

Internship at a Retirees' Association

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ABSTRACT

Obtaining a place for internship for a graduating student of business is a challenge. The challenge became a worrying concern to an international student who attempted to obtain a training organization during Covid-19 pandemic within four weeks before he submitted the name of the willing organization to the internship coordinator. The case describes the student's efforts to obtain a placement and the tasks that he performed as an intern in an organization related to his university.

Key words: Internship, training, retirees' association, Malaysia

Safwan Madi was in his final semester and final year of studies in the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program of a public university in Malaysia. He hailed from Langsa, Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (commonly known as Aceh), Indonesia, and has moved to Medan, North Sumatera since the last 15 years.

Medan is the capital and largest city of in the province of North Sumatera. The city is also a regional financial centre of Sumatera.

Safwan completed 12 years of education in Indonesia before enrolling into the BBA studies at RUU, an acronym of Regional Universal University, one of the 7 public universities in the states of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur combined, Malaysia. Prior to that, he studied for Higher Secondary School (Sekolah Menengah Atas) at Al-Azhar International High School, Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia from 2014 to 2016. Al-Azhar used English as it medium of instruction.

While studying at Al-Azhar, he entered The National English Competition (NEC) and was the second runner up, i.e., the third winner in the national-level competition in Indonesia. The NEC that started in 2012 was a prestigious competition to assess English competencies.

Target Organizations

It was four weeks before the end of his last semester of his final year of studies when Safwan started to apply for industry attachment. He did not contact any organizations in his home country because of two main reasons. During Covid-19 outbreak, travelling back to his home country would be cumbersome and expensive. Moreover, he wanted to be trained and gather industry experience in Malaysia.

He contacted five organizations to obtain a placement.

His first target was a Malaysian publicly listed company. He submitted an application letter together with his CV via email. He attempted to get a place with the company when he learned that his peer was given a place. But the company gave no response to his application. This was his first disappointment.

He walked-in the University's research center to inquire a vacancy for an internship. The staff of the center said it was not accepting interns during Covid-19 outbreak.

Next, Safwan wrote to the University's social responsibility unit (SRU) on December 18, 2020. His letter was shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1 Application for an Internship

Room 49, 3rd Floor,
International UG Hostel-23
Regional Universal University
Jalan Berombak
70777 Bukit Untung, Selangor

December 18, 2020

APPLICATION FOR A TRAINEE POSITION AT SRU

I am Safwan Madi, a business administration graduating student of the Regional Universal University (RUU). I would like to apply to do my internship with SRU for 12 to 14 weeks. My former lecturer, and prospective Business Department's internship supervisor, Prof. Soleh Hamdi recommended SRU to me when I sought his advice to do my internship at RUU.

I am a detail-oriented, focus-minded as well as highly punctual person, which I believe will match me with SRU work environment.

I am comfortable with public speaking and in-class presentations in almost all of my courses. I also became group leader for almost every group project in the courses that I completed.

I am attaching my resume together with this application letter. I would really appreciate your consideration to accept me as a trainee with SRU. My internship is scheduled to commence from February 8, 2021.

Thank you.
Sincerely,

Safwan Madi
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Email address: safwanmadi6915@gmail.com

Safwan made a follow-up phone call a day after he emailed his letter to SRU. He was partially jubilant when an officer hinted a positive reply. However, the officer did not give a very clear response, whether or not he wanted to offer a place of training to Safwan. When Safwan called back subsequently, the officer said he would be keeping him posted. Thinking that the unit would expect him to do report writing, Safwan brought his past assignment reports during his final year for various courses to the SRU office to substantiate his writing competency.

Safwan suspected that the officer seemed to be indecisive. He hoped the latter would have given him a decisive – accept or reject - reply. Eventually, the officer never contacted Safwan. Safwan also decided not to make a follow-up.

A Related Organization

It was one week left for Safwan to submit the name of his proposed training organization to the internship coordinator of his degree program.

He felt dejected and truly desperate to find a training organization. The Covid-19 outbreak where movement restrictions were imposed by the Malaysian government further constrained the companies to consider placing the prospective interns on their premises

In response to Safwan's request to suggest an alternative place for training, Safwan's former lecturer, Prof. Ayub Khidir suggested to him to do his attachment with RUU's Retirees Association (RRA). Safwan welcomed the idea. He clearly knew that if he could not obtain a training organization, he would have to extend the duration of studies and would not be able to graduate on time.

The quietness of campus due to the Control Movement Order by the Malaysian Government suddenly broke the silence with the good news. By undergoing the internship, he will be able to graduate on time. Graduate on time refers to the completion of studies of a full-time student from a particular enrolment batch on or before the year that they are prescribed to graduate. The Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia emphasizes that all public universities strive to prepare their students to complete their studies on time.

The retirees' association approved the internship application of Safwan. His training duration commenced from 02 February 2021 to 26 April 2021, approximately 13 weeks.

The Retirees Association (RRA) office was located within 2 kilometers of Safwan's hostel. It took him 20 minutes to walk from hostel to the office. He normally reached the office by 7.30 a.m., leaving by 6.00 p.m. He faced the least difficulty to buy meal on campus because the cafeterias were opened in the building. The food was still cheap at that time, unlike post-Covid time later.

Covid-19 Environment

The COVID-19 or the coronavirus pandemic was caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that was deemed to have originated from the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the

outbreak a public health emergency on 30 January 2020, and declared it as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Prior to this, some countries regarded Covid-19 as an endemic disease.

Endemic refers to a case that belongs to a particular country. An outbreak is an increase in the number of endemic cases. When an outbreak affects a large number of people within a region it is called an epidemic. When the case spreads over multiple countries it becomes a pandemic.

Covid-19 symptoms include fever, nocturnal cough, and fatigue and have caused death. Covid-19 was transmitted through air. The virus has been mutating and producing many variants. Vaccines were produced in various countries since December 2020. Treatments include antiviral drugs and symptom control.

In mitigating the public health threat of the virus, the Malaysian government has issued national orders under various phases. The mitigation measures included mask mandates, quarantines, testing systems, contact tracing of the infected, lockdowns, travel restrictions, business restrictions and closures, and workplace hazard controls.

The internship of Safwan was subject to RMCO and MCO because his start and end dates were 02 February 2021 and 26 April 2021. The duration of the orders is shown in the table below:

Exhibit 2 Duration Type of Covid-19 Control Orders

Duration	Acronym	Name of Order
18 March 2020 – 3 May 2020	MCO	Movement Control Order
4 May 2020 – 9 June 2020	CMCO	Conditional Movement Control Order
10 June 2020 – 31 March 2021	RMCO	Recovery Movement Control Order
13 January 2021 – 31 May 2021	MCO	Movement Control Order

During 2020 and 2021, educational institutions like RUU were partially or fully closed. Classes and meetings were held online.

The control restrictions according to various phases include stay at home or in the hostel orders; allowing two people per household to travel in cars and buy groceries limiting travel 10 km away from homes; eateries and hawker stalls can only provide takeaway services and deliveries; banning social gathering; only five essential economic sectors allowed to operate: manufacturing, construction, services (including supermarkets, banks and health services), trade and distribution and plantations; outdoor recreational activities limited to people from the same household; non-essential workers must conduct remote work; and five person limit at mosques and other places of worship; banning travel between states and districts.

On 5 March 2021, Selangor, the state in which the University was located entered the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO). It was around this date the Malaysian government launched its National COVID-19 Immunization Program.

Despite the serene campus environment, Maulana felt extremely tense because he was worried that Covid-19 could infect anyone anytime. Without having to travel outside campus which would be riskier for Covid-19 infection, Safwan felt blessed to have gotten a safe place of training on campus.

Office of the Association

Safwan arrived at RSU office on the first day of his training, 7.30 a.m., although the official office hours started at 8.00 a.m. Early arrival to and late exit from office had been his routine.

The transparent glass door of the office looked dull from outside as if it were abandoned for many years. Upon entering, Safwan noticed that many of the wooden furniture were termite infested. The ceiling showed scattered spots of leakage. The carpet looked old and hardened, perhaps due to age.

Hostel

In his hostel, Safwan occupied a room with three single beds with two other mates, a Chinese and an Afghan. He coped with their annoying personalities, talking aloud and staying up late into the night. His roommates slept mostly during the day. He noticed this during Covid-19 season. Since he felt that the presence of his roommates affected his productivity of performing internship assignments, Safwan escaped by spending more time in the association's office.

The cafeterias were all operating during that time, except that the residents could only have takeaways. His hostel cafeteria was located only few steps away. The distance between hostel and the association office was a 20-minute walk.

Training in the Office

Safwan was totally independent and alone in the association office. The office was virtually deserted. It was co-shared between two associations, i.e., the retirees' association and the academic staff association (ASA). Safwan never met face-to-face any of the committee members of RSU, except with the Secretary once. He met the other committee members during the online Annual General Meeting (AGM). In fact, he had never seen the ASA committee members in the shared office.

He communicated with his supervisor almost on a daily basis via WhatsApp and Google Meet. These media were used in exchanging the Word and Excel attachments. The supervisor typed his remarks in the attachments received and returned them to Safwan.

The bulk of Safwan's assignments required writing, drafting the letters, notices, and minutes of meetings. See Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3 Job Assignments

WEEK 1

Drafted and completed the Trainee Job Description
Drafted proposed events for members
Drafted the Job Description of main committee members
Drafted the proposed subtopics for Association's website
Drafted a comparison among selected retirees' associations

WEEK 2

Completed the draft comparison among selected retirees' associations

Drafted the notice of meeting for the Main Committee
Drafted the appointment letter of the sub-committees
Resubmitted the improved version of ALL tasks done from 3/2/2021 until
9/2/2021
Drafted the notice to visit the University President
Drafted the letter to invite panellists to an Online Forum

WEEK 3

Drafted the Course Outline for NGO Management: due in 2 weeks

WEEK 4

Revised and completed the Course Outline for NGO Management
Sketched and completed the association office layout
Revised and completed the Course Outline for NGO Management

WEEK 5

Completed the Course Outline for NGO Management
Assisted the Secretary to create questionnaire for association's website

WEEK 6

Assisted the Secretary to record data on newly registered members

WEEK 7

Continued assisting the Secretary to record data on newly registered
members
Drafted and sent the Association's 3rd AGM's Minutes of Meeting: Draft
Sent
Attended the Association's committee meeting

WEEK 8

Processed the data on newly registered member registration in Google Forms
Compared the draft minutes of AGM by the Secretary and Assistant
Secretary
Monitoring the submission of application new member registration in
Google Forms

Week 9

Monitoring the submission of application new member registration in
Google Forms
Made a follow-up on office maintenance matters

Week 10

Monitoring the submission of application new member registration in
Google Forms

Week 11

Monitoring the submission of application new member registration in
Google Forms

Week 12

Monitoring the submission of application new member registration in Google Forms

Created a simple organization chart of senior citizens' center: Completed

Monitoring the submission of application new member registration in Google Forms

Week 13

Monitoring the submission of application new member registration in Google Forms

Since the Indonesian shared language roots, Being Indonesian, Safwan could comprehend *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) 95 percent. The two sister languages share common roots. People conversant in both languages should not assume common words share the same meaning. If one is not careful, he could cause miscommunication to the other party.

For example, the word “pusing” means taking a stroll to a Malaysian, but conveys a different meaning to an Indonesian. “Pusing” refers to head-spinning, headache to an Indonesian. Lelaki” or “*laki-laki*” is used to the male in Malaysia, but *pria* is used for male in Indonesia.

Safwan came to the association office 80 percent of his training days, and he worked from his room for the rest of the time.

Perhaps another person who Safwan communicated with was a fellow trainee, the one who was given a place for attachment in a publicly listed company. The were companies that took in trainees despite Covid-19, except it was not Safwan’s *rizq* to be trained in a private sector firm. Safwan was fully aware that his peers underwent a combination of physical presence in the office and undertaking their assignment online due to the inevitable pandemic control measures.

Pondering over his weeks of compulsory training as part of the prerequisite for graduation, he experienced the aura of flexible working hours even though he went to the association office and worked more than the typical 8 hours daily. Yes, he did feel lonely at times, but the type of assignments given to him consumed most of his time as a trainee, leaving him little room to be bored while in the office.

If he were asked his main contribution to the association during his training. His mind instantly suggests that introducing Google Form application for membership may be memorable. This is because the association had never used it before he joined the organization as its first trainee! He was apparently apprehensive about his drafted Course Outline, i.e., a syllabus for a Non-governmental Organization which he was least exposed to in his BBA curriculum. Reminiscing about it, Safwan thought, he will be eager to teach the course if allowed to do so.

Arguably, Covid-19 restriction did not provide Safwan an opportunity to organize events for the association. He loved to be involved in fund raising events. This training provided him the notion that an NGO like the retirees’ association seems to be very CSR-inclined, providing more psychological rather than material impacts on its members and external stakeholders.

Safwan believes that his future work will likely require him to interact with his co-workers rather than mostly doing work online that he went during the Covid-19 situation.

Discussion Questions

- 1 Should a bachelor's degree program like BBA exempts (excuses) its students from internship as part of the requirement to award a degree? Take a position, whether you agree or disagree and justify.
- 2 When should a prospective intern (trainee), like Safwan, start to apply for places of internship, and why?
- 3 Who should determine the training assignments: The intern, the academic supervisor, or the internship organization supervisor? A combination? Why?
- 4 Which two (2) work assignments do you think were appropriately given to Safwan? Why?
- 5 Which work assignment given to Safwan that in your opinion should be abolished, and why?
- 6 Which is better for Safwan to do his internship in Indonesia or Malaysia? Why?

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