

Assessment of Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) Language Program for Maritime Students

**Benjelou A. Tacogdoy¹, Henry D. Dagamac¹, Juvy H. Vallejo²,
Frestel E. Olayer²**

**College of Maritime Education, Misamis University, Misamis University,
H. T. Feliciano Street, Ozamiz City, Philippines**

**English Department, College of Arts and Sciences, Misamis University,
H. T. Feliciano Street, Ozamiz City, Philippines**

Corresponding author: Benjelou A. Tacogdoy , email: tacogdoy@yahoo.com

Abstract

Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) is an intensive two-year English language training program of United States Agency for International Development-USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM). This program features learning design specifically for interactive study via computers and is envisioned to improve the English proficiency among students enrolled in selected universities in Mindanao. Through collaboration and shared educational missions, GEM and Misamis University are creating new ways of learning the English language. Maritime students are one of the recipients of the program. Assessment of JEEP is an important component of determining if the program is effectively working for maritime students. This study aimed to assess Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) language program for maritime students in Misamis University. Descriptive research design was used in this study. Structured questionnaire was administered to randomly selected 60 third year maritime students. Based on the overall results students' assessment was excellent for JEEP language program but few items have to be improved. Findings also revealed that JEEP (Start) program was rated excellent by 50% of the maritime students and very satisfactory by 38%, satisfactory by 5%, fair by 5%, and poor by 2% of the respondents. Results of the appraisal are critical in developing strategies to improve the program.

Keywords: appraisal, computers, excellent, interactive, structured

Introduction

The Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) program is an intensive two-year English language training program of United States Agency for International Development-USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM). The program features learning designed specifically for interactive study via computers. The program aims to improve English proficiency and help increase the employability of maritime students (Garcia, 2009; Grau, 2010). The JEEP program helps the students in their interview skill to appear smart and knowledgeable and be able to express themselves well in English (Ojastro, 2010). Students are not taught about the language but the language itself, and how it is used in a real-life work setting. The ultimate goal of the program is to deliver innovative approaches in learning English among students and language enthusiasts of all ages and cultural backgrounds (Dalagan, 2013).

Twenty-seven colleges and universities in Mindanao are participating in the project that assists college students in acquiring proficiency in the English language 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.

A competitive employment market requires good communication skills in workplaces (Tang et al., 2016). Under globalization, communication skills in English play a crucial role in maritime employment. English is often a decisive factor in employment opportunities with higher earnings (Casale & Posel, 2011), and in organizations aiming at higher productivity (Dustmann & Faber, 2005). On the other hand, people who are incompetent in English face difficulty in finding work, especially well-paid jobs. Lack of English fluency may also result to earning losses (Dustmann & Van Soest, 2001; Leslie & Lindly, 2001). English proficiency therefore, is needed for employees to advance in both local and international companies.

Assessment of JEEP is an important component of determining if the program is effectively working for maritime students. Assessment is a way to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement (Heinrich, 2012) so that the program can sustain and provide the expected efficiency in English among maritime students.

Misamis University (MU) in Ozamiz City is a privately-owned institution in Northern Mindanao that offers JEEP program. Maritime students are one of the recipients of the program. The program has started since October 2010 in MU. The offering of JEEP courses in the maritime curriculum of MU aims at improving the employability of graduates by expanding and enhancing the students' English language capabilities. However, there was no study on the perception of maritime students towards JEEP (Start) in this area of Misamis Occidental province. As part of the continuous improvement of the University to provide quality education to the maritime students, the effectiveness of the JEEP program has to be assessed in terms of the perception of the users. Hence, this study was conducted to assess the Job Enabling English Proficiency language program for maritime students in Misamis University, Philippines. Results of the appraisal are critical in developing strategies to improve the program.

Materials and Methods

Research design

The descriptive research design was used in this study to gather student assessment for JEEP (Start). This study was conducted in Misamis University in Ozamiz City during the First Semester of School Year 2015-2016. A total of 60 maritime students who already enrolled in the JEEP (Start) program were the respondents of the study. Informed consent was procured from the respondents.

Research instrument

Structured questionnaire was used in gathering assessment rating of maritime students for JEEP Program to three areas, namely, interest

and relevance of the JEEP, effect of JEEP on technical/language skills, and effect of JEEP on the confidence as a learner. The respondents were also interviewed to obtain additional information. The questionnaire contains 23 items on which the respondents indicate their response following the five-point Likert scale: 5 – To a very great extent, 4 - to a great extent, 3 - to some extent, 2 - to less extent, and 1 - to no extent. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part I obtains information on interest and relevance of the JEEP. Part II assessed the perception of the students on the effect of JEEP on technical/language skills, and Part III was on the effect of JEEP on the confidence as a learner. A pilot testing for the questionnaire was carried out to 20 students. Cronbach's alpha available in SPSS software was utilized to determine its reliability. The percent distribution of respondents as to their assessment rating was obtained.

Sampling procedures

Simple random sampling was the method used in selecting the respondents of the study. A total of 60 third-year maritime students were selected from the target group. The questionnaire was disseminated to 30 third-year students of Bachelor of Science in Marine Engineering and 30 third-year students of Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation. The sample size was determined using the Sloven's formula (Olatunde & Joshua, 2012) with 95% level of confidence. Before the respondents were given the questionnaire, an orientation of the scope and purpose of the study was conducted. The respondents were assured that all information they give would be treated with confidentiality.

Data analysis

Frequency, percentage and average weighted value were used for the analysis. The following scales were used in interpreting the responses of the respondents: 4.20-5.00 (Excellent), 3.40-4.19 (Very Satisfactory), 2.60-3.39 (Satisfactory), 1.80-2.59 (Fair), and 1.00-1.79 (Poor).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the student assessment for JEEP (Start). The overall assessment was excellent. Examining the three areas assessed, interest and relevance obtained a very satisfactory rating which implies that JEEP is an interesting and relevant program. Looking into each item in this area, the learning experiences of students and the interactive nature of the course were considered excellent. Other items were very satisfactory. Although the lowest mean was obtained on laboratory and classroom tasks updating, still the program was perceived very satisfactory. The result suggests that students were interested in the activities in the laboratory because they are interactive. However, there has to be a constant updating on the activities in the laboratory and in the classroom to make the program more interesting.

The student assessment for JEEP (Start) to their technical/ language skills was excellent by majority of the respondents. Relatively, their speaking and writing skills have improved as a result of the activities in their class and they learned to be resourceful in doing different language tasks. Moreover, the respondents also claimed that the information from the laboratory and classroom activities helped them learned the importance of communication. Their listening skills in English have also improved. Most of the students have excellent perception that all the activities done in class will help them in the job application process. According to Clark (2015), a powerful communication skill in English will take one to great heights in career because English is the common corporate language used globally. Job interviews are conducted in English and an individual is judged by the style of speaking. Proficiency in the language can give a good impression and one has better opportunities to obtain excellent jobs. Although, the lowest mean of 4.10 was obtained, the overall rating in this area was excellent.

Table 1. Student assessment for JEEP (Start).

Areas and Items	Weighted mean	Verbal interpretation
A. Interest and Relevance		
1. The learning experiences	4.40	Excellent
2. The tasks to real-life experiences	4.10	Very Satisfactory
3. The interactive nature of the course	4.20	Excellent
4. Computer based test and drills	4.18	Very Satisfactory
5. The tasks are updated.	4.00	Very Satisfactory
6. Enjoyed the computer-based learning tasks and presentation.	4.20	Very Satisfactory
Mean	4.18	Very Satisfactory
B. Effect on Technical/Language Skills		
7. Listening skills in English have improved as a result of this course.	4.42	Excellent
8. The information helped me learned the importance of communication.	4.43	Excellent
9. I am able to complete my tasks on time and efficiency.	4.10	Very Satisfactory
10. Gained knowledge of topics in other areas such as Math, Science, Business, etc. as used in the computer software.	4.15	Very Satisfactory
11. Speaking skills have improved as a result of the activities done in this class.	4.50	Excellent
12. The drills contributed greatly to my knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary.	4.30	Excellent
13. Writing skills in English have improved as a result of the activities.	4.20	Excellent
14. Resourceful in doing different language tasks in class.	4.50	Excellent
15. Reading skills have improved as a result of the activities in this class.	4.10	Very Satisfactory
16. Learned the proper use of business correspondence and technical writing (application letter and resume-writing) in class.	4.10	Very Satisfactory
17. Help me in the job application process.	4.40	Excellent
18. Learned the basics of the interview process.	4.30	Excellent
Mean	4.29	Excellent
C. Effect on Confidence as a Learner		
19. Gained confidence in my ability to do English language activities (dialogues, role plays, interview, and presentations).	4.30	Excellent
20. Gained confidence in my technical skills (use of computers, recorders, video camera, etc).	4.30	Excellent
21. Able to communicate effectively.	4.30	Excellent
23. Gained confidence in my ability to speak in English as a result of the activities in class.	4.30	Excellent
Mean	4.30	Excellent
Overall mean	4.26	Excellent

The student rating for JEEP to their confidence as learners was excellent. Many of the respondents verbalized that they have gained confidence in their ability to do English language activities such as dialogues, role plays, interview, and presentations and doing technical skills. They also confirmed that through JEEP they can communicate effectively and gain confidence in their ability to speak in English as a result of the activities in class. Similar results were reported by Al-Hebaish (2012) who stressed that fluency in English language can help learners recognize their fears and help them learn to deal with them. Their confidence can support positive thinking and fight negative views and beliefs. Designing interesting activities give students more time and opportunities to gain self-confidence. Brown (2000) and Skehan (1991) stressed that self-confidence is one of the most influential variables which affects learning. It is one of the central drives in human beings and can exercise a determining influence on a person's life (Lee, 2014). The concept of self-confidence is closely related to self-esteem, both share a common emphasis on the individual's perception of one's abilities as a person (Dörnyei, 2005).

Figure 1 shows the summary of student assessment for JEEP (Start) to three areas assessed. Relatively, the program was rated excellent in terms of its effects on the technical/language skills and confidence as a learner, while very satisfactory on the area of interest and relevance. The results imply that the JEEP (Start) language program may help the maritime students improve their language proficiency. During the informal interview, students also believed that JEEP (Start) program is very useful for their future career. Recent literature has suggested that the relationship between globalization and the English language implicates employability in the job market. Although the effects are uneven in different occupational groups and in different countries (Chiswick, 2009; Akbulut-Yuksel et al., 2011) such relationship is growing significantly to policy makers (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013).

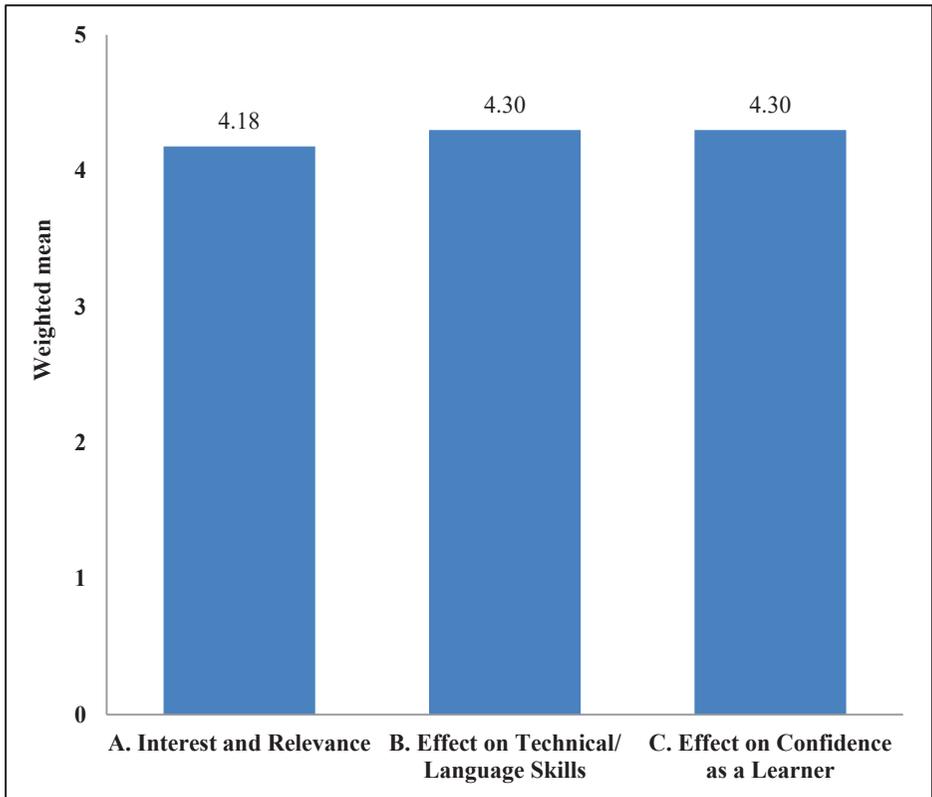


Figure 1. Overall rating of the three areas of JEEP (Start).

Figure 2 presents the percent distribution of students as to their rating for JEEP (Start). Half (50%) of the respondents rated the program excellent, 38% rated it very satisfactory, 5% assessed the program as satisfactory, 5% considered it fair, and there was 2% which rated the program poor. The excellent and very satisfactory perception of the respondents could be due to the fact that their technical/language skills and confidence have been enhanced when they enroll the program. Similar results were reported by (Ojastro, 2010).

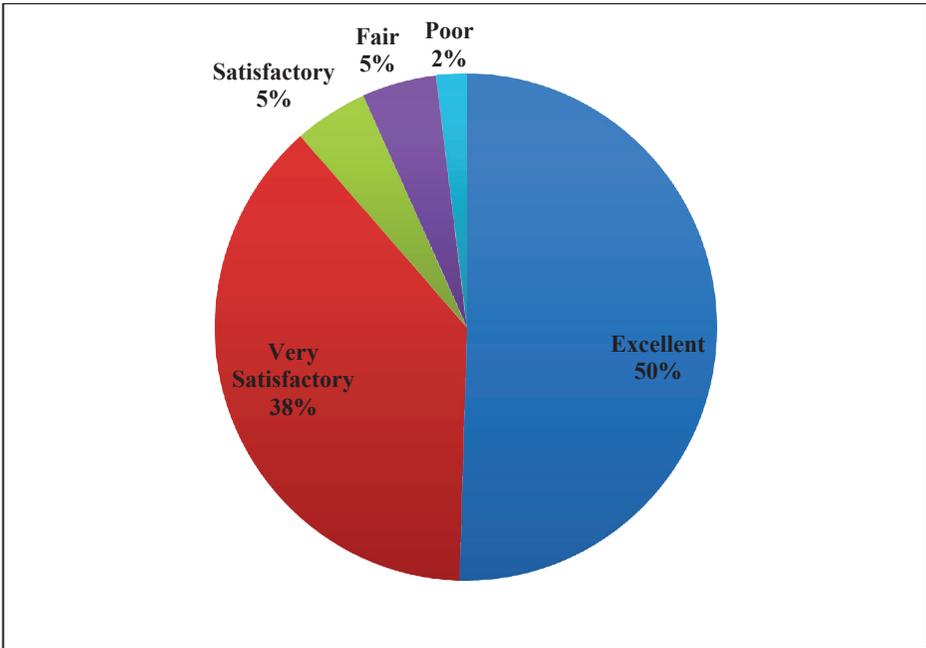


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents as to their rating for JEEP.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The overall assessment for JEEP language program for maritime students in Misamis University is excellent. Looking into the areas assessed, interest and relevance needs improvement because it is rated very satisfactory. The conduct of exit interview as part of the program implementation is recommended. The findings may be utilized by the school planners, teacher educators, employers, and career advisers to optimize English language learning programs that support increased employability. Hence, the findings of this study are significant to curriculum development.

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