

Ascertaining the Curriculum Relevance of the Special Program Journalism in Select Public Secondary Schools in Caraga Region

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ABSTRACT

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The study delves into the impact and effectiveness of the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) by examining the experiences and perspectives of graduates from select public secondary schools in Caraga Region – XIII. The primary aims include profiling the pioneering SPJ graduates, assessing the development of their journalistic skills, and evaluating the benefits derived from completing the program. Utilizing a tracer study approach, data was collected through surveys and thematic analysis to capture the graduates' feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the SPJ curriculum, particularly focusing on the availability of journalism facilities and technological resources. Results revealed that while graduates acknowledged the program's strengths in enhancing writing, speaking, and lay-outing skills, they



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also highlighted deficiencies in access to essential tools like speech laboratories and digital cameras. The study concludes that improving journalism facilities is crucial for enhancing the program's effectiveness and ensuring graduates are well-equipped for journalism careers. Additionally, establishing a monitoring and evaluation tool is recommended to track the long-term impact of the SPJ program on graduates' professional trajectories.

INTRODUCTION

The existence of SPJ is anchored on the principles related to the basic human rights to information and freedom of expression, as stipulated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution under Article 3, Section 4 of the Bill of Rights. Its implementation is based on the guidelines under DepEd Memorandum No. 103, Series of 2009, published in the official gazette on March 18, 2009. True enough, the program provided the young and aspiring journalists of the country with a better avenue to optimize their writing skills and extraordinary gifts in the art of writing and broadcasting. Gavilan (2018) explained that mainstream media and campus journalism play a massive role in providing relevant information, helping shape public opinion, and preserving democracy, freedom of speech, and choice.

SPJ is offered from Grades 7 to 10 and was pilot-tested in the select 17 public secondary schools in the country. This was under the leadership of former DepEd Secretary Jesli A. Lapus. In preparation for the field test of the program, the Regional Directors were requested to submit to the Bureau of Secondary Education (BSE) their recommended pilot schools (one per region) and the names of the teachers who will handle the class with the following subjects: 1) Journalism 1 (English/Filipino), and 2) Advanced English 1. Guidelines were specified under DepEd Memorandum No. 103, Series of 2009, published on March 18, 2009. Since then, the program has evolved in the 17 regions, and in 2018, SPJ was also implemented at the elementary level, starting in grade four. The program implementation at both the elementary and secondary levels is done progressively. This means that only one grade level per school year will be offered.

Undoubtedly, the program has contributed positively to the lives of both the teachers and the learners, as Avelino (2022) of Casimiro A. Ynares Sr. Memorial National High School (CAYSMNHS) in DepEd Rizal collated that the results of the computed data revealed that both the faculty members and students of SPJ as respondents evaluated the Special Program in Journalism as *Outstanding* based on its Program Objectives, Curriculum, Instructional Materials, Physical

Facilities and Equipment, Teaching Strategies, Administrators' Support, Teachers' Competence, and Students' Engagement. Notably, there is no significant discrepancy between the actual performance and the intended standard of the program.

To trace its relevance, the DepEd central office has conducted an orientation on the data gathering for the national tracer study of the SPJ graduates of S. Y. 2017-2018, as articulated in DepEd Memorandum CT-2023-007. In the said DEPED Memo. The following regions were included: CAR, NCR, Regions I, III, IV-B, MIMAROPA, VI, VII, VIII, XI, and XII. Caraga Region XIII was not on the list. Therefore, this region has not yet gathered the relevant data in probing the sustainability of the progress monitoring on the management and delivery of the SPJ curriculum and in ascertaining its relevance in changing the lives of the young campus journalists through the lens of tracing its genuine impact, whether it influenced the career choice of the students, and whether these changes are sustained in the medium- to long-term as to employability and career status.

Strengthened through R.A. 7079, or the Campus Journalism Act of 1991, the DepEd-Caraga region continues to implement the SPJ curriculum. The division of Bayugan City started SPJ in the school year 2009-2010. Other divisions in the region then offered SPJ in the following years.

This research is the first comprehensive assessment of the SPJ program in the Caraga region, a benchmark study. Its results and key findings are essential inputs to planning and evaluation. Further, this work provides a stepping stone to strengthening the monitoring strategies for the continual development of the SPJ.

FRAMEWORK

The paper anchored on the Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM) by Malcolm Provus in 1971. DEM was also used by Avelino (2022) to evaluate the SPJ implementation in one of the schools in the Philippines. Evaluation has been vital to most aspects of a person's life. In education, it can be an instrument to gather relevant information on teachers' and students' performance. Additionally, it aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a specific academic program. The definitions of the term evaluation may vary from one scholar to another. Some view evaluation as primarily a scientific inquiry, whereas others argue that it essentially collects and provides information to enable decision-makers to function effectively (Worthen et al., 1997).

Ralph Tyler (1991) conceptualized evaluation as a process significant to curriculum development. The evaluation was the basis for identifying strengths

and weaknesses in the curriculum, followed by replanning, implementation, and evaluation (Gredler, 1996). Similarly, Worthen et al. (1997) stated that evaluation formally determines the quality, effectiveness, or value of a program, product, project, process, objective, or curriculum (Aldaihani et al., 2019).

The evaluation model guides this research on how to evaluate the SPJ in terms of its targets relative to its performance in terms of its products, output, and outcome. Beyond the definition of performance, this study considers the outcomes potentially induced by the skills, competencies, and experiences of the graduates from the SPJ program. Blending the research gap, existing policies, and theoretical framework, this research uses the input-process-output-outcome (IPOO) scheme to show the research flow and the variables to be included in the study. The outcome component is included because the evaluation encompasses the actual impact of the SPJ program on the current career of the first batch of graduates.

In particular, the input component contains the variables that will be measured in this study. These include the respondents' profile in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, degree completed, employment status, work tenure, work position, and monthly income. The level of school compliance with the SPJ program implementation in terms of facilities, support, standards, leadership, and governance. In addition, the respondents' experiences as SPJ program graduates in relation to their current careers are also considered. The second part of this study discusses the several processes that must be implemented to achieve its objectives. This component describes the actual procedures for gathering the quantitative and qualitative data that will be used to answer the objectives. The third component of the framework is the expected output of the research. Monitoring and evaluation tools and an action plan are the target outputs of the study. Moreover, the desired outcome points to the production of graduates with high journalistic skills and competence that are useful in their professional careers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study generally aimed to evaluate the implementation of the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) in the Caraga region. Specifically, this study will seek to (1) identify the graduates of the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) in terms of Age, Sex, Degree completed, Employment status, Work tenure, Work position, and Monthly income, (2) analyze the distribution of SPJ graduates in various media sectors, including Print media, Online media, and Broadcast media (radio or TV), (3) assess the level of compliance of schools offering the SPJ

program concerning Facilities, Support, Standards, Leadership and governance, (4) explore the experiences of SPJ graduates in their current careers, focusing on Strengths of the program, Weaknesses of the program, and Contributions of the program to their current careers, (5) develop an action plan and a monitoring and evaluation tool based on the findings of the study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive, evaluative research design using quantitative and qualitative approaches. In particular, the quantitative part was the investigation of the respondents' profile (age, gender, degree completed, employment status, work tenure, work position, and monthly income) and the description of the level of compliance with the SPJ program in terms of facilities, support, standards, and leadership and governance.

On the other hand, the qualitative part included the experiences of the respondents who were drawn from the SPJ program. These were categorized according to the strengths and contribution of the program to their current career and the areas that probably needed improvements along with the ongoing SPJ program implementation.

The blending of quantitative and qualitative evidence implied using a descriptive-evaluative research design using quantitative and qualitative approaches to research.

Respondents

The respondents of the study were the graduates or completers of the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) from the Division of Bayugan City, Bislig City, and Agusan del Sur. Furthermore, because of data privacy and personal reasons, only 64 out of 121 SPJ program graduates or completers participated in the survey from DepEd Bayugan City Division, Bislig City Division, and Agusan del Sur Division. For graduates within the Caraga region, the study was conducted in their workplace or an individual location convenient for them, mostly at their affiliated agencies. For those who were not working within each city and who were difficult to access, data was gathered through Facebook, emails, phone calls, virtual meetings, and onsite visits to the school and its immediate community with the help of the Education Program Supervisor (EPS) per division, school heads or principals, and former teachers in SPJ.

Instrumentation

This study used a researcher-made graduate tracer study questionnaire containing four parts that were reviewed, quality-assured, validated, and approved by the DepEd Caraga regional office's Quality Assurance Division (QAD). The first section covered the respondents' age, gender, degree completed, employment status, work tenure, work position, and monthly income. The second part, composed of open-ended questions, was used to capture the experiences of the SPJ graduates about the program.

The second part contained the involvement of the SPJ participants in journalism outlets such as print media, online media, broadcast media on radio or TV, and other forms of journalism. The third part of the questionnaire or instrument assessed the school's compliance with the SPJ program in terms of facilities, support, standards, leadership, and governance. A five-point Likert scale was used. It was subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha criterion and a validity test using experts' opinions. The last part included open-ended questions to solicit the participants' experiences with the SPJ curriculum, emphasizing its strengths and weaknesses.

Research Ethics Protocol

A request letter with the endorsement from the President of the Dean of the Graduate Study of the Saint Joseph Institute of Technology was handed to the regional office of DepEd Caraga region – 13. After the perusal of the documents, the Office of the Regional Director (RD) of DepEd Caraga Region approved the conduct of the tracer study at the three schools' Division Offices (SDOs) in Bislig City, Bayugan City, and Agusan del Sur. These SPJ-implementing SDOs were chosen since they were the first three SDOs to implement SPJ in the Caraga region. After the approval was granted, the researcher brought the approved letter to the respective school's division offices through their Schools Division Superintendents (SDSs) and sought their approval, which was granted through the Education Program Supervisor (EPS) in Journalism per SDO. Then, it was communicated to each school principal of the identified public secondary school offering SPJ curriculum.

After the approval was granted, an onsite visit and information dissemination of the study was done with the three SDOs. Through the assistance of the EPSs in Journalism and with the leadership of the school principal, school SPJ coordinator, registrar, planning officer, and alumni president, the researcher sought the master list of graduates or completers from each school since the program started. The learner's registry number, or LRN, was also utilized to trace additional yet relevant

information about the graduates. Then, the researcher administered the graduate survey questionnaire and focused group discussion. To reach other graduates, enrolled students were asked if they knew previous graduates of SPJ. Those who answered affirmatively were given survey questionnaires and instructed on how to hand the instrument to prospective respondents and retrieve them. Considering the protocols under Republic Act 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Moreover, this study maximized the use of technology. A Facebook page dubbed Caraga SPJ Fellowship, an online community for SPJ graduates or completers, teachers, education leaders, and SPJ enthusiasts, was created, and a public message was posted to give access to the respondents.

The ethical requirements for conducting the research were considered. As a result, a letter of request was secured first from the office of the Regional Director of DepEd Caraga Region. The Schools Division Superintendents approved immediately upon receipt of the approved letter request from the Office of the Regional Director. Then, the respondents were identified as being involved in the study with the help of the EPS per division, the school principal, and the teachers in SPJ.

The following statistical tools were used in the treatment of the data:

Frequency and percentage. These statistical measures were used to describe the respondents' profiles regarding degree completion, employment status, work tenure, work position, and monthly income. These tools were also used to describe the involvement of the journalists in the journalism exits. Specifically, these tools were used to answer problems 1 and 2. Mean. This statistical tool was used to determine the level of compliance with the SPJ program in terms of facilities, support, standards, leadership, and governance. In particular, this was used to answer problem 3. Thematic Analysis. This technique generated emerging themes describing the respondents' experiences relative to the SPJ program. Thematic analysis was used to answer problem 4.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relevant findings were presented according to the sequence of the statement of the problems.

Problem 1. What are the profile characteristics of the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) graduates in terms of Age, Gender, Degree Completed, Employment status, Work tenure, and Work position?

In terms of age, the majority, or 54% (34) of the respondents, were 18-23 years old. A percentage share of 39% (25) also comprised the SPJ graduates

within 24-28 years old. The other 7% (5) SPJ graduates were still below 18. The distribution across ages depicts that some SPJ graduates still pursue college degrees while others have already landed different jobs. This finding showed similarities to the study of Avelino (2022), which highlighted that graduates of the K to 12 curriculum have mostly secured work positions at least 25 years of age. In terms of sex, the majority, or 69% (44) of the SPJ graduates, were female, while only 31% (20) were male. The report published by Tutor (2019) also noted that SPJ enrolment was dominated mostly by women. Accordingly, Marchi (2012) pointed out that most women were more inclined to journalism because of their innate writing and public speaking passion, unlike males, where data commonly spoke of their inclinations in sciences and mathematics.

When it comes to the highest educational attainment, (When it comes to the highest educational attainment, A Proposed Supply Chain Management Model for Teacher Education Institutions: A Structural Equation Modeling two largest percentage shares of 36% (23) and 34% (22) correspond to the respondents were college graduates and college students at the time of the survey, respectively. While cases of high school (11%) and college (9%) levels were evident, some of the SPJ graduates have pursued master's (8%) and doctorate degrees (2%). The statistical distribution on educational attainment signifies that SPJ graduates have pursued careers from different colleges and universities in the country.

Moreover, data gathered revealed that 44% (28) of the respondents were already employed, while the largest percentage chunk of 50% (32) corresponded to the SPJ graduates still studying at college. It is highly notable that this percentage distribution showed coherence to the ages and educational attainment of the respondents. The results of the data gathered in this study definitely provided information that some of the SPJ graduates have already landed careers.

Furthermore, regarding the distribution of college courses that the SPJ graduates pursued, 18 respondents took education courses, 17 pursued medical sciences, 8 pursued engineering, and only 6 enrolled in communication arts. The other 5 and 3 SPJ graduates had, respectively, taken business management and psychology programs.

The above statement indicated continuity in applying the skills acquired from the SPJ curriculum, especially when it comes to college requirements. Romero (2016) reported that students with good communication skills excel in college subjects, especially arts and literature. Another paper by Smith and Baden (2016) asserted that good writing skills predicted better performance in college and increased the chance of being involved in campus journalism and publications. Such testimonies from the respondents' manifested that though some of the SPJ graduates did not exactly pursue journalism after exit from the

SPJ curriculum, their journalism skills and talents had been used in making them perform better in college.

The employability of the respondents highly depended on the opportunities and vacancies after graduation. The data reflect more options for working in private institutions. The given data potentially highlighted that in the Philippines, the availability of work positions is more evident in private companies than in government, particularly regarding the security of tenure. In the responses collected from the survey, most respondents acknowledged that their writing and speaking skills had contributed to their current nature of work. Tutor (2021) asserted that workplace communication and writing skills are essential. In highly technical positions, writing and oral communications were deemed essential. Regarding the potential contribution of the SPJ curriculum, most respondents could utilize their journalism skills in their present jobs, especially those handling technical posts.

Regarding work tenure, the data gathered revealed that 15 employed respondents held a contractual job status while 11 were permanent. One of them was also noted to have been involved in business. Most SPJ graduates now employed in different companies are in their prime working ages and below 30 years old. This potentially explains the dominance of contractual employees over permanent ones. The number of respondents who held permanent positions did not get away further from the number of permanently employed. Such a scenario was more likely explained by the fast promotion opportunities evident in private institutions than the availability of plantilla items in the government, either administrative or technical positions (Orejana & Resurreccion, 2010).

Problem 2. What is the distribution of the SPJ graduates in terms of involvement in Print media, online media, and Broadcast media on radio or TV?

The data gathered posited that 50% (32) of the surveyed SPJ graduates did not pursue any journalism platforms after completing the program. However, this does not mean they could not apply their journalism experiences in their journey to college and even the workplace (Tutor, 2021). Conversely, 39% (25) of the respondents mentioned that they still engage in online media platforms where they earn significant figures while working as writers. McHaney (2023) mentioned that writing jobs that did not require higher educational qualifications were rising opportunities in the digital world. Anyone with the skill to write and communicate in English can enjoy working through online media as either a writer or a virtual assistant.

Problem 3. To what extent is the level of compliance of the schools that offer SPJ programs to the following: Facilities, Support, Standards, and Leadership and Governance?

The respondents responded that the majority of the items used to measure the extent of compliance with journalism facilities were coupled with mean scores with equivalent descriptive levels of at least high. The largest mean rating of 4.67 on the item “*Classroom materials for different simulation activities are provided*” signified that the respondents strongly agreed that they could experience different simulation activities essential to their learning. Implementing simulation activities in the classroom was highly mandated in the SPJ curriculum to provide the learners with an effective environment to experience the technicalities and beauty of journalism.

The very high level of agreement of the respondents regarding the existence of simulation activities indicates the very high compliance of the SPJ offering schools with the curriculum. This is supported by several reports from Agusan del Sur, Bayugan, and Bislig City Division regarding the efforts made by the program Key Implementers per schools’ division involved just to maintain the SPJ standards. As of the current SPJ implementation, its budgetary allocation is still under the school’s Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE). No specific Special Program Fund (SPF) is downloaded in the schools specifically for SPJ alone. This issue was raised during the regional virtual meeting participated by the 12 division SPJ - EPSs in Caraga region with the presence of the regional EPS in-charge in SPJ, Regional Director, and the SPJ focal person from DepEd central office last August 24, 2023, via MS Teams online platform.

Tutor (2021) noted that this specific finding observed that the SPJ curriculum offered opportunities for the learners to be exposed to meaningful simulation activities in the classroom. In support, DepEd Order No. 46 also articulated that through the SPJ curriculum, students’ journalistic skills and talents will be honed and optimized through effective classroom-based simulation activities and approaches.

On the other note, the two least mean scores of 3.26 and 3.25 fall on the items “*Speech laboratory is highly functional*” and “*Advance technologies for better learning are utilized*”, respectively. Particularly in Agusan del Sur, Trento NHS and Bislig City Division, Mangagoy NHS, issues on the availability of technologically advanced facilities were evident due to budget constraints, and these divisions also were not yet recognized in the DepEd Central Office as SPJ implementers. As to partnerships with the local government units from these schools, the principals still needed to lobby the city and provincial councils to beef up their school budget. According to the school principals of these schools, they had to

prioritize the payments for utilities and other non-negotiable monthly expenses. In Mangagoy NHS, the Schools Division Office of Bislig, helped the school on the concern for the availability of the latest facilities. The division focal person in SPJ lobbied in the city council with an approved Php50, 000.00 purchase of gadgets for Radio Broadcasting. As planned, upon the approval of the Schools Division Superintendent, the SPJ focal Education Program Supervisor, with the help of the Division Social Mobilization coordinator, will still lobby for a Supplemental Budget in the Special Education Fund (SEF) to avail additional support for the SPJ and Campus Journalism activities as well (Curriculum Implementation Division, Bislig, 2024).

As for Trento NHS in Agusan del Sur Division, the SPJ focal assured that for this year, their provincial government pledged to beef up the budget under the Special Education Fund, and part of this will be given to the SPJ implementation in Trento NHS to purchase gadgets and equipment for Radio and Television Broadcasting. Additionally, the school principal still needs to forge partnerships with possible stakeholders.

Despite all these challenges, the Schools Division of Agusan del Sur and Bislig City have strived to be in the top five in every RSPC for the last four years. Trento NHS of Agusan del Sur and Mangagoy NHS of Bislig City Division are still in the limelight for every RSPC and NSPC, with winners in the School Paper contest and Individual and Group categories in the competition. These were testaments to the fact that their SPJ implementation helped the learners achieve their ultimate goal of mastering the competencies of the SPJ.

On the other note, the positive support from LGU in Bayugan city has been very instrumental in the fast improvement of the journalism curriculum as evidenced by their consistent triumphs in Regional Schools Press Conferences (RSPC) for the past four years they have consistently emerged as the overall Champion/Top 1 Performing Division since the year 2021 and in the recently concluded RSPC held in Butuan City on May 11 – 15, 2024. Furthermore, the school principal of Bayugan National Comprehensive High School had established a meaningful partnership with Bayugan LGU.

These were notable areas that needed improvements, considering the demands of global trends in communication and journalism (Tutor, 2021). The lowest mean scores were also indicative of the experiences of the SPJ graduates, as noted in their qualitative responses from the survey. Most of them pointed out that schools must give immediate attention to equipment, facilities, and technological resources for the continuity of better learning experiences and outcomes in journalism. Similarly, Compado et al. (2023) reported that facilities and other resources were imprinted challenges in the many public schools in the

Philippines. The implementation of the SPJ curriculum was able to escape from the impediments brought by the problems with equipment and technological resources (Avelino, 2022).

Moreover, the overall mean of 3.98 is still statistically implied for the high level of compliance of the schools that offered SPJ programs to provide essential facilities and other learning resources. Findings unfold the need to strengthen the implementation of the SPJ curriculum by ensuring access to sophisticated and latest technological resources that are highly instrumental to the production of competent and world-class journalists, writers, and workforces of the country.

Notably, most of the items under support were rated with mean scores that had equivalent descriptions of at least high. In particular, the largest mean rating of 4.77 indicated a very high level of agreement with the item *“Teachers are also giving interest to the implementation of the SPJ.”* With a very minimal mean difference of nearly 0.02, SPJ graduates also expressed a very high level of agreement with the items *“The school management shows positive support to SPJ students”* and *“School activities also emphasized the importance of journalism.”* These statistical findings unveiled the positive experiences of the respondents through their qualitative responses and notes from the survey. Many respondents confirmed the support they received from the school administrators and their teachers during the years of learning journalism. The high level of support for SPJ is potentially linked to the collective interest of the teachers, school administrators, and even stakeholders’ support.

The increase in the enrolment in the SPJ program in the schools was another manifestation of the growing inclination of the students towards journalism, which was also attributed to the efforts of the implementers from campaigns and promotional activities (Special Report on SPJ, Bayugan City, 2023). Testimonies of the SPJ graduates or completers were also very influential to the lower years of pursuing journalism because of the opportunities and fun learning experiences with highly competent teachers and mentors. In the paper of Spikes (2023), it was emphasized that the teachers in journalism education were pivotal in developing skilled, ethical, and adaptable journalists who can navigate the complexities of the modern media landscape and uphold the values of a free and informed society.

On another important note, the mean score of 3.35 posited an average level of parental involvement and the demands in implementing the SPJ curriculum. This was evident by the equivalent descriptive rating of average on the item *“Parental involvement and support are evident in SPJ.”* Definitely, the lowest mean rating under parental involvement was another spotted opportunity for improvement. This was along with the known results regarding the important role of parental involvement in student’s success (Jeynes, 2024). The important role of

parental involvement in student success is contended, and parental involvement is a significant factor in the success of journalism education and overall student success. In addition, parental involvement in journalism education and student success is multi-faceted, encompassing emotional support, resource provision, ethical guidance, and active participation in educational activities. Parents can significantly enhance their child's success in journalism and overall academic achievement by fostering an environment that values education, critical thinking, and civic responsibility (Özdemir et al., 2023).

In a nutshell, the findings revealed some important areas that needed to be reinforced when dealing with support from the stakeholders. Teacher and administrative support must be sustained while parental involvement is an identified opportunity to be maximized along with the efforts to better implement the SPJ curriculum.

As for the school's level compliance to the standards of the SPJ curriculum implementation and its practices, noticeably, all mean scores of the items that described compliance to standards were coupled with mean ratings that had equivalent descriptive meaning of at least high. In effect, the overall mean of 4.54 empirically supports the very high level of compliance by the schools that offer SPJ programs. Through the lens of the SPJ graduates, the largest mean rating of 4.73 depicted for the very high level of agreements of the respondents to the items "*Teachers are highly competent in teaching*" and "*Teachers are also well-trained in the different fields of journalism*". Such findings showed strong coherence to the discussions regarding the competence and dedication of the teachers towards their job. Relative to the qualitative responses from the survey, many of the SPJ graduates had emphasized the undeniably high competence of teachers in journalism classes during their time. DepEd Order No. 46, series of 2012 further noted that teacher qualifications and experiences are prime considerations in the hiring and selection process within the program. DepEd emphasizes that the SPJ curriculum shall be handled by highly equipped and qualified teaching personnel.

The very high level of agreement by the respondents was a strong indication of the collective efforts of the school personnel, both the teaching and non-teaching personnel, to sustain the program and produce graduates with high competence in journalism.

Moreover, the lowest mean rating of 4.03 consistently pointed to the school facilities, as reflected in the item "Equipment for journalism exercises is technologically advanced". This is once again noted in the findings regarding the challenges experienced by the SPJ graduates regarding the limited technological resources they have in learning from journalism exercises. Tutor (2021) further noted that public school facilities in the country have long been in the spotlight

for being a hindrance to a better quality of learning. Hence, it was implied from the results that SPJ curriculum implementation could be better improved when facilities and other technological resources were well provided. It was further implied that the school and DepEd administration might consider the strategies and initiatives to provide more advanced facilities along with the recent efforts to better implement the SPJ program among schools in the country.

Lastly, for the level of school compliance with the SPJ program in terms of leadership and governance, SPJ graduates also rated relatively large mean scores on leadership and governance. The top two largest mean ratings of 4.36 and 4.33 manifested the respondents' very high level of agreement to the items "Curriculum feedback is practiced" and "School improvement plan considers the success of SPJ implementation," respectively. These good practices in implementing the SPJ program were significantly instrumental to the positive program outcomes, as reflected in the testimonies and work skills of the graduates. It was a culture in the schools in Agusan del Sur, Bayugan, and Bislig City that gave importance to curriculum feedback through its School-Based Management planning team.

To strengthen the feedback mechanism, intensified monitoring and evaluation have always been an important part of the quality management control of DepEd to ensure better learning outcomes for all learners (D.O. 007, S. 2024). Definitely, the very high level of compliance to leadership and governance was attributed to the constant technical assistance provided by the Education Program Supervisors to school heads and teachers as well as the positive response of the school leaders to the vocation of being an effective administrator in the schools.

Avelino (2022) stated that school implementers of the SPJ program had been exerting efforts to continually improve learning outcomes in classroom and journalism competitions, both local and international. Accordingly, pertinent facilities and technological equipment had long been eyed by many schools but only constrained by budgetary requirements.

Though rated with the lowest mean score of 4.09, the respondents still agreed to the item "Curriculum monitoring and evaluation is strictly conducted". Though areas for improvement remained evident, schools had been keen in their monitoring and evaluation efforts. Tutor (2019) stated that DepEd is a very strict institution regarding monitoring classroom targets, learner performance, and other deliverables. As evidenced by ample forms and submissions, the quality assurance management ensures a proper feedback system and mechanism.

Consequently, the overall mean of 4.26 empirically implied the very high level of compliance of the schools that offer SPJ programs in terms of leadership and governance. Remarkable findings were quantifiable strengths of the

program implementation that were backed up by the relevant experiences of the SPJ graduates and actual practices on the ground. Such findings reflected the positive investments that demand sustainability while considering the identified opportunities for further improvements.

Problem 4. What are the experiences of the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) to the graduates in the current career of the graduates in the domains of Strengths of the program, Weaknesses of the program, and Contributions in relation to their current career?

A total of four (4) relevant themes that described the strengths of the implementation of the SPJ program were identified from the actual responses of the SPJ graduates to the open-ended questions from the survey. The provision of hands-on training in writing and speaking emerged as the first thematic program strength relative to the experiences of the respondents. It indicated that the presence of highly effective hands-on exercises establishes the strength of the said program. The provision of practical exercises in writing and speech were imprinted on the learning experiences of the SPJ graduates. Reilley (2024) argued that hands-on training in writing and speaking is fundamental in journalism as it equips journalists with essential skills, confidence, and ethical grounding necessary for effective and responsible reporting. It bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring journalists are well-prepared to meet the demands of the profession.

The availability of competent teachers who handled journalism classes was another strength of the SPJ program implementation. A total of 32 SPJ graduates stated, through their qualitative responses, that having a highly competent teacher was one of the best things that happened in their journalism years. Some of them had noted that because of their high-caliber teachers and coaches, they could consistently secure spots in Division, Regional, and National Level Schools Press Conferences. Avelino (2022) further asserted competent teachers were essential for better journalism performance as they provided the knowledge, skills, mentorship, and inspiration needed to train effective and ethical journalists. Their expertise and dedication ensured that students were well-prepared to meet the challenges of the profession and contribute meaningfully to the field of journalism. Besides the presence of competent teachers, 34 respondents also exposed that the strength of the SPJ program may include the existence of dedicated trainers and teachers in their jobs.

The dedication of teachers towards their profession is an expedient element of student's success. Sekar et al. (2024) argued that dedicated teachers played a pivotal role in shaping the future of journalism by fostering a deep understanding

of the field, promoting high standards of ethics and professionalism, and providing personalized support and guidance. Their commitment to their students' success ensured that aspiring journalists had the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to excel in their careers and contribute meaningfully to the industry.

The SPJ graduates viewed the curriculum itself as one of the strengths of the program. As described by 10 of the respondents, SPJ curriculum was far more advanced than those in STEM and other programs. It is an inherent program strength since it is intentionally designed with a special focus on journalism and its allied fields.

Despite the notable strengths, weaknesses were also spotted. The respondents exposed three (3) thematic areas that emerged from the qualitative responses of the SPJ graduates in the survey. The lack of physical facilities and technological resources such as functional speech laboratories, digital cameras, and computers was confirmed by 42 respondents from different schools and different batches. More particularly in schools without functional speech laboratories, learning had been missed. Even in photojournalism, highly essential competencies were not met in some schools due to the absence of advanced and high-powered digital cameras. Such undesirable realities were reflected in the testimonies of the respondents in the open-ended questions.

Tutor (2021) noted that the lack of school facilities can significantly impede the journalism performance of students by restricting access to essential tools and resources, limiting practical experience, hindering skill development, and reducing motivation and engagement. In addition, Basilan and Padilla (2023) also argued that without access to modern technology like computers, cameras, audio recorders, and editing software, students cannot practice essential journalism skills. This hinders their ability to learn multimedia storytelling, video production, and digital journalism. Furthermore, the lack of equipment for TV and Radio broadcasting was encountered by 34 SPJ graduates as another notable weakness in the implementation of the SPJ program in some schools. This was also linked to the lack of effective materials and facilities for effective teaching. The weaknesses of the SPJ curriculum were centered on the availability of more advanced technological resources that were at par with the global trends. On the positive side, these findings were treated as opportunities that were potential to the continual improvement of the said program.

As to the contribution of the SPJ program to the present career of the respondents, 44 SPJ graduates attested that their high competence in writing and speaking was very useful in college life and their present careers. In addition, 21 respondents revealed that their lay-outing skills honed through SPJ have been very useful in their workplace. The statements from the respondents further

signify the implied benefits of the SPJ curriculum, though the majority of the graduates did not exactly pursue a career or job in journalism.

In addition, those respondents who are still involved in either print, online, or broadcast have directly utilized their skills in journalism both for recreation and as a means of living. Previous testimonies from the SPJ graduates also highlighted that companies had hired some of them because of their competence in writing and speaking. Remarkably, the journalism experiences of the graduates through the SPJ program have contributed to their professional skills as students or workers in different fields. Common to almost every graduate, their high competence in writing, speaking, and lay-outing are essential assets gained from the program, making them productive in their careers.

Problem 5. Based on the results of the study, what action plan and monitoring and evaluation tool can be developed?

Relative to the major findings from problem statements 1, 2, 3, and 4, it was consistently noted that school facilities and other technological resources were the prime weaknesses in implementing the program. This paper viewed these as opportunities and significant inputs to the intervention program proposed in this study. Moreover, the absence of monitoring and evaluation reports on the status of SPJ program graduates provided another area that needed improvement. Hence, the output of this paper is also considered a monitoring and evaluation tool that will be used in tracing SPJ graduates, which will be further recommended for digitalization.

The data gathered showed the proposed intervention program that mainly addresses the identified weaknesses of the SPJ program, as discussed above. Improving school facilities is the prime area of concern based on the experiences of the respondents. Two strategies are considered in the proposed intervention. First, is the prioritization of journalism facilities in the budget and school improvement planning sessions? This initiative will prioritize the allocation of budget for journalism facilities. Secondly, the creation of strong partnerships with stakeholders, alumni, and potential philanthropists for mutual ties and sponsorships will be reinforced to potentially raise facilities considering the limitation of the school budget. Moreover, the second objective of the program is to develop a monitoring and evaluation tool for constantly tracing the SPJ graduates.

The limitations of this study include a focus solely on graduates' perspectives rather than incorporating input from educators, employers, or other stakeholders, potential biases in self-reported data, and a lack of longitudinal data to track the sustained impact of the Special Program in Journalism on graduates' careers.

CONCLUSIONS

The new knowledge contribution of this study lies in its detailed examination of the specific strengths and weaknesses of the special program in journalism, particularly in terms of the impact on graduates' career paths and the identified areas for program enhancement, culminating in a comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness and areas for improvement.

The employability of SPJ graduates was evident, while the majority still pursued college careers. It was also concluded that journalism skills learned from SPJ facilitated better performance in college and increased chances of employment.

After completion from SPJ, continuity of journalism involvement was also evident, particularly in online media. However, a significant proportion of the SPJ graduates decided to completely leave the journalism pathway.

There is a very high level of compliance at the school that offers SPJ on support, standards, and leadership and governance. On the other hand, there was only a high level of compliance with the provision of sophisticated journalism facilities due to resource limitations.

It is further concluded that the implementation of SPJ was dominated by more strengths and positive contributions to the careers of the graduates than weaknesses in the provision of more technologically advanced journalism facilities.

An intervention program to address the issues with journalism facilities was deemed essential. Further, the absence of a tracer system provided an opportunity for the development of a monitoring and evaluation tool.

The study's findings contribute to policy development by prioritizing the enhancement of journalism facilities and technological resources in secondary schools offering the Special Program in Journalism, thereby providing valuable guidance for policy development aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of journalism education programs.

Future research stemming from this study could focus on exploring the long-term career paths and job satisfaction of SPJ graduates, gathering insights from employers in journalism-related fields, and conducting comparative analyses of journalism programs globally to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of the Special Program in Journalism.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Practical translational research initiatives stemming from this study could involve collaborating with educational institutions and industry partners to implement targeted interventions aimed at enhancing journalism facilities and technological resources in schools offering the Special Program in Journalism, developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation tool to track the career progression and outcomes of SPJ graduates, and establishing partnerships with media organizations to provide real-world experiential learning opportunities for students enrolled in the program.

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