

PROFILING THE COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF JOB ENABLING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (JEEP) GRADUATES OF A STATE UNIVERSITY IN NORTHERN MINDANAO

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ABSTRACT- *This study attempted to record the graduates of the Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) in a state-owned university in Northern Mindanao, which is the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines (USTP). It is important to note that one of USTP's graduate attributes is communication. It is the goal of the university to have students well-equipped with critical thinking and imbued with mathematical and scientific knowledge. Notwithstanding the enhancement of students' communication skills. This paper utilized a Qualitative Research Design specifically in gathering the needed data and interpreting them. Significant results yield that most of the graduates were from School Year SY 2018, while School Year 2017 ranked second and SY 2016 ranked third. The top degree program was attributed to BSTCM, followed by BSED TLE and BEEd SpEd on the third spot. JEEP graduates' communication skills were highly rated in terms of how they explain and communicate with their colleagues followed by their use of courteous expressions and efficiency in filling out forms which are highly needed in the workplace. Hence, this study recommends that the communication skills training embedded in JEEP must be enhanced and restructured in order to fully address the needs of the offices and industry.*

Keywords – English proficiency, communication skills, graduate attributes

1. INTRODUCTION

The university's task is not only focused on educating the students but ensuring that students can also land a good job. Generally, students are often faced with the difficulty of landing or staying in the job after graduation. A news article [1] published in Philippine Star dated February 8, 2018 reported that the English proficiency level of college graduates in the Philippines was lower than the proficiency target set for high school students in Thailand and the competency requirement for taxi drivers in Dubai. In the same report, Rex Wallen Tan, general manager of Hopkins International Partners, claimed that poor communication skills were the number one reason why graduates are not being hired. Having such a situation, it is important to note that one of USTP's graduate attributes is communication. It is the goal of the University to have students well-equipped with critical thinking and imbued with mathematical and scientific knowledge, notwithstanding the enhancement of students' communication skills.

It is on this premise that this study would like to evaluate the language competence of these students who had undergone the JEEP programs. It will look into the learnt skills gained from the JEEP program relative to finding jobs. Moreover, it is USTP's mission to bring the world of work (industry) into actual higher education and training of students, offer entrepreneurs the opportunity to maximize their business potentials through a gamut of services from product conceptualization to commercialization, and contribute significantly to the National Development Goals of food security and energy sufficiency through technology solutions [2]. Alongside this, it is primarily the aim of the Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) [3] Program to train the students to be well-equipped in the communication aspect. It is in this desire that the program envisions to develop the students' rhetoric, leadership, collaborative, teamwork, and professionalism to make them effective and globally competitive workers in the business world. The results of this study confirmed that JEEP program's

implementation by the administration has enhanced or developed the English proficiency of the learners. In addition, the students' enrolment contributed significantly in determining the students' English language proficiency. Moreover, students who took the JEEP classes have a bearing on their English proficiency. Hence, it was the effective and efficient administration of the JEEP program that truly developed or enhanced the English language skills of the college learners in preparation most especially for their employment. In this sense, they can compete locally and even globally with the sectors that require a high degree of English proficiency. This study came up with findings and conclusions that include, first, that the implementation of the JEEP program must be sustained to help graduates with a high degree of English proficiency, especially graduates in Mindanao. Second, students can have improved English skills. Therefore, the need to have skilled and well-trained teachers to handle JEEP classes is imperative. This can be done when teachers themselves undergo proficiency level assessment in order to also determine the strengths and weaknesses of the students and categorize their level of proficiency.

In relation thereto, JEEP has been conceived by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with its leading program on Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) – a non-government organization pioneered its support through its Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) Program [4]. This program offers the college students learning opportunities and to enhance their English proficiency.

Furthermore, this also aims to increase and produce graduates with the English language skills needed for productive employment of the graduates from colleges and universities in Mindanao [5]. More so, the project [6] teaches students on how to handle job interviews with international companies and deal with workplace-related problems through English-language simulation exercises. For the record, the university has been a recipient of the USAID GEM project, which has brought with it one of its

programs which is JEEP. This program aims at preparing the students to be ready to face the real world of employment. As such, the students were prepared in the communicative aspects of English's five macro skills – reading, speaking, writing, listening, viewing and even presenting skills.

2. ETHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design and Instruments

This study is mainly qualitative in nature and used a qualitative research design. Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA), and interviews were employed. This research utilized a survey instrument, as it gathered and analyzed the profile, in terms year graduated and degree program obtained from the university and the communication skills of the JEEP graduates.

2.2 Setting and Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection took place in the respective workplaces and areas of the respondents. The questionnaires were administered through an online survey, which were accomplished by the respondents at their most convenient time.

2.3 The Respondents

The respondents for this study were the JEEP graduates of the USTP from the school year 2016-2018. They are currently employed in the various working places such as customer service industry, banking institutions, Business-Processing Outsourcing (BPO), academe/teaching institutions in Cagayan de Oro City, neighboring places in Region 10 and in other places in the Philippines and even abroad.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary and given the highest priority to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of all questionnaires and responses to all participants. Necessary measures were also considered to ensure that the participants will not be harmed in any way. Study objectives were clearly explained to all participants' prior data collection.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

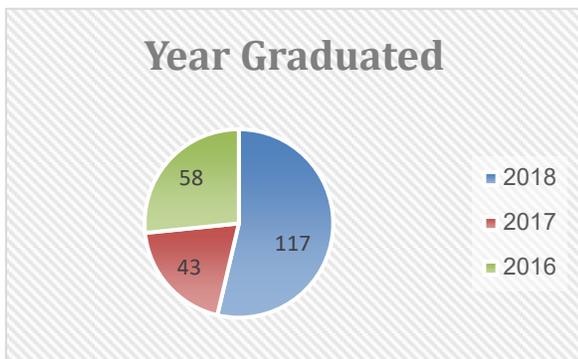


Figure 1 Profile of the JEEP graduates according to Year Graduated

Figure 1 presents the school year in which the JEEP graduates have finished their tertiary education at the university. Majority of the respondents were from 2018, followed by 2016 and 2017 respectively. It can be recalled

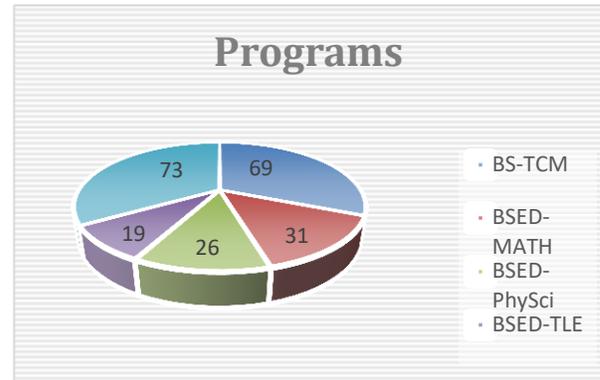


Figure 2 showcases the JEEP graduates according to their obtained academic degree.

That the JEEP Program initiated by the USAID started in School year 2009-2010, and the JEEP graduates in this study were among the recipients of this program. As [7] posited that a total of twenty-seven colleges and universities in Mindanao have participated in the project that assisted college students in acquiring proficiency in the English language. This is to enable them to compete for jobs in travel, tourism, and the merchant marine, among other fields. More than 23,000 students have enrolled in JEEP since the project began in 2009.

Figure above presents the academic degree of the JEEP graduates. Bachelor of Science in Technology Communication Management (BS TCM) topped the list followed by Bachelor in Secondary Education major in Technology and Livelihood Education (BSEd TLE) and Bachelor in Elementary Education major in Special Education (BEEd SpEd) on the third spot. Moreover, the ultimate goal of the program was to deliver innovative approaches in learning and gaining English language and skills among tertiary students of all ages, sex, gender and cultural backgrounds [8]. Conversely, students must be informed of the qualities they need to develop before they graduate in order to succeed in the workplace [9]. In the same respect, [10] a competitive employment market required good communication skills in workplaces. While [11] it is stipulated that as the workplace requirements changed from knowledge age to information age and progressed towards conceptual age, the prospective employees were expected to be equipped with 21st Century skills.

Among the communication skills, *Explaining and Communicating Effectively When Dealing with Colleagues* got the highest mean of 4.76. In any office or industry, handling other people can be best facilitated when an individual possesses good communication skills. As a matter of fact, it is considered as an important factor in the workplace [12]. The way you could stimulate the mind of your coworkers would determine the success of communication and whether or not the message you wish to convey is going to be received correctly. In a study [13], oftentimes, when the intended meaning is not correctly channeled, miscommunication in the workplace can happen. The result of this study can also be supported by the profile

of the JEEP graduates that indicated most of them were either teachers or communication managers.

Table 1 depicts the Communication skills of the JEEP graduates of a state-owned university in Northern Mindanao.

Communication Skills	Mean Score	Description
Introducing and talking about one's self	4.38	Highly Applied
Negotiating or making deals	4.14	Highly Applied
Decision making	4.24	Highly Applied
Asking and answering questions	4.28	Highly Applied
Giving and following instructions	4.48	Highly Applied
Conceptualizing or creating ideas	4.38	Highly Applied
Examining and understanding documents	4.66	Highly Applied
Filling out forms	4.67	Highly Applied
Using courteous expressions	4.72	Highly Applied
Explaining and communicating effectively when dealing with colleagues	4.76	Highly Applied
Showing confidence in dealing with clients	4.62	Highly Applied
Giving directions	4.5	Highly Applied
Dealing effectively with clients and colleagues	4.39	Highly Applied
Resolving conflict	4.27	Highly Applied
Creating itinerary	4.33	Highly applied
Explaining guidelines and policy	3.98	Occasionally Applied
Organizing and holding meetings	3.96	Occasionally Applied
Reporting cases and incidents	4.13	Highly Applied
Making and responding phone calls	4.33	Highly Applied
Evaluating and interpreting documents	4.38	Highly Applied
OVERALL MEAN	4.34	Highly Applied

A closer look at the table magnified the result that the skill in *Explaining Guidelines and Policy* and that of *Organizing and Holding Meetings* were *Occasionally Applied*. The profile of the JEEP graduates indicated that most of them graduated in 2018. This could mean that these graduates have just started their career. Therefore, skills that pertained to supervisory level such as explaining guidelines and organizing meetings

were still occasionally applied. These results support the studies relating to the relationship of measuring English proficiency and academic preparation. Students who have so much difficulty with their communication skills in English language may not function effectively, not only in English language but in their academic aspects [14]. Moreover, in a study of [15], it was revealed that the importance of academic excellence is much needed in today's world because it will be a passport of one student and soon to be a graduate in order to earn decent employment. In sum, as espoused by [16] effective communication skills are not generic personality traits automatically obtained from the home environment; rather, they are tools that require training and practice in suitable contexts to help individuals build communication competence for the workplace.

4. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Measuring academic success using English should be based on the English language learners' need for instructional strategies that could bridge the gap between them and the native English speakers. The interventions brought about by the introduction of Job Enabling English Proficiency have given numerous benefits to these college students. They were aided not only in terms of acquiring learning opportunities to enhance their English proficiency but more in developing their rhetoric, leadership, collaborative, teamwork, and professionalism to make them effective and globally competitive workers in the business world. This paper has found out that most of the graduates were from School Year SY 2018, while School, Year 2017, ranked second and SY 2016 ranked third, while the top degree program is attributed to BSTCM, followed by BSEd TLE and BEEd SpEd) on the third spot. JEEP graduates' communication skills were highly rated on *Explaining and Communicating Effectively When Dealing with Colleagues*, followed by *Using Courteous Expressions* and *Filling out forms*, which skills are highly needed in the workplace. Hence, this study recommends that communication skills training in JEEP must be enhanced and restructured in order to fully address the needs of offices and industry.

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