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# ORAL COMMUNICATION USED BY POLYTECHNIC MARKETING STUDENTS DURING INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AND THE EMPLOYERS NEEDS



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GUNADEVI A/P K. JEEVI SUBRAMANIAM

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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ORAL COMMUNICATION USED BY POLYTECHNIC MARKETING STUDENTS  
DURING INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AND THE EMPLOYERS' NEEDS

GUNADEVI A/P K. JEEVI SUBRAMANIAM



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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the gap between the English language requirements needed for marketing industries in Malaysia and the English competency of graduates in polytechnics. In addition, this study also aims to investigate how the oral communication skills taught at polytechnics prepared the students for their industrial training and the types of oral communication skills that the employers would require their employees to possess at the workplace. The research design for this study is a descriptive case study that was analysed through qualitative methods. The instruments used for this case study were obtained from questionnaires, weekly journals, students' final report, supervisor's report and in-depth interview. The result from the research establishes that Malaysian marketing industry employers perceive that the graduate employees' English oral communication skills are still below their expectations from a range of (2.93) (sd-0.42) to (2.28) (sd-0.78). Even though the needed skills were covered in polytechnics, but the activities carried out were not workplace based activities. Therefore, this study recommends more activities to be carried out in industries to give exposure to the students. This ensures that the teaching of oral communication is in line with current workplace demands. The implication from this study shows that there is a strong need for the polytechnics to carry out studies that can determine reasons of students' inability to master the oral communication skills. Apart from the content of the oral communication skills, there is also a need to pay attention to the implementation of the curriculum so that the teaching of oral communication is in line with globalization and current workplace demands.





## **PENGUNAAN KOMUNIKASI LISAN BAHASA INGGERIS OLEH PELAJAR PEMASARAN POLITEKNIK SEWAKTU LATIHAN INDUSTRI DAN KEPERLUAN MAJIKAN**

### **ABSTRAK**

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji jurang antara keperluan Bahasa Inggeris yang diperlukan untuk industri pemasaran di Malaysia dan kompetensi lulusan Bahasa Inggeris di politeknik. Tambahan pula, kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji bagaimana kemahiran komunikasi lisan yang diajar di politeknik dapat menyediakan pelajar untuk menjalani latihan perindustrian dan apakah jenis kemahiran komunikasi lisan yang diperlukan di tempat kerja. Reka bentuk penyelidikan untuk kajian ini adalah kajian kes deskriptif yang dianalisis melalui kaedah kualitatif. Instrument yang digunakan untuk mengumpul data ialah soalan soal selidik, jurnal mingguan, laporan akhir pelajar, laporan penyelia dan temuduga. Hasil daripada penyelidikan ini menunjukkan bahawa majikan industry pemasaran Malaysia memahami bahawa kemahiran komunikasi lisan siswazah masih jauh dari jangkaan mereka iaitu antara (2.93) (sd-0.42) ke (2.28) (sd-0.78). Latihan yang berfokuskan pada tempat kerja adalah sangat diperlukan untuk meningkatkan kemahiran pertuturan Bahasa Inggeris. Implikasi daripada kajian ini menunjukkan keperluan politeknik untuk menjalankan penyelidikan untuk menentukan sebab ketidakupayaan pelajar untuk menguasai kemahiran komunikasi lisan. Selain daripada kemahiran-kemahiran komunikasi lisan terdapat juga keperluan untuk memberi perhatian kepada pelaksanaan kurikulum supaya pengajaran komunikasi lisan adalah selaras dengan tuntutan globalisasi dan keperluan semasa di tempat kerja.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the information on the background of the study and how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is introduced into the Polytechnic curriculum for marketing students at the commerce department. It also discusses the structure of the English syllabus primarily focusing on the oral communications skills. This chapter outlines the statement of the problem, rationale of the study, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, conceptual framework and operational definitions of terms.

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The discussion of the background of the study entails the national education philosophy, polytechnic education in Malaysia, English language in the polytechnic context, the curriculum development and evaluation division and the English syllabus used for marketing students in Polytechnic Malaysia.





### 1.1.1 National Education Philosophy (NEP)

The basis for any education system is a well-defined philosophy that becomes the core of the education system. In Malaysia, the implementation of any education policy has to be in line with the enactment of the National Education Philosophy (NEP). The polytechnic education is designed based on the NEP, as it is the most important document that guides educational practices from the primary to the tertiary level in Malaysia. Polytechnics education aims to prepare students to meet the challenges of the industrialised nation and to meet the demands and needs of the industries. Polytechnics play the role of providing broad-based education and training to enable students to acquire the necessary skills as technical assistants and middle-level executives in the commercial and service sectors. With the principles of the NEP, it is hoped that through education, the development of polytechnic students will be achieved through developing a well-balanced personality comprising the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical elements.

The route for technical and vocational education which was laid approximately a century ago has been an important route for secondary school leavers to gain access to post-secondary technical and vocational education and training in polytechnics all over Malaysia. The polytechnic as an institution, which provide work based education, adopts and develops the well-defined philosophic principles in NEP. The oral communication skills, which guide and support students during industrial training, provide them with opportunity to practice at workplace. In order to meet the needs of the workplace of today and the future, education-for-work practitioners are aware of the philosophies which should promote both technical-vocational needs and personal development.





The statements of the NEP have been translated into higher education policies to suit the polytechnic educational aims and objectives. The aims of producing polytechnic graduates who are knowledgeable, competent, holistic, responsible and capable are to be actualized. Thus, the NEP is an important contributing factor in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in becoming world-class in terms of higher education and human development.

### 1.1.2 Polytechnic Education in Malaysia

Polytechnic education was first introduced in Malaysia through the establishment of the first polytechnic, Ungku Omar Polytechnic in Ipoh, Perak, under the United Nation Development Plan in 1969. It was further strengthened in the resolutions approved by the Cabinet Committee on Education in 1979 and the First National Industrial Plan 1985 – 1995. The first National Industrial Plan, together with the Cabinet Committee on Training (1991) paved the way for the establishment of more polytechnics together with an increase in the number of their programmes as well as the demand for more semi-professionals in the fields of engineering, commerce and hospitality. At present, there are 33 polytechnics in Malaysia.

The polytechnic adopts the continuing education approach in lifelong learning programmes. Currently there are 49 diploma programmes, five special skills programmes and one advanced diploma programme with a total enrolment nearing 100,000 students (National Industry Dialogue, 2009). Polytechnics offer customized





courses for the community and industry. Part-time courses are also offered to polytechnic certificate holders who intend to further their studies at a higher level. These programmes are aimed at providing knowledge and skills to individuals through the concept of “Learn as You Earn”.

### 1.1.3 English Language in the Polytechnic Context.

The English syllabus used in polytechnics is provided by the Minister of Higher Education. Feedback from the marketing students, lecturers and the stakeholders can help to find out how much the of oral communication skills content can assist the students to carry out their industrial training effectively.



Although the polytechnic education has gained popularity based on the increased number as stated above, the current system of school education in Malaysia does not fully prepare school-leavers with good grades in English (Mohamad Jafre, 2013). This is one of the reasons why students admitting to Polytechnic have low grades in English. Therefore, they lack communication skills and they have less exposure to the English speaking environment. This situation is in contrast with the current needs of the new ‘information age’ which requires knowledgeable and skillful workers (Maclean & Ordonez, 2007) particularly those with good communication ability. Therefore, the oral communication skills being taught in polytechnics play an important role to prepare students for the workplace.





There have been fundamental changes in the way we view language and proficiency-oriented instruction (Brickbichler 1993; Yusmarwati, Mimi & Adnan 2013). In general, language learners practice the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in order to communicate meaningfully and effectively for real-life purposes. Polytechnic as an institution which prepares the students to work at industries needs to equip students with good oral communication skills in order to ensure the students marketability. Upon graduating from polytechnic, the students should be able to communicate fluently and accurately in authentic working contexts.

The recent processes in the business world, such as globalization, have underscored the need to increase understanding and to improve communication among people, as well as individuals. In line with the current developments in business, Malaysian education system needs to prepare its graduates to become knowledge workers and being able to communicate effectively. They need to communicate to suit the situation at work place and perform work successfully. Therefore, students undertaking the polytechnic programmes such as marketing, hospitality and engineering should have well-developed communication skills and high English language proficiency to help them achieve success in the modern highly competitive global work arena. In the process of educating future marketing officers, who are the participants of this study, special emphasis on Communication English (CE) becomes necessary. The ability to communicate is the most important factor needed by the prospective employers.





### 1.1.4 Curriculum Development and Evaluation Division (CDED)

The Department of Polytechnic, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOE), is committed in providing education and training at Polytechnic institutions in order to fulfill the human capital needs of the nation through strategic management, relevant and dynamic curricula, effective training and career development programmes. This is to ensure continuous quality assurance and strong support services based on the NEP. To accomplish the above objective, the Curriculum Development and Evaluation Division (CDED) have been set up. The department is responsible for the development of curriculum and evaluation for polytechnics. The department plans and develops a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the industries, communities and nation. This is to produce quality graduates through dynamic and relevant education and training programmes in line with the advancement of technology. Moreover, it also caters for the needs of industries, creates linkages with the industries, and promotes international initiatives and collaboration.

Through the strategic plan 2005-2010 by the CDED, quality graduates can be produced through enriching students' learning experiences, improving the quality of the curriculum and teaching staff, and providing fully functional and sufficient infrastructure. Under the plan, there will be a 30% increase in the number of places offered for diploma programmes from 60,840 in 2009 to 87,440 in 2012. The Polytechnic Transformation Plan has set to make polytechnics as the preferred choice for students in the field of Technical & Vocational Education Training (TVET) and will increase its student enrolment to 119,000 by 2015. This thrust is aimed at providing an effective and holistic learning experience to produce graduates who are enterprising,





marketable and globally competitive. This is also to ensure that the innovative teaching approach is of quality, relevant and dynamic in line with the current trends and future development needs. In line with the initiatives made, regular monitoring, assessing the implementation, and reviewing of the curriculum are necessary. Besides that CDED also plays its role in engaging representatives from industry, trade and commerce associations, training and research institutes, and professional bodies for input on best practices with respect to methodology, content and technology.

The second strategy that the CDED has outlined in carrying out its policy is to enhance the teaching and provide learning experiences in various job contexts. It is carried out by promoting and strengthening innovative teaching approaches that are relevant, dynamic and current in the hope of producing versatile and marketable graduates. The methodologies used include problem-based learning, case study and collaborative learning. This is to build critical and scientific thinking, and knowledge management so that students become more confident and skilful in writing, public speaking and in job communication.

With reference to the above, the mission of the CDED is to improve the quality, effectiveness, efficiency and relevancy of the curriculum in the polytechnics to fulfill its mission. The ESP syllabus has been introduced to the students and has been used since the inception of CDED and since the first polytechnic was established in 1969.







### 1.1.5 The English Syllabus Used for Marketing Students in Polytechnics Malaysia.

The focus of this research is on the English oral communication skills for diploma programmes designed by CDED, particularly in the area of Marketing, which is named as Communication English (CE). The overall contents in the CE focus on the following: oral communication skills, dictionary skills and oral presentation skills consisting of presentation on products and services; processes, procedures and instructions; enquiries and complaints; mini projects and job hunting mechanics. However, only the component of oral communication skills serves as the basis for this particular study. Engaging the students in all the above topics will help them to focus on the skills and concepts emphasized in their courses. Besides that, it also helps to identify instructional needs, to consider the many ways in which lecturers teach and students learn, and to reflect on how their course goals fit into their work place.



The courses are covered in three academic semesters. Each semester consists of 15 weeks duration and the total contact hours are 60 hours (3 hours in a week). The number of students enrolled for this course is usually between 30 and 40 students in each class. The target learners are the diploma marketing students taking up a course on marketing. The marketing students are required to take up a set of courses as their core subjects as shown in Appendix 1. The CE course is compulsory to be taken by the marketing students.

The CE courses are being taught to students using modules, lectures, tutorials and visuals materials. CE is required to be taken in semester one (Communicative English 1), semester three (Communicative English 2) and semester five





(Communicative English 3). Based on the Matrix of courses verses Programme Learning Outcome (PLO), there are two PLOs which need to be achieved by all the three English courses (refer to Appendix 1). The students have to apply the knowledge of marketing and related fields in every industry worldwide and communicate effectively both in written and spoken form with colleagues, other professionals and community and provide creative, innovative and effective solutions to business situations.

Communicative English 1 focuses on speaking skills for students to develop the ability to communicate effectively and confidently. It is designed to provide students with useful expressions that can be used in a variety of social interactions and situations. It also provides students with an opportunity to initiate and participate in group discussions (refer to Appendix 2).



Communicative English 2 focuses on the skills needed to describe products and services as well as processes and procedures. It focuses on the skills to give and respond to instructions. The course enables students to make and reply to enquiries and complaints in their future workplace (refer to Appendix 3).

Communicative English 3 aims to develop the skills necessary to carry out a mini project as well as job hunting skills. Students learn to present ideas through the use of graphs and charts. Students learn the process of job hunting which includes job search strategies and making enquiries. They also learn to write resumes and cover letters. The students develop the skills to introduce themselves, highlight their strengths and abilities, present ideas, express opinions and respond appropriately during job interviews (refer to Appendix 4).





Industrial Training is compulsory for the students in semester 4. They are placed at industries for 5 months to carry out their on-the-job training. During this 5 month periods, they are supervised by appointed supervisors at the company. The polytechnics also prepare their programmes by having industrial dialogues with companies all over Malaysia from time to time. This is to get feedback from the companies about the courses and programmes offered in polytechnics.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The English proficiency and achievement of the majority of Malaysian students is completely unsatisfactory and disproportionally low (Aruna, 2011; Teoh, 2011). Given the challenges facing higher education institutions in Malaysia, there are strong justifications for this study. In general, one of the issues related to the existing workplace language needs and challenges faced by polytechnic students specifically in the marketing industry has always been on the use of oral communication skills and the requirement of the marketing industry. The following presents the problems which necessitate such a study on oral communication skills.

Firstly, there is lack of holistic and comprehensive research on current English curriculum practices for marketing students in Malaysian polytechnics. Since the 1990s, the quality of teaching English in Malaysia has deteriorated with evidence of a decreasing level of English language proficiency among Malaysian university graduates. In Malaysia, feedback from stakeholders in the private sector, reported in the mass media (Aruna, 2011; Teoh, 2011), indicate that graduates do not have the necessary language and communication skills for workplace communication.





English education, particularly in higher education (HE), has been in the limelight mainly due to the many negative testimonies of employers. Research by the National Institute of Research in Higher Education (IPPTN) has discovered that Malaysia is grappling with quality issues in (HE), which has had an impact on employability figures standing at a worrying 48.5% (IPPTN, 2010). Based on the previous research, there is a need to investigate the need for English and communication skills among marketing students at workplace.

There is a mismatch of curriculum implementation between the students' preparation and the skills needed by the industries (Yunus, 2007). Employers today are concerned about finding good workers who not only have basic academic skills but also with good oral communication skills. The HE institutions produced fresh graduates to keep pace with global competition and adapt to workplace demands. One of the element to enable graduates to keep up with those demands seems to be oral communication skills that are imparted during tertiary education. It has also become a common belief in industry that higher education institutions should equip graduates with the proper oral communication skills necessary to achieve success in the workplace. (Yunus, 2007, Annie and Wong, 2006 and Latisha and Nayan, 2010). To overcome this problem, this research attempts to investigate the oral communication skills needed for current workplace environment, especially in marketing industrial sectors in Malaysia.

Due to the profound changes in the workplace, employers are also increasingly expecting workers to have effective oral communication skills. Malaysia employers are likely to rate communication skills in English as a top priority for hiring and retaining employees Mohamed (2014), and findings of studies by Isarji (2013), indicate that





Malaysian graduates have poor communication skills for workplace. This was supported by (JobStreet (2015), and Zubairi (2008), in which employers have continued to voice their dissatisfactions concerning the English competency of university graduates. A survey which had been carried out by MoHE in 2008 on employers in relevant industries has shown that the majority of fresh graduates and workers are limited users of English especially in writing and speaking. Looking at the situations in the industry, there are three problems that underpin the need to carry out this study.

The first problem is the gap between the polytechnic graduates and the industrial needs. Polytechnics are given the specific role as the premier provider of technical and professional education. Although the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has released a soft skills module to be emphasized in teaching and learning in Malaysian HE institutions, it does not capture the specific needs of communication skills in English for Malaysian graduates. There is no related research carried out specifically in any polytechnics, however, a recent research carried out by Koo Yew Lie (2008) based on Malaysian university graduates has shown that there are gaps between the graduates and the industries in relation to the use of oral communication at workplace. In particular, employers are concerned with university graduates' preparedness to use English for employment and have highlighted the widening gap between the English language proficiency of graduates and the English language requirements for employment (Hafizoh Kassim & Fatimah Ali, 2010). Malaysian employers have cited that poor English Language competency has hampered graduates of Malaysian higher education institutions to present ideas and explain issues orally (Federation Employers Malaysian, 2012).





The second problem is on the graduates' lack of ability to perform well during the 'On the Job training' due to poor oral communication skills. The continued development of English in the Malaysian education domain is vital to enable graduates to succeed in the global workplace. This is also supported by the research carried out by Isarji, Ainol, Mohamed, & Tunku (2011), in which the majority of the respondents (94.5%) support the importance of English at the workplace. On the 'Malaysian employment outlook-changing market trends' as presented by Dhirendra Shantial during the National dialogue (2016) report, there is a need for institutions to do more to prepare their graduates for communication in English and to function effectively at the workplace. This is supported by (JobStreet, 2015 & Chang, 2004) from the Malaysian Employers Federation, which stated that English is not only important at the workplace, but also the most important language in the organization. It is said that there are significant gaps between what universities offer and what industries demand. Schools and universities have been blamed and criticized for their failure to adequately prepare students for employment (Abedi & Khorshidifar, 2011).

In 2003, the former Education Minister, Tan Sri Musa Mohamad called upon public universities to re-examine their training and university programmes to see how they can overcome the perceived weakness of graduates in terms of low English language proficiency and lack of communication and leadership skills (The Star, 6 November 2003). In a survey carried out by the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) involving 205 member companies, it was reported that the major problem among local graduates is their inability to communicate well in English (Sunday Star, 6 November 2003).





Effective and systematic training strategies should be adequately planned, provided and evaluated to ensure that English instruction adapts comfortably with the changing environment. It is also said that English being the business language will further allow students to compete globally. The shift to knowledge-based jobs requires training, upgrading and talent development. Therefore, if the students do not have the readiness in terms of oral communication ability in English, it may be a problem for the students to perform well.

The third problem relates to the oral communication skills which can lead to unemployment. In the research carried out by Gurvinder & Sharan (2008), there are about 60,000 Malaysian graduates who were unemployed due to lack of experience, poor English and poor communication skills. The study further mentions that most unemployed graduates have majored in business studies. To support the above argument, 91% of the employers said that English is the language of business communication, and the employers are keen in hiring new people with good command of the English language (Jobstreets, 2009). In relation to this, there is a need for this study to be carried out to look at the gap on oral communication skills offered by the polytechnic before the students go for their industrial training. It is evident that there is a mismatch between, or inconsistency of standards by polytechnics and industries, as well as the lack of a valid and reliable mechanism to assess graduates' English competency for entry-level employment. Malaysian employers have drawn attention to the discrepancy between graduates' English competency based on their English language scores in the SPM, MUET or polytechnics English courses and their actual performance during the in job training.





More often than not, an excellent score in the SPM and/or MUET English (A or A+) does not readily translate into an excellent performance in English during the recruitment exercise (IPPTN, 2010; UNESCO, 2012; Yasin, Wan, & Mukhtar, 2010).

Furthermore, research done by the Malaysian National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN, 2007, 2010) has shown that industries have had to develop their own in-house assessments and training programmes for appraising graduates' English language competency since they were unsatisfied with present English language assessment results, such as those of the SPM and MUET. This creates an issue where the needs of industry are not linked to the institutions and their policy makers, and subsequently a greater skills mismatch emerged. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop a valid and reliable mechanism to eliminate these skills mismatch between



industries and polytechnics.

This study aims to link the needs of both industry and academia. It is of great importance that the gap between what is acquired and what is required in terms of English proficiency skills for the workplace be closed for future Malaysian graduates.

In 2006, the government of Malaysia revealed that 45,000 college graduates were unemployed, and this was mainly caused by a poor command of the English language (Hafizoal Kassim & Fatimah Ali, 2010). In addition, the Malaysian Employers Federation [MEF] (2004) stated that engineering and science graduates were the most sought after graduates due to the proliferation of these industries both in Malaysia and globally. Therefore, there is a great need to improve the level of oral communication in







English at the workplace for marketing students as they will seek for jobs immediately after completing their studies.

In a survey conducted by (Maes, 1997; Shamsuddin Bardan, 2011), oral communication skills have been identified as the most important skill in the workplace. Their study conducted in the Greater Gulf Coast area, including the coastal areas of Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida panhandle, revealed that oral communication in English is the most important skill demanded by employers when it comes to recruiting new staff. In addition to being one of the most essential skills for employment, oral communication skills are vital for job success and promotion (Crosling, 2002; Lee, 2003). Since Huckins (1984) and to the recent research carried out by Isarji et al. (2011), they are of the view that employees who do not demonstrate good oral communication skills are rarely given managerial responsibility.

From the researcher's experience as a lecturer in the English Unit, it has been realized that the English oral communication skill has always been a problem among graduates in polytechnics. Based on the intake record, 95% of the students from polytechnics have low proficiency in English. The average grades obtained by them in the English subject are from C to D in their *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Examination). Effective oral communication skills are vital to fresh graduates from polytechnics. This is because after completing their studies they will be venturing into the working world. Their lack of ability in oral communication skills can be seen through their choice companies for industrial training. Students who are less proficient will have the tendency to choose companies with Bahasa Melayu as the language of communication.





It is clear that the issues highlighted above indicate significant relationships between employability problems and deficiencies in English oral communication skills of Malaysian polytechnic students. A clear difference exists between the actual performance of the students pertaining to their English oral communication competencies, and the demands of the academic and workforce worlds. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the needs of the marketing industries involved in order to bridge this gap.

### 1.3 Rationale of the Study

The problem statements outline above indicate that there is a great concern on the issue of English communication skills among job applicants and the oral English language communication competency required for employment. Therefore, it is important to investigate the industrial needs and the importance of graduates' English language oral communication skills for employment purposes. Many studies have discussed on the need for English oral communication and the discrepancy between the institution of higher education English language curriculum and English language requirements for jobs (Phosward 1989; Silpa-Anan 1991; Boonjaipet 1992; Crosling and Ward 2002; Vasavakul 2006).

There has been a trend toward the promotion of occupational/professional education in higher education (Norton & Marvin, 2005) in bridging the gap between the oral communication taught in institutions and the oral communication practiced in workplace. In the area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Belcher (2004) uses the





term ‘Academic-for-occupational purposes English’ (EA/OP) for the integration between English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for occupational purposes (EOP). In her paper, she gives a brief example of the integration supported with the use of new technologies such as video cameras, network computers and the internet allowing access to virtually real world settings. She states that technology facilitates not just collecting and analyzing data but also generating teaching materials from those actual occupational situations. In addition, Grubb and Eileen (1992:29) present a model called remedial English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programme with an occupational focus which only integrates occupational content and academic instruction as teaching basic skills.

However, there is not much information on the integration and how to develop such an ESP course. Professional information about the students’ module and the use of English for target situation in the workplace is most needed.

According to a research carried out by Isarji et al. (2011), English has always been and will always be the most important language at the workplace. The findings of his study have presented the employers concern about the needs of graduates’ lack of English competencies and how it can jeopardize the core of their business intelligence. It is of paramount importance to develop students’ ability to use English competently, especially in listening and speaking, so that they will be able to exchange information effectively through both spoken and written channels, and consequently enhance their performance at the workplace.





The rationale of this study is to look at the specific needs for the marketing students taking up communicative English courses. According to Chen (2006), when a course is carried out, there is a need to look at the what, how, and why the course is carried out. There is also a need to explore and identify the learners' potential needs and how it is used in the working environment (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998; Ali, 2010). They have stated that by knowing the professional information of the students, the tasks and activities the students use and will be using for the target situation is important. Besides that, the kind of professional communication used at their work place and the knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situations has to be explored. This is because when the students are prepared to go for their industrial training, they should be ready with what the employers need at the workplace. Based on the above concerns, this research aims to investigate the marketing students' readiness in oral communication before they go for their industrial training. Besides that, there is a need to study the oral communication skills used by the students while they were carrying out their industrial training.

There is also a need to look at the gaps which exist in using oral communication skills during their industrial training. According to Isarji et al. (2011), communication skills in English have been recognised as vital workplace tools for success in business and have been linked with career success and increased in financial rewards. Besides that, there is a global concern regarding the widening gap between the communication skills in English of job applicants and the English language competency required for employment.





The ESP courses offered to the students should aim to equip them with the understanding that there should be a strong bridge between the course offered in polytechnics and the industries' needs to suit the working environment. The students can only develop this capability by developing their communication skills to allow them to engage in the job environment. For this reason, there is a need to emphasize the social aspect of acquiring and using the linguistic tools before they are actually exposed to the workplace. According to (Gee, 1996; Isarji et al., 2011), putting the students in the real working situation and making them speak will give them the opportunity to face the real world.

#### 1.4 Objectives of the Study



This study aims to investigate the gap between the English language requirements needed for marketing industries in Malaysia and the English competency of graduates in polytechnics.

The first objective of the study is to evaluate the extent to which the polytechnic English oral communication skills components have prepared the polytechnic marketing students to communicate effectively in English at the workplace during industrial training.





The second objective is to determine the English oral communication needs of the polytechnic marketing students at the workplace during their industrial training.

The third objective is to determine the English oral communication competence of the polytechnic marketing students based on the industrial feedback from the managerial and the supervisors.

### 1.5 Research Questions

This research is guided by the following research questions:

1. How have the oral communication skills components studied at the polytechnic Prepared students to communicate during their industrial training?
2. What are the English oral communication needs of the polytechnic marketing Students at the workplace during their industrial training as perceived by their Employers?
3. Which pertinent English oral communication skills are found to be lacking among polytechnic marketing students at the workplace during their industrial training?

### 1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide data on the use of oral English communication skills of marketing students from polytechnics during their industrial training. The following are some benefits to be derived from the study.





The study is useful to marketing department and students either for Polytechnics and other similar institutions. Identifying the readiness to communicate orally in English before the students go for their industrial training is important. This gives confidence and ability to perform well during industrial training.

It is useful for managers or employers as supervisors at the industries to better prepare students undergoing industrial training. Marketing industry, in any capacity, are extremely fast paced in nature and are very demanding in terms of providing customer services whilst also producing a high quality customer care. This study helps to bridge the skills which are lacking before the students are sent for industrial training. It can be a win-win situation for all parties concerned. The findings of this study benefits the lecturers in preparing students with relevant oral communication skills as needed by the employers.



The findings can contribute some core elements to improve the present skills for the marketing students. The results of the study can become the basis of the ESP syllabus design for marketing students in polytechnics in Malaysia. The curriculum developers can benefit the feedback from the industries to further improve the syllabus for successful language learning relevant to current needs and demands.

## 1.7 Conceptual Framework

This section provides an overview on how oral communication skills are used as knowledge skills in the Polytechnic environment and how they are transferred or applied by the students during their industrial training. This conceptual framework is adapted





from Maistre & Pare (2004). The understanding of learning presented in the area of oral communication skills is based on the content used in which students make meaning out of the learning process through their engagement in the learning activities before and while doing their industrial training.

Institution-based learning, such as in polytechnics, is learning in formal settings in which lessons are carried out in a formal, guided and structured syllabus with a predetermined programme plan and studied with certain number of allocated credit hours assigned to each particular course. The English courses which focus primarily on the oral communication skills have been taught to students before going for their industrial training. The emphasis of these courses is on the four main language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.



The oral communication skills for polytechnic diploma students, as in Figure 1.1, are divided into two parts: learning based on language skills or known as knowledge skills and language skills on the job training or known as Practical language skills.

The Learning based on language skills are taught while the students are at the polytechnic. This learning based on skills is the proficiency and communication skills which they learn before going for industrial training. The sub-skills encompass oral communication skills such as greetings and introductions, dealing with customers, social conversation skills and participating in administration. The students have sufficient practice in the four oral communication skills before they are engaged in the job training. In semester four, the students are expected to use these knowledge skills during industrial training.







Maistre & Pare (2004) have outlined three applications of language learning skills during industrial training which involve the people, organization and work system. The students are required to apply their knowledge skills of language that they have learned in the polytechnic within these three applications. These applications during industrial training can be sub-divided into five learning situations. Firstly, learning in situational context where students are engaged in the work given by their supervisor during the industrial training. They are expected to participate in open communication with customers, officers and other staffs in the work environment. Secondly, the students are exposed to authentic tasks which create opportunity for them to immerse in the learning environment. Thirdly, learning through problem solving activities in which students get the reinforcement and strengths by participating in situational problems. Fourthly, learning by doing authentic tasks or activities during the industrial training can create opportunity for students to participate in daily work by carrying out the task, observe and listen to others and get involved in a particular workplace situation. Finally, learning in social context/ culture permits students to be directly involved with the people. This creates opportunities for students to use the oral communication skills.

The four skills taught before students going for industrial training are to be applied at the job environment during industrial training. The students are involved namely in three different situations (people related situations, organizational constructs and work system) in terms of using the oral communication skills. When students are involved in communication during the on-the-job training with people, they can assess the skills which they have learned, and this enables them to identify limitations in oral communication skills and thus help to improve learning and performances.





This conceptual framework serves as the underpinning, as in Figure 1.1, to determine whether there is a significant difference between employers and students expectations on the importance of oral communication skills. This can also verify whether the oral communication skills taught at the polytechnic are useful and applicable for the students during the industrial training.

### 1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are operationally defined as they have been used consistently throughout the study.



#### **Employers**

In this study, employers refer to the private sector, mainly the marketing industries. The companies chosen came from the top three key industries in Malaysia (as reported in the Malaysia Investment Performance Report 2011), which are the servicing departments, manufacturing and agriculture sectors (MIDA, 2012). The students understudy is placed in these industries.





## Lecturers

Lecturers are persons who teach in a specific discipline or field of study. These are the policy makers and lecturers in Malaysian polytechnics. They are lecturers and language instructors who teach English oral communication skills (OCS).

## Oral Communication Skills (OCS)

Hymes (1971) explains the term *communicative competence* as “that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific context” (as cited in Brown 2000:246). In this research,

OCS is defined as the ability to communicate efficiently at the workplace by using the oral communication skills. For the purpose of this study, oral communication skills refers to the entire knowledge and ability that enables one to do something well and includes the following skills: listening skills, conversational skills, giving feedback, meeting skills, presentation skills, handling customer complaints, conflict resolution skills, negotiation skills, taking customers’ orders, training skills, interviewing skills, persuading skills and promoting one’s own strengths and abilities.

## Industrial training

Training is viewed as a systematic approach of learning and development which improves individual, group and organization (Khawaja & Nadeem, 2013). Industrial training, in this study refers to a training attachment for undergraduates in an organization to fulfill part of the academic requirements. It is planned to develop





knowledge and skills through experience generally in the form of ‘On the Job Training’ (OJT) at the work place. In this study, Industrial training refers as OJT for marketing students to fulfill part of their academic requirements.

### **On the job training (OJT)**

According to Manju & Suresh (2011), training serves as an act of intervention to improve organization’s goods and services quality. The OJT fills the gap between classroom knowledge and practical knowledge because classroom knowledge is never sufficient for students until and unless it is practiced practically in the field. In view of this, OJT refers to the knowledge, experience, and skills gained by students under the guidance of an on-site supervisor.



### **Learner Needs**

Skills transfer from simulation or lecture in which the trainee learns on the actual equipment or machinery involved, performing actual job tasks (Sisson, 2001). Learner needs in this study refers to the language needs needed by students to function at the workplace.

### **Industrial supervisor**

Supervisors are assigned training duties to employees who are resident experts on certain subjects as they often do an excellent job of sharing their expertise (Manju & Suresh, 2011). The assigned supervisors are assigned to give training to the trainees with their





job expertise. They monitor and approve the trainees work throughout the students' industrial training. The students report their duty directly with the assigned supervisor.

## 1.9 Summary

This chapter provides an introduction and overview of the study. The earlier section of this chapter introduces the study by discussing the research background and establishing its rationale and aims. The remaining sections present the research questions and objectives, significant of the study, and conceptual framework. Finally, this chapter defines the operational terms used in the study. The following chapter provides a review of the theoretical and contextual literature that informs this study.

