THE STUDY OF PROBLEMS DURING INTERNSHIP PROGRAM OF BUSINESS ENGLISH UNDERGRADUATES AND THEIR SUGGESTIONS

* Chinchira Bunchutrakun, ** Angvarrah Lieungnapar, *** Anantachai Aeka**** Wichuda Kunnu

* Chinchira Bunchutrakun, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha
Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand, E-Mail: chinchira.bu@ssru.ac.th
** Angvarrah Lieungnapar, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha
Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand, E-Mail: angvarrah.li @ssru.ac.th
*** Anantachai Aeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat
University, Bangkok, Thailand, E-Mail: anantacha.ae@ssru.ac.th
**** Wichuda Kunnu, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat
University, Bangkok, Thailand, E-Mail: Wichuda.ku@ssru.ac.th

ABSTRACT

Abstract— In Business English Program, students must enroll in the internship course in the last semester before graduation. The course requires students to work in a real working situation for 450 hours. There are often difficulties in choosing the training place. Therefore, this study hopes to investigate and analyze the problems during the internship program of Business English undergraduates and their suggestions to those who are interested in choosing the career for their internship. The data was collected by using interviews from 75 fourth-year students. The focused areas of careers are hotel business, airline business, logistic business, government offices, tourism business, sales and marketing and human resources department. The results suggest that students faced different problems depending on their internship careers; however, the problems were classified by the framework of the 5 learning outcomes deriving from Thai Qualifications Framework. The findings also differ depending on the nature of the careers; however, they can be guidance for other students to prepare themselves before choosing to their internship workplaces.

Keywords—Business English 1, Higher Education 2, Internship 3, Problems 4 , Thai Qualifications Framework 5 .

INTRODUCTION

After three years of becoming a member of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) since 2015, Thailand has experienced the changing situation in business markets and also the flow of workers around ASEAN countries. As a result of language diversity in this region, English is acting as a lingua franca in order to internationally communicate with people. The better command of English, the higher opportunity to get a well-paid job, as one might say. It is often shown in many job advertisements that good command of English is required or at least an advantage for applicants.

English subject is one of the subjects that included in Thai curriculum for a long time, [1] however, there seems to be many aspects to be improved in enhancing students to receive a great deal of opportunities for employment after graduation. Saweangsak [2] suggests the qualifications for employees to succeed in their careers in three major aspects: personal qualifications, problem-solving skills and interpersonal skills. In addition, the Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF) was proposed by the Thai government to emphasize on five domains of learning, namely ethical and moral; knowledge; cognitive skills; interpersonal skills and responsibility; and technical skills including numerical analysis, communication and information technology (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2006) [3]. It is still wondered that TQF can enhance the quality of the graduates according to international professional qualification standards [4].The purpose of the framework is not only to standardize the quality of education in Thailand but also to ensure the standards of student learning outcomes as well as improve the

higher educational system in order to serve the increasing demands of efficient staff in the AEC market.

The prime importance to improve the education standard is to emphasize on learning outcomes, program specification, course specification and field experience specification under the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. [5] Business English Program of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University has revised and improved the curriculum every four years to update these key stones. One possible way is to survey the needs of entrepreneurs of required qualifications of each job, for it is believed that students need to improve their English language skills and other qualifications in order to compete with the new intercultural workplace [6]. To reach the goal, not only technology and global communication [7] are necessary, but also other qualifications such as attitudes, characteristics, etc. Co-workers' perspectives are considered crucial sources of information to form the concept of the preferable model of Business English graduates because the different views toward preferable qualifications of the graduates depending on the position they are responsible for. [8] The opportunity to be employed after being a trainee, occasionally, is the expectation of the employers that the person meet the standards they are expected or not. [9]

After paying attention to both entrepreneurs' and workforces' perspectives, students' experience has come into the light. Students' ideas towards their own experience in the internship program are the direct source of information to complete the picture of a prototype Business English graduate, according to Iwai et al. cited in Songhori [10] it suggests that needs analysis usually refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information. There are, still, not many researches expressing the concept of ideal trainees in various business fields from their own perspectives for students to follow. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the problems during the internship program of Business English undergraduates and their suggestions to those who are interested in choosing the career for their internship and hope to be a pioneer guideline for preparing before taking the internship program.

METHODOLOGY

The data was collected from 75 fourth-years Business English students who had spent 450 hours on the job training in real working places. The students were categorized into 7 groups according to the working places which are human resources, government offices, logistics, sales and marketing, tourism business, airlines business and hotel business. Each group of the students was interviewed about the major problems occurred during their internship program. The problems were then analyzed based on the five aspects of learning deriving from Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF): ethical and moral; knowledge; cognitive skills; interpersonal skills and responsibility; and technical skills including numerical analysis, communication and information technology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The tables show the problems the students encountered during their job training program in various workplaces which were categorized into 7 groups. The problems were categorized based on the 5 learning aspects of TQF.

Table 1

Problems occurred during internship program in various working fields

Working fields	Problems	1. The ethical and moral aspect	2. The knowledge aspect	3. The cognitive skills aspect	4. The interpersonal skills and responsibility aspect	5. The technical skills aspect
1. Human resources	Don't know much about some computer programs such as Microsoft Excel					✓
	Don't know about some related laws such as tax		✓			
	Don't know much about that business jargons		✓			
	Must be punctual to work	✓				
	Must be very detail-oriented			✓		
	Have to work too hard sometimes	✓				
	Very stressful when handling too many difficulties			✓		
2. Government offices	Can't solve some unexpected problems			✓		
	Don't have experience of filing system		✓			
	Hard to control temper when encountering unexpected problems simultaneously			✓		
	Need to control one's self when there is a conflict among co-workers				✓	
	Need to control one's temper when facing with unpleasant co-workers				✓	
	Can't communicate with foreign customers who can't speak English					✓
3. Logistics	Can't answer customers' questions because they're too specific		✓			
	Don't know much about some computer programs such as Microsoft Excel					✓
	Need to solve problems caused by wrong information from customers	✓				
	Don't understand some specific terms or details of the work		✓			
4. Sales and marketing	Sometimes being careless about the details of the work causes problems			✓		
	Don't know much about some computer programs such as Microsoft Excel					✓
	Don't know how to persuade potential customers to finish the deal					✓
	Hard to deal with some customers				✓	
	Very stressful when handling too many difficulties			✓		
5. Tourism business	Don't know much about that business jargons		✓			
	Don't understand some English accents					✓
6. Airlines business	Don't know much about that business jargons		✓			
	Hard to get used to working in shift				✓	
	Hard to fit in the new working environment				✓	
	Don't understand some English accents					✓
	Can't communicate with foreign customers who can't speak English					✓
	There are always passengers who miss their flights who need our helps	✓				

Table 1 (Cont'd)

Problems occurred during internship program in various working fields

Working fields	Problems	1. The ethical and moral aspect	2. The knowledge aspect	3. The cognitive skills aspect	4. The interpersonal skills and responsibility aspect	5. The technical skills aspect
7. Hotel business	Don't know nearby important places such as hospitals, tourist attractions, etc.		✓			
	Don't know much about that business jargons		✓			
	Can't communicate with foreign customers who can't speak English					✓
	Don't understand some English accents					✓
	Hard to deal with some customers				✓	

As can been seen from Table 1, students who were trained in human resources areas found the computer skill such as Microsoft Excel one of their problems which is interesting. They explained later that the basic skill of computer that they had learned was not enough so they need to improve their computer skill to match their work. The interpersonal skills and responsibility aspect is not mentioned as their problem because they can very well adjust themselves when working as a team and their work are more related to documents than serving customers; therefore computer literacy is considered more significant for them. The specific knowledge aspect is also necessary for working in the business. In this case the students mentioned about specific laws and regulations which have not been taught in Business English Program so that they think it is hard to get started within short period of training.

Students who were trained in government offices do not find the aspect of ethical and moral problematic, in contrast they express the ideas of being in-between conflicts in offices and encountering unpleasant colleagues to which are difficult for them to get used. They reason the difficulties as things that they cannot prepare in advance. They can only try to focus on learning new things and work instead of joining the conflicts or unpleasant people. One more interesting point is the filing system which causes them troublesome. Each office has different filing system, but they suggest that the filing system is not too difficult to learn or prepare some basics of the system or at least try to be well-organized.

From Table 1, training in logistics introduces the problem about the computer illiteracy as well. In addition, these students also mentioned two problems in the knowledge aspect which relate to specific details of the work and jargons. This means there is too much knowledge they have to learn in the short period of training time that they find it problematic. Even though the students had already enrolled in English for Logistics course for one semester, there are more to learn in real working situation. They then suggest that the better you prepare, the easier it becomes.

In sales and marketing field, the students raise some interesting points about the technical skill including numerical analysis, communication and information technology. One is about the computer skill required in the area of work and the other is the communication skill in the aspect of how to persuade their potential customers in order to complete the job. To them it is the skill which required much practice, techniques and experience. They explain that it was a good start but it also was very stressful.

At the same time, students worked in tourism business introduce the two problems from different learning aspects which are the knowledge and the technical aspect of communication. They later explained that the problems generated from them and their lack of enough preparation in advance. They had not prepared themselves enough to handle the diversity of English accents as well as learning new jargons in tourism.

Another significant problem which is worth mentioning is from the airlines business as shown in Table 1. The problems of adjusting themselves to new working environment and office hours are troublesome to some students. They describe the situation that they had to work in the airport which is full of passengers and chaos which sometimes causes them confused. Also, the working hours particularly the night or very early shift causes them difficulty. They explained that they had already recognized the unusual working hours in advance; however, routinely performing it is somehow unpleasant at the beginning. As mentioned earlier, the airport is sometimes fully functioned their work to help passengers is compulsory; still the language barrier is another

thing to focus. The students feel difficulty listening to people who are non-native English speakers which they are not familiar or in the worst case they do not speak English at all. To these problems they suggest practicing English harder with various accents which they find it might useful. They also advise to take some extra language courses for the third language apart from Thai and English.

The last area business presented in Table 1 is hotel business. The students trained in this business do not mention about the ethical and moral aspect and the cognitive skills aspect because they had prepare themselves to work in servicing business. They, however, are not aware of other general information such as nearby tourist attractions or significant places such as hospitals, police station as well as recognizing the local map. Language barrier is also another problem for the students. They also suggest that practice makes perfect. Customers are also the heart of servicing business; however, some customers are difficult to handle to their experience. Their suggestion is to be calm and try the best with service-minded attitude.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, each category, which was analyzed based on the 5 learning outcomes deriving from Thai Qualifications Framework, represents the problems the Business English students encountered during their training in the real working places. Each area of work has different problems depending on the nature of the work that has mostly related to documents, servicing or connecting with a lot of people. These factors affect the problems in the findings. Another factor that might affect the outcomes is the students themselves; how much they prepare themselves for the new experience in all of the 5 learning aspects. However, this study might be from a small focused group which can possibly not represent the whole picture of the work in each business, it functions as a guideline for Business English students who are about to choose their places for the internship program to focus on preparing themselves to handle difficulties that might occur.

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