

## **Exploring the Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) Level among College Students: A Roadmap for the Early Intervention for Children with Limited Language Proficiency**

**Annura H. Muallamin**

*Zamboanga State College of Marine Sciences and Technology  
Zamboanga City, Philippines*

### **Abstract**

This study is experimental research which looked into the effectiveness of the Job Enabling English proficiency (JEEP) Program of ZSCMST. This is pseudo experimental research utilizing randomized pretest-posttest control group design which attempted to find out whether there is improvement in the language competence of students enrolled in the JEEP Program. There exists the significant difference in the pretest and posttest of the experimental group in English Proficiency among the students who were enrolled in JEEP. There is significant difference in the posttest of both the experimental group and control groups who were enrolled in the JEEP program than those who were taught in the traditional method of teaching English language subjects. The researcher recommended that JEEP must be retained as an enhancement program of the language department of the ZSCMST. Thus, the program must be implemented if possible in all courses of the institution to prepare students for employment. There must be orientation and reorientation about JEEP program twice a year. Teachers of the institution, regardless of their discipline or area of expertise must be allowed to take the placement test to measure their English Proficiency. It is recommended too that similar studies on JEEP can be undertaken by other researchers, utilizing other variables, setting and respondents.

**Keywords:** *Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP), college students, early intervention, children, limited language proficiency*

### **Introduction**

English Language proficiency has never taken a back seat where advancement and progress capture center stage and has remained the key asset in therapeutic measures undertaken with regard to the Philippine economy to the point that a decline in the proficiency poses a threat to it. Some attributable factors for its decline is compounded by falling school standards and a mass exodus of linguistically skilled professionals. It is with the former, that this study has been made.

Many a blame has put on faulting text messaging and the popularity of soap operas dubbed into the Filipino language often resulting to a proficiency of the vernacular which is considered innate than that of the English language. The common language of everybody is that of the hybrid language Taglish." It has become the standard rather than the exception. In the article dated May 26, 2006, it was stated that "The Philippines used to be very adept in the English language decades ago and today. It leaves many wondering what went wrong and why is our country still in bad shape. Ironically though, Japan the second largest economy in the world is not skilled in the English language, yet is such an economic powerhouse. It is a general belief that proficiency in the English language will be the answer to economic relief". Yet, another factor contributing to the decline of the English language is the lack of its mastery by the very ones who teach it. In the article of Cyril L. Bonabente published in *Inquirer* research. Stated that "DepEd in 2005 allocated nearly 600 million for the training of teachers in the English proficiency and Science as a result of the very low performance of public-school student's performance in the National Achievement Test".

The nation has received prior warning about the potential consequences of a decline in English proficiency among Filipinos, particularly in relation to the call center industry, which generates numerous employment opportunities both domestically and internationally. Nonetheless, it is essential to reiterate that English continues to hold a dominant position as the lingua franca or default language in global business and diplomatic interactions. Critical documents such as international treaties and business contracts are predominantly composed in English due to its precise nature. Consequently, it is imperative for a country to have individuals who possess the ability to speak, read, and write English proficiently. In today's global job market, employers seek candidates with international experience, recognized qualifications, and a high level of proficiency in spoken and written English. Merely being able to communicate at a basic level is insufficient; proficiency is the key. The English language offers limited elasticity and flexibility, allowing individuals to convey their intended messages accurately without room for interpretation. Mistakes in verb tenses, plurals, or prepositions result in inaccuracies that can hinder effective communication.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has emerged as a timely intervention through its one-year-old Growth for Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Project, specifically the JOB ENABLING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (JEEP) Program, which has been actively involved in infrastructure development, business development, governance, and workforce preparation in Mindanao for thirteen years. Recognizing that a significant barrier to securing desirable employment is the insufficient proficiency in the English language, USAID conducted a survey in November 2008 in collaboration with higher education institutions in Mindanao to identify the needs and circumstances pertaining to English language development. Subsequently, a project was devised to address these concerns, resulting in the establishment of JEEP, a program with a focus on employment outcomes. JEEP aims to assist graduates in Mindanao in obtaining and retaining jobs in highly sought-after sectors that require English proficiency, such as international nursing and allied health, call centers and other business process outsourcing (BPO) industries, hotel, and restaurant management (HRM), and the maritime trades. Inadequate English proficiency often acts as a significant obstacle to employment opportunities.

In response to these pressing real-world needs, JEEP has been developed as a targeted and practical program that emphasizes skill development. The program spans two years and was initially offered as an elective to second-degree students in 2008, followed by third-year students in 2009 who were limited to completing only the first year of JEEP. The first year, known as JEEP-Start, utilizes computer-assisted language learning (CALL) with the esteemed Dyn Ed software from the United States, focusing on enhancing general English skills. In the second year, referred to as JEEP-Accelerate, a variety of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are provided, concentrating on preparing students for employment in the targeted sectors. Throughout, the role of the teacher as an instructional manager is very important having received intensive training in computer-assisted language. This program involves six hours per week for a total of approximately one hundred hours per semester and thus four hundred hours for the entire program.

Thus, the researcher was motivated to pursue this study in order to make this as a road map for the early intervention for children with limited language proficiency. Through this, language development will be started in the years of education.

### **Review of Related Literature and Studies On the Language Proficiency**

In general terms, language proficiency encompasses the skill of effectively using language for various communication purposes. Individuals who are proficient in a language are considered to have a strong grasp of it, meaning they can easily comprehend it, express their thoughts clearly through speech and writing, and engage in comfortable interactions with other speakers. Evaluating language proficiency

typically involves considering five performance indicators: accuracy, fluency, complexity, appropriateness, and capacity (Richards, 2018).

This study is based on Cummins' (2000) theory of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins makes a distinction between two types of language proficiency. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) refer to the surface-level abilities of listening and speaking, which are typically acquired quickly by many students, especially those from language backgrounds similar to English who have ample interaction with native speakers during their school years.

On the other hand, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is the foundation for a child's ability to handle the academic demands across different subjects. According to Cummins, while many children become fluent in everyday spoken English (i.e., BICS) within two years of being immersed in the target language, it takes approximately 5-7 years for a child to reach a level of academic language proficiency similar to that of native speakers. It should not be assumed that non-native speakers who are highly fluent and accurate in everyday spoken English possess the same level of academic language proficiency. Being aware of this difference can prevent us from mistakenly classifying children as having special educational needs when, in reality, they simply need more time. Non-native speakers in your classes who have transitioned out of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program are still, in most cases, in the process of catching up with their native-speaking peers.

Cummins states that when a child learns one language, they gain a set of skills and implicit meta-linguistic knowledge that can be applied when working with another language. He labels this collection of skills and knowledge as the common underlying proficiency (CUP), as shown in the diagram provided. The CUP acts as the base for the development of both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2). Therefore, any growth in the CUP in one language has a positive effect on the other language(s). This theory also clarifies why acquiring additional languages becomes increasingly effortless as time goes on.

Cummins (2000) posits that the conceptual knowledge acquired in one language contributes to the comprehension of input in another language. If a child already understands concepts like "justice" or "honesty" in their native language, they only need to acquire the corresponding labels in English. However, if they must learn both the label and the concept in their second language, the task becomes more challenging. Cummins has devised a model that categorizes the various tasks students are expected to undertake. The diagram presented illustrates the continuum of task difficulty, ranging from cognitively undemanding to cognitively demanding, as well as the continuum from context-embedded to context-reduced. A context-embedded task provides students with additional visual and oral cues, enabling them to refer to illustrations or ask questions for clarification. Conversely, a context-reduced task, such as listening to a lecture or reading complex text, relies solely on the language itself without additional sources of assistance. Tasks falling into the D quadrant, which are both cognitively demanding and context-reduced, pose the greatest difficulty for students, especially non-native speakers in the early stages of learning English. Nonetheless, it is crucial for ESL students to develop the ability to tackle such tasks, as academic success is unattainable without it.

Cummins also emphasizes the distinction between additive bilingualism, where the first language and culture are nurtured while the second language is added, and subtractive bilingualism, where the second language is acquired at the expense of the first language and culture, leading to their decline. Cummins (1994) cites research suggesting that students in additive bilingual environments achieve greater success compared to those whose schools and society devalue their first language and culture.

At a minimum, a professional language instructor should possess adequate knowledge of the subject matter (English language), pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of how to teach English), and sufficient proficiency in the language to effectively teach using the target language. However, the

relationship between proficiency and teaching effectiveness is not without exceptions. Merely having a high level of proficiency does not guarantee automatic effectiveness in the classroom as a teacher. If this were the case, then all native speakers would be ideal classroom instructors. Research indicates that even highly proficient native English speakers still need to acquire and employ "classroom language" effectively to facilitate language learning in an instructional setting (Richards, 2017).

It is crucial to emphasize that possessing adequate proficiency is an essential requirement for teaching. It is a necessary condition, though not sufficient on its own, for effective teaching. A sufficient level of proficiency enables teachers to navigate their lessons more smoothly and efficiently. Research indicates that teachers with higher proficiency levels demonstrate greater proficiency in using English to accomplish classroom tasks and provide appropriate language support to their students. In a recent study conducted by H. Richards et al. (2013) involving foreign language teachers with varying levels of proficiency in New Zealand, the following seven aspects of teaching were examined:

1. Exploitation of target language resources
2. Provision of appropriate language models
3. Provision of corrective feedback
4. Use of the TL to manage the class
5. Provision of accurate explanations
6. Provision of rich language input
7. Ability to improvise

### **Exploring the JOB ENABLING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (JEEP) Level among College Students**

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) as an interactive language intervention and the result of the findings will be used as the basis for curriculum review. This study involved the areas of following linguistic features such as grammar and vocabulary. Since it is a Quasiexperimental research design employing the pretest-posttest equivalent two-group design (control and experimental group), the study included an intervention employing Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) program. The subjects in the experimental group were given the treatment of Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) program while the control group was exposed to the traditional method of teaching the English language. Both the control and the experimental groups were given the pretest and posttest to determine the significant difference.

### **Early Intervention for Children with Limited Language Proficiency**

During early childhood, children demonstrate various forms of aggression, as observed in studies conducted by Crick et al. (2006). While there has been significant research attention given to physical aggression in childhood, the investigation of relational aggression displayed by preschool-aged children has received comparatively less scrutiny. Relational aggression encompasses indirect strategies such as ignoring, spreading malicious rumors and gossip, and employing social exclusion as means to deliberately influence peer relationships, as defined by Crick and Grotpeter (1995). Such behaviors are known to have negative consequences on children's ability to establish enduring social connections, thereby impacting their mental well-being, as highlighted by Fraser (1996) and Salmivalli (2010). However, there remains limited understanding regarding the early developmental factors associated with these behaviors, underscoring the importance of further exploration into relational aggression to advance both research efforts and prevention strategies, as emphasized by Godleski, Kamper, Ostrov, Hart, and Blakely-McClure (2015).

### **Methodology**

This study utilizes a pseudo-experimental research design that employs a randomized pretest-posttest control group design. It is a methodological approach that aims to gather factual information with appropriate interpretations. This design represents an improvement over pre-experimental designs as it

enables the determination of behavioral and outcome changes following an intervention, thereby reducing the likelihood of confounding due to other factors. Consequently, there is a high level of confidence that any observed differences between the intervention group and the control group can be attributed to the intervention itself. While this particular experimental design does not incorporate certain features, it offers additional advantages. For instance, it can accommodate multiple treatments, facilitate various comparisons (e.g., between groups, pre- to post-intervention within a single group), and enhance statistical power by employing the pretest measure as a covariate to statistically equate the groups. The study aims to assess the current state of English proficiency among students of ZCMST by implementing the Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) program.

A total of 30 students was selected from a specific section, namely JEEP A, based on their performance in the admission exam. These students are currently enrolled in various degree programs such as Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation, Bachelor of Science in Marine Engineering, and Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management. On the other hand, the group of 30 non-JEEP students consists of individuals pursuing Bachelor of Science degrees in Aquaculture, Marine Biology, Marine Technology, Food Technology, Fisheries with a specialization in Fish Processing, Secondary Education with majors in Physical Science, Biological Science and Technology, Livelihood Education, as well as Bachelor of Science in Fisheries.

The DynEd is a computer-based program used to measure the English proficiency of second-year students. It was utilized in this study to test linguistic competence which includes grammar and vocabulary starting from easy, average to difficult levels the number of items granted for each subject varies depending on the accuracy of their answer and the scores they get. The test was supervised by the researcher and the JEEP teacher. The JEEP program of this college has used this test for (2) two years in determining the recommended courses for a particular subject. The results of this test serve as basis for the recommended courses to be offered to the student. Since it is an experimental research design employing the pretest-posttest equivalent to two-group sign (control and experimental group), the study included an intervention employing Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) program. The subjects under the experimental group were given the treatment of Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) program while the control group was exposed to the traditional method of teaching an English language. Both the control and the experimental groups were given the pretest and posttest to determine the significant difference.

## Results and Discussion

### Level of English Proficiency in the Pretest

The table 1 shows that the control group has earned the pretest score of .3300 and the experimental groups has 4000 (very low). Although, the experimental group showed better performance, both groups exhibited the capacity to speak and understand a few phrases in English, including time, numbers and spelling. Both groups could answer questions concerning age, family, and job. They have the knowledge on basic grammar such as the pronouns and simple Wh question formation. The overall weighted mean is .3650 which also reflects the groups capacity to perform the linguistic tasks mentioned above.

**Table 1. Level of English Proficiency in the Pretest**

Variable	Level of English Proficiency	
	Pretest	Descriptive equivalent
Control	.3300	Can speak and understand English phrases
Experimental	.4000	Can speak and understand few phrases
<b>Overall weighted mean</b>	<b>.3650</b>	Can speak and understand free

	phrases
--	---------

The table 2 below reveals a distinction between the control group and experimental group. The control group yielded the posttest mean of 4500 showing that the respondents could speak and understand few English phrases as acquired from the environment that they are in. The experimental group accumulated a general mean of 8800 which is described as elementary level. The students could use short sentence to answer simple question about job, family, daily and weekly schedule, like /dislikes, and weather, but not about life history or future plans. Although, at this level, the respondents could use short sentences which are fragmental, reflecting limited basic patterns. The overall weighted mean is .6250 disclosing that the respondents as a whole can utter and comprehend few English phrases acquired from the environment they are in.

The Computerized Oral Proficiency Instrument (COPI) is an oral proficiency test created for postsecondary students and administered through a CD-ROM platform. Its development was influenced by the ACTFL OPI and CAL's Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI), which is an assessment conducted using tape recordings. A study conducted by CAL from 1998 to 2000 evaluated the feasibility of a computer-based oral proficiency test (Kenyon & Malabonga, 2001). The study's findings confirmed that the COPI effectively elicited language samples from test takers and produced results that were comparable to those obtained from the ACTFL OPI and CAL SOPI (Kenyon & Malabonga, 2001).

**Table2. Level of English Proficiency of the respondents in control and experimental groups in the posttest**

Variable	Level of English Proficiency	
	Pretest	Descriptive equivalent
Control	.4500	Can speak and understand English phrases
Experimental	.8000	Elementary level
Overall weighted mean	.6250	Can speak and understand free phrases

Table 3 and 4 below present the result of t-Test dependent/correlated/paired sample in the score gain increase between pretest and posttest of the control group in the level of English proficiency. The findings revealed that the significant difference does exist in the pretest and posttest of the control group in the English Proficiency among the students who were not exposed to Job Enabling English Proficiency Program, instead they were taught in the traditional method of teaching English with the t value of -2.724 and the probability of occurrence under the null hypothesis lesser than  $\alpha = 0.05$  level of significance. As manifested through the score gain increase in the pretest = 3300 and posttest = 4500, therefore, the posited hypothesis is rejected since there is a statistical significant difference in their pretest and posttest.

**Table 3. Significance Difference in the Score Gain Increase between Pre-test and Posttest of the control group in the level of English Proficiency**

Variables	Overall Mean Rank		t-value	p-value	Decision on Ho
	Pretest	Posttest			
Control Group	.3300	.4500	-2.724	0.11	Reject

**Table 4. Paired Sample Correlation**

X Independent Variable	Y Independent Variable	r-value	Verbal Description	Probability Value	Decision on Ho
Pretest	Posttest	.818	High correlation	.000	Reject

Evidently, it is also supported by the paired sample correlation, as reflected in table 4, between the pretest and posttest of the control group with the r- value of .818 described as high correlation. The data show that the performances of the students in the English proficiency using the traditional method are positively correlated in the pretest and posttest. Moreover, the students who got high scores in the pretest are more likely the ones who have obtained high scores in the posttest. The fourth research question that this study sought to answer is, "Is there a significant score gain increase between pre-test and posttest of the experimental group in English proficiency.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Although the experimental group showed better performance, both groups exhibited the capacity to speak and understand a few phrases in English, including time, numbers and spelling. Both groups could answer questions concerning age, family, and job. They have the knowledge on basic grammar such as the pronouns and simple Wh question formation. Also, the experimental group obtained high score as compared to the control group which is described as elementary level. The students could use short sentence to question about job, family, daily and weekly schedule, like /dislikes, and weather, but not about life history or future plans. Although, at this level, the respondents could use short sentences which are fragmental, reflecting limited basic patterns. It was also noted that the significant difference does exist in the pretest and posttest of the control group in the English Proficiency among the students who were not exposed to Job Enabling English Proficiency Program, instead they were taught in the traditional method of teaching English. The students who got high scores in the pretest are more likely the ones who have obtained high scores in the posttest.

In the light of the foregoing findings and conclusions, this study recommends that in as far as improvement is seen in the performance of the JEEP students, JEEP must be retained as part of the recommendations enhancement program of the language department of the institution. Moreso, JEEP must be implemented in all courses in the college since it develops language proficiency in the students that prepares them for employment interview and professional work in the future.

### References

- Crick, N. et al. (1995). Relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment. *Child Development*.
- Crick, N. et al. (2006). A Longitudinal study of relational and physical aggression in preschool. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*.
- Cummins, J. (1994). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In California State Department of Education (Ed.), *Schooling [-8-] and language minority students: A theoretical framework* Los Angeles: California State University, Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, Power, and Pedagogy. Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Fraser, M. (2010). Aggressive behavior in childhood and early adolescence: An ecological-developmental perspective on youth violence. *Social Work*.
- Godleski, Kamper, Ostrov, Hart, & Blakely-McClure, (2015). Peer victimization and peer rejection during early childhood. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*.

- Richards, H., Conway, C., Roskvist, A., & Harvey, S. (2013) Foreign language teachers' language proficiency and their language teaching practice. *The Language Learning Journal*, 41(2), 231-246.
- Richards, J. C. (2018). Communicative competence. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpGvWYPL7cU>.
- Richards, J. C. (2017). Teaching English through English: Proficiency, pedagogy and performance. *RELC Journal*, 48(1), 7-30
- Salmivalli, C. (2010). Bullying and the peer group: A review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*.