

Reflection on Building a library for a local secondary school in Vietnam (12th June – 29th July 2016)

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I am a year 2 civil engineering student. This is the first project that I involved in building a library with HKU students and local people in Vietnam. I learnt a lot from this internship.

As for the construction work, I can learn more new skills and knowledge that are hardly learnt in Hong Kong. Take steel cutting and steel bending as an example, in Hong Kong steel bars are precast in factory and are made by machine. Engineers don't need to make, or even know how to make it by themselves. However, in Vietnam, almost all construction materials such as concrete and steel bars are made on site without precast. Therefore, we participated in lots of construction work and learnt lots of practical knowledge from this internship.

Apart from gaining practical knowledge in preparing building materials, I learnt management skill which was very significant for the whole project. For instance, I practiced time management skills. As there is a timeline for every projects, engineers would make sure that the whole program was carried out according to the proposed progress and schedule. We verified that the activities like inauguration ceremony, interviews with various stakeholders, and evaluation on research projects were organised in the right track. In times of bad weather, all construction work and working schedule would be affected. As interns, we worked to assist local engineers to rearrange the construction work schedule, as well as better arrange manpower and utensils distribution to increase the efficiency of the construction work. Also, we learnt to manage the quality of the construction work. We recognised that after some parts of the infrastructure were built, we would need to carefully measure them to ascertain that the structure is following the drawings.

In the construction trip, I have a deep reflection on safety issues. In the construction site, it is not uneasy for us to see many nails and bricks on the ground, and wooden plates surrounding the site, we might easily get hurt by pound, cut and stab. As regards, alert should be paid on site every time and everywhere so as to prevent any potential accident. Through this trip, I also realise the importance of taking care of others perspectives as a single decision can be related to a lot of different stakeholders. I would think about child safety issue when working on the construction project. While this library was built for students to read and cultivate reading habits, convenience and security of the building was consider in the first place. When we found that one of the proposed staircases to access the library is next to a pond, we took into consideration children safety and drowning issues, and finally decided not to build the staircase to prevent any accidents.

Regarding communication with stakeholders in Vietnam, I think that Vietnamese including translators in our team were very nice. For the translators, they reminded us of the details we forgot when doing project, helped us for translation and amended details of the project. Besides, they were willing to share their experience and feelings they had on distinct issues, and thought us their culture and customs. We got along with them well. Regarding the local Vietnamese we encountered outside the construction area, it was very nice of them to help us to fix the fuse, teach us play roller skating and chat with us in English. The experience I had in Vietnam was very different from that I expected. I was more than glad to have joined the program, met and made friends with the translators, and exchanged my ideas with various stakeholders in the project.