the internship experience of OT interns. To further support this, the following themes were identified: (1) Preparation

for Virtual Internship through Bridging Programs; (2) Positive Experiences, Attitudes, and Practices in Virtual Internship; (3) Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Internship; (4) Challenges and Additional Demands in Virtual Internship; and (5) Preview of Real Occupational Therapy through Virtual Internship.

Preparation for virtual internship through bridging programs

According to McGrath et al. (2009), bridging programs are designed to fill the perceived gap between students' current English language ability and academic level and the level required for undergraduate study via the English medium. One of the themes that was discussed during the focus group discussion was the interns' preparation for virtual internships through bridging programs. The bridging programs shared by the participants included junior internships, management of actual patients, use of available communication for telehealth, and role-play activities. In preparation for their internship, the participants also noted the importance of self-reviewing different case studies related to their assigned clinical rotation, as well as theoretical learning. One participant disclosed:

Bridging or Transition programs include teaching ethics, practical tips into handling virtual clients, just like virtual intervention. We were also taught about evidence based practice (EBP), and how to maximize the use of the platforms, such as Zoom and Google Meet.

This finding reflects the previous study by Jones & Park (2021), implying that well-planned and well-designed virtual internships can be an empowering learning experience and can be a good option for student internship programs.

Positive experiences, attitudes, and practices in virtual internship

According to Gault et al. (2000), internships are a bridge to link theory and practice by taking part in supervised and scheduled work. These internship programs not only improve interns' personal skills but also enhance their personal growth and experience. By integrating conceptual knowledge and training through academic internship programs, students

can be facilitated to better implement their concepts in the workplace. Furthermore, according to Carlton (2021), virtual internships necessitate excellent organizational and time management abilities. Virtual internships provide access to previously unavailable opportunities. Students in remote locations can complete internships with prominent firms without migrating, and undergraduates can target their desired employer even if it is not in their immediate area. Virtual interns can broaden their search to a national level. Based on the responses of the participants, client-oriented skills, interpersonal attitudes, and intern skills were highlighted. These contribute to their responses, such as learning how to cope, practicing good communication skills, and accepting constructive feedback. One participant disclosed:

What really helps me as well is learning to be open with feedback and learning not to take that feedback personally because they are our clinical preceptors in each rotation, they are the ones to have experience and they are good with handling clients, so it's very important to take note of the feedback.

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of virtual internship

Advantages

The advantages developed during the virtual internship were the organization and efficiency of sessions. Participants mentioned that the setup of a virtual internship gave them sufficient time to have a prepared flow of the evaluation process and the use of visual aids. One participant stated:

The advantage for me is you can have a copy of the flow of your evaluation, so you can prepare beforehand including the scripts for questions. With that, you will not worry and will not miss out any questions because you have the copy of the said outline.

This finding is supported by the literature, e.g. (Cortese et al., 2015), indicating that virtual internships are viewed as an essential and innovative approach for an effective method for students to use their academic knowledge in a modern corporate environment.

Disadvantages

The disadvantages of virtual internships were increased task demands, non-participative clients, uncertainties in the availability of resources, technical issues, and personal dilemmas.

1. Task demands

One of the most mentioned disadvantages is the increase in task demands in terms of instructional materials, such as making PowerPoints and creating visuals aids. One participant disclosed:

t is really difficult to always prepare visual aids and worry about how to engage with clients. One of the disadvantages as well is that when it comes to preparation, especially in telehealth, is getting the materials ready because we are not in an onsite clinic. With this, clients are the ones to prepare and provide their own materials since they are at home, so you must list the materials that they need to prepare (days) before the therapy starts.

2. Non-participative clients

Non-participative clients also imposed a disadvantage on having virtual internships. According to Al-Tannir et al. (2017), there is increasing evidence that client participation contributes to the development of better health outcomes. In the dynamic therapeutic relationship, clients and health providers should share relevant healthcare information and resources so that clients can consider all the options available to them and decide on a plan of care that best suits their individual lifestyles, cultural beliefs, and personal values. Participation is essential to enable clients or communities to increase their healthcare knowledge, improve their capacity to have control over their conditions, and produce better health outcomes. One participant said:

You don't know the materials that they have, although you can ask them, but what if they don't have any prepared materials and they are not that responsive? You need to keep on texting them or messaging them. It is difficult to contact your clients or their caregivers.

3. Availability of resources

Another disadvantage given by the participants is the uncertainty about the availability of resources, especially for their clients. Clients may face challenges during the participation process that could variably influence the length, frequency, or quality of their engagement at any point in time. In

dealing with the resources itself, socioeconomic factors may influence client participation, with reference to how educational level may impact health literacy and a client's potential to think critically about their healthcare decisions. (Longtin et al., 2012). One participant disclosed:

It becomes a hassle because the caregivers must be taught each on the list of materials. Since we have to consider their socioeconomic status, we must explain everything in depth since they may not be able to fully comprehend. Since this is an online mode of service delivery, we must utilize the platform and only the available resources in their home, this is where the activities become limited. Therefore, as much as you would like to provide a better activity for the client, you are unable to do so..

4. Technical issues

Another disadvantage is the technical issues faced by the participants. According to Raina (2020), technology is considered the key component of a virtual internship and is greatly dependent on video conferencing, messages, and meetings. This kind of internship might not work for students with poor internet connections or those without technical equipment. Technological issues cited by the participants include interrupted internet connections, technical difficulties, and power interruptions. One participant stated:

Another disadvantage is that when you are already implementing the OT activities and since it's telehealth, you cannot avoid having an intermittent internet connection. I've experienced this, wherein I'm facilitating a group activity and suddenly I'm disconnected, and I find it hard to get it back.

According to Hurtado (2021), miscommunication can occur during virtual internships since everything is dependent on communicating through emails or video calls. A participant from the physical dysfunction setting added that technological difficulties experienced by either the intern or client are also challenging throughout the occupational therapy delivery. Moreover, the participants also reported that an interrupted internet connection affects the productivity of the 1-hour session. One participant said:

Internet connection is also a challenge, we can't utilize the whole one hour session for productive therapy..

5. Personal dilemmas

Another disadvantage mentioned by the participants is their personal dilemmas, such as experiencing burnout. Burnout is a work-related, psychological condition defined as physical and/or emotional exhaustion and fatigue among individuals working in the human services sector (Galán et al., 2011). Burnout can be associated with any job and stress. In medical practice, it refers to the feeling of being overextended, 'drained-out,' and 'used-up' (Patel et al., 2018). The reasons behind this high level of burnout and stress among interns are still vague and variable but can be related to the inadequate preparation for practice, financial worries, and sleep deprivation according to the study of Hannan, et. al. (2018) and also working hours and heavy workload, as reported in another study by Lam et al. (2010) among interns. According to one participant:

It's very ppt (power point) heavy, so it is necessary for you to prepare it beforehand. So, I've experienced burnout, especially when there are several patients to manage within the same day, as you have to edit and prepare the materials. Since my first rotation was pediatric, it had to be colorful and tailored appropriately for the client.

Challenges and additional demands in virtual internship

The fourth theme indicates the challenges and demands experienced by the participants in managing clients during virtual internships. The article "Challenges to Account for with Virtual Internships" by Hora (2020) states that it is necessary to understand that when internships are undertaken virtually, many of the benefits of traditional internships are lost. Challenges are inevitable with a rapid shift from a typical internship (Shield, 2020). This finding also relates to the study by Jones & Park (2021), which shows that heavy dependence on digital technology poses some challenges for virtual internships and indicates that these internships may not be suitable for all students because it is more difficult for interns to gain on-the-job experience. From the narratives, it is evident that seven factors affected the clinical performance of the students, such as increased work demands, technological issues, limited resources, inaccurate assessments and methods, parents' willingness and cooperation, lack of client motivation, and personal duties.

Increased work demands

One of the most reported challenges by the participants was the increased work demands they experienced during their clinical rotation. The transition from in-person to virtual occupational therapy delivery brought adjustments and increased the work demands for the participants to successfully deliver the occupational therapy services. Primarily, the participants experienced increased demands in preparation for the activities before the virtual therapy session. One participant from the pediatric setting said:

Really, it's been tiring, because it is difficult to think of such activities that can be easily instructed and can be performed at home with very limited resources.

Other demands that were reported by the participants include familiarization of the platform to be used; the pressure they feel caused by different factors (i.e., the presence of the clinical supervisor, co-interns, or parents); and tiredness from the preparation.

Limited Resources

In terms of resources, participants revealed that it was a challenge for them to manage clients due to limited resources. The participants experienced difficulties in preparing activities for the client since they needed to make sure that all materials would be available in the comfort of the client's home. According to The OT Toolbox (2021), occupational therapists use OT tools to assist people to attain what is important for them to have a full and functional life. In occupational therapy, tools are vital for occupational therapy professionals in building skills. OT tools are evidence-based interventions and specific resources and can include toys, games, adapted equipment, worksheets, and educational handouts (The OT Toolbox, 2021). Utilizing proper materials in telepractice can create a meaningful difference in the gains made by the patient and occupational therapist (Natalia, 2020). However, as a result of the abrupt shift to virtual means of service delivery, the interns had difficulty managing the client with the available materials. One participant stated:

I've experienced that if the materials to be used are not available, what are the activities you need to provide that will also achieve the same target. For example, if a ball is not available, does the caregiver need to buy it? ...or can you make another or use alternative materials.

Inaccurate assessment and method

The interns expressed concerns about the assessment and method given during the virtual internship. With virtual internships, students are unable to obtain first-hand professional experience and do not have any human interaction since they work alone. Virtual internships also bring too many distractions that may affect work productivity (Letting Agent Today, 2021). This was demonstrated by the participants' experiences with providing and receiving inaccurate evaluations and procedures as a result of the circumstance. Due to the fact that it was conducted via digital platforms, participants were unable to manage clients in person, which made it difficult for them to provide instructions and strategies for a particular assessment. One participant shared:

My client from my past rotation- phys days, he has cerebral palsy (CP) and part of the intervention are massages and passive or active range of motion (ROM)...it is difficult since it becomes a challenge because you need to instruct the caregiver properly although you can provide a video but it's still different when you give the instruction, the massages or the ROM exercises in person because you can't really show how much pressure is needed for the massage.

Parents' willingness and cooperation

The willingness and cooperation of the parents challenged the participants in delivering occupational therapy services to children. As stated by Vermiere (2012), the care received by a child is best when there is a parent's active involvement in the process of the child's intervention. This is because the parents and interventionists will work as a collaborative team. Moreover, parents act as "partners" with the therapist in the process of the child's therapy and no longer play the role of "observers." Valeo Team (2021), Most of the participants pointed out that other caregivers or parents were

not compliant when they were trying to reach out to them out for therapy purposes. The interns communicated with the caregivers through online platforms such as Messenger to give information and further details of the therapy session. However, one participant narrated that it is a challenge when the caregiver is not cooperative in communicating with the intern. The participant experienced a situation wherein a caregiver would give an update whether they could attend the session or not a day or an hour before the therapy session. Technivorz Media (2021) stated that communication can be affected in remote internships and can lead to difficulties since different schedules result in failed communications. Miscommunication can occur during virtual internships. As narrated by one participant:

The other challenge there is communication with the caregiver because sometimes when they reply, 'okay', I'm not assured that they are able to prepare the materials. Then sometimes, they do not reply to the message and then they will reply that they can attend minutes before the session.

Lack of client motivation

Aside from the problems stated above, the participants also experienced difficulties engaging the clients during the therapy session due to a lack of motivation. From the study by Peterson (2018), a client's motivation is noted as a vital component to obtaining an efficient and effective road to recovery. However, as a result of the virtual arrangement, the participants had concerns about motivating their clients, as the setup could have an impact on them. One of the participants reported that an unexpected situation, such as connection problems, can affect the client's motivation. Another participant also said:

'Another challenge that I encountered during virtual internship is when the client himself is not compliant or he is not motivated to participate in the activities. In my case, I had a client during the first rotation... The client is young, about 3 years old and he did not want to engage in the activities.'

Personal duties

Lastly, the personal duties of the interns served as another challenge for

them. One of the participants experienced trouble managing life roles. The participant expressed:

Maybe the part of how you'll divide your role is also difficult because given that you are at home, your role is not only as a student. Of course you are also a child, you also have household chores that you need to finish'.

Preview of real occupational therapy through virtual internship

From the analysis, the last theme presents the insights of the participants concerning the preview of real occupational therapy through the means of a virtual internship. Undertaking a virtual internship made it possible for the interns to acquire a preview of the occupational therapy field of practice despite the challenges encountered. Hence, perceived similarities and differences between face-to-face and virtual occupational therapy were derived from the narratives of the participants. The participants believe virtual internships are very different from in-person therapy delivery. It differs in terms of the effectiveness of the two means of therapy delivery. Moreover, the participants also identified similarities in terms of the occupational therapy process applied. This is in accordance with the study by Wildana et al.(2020), which emphasizes the importance of regulatory factors including the availability of Wi-Fi and the level of students' literacy in the implementation of online learning and virtual internships.

A participant stated that compared to the virtual, activities during onsite OT are more effective. Another participant also expressed that onsite OT is more fulfilling. For instance, the participant argued:

It's really a different scenario in real life. . .it's more fulfilling and it's very different if you're in the clinics. There are no parents around and you can maximize the therapeutic use of self (TUS) and you can really do your management for them as you hold them in person.

On the other hand, a participant from the Community-Based Rehabilitation setting shared that virtual internships and in-person internships provide the same process when it comes to occupational therapy

delivery. CBR is a strategy for community development intended to improve the lives of those with disabilities and their families and to ensure their inclusion and engagement in society (WHO, 2017). In the CBR setting, OT interns encourage participation in therapeutic activities for people with disabilities and aid them in being integrated into society (Mishra, 2003). The general field procedure is the same for the two methods. The participant disclosed:

The only difference is you can't really handle the patient face to face but the process... is the same because of course, you will do the screening... screening to discharge plan.

Additionally, the participants are also able to discern the client-centered practice of the profession. The conditions were observed and understood by the interns based on the client's manifestations and provided a broad understanding of the case that resulted in the awareness of giving meaningful interventions. One participant indicates the importance of appropriate interventions that are centered on the client's condition and potential. The participant stated:

It's very different when you see the manifestation in your client...you can see how it really is and you can understand the case...and understand if the intervention is motivational.

As indicated by Thomas (2016), client-centered therapy requires the client to participate actively in the treatment with the therapist's understanding and nondirectiveness. It is focused on treating clients as they want to be treated, empowering the clients, and promoting interventions to minimize the potential harm to clients (CAHM, 2017). Thus, occupational therapy aims to allow clients to participate in different occupations based on what they want to do personally, socially, and culturally (World Federation of Occupational Therapists [WFOT], 2010). Furthermore, as concluded by the systematic review of Rodriguez-Bailon et al. (2020), client-centered practice aids patients to achieve greater satisfaction with occupational performance as they accept the new limitations on their occupations. The interns' ability to observe how client-centered practice influences the delivery of occupational therapy services strengthens the arguments.

Finally, a virtual internship can provide a preview of the holistic approach to occupational therapy. The holistic approach is an integrative outlook on occupational therapy that aims to provide service to the clients

and view every factor that could affect their well-being (Blazevic, 2020). It is highly relevant in occupational therapy practice because of a whole-person approach to treatment (Stromsdorfer, 2020). Most of the participants expressed how this internship helped them to understand the broadness and flexibility of the profession that contributes to the effectiveness of the OT services. A participant narrated that occupational therapy is a creative life skill that focuses not only on one area. One intern disclosed the flexibility of OT in terms of interacting with the patients, despite the circumstances. The intern said:

We are under circumstances we can't control, but we're still able to find a way...at least we're able to interact with these patients so it really shows that the occupational therapy field is really flexible.

Conclusion

A virtual internship provides interns with a remote experience of a clinical internship, but it is clear that the whole process was abruptly implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This led healthcare students, specifically Occupational Therapy students, to value the flexibility of having internships virtually. It enabled them to gain access to clinical training, have experience in handling clients from different clinical settings as they go along with their rotations, and be supervised by their instructors. The narratives of occupational therapy students from Philippines on virtual internship revealed how the shift due to COVID-19 made significant changes in their whole internship experience and determined if this engagement affected their capacity to learn clinical skills and ability to provide quality patient care. Their experiences reflected their preparations and how the schools prepared for this set-up. Also, it stated how virtual internships provided a realistic preview of the occupational therapy field and how they benefited and were challenged by the delivery of services virtually. The themes that emerged from this study can potentially address the improvement and implementation of virtual internships both during and post-pandemic. This can also further enhance the pursuit of future researchers to gain insights from studies that will broaden the aspects of this virtual internship.

Implications

- There is a need for adequate preparation on changing or enhancing delivery of learning, hence flexibility and openness to various methods of internship should be encouraged.
- Enabling feedback of the current programs based on the occupational therapy interns themselves is essential.
- Improvement of the virtual internship in the Philippines to improve learning, working, and clinical experiences of occupational interns could be further explored. The possibility of future outbreaks must be considered for them to explore further improvements as an internship response.

Limitations and recommendations

The study only covered one FGD with a small sample from the Philippines. Since this study solely focuses on occupational therapy interns at two universities in the Philippines, the researchers propose using a broader source of data for future studies. Allied health programs have varied criteria and focuses; therefore findings may vary. The study proposes conducting a webinar with a seminar or training for present and future OT interns doing virtual internships. Researchers recommend that internship coordinators evaluate OT interns' experiences. This is to determine what changes and enhancements to the virtual internship memorandum should be made to allow OT interns to participate and interact in the field despite physical distance.

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