

## Unfolding Workplace Skills through Oral Progress Report Activity (OPRA)

### Merungkai Kemahiran Pekerjaan Melalui Aktiviti Laporan Kemajuan Lisan (OPRA)

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#### ABSTRACT

*In line with the changing nature of the workplace, Malaysian higher learning institutions are currently confronted with issues pertaining to graduates' lack of ability to communicate confidently and fluently in English and to adapt effectively to the requirements of the workplace. This paper deliberates on the dynamic and constructive workplace skills demonstrated by undergraduate students through Oral Progress Report Activity (OPRA), introduced in an English language course. OPRA requires the students to carry out small group discussions in which they present and discuss the progress of their project work in a meeting-like situation. One student leads the group discussion while the others report on the progress of the project. After conducting the OPRA, the students are asked to write on their experiences, feelings and action plans in their reflective journals. Informed by the social theory of learning, this paper explicates the workplace skills involving communication skills, meeting skills and analytical reasoning. Data for this study are drawn from students' reflective journals and focus group interviews. The findings of the study illustrate that OPRA enhances students' communication skills, fosters critical thinking skills and increases students' self-confidence. The findings also show that OPRA encourages them to become critical of their own performance and skills. The implication of this study suggests that the use of pedagogical approach promotes language and communication, and at the same time, emulates workplace skills is important to train students to acquire workplace skills.*

*Keywords: Oral Progress Report Activity; workplace skills; English language learning; higher education; reflective journals*

#### ABSTRAK

*Sejajar dengan perubahan keperluan alam pekerjaan masa kini, institusi pengajian tinggi di Malaysia berhadapan dengan masalah graduan yang kurang berkebolehan dan kurang berkeyakinan untuk berkomunikasi dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Malah graduan juga dikatakan tidak dapat menyesuaikan diri dengan kehendak alam pekerjaan. Makalah ini bertujuan membincangkan kemahiran berkaitan pekerjaan yang dipamerkan oleh pelajar prasiswazah melalui Aktiviti Laporan Kemajuan Lisan (OPRA). Untuk aktiviti ini, pelajar diminta melaporkan dan membentangkan kemajuan projek mereka dalam perbincangan berbentuk sebuah mesyuarat. Ketua projek mengetuai perbincangan manakala ahli lain melaporkan kemajuan projek. Selepas menjalani OPRA, pelajar diminta membuat refleksi diri untuk menilai pengalaman yang mereka perolehi melalui aktiviti ini. Mereka juga diminta menyatakan pelan tindakan mereka dalam jurnal refleksi. Berpandukan kepada teori pembelajaran sosial, makalah ini merungkai kemahiran pekerjaan yang diperolehi seperti kemahiran berkomunikasi, kemahiran bermesyuarat dan keupayaan berfikir secara analitikal. Data kajian diperolehi daripada jurnal refleksi pelajar dan temuduga kumpulan berfokus. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa OPRA mampu meningkatkan kemahiran komunikasi pelajar; memperkukuhkan kemahiran berfikir secara kritikal dan mempertingkatkan keyakinan diri. Dapatan kajian juga membuktikan bahawa OPRA mampu mempertingkatkan kemahiran kritikal pelajar dalam menilai*

*pencapaian dan kemahiran mereka. Implikasi kajian ini menunjukkan kaedah pengajaran yang memfokus kepada latihan bahasa dan komunikasi serta pemupukan kemahiran berkaitan pekerjaan perlu diserap dalam pengajaran untuk membantu graduan menguasai kemahiran tersebut.*

*Kata kunci: Aktiviti Laporan Kemajuan Lisan; kemahiran pekerjaan; pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris; pendidikan tinggi; jurnal refleksi*

## INTRODUCTION

Research on employability in Malaysia has drawn attention to the need for future graduates' to have the ability to communicate well in English (Isarji et al. 2008; Morshidi et al. 2008; Wahiza 2014). A review of literature by Mohamad Shukri et al. (2013) on graduates' employability attributes shows that employers place high importance on qualities such as the ability to speak and write effectively in English, the ability to recognize and analyze problems, and the ability to express ideas confidently and fluently. A study by Abd Hair et al. (2013) discloses that graduates' technical and employability skills are significantly valued by most urban employers. Other qualities such as leadership skills, the ability to work in a team and to think critically are among the attributes that employers seek for when looking for an employee (Jamal et al. 2012; Noor Azina 2011; Mohammad Sattar et al. 2014). Nevertheless, Malaysian graduates are reported as lacking these qualities and this has resulted in unemployment among the graduates (Isarji et al. 2008; Noor Azina 2011; Zaliza & Mohd Safarin 2014).

Academics at Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) have also expressed general concerns about undergraduates' inability to express themselves clearly and to present information in their disciplines effectively despite having impressive ideas (Noor Azina 2011; Wahiza 2014). Similarly, Rosemala (2008) reported that many of the undergraduates did not have a satisfactory level of English proficiency and this affected their performance in their academic disciplines. Other studies also posit that the students' limited English language proficiency has negatively influenced their ability to comprehend and respond to academic tasks at the tertiary level (Ahmad Mazli 2007; Noorizah 2010; Wahiza et al. 2013).

In addition, a review of literature on English language literacy for employability by Wahiza (2012) has established that there is limited study done on English language communication

practices and competencies for employability in a second language context. In particular, looking at the Malaysian context, research and practical solutions on improving communication practices at the workplace for undergraduates' courses in HLIs is still lacking. Given the significant emphasis on using English verbally and in writing required by most international and multinational companies, Rosli and Rohimmi (2009) conducted a study to investigate the relevance of tertiary English language proficiency curriculum to the workplace needs. They discovered that there was a 'gap' between the workplace needs and the pedagogical resources offered in the university curriculum. Employers and stakeholders also have commented that most graduates are unable to (i) present ideas and explain issues verbally and in writing, (ii) write reports, project papers, proposals and minutes of meeting; (iii) negotiate and convey ideas in planned and impromptu situations (iv) participate in group discussions (Ken et al. 2012; Mohammad Sattar et al. 2014).

Correspondingly, Wahiza (2012) investigated the requirements of engineering employees' communication skills in English. One of the criteria that recruiters and employers looked for in the candidates was good communication skills in the English language. Employers in the engineering industry perceived engineers' communication skills as so important that potential employees were measured on their oral communication skills even during recruitment. On the same note, this study also disclosed that almost 50% of communication in the engineering workplace was carried out in English, indicating the importance of communicating in English among professional engineers in multinational companies. Therefore, this denotes that employers perceived communication skills in English as important for both recruitment and promotion. In line with the National Education Philosophy, one of the HLIs' aspirations currently includes the focus to produce future graduates who are "effective communicator,

emotionally intelligent and able to work across cultures while being socially responsible, competitive, resilient and confident” (Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025: 14).

The issues highlighted here bring to the fore the crucial need to offer a course at the university which, while taking place in an academic setting, is designed to equip undergraduates with workplace English language competency and practices, in order to meet their future communication needs after graduation. In this regard, Wee et al. (2016) suggest a paradigm shift, from academic to professional and workplace-related communicative activities in the English language courses, which are authentic, interactive and meaningful to the students. This echoes Normazidah et al.’s (2012) claim that current English language classroom should incorporate meaningful learning environments that encourage critical thinking and innovative culture. Ability to think critically and creatively are necessary given the emphasis on the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills put forward by most international organisations worldwide (Greenstein 2012).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to look at how a workplace-related English language course at tertiary education prepares the future graduates to meet the workplace needs. In particular, this study examines the extent to which a newly-designed activity, Oral Progress Report Activity (OPRA), helps to facilitate students’ work-integrated learning experiences and develop workplace skills.

ORAL PROGRESS REPORT ACTIVITY (OPRA)

Given the significant requirements of English for employability, the Workplace Communication II course was offered to undergraduate students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The main objective of the course was to equip students with both oral and written communication skills to prepare them to perform in various workplace situations. One of the course components was a project work in which the students had to carry out a small scale research on workplace-related issues. Implicit in this project work is the element of work-integrated learning dimension (Martin et al. 2012; Orrell 2011) which incorporates academic knowledge, simulated workplace activities and English language use. Hanstedt (2012) asserts that an integrative learning approach is necessary in response to the needs of the constantly changing workplace. Such an approach encourages students to be deliberative about their explorations of more than just one academic field and to think about how they fit into their own lives, their professional goals and their worldviews.

In this project work the students were required to (1) identify a workplace issue, (2) carry out fieldwork at a selected company, (3) discuss the progress of their project in OPRA, (4) submit a written report on the issue that they have researched on and (5) present their report to the class. Students worked in a group of five to do their project work. Diagram 1 outlines the components involved in the project work.

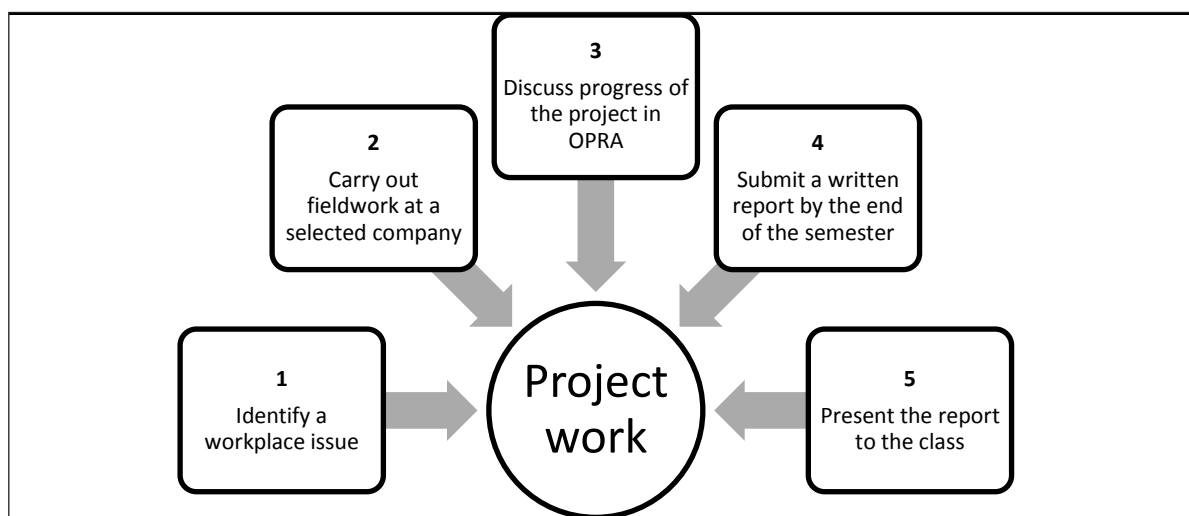


DIAGRAM 1. Components of Project Work



PICTURE 1. Students participating in the OPRA

Oral Progress Report Activity (OPRA) is the third component of the project work which is designed to provide opportunities for the students to explore and use appropriate workplace discourse while practicing communication skills that simulate a workplace setting. OPRA is carried out in a small group meeting-like situation where individual student in a group is required to present the progress of the group project assigned to him or her respectively. One student leads the group discussion while the others report on the progress of the project. Through OPRA, students use English language to discuss issues pertaining to the project, reflect on their actions, and make plans for writing the final report. These skills are reflective of the existing practices in the workplace community. Picture 1 is a photograph of the students participating in OPRA.

Therefore, the study reported in this article sought to find out the extent to which OPRA helps to facilitate students' work-integrated learning experiences and develop professional attributes. It deliberates on the dynamic and constructive workplace skills demonstrated by the undergraduate students through the OPRA.

#### UNDERPINNING THEORIES

Informed by the social theory of learning (Wenger 1998), this article stands on the notion that learning takes place as a consequence of social participation in a learning community. Indeed, the students' participation in the OPRA is seen as a process of being active participants in their social

communities (i.e. workplace) and at the same time, constructing their workplace identities and values. It is expected that by participating in the OPRA and engaging in workplace routines (such as group discussion), the students will be able to learn the workplace discourse, while establishing the values and building on the identity of the workplace community.

Germane to the OPRA is the conception of literacy as a social practice (Baynham & Prinsloo 2009; Street & Lefstein 2007). Within this framework of literacy, English language is seen as a tool to construct meaning, navigate the social world, display identity and accomplish social goals. The focus of language learning through OPRA is on the processes and practices as they are situated in a meaningful activity such as meetings and group discussions at the workplace.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To examine the extent to which OPRA helps to facilitate students' integrated learning experience and develop workplace skills, this research adopts the use of case study approach that gives an in-depth and holistic understanding of the students' lived experiences, perspectives and the actual context of study (Merriam & Tisdell 2016; Yin 2013).

The participants for the study were chosen based on 'purposive sampling' (Punch 2013) or 'purposeful sampling' (Creswell 2015). This strategy allows the researchers to get first hand information and in-depth understanding of the



context and the problem understudied. Thirty students who were in Year Two and Three who enrolled in the Workplace Communication II course were recruited as the research participants. This course is offered as a compulsory English Language course for students, with the intention of preparing students for the communication in the workplace. Prior to doing the OPRA, students were divided into groups of five and introduced to the Project work. They proceeded to the components of the Project work as prescribed earlier in Diagram 1.

The first set of data was collected through the use of focus group interviews (Creswell 2015). Once the project groups have finished their OPRA, these interviews were immediately conducted to obtain thoughts on their experiences in conducting the activity. According to Rajadurai (2011), these thoughts and reactions were authentic and required interaction among the students, as they questioned one another and re-evaluate and their understandings of their recent OPRA experiences. The focus group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In the second phase of data collection, the students were asked to write about their experiences, their perceptions of their own performances and their plans of actions after they conducted the OPRA in their individual reflective journals. This reflection-on-action (Schön 1991) writing is deemed essential to better understand the students' experiences and feelings when performing the OPRA. These journals were very useful as they offer insights on the students' inner thoughts and voices, and renewed understandings which might not be captured through interactions during the focus group interviews. The journals were collected at the end of the semester.

These two sets of data complement each other, and provide a richer insight on the students' perspectives towards the OPRA, and shed light on how OPRA helps them to attain workplace skills. Transcriptions of the focus group interviews and their reflective journals were carefully and repeatedly analyzed. Following the convention in qualitative research design, analyzing these sets of data was done inductively and reiteratively and the outcomes of the data analysis were grouped in the forms of emergent themes and categories (Merriam & Tisdell 2016; Punch, 2013). With the aim to uncover students' perspectives on the OPRA experience and to identify in what sense the activity helped them construct workplace skills, significant

journal entries and excerpts from the interviews that support each theme were extracted. They were evaluated rigorously on whether they were relevant and supportive of the emerging themes and meet the research objectives. Pseudonyms were used for students' whose entries and excerpts were chosen, and quotes from the students were extracted verbatim to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness of the data.

## FINDINGS

The data derived from focus group interviews and student reflective journals revealed that the OPRA has exposed students to a number of workplace skills. The findings show that OPRA has managed to;

1. Enhance students' communication skills in English,
2. Foster critical thinking ability,
3. Introduce students to meeting skills,
4. Promote collaboration skills,
5. Increase students' self-confidence.

### ENHANCE STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH

One of the key workplace skills that are required out of graduates is the ability to communicate effectively in various contexts. Oral communication is central to ensure the success of social workplace conversations, meetings, discussions and presentations. The Malaysian Employment Federation (MEF), as reported by Mohammad Sattar et al. (2014), indicates that new graduates are expected to present ideas clearly during meetings and discussions.

It is observed that the OPRA provides a good opportunity to practice their communication skills needed in the workplace. Through the students' reflective journals, participants expressed that they became aware of the benefits that they have gained from the activity. Najihah noted that she learned "how to enhance my communication skills and how to conduct a meeting and discussion". The same view was also expressed by Lin and Siti.

"The things I've learned during this discussion are the courage and confidence in communicating with each other. Effective communication can provide a positive impact and achieve good results in the discussion." (Lin)

“While performing OPRA, I learnt to upgrade my communication skills and give chance to others to give out their ideas...” (Siti)

These reflections indicate that the OPRA has given them a constructive opportunity to improve their communication skills and thus, train them to communicate better. OPRA has made them aware of the values needed to ensure successful communicative events, such as they have to be confident to express their opinions and at the same time, should give opportunities for others to express themselves.

In addition, throughout the process of preparing for the OPRA, the participants became aware of the elements that shape effective communication. Among them, the importance of practice in ensuring that the communication flow during the OPRA is clear. Amir admitted that he learned that

“... practice makes perfect. It’s okay, if I make mistakes, as long as I am learning new things.”

Similarly, Alia cited that her “communication in English also improves as I and my friends practice for several times”. The participants acknowledged the value of constant practice in ensuring effective communication which they have learnt through doing the OPRA.

Besides highlighting the need for constant practice to ensure effective communication, the students also discovered the importance of being clear and comprehensible. In order for communication to be successful, students became particular about the clarity of the message conveyed during the OPRA. Tan expressed that

“I think I am confident with my answer during the discussion and I speak clearly and my friends do understand what I want to deliver.”

On a similar note, Subashini indicated that what she has learnt from the OPRA is “a way to report the work distributed to us properly and clearly.” The students expressed that in order for the meetings and discussions to be successful, people who are involved need to understand their tasks clearly and ‘report’ the actions or the tasks that they have done.

Another interesting finding is that the participants’ recognition of language as an important tenet of successful communication.

Their reflections showed them as being critical and concerned towards their grammatical errors and vocabulary during the OPRA. Nurul reflected that as she lack practices and are not fully ready, “there’s a lot of grammatical error, lacks of idea and also lacks of vocabulary words”. Similarly, Nani admitted that she “has done a good job and participate well in the discussion...however, there are grammatical errors in my communication”. These reflections indicate the value of language, particularly in the aspects of grammar and word choice, in ensuring that successful communication in the OPRA.

The participants also noted the values of delivery element, especially voice projection, in communication. Tan reflected that

“I believe that, I face some trouble delivering sentences. Many stop to seek words make awkward situation while discussing. I should control my voice intonation”.

His reaction is similar to Muhammad’s, who believed that his performance “wasn’t a good performance as is not conducted formally and the voice projection is not too loud”. Their reflections of their performance during the OPRA point towards their awareness of the voice quality as an important factor that contributes towards the success of the OPRA.

The participants’ reflections of their performance in the OPRA signify two major aspects; the significance of OPRA in helping them to communicate better in the workplace, and their awareness of the different values that contribute towards successful workplace communication. Elements like clarity of information, voice projection, language and constant practice were determined as important values that contribute towards an effective workplace communication.

#### FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY

It is important to note from the findings that the OPRA has helped the students to develop critical thinking, and led them towards self-evaluation. Through the analysis of focus group interviews of the students’ OPRA discussion, it was discovered that the students were critically analysing their performances and highlight aspects which they felt need improvements. This was also mentioned by the students in their reflection as can be seen in the remark by Nani,

“...as I lack practice and am not fully ready, so there’s a lot of error such as grammatical errors, lack of idea and also lack of vocabulary [to use].”

As they were conducting the OPRA, the students were able to critically identify their weaknesses and were subsequently thinking of possible means to overcome their predicaments. The following comment illustrates the case in point:

“...I learned to consider other people’s opinion because I know my weakness. I also think that I need to improve my grammar in English so that I can speak confidently next time.” (Shawal)

OPRA has also prompted the students to reflect what they have done while preparing for the OPRA and justify their actions during the discussion. This also includes implicit examination of their thoughts in regards to the problems that occurred throughout the running of the OPRA. According to Najihah, she learned “how to handle things when it does not go according to plan.” Therefore, as she was appointed as the Project Manager by her group members, she deliberated that it is her obligation to “bring new topics and questions to make [their] discussion long and to keep other members talk.”

Amar pointed out in his reflective journal that the prominent values that he discovered after conducting the OPRA are “problem solving and critical thinking skills.” He further elaborated that the OPRA necessitates him “to figure out topics to discuss” throughout the entire session. Concurrently, Yusri reflected that he needs more practice to prepare well for the OPRA. Evaluating on his own performance after the OPRA, he acknowledged that he needs to “increase the projection of word and pronunciation. Be more serious during a meeting”.

Through the OPRA, the students have exercised critical thinking abilities which include critical and reflective analysis of their individual actions and performances.

#### INTRODUCE WORKPLACE MEETING SKILLS

The OPRA is designed to mirror common but important workplace events, which are meetings and discussions. It exposes the students to the workplace practices of conducting meetings and discussions among the group members .

After the OPRA session, the students became aware that the OPRA is a simulation that reflects a common yet significant workplace event, the meeting. They have managed to understand the concept of meeting in the workplace and grasped the value of the skills needed for this workplace event. Acknowledging the authenticity of OPRA to a real meeting session, and self-reflection, Alan quoted that “It’s like being in a real life of a big company...” Both Lina and Najwa shared similar opinion, stating that they “felt like real employee and attending a meeting in a company that I will work...”. The OPRA, therefore, is a platform for introducing the values of meeting as an important workplace activity.

Through self-reflections, the students admitted to have grasped some of the meeting values and skills that are required in the workplace. One of them is the importance of preparing for meetings in advance, which have been emphasized in many business communication websites. Through the OPRA, the students were exposed to essential meeting practices such as making preparations for the meeting beforehand. Alan reflected that during the OPRA, he has “to prepare what I have to report and list out all notes that I want to say”. Chew, a Project Manager of her group recalled that she has “divided the task between the members. It will be easy for them to know their prospect of work”. Siti who felt that she needs to get ready the tasks that are given to her quoted,

“With all the preparations are made able to help me in discussing all the questions and the development of projects currently implemented. Initial setup is done indirectly able to help me for a smooth discussion will be done”.

Preparation is also important as cited by Nurul, who indicated that “*I keep practising on how to present the progress to our project manager and I did a research regarding the company profile and activities*”. Largely, the students felt that by making preparations for the OPRA would ensure that the meeting would run smoothly.

However, some students discovered that even though they have made preparations prior to the OPRA, they need to be on their toes for changing circumstances. Subashini discovered that to prepare herself for attending a real meeting, she “*needs to be spontaneous and not memorized the text*”. She highlighted that communication in

meetings involves members of meetings to be ready for unstructured and impromptu communication. This notion is supported by Lina, who revealed that through the OPRA, she learned that she had to introduce new topics and “*to make our discussion long and to keep other members talk*” when what they have planned to discuss finished earlier than expected. Hence, even though the students felt that they need to make adequate preparations for the OPRA, they also need to be prepared for changes that require them to think on their feet.

The students have also discovered other workplace skills that are needed for meetings through the OPRA. Chew discovered that in preparing for the OPRA, she has learned how to make good decision, particularly when the meeting did not go according to their plans. Spontaneous decision making made her “*decide on new topics and questions to sustain the group discussion and keep group members talking*”. Similarly, Iskandar reported that having good communication between group members have allowed him to overcome obstacles in doing the project. Through the OPRA, the students were able to exercise the attributes that ensure the success of meetings. Another important value which is remarked by Ramli is as follows:

“I learn to listen to all opinion and be straight to the point in the meeting. I learn not to wasting time and use the time wisely.”

The findings generally point towards the value of OPRA in creating students’ awareness of the elements of a meeting and the significance of the meeting as one of the workplace events.

#### PROMOTE COLLABORATION AMONG MEMBERS

In order to ensure the success of the OPRA, the students had to cooperate with one another. This attribute needed to be developed while preparing for the session, during the meeting and after the session ended. Through OPRA, the students became aware of the value of collaboration, as demonstrated by these statements:

“...without teamwork and good communication skills our group will not be able to complete OPRA.” (Lee)

“I think the most important thing I learn while doing preparation and performing for OPRA is teamwork... we help each other to make sure we prepare and do the best...” (Shawal)

These statements indicated that the students valued teamwork as one of the key skills for the success in meetings and the workplace in general.

Collaboration with group members in ensuring the success of the OPRA is essential because the students felt that they are able to make improvements gained from peer feedback. Najwa indicated that “*I learned to consider others people opinion because from that I can know my weakness*”. She added that by receiving ideas and opinions from group members allowed the group to carry out the project successfully. Tan also pointed out that “*enhancing discussion among group members could minimize miscommunication and give them room to solve problems regarding the project*”. Teamwork among group members is valued as one of the key skills needed to succeed in the OPRA and in completing the project assigned to them.

Besides the demonstration of collaboration through verbal communication, group cooperation was also displayed through the use of body language during the OPRA. This is confirmed by Nadia, who indicated that their communication and teamwork were satisfying since they had body language and eye contact with one another as they were discussing. Body language and signals that are understood by group members aided the group’s communication and signifies the value of teamwork among the students.

#### INCREASE SELF-CONFIDENCE

Another important attribute gained by the students when conducting the OPRA is self-confidence. Being self-confident has apparently enhanced their performance in the activity as reported by Ng, “*This task provides the opportunity for us to develop self-confidence, polish our communication skills*”. Rita also confirmed that she had learned “the courage and confidence in communicating with each other” while carrying out the OPRA. She further commented that “effective communication can provide a positive impact and achieve good results in the discussion.”

Through their experience in conducting in the OPRA and participating in the discussion, the students were able to analyse and reflect on their individual performances. These drew attention to new forms of knowledge that would increase their confidence level and foster their performance in the workplace activity. The following remark by Amar illustrates the case in point;



“...through discussion that provide many useful lessons in myself. This indirectly helped me in preparing myself to face the challenges ahead. Good and proper preparation can help to provide confidence in delivering the information needed in the discussion.”

## DISCUSSION

The findings presented above reveal the dynamic and constructive workplace skills gained by the undergraduate students through their participation in the OPRA. Central to the findings is the development of communication skills in English experienced by the students as a result of their involvement in the activity. This is indeed a salient value that is sought after by most employers as reported in a study by Wahiza (2014). There is a prevailing view among the employers that communication skills is the most crucial skill demanded of prospective employees given the central use of English in the workplace daily practices. In fact, communication skill is highly valued at the workplace, so much so that the employees who are competent in English are normally privileged by their organisations. In addition, the findings suggest that OPRA has helped to provide a meaningful learning experience for the students to conduct and present ideas in small meetings and group discussions. These resonate with the findings in Wahiza (2014) that the reporting skill is essential among the new executives in order to report on the progress on their work to their bosses. In addition, the employers also look for the ability to conduct oral presentations, particularly in presenting proposals in meetings ahead of internal and external counterparts and monthly meetings.

Consistent with the assessment and teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as outlined by Greenstein (2012), the findings depict significant germane skills such as thinking skills (critical thinking), acting (communication and collaboration skills) and living skills (meeting and self-confidence). This clearly shows that the OPRA provides practical and authentic platform for the students to gain 21<sup>st</sup> century professional and workplace learning experience. It is extremely essential for the students to be able to comprehend diverse workplace discourses emerging in various settings such as in the meetings and group presentations. This would enable them to perform their daily tasks efficiently at the workplace.

The findings of this study concur with the notion of learning as an outcome of social participation in the learning community (Wenger 1998). Indeed, the students' participation in the OPRA is seen as a process of being active agents in learning the practices and values of the workplace communities while constructing their own workplace identities. By engaging themselves in the workplace routines, such as small-group meeting just like in OPRA, the students are able to interact dynamically using the language of the workplace community, while establishing various workplace skills that incorporate critical thinking, communication, teamwork and building up their own self-confidence. This coincides with a study done by Norlaila et al. (2016) on integrating project work in language classrooms at a HLI which exhibits a significant intersection between language skills, particularly listening and speaking, and team-working, problem-solving, management and communication.

This study emphasizes the strength of OPRA as a language task that advances on inclusive, learning-by-doing experiences that encourages a meaningful learning. The improvisation of OPRA in the English language classroom intensifies on reflective learning pedagogy that encourages students to become independent and critical language learners, in line with the current trends in language learning. Concurring Hanstedt's (2012) notion, the integrative learning approach applied in the OPRA demonstrates the students' deliberative attempts in exploring the workplace practices while adapting appropriate measures to learn the workplace skills. These are obvious as the students were able to reflect on their individual performances and achievements in OPRA as well as their weaknesses and strengths as illustrated in their written reflections. It is apparent that OPRA has enhanced the students' learning experience and that it has enabled more personalized learning for the students in line with the aim of the Malaysia Education Blueprint shifts since 2015. It is envisaged that the students have embraced the opportunities to develop holistic and balanced individuals to serve the industry and the community at large.

The findings also draw attention to the crucial role of meaningful situated language use in the construction of knowledge and workplace learning opportunities of the students, suggesting that language literacy is highly contextualised.

Language use is situated in specific educational and workplace contexts that are acquired through the complete engagement by the students. The study has shown that the teaching of English literacy lies in making the classroom practices relevant to the current literacy needs. Education in the 21st century necessitates an inclusive pedagogy that looks at students as co-authors and co-producers in knowledge acquisition (Normazidah et al. 2012).

### CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to show the benefits of OPRA as a platform to develop dynamic and constructive workplace skills. By participating in the OPRA, these undergraduates were given a hands-on experience on what it was like to do an oral report and carry out a discussion in a meeting. Through taking part in the OPRA, the students were able to enhance their communication skills, foster critical thinking, engage in collaborations and increase self-confidence. These workplace skills are essentially sought after by employers as stated in most literature.

More importantly, this study has illuminated the emerging values of OPRA which encourages students to become active agents in their own learning and become critical of their own performance and skills. These two values are important especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace as graduates are expected to respond to constant change and adapt to new demands in the workplace. Though this study was carried out involving only a small population and generalizations on the findings can only be made to students with similar background, the findings reported in the study may provide insights into English language programs offered at the university. In conclusion, this study calls for a more concerted effort to address the problem of un-employability among Malaysian graduates, specifically lack of communication skills in English. One approach is by promoting language and communication training that emulates workplace skills as what has been implemented in the OPRA.

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