

Job Performance of Bicol University Language Practicum Trainees 2013

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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the first batch of Language Practicum (LP) trainees among the AB English majors of Bicol University, from the viewpoint of sponsoring organizations. It composes the second part of a research project titled “The AB English Language Practicum 2013 and Beyond”. It particularly determined the level of attainment of objectives of the practicum; the level of knowledge, skills and attitude (KSA) development of the trainees; and the over-all assessment of the language practicum learning experience. It is anchored on the quasi-evaluation approaches/model of program evaluation. It uses survey-questionnaires deriving information from employer evaluations on the attainment of objectives. It is also qualitative in nature as descriptions of learning experience and job performance are derived from feedback forms from sponsoring organizations. Responses were validated through a focus-group discussion (FGD) among representatives from sponsoring agencies, and other stakeholders.

Results show that sponsoring agencies found the Language Practicum 2013 to have achieved its objectives, giving it a superior rating. The development of KSA is rated outstanding, with knowledge, skills, and attitudes placed at the superior level. Some respondents, however, found a few problems with regard to trainees’ job performance, particularly in listening to instructions; suitability to the task; using computers and applications; and writing skills. Overall, sponsoring agencies found the implementation of LP 2013 to be remarkably successful. Guidelines to be crafted can profit from a few practices that can be deduced from this implementation and carried over to the next batch of trainees.

Keywords: *practicum, on-the-job training, supervisors’ assessment, AB English*

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Introduction

This research is the second of three studies that make up a research project forming a quasi-evaluation of the AB English Language Practicum 2012-2013. Largely, the intention is to use findings to propose policy recommendations and guidelines for the improved conduct of the Language Practicum, now only on its third year of implementation. The research looked into the attainment of objectives of the newly-implemented requirement for graduates, the training experience of the students, and the job performance of the Language Practicum Trainees. It also went as far as industry profiling of host organizations willing to accommodate AB English trainees in the future.

Consequently, the research aims to bridge the gap between competencies and jobs available. The continuity in information exchange, with schools updating the students about the trends in employment and with the Industry providing such information, hopefully, will resolve the pervasive mismatch between academe and industry, on a micro level at the least.

The main objective of this study, the second phase of the research project, “The AB English Language Practicum 2013 and Beyond”, is to evaluate the first batch of Language Practicum trainees among the AB English majors of Bicol University, from the point of view of the sponsoring organizations.

Specific objectives are as follows:

1. Determine the level of attainment of objectives of the Language Practicum 2013 from the point of view of the sponsoring organizations;
2. Determine the level of knowledge, skills and attitude (KSA) development of the Language Practicum trainees; the most/least developed learning domain in particular, as assessed by immediate supervisors;
3. Find out from sponsoring agencies which academic skills are most/least applicable to job performance of language trainees;
4. Identify the problems in terms of job performance of the trainees encountered by training supervisors throughout the duration of the Language Practicum; and
5. Establish the sponsoring agencies’ over-all assessment of the language practicum learning experience, at the same time, deduce the good practices derived from the experience.

Research Framework

This research is anchored on the quasi-evaluation approaches/model of program evaluation.

The researchers adhered to the restraint of the source in using the term evaluation theory, referring to the “more advanced” notion of evaluation. Evaluation Theory is here reserved for “creatively developed yet more rigorously tested conceptualization of program evaluation” (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2013, p. 63). Because more demanding requirements and higher standards are required for the meaning of theory, the term model/approaches is preferred. This refers to “an evaluation theorist’s

idealized conceptualizations for conducting program evaluation” (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2013, p. 63).

The question-oriented approaches address specified questions (often employing a wide range of methods) and the method-oriented approaches typically use a particular method. Whether the methodology or questions addressed in these approaches are appropriate for assessing a program’s merit and worth are secondary consideration. The questions-oriented begins with a set of questions and the methods-oriented may start with an overriding commitment to employ both qualitative and quantitative methods. Both approaches stress that it is usually better to answer a few pointed questions well than to attempt a broad assessment of a program’s merit and worth (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2013).

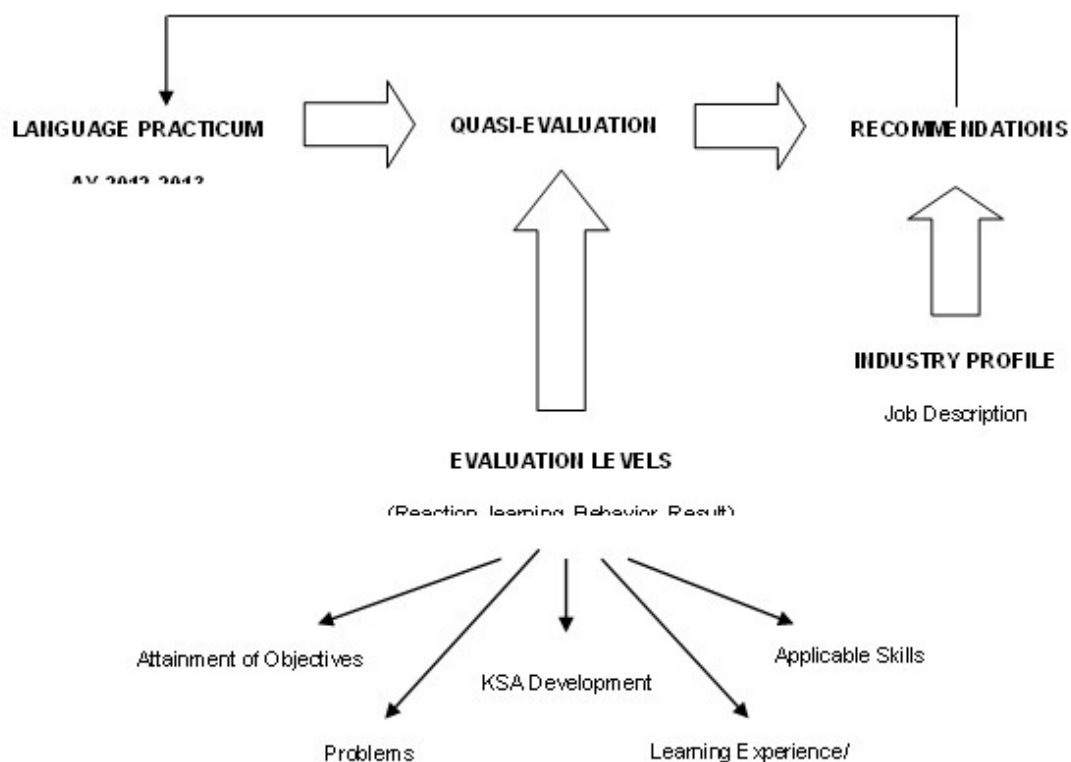


Figure 1. Research Model

This study operates within the same framework as the first study of the larger research project, but data are gathered from the sponsoring agencies. All data are validated via a triangulation methodology, the focus-group discussion, for a richer and more qualitative information-gathering. The findings are deemed relevant in the crafting of a comprehensive set of guidelines for a much improved Language Practicum implementation.

Equally important is the anchoring of the research on Kirkpatrick’s Training Evaluation Model which seeks to meaningfully measure learning in organizations through the four levels: “reaction (what they thought and felt about the training),

learning (the resulting increase in knowledge or capability), behavior (extent of behavior and capability Improvement and implementation/application), and results (the effects on the business or environment resulting from the trainee’s performance)” (“Kirkpatrick’s Learning”, 2013). These components are addressed in the ensuing questions, except for level 4, which may be a subject of subsequent studies. Level 3 on the other hand is modified to focus more on the learning in the academe as applied to job performance, instead of the intended application of learning from the training to the actual job.

Materials and Methods

A descriptive type of research, this study used survey-questionnaires deriving information from employer evaluations of the attainment of objectives. However, it is more qualitative in nature as descriptions of learning experience and job performance were derived from feedback forms/evaluations by sponsoring organizations. Respondents include a total enumeration of the thirty (30) sponsoring employers.

For validation purposes, the results of the research project were presented to a small group of fifteen, made up of sponsoring employers, representatives from the academe, and former trainees. The focus-group discussion (FGD) yielded more qualitative data meant to enrich the discussion of results.

Results and Discussion

Attainment of Objectives of the Language Practicum 2013

Sponsoring agencies have found the Language Practicum to have achieved its objectives, garnering a weighted mean of 4.40 or Superior. This means that for the most part, the immediate supervisors of the AB English trainees consider the practicum to be useful in terms of providing the students with additional learning through the exposure they acquired in the workplace. Table 1 gives the details.

Table 1. Ratings on Attainment of Objectives

Objective	Rating	Description
1. Provide students with practical training on the job supplemented by related theoretical instruction	4.31	Superior
2. Offer students a venue to translate their communication and related skills to actual job performance	4.51	Outstanding
3. Give students the opportunity to acquire the work values required of the job market	4.43	Superior
4. Afford students actual venue for job prospecting, networking and over-all development of professional work relationships	4.35	Superior
Average	4.40	Superior

This is a direct confirmation of the assumption that not everything can be learned in the classroom, thus, the need for additional avenues for learning, such as that offered by training in companies or agencies where AB English graduates may be hired. This affirms the importance of requiring a Language Practicum as part of the AB English

Program, where students are provided additional and highly significant input in terms of skills, knowledge, and attitude which they will need as future professionals.

The objectives of the Language Practicum (LP) are four-fold. Primary among them is the provision of practical training in an actual job and supplemented by related theoretical instruction coming from the LP professor. As assessed by the sponsoring agencies through the trainees' immediate supervisors, this objective has been achieved, having gained a mean rating of 4.31 or Superior.

The second objective is to offer students a venue to translate their communication skills, as well as other related skills, to actual job performance. This was given a mean rating of 4.51 or Outstanding. This rating is also a reflection of the level of communication skills the trainees have, being an indication that the supervisors were in fact satisfied with the way the trainees used the communication skills they had learned in the classroom, in specific tasks required of them in their training stations. It has to be assumed that the students had good communication skills to start with.

The third objective, which is to give students the opportunity to acquire the work values required of the job market, gained a mean rating of 4.43 or Superior. The sponsoring agencies therefore agree that exposing students to an actual workplace gives them the venue for learning not just skills and knowledge but also work values which the trainees will need once they find themselves in the professional world.

Finally, the Language Practicum was conceived to afford students an actual venue for job prospecting, networking and over-all development of professional work relationships. This objective acquired a mean rating of 4.35 or Superior. Being in an actual workplace allows the trainees to assess what it is like to be working in the company or agency in which they trained, based on which they can decide whether such is the kind of work or place they wish to find themselves in after they graduate from college. They also get exposed to other agencies and offices with which their sponsoring agencies do business with, expanding their knowledge about the world of work. They also have the opportunity to build friendships and other business relationships which they may find useful when they start looking and applying for jobs.

In the focus-group discussion (FGD) held to validate findings of the research, it was affirmed that student-trainees are able to make use of classroom-learned skills in the workplace. The representative from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Ochoa, particularly mentioned that the trainees are given the tasks of organizing events and trainings, and writing about as well as documenting them. These are tasks that require the application of communication skills, which is one of the major skills developed in the AB English program.

Development of Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude

The development of the trainees' Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude (KSA) is rated 4.56 or Outstanding. As detailed in Table 2, Knowledge domain is rated 4.52 or Outstanding; Skills domain is 4.53 or Outstanding; and Attitudes domain is 4.61 or Outstanding.

Table 2. Ratings on Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude

Learning Domain/Indicators	Rating	Description
Knowledge		
Knowledge on the key functions of the job	4.44	
Management of office/work procedures	4.36	
Task accomplishment and productivity	4.75	
Average	4.52	Outstanding
Skills		
Writing of documents, letters, memos and reports	4.07	
Speaking in both formal and informal situations	4.61	
Listening and following of instructions	4.81	
Use of technology in the workplace	4.63	
Average	4.53	Outstanding
Attitudes		
Desirable Attitudes as self-esteem, positivity and assertiveness	4.60	
Personal appearance or professional image	4.60	
Work qualities and habits	4.61	
Business ethics with executives and coworkers	4.64	
Relationship with clientele	4.59	
Average	4.61	Outstanding
Weighted Mean	4.56	Outstanding

The results of the assessment of the trainees' skills, knowledge, and attitude as shown in Table 2 indicates the high level of success of the Language Practicum. It is an assurance that the training has been able to provide AB English students with the venue in which to practice what they have learned in the classroom, and reinforce the same, side by side with acquiring a work attitude which may not be simulated in simple class activities.

Knowledge

In terms of knowledge, rated highest among the indicators is the trainees' task accomplishment and productivity, with mean rating of 4.75. Some improvement can be done in terms of knowledge on key functions of the job, which received a mean rating of 4.44, and in the management of office or work procedures, which has a mean rating of 4.36. This is understandable, though, considering this is the first time most of the trainees would have been exposed to real work settings, and could not have been made immediately familiar with such procedures. However, this setback is surely compensated by the trainees' ability to accomplish tasks assigned to them, as indicated by their Outstanding rating for productivity and task accomplishment. Whatever their lapses in knowledge of procedures, they make up for knowledge in finding ways to ensure that the work is done.

Skills

Under the skills domain, highest rating is given to listening and following instructions, with mean rating of 4.81. Following are the use of technology in the

workplace, and speaking in both formal and informal situations, which received mean ratings of 4.63 and 4.61, respectively. Lowest rating was given to writing of documents, letters, memos, and reports, with only a 4.07 mean rating.

Having a high rating in listening and following instructions definitely supports the earlier finding that the trainees excel in task accomplishment and productivity. Though found slightly lacking in knowledge of office procedures and key functions of the job, they are found to be good listeners which make them effective in following instructions. Their likewise favorably assessed ability to use necessary technology and to use good speaking skills to communicate what they need to accomplish the task, must have made them very skilled in accomplishing their tasks properly, making them highly productive in the workplace.

Attitude

Work attitude is considered just as important as skills and knowledge. It is therefore greatly reassuring that this has been rated by the sponsoring agencies as Outstanding. Particularly assessed were self-esteem, positivity, and assertiveness which gained a mean rating of 4.60; personal appearance or professional image with a mean rating of 4.60; work qualities and habits with 4.61; business ethics with executives and coworkers with 4.64; and relationship with clientele with 4.59.

With minimal differences in the ratings, it can be generalized that the AB English trainees have impressed their immediate supervisors with the work attitude they displayed and also developed in the workplace, be it in terms of self-expression or in their interactions with supervisors, co-workers, or clients.

These findings, however, especially that on skills, were somewhat contested during the FGD. Despite the outstanding ratings given by the supervisors to the trainees, some FGD participants pointed out the observed lack of skills in terms of computer literacy. For instance, according to Ochoa of DSWD, they do not know “more complicated aspects of MS Excel such as formulas and generating other web sheets”. However, according to the FGD participants who are AB English graduates and former Language Practicum trainees, the training was successful in the development of skills, knowledge, and attitude.

Latigay, a 2015 graduate, declared, “There were skills we had already before the training started and others that we had to learn during the job itself, especially when the job you are given is not relevant to your course, [but] that way you can adjust and adapt to the work environment. Either way, I learned a lot from the training.”

Rasco, a 2013 graduate, related how challenges became opportunities for learning, particularly when it came to the lack of ICT skills. “We were only able to resolve that issue by being honest and asking questions on how to do the task asked to be done. Communicating your difficulties and weakness to your supervisor effectively is the key in surviving the training....” This is a clear example of positive attitude in facing challenges in the workplace.

Academic Skills Most/Least Useful

One of the objectives of this study was to find out from the sponsoring agencies which academic skills they find most and least useful in the workplace. These skills

are those that the trainees are assumed to have learned in the classroom, in their four years of study, and based on the subjects they took up since their first year in college. Considered as useful are those with mean ratings of 4 and above, while least useful are those with mean ratings of 2 and below.

Organizational communication and interpersonal skills were rated to be the most useful academic skills needed during the training, and therefore in the trainees' future jobs. This is an affirmation of the results under attainment of objectives which show an Outstanding rating for translation of communication skills to actual job performance. The respondents find this skill most useful, and they also think that the trainees have excelled in applying this skill in the workplace.

Table 3 details the skills found most useful by the sponsoring agencies.

Table 3. Academic Skills Found Most Useful

Academic Skill	Rating	Rank
Organizational Communication	4.95	1
Interpersonal Skills	4.90	2
Critical, Analytical & Reflective Thinking	4.87	3
Listening	4.85	4
Cooperative Planning & Teamwork	4.72	5
Social Responsibility	4.60	6
Leadership	4.49	7
Reading Comprehension	4.35	8
Workplace –readiness	4.31	9
Oral Presentation	4.28	10
Data Gathering	4.27	11
Oral Expression	4.26	12
Grammatical	4.23	13
Statistics/Mathematical	4.18	14
Business Letter Writing	4.17	15
Non-Verbal Communication	4.03	16
Information Technology	4.00	17

Most of the rest of the skills rated 4 or higher are communication-related, and therefore leads to the conclusion that most companies/agencies need employees who are good communicators, both in written and oral forms.

Table 4, which details the least useful academic skills, lists Literature-related skills and physical education skills as least useful. This runs parallel with the move of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to realign the AB English curriculum so that it deals more on Language and less (or even no longer) on Literature. The skills of playing sports and dancing have understandably been given low ratings because they have little, if any, relation to the job.

The study of Sergio, et al. (2011), for instance, yielded the result that schools in the Bicol Region who offer AB Literature have little or no enrollees and will be phasing out the course. CHED itself has not pursued a once-proposed plan of creating a

ladder program for AB English for students to choose between language and literature as they move up to the third and fourth years.

Table 4. Academic Skills Found Least Useful

Academic Skill	Rating	Rank
Literary Evaluation	1.90	34
Playing Sports	1.82	35
Comparing & Contrasting of Literary Masterpieces	1.68	36
Literary Interpretation & Analysis	1.64	37
Literary Performance	1.54	38
Writing of Literary Criticism	1.51	39
Defining of Literary Terminologies	1.42	40
Folk & Ballroom Dancing	1.32	41

The finding that skills learned in Literature subjects are among the least useful was picked up during the focus-group discussion. The reactions were mostly against the removal of the subjects, but more for reducing the number of course offerings. Most insistent about their retention were the AB English graduates themselves, who find much use for literary skills in the workplace. Rasco shares:

“On the issue that literature subjects are not that necessary for students to be job ready, I do not agree with that. My writing skills were developed because of the literature subjects I have gone through and I was and still am able to apply it in my day-to-day task as an administrative aide for Mayor Alsua as I am tasked to also write some of her speeches, presentations and reports. I am able to apply literature values and writing skills.”

Mora of the Department of Tourism (DOT) similarly shares her experience, being an AB English graduate herself: “I also believe that literature and English subjects are of great help in developing communication skills, organizing skills, comprehension and critical thinking which make AB English students proficient in oral and written English and ultimately job-ready especially for government agencies.” She adds: “I think Literature subjects develop our critical thinking skills; we may not see its importance right away but it does help students become more proficient in communication such as writing.”

The respondents, however, agree that some literature subjects can be set aside and exchanged for more technical subjects. In Ochoa’s words, “I think they are helpful and it serves as their edge but maybe it could be lessened and focus on other technical subjects.” Mora concurs, saying: “The AB English curriculum hones you and leads you to the academe. Maybe the curriculum may be adjusted in a way that we can incorporate more technical subjects which develops skills that are required by the work industry.” Latigay suggests, “Lessen and remove other literature subjects that seem redundant all throughout the course of the program.” She explains, “Though we appreciate those literature subjects, I think some are no longer necessary to prepare us for the corporate world.”

The current study therefore contributes to the bases for adding more language-related subjects to any new curriculum to be designed for AB English, and lessen literature subjects.

Problems Encountered by the Sponsoring Agencies in the Language Practicum

The sponsoring agencies found a few problems encountered with regard to job performance of trainees. The most complaints were about the very short duration of the training. A number of respondents felt that the 200 hours allotted for the training was not enough for the trainees.

When validated during the FGD, participants had different answers. Ochoa said that for them it is not enough because their project-based workloads require more than 200 hours, therefore that would mean the trainees may have to leave in the middle of a project and leave them hanging or with lack of manpower. For Tuason of the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), however, “200 hours is enough, so long as it is continuous. We do not appreciate students leaving during office hours because they have a class.” According to her, this leaves much of the work unfinished.

Another problem identified was the trainees’ non-suitability to the task. Respondents observed that the AB English students were more suited to work in law offices or schools. To this, FGD participants did not agree. Tuason states: I do not agree. I think AB English students have good communication skills which is a great foundation to land any job in any industry. So long as you know the basics of the job....” Mora adds, “AB English students can work in any government agency but need to start small such as administrative officer, administrative aide (as entry points) and just work their way up the career ladder.”

Some complained that the Language Practicum was not well coordinated with the agencies, thus some companies had jobs for the trainees that were not relevant to their course. This was validated by the participants. Ochoa explains: “Some applicants go to our office very late, or the communication from schools comes in late that we decline because of time constraint. We prefer that notice be given a month before so we could plan their assignments, the number of students we would need, etc. Otherwise we would already be full because other schools also apply for OJT.” Tuason adds, “Proper communication and endorsement is requested from the schools so we could accommodate the students right away.”

Respondents also mentioned the need for improvement of writing skills such as memos, letters, etc., need for improvement in the use of computer and applications; and no chance to observe the trainees’ communication and related skills to actual job performance. According to FGD participants, however, as far as their experience is concerned, they are able to give proper supervision to their trainees. Tuason claims, “...in our office students are assigned to a specific supervisor who monitor and eventually grade them.” This is seconded by Ochoa, who states, “There is an immediate supervisor to the students who guide, monitor and grade them monthly. They are also required to submit accomplishment reports.” Likewise in DOT, where “there is close supervision but centralized to the administrative officer alone due to our small population in the office.”

Isolated problems mentioned were difficulty in listening to instructions, need to improve computer skills and applications, need to improve writing skills such as needed in preparing memos, letters, etc., and the absence of a chance to observe the

trainees' communication and related skills to actual job performance. These problems may have occurred due to job requirements which may have been more than what the students could handle, the standard or expectations of the supervisor, or the student trainees' own capabilities. Not being able to observe the trainees' use of skills in some agencies, may be due to lack of time spent with the trainees, or the possible mismatch of the job, identified earlier as another problem.

As to the lack of computer skills, including using computer applications, FGD participants, particularly the AB English graduates agreed that they did not have enough training in school on the matter. According to Latigay, what they learned were mostly general information and concepts about computers and their history, and what other knowledge they gathered were mostly theoretical.

Ochoa of DSWD narrates,

“When it comes to the use of computer, we have observed that they are able to use Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel but when it comes to the more complicated aspects of Excel such as formulas and generating other web sheets, they do not know how to do it. So recently, we addressed that problem by preparing web sheets with formulas ready and all they really do is input the data alone and by that, they were able to observe and learn how the application works.”

Latigay furthers, “I believe that students must be given the necessary training to use various programs in the computer such as Microsoft Excel beyond the basics of the program, preparation of AVPs, photoshop, etc., because these are now required of the students and job applicants especially now that we are in the 21st century.”

Overall Assessment of the Language Practicum by the Sponsoring Agencies

Judging from the assessments of the Language Practicum sponsoring agencies, the implementation of LP 2013 was remarkably successful. Based on the findings, and gaining insights from a few practices observed in the conduct of this first Language Practicum of the AB English program, guidelines will be crafted such that they will benefit the next batches of trainees.

This assessment is echoed by participants of the FGD. While there were problems pointed out like limitations on tasks due to privacy and confidentiality concerns and issues about agencies not following the contract, the FGD participants who were also trainees are unanimous in saying that the Language Practicum program was successful.

Conclusions

These are the conclusions derived from the findings, and the recommendations advanced in the light of these findings:

1. Sponsoring agencies find the Language Practicum 2013 to have attained its objectives, though not to its full extent. Recommendation is to address problems encountered in order that this may be achieved.

2. Immediate supervisors find KSA development to be outstanding, that is, the training has been able to greatly improve Language Practicum trainees' skills, knowledge, and attitude through exposure in an actual workplace. Recommendation is towards the continuance of the Language Practicum, with careful planning of specific tasks that would particularly lead to this.
3. Academic skills are most applicable to job performance of language trainees are communication skills, particularly those required for public relations. Least applicable are literature-related and sports-related skills. Recommendation is to add courses that focus on organizational and interpersonal communication, and phase out or at least lessen courses on literature and sports.
4. Problems encountered in terms of job performance of the trainees during the Language Practicum are varied yet minimal and easy to address. Recommendation is to study solutions to each one in order to maximize the partnership offered through this program, with the industry and academe mutually benefitting from it.
5. Sponsoring agencies' over-all assessment of the language practicum learning experience is that it has been remarkably successful. Its continuance is hereby recommended.

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