

Readiness of Agriculture Undergraduates Towards English Workplace Communication: An Evaluation

Wan Hurani Osman *, Shakiratul Hanany Abd Rahman

Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

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Abstract

According to the CareerEDGE Development Profile, employability skills and graduate readiness refer to the subject knowledge, generic skills, employment experience, and also emotional intelligence. Many higher education institutions are aware of the importance of preparing their students for employment. The employment rate reflects the institutions' credibility since logically education increases productivity and this relates to job performance. This present research was conducted to evaluate undergraduates' knowledge and readiness towards workplace communication. It focuses on generic writing skills as well as language skills in general and also workplace documents. A survey using questionnaire was conducted among second year agriculture students taking English for Employment module at a public university in Malaysia. The results indicated that graduates are aware of most of the generic and language skills required but some are not confident of their abilities. The result from this research will benefit academics who are teaching finishing schools or courses related to preparing undergraduates for the workplace.

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Keywords: Employability, Generic skills; Language skills; Workplace documents

INTRODUCTION

“What is actually needed by the employers?”

“Is having mastered the subject contents and theories in the relevant field sufficient to ensure employability of university graduates and to later survive in the job market?”

“Why are there still reports of unemployment among graduates?”

These are among the common questions being asked by future workers, and also education institutions. There have been a few studies conducted on employability and its qualities. According to previous research findings, subject knowledge alone is insufficient. Qualities such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills have been highlighted as important qualities in a good worker (McCowan, 2015; Belt, Drake & Chapman, 2010). These are the common and basic qualities in a competent worker.

* Corresponding author: Tel.: +608 9248100 ext 8054

E-mail addresses: wanosman@ums.edu.my [Osman, W. H.]; hanany@ums.edu.my [Abd Rahman, S. H.].

TalentCorp (2014) in their report entitled *Matching Talent to Jobs – Trends in Graduate Employability* indicated that Malaysian graduates in general are not well-informed of employers' expectations, and this would subsequently result in them losing out to their counterparts who have more awareness of the expectations. In the report, the organisation has also stressed that universities must incorporate what are required by firms into the course curricula in order to produce graduates who are ready for the workforce. Thus, universities in Malaysia must play their role in being updated and aware of the required skills and qualities in the respective field of work so that their graduates are employable. It is a common knowledge that education institutions are not only expected to prepare learners for the academic content; they ought to prepare the learners for the job world as well. More focus is given to higher education institutions compared to high schools as school leavers will normally have the option to either continue studying or working. However, the common option for graduates after they finish studying in university will be to work.

Realising the importance of higher education institutions as one of the platforms to prepare future workers to be employable and competent, there is a need to look at what higher education institutions are feeding the future workers in terms of work readiness and employability skills. This is because the employment rate of a university or institution reflects its credibility. Researchers such as Teichler (2009) and Cai (2012) stated that logically, education increases productivity and this relates to job performance. Thus, many institutions provide courses for their undergraduates that will help prepare them for employment.

In Malaysian universities, work-related information and skills are embedded in the faculties' courses. However, there are also courses such as finishing schools, grooming courses, and communication courses being offered especially towards the end of the study years. In certain universities, there are courses that are designed to address the language and convention needs of different professions known as *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) courses (Tan, 2016). Under the same umbrella of ESP, there is a different course known as *English for Occupational Purposes* (EOP) that is geared towards emphasising the language used in job performance which is also on offer (Tan, 2016).

One of the skills that has always been highlighted in the above-mentioned courses is communication skills especially communication in English. In Malaysia, English has claimed its importance over time in the new economic knowledge and as a second language. It continues to be a compulsory subject taught at all levels, including at university levels (Darmi & Albion, 2013). Language competence gives an advantage because it helps ease communication and being able to communicate in English is an advantage in Malaysia's multi-racial community. Communication skills involve the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Communication also involves the ability to arrange and present views and ideas. Having higher order thinking skill which involves being analytical and critical is also important because it reflects one's character. All these communication skills can be seen through the tasks graduates have to produce during their university years such as presentations, discussions and project papers. These skills are important for academic world, work place and also daily activities. The way they speak, write and present their work are determiners to differentiate between excellent, average and poor learners. These skills that they use at universities will help them to be competitive in the job market as the skills will help them to stand out during interviews and in their job later.

Thus, employability, education, and communication are interrelated. Being aware that learners differ individually in knowledge, fields of study with diverse needs and wants, this research looked at whether non-native speakers of English undergraduates undertaking agriculture are ready for workplace written documents. Of the four language skills that include reading, writing, listening and speaking, it is known that writing is the most difficult to master. This is because there are certain organisation and linguistic conventions that students need to familiarise themselves with in order to make readers able to read and understand their writing easier. Some of the common workplace written documents include emails, memos, letters, proposals and reports; these documents have their own conventions and requirements which an employee needs to be familiar with in order for him or her to become efficient at the workplace. This research therefore aims to discover if the graduates are ready for workplace communication by evaluating their views and knowledge in terms of generic and language skills in the workplace and the required workplace written documents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 University Preparation for Workplace

What do learners expect to obtain by entering universities and graduating? Is it merely obtaining knowledge and academic excellence? Most learners' reply will definitely be a 'No'. Most of them will surely answer 'to get a good job'. Thus, being employed after graduating from higher institutions is imperative as they would mostly prefer to find a job upon graduation though some might prefer to take up the challenge of embarking on a postgraduate study.

What is employability? Is it merely getting a job after graduation? A definition given is:

Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is one's capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. With this in mind, the key words are 'getting and keeping fulfilling work'

(Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 2).

How can future employees make sure that this could be successfully accomplished? One of the ways that could help them accomplish this is they need to know exactly what employers are looking for in an employee. Hillage and Pollard (1998) listed a few criteria which employers put great emphasis on and they are employability asset, deployment, presentation and personal and external factors. Employability asset is related to knowledge, skills and attitudes. Deployment on the other hand is the career management skill. The third is the presentation aspect which is the job getting skill, and finally, the personal and external factors such as family responsibility and current job market opportunity.

Based on these criteria, a few models were developed for higher institutions to use as a guide to prepare their learners for the working world. For example, Bennett, Dunne and Carre (1990) came up with a course model containing five elements which are disciplinary content knowledge, disciplinary skills, workplace awareness, workplace experience and generic skills. There are also other models such as 'decision learning', 'opportunity awareness', 'transition learning' and 'self-awareness' (DOTS) model and also the CareerEDGE model. In Malaysia, a few studies have been conducted to look into the DOTS and CareerEdge Models usefulness in relation to Malaysian graduates and the courses offered in universities (Anas & Hamzah, 2017; Sumanasiri, Ab Yajid & Ali Khatibi, 2015).

2.2 CareerEDGE Development Profile

There have been a few theoretical models that are related to career development concepts. One famous concept is DOTS model (Law & Watts, 1977) which is the acronym for 'decision learning', 'opportunity awareness', 'transition learning' and 'self-awareness'. Based on DOTS model, USEM model was created by Yorke and Knight in 2004. USEM stands for 'understanding', 'skills', 'efficacy beliefs' and 'metacognition'. In the United Kingdom, The Centre for Employability (CfE) at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) used DOTS model to help future workers. However, Peter Sewell highlighted that DOTS and USEM have their weaknesses. This is because he has defined employability as:

Having a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make a person more likely to secure, and be successful in their chosen occupation. This definition has been used as a starting point from which to develop a new theoretical and practical framework for employability called "The Key to Employability" model.

(Pool & Sewell, 2007, p. 280)

The Key to Employability model consists of two main components which are 'employability' and 'reflection and evaluation'. Employability involves elements of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-

efficacy. Reflection and evaluation involves 5 elements which include career, experience, degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills, generic skills and emotional intelligence. Based on the model, all components and elements are important and if one element is missing, it is said that a graduate's employability rate will reduce. Figure 1 displays the connection between each element in the model.

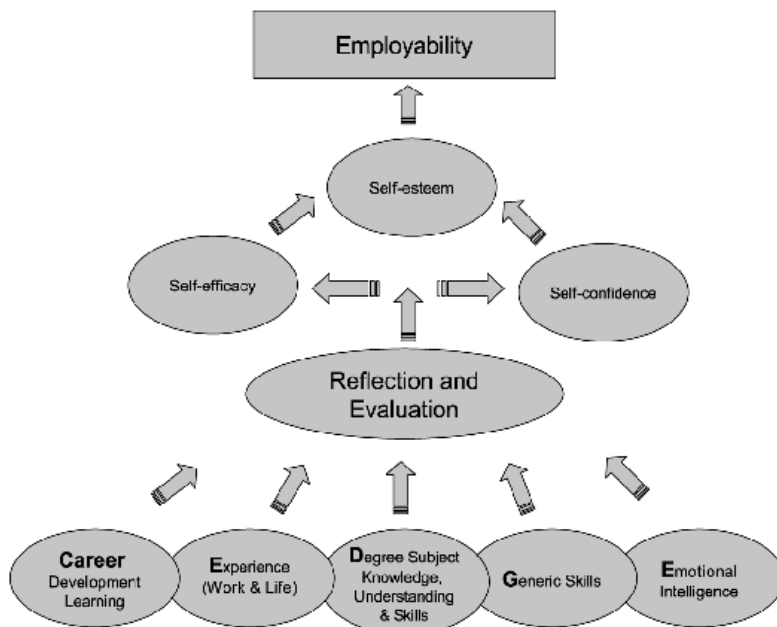
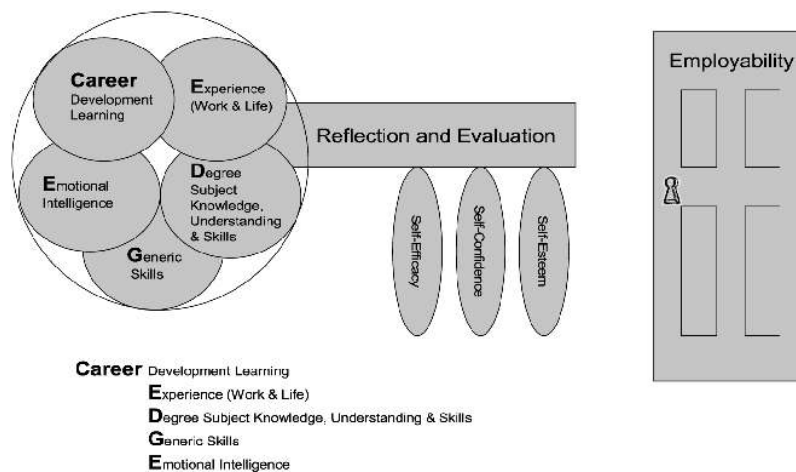


Figure 1. The Essential Components of Employability (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Pool and Sewell (2007) highlighted that the elements in the lower tier of the model are important for graduates to develop themselves and later reflect and evaluate these elements in order to have a higher level of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem (the upper tier of the model). Based on the lower tier, the mnemonic “CareerEDGE” is used for easy references to the elements. There are five elements in CareerEDGE; Career, Experience, Degree, Generic and Emotional. CareerEDGE Profile is shown in Figure 2 in the shape of a key and a door. This symbolises that if the graduates have mastered CareerEDGE Profile, they will get the key to employment.



CareerEDGE - The Key to Employability

Figure 2. The Key to Employability.

The main focus of the model is the ‘Degree’ which basically are the subject knowledge, understanding and skills they acquire during their university years. It is undeniable that a paper qualification that one holds does play a very important role in determining employability. However, it is not the only determining factor that is taken into consideration by employers.

The next important component is the ‘Generic Skills’. It is also referred to as core skills, key skills or transferable skills (Pool & Sewell, 2007). According to The Pedagogy for Employability Group (2004) in Pool and Sewell (2007), a list of generic skills was derived based on years of research and the list includes creativity, teamwork, good oral skills, time management and many more. The third component is the ‘Emotional Intelligence’. Research has shown that if one has high emotional intelligence, the person has better personal relationship and better health (Cooper, 1997; Yorke & Knight, 2002). The fourth component is ‘Experience’. This component is related to work and also life experiences.

The last component is the Career Development Learning. This is mostly based on the DOTS model (Law & Watt, 1977) which involves activities that will make the students consider what they like or are interested in and to motivate and match their personalities. With the combination of degree knowledge, generics skills, emotional skills and experience, the career development learning will fall into place. This will help students to be able to decide on which career suits them the most in terms of interest and personality.

2.3 Workplace Documents

In most workplaces, written documents are deemed fundamental. Written documents refer to any hardcopy or softcopy written text that is used to convey messages or information necessary to make a workplace run smoothly and effectively. Different jobs will have certain written documents unique to the organisations. However, among the common written documents are letters, memos, reports, proposal papers and emails. In higher learning institutions, these documents are introduced to learners in various courses and also through many co-curriculum activities that learners are involved in during their study years. Universiti Malaysia Sabah, for instance, offers *English for Employment* and *English for Occupational Purposes* for undergraduate learners (English Language Cluster, 2019). Through these courses, learners are exposed to the various types of workplace documents which they will find useful once they land themselves a job later on.

With all that has been written and summarised regarding employability, the various models and also the documents needed, this study looks at the readiness and knowledge related to workplace documents, the generic skills and also language skills of a group of Malaysian learners from a public higher institution.

2.4 What the Employers are Really Looking for in Graduates?

At this point we might think that we now have a better understanding of the criteria of an employee that employers put great emphasis on, such as the ones listed by Hillage and Pollard (1998). Nevertheless, gaining an insight into the current scenarios revolving around this issue would provide us with a clearer lens to better understand what is really happening in the real world. Firstly, it is undeniable that possessing strong written communication skills are becoming more and more important these days. In a recent survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in 2018, it was found that 82 per cent of the participating employers want candidates applying for jobs in their companies to possess strong written communication skills (NACE Staff, 2018). Written communication skills also top the list as the most sought after attribute that they want the candidates to have on their résumés. On the other hand, 67.4 per cent of the employers rated verbal communication skills as the skills that they consider crucial in an employee. Other generic skills such as problem-solving skills and ability to work in a team were also rated as vital by the employers as the percentages of them agreeing were recorded at 80.9 per cent and 78.7 per cent respectively. It could then be implied that the vast majority of employers these days put great emphasis on communication skills especially on the written aspect. Therefore, it is high time that this research be carried out so as to fathom the current scenario pertaining to the learners’ own awareness and knowledge on these skills.

In a recent news in the News Straits Times by D’silva (2019), Sutha Menon, an assistant manager of a GBW hotel (formerly known as Grand Bluewave Hotel) has stated that both written and oral English communication skills are deemed the most important in hospitality industry. Despite the fact that these skills

are of great significance to the industry, many graduates fail to demonstrate their proficiency in verbal English although their résumés were error-free and this has led to a huge discrepancy in this regard. One candidate had even asked for her permission to converse in Malay during an interview session despite having furnished an error-free written application. In a different study, Ting, Marzuki, Chuah, Misieng and Jerome (2017) has conducted a study on the employers' view on the importance of English proficiency and communication skills for employability in Malaysia and the researchers had interviewed 10 employers in the private sector to understand their views on this issue. In the study, it was found that employers from the private sector would still be willing to employ graduates whose English proficiency is considered average provided that they have good communication skills. Nevertheless, this is not the case for jobs that involve more communications in English such as customer service, marketing, bank frontline and insurance as candidates are expected to be proficient in English particularly for communication purposes. Based on the study, the interviewed employers do not perceive good English mastery as a determinant for good communication skills as they have repeatedly mentioned that one with good proficiency in the language does not necessarily have good communication skills. Hence, it could be implied from this particular study that employers from private sector put great emphasis on a candidate's communication skills in the decision-making process of recruitment.

A study was conducted by Shukri, Norhazilah and Islam (2014) to highlight the gap between the importance of Malaysian graduates' employability skills to employers and their level of satisfaction on those skills, and it was found that among the skills that reflect the largest gap scores for importance and satisfaction include the graduates' ability to write effectively, speak fluently in English, as well as make logical conclusions. This particular finding suggests that employers were less satisfied with the above-mentioned skills. It is especially alarming to the Malaysian higher institutions particularly the academics and the curriculum designers as students at these institutions ought to be equipped with those skills in their study years so that when they graduate, they would be highly employable with the qualities required by the industries.

To further comprehend this situation, this study is certainly of utmost importance as to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no other research has been done thus far to understand the present situation particularly from the point of view of the Agriculture undergraduates as in whether or not they are aware of their own skills and knowledge required by the employers.

METHODOLOGY

Survey research was applied as the research design, and a questionnaire was used as the instrument to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed to undergraduates majoring in agriculture who are in their second year of studies in a Malaysia public university. This paper reports the findings of the preliminary study of a larger study. The study was conducted in February 2019 and there were only 48 students who were enrolled in the English for Employment module offered by the university. There were 3 classes and 16 students from one class volunteered to be the respondents of the study. At the same time, a similar course called English for Occupational Purposes was also offered, which was taken by students with MUET Band 1 and Band 2. MUET is a national English language proficiency test, and Band 1 and 2 denote weak students, CEFR level B1 and below. Only 2 students from this course who were willing to contribute. Therefore, there are 18 respondents in total.

Table 1 shows the respondents' demographic information, which illustrates that there is a balance of female and male respondents. 88.9% (16/18) have good command of the English language based on their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) result. MUET is an English language proficiency test used as an entrance requirement by most Malaysian universities. MUET result is categorised according to Bands which starts with Band 1 (very limited user) to Band 6 (highly proficient user). Two of the respondents scored Band 2 and lower while 16 respondents are modest (Band 3) and satisfactory (Band 4) users of English.

Table 1. Demographic Information.

Item	Characteristics	Frequency
Gender	Female	9
	Male	9
Age	20 – 21	7
	22 – 23	8
	24	3
Race	Bumiputra Sabah	13
	Malay	4
	Chinese	1
Highest Academic Qualification	STPM	3
	Matriculation	4
	Science Foundation	2
	Diploma	9
MUET Result	Band 1	1
	Band 2	1
	Band 3	7
	Band 4	9
	Band 5 – 6	0

The questionnaire consists of 5 sections, namely A) the demographic data, B) general information on written documents at workplace, C) generic skills, D) language skills, and E) general view on work-readiness. Items for sections C – E were assessed using Likert-type scale of five from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It was adapted from CareerEdge Profile questionnaire (Sewell & Pool, 2007). Table 2 illustrates the sections and types of items in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed via Google form which is an online medium. Students were given the questionnaire link and the link was accessible for one week. All questions were compulsory to be answered and the respondents could not progress to the next question if they have not answered any prior questions. Based on the respondents' answers, the data were analysed and reported in the form of descriptive statistics.

Table 2. Items in the Questionnaire.

Section	Number and types of questions
Demographic Information	7 questions
General information on written documents at workplace	1 question – ranking 4 questions – yes/no
Generic Skills	15 statements – 5 likert-scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree)
Language Skills	14 statements – 5 likert-scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree)
General View on Work-Readiness	3 statements – 5 likert-scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research are presented in four tables based on the four sections in the questionnaire other than the demographic information. Percentages and numbers are used to report the findings.

Section B of the questionnaire is related to general information on written documents at the workplace. The purpose of this section is to obtain the respondents' knowledge on what are needed at the workplace in relation to written documents. Table 3 displays the questions and the responses. Based on the responses, it can be concluded that the respondents ranked formal and informal letter (66.7%) as the most important documents at a workplace, followed by memo and report (55.5%) and the least important documents as email and proposal paper (50%). When compared to the least important, it can be inferred that letters top the list of most common workplace written document.

All respondents also agreed that it is important to know the format and structure of workplace documents and all students should learn the necessary workplace documents during their university years. However, it is surprising that 6 respondents (33.3%) said they are not sure if they have been taught all the necessary workplace documents in their field of study and 3 respondents (16.7%) said they have not been taught the necessary workplace documents in their field of study. Looking at the syllabus of the university's English for Employment module offered, the students ought to be exposed to formal letter, memo, resume, email, notice of meeting, minutes of meeting and proposal paper. Since the respondents are all from the Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture, perhaps there are a few other workplace documents that are common in their field but have not been taught or exposed to them.

Table 3. Findings of the General Information on Written Documents at Workplace.

Item	Responses		
To your knowledge, what written documents will be important for you when you work? Rank 1 (most important) or 2 (least important).	1	2	
a) Memo	10	8	
b) Email	9	9	
c) Proposal paper	9	9	
d) Formal letter	12	6	
e) Informal letter	12	6	
f) Report	10	8	
Do you think knowing the format and structure of a particular written document is important?	Yes 18	No -	
Do you feel that every student should be introduced and taught the relevant workplace documents before they graduate?	Yes 18	No -	
In your field of study, which language do you think is used most often in written communication?	Malay 5	English 13	Chinese -
I have been introduced to the necessary workplace written documents in my field of study.	Yes 9	No 3	Not sure 6

Section C of the questionnaire contains statements related to generic skills. The purpose of this section is to obtain information on their awareness of their own generic skills such as communication skills (statement a, b, c, and d), personality and working style (statement e, f, g, h, i, j, and o), and view on accuracy, format and structure (statement k, l, m and n). The findings are displayed in Table 4.

For communication skills, 77.8% of the students agreed that they have good written skills whereas only 55.6% stated they have good oral communication skills. For personality and work style, 83.3% indicated that they are open to comments and critics and they adapt well to new situations. However, in terms of having good persuasive skills, only 33.3% chose to ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ with the statement. For structure, format and accuracy, 88.9% agreed that they are important elements in written communication. For spoken communication, only 66.7% said accuracy is important while for structure and flow of oral communication only 83.3% agreed it is important.

Table 4. Statements Related to Generic Skills.

Statements	Responses				
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
Communication Skills					
a. I have good oral communication skills.		10	6	2	
b. I have good written communication skills.		14	4		
c. I am good in oral presentation.		9	7	2	
d. I am confident about my written communication skills.		9	9		
Personality and Work Style					
e. I am good in solving problem.	1	11	6		
f. I am open to comments and critics.	4	11	3		
g. I am able to adapt to new situation well.	2	13	3		
h. I have good planning and organisation skills.	1	8	9		
i. I work well independently.	3	11	4		
j. I work well in a team.	4	9	5		
o. I have strong persuasive skills.	1	5	10	2	
Format, Structure and Accuracy					
k. I view structure and format as very important especially in written documents.	6	10	2		
l. I am particular about accuracy in written documents.	6	10	2		
m. I am particular about accuracy in spoken communication.		12	6		
n. I view structure and flow as very important in spoken communication.	4	11	3		

Section D is related to language skills with 14 statements which are related to the English language (statement d, e, f, h, i, j, k and l), other languages (statement b and m), grammar (statement c and g) and vocabulary (statement a and n). Based on Table 5, 17 respondents (94.4%) agreed that the English language is important for their future career. However, between speaking and writing in English, 15 respondents (83.3%) are more confident in writing than speaking the language (55.6%). 3 respondents (16.7%) said that they would avoid as much as possible from having to speak in English (statement h) whereas no respondent said they would avoid writing in English (statement i).

Table 5. Statements Related to Language Skills.

Statements	Responses				
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
English Language					
d. I am confident when I speak in English.	2	8	6	2	
e. I am confident when I write in English.	4	11	3		
f. I can pronounce English words properly and clearly.	1	8	7	2	
h. I avoid as much as possible from having to speak in English.	1	2	7	5	3
i. I avoid writing in English.			4	9	5
j. I use English only when I am forced to use it.	2	3	4	4	5
k. I find English very easy.	1	5	12		
l. I view English as very important for my future career.	10	7	1		
Other Languages					
b. I am more confident in using Malay/Chinese words than English words.	4	5	8	1	
m. I only need to know Malay language when I graduate.			5	2	11
Grammar					
c. I am good in English grammar.	2	4	11	1	
g. I am able to identify my own grammar mistakes and correct them immediately.	2	6	8	2	
Vocabulary					
a. I know a wide range of English vocabulary.		6	10	2	
n. I know the appropriate words to convince people to agree and follow me.	2	9	5	2	

The last section of the questionnaire is on the respondents' general view on work-readiness. This section has three statements related to their work-readiness. The findings are reported in Table 6. It can be seen that students are very confident of themselves. This is because 88.9% of the respondents said that they are ready to work if given the opportunity. The respondents also acknowledged that besides subject knowledge, language is also an important subject to study. This is proven when 17 respondents (94.4%) opted for 'strongly agree' and 'agree' for statement c which is 'I feel it is important to learn languages and not only subjects related to my field'.

Table 6. Statement on Respondents' General View on Work-readiness.

Statements	Responses				
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
a. I am ready to work if given the opportunity.	9	7	2		
b. I feel the most important knowledge for my career is only my subject knowledge.	3	4	3	7	1
c. I feel it is important to learn language(s) and not only subjects related to my field.	13	4	1		

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research objectives which are to discover if the graduates are ready for workplace documents and if they are aware of what is required of them in terms of generic and language skills in the workplace, it can be concluded that the respondents are ready and aware of what is required of them in the workplace. This is because from the data obtained from the questionnaire, majority of the respondents said they are ready for work (refer to Table 6). However, there are a few respondents who repeatedly responded 'Neither agree nor disagree'. After analysing the respondents' demographic details, it can be concluded that the respondents with lower MUET band results are less confident or sure of certain statements as they were the respondents who repeatedly answered 'neither agree nor disagree'.

This study has revealed that 50% of the respondents admitted that they have not been taught or were not even sure if the necessary workplace documents in their field of study has been taught to them. It is important to note that these students have already taken either the university's *English for Employment* or *English for Occupational Purposes* module. Getting such feedback from the students would mean that there could be other workplace documents that are common in their field but have not been covered in the syllabus. The academics teaching Agriculture students might then use this finding to work on finding out the other documents that are relevant to the Agriculture students so that they could be integrated in the module as well.

This particular finding could also mean that there is a high possibility that half of the respondents could not recall that they have indeed been exposed to the formal learning of all of these important workplace documents, such as formal letter, memo, resume and email. Hence, it is important for higher learning institutions to make sure that the learning of these workplace documents can be done in a way that is more meaningful to the students so that they would take it more seriously and the lessons would then become more memorable. It is undeniable that the learning of these documents is a bit dry as it is a well-known fact that writing is daunting at times. Many researchers such as Zamel (1982), Brown (2001), Ahlsén & Lundh (2007) highlighted that writing is different from speaking and requires creation of thoughts and ideas in an organised manner.

Thus, academics teaching these employment modules need to figure out some strategies to make the learning process of the modules becomes less dry. Perhaps, fun activities and games could be executed as part of the learning process so that students will enjoy learning them. This is because the knowledge of how to compose a proper email, for example, can help a student secure a job as most jobs these days need to be applied either online or via email. When they work later, the knowledge of composing a formal/informal email becomes even more crucial as most workplace correspondences these days take place via emails.

Moreover, this particular study has also exposed that a majority of the students admitted that they do not have good persuasive skills as only 6 respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. Persuasive skills are becoming more important these days as more and more companies are becoming sales-oriented and thus, having these persuasive skills would be a bonus to the employees. Selvadurai et al. (2012) succinctly described that the persuasive and rhetoric abilities are pivotal when it comes to dealing with people including the stakeholders as well as the decision makers, and in their study they even cited an employer from a youth department that said, "...they must be able to *jual air liur*" (it literally means 'sell saliva' which is a Malay figurative expression of 'possessing oral persuasive skills') (p.299).

These persuasive skills are not just important in sales and marketing; they are indeed essential in other work aspects too, such as getting a proposal to be approved after a presentation, securing a research grant after a proposal defense, as well as making the superiors or colleagues agree with our ideas and opinions during a meeting. Hence, it is recommended for higher learning institutions to polish these persuasive skills through activities that could help the students improve in them. For instance, activities such as delivering a persuasive speech can be conducted among the students and it could be an activity that is conducted bi-monthly on a 'Speaker's Corner' stage established at the faculty for the students.

In this study, a majority of the students admitted that they are more confident in writing than speaking the language. Based on the researchers' observation on the students in general, this is undoubtedly true as a lot of students seem to be afraid to express themselves in English. There could be many reasons why they avoid speaking English, and one of the reasons could be their own incompetence which leads to the fear of making mistakes or feeling ashamed if they speak broken English. As this is only assumption based on the researchers' own observations, future research could consider looking into this aspect to gauge understanding of why many Malaysian students in general are not confident in speaking English.

Further research can be conducted to obtain deeper insights into the respondents' views and opinions by conducting an interview session with them. This is because, the present research only uses questionnaire and the researchers had to come up with a few assumptions based on their demographic details. It may not be that accurate, thus an interview session is seen as more useful to obtain a more just and clear explanation on the respondents' views. It is hoped that the findings from the present research can be used to further tackle issues related to preparing undergraduates for the working world.

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