The Language Practicum Learning Experience of AB English 2013

Jocelyn I. Bartolata, Bicol University, Philippines

Abstract
The research is a quasi-evaluation of Language Practicum (LP) 2012-2013, the on-the-job Training (OJT) component of the AB English Program of Bicol University. 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.

The results showed the remarkable success of the first year of implementation as viewed by the trainees themselves. The development of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA) was rated outstanding as well, indicating satisfactory work performance and experience. The academic skills developed in the AB English program found to be most applicable to job performance are: interpersonal; work-readiness; business letter writing; oral presentation; public speaking; social responsibility; composition writing; listening; oral expression; and information technology. The academic skills found to be least applicable are: folk and ballroom dancing; playing sports; scientific literacy; comparing and contrasting literary masterpieces; literary performance; foreign language; defining of literary terminologies; literary evaluation; literary interpretation and analysis; and writing of literary criticisms.

Over-all, the trainees are one in saying that the AB English Language Practicum 2013 was beneficial and successful. While saying so, others also expressed the need for improvement in terms of implementation. Among these are: increase the number of hours; schedule the practicum in summer of the 3rd year; provide a pre-orientation seminar to better prepare the students before deployment; provide a list of possible sponsoring agencies that accommodate language practicum trainees; and regular visits by the Language Practicum Professor.

Keywords: *practicum, on-the-job training, trainees' assessment, AB English*

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Introduction

This research is the first 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 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.

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.

Language Practicum as part of the AB English curriculum was implemented for the first time in 2013 as a development emerging from the 2009 revised curriculum. However, owing to the dramatic change in the educational landscape in the Philippines, particularly the 2012 shift to K to 12 in the basic education which directly impacts higher education, and ASEAN Integration 2015, the need to revamp the existing program design becomes imperative. As such, the question on what to change, and why becomes crucial. At the onset, this research intends to use its findings only in the development of guidelines that will redound to the improved implementation of the Language Practicum. Today, this narrow view has expanded to getting a fuller examination of the Language Practicum learning experience of the trainees to determine its place and value to future curriculum development efforts.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To determine the level of attainment of objectives of the Language Practicum 2013 from the point of view of the trainees;
2. To determine the level of knowledge, skills and attitude (KSA) development of the Language Practicum trainees; the most/least developed learning domain in particular, as self-assessed;
3. To find out from trainees which academic skills are most/least applicable to job performance of language trainees;
4. To identify the problems in terms of job performance encountered by the trainees throughout the duration of the Language Practicum; and
5. To establish the students' over-all assessment of the language practicum learning experience, at the same time, deduce the good practices derived from the experience.

Conceptual/Theoretical 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/approache 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).

One example of the question-oriented approaches is the objectives-based study advanced by Tyler. Here, the objectives are oftentimes formulated by the service provider as an advanced organizer. The purpose of the evaluation is to know the extent of attainment of objectives. Study 1 mainly determines the extent to which the previously set objectives of the Language Practicum (LP) are achieved, assessed from the point of view of the trainees themselves. It is likewise methods-oriented in its commitment to varied strategies in obtaining answers to, what may be described as narrow, nevertheless, important questions in order to obtain an insight into the worth and merit of the Language Practicum. For instance, the study is substantiated by data on the development of trainees along knowledge, skills and attitudes through their self-ratings. Finally, the paper presents a qualitative assessment of the Language Practicum by perusing the trainees' narrative reports and inferring into other factors as useful skills, problems encountered, good practices and over-all assessment of the experience.

The elements for quasi-evaluation, true to the expert's conceptualization, may not meet the requirements of a sound evaluation (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2013) but they can investigate questions that will provide evidence on the program evaluated and the approaches are committed to assessing and helping improve aspects of the Language Practicum.

Equally important as well 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.

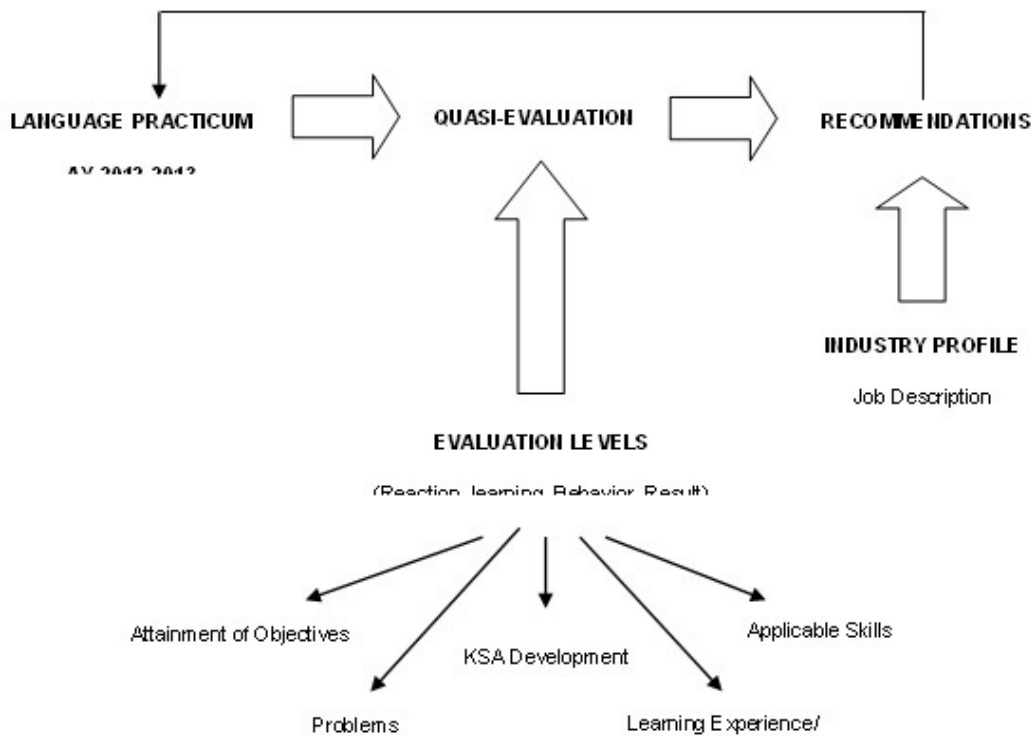To graphically represent the framework, a model follows:

LANGUAGE PRACTICUM
AY 2012-2013

QUASI-EVALUATION

RECOMMENDATIONS

INDUSTRY PROFILE

Job Description

EVALUATION LEVELS

(Reaction, learning, Behavior, Result)

Attainment of Objectives

KSA Development

Applicable Skills

Problems

Learning Experience/

Figure 1. Research Model

Materials and Methods

This study used survey-questionnaires deriving information from student evaluations of the attainment of objectives. However, it was more qualitative in nature as descriptions of learning experience and job performance were derived from the guided narrative reports submitted by the trainees. Respondents include a total enumeration of 86 fourth year students.

For validation purposes, the results of the research project were presented to a small group of fifteen (15), mostly sponsoring employers, and representatives from the academe, particularly the department chair of the English Department. The focus-group discussion (FGD) yielded more qualitative data meant to enrich the discussion of results.

Results and Discussion

The Level of Attainment of Objectives

Data showed that Language Practicum trainees rated the attainment of objectives of LP 2013 superior, with the average mean of 4.49. The objectives are here presented, as ranked from most to least achieved: give students the opportunity to acquire the work values required of the job market (4.61 or outstanding); afford students actual venue for job prospecting, networking and over-all development of professional work relationships (4.52 or outstanding); provide students with practical training on the job supplemented by related theoretical instruction (4.48); and offer students a venue to translate their communication and related skills to actual job performance (4.36 or superior). Table 1 presents the same data.

Table 1. Level of Attainment of Objectives

Objectives	Mean	Adjectival Description
Provide students with practical training on the job supplemented by related theoretical instruction	4.48	Superior
Offer students a venue to translate their communication and related skills to actual job performance	4.36	Superior
Give students the opportunity to acquire the work values required of the job market	4.61	Outstanding
Afford students actual venue for job prospecting, networking and over-all development of professional work relationships	4.52	Outstanding
Average Mean	**4.49**	**Superior**

The numbers show the remarkable success of the first year of implementation of the Language Practicum as viewed by the trainees themselves. It is however notable that the 2nd objective, *to offer students a venue to translate their communication and related skills to actual job performance,* although described as superior, garnered the lowest rating of 4.36. It could be attributable to the fact that supervisors normally do not entrust to their trainees sensitive functions, as this may also mar the supervisor's own targets and performance expectations. This was validated in the focus-group discussion conducted for the purpose. Tuason of GSIS Legazpi mentioned:

> "Due to the privacy and security policy of the agency, we really cannot give them the same tasks that we have. They are limited to clerical or 'messengerial' tasks. We have our own system which only the regular GSIS employees can access and use. Even our contractual employees are not given access to the main system so students, regardless of the course, are given only basic tasks such as filing and sorting for privacy and security reasons."

Mora of DOT Legazpi confirmed the statement saying:

> "We indeed do not give big tasks to the trainees, usually clerical and 'messengerial' tasks only. Also, our work load is usually per project and on organizing events which require good communication and coordination skills. Having said that, there are times when OJTs come in and the event is already ongoing or sometimes their OJT hours are not enough to last through out the event so, we really cannot give them such big tasks due to time constraints."

The same was noted by Ochoa of DSWD Legazpi:

> "In DSWD, we assign students based on their courses, so AB English students are tasked to departments with relevant work, but we do not entrust them with writing communication letters for efficiency and to save time as well. We can only give them the training they need by giving basic tasks such as

acting as secretariat and other easy jobs because our tasks are done faster if we do it ourselves rather than entrusting it to them which will need time because we still have to teach them and check if they did what we asked correctly."

In general student trainees are given the same basic tasks/functions regardless of their disciplines because of privacy and security issues, time constraints and efficiency problems. Trainees do not really have solid client and work exposures as those of the regular/permanent workers, unless of course the supervisor's trust and confidence in them have been built over time. The 108-hour duration may not have been sufficient to allow that.

The Level of Attainment of the KSA of the Language Practicum Trainees

Over-all, the development of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes is rated outstanding at 4.58 average mean. Knowledge is rated 4.63 (outstanding); skills is 4.50 (superior); and attitude is 4.61 (outstanding). Knowledge is most developed.

Going over the details, in the knowledge domain, task accomplishment and productivity was rated 4.66 or outstanding. This is the most developed aspect in this domain. The other key aspects followed closely: management of office/work procedure was rated 4.63 or outstanding; and, knowledge on the key functions of the job was rated 4.59 or outstanding.

On skills, listening and following instructions was rated 4.66 or outstanding. This is the most developed aspect in this domain. The two other aspects were rated outstanding as well: use of technology in the workplace was rated 4.63 or outstanding; and, speaking in both formal and informal situations was rated 4.62 or outstanding. Writing documents, letters and memos was rated 4.09 or superior.

The attitude domain posted these ratings: desirable attitudes as self-esteem, positivity and assertiveness was rated 4.68 or outstanding. This was the most developed aspect in the attitudes domain. Relationship with clientele was rated 4.63 or outstanding; personal appearance or professional image also earned a rating of 4.63 or outstanding while work qualities and habits was rated 4.49 or superior. Table 2 shows these data clearly.

Table 2. Level of Attainment of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes Development of Language Practicum Trainees

KSA	Mean	Adjectival Description
Knowledge on the key functions of the job	4.59	Outstanding
Management of office/work procedures	4.63	Outstanding
Task accomplishment and productivity	4.66	Outstanding
	4.63	Outstanding
Writing of documents, letters, memos and reports	4.09	Superior
Speaking in both formal and informal situations	4.62	Outstanding
Listening and following of instructions	4.66	Outstanding
Use of technology in the workplace	4.63	Outstanding
	4.50	Superior

Desirable Attitudes as self-esteem, positivity and assertiveness	4.68	Outstanding
Personal appearance or professional image	4.63	Outstanding
Work qualities and habits	4.49	Superior
Business ethics with executives and coworkers	4.64	Outstanding
Relationship with clientele	4.63	Outstanding
	4.61	Outstanding
Average Mean	**4.58**	**Outstanding**

While the superior description is overwhelming, a few notes can be telling. On knowledge, key function on the job was rated lowest. In the focus-group discussion, Rasco shared: "It is true that Information Technology and Computer Literacy are two of the skills asked of us during training that we could not respond to properly due to lack of enough training." This was stressed by Ochoa who shared her observation: "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. It might be necessary to provide orientations on office procedures before students are deployed to their sponsoring agencies.

On skills, listening and following instructions was rated outstanding which gives an impression that AB English students are skilled at this micro skill in communication, and are willing to learn from their supervisors. Work qualities and habits being rated as lowest in the attitudes domain might just be the prodding needed to insist on a thorough orientation on desirable work habits before deployment. If not, it is also possible to integrate this in regular classroom instruction in courses such as Organizational Communication and Business Writing.

Academic Skills Most/Least Applicable to Job Performance of Trainees

The academic skills here identified are culled from the course syllabi of the 2009 Revised AB English Curriculum as already used in Hermosa et al's. As revealed in the findings, the academic skills found by the Language Practicum trainees to be most applicable to job performance are: interpersonal (4.42); business letter writing (4.26); workplace readiness (4.16) oral presentation(4.16); social responsibility (4.11), public speaking (4.11); composition writing (4.11): oral expression (4.05); listening (4.05) and Information Technology (4.05). These are the skills topping the list as presented in Table 3.

The result for the most applicable skills is not as surprising. After all, the respondents of this study were the beneficiaries of the revised curriculum which, at the time of revision in 2008, incorporated courses which were the identified needs of the times. The revised curriculum strengthened the development of interpersonal as well as organizational communication skills in the course *Interpersonal and Organizational Communication*. It also ensured the work readiness of the students through the course *Language Practicum*, which provides the students the basic knowledge and preparation before actual deployment. Business Writing which is adequately treated in *Business Communication* may indeed be attributed to the addition of this course. Oral presentation, public speaking and listening being on top 10 may also be credited to the enhancement in course description of *Speech Communication*. Social responsibility on the other hand are embedded in most of the courses in the program.

At the tail end are six academic skills developed mostly from literature courses namely: writing of literary criticisms, literary interpretation and analysis, literary evaluation, defining of literary terminologies, literary performance, and comparing and contrasting of literary masterpieces; two academic skills from Physical Education, namely: playing sports and folk and ballroom dancing; one from an elective subject, which is Foreign language and one from Technological Environment which is scientific literary skill. This is a valuable insight that must be considered in the crafting of a new curriculum.

While literature courses are instrumental in developing critical, analytical and reflective thinking, fact cannot be discounted that other skills developed from literary studies are not readily applicable to the workplace. The focus-group discussion provided insights on the issue. Mora of DOT maintained: "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." Rasco also stressed a similar point by emphasizing 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." On the other hand, Latigay offered a different viewpoint: "Literature is important for it develops our comprehension and thinking skills but the students find it hard to apply their literature skills into their daily communication and tasks." Mora agreed, and thus pointed out: "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." To this Ochoa added: "Maybe lessen literature subjects, make it elective subjects only."

Table 3. Skills Most/Least Applicable to Job Performance of Trainees

Academic Skill	Rating	Adjectival Rating	Rank
Interpersonal Skills	4.42	Most Applicable	1
Business Letter Writing	4.26	Most Applicable	2
Workplace –readiness	4.16	Most Applicable	3.5
Oral Presentation	4.16	Most Applicable	3.5
Social Responsibility	4.11	Most Applicable	5.33
Public Speaking	4.11	Most Applicable	5.33
Composition Writing	4.11	Most Applicable	5.33
Oral Expression	4.05	Most Applicable	9
Listening	4.05	Most Applicable	9
Information Technology	4.05	Most Applicable	9
Organizational Communication	4.00	Most Applicable	10.5
Cooperative Planning & Teamwork	4.00	Most Applicable	105
Leadership	3.95	More Applicable	11.5
Data Gathering	3.95	More Applicable	11.5
Critical, Analytical & Reflective Thinking	3.89	More Applicable	13.5
Community Development	3.89	More Applicable	13.5
Debate	3.84	More Applicable	16
Creative Writing	3.84	More Applicable	16
Correct Movement	3.84	More Applicable	16
Grammatical	3.68	More Applicable	20

Non-Verbal Communication	3.63	More Applicable	21.5
Essay Writing	3.63	More Applicable	21.5
Research Writing	3.53	More Applicable	23.5
Reading Comprehension	3.53	More Applicable	23.5
Statistics/Mathematical	3.47	More Applicable	25
Teaching	3.11	More Applicable	26.5
Journalistic Writing	3.11	More Applicable	26.5
Argumentation	3.05	More Applicable	28
Thesis Writing	3.00	More Applicable	29.5
Artistic/Creativity	3.00	More Applicable	29.5
Presentation of Science Advocacies & Business Report Writing	2.95	Fairly Applicable	31
Writing of Literary Criticism	2.74	Fairly Applicable	32
Literary Interpretation & Analysis	2.63	Fairly Applicable	33.5
Literary Evaluation	2.63	Fairly Applicable	33.5
Defining of Literary Terminologies	2.47	Fairly Applicable	35
Literary Performance	2.42	Fairly Applicable	36.5
Foreign Language	2.42	Fairly Applicable	36.5
Comparing & Contrasting of Literary Masterpieces	2.21	Fairly Applicable	38
Scientific Literacy	2.05	Fairly Applicable	39
Playing Sports	1.84	Least Applicable	40
Folk & Ballroom Dancing	1.63	Least Applicable	41

Following this line of thought, the panel seemed to arrive at an agreement summed up in Latigay's comment, thus: "lessen and remove other literature subjects that seem redundant all throughout the course of the program. Though we appreciate those literature subjects, I think some are no longer necessary to prepare us for the corporate world."

This research sees the value of inculcating higher order thinking skills which can only be attained by rigorous reading or even viewing of academic materials, regardless of content classification. The more critical aspect is the attainment of the set learning outcomes which necessarily must be constructively aligned to instructional strategies and assessment. Content becomes secondary to the outcome which is now the take-off point of all instruction. Teachers become secondary to learners who now occupy the central role in the process.

As for physical education courses, relegating it to basic education might just be a solution.

Problems in Job Performance Encountered by the Language Practicum Trainees

Problems encountered by the Language Practicum trainees as ranked include : limited duration/number of hours (56.63%); difficulty in applying for a job (34.94%); schedule

of LP in conflict with class (25.30%); job mismatch (18.07%); delayed submission of documents for LP (7.23%); LP was confined in Bicol region (7.23%); no orientation/seminar before deployment (6.02%)t; operation of office facilities(4.82%); demanding customers/clients (4.82%); difficulty in accounting (1.20%); and limited knowledge on computer applications (1.20%). On the following page is a graphical representation of data.

Shown in the graph as the biggest problem encountered by the trainees was *limited number/duration of time for language practicum.* It must be understood that in the approved curriculum, the 6-unit course was given an equivalent number of 108 hours. This was prior to the release of the CMO prescribing the standard number of hours for On-the-Job-Training at 200 hours. On the 2nd year of implementation, the 200-hour requirement was encouraged pending the revision in the curriculum. Representative from GSIS however said that 200 hrs is enough for as long as it is continuous. She stressed further that during OJT, students must not have other school-related activities such as class or thesis for them to be able to join regional trainings and travels which usually last 5-10 days. It does not need to be summer time, though.

 Difficulty in applying for a job came in 2nd. Language Practicum 2013 was the first year of implementation. As such there was no prior listing provided to the students as to possible sponsoring agencies in the locality. There was also no previous experience or practice that could have been referred to for reference and guidance. The next year was a better version, procedure-wise.

The 3rd problem was *conflict in schedule with other classes* which resulted from the Language Practicum being scheduled in the last semester along with a few other subjects. This was in a way resolved the following year by requesting the college registrar to rethink the schedule and allot one day free when students can work in their respective sponsoring agencies.
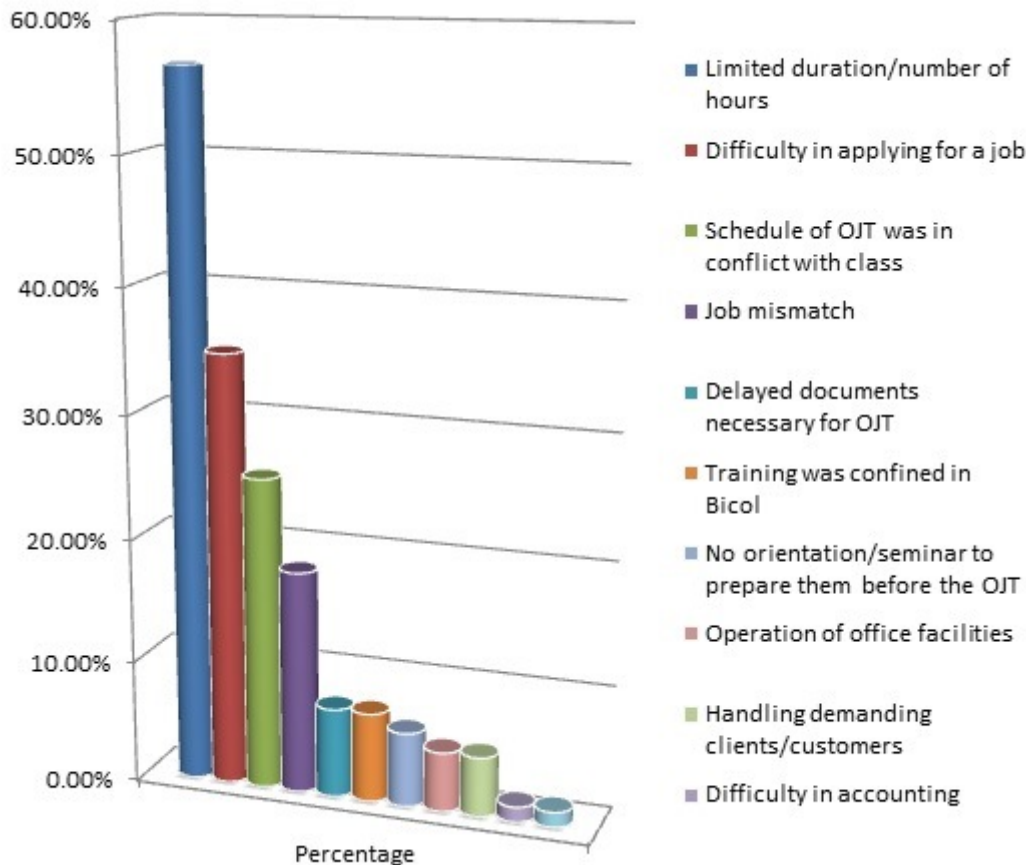
Figure 1. Problems in Job Performance Encountered by the Language Practicum Trainees

Job mismatch was also seen as the 4rd problem. This could be interpreted as trainees being asked to perform functions not specialized or geared to their skills. The problem is legitimate, but then again, by observation trainees regardless of degree programs, are oftentimes assigned rank and file jobs. These are also entry-level positions for most.

Delayed documents necessary for language practicum was 5th. While it is true that there were a number of documents required before a student was allowed to undergo language practicum, the delays were mostly caused by the students themselves. Most of them were unable to comply because of other preoccupations as thesis defense and requirements in other courses. MOA signing was also part of the delay.

Training was confined to Bikol, also ranked 5th, was necessary because of the schedule for Language Practicum being in the second semester. The problem will remain unresolved until such a time that training is scheduled in summer or if not, until the rest of the courses for the second semester are realigned and distributed to the other semesters in the lower years. As of the moment though, there is an option for either national or international Language Practicum for as long as students are personally able to make arrangements with the registrar and subject professors as to compliance with course requirements.

Trainees' Over-all Assessment of the Language Practicum 2013

Over-all, the trainees are one in saying that the AB English Language Practicum 2013 is beneficial and successful. Insights were provided in the focus-group discussion such as as said by Latigay: "Yes it is successful. 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 given is not relevant to the course. Either way, I learned a lot from the training." Martinez, also shared her experience: "It was successful yet there were limitations due to privacy concerns so we were given basic tasks such as encoding, filing etc."

While mostly lauded the success of the Language Practicum, others also expressed the need for improvement in terms of implementation. Among these are: increase the number of hours; schedule the practicum in summer of the 3rd year; provide a pre-orientation seminar to better prepare the students before deployment; provide a list of possible sponsoring agencies that accommodate language practicum trainees; and regular visits by the Language Practicum Professor.

Some good practices that may be adopted from the implementation are: effecting time management in complying with documentary requirements; practicing good communication skills to land a job related to the field; and showing of professionalism at all times.

Conclusions

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

1. The objectives of Language Practicum are successfully attained. It is recommended that program implementers find ways to ensure that these objectives are continuously attained by putting guidelines in place.

2. Language Practicum is successful in developing the competencies required by this OJT component of the program. However, it is recommended that further assessment of competency acquisition be made by identifying the task accomplishments which are the tangible manifestation of this.

3. There are academic skills that are most and least useful to actual job performance. It is recommended that these be considered in the crafting of future curriculum to ensure that graduates are job-ready.

4. The Language Practicum trainees encountered problems in Language Practicum. It is recommended that these be addressed by program implementers.

5. Language Practicum 2013 is remarkably successful, thus it is recommended that it be adopted in succeeding curriculum revisions, ensuring that good practices are replicated and improvements be added.

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