

Professional Growth Through Professional Employment Program

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Abstract

In the second semester of school year 2012-2013, JRU pioneered a special training program for graduating students in partnership with LiveIt, a subsidiary of the Ayala Group. An initial group of 81 highly-motivated graduating students from the College of Business Administration were chosen as the first group for the Professional Employment Program (PEP). They met four half days a week in a specially constructed classroom and were taught by a highly trained faculty from LiveIt. They completed the following courses: Business Communications, Service Culture, Systems Thinking, and Fundamentals I & II which are Sales and Technical Support. They were also trained on Application & Interview Readiness for jobs. This paper aimed to study the professional growth of Jose Rizal University (JRU) graduating students through the Professional Employment Program (PEP). The results showed that all respondents had positive experiences with PEP, and used words like: the program was worth the effort, effective, nice, great, very good, perfect, interesting, challenging, helped them a lot, extra ordinary and phenomenal, and the best program that they ever had. Although they admitted that the program was difficult and that they failed many times, in the end they realized that they benefitted a lot from it through the help of their patient and supportive mentors who brought out the best in them.

Keywords: Professional Employment, PEP

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According to (Kerr, Von Glinow, and Schriesheim, 2009) they characterized the Professional Employment Program as: an identifiable base of knowledge from which the students practice, has a lifelong commitment to professional growth, through extended education students can acquire a mastery of knowledge, participants should possess a strong commitment to the field, and has a good decision making skills regarding application of the knowledge he/she acquired.

In the study of Marzano (2010), entitled “What works in school: Translating research into action” It becomes a challenge to ensure that such individuals have adequate opportunities to satisfy needs for professional growth but they choose to remain in a particular job for many years. However, more often than not there is no structured career ladder to follow for professional careers. Employees progress through a number of upward job changes, in many careers like for instance, from sales associate to department manager to store manager to regional manager.

Professional employment involves its relationship to student achievement. Much of the available research on this program identified several variables like school, teacher, student level, student level of learning within the classroom, parent, community involvement, instructional strategies, classroom management, curriculum design, student background, student knowledge, and student motivation as one of the factors to be considered in student achievement. Guskey (1995), Willis (2000), and Marzano (2003).

In 2007, the first Professional Employment Program (PEP) was offered at the Information Communication Technology in Australia. The nature of delivery in PEP was purely in the form of workshops with highly interactive teaching approach including activities like: industry visits, expert feedback, team activities, mock-interview, and self-assessment. About 60 ICT international postgraduate students commencing their final semester participated in the program. The session runs four full days from June 18 to June 21.

Furthermore, the first Professional Employment Program (PEP) was launched in the Faculty of Information Communication Technology (FICT). It is a 4-days career development workshop. In response to student feedback from focus groups conducted in 2006 the Professional Employment Program (PEP) was developed. These focus groups identified a need for a program that would address international graduates’ generic skills for employment. To increased job readiness upon completion of their ICT masters courses at Swinburne University of Technology, the program Swinburnes Careers and Employment Unit (CEU), focused on helping overseas postgraduate students understand the Australian job application process and workplace culture.

In September 2012, Jose Rizal University (JRU) in partnership with LiveIt (a member of the Ayala Group of Companies) established the first ever Professional Employment Program (PEP) in the Philippines to meet the growing demand of the progressing industry. The program aims to equip students with industry-specific skills and enable them to acquire their dream job and establish a great career after graduating from college.

An initial group of 81 highly-motivated graduating students from the College of Business Administration were chosen as the first group for the Professional Employment Program (PEP). They met four half days a week in a specially constructed classroom and were taught by a highly trained faculty from LiveIt. They completed the following courses: Business Communications, Service Culture, Systems Thinking, and Fundamentals I & II. They were also trained on Application & Interview Readiness for jobs. These courses have a total of fifteen (15) unit credits.

The 5 courses aimed to equip students with the following competencies: (1) Excellent spoken English, (2) Broadly applicable service, sales, support skills, (3) Job specific problem solving skills, knowledge and routines, (4) Strong work ethic & habits, and (5) Solid computer literacy. The program is totally different in the normal classroom set-up because, there are no lectures, quizzes or home-works. Students are engaged through cases, challenging simulation, and computer-based interaction.

At the end of the program PEP students were assisted in getting job interviews with their preferred employer such as; Accenture, Ayala Land, BPI, Globe, Stream, Honda and Isuzu Cars. Job hunting became much easier and seamless because graduates were equipped with the necessary competencies needed by the industries.

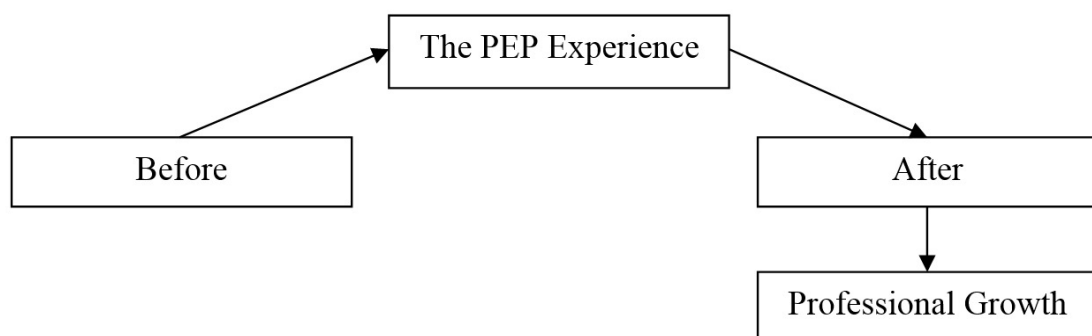
This research study aimed to describe the PEP program from the viewpoint of students who underwent it at Jose Rizal University. Specifically, the study sought to find out: (1) their perception about the program before enrolling, (2) their experiences during the program, (3) the benefits they got after attending the program, (4) their assessment about the program, and (5) their suggestions or recommendations about the program.

Results of this study may guide the direction of future PEP programs in the university on whether a new technique can be adopted and implemented to improve student's experiences about it.

Also, this paper may serve as a basis for future research on the effectiveness of the program through a tracer study or the employability rate of the graduates.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Perception of Professional Growth through the JRU-PEP



The conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1, presents the experiences and professional growth of the 1st batch of students enrolled in JRU-PEP program.

Method

This section discusses the methods that were used in gathering data to answer the research statement of the problem.

First, the focus group discussion technique was used to make sure that the respondents would feel free to share their experiences as well as their assessments, suggestions and recommendations about the program. The questions were discussed and explained thoroughly so that the respondents will not be misguided in responding.

Second, individual interview was done to validate the information/data collected during the focus group discussion.

Third, written interview with open ended questionnaires was conducted to make sure that the respondents will include other information that they didn't mention during the oral interview and to validate the earlier data obtained.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Sixteen participants who had undergone Professional Employment Program (PEP) for school year 2012-2013, second semester were included in the study. These included five (5) BSBA-Accounting majors, five (5) BSBA-Marketing majors, four (4) BSBA Management majors and two (2) BSBA-Banking and Finance majors.

Results

The information gathered from the respondents are presented, and analyzed as follows according to the research questions.

Question Number 1. Before entering PEP, what was your perception about it?

Most of the respondents positively answered that they were excited because they heard that the program was very different from the normal classroom set up. For them, they knew that it would be hard but it was challenging. They were not used to speaking English all the time, so they wanted to grab the opportunity and use it as a stepping stone for them to get employed in Ayala group of companies after graduation, they added.

Meanwhile, some of the respondents answered that their perception was that the program was difficult because of the English Only Policy (EOP). According to them, they were afraid at first because the mentors were from Ayala group of companies.

Question Number 2. Describe your experiences in PEP.

All respondents had positive experiences in PEP. Their responses were the following:

PEP was very nice and interesting because they did a lot of computer based training as well as oral interactions. In the last four weeks of their sessions they did job hunting to practice the skills that they experienced during the sessions.

PEP was absolutely worth it. They wouldn't think they would gain competence in sales delivery, customer service, and technical support in just a span of four months. The experience was challenging because every day, they encounter different role plays and they have to think critically and sometimes think out of the box to meet or even exceed their mentor's expectations. According to them, sometimes they failed but they didn't stop from getting back up again.

PEP had a lot of fun especially with their co-pepters. The accounting simulations with accounting experts also helped them a lot because they gain unparallel knowledge and experiences.

The most important things that they will never forget were the "work habits" that really helped them a lot to face the real world. Practicing these habits every day improved them a lot.

At PEP they felt a different pressure, different from any professors and different from any subjects that they ever had. The feeling was so unique. They were required to speak English as soon as they enter in the PEP room. One of the respondent said "I thought my English was good but I later found out that it wasn't". There were times that they thought they should surrender because of failures but they later realized that with those failures they were able to build their own armor that made them even stronger.

PEP was great specially the first month because their mentors helped them to communicate in English well and correct their English grammar in a nice and not in an offensive manner. They also thought them how to handle job interviews so that they are prepared and ready for it right after graduation and were able to face another chapter of their lives.

PEP provided them real experiences in terms of how to prepare them for their future jobs/careers.

They experienced a real business scenario as marketers. They taught them on how to sell things, how to give quality service and how to communicate well. They also trained them how to do their work properly and make them feel as if they were working in real business field.

PEP is unforgettable. The program does not only train the students to be the best students, but the program trained them to be successful in their chosen field/career someday. This is done thru relevant trainings. The trainings were awesome as they trained as a client not as students.

They experienced many failures during PEP sessions but the good thing about it is that these failures helped them realized the importance of being ready for a job. Things that can't be learn inside the classroom.

It was life challenging with them. They are confident that they have the edge when they go out to the real world.

Lastly they experienced a real work environment.

Question Number 3. After attending PEP, what were the benefits that you got from it?

All respondents claimed that they learned a lot in Sales, Customer Service, Business Communication, Technical Support and Systems Thinking. The program built their self-confidence, enhanced their critical thinking skills, trained them to become responsible, improved their work habits, enhanced their oral and written communication skills, improved their customer relationship, and improved interpersonal skills. They learned to become independent, learned about simple technology trouble shooting and got job offers/opportunities

Question Number 4. What Is Your Assessment About PEP?

The respondents have a unanimous assessment that the program was worth it. Some of the description they gave were: effective, nice, great, perfect, interesting, challenging, very good, the best program that they ever had, extra ordinary and phenomenal. It was a big help for them because it brought out the best in them.

Question Number, 5. What Are Your Suggestions/Recommendations?

The respondents gave the following recommendations:

1. Other students/schoolmates should enroll in the program and grab the opportunity to become one of them.
2. The program should be offered to a bigger number of students so that more students will benefit from it.
3. PEP should be expanded.
4. Training for entrepreneurship should be included in the program, and
5. Make PEP as part of the curriculum so that all students can have the opportunity to take the program because it really helps a lot.

Discussion

Over the past few years, as the system focuses more on holistic professional development, the relationships between professional improvement and staff development have become much stronger (Rennekamp, 1987), as cited by Rennekamp, A. and Nall, M. (2010) Generally, professional development is described as a tool to help an individual grow and develop on his/her job through the combined impact of both organizational and individual efforts. Staff development are the efforts initiated by the Extension program while professional improvement are the opportunities sponsored by other organizations in which participation by extension professionals is self-initiated.

José Rizal University was granted by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) the official designation of Center of Development (COD) for its Business Administration program.

The continuous drive for excellence has resulted in not only recognition but improvement at the academic front as well. Innovation in instruction and research, linkages and engagement with industry leaders has made JRU among the premier educational institutions in the country.

Furthermore, the University recognizes the growing demand for highly specialized skill-sets among graduates. To meet this demand, the University forged partnerships with corporations like LiveIt and other various sectors of industry. By combining expertise and developing curricula responsive to a constantly changing global market, JRU students will gain pertinent experience and will be equipped with the technical knowledge that will give them the decisive advantage when they graduate.

Lastly, the College of Business and Accountancy is continuously redefining its course offerings to meet the demands of an evolving industry as well as to ensure that its programs remain dynamic, progressive, and relevant. This program is designed to train students to take on important functions in business through systematic exposure to specialized knowledge in the major functional areas of business consisting of production, finance, personnel, and marketing. Students will acquire supportive computational and communication skills and become familiar with the business framework which includes roles of government, and the significance of business ethics.

To maintain its status, the administration keeps on tightening its linkages by attracting more companies to tie-up with the university, and one of which is the PEP Program.

The program started last second semester of SY 2012-2013 with an initial total number of 81 participants (all graduating students). The researcher who was also the PEP coordinator during that time requested a report copy to the mentors to be used as basis for comparing the effectiveness of the program in terms of employability compared to the Non PEP graduates, wherein the request was positively granted by the mentors.

Figure 2 presents the employability rate of PEP first batch in which 95.06% were employed within three months, while only 63.4 % of None-PEP graduates were employed within three months. Likewise, the table shows that the starting salary of PEP graduates was higher than Non PEP graduates. The table also presents where the PEP graduates were first employed.

Figure 2. Key Performance Indicator of PEP Graduates (First Batch)

Job Placement Status (90 days post graduation)		
KPI	PEP	NON-PEP
% Hired	95.06%	63.40%
Level = < 2	16.9%	30.8%
Level = 4	15.6%	0.0%
Wage/month	PHP 15,881.89	PHP 12, 246.06
%<=10k	4.0%	18.2%
%>=20k	9.3%	0.0%

Partner Employers	Count students hired
AA	5
ALI	3
Accenture	2
BPI	10
GLOBE	2
STREAM	16

Figure Adopted from PEP Files

LEGEND: KPI = Key Performance Indicator (Annual Average Salary, Job Level)
 AA = Ayala Automotive (Honda & Isuzu)
 ALI = Ayala Land Incorporation
 BPI = Bank of the Philippine Island

Conclusion

The result showed that all respondents benefited from the program. They perceived that PEP is extraordinary and phenomenal because it is quite effective, helpful, it enhanced their critical thinking skills, trained them to become responsible, improved their work habits, enhances their oral and written communication skills, improve their customer relationship as well as simple technology trouble shooting, and most of all it open job opportunities for them.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. PEP program should be flourished and continued because this is a big help to the graduating students.
2. PEP must be offered to a bigger number of students and to other courses as well because it is really quite good and effective.
3. PEP must be open to all senior students who are willing to take it because they really need to be trained for their future career.
4. Conduct a tracer study of PEP graduates to find out if they are employed in line with their field of specialization.

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APPENDIX B

RESP.	QUESTIONS # 1: A. Before entering PEP, what is your perception about it?	TRANSCRIBED
1.	Before entering PEP, the first thing that came to my mind is that, it is hard because you should speak English every time and you should wear corporate/proper attire like if you are working. But it all changed when I enter PEP, because I was very inspired because of the instructors/mentors that we had. They are really good and they teach us very well. They tried their best for us to learn the right things that we really don't know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP was hard because of the Speak English Policy. • Inspired because of the mentors.
2.	Before entering PEP, I have doubts about it because most of the person I had talked to before told me that PEP is difficult. Their activities are different from what we're studying from our subjects and more stuff or confusing from those students that whose really don't know what PEP is all about. But of course since I really wanted to know more about this program, I felt the excitement since the first time I entered PEP classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubt • excited
3.	I thought of it as a very tough or hard program, that it has no rooms for mistakes. Others are afraid of taking it because they might fail badly. And so am I, I felt that I am not confident enough to enter PEP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very tough or hard • No room for mistakes • Afraid • Not confident
4.	PEP for me is communication skills training. A program that enhance the capability to communicate well in English and to help your employability after college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills training • The program was a big help for them to employ after graduation
5.	I first encountered PEP when I attended an open event held in JRU open ground last year. My perception was: first the program is not open for all. And second that the training is offered only to chosen students. There were limited slots offered and I was wrong because the program is open for all as long as the students fulfill the requirements.	
6.	Teach and give tips/ familiarize to work environment. PEP will prepare me in a real world. Enhance my skills and boost my confidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance their skills • Boost my confident
7.	I was confused before I entered PEP, because I don't know what the program is all about. I just heard from my classmates that PEP can help to get us a job and can help us to credit our other subjects. At first all I want is to credit my subjects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confused • PEP can help them employ after graduation
RESP.	B. Describe your experienced in PEP.	TRANSCRIBED
1.	During PEP, well it is very nice and interesting because we did a lot of computer based training as well as oral interaction with our mentors/instructors. In the last four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nice • Interesting because of computer based training

	<p>weeks, we did job hunting to exercise our skills that we experience during the session. In PEP they allow us to ask question to clarify something that we didn't understand.</p>	<p>and mentors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students will now apply what they learn during the sessions. • They are now ready to do job hunting
2.	<p>My experienced during PEP was great especially the first month of PEP because our instructors helped us to communicate in English well and correct our English grammar in a nice and not in an offensive way that really helps us a lot. They also taught us how to handle job interviews so that we are prepared right after we graduate from college and face the real world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP was great thru the help of the mentors. • Mentors taught them in a nice way and not in offensive manner. • They learned how to handle job interviews
3.	<p>I gained lots of experiences from PEP, academic experiences but I can feel that the things we're doing here are something that we can apply after our graduation. They basically provided us real experiences in terms of how to prepare us for our future jobs. I failed many times but its fine, others failed too. Somehow we learned from that and even did better.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained a lot of experiences like; academic experiences, preparing for future jobs, failed many times but these failures made them even better.
4.	<p>We experienced a real business scenario as marketer. They teaches us on how to sell, give a good service and communicate well, They also disciplined us as a worker and make us feel as a working in business field.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They experienced real business scenarios. • Learned how to sell, give good service, communicate well.
5.	<p>The experienced I had in the program is unforgettable. The programs not trained students to be best students, but the program trained students to be successful in their chosen field. This is done thru relevant trainings. The trainings are awesome as they trained us a client not as a student.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program trained the students to be successful in their chosen field. • They underwent relevant trainings
6.	<p>I experienced a real world environment. I experienced being an agent and do role play. I learn things that can't be learn inside the classroom. And the experiences that the facilitators share give me inspiration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They experienced a real work environment. • Learned things that can't be learn in ordinary classroom set up. • Inspired by the mentors
7.	<p>For me it was a great experience to be part of this program. It really helps me to enhance my skills and confidence. Start from business communication up to application and interview. It felt so good especially the environment that we had at PEP, and when we had a mistake you will not feel that you don't want to do it anymore instead you will motivate yourself to anchor your goal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP was great experienced starting from the business communication, to the application and until job interviews. • The program helps him to enhance his skills and confidence.

RESP.	C. After attending PEP, what are the benefits that you got from it?	TRANSCRIBED
1	After attending PEP I learned how to troubleshoot problems in customer service, sales delivery as well as technical support even though before I really don't have any idea about those. I learned how to speak well in English and how to pronounce some words correctly as well as the accent. I learned how to answer interview questions appropriately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learned how to troubleshoot, customer service, sales delivery, technical support, speak English well, and answer interview questions properly.
2	The benefits that we got here in PEP are confidence, skills and also those from the simulations that we had undergone during our sales, customer service and technical support that only PEP offers. In PEP we became knowledgeable and competent in some ways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They improved a lot in many aspects like; confidence, skills, sales simulation, customer service, and technical support.
3	I already improved my communication skills, and not only that, I realized that entering PEP was a very good decision for me. I now have the confidence in talking especially in applications and interviews. Other skills were also enhanced by this program. I am confident enough that soon I can land to a good job because I am experienced enough from the way they trained us prior to our graduation. I feel that I am elevated enough from other graduating students because I have the knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved in communication skills. • Gained confidence in application and interviews. • Confident to get a good job. • Had an edge compared to the other graduates.
4.	Compare to other students, we have an edge in communication and marketing skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident that they have edge compare to other students in terms of communication and marketing skills
5.	PEP trainings improved my communication and interpersonal skills for employability not only that the training is not only educational, it is also rewarding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP improved his communication and interpersonal skills. • PEP is rewarding
6.	I gained experience and I am now prepared for the real world. I became more confident in facing the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained experiences that prepared him for the real world.
7.	First, I gained the confidence that I am enjoying right now. Second, I got skills in sales delivery, customer service and technical support. Next, it led me to better and bigger opportunities, and from that, I already got a job offer and other companies also invited me for an interview.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained confidence • Got skills in sales delivery, customer service and technical support. • Got job offers and interviews
RESP.	2. What is your assessment about PEP?	TRANSCRIBED
1.	For me, PEP is a very nice and effective program that really helps graduating students pass and get a good job someday. Not only that, PEP helps students to expand their knowledge about something that they are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP was nice and effective. • It helped the students to expand their knowledge

	not good at, like speaking in English, interaction with customers and giving resolution in technical problems.	in terms of interaction with customers, giving resolutions in technical problems, good in English communication, and even to in getting jobs.
2.	PEP is really a big help for me because even if I still am not a college graduate they helped us find a job for practice, and we got job offers from different companies. That only means that PEP helps us to improve ourselves inside and outside the school. Good job PEP!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Got job offers from different companies.
3.	All in all, PEP is a very good program for graduating students. PEP is not just a subject to complete; it requires critical thinking and preparedness. It's like a real working environment wherein students got to practice their work habits and behaviors. After graduation, we can definitely apply what we learned from PEP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP requires critical thinking. • Practice work habits in a real working condition
4.	PEP is broader right now because they adjust to consider other courses to take PEP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP was broader
5.	PEP is extraordinary and phenomenal. The program is challenging yet rewarding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP was extra ordinary, phenomenal and challenging
6.	PEP will prepare and build you up with the help of the great, kind and understanding facilitators that help us to be more productive and better.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors were great, kind, and understanding
7.	For me PEP is really effective. This program can help open job opportunities for the students. PEP also has great facilitators who always provide great learning skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective • Can open opportunities for the students • Facilitators were great

RESP.	3. What are your suggestions/recommendations?	TRANSCRIBED
1.	Well, I suggest that students should enroll in PEP because it will help them a lot in life and with their skills and abilities. They will learn a lot that is beyond their knowledge that will help them in their future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should enroll in PEP
2.	I suggest that you continue to educate students in the future because this program is really helpful for those students who are aiming for a brighter future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program is helpful • Continue to educate students
3.	Maybe PEP can expand the course as a 4 year program so that all JRU students will have the opportunity to be educated the way we did.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand
4.	Consider PEP as a part of the curriculum in all courses because it helps the students be employed in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it part of the curriculum
5.	I suggest the PEP to have trainings that would develop entrepreneurship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP should give trainings to develop entrepreneurship
6.	Accept more slots. Don't stop helping students face the world. Inspire more students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept and inspire more students
7.	This program is great. Just continue to expand the course so that the students can access it and if possible, make it a four-year course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great • Continue to expand the course • Make it four-years.