

Reflective Essay on My Practical Training Experience as a Final-Year Construction Studies Student at the University of Cape Town

The Importance of Practical Training as a Student

Practical training is an essential aspect of education in the construction industry, especially for students like myself pursuing a Bachelor of Science Degree in Construction Studies. This training provides an invaluable opportunity to gain real-world site experience while still in the academic environment. While theoretical knowledge from textbooks and lectures lays the foundation, there are nuances and complexities in the construction industry that can only be fully understood through hands-on experience. My practical training experience exposed me to aspects of the construction process that I would not have fully grasped had I relied solely on classroom knowledge.

As a final-year student, my engagement in real-world projects has broadened my understanding of the construction industry and allowed me to apply my academic learnings in a practical setting. This experience has been instrumental in shaping my perspective on the various career paths available within the construction field. It has provided me with insights into both the practical aspects of construction management and the more technical dimensions such as project scheduling, procurement, and site safety. Through this practical training, I am better equipped to make informed decisions about which career trajectory to pursue, whether it be in construction management, quantity surveying, or another specialized area within the industry.

My journey into the intricacies of project management started with Musa Mseleku, the site agent for Ojama. Musa played a pivotal role in coordinating various aspects of the project. I had the privilege of attending and documenting minutes for his meetings, where he interacted with stakeholders such as the client, subcontractors, and principal agents. These meetings offered insights into project progress, challenges faced, and strategic decisions taken. Shadowing Musa broadened my understanding of his responsibilities in overseeing day-to-day operations and ensuring alignment with project timelines and goals.

My Personal Practical Training Experience

During my third year, I fulfilled my practical training hours on three different occasions, two of which were events organized by the Association of Built Environment Students (ABES). The first was the ABES x Blue Moon Do-It-Day, and the second was the ABES x CIOB x W3O Open Day. To further my work experience, I returned to Motheo Academy in Randburg, Gauteng, where I worked as an intern throughout my June vacation. These diverse experiences allowed me to engage with the construction industry in various capacities, each offering unique learning opportunities and insights into different facets of the field.

Blue Moon x ABES Do-It-Day

The Do-It-Day initiative is designed to engage construction students with projects that give back to the community while providing hands-on construction experience. These events typically take place at sites focused on community development, often in underprivileged areas. Blue Moon, a non-profit organization, collaborates with ABES to select and coordinate these projects. ABES plays a crucial role in organizing students for these events, ensuring that they gain both practical experience and an understanding of the social impact of their work.

The Do-It-Day event I participated in took place on the 29th of April in Franschhoek, where we worked on a community center in an underprivileged area. The center, which included a church and classrooms, was operated by an elderly preacher and served as an important hub for the local community. As an executive member of the ABES committee, I was deeply involved in planning the event. The days leading up to the event were a valuable opportunity for me to refine my

coordination and project management skills. Together with my committee members, I liaised with Blue Moon and the Construction and Economics Management (CEM) Department, coordinated student participation, prepared the site hosts, and managed logistics such as catering. the day of the event, we were responsible for ensuring that students adhered to the rules of the site, while also facilitating communication between them, the ABES team, and the site hosts. I had the chance to use tools and materials I had never worked with before, including a drill to help fix the roofing for the children's classrooms. Through this experience, I gained practical skills such as understanding how to assess site safety and the importance of clear communication in a construction setting. It also gave me insight into how small-scale construction projects can have a profound social impact on communities.

ABES x CIOB x W3O Open Day

The ABES x CIOB x W3O Open Day was an event aimed at exposing built environment students to an active construction site and providing an opportunity to interact with professionals in the field. Organized by ABES in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and hosted by Washirika 3 Oaks (W3O), the day was structured to give students a comprehensive view of how a construction site operates.

arrival, all students were given a safety induction and provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) such as hard hats and vests. Once inducted, we were led onto the site where we observed ongoing construction work. This experience was particularly enlightening for me because I had been learning about pile foundations in my Construction Technology 3 lectures, and seeing them in person helped me understand the theoretical concepts in a more practical manner.

Being able to witness the construction process firsthand made my coursework come alive, and I found myself more engaged in my academic studies afterward. Additionally, the event provided an excellent opportunity for networking. Meeting and interacting with industry professionals from W3O helped me feel more comfortable in engaging with experienced practitioners in the field, which is a crucial skill for any aspiring construction professional.

During my June vacation, I returned to Motheo Academy, the first place where I had done my practical training. Motheo Academy specializes in training apprentices in trades such as bricklaying, plumbing, and carpentry, and has recently expanded its operations to accommodate more students. Returning to this familiar environment, I realized how much I had grown in both my academic journey and career ambitions.

At Motheo Academy, I worked closely with the program coordinator, which allowed me to apply my construction management skills in a real-world context. I was involved in coordinating plans and programs for the incoming learnership initiative, assisting the trade lecturers with administrative tasks, and overseeing daily site operations. Additionally, I had the opportunity to work directly with tools and materials, which enhanced my carpentry and bricklaying skills.

One of the most enriching aspects of my time at Motheo Academy was participating in site visits. The academy regularly checks on the performance of its apprentices by conducting visits to various construction sites, and I was fortunate enough to be part of the team that carried out these evaluations. This provided me with valuable insights into the real-world application of the training the apprentices were receiving, as well as the standards of performance expected on a construction site.

Overall Experience

My practical training experiences have provided me with a comprehensive understanding of the construction industry, which has significantly informed my academic journey. Through these experiences, I have gained insights into the daily operations of construction sites, developed technical skills, and honed my ability to coordinate and manage projects. I have also learned valuable lessons in leadership, communication, and teamwork, all of which are critical skills for a successful career in construction management or quantity surveying.

These experiences have allowed me to reflect on the direction I want to take in my career. I now feel more confident in pursuing either construction management or quantity surveying, as I have gained firsthand knowledge of the responsibilities and challenges associated with both fields. The practical training has not only reinforced my academic learning but also provided me with the clarity I needed to make informed decisions about my future in the construction industry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the practical training I have undergone has been instrumental in shaping my perspective on the construction industry. It has provided me with the opportunity to apply the knowledge I gained in the classroom in real-world situations, thus enhancing my understanding of the field. Through my participation in events like Do-It-Day and the Open Day, as well as my internship at Motheo Academy, I have developed both technical and managerial skills that will serve me well in my future career. As I prepare to complete my studies, I am confident that the practical training experiences I have had will guide me in making the best decisions for my professional development.