

Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP): Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract: *This study explored the challenges and opportunities of graduates on the two-year Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) program of Surigao State College of Technology, Surigao City. This paper employed phenomenological design and used a purposive sampling as it chose participants to be interviewed employing a set of open-ended questions within a given time duration by which an informed consent was asked before the interview was initiated. A recorded audio was also made to support necessary concepts and themes established. It is revealed that JEEP is a beneficial program for job-seeking and job-related tasks for it helped improved the oral communicative competence and soft skills. However, it was also found out that graduates still lack the necessary technical writing skills*

Keywords: Job Enabling English Proficiency

I. INTRODUCTION

Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) is an intensive two-year English language training program of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) project, in partnership with Surigao State College of Technology, Surigao City, Philippines. This English language program features learning designed specifically for interactive study via computers. As competitive labour market requires a high demand of English proficiency, it is but a great advantage of one with good communication skills in any work places. With the onslaught of globalization, graduates across disciplines continually experience difficulties in mastering communicative skills which are highly essential for local and international employment.

Proficiency in English has deep influence on job market. Studies have also established that across a wide range of settings, English language proficiency is associated with higher salary. English language aptitude works as one of the important determining factors to get a job, to earn higher salary, and get other advantages in employment market (Fabbr, 2013). As global competitiveness through increased English language proficiency is becoming the goal of many throughout the world, more and more people particularly from Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea exert effort to enhance their knowledge and skills needed to understand and participate in a wide range of intellectual and practical communicative activities by enrolling English enhancement trainings and language software as blended instruction.

There are already published researches on job-related competence of baccalaureate graduates but nothing is known about challenges and opportunities experienced by graduates who finished two-year intensive language training program like the Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) offered only in the select Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Mindanao, Philippines.

This being the case, the researcher wanted to explore the lived experiences of employed graduates who successfully took the said Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) training program of Surigao State College of Technology, Surigao City, Philippines. Specifically, the study further sought to answer: what are the challenges faced by the graduates in relation to oral and written discourses required in the workplaces; what opportunities they obtained in their workplaces, how did their two-year training affect their job performances.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study will make use of phenomenological method of inquiry which is defined as the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced by people living those experiences (Wambaleka, 2018). Phenomenological research is typically conducted through the use of in-depth interviews of small samples of participants. By studying the perspectives of multiple participants, a researcher can begin to make generalizations regarding what it is like to experience a certain phenomenon from the perspective of those that have lived the experience.

Informants. The research interview participants shall be twenty-four (10) from various per pathways they enrolled with the program during the college. These pathways offered were English for International Employment (EIE), English for Engineering (EE), English for Hospitality Management (EHM), and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). For the FGD, four (4) were randomly selected from the ten interviewees.

Sampling. For the interview, the ten (10) participants shall be selected using purposive sampling, in which the researchers shall handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality or possession of the characteristics being sought (Cohen, et.al., 2007). In this study, the participants will have to meet the following criteria: have been employed at least 6 months relevant to his college degree, Filipino, and currently based in Surigao and Siargao areas.

Research Instruments. A survey questionnaire will be used to determine the profile of the participants. This contained information such as name, sex, and degree attained, pathway taken with the JEEP program, employment status, nature of work, and number of years in service. For the in-depth interview, an interview guide written in English will be utilized. It will undergo validation by technical and English language experts and by administering it in a pilot test with 10 respondents having the same characteristics with the target population.

Data Gathering Procedure. This study shall research interview for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information. Specifically, it will use of interview guide approach in which topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form. The interviewer will decide the sequence and working of questions in the course of the interview. Prior to the interview, the researchers shall first obtain the consent of the interviewees in writing. The participants will be identified using purposive sampling technique.

To validate the data collected, a focus group discussion (FGD) will be conducted involving 4 participants randomly selected from the 10 interviewees. The researchers' decision on the size of the group is based on the suggestion of Morgan (1988) which says that the size of the focus group should be between four and twelve only; not too large, otherwise the group becomes unwieldy and hard to manage. According to Robson (2002), a focus group is very focused on a particular issue and, therefore, will yield insights that might not otherwise have been available in a straightforward interview.

In all these activities, the researchers will write memos or note down their observation, reflections, analysis, and interpretation of responses.

Data Analysis. The researchers carried out the procedures in analyzing interview data set out by Hycner. They were the following: (1) Transcription – having the interview tape transcribed, noting not only the literal statements but also nonverbal and paralinguistic communication; (2) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction – suspending as much as possible the researcher's meaning and interpretations and entering into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed; (3) Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole – this involves listening to the entire tape several times and reading the transcription a number of times to provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes later on; (4) Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question – units of general meaning are reduced to units of meaning relevant to the research question while those that are redundant are eliminated; (5) Clustering units of relevant meaning – the researcher now tries to determine whether there seems to be some common theme or essence that unites several discrete units of relevant meaning and then determining those themes from clusters of meaning; (6) Writing a summary of each individual interview – writing a summary of the interview incorporating the themes that have been elicited from the data; (7) Returning to the participants with the summary and themes, conducting a second interview or an FGD – this is to check whether the essence of the first interview has been accurately and fully captured; (8) Identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews – to note if there are themes common to all or most of the interviews and if there are themes unique to a single interview or a minority of the

interviews; (9) Composite summary – this accurately captures the essence of the phenomenon being investigated (Manion, et.al., 2007).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After theoretical sampling and constant comparison were done, analysis and coding of the transcribed data was employed which led to the identification of the categories and subcategories.

Three (3) themes for the opportunities and two (2) for the challenges emerged as a result of the process described above. They are the following:

Opportunities as Graduate/Completer of Job English Enabling English Proficiency Program (JEEP)

Theme 1: Beneficial for Job Seeking

Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) is a program beneficial to the four-year baccalaureate degree graduates especially when seeking for a job. They described it as a great advantage over other applicants or colleagues.

“I was able to gain a few points in terms of my communication skills because I attached the certificate of completion I earned through the program,” (P1)

“Through JEEP, I was able to deliver innovative approaches in teaching English to students and language enthusiasts during my demo.” (P3)

It really helps me to become confident to the way how I communicate with other people. Way back college, when I was a student under the JEEP program, it really taught me how to answer properly in an interview, how to properly talk in your customer. (P4)

“It encouraged me to heighten my patience in listening so I could pronounce words the same way they were pronounced.” (P1)

“It creates greater tolerance and open-mindedness.” (P3)

“Speaking in English allows me to actually broaden my world, from job opportunities to the ability to relate to people from every country.” (P3)

“The program should really continue as it serves as an instrument why I was hired in my current job.” (P2)

“I gain more confidence and I do not feel awkwardness to any job interviews anymore.” (P3)

This implies that the said program had been an avenue for the participants to excel in their assigned tasks for they have prior knowledge and training in relation to written and oral requirements in the job.

Theme 2: Improves Work-related Skills

For many of the participants, being able to finish the two-year language teaching program is a good training ground for a real teaching post or for any better job they have. They are able to improve their oral and written communication skills and social skills. The participants put it this way:

“It helped me to speak as if I was a native speaker who could pronounce words with various accents.” (P1)

“I am good in speaking the English language now. Though I really don’t speak like a native English speaker but I have this knowledge on the technicalities in speaking the language.” (P4)

“I have improved my English communication skills and especially in thinking out of the box.” (P6)

“It hones my communication skills and boosts my confidence in speaking especially English language is our medium in speaking with our customers.” (P10)

“JEEP was a fun experience. Its focus is on enhancing the communication skills, fluency, pronunciation, reading and listening skills.” (P10)

“Through JEEP, I am entrusted to be a training officer with our newly hired employees in the company.” (P9)

“I enhanced my public speaking skills. It also helped me to become better communicator and to become an efficient teacher.” (P7)

The program is a great learning advantage particularly in the oral communicative competence. It is viewed as communicative-focused program because participants are able improve their public speaking skills.

Theme 3: **Boosts Self-Confidence**

Soft skills have improved among participants. When dealing with costumers and colleagues in the organization, they are able to connect themselves with any communicative situations.

“I gain more confidence and I do not feel awkwardness to any job interviews anymore.” (P3)

“The confidence level is 100% even if I am not that kind of good speaker. Because of JEEP, I was able to answer the questions easily during interviews and even simple conversations.” (P10)

“JEEP was my perfect avenue for to develop my communication skills and to boost my confidence.” (P9)

“It really helps me to become confident to the way how I communicate with other people. Way back college, when I was a student under the JEEP program, it really taught me how to answer properly in an interview, how to properly talk in your customer.” (P4)

“JEEP training helped me to conquer my stage fright.” (P7)

Apart from the linguistic competence, the participants had experienced improving their soft skills which made them more confident in the workplaces.

Challenges as Graduate/Completer of Job English Enabling English Proficiency Program (JEEP)

Theme 1: **Difficulties and Consistencies on Written and Oral Fluency**

Speaking and writing are two inseparable skills. The participants shared that they cannot master both at the same pace.

“When I first handled training to our clients, it was a very challenging task because we need to study not just about the topics but also how to speak to high-profile audiences.” (P2)

“I found it hard to translate straight English terms in vernacular to my students. That sometimes led me to be ineffective in my class.” (P1)

“I found it really difficult to speak fluently like a native speaker.” (P3)

“One of the difficulties I came across is to maintain correct grammar consistently. I do really have difficulties when it comes to grammar.” (P5)

“I am not good in written communication. I am still learning and still willing to learn more. I still struggle especially in technical writing.” (P9)

“Writing as one of the communication skills was not really given much emphasis during my JEEP training.” (P9)

“As a Customer Service Representative, grammar and accent are my struggles because I cannot easily get the message of my costumers.” (P10)

Because program is widely focused on the oral competence of participants, writing as an output skill is overlooked. Hence, the participants expressed that they cannot perform better on the writing requirements over the speaking.

Theme 2: **Job Readiness**

I have my classes because it's part of my job as an English teacher and there's a little pressure added because I serve as a model to my students (P1)

I would consider the making of urgent report and then you are not yet fully acquainted with the process or the so-called template (P7)

The two-year program is not enough for it seemed that I am not ready for any given tasks especially on urgent written reports. (P9)

The participants expressed that the program must be continued, however, they gave suggestions to adding more activities in writing because graduates are not fully ready in any assigned tasks given to them.

IV. CONCLUSION

With the aforementioned findings, it is concluded that Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) is a relevant training program across disciplines; hence, opening doors for job opportunities of its graduates. These graduates/completers of the program have improved their oral communication, social, and soft skills which are all vital in the performing their jobs. However, they have found to be not fully ready with the job requirements particularly in the technical writing tasks.

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