ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF UNIVERSITY INTERNS FOR EMPLOYABILITY

Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh

ABSTRACT

This study discusses English Language Communicative Competence (ELCC) of university interns during their eight-week internship. The aim of the study is to identify the importance of workplace oral and written communicative tasks from the lens of university interns. Quantitative methodology using an adopted questionnaire was employed among sixty-eight participants selected purposively. The instrument examined the university interns' written and oral language skills in internal and external workplace communication. It also examined the adequacy of university's preparation for the future graduates to manoeuvre their ELCC ability at workplace. Findings obtained from university interns revealed high frequency engagement with written and oral communicative tasks in internal and external workplace contexts in terms of emails, team-based discussion, telephone communication and general workplace writing. Further, tasks such as handling the writing of proposals, manuals and business letters were found to be challenging. The findings also revealed inadequacy of university's training in equipping future graduates with ELCC for improved graduate employability. The issues highlighted require attention of higher education providers to enhance university interns' ELCC. In addition, collaborative input from the industry is also highly encouraged to improve ELCC training of university interns for future employment.

Keywords: employability, English Language Communicative Competence, higher education provider, university interns

INTRODUCTION

Employers expect graduates entering the job market to be well equipped with the required hard and soft skills. Norback and Hardin (2005) and Patil (2005, p.49) drew attention to the fact that the demands and challenges of the workplace are rapidly increasing due to time constraints and globalization. Higher education (HE) providers are given the responsibility to prepare graduates for engagement in the employment market (Heaton, McCracken & Harrison, 2008; Tholen, 2014). According to Wharton and Horrocks, academic milieu is well equipped to measure discipline skills delivery. However, in many cases, the more generic and transferrable skills are considered nebulous and difficult to assess (2015, p.2). It is, therefore, challenging to determine whether these skills have indeed been effectively delivered and cultivated. Among the skills expected of graduates, language English language skills are considerably sought after by employers among graduates as it is the lingua franca of the business sector in Malaysia. Competency in the English language is essential for graduates entering a competitive job market to perform effective and efficient work-based tasks. However, the current scenario in Malaysia indicates that there is a mismatch between the English language communicative competence (ELCC) of graduates entering the job market and employers' expectations.

Research has also indicated that although HE providers or universities continue to develop employability skills, graduates are not considered skilled for present-day work environments (Cumming, 2010; Zainuddin, Pillai, Dumanig & Phillips, 2019). This mismatch of expectations suggests that minimal action has been taken to examine university interns' perspective after they have undergone their internship Program regarding employability skills in the context of ELCC. Accordingly, this study aims to research ELCC tasks that university interns are required to perform and the adequacy of their preparation for their internship. This article begins with a discussion of the internship role and its relevance to the stakeholders involved. Next, the purpose, literature review, and methodology are discussed. The findings section presents the students' viewpoints regarding the internal and external communication activities at the workplace and the adequacy of workplace communication preparation offered by the university. In the final part, a discussion of recommendations, policy implications, and future research directions are presented.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was undertaken to examine university interns' perspective between the occurrence of oral and written communication tasks at the workplace (internal and external) and gauge the adequacy of the university's preparation of interns for ELCC and employability.

RELATED LITERATURE

Internship

An internship is an essential component in preparing graduates for the job markets (To & Lung, 2020). It is also a key component of a scholarly educational plan of HE institutions. O'Leary (2017) argued that the current HE trends show more deliberate preparation of students for the workforce, and this move receives strong support from students and recent graduates. Internships provide students with the opportunity to engage in authentic workplace practices in ways that typically do not occur in a classroom environment (Ambrose & Poklop, 2015). Valo (2000, p. 152) indicated that internship offers students ''a self-ruling, multifaceted setting of learning'', which provide a more successful learning condition than traditional classrooms. Later, Renganathan, Zainal Ambri and Chong (2012) argued that an internship provides opportunities for undergraduates to incorporate work-related experience and depth of understanding into their university education. This can be established through their participation in a monitored and designed professional work in real-world settings. They also indicated that an internship is beneficial for students to upgrade their employability. As such, the possession of "industry work culture" infers that the objectives of the internship programs are met.

In addition, Silva, Lopes, Costa, Seabra, Melo, Brito and Dias (2016) asserted that internship is a practical methodology for bridging theoretical practices and knowledge and improving graduate employability. Their study of Portuguese first-cycle HE Program demonstrated that compulsory internships and shorter internships during studies were significantly related to the employment of graduates six months after completing their studies, and a program that combines two or even more job experiences (e.g., thin sandwich courses)

exceeded those that integrated just one internship, normally at the end of the degree (e.g., thick sandwich courses). Further, Schworm, Cadin, Carobone, Festing, Leon and Muratbekova-Touron (2017) and Sides and Mrvica (2017) indicated that HE providers are increasingly utilizing experiential learning experiences such as internship to expose their students to practical employability skills. Consequently, Pinto and Pereira (2018, p. 457) also highlighted the positive outcomes of participating in an internship while studying as it is *'great to include'* internship in one's resume that will ease securing a job interview and a more significant salary. In the context of the study, the researcher's view on an internship is that it functions as one of the main avenues for enhancing the interns' ELLC. It provides undergraduates with a business-related perspective and understanding apart from the traditional education they received in university. Chen et al. (2018)   reported that the enhanced competency for future employment was found to be significantly associated with internship satisfaction among hospitality students in Taiwan.

Generally, Wilton (2012) stressed that internship would cultivate professional growth and development, offering interns the chance to build up their teamwork skills, communication, and interpersonal skills and gain an awareness of the culture of the workplace. Undergraduates also emphasize the value of developing skills, which they think are transferrable to a work environment. As stressed earlier by Archer and Davision (2008), Branine (2008), Holmes and Miller (2000), and Moreau and Leathwood (2006), industrial experience through the work placement platform is the most appropriate method for developing one's professional skills, soft skills, advancing knowledge and applied skills. Previous research such as those conducted by Knight and York (2002) and Raybould and Sheedy (2005) has shown that undergraduates strongly identify employability skills with the ability to demonstrate aptitude in conducting the tasks. Cole and Tibby (2013) asserted that employability among graduates is a long-lasting cycle that urges students to construct a spectrum of expertise, skills, behaviors, attributes and attitudes which could empower students to be successful, both in employment and throughout their lives. To ensure a successful lifelong learning process, employability also means making parts of employment prospects visible in support of lifelong learning for the students.

Linguistic and Communicative Framework for Employability

Koo (2006, 2007a, 2007b) created a conceptual framework of pluriliteracy. It is confined to around eight literacies that are recognized by changes in the working environment and communication settings. Among them are linguistic proficiency and communicative literacy. Linguistic proficiency as stated by Kubler and Forbes (2004), is labeled as one of the significant traits of employability for students. English is recognized as the world's lingua franca and the international language of business apart from competencies in the utilization of skills and abilities in specific languages, the capacity to use them in suitable settings, such as the ability to demonstrate sustained and convincing verbal and writing arguments pertinently and intelligently; responsiveness to generic conventions and to the formation of speech impacts on communication that involves circumstances, authorship, textual production and expected audience.

In practice, the use of English in the work environment is not the same as in the academic environment. Linguistic skills are determined by two qualities: oral and written interaction in one national language and knowledge of a second and a foreign language that is an international/global language. According to Koo's study among Malaysian employers

(2013), most employers concur that linguistic proficiency is critical to the company and believe that public universities should prepare students to be decidedly ready and prepared for verbal and nonverbal communication. The employers likewise communicated their eagerness to re-train their graduate employees if the requirements are not met. In the context of Australia, an investigation on the effect of English Language Proficiency and workplace preparedness of tertiary international students (Arkoudis, Hawthorne, Baik, O'Loughlin, Hawthorne, Leach & Bexley, 2009) highlighted the importance of both written and oral communication skills. The study recommended that HE institutions, usually in the form of one-off seminars, have momentary programs.

English Language Communicative Competence (ELCC)

ELCC requirement is competency in written as well as oral communication. The types of written communication activities or tasks that interns are often engaged are translation work, writing reports, e-mails, formal business letters, internal memorandum, proposals, and manuals. Secondly, oral communication activities or tasks involve making presentations to staff and customers at the workplace, meetings, formal/informal discussions, video conferencing and telephone conversations. The control of the formal and functional properties of language, such as the ability to communicate and comprehend meaning precisely, smoothly, and suitably as per setting, is important for successful communication. Other criteria of ELCC involve competence in grammar, sociolinguistics, discourse, and strategic competence. The competencies include grammatical competence (well-formed language skills), sociolinguistic competence (appropriation of language skills), discourse competence (knowledge on associations between articulations in a text to form a meaningful whole), and strategic competence (the ability to make up for flawed language knowledge) (Canale & Swain, 1980).

The growth of the English language as a global and common world language has increased the demand for language proficiency in the workplace in the 21st century. Employers' expectations have had a tremendous impact on prospective graduates, not only to acquire professional and specialized knowledge but to also be furnished with relevant soft skills for successful workplace communication purposes (Patil, 2005, p. 50). Employers' concerns are reflected in communication studies such as studies conducted by Artemewa (2008) and Schnell (2006), with resound requirement for prospective graduates to be technically competent. In other words, they must be equipped to always be competitive and marketable in the business, with technical (hard) skills and professional (soft) skills competence. Ziegler (2007) added that soft skills incorporate communication skills, problem-solving skills, presentation skills, creativity, project management skills, people's skills, and teamwork. Workplace communication studies (Thomas, 2007; Norback & Hardin, 2005; Amare & Brammer, 2005; Artemewa, 2005) found dissimilarity between industry and academia in the requirements of communication skills, inadequate educational materials, and lack of clear examples from employers. In the world of business, Thomas (2007) reiterated, "it does seem more crucial than ever that scholars try to overcome these problems by working with practitioners and organizations" (2007, p. 284).

English for Professionals' Internship

The internship in the context of this study is designed for English for Professionals (EfP) degree program students from a particular faculty of a university in Malaysia. It is compulsory for undergraduate students in various academic degree programs in this university to undergo internship according to various time lengths before completing their studies. The 8-week internship requirement is set for the EfP undergraduates who have completed their second year of study at the university and are slated to proceed into their final year before joining the employment market. The internship is related to their future career choices in selected organizations. EfP undergraduates are encouraged to do their internship in whichever organization that is relevant and related to their future career choices. These interns are required to utilize the internship opportunity to acquire experiences in skills, for example, management and leadership, language, critical thinking, and interpersonal. At the end of the training program, students should be able to compose and submit a report on their internship program consisting of the company/organization's background, internship experience, work situation/system problems and issues, and recommendations for improvement/change. Four-credit units are awarded to the students after the completion of the internship.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This quantitative design employed a questionnaire survey method for data collection purpose. The participants were requested to comment on written and oral communication practices in internal and external workplace settings and the adequacy of university preparation of ELCC at the end of their internship.

Research Instrument

A quantitative approach was used in this study to obtain data about the students' ELCC practices at work and their readiness for work-based tasks. The questionnaire comprised 45 items (adopted from Bhattacharyya, Shahrina & Rohani, 2009) and it consists of four sections that include the demographics of the students and details about the industry, internal workplace written and oral communication activities, external workplace written and oral communication activities and the adequacy of university preparation for communication activities in the workplace.

Sampling and Data Collection

The purposively selected participants are 68 undergraduates of an English for Professionals (EfP) degree program from a university in Malaysia. They completed their 2-month internship at the workplaces relevant to their discipline. The participants were invited to voluntarily participate in the study and complete the survey immediately after completing their 2-month internship. Informed consent forms were provided and collected to verify voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

SPSS 18.0 was used for the analysis of data. Descriptive statistics of the sample were applied to analyze the data. Students' perspective on (1) internal workplace communication activities (written communication and oral communication skills); (2) external workplace communication activities (written communication and oral communication skills) and (3) adequacy of university preparation for workplace communication (written communication and oral communication skills) were analyzed.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study were based on the responses provided by 68 participants between the ages of 20 and 28 years. Among the respondents, 54 of them were between the ages of 21 and 22 years old. Forty-five of the respondents were females, while the remaining 23 were males. Sixty-four of the participants were Malaysian, while 4 participants were from different countries, namely Indonesia, India, and China. For internship placement, the majority of the participants were in education (36.8%) and services (25%), followed by manufacturing, hospitality, entertainment and others (administration, agricultural, construction, insurance, non-governmental organization, publishing house, research and tourism (25%).

Research Question 1

What are the internal workplace communication activities practiced in the industry?

Internal Written Communication

Table 1: Frequency of internal written communication activities practiced in the industry

Task	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all
Business letters	11	11	15	10	21
E-mail	36	8	16	5	5
Internal memorandum	8	11	20	17	12
Proposals	7	9	16	14	22
Reports	18	23	12	9	6
Set of Instructions/Manual	16	14	14	11	13
General writing	33	23	10	1	1

Based on Table 1, the highest mean (3.51) is for writing proposals for internal written communication activities in the workplace. This means that writing a proposal is the most rarely occurring activity compared to other tasks. Having said that, the lowest mean is 1.74, which is the general writing task. This conveys that a general writing task is very often performed in the internal workplace as a written communication activity. In order to further support the data, Keane and Gibson (1999) stated that writing is a fundamental day-to-day routine activity and occurs on a regular basis in communication with internal staff.

The findings also suggest the commonality of using e-mails for communication within the organization. It is a form of instant feedback between staff in the organization. As suggested by Amare and Brammer (2005), e-mail messages are generally utilized for "reducing the

requirement for verbal communication at workplace. Besides, Skovholt (2006), further supported the same elevated level of reliance on e-mails, mostly as a focal device for communication at the workplace. Proposal and internal memorandum were minimally used in companies. The findings display a mismatch with earlier research (Gupta & Ervin, 1997; Keane & Gibson, 1999) that positioned memos as one of the three major writing assignments.

Internal Oral Communication

Table 2: Frequency of internal oral communication activities practiced in the industry

Task	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all
Give formal presentations	4	7	27	16	14
Participate in meetings	23	20	14	5	6
Participate in non-technical discussions	26	27	7	6	2
Oral communication in teams	34	21	10	1	2
Lead discussions	5	13	17	21	12
Integrate and communicate technical knowledge in discussion	15	19	18	10	6
Telephone conversation	30	11	13	6	8
Conduct briefing	6	5	21	17	19

The highest mean (3.56), according to Table 2, for the internal oral communication activities at the workplace is conducting briefings. It suggests that the task of conducting briefing is the activity that rarely occurs when compared to other tasks. The lowest mean is 1.76, participating in oral communication in teams. This indicates that oral communication task in teams is very often applied as an oral communication activity in the internal workplace. The interns' feedback suggests that the organizations involved emphasize the importance of oral communication in teams, communication via telephone with other staff, participation in discussions, and meetings. This finding also echoes similar views of past studies, which reiterate that graduates require competency in oral communication skills to ensure the spirit of collegiality and contribute to the success of the organization.

Nevertheless, briefings are not practiced at all or rarely practiced. Although briefings are not a common task that the interns need to handle, the nature of the briefings should still be known to them. Hovde (2005) stated that they would, in the long run, have further involvement in the corporate sector (Thomas, 2007). The results of the study on the internal communication within the workplace show some commonalities and dissimilarities to previous studies on written and oral communication practices.

Research Question 2

What are the external workplace communication activities practiced in the industry?

External Written Communication

Table 3: Frequency of external written communication activities practiced in the industry

Task	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all
Business letters	12	9	10	14	23
E-mail	21	13	10	10	14

Internal memorandum	3	4	11	22	28
Proposals	3	8	16	11	30
Reports	5	11	17	15	20
Set of Instructions / Manual	7	16	12	10	23
General writing	18	17	19	7	7

Table 3 presents that the highest mean (4.00) is recorded for writing an internal memorandum in the external workplace communication activities. This indicates that writing an internal memorandum task is the most rarely done activity compared to other tasks. At the same time, the lowest mean (2.53) is for general writing. This shows that general writing is a form of written communication activity that is most often applied in the external workplace. This finding is similar to internal written communication skills, which emphasizes the general writing task. Further, e-mails are also prioritized as a mode of communication within the organization's external community. Thomas (2007) indicated that e-mails reflect the speed of conducting business today and it eases global communication due to their asynchronous nature and multiple recipients' mailing list characteristics.

External Oral Communication

Table 4: Frequency of external oral communication activities practiced in the industry

Task	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all
Give formal presentations	4	3	17	15	29
Participate in meetings	9	13	20	10	16
Oral communication in teams	10	20	16	8	14
Lead discussions	5	5	10	26	22
Integrate and communicate technical knowledge in discussion	8	16	10	16	18
Telephone conversation	24	16	7	5	16
Conduct briefing	3	9	10	19	27

In accordance with Table 4, the highest mean (3.91) is recorded for the task of giving formal presentations in external workplace communication. This means that formal presentation is the rarest activity compared to other tasks. Meanwhile, the lowest mean (2.60) is for telephone conversation. This means that telephone conversation tasks are very often used as an oral communication activity in the external workplace. External oral communication such as telephone conversations, oral communication in teams, and participation in meetings are activities that most interns are engaged in. The activities that the interns are least engaged in are giving formal presentations, conducting briefings, and leading discussions. It is assumed that as undergraduates, the interns are yet to be given the opportunity to lead presentations and discussions as well as conduct briefings. They are only allowed to assist or observe.

The external communication practices within the workplace indicate specified differences and similarities with previous research published on verbal and nonverbal communication practices in organizations. Meetings are vital workplace practices as "work environment problems can be pondered with each other in a typical meeting spot" (Dickson & Hargie, 1999, p. 14). Attention to meetings is considered a significant aspect of workplace practice as it enables members of the team to assemble and deliberate collectively prior to decision-making.

Research Question 3

Adequacy of University Preparation for Workplace Communication

Table 5: Adequacy of written communication

Task	Very well	Well	Average	Poor	Very poor
Business letters	16	17	31	4	0
E-mail	31	27	10	0	0
Internal memorandum	13	30	21	3	1
Proposals	11	21	28	7	1
Reports	26	23	17	2	0
Set of Instructions / Manual	12	22	29	4	1
General writing	36	25	7	0	0

This section reports the findings regarding the adequacy of university preparation for workplace written communication during the internship. With a mean of 2.50, the interns are ill-prepared for writing proposals at the workplace. Interns indicated they are very well prepared for general writing with a mean of 1.57. This means that general writing tasks are much emphasized in their education and are well prepared for general writing for written workplace communication. The interns indicated that they are also adequately prepared for writing e-mails, reports, and internal memorandum. As for written communicative skills, they are also least prepared for writing manuals and business letters. The majority of the interns also indicate that they are averagely trained to write business letters, set of instructions/manuals, and proposals.

The above result is consistent with studies on workplace communication (Norback & Hardin, 2005) that express a need for classroom activities to embrace real work opportunities to help ease the transition from university to work and also "engaging students with clear suggestions to improve work efficiency as professional communicators" (Nelson, 2003 p.274). The feedback obtained recommended the need for conceivable thought on how to establish the existing program to meet the job demands. Additionally, this feedback is also consistent with previous research studies on the communication gap (Norback & Hardin, 2005), which uncovers that students ought to be prepared in classroom communication courses using real communication instruction because it empowers students to "recognize the relevance quickly" and to "be better prepared to adapt to the communication skills learned in class to their work" (p. 415).

Table 6: Adequacy of oral communication

Task	Very well	Well	Average	Poor	Very poor
Give formal presentations	39	19	8	2	0
Participate in meetings	23	24	19	2	0
Participate in non-technical discussions	22	28	17	1	0
Oral communication in teams	32	23	12	1	0
Lead discussions	23	25	17	3	0
Integrate and communicate technical knowledge in discussion	14	30	19	4	1
Telephone conversation	15	28	15	10	0
Conduct briefing	19	19	28	1	1

This section discusses the adequacy of university preparation for workplace oral communication during the internship. The highest mean (2.29) for telephone conversation indicates that it is the most rarely taught skill in comparison to other skills. The lowest mean (1.60) for the adequacy of university preparation is giving formal presentations. This shows that sufficient practice and exposure is provided for oral presentations. Regarding oral communication in teams, most interns also indicated well-preparedness. Apart from that, the interns also demonstrated communicative skills such as participating in meetings, leading discussions, and participating in non-technical discussions. This indicates that the interns were well prepared through the EfP degree Program to perform such tasks. The positive intern responses might be connected to sufficient and comprehensive language courses exposure at university level. There are still possibilities to enhance the EfP Degree Program to meet the current demands of workplace communication skills, as interns have indicated that they still need more preparation to integrate and communicate technical knowledge in discussions and conducting briefings.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this research reflect the importance of understanding the requirement of workplace communication activities from the perspective of interns. This will help to decrease the "borderlines and promote closer collaboration among both industries and universities" (Vest, Long, Thomas, & Palmquist, 1995 p. 12). A glance at the existing research on communication (McKay, 2007; Paretii & Burguyone, 2005; Schnell, 2006; Thomas, 2007) demonstrate a debate of different perspectives on communication in the workplace like the significance of communication skills in the working environment, the integration of communication skills in the workplace, differences among the academicians, the needs of industry and communication, and difficulties of professionals. The findings of this study concur with the general findings by Muhammad Sabri, Taufik and Saiful (2016) that indicated internship training has essentially improved Malaysian undergraduates' soft skills and increased their workplace literacy and well-being.

Communication skills, according to Levitt (2001), can be seen as an important tool or ability which is used by all levels of the workforce in almost any company. Furthermore, the findings of this study also asserted by Hee and Zainal (2018) that the importance of oral and written communication skills assessment, considering that the fundamental role of languages and skills in creating an efficient and effective workplace. There is a greater demand for graduates to be equipped with ELCC, and a greater need for more effective, life-changing approaches in preparing undergraduates for language competence in the workplace. As mentioned by Clarke (2018) and Jackson and Collings (2018), work-integrated learning (or work-based learning) strategy, in which employability skills and experiences are inserted into the curricula of the course to effectively prepare students for the workplace can improve ELCC.

The significance of communication skills as a tool of communication is perceived and recognized by stakeholders, both from the company and education sectors as an irreplaceable aptitude that students should be prepared within the workplace for future career demands. Besides, learners must also be assisted in understanding the need for and significance of learning communication skills. This finding is further supported by Perinpasingam, Arumugam,Thayalan and Manian (2015) in their research among Malaysian architect interns that indicate the need of more practice on spoken and written discourse. Bharathi (2016)

proposed introducing English as a subject for specific purposes, as it can offer the learners better qualification, enhance their job potential, and increase their employability by and large. Self-introduction, group discussion, presentations, and quizzes can be incorporated into the evaluation and assessment. It is likewise concluded that English, which is the wellspring of language skills, encourages and improves other skills required such as soft skills, presentation skills and, most importantly, communication skills. As such, a more significant role of the industry in curriculum designs must be enhanced to a different level.

Employers should also play a role as co-designers of the curricula, learning activities, and assessments by being involved in decision-making as opposed to just being the supervisors of students in the workplace (Arkoudis, Baik, Bexley & Doughney, 2014). Further, Zainuddin, et al. (2019) stressed a more structured feedback for student preparedness to ease their transition from campus to career. Like any educational intervention, employer engagement should be pedagogically driven. Curricular or modules, which address employability issues, could be included. Employers' input in the design of the curriculum is crucial to encourage students' readiness to enter the workforce with high language competence and communication skills, parallel to the employability requirements. At the same, ELCC will also improve employee engagement as postulated Norcahyo, Della, Irawan and Ronaldy (2018) to be crucial for the success of an organization. Graduate training components across syllabuses can also be introduced to build up adaptable skills for the students' future employment and assist them by grasping workplace experience. Such syllabuses offer perceptual educational experiences that are of advantage to the students and ensure future job opportunities (Guile & Lahiff, 2013). Most importantly, for English courses, planners of language courses must concentrate on modifying the current English teaching curriculum to provide student learners with an increased opportunity to be competent in English.

Such involvement will have the potential to stimulate innovation in teaching and learning and ensure the application and relevancy of the subjects taught in HE institutions. A shift from a supply-driven to demand-driven education model is necessary to cope with the graduate mismatch issue in terms of ELCC. Therefore, employers must develop close relationships with the universities to enhance students' capabilities, as proposed by Herbert, Rothwell, Glover, and Lambert (2020). Requesting for a longer internship period can also be suggested by the employers to improve interns' ELCC at the workplace. In fact, companies have proposed a more extended period of training for graduates to conquer this issue (Lie, Pang, & Mansur, 2008). Requesting for a more extended internship period may also benefit students in terms of their readiness to pursue a real career in the future.

Universities should also expose the students to more opportunities to develop connections between the classroom and workplace through case studies, problem-based and experiential learning. As indicated by Zehr and Korte (2020), one way is to provide a pre-internship course that teaches students to regularly reflect on their experiences and what they have learned. A pre-internship course will also help them consider whether the workplace tasks relate to their prior learning experience. At the same, the students will be able to reflect on their ability to interact effectively with people from other backgrounds and cultures, considering various ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. This experience is vital in the globalized world, which potentially allows the students to expand their professional careers (Pardo-Garcia & Barac, 2020)*.* Rameez (2019) indicated that learner-centered teaching practice in the classroom could invert the lack of English proficiency of faculty students, increase their self-confidence through ELCC and start preparing them for future

competitiveness in the job market as well as increase their job prospects. Instruction in English language and excellent communication skills have always been critical in achieving ELCC. In the globalization era, the role of good communication is unquestionable, as it empowers personal and professional relations to be established and maintained effectively (Bharathi, 2016). Interns with improved ELCC will be more equipped to contribute to the workforce of the 21st century once they are employable and employed.

REFERENCES

Amare, N. & Brammer, C. (2005). Perceptions of Memo Quality: A Case Study of Engineering Practitioners, Professors, and Students. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, 35*(2), 179-190.

Ambrose, S.A. & Poklop, L. (2015). Do students really learn from experience? Change, No. January/February, 54-61.

Archer, W. & Davison, J. (2008). Graduate employability: What do employers think and want? *The Council for Industry and Higher Education*. Retrieved June 1, 2020 from http://www.cihe-uk.com

Arkoudis, S., Baik, C., Bexley, E., & Doughney, L. (2014). *English Language Proficiency and Employability Framework for Australian Higher Education.* Melbourne Centre for Study of Higher Education.

Arkoudis, S., Hawthorne, L., Baik, C., O'Loughlin, K., Hawthorne, G., Leach, D. & Bexley, E. (2009). *The Impact of English Language Proficiency and Workplace Readiness on the Employment Outcomes of Tertiary International Students.* Canberra: DEEWR.

Artemeva, N. (2008). Toward a Unified Social Theory of Genre Learning. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 22(2), 160-185.

Bharathi, A. V. (2016). Communication Skills–Core of Employability Skills: Issues & Concerns. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, *6*(4). https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v6i4.359

Bhattacharyya, E., Nordin, S., & Salleh, R. (2009, Feb. 4-6). *Internship Students' Workplace Communication Skills: Workplace Practices and University Preparation*. Conference for Industry and Education Collaboration, Orlando, Florida.

Branine, M. (2008). Graduate recruitment and selection in the UK. A study of recent changes in methods and expectations. *Career Development International, 13*(6), 497-513.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied linguistics*, *1*(1), 1-47.

Chen, T.L., Shen, C.C. & Gosling, M. (2018). Does employability increase with internship satisfaction? Enhanced employability and internship satisfaction in a hospitality program. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education, 22*, 88-99.

Clarke, M. (2018). Rethinking graduate employability: The role of capital, individual attributes and context. *Studies in Higher Education, 43*(11), 1923–1937.

Cole, D. & Tibby, M. (2013). *Defining and developing your approach to employability: A framework for higher education institutions*. Heslington: The Higher Education Academy.

Cumming, J. (2010). Contextualised performance: *Reframing the skills debate in Research education. Studies in Higher Education, 35*(4), 405-419.

Dickson, D. A. & Hargie Owen, D. W. (1999). Cross-Community in the Northern Ireland Workplace: A Scoping Study. *A Report on Research Funded by the Central Community Relations Unit*, 1-32.

Guile, D., & Lahiff, A. (2013). *Internship: Conventional wisdom, models & recommendations.* London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Gupta, V. S., & Ervin E. T. (1997). Assessment of Workplace Writing and Incorporation into

Curriculum. *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, *13*(2), 1-12.

Heaton, N., McCracken, M., & Harrison, J. (2008). Graduate recruitment and development: Sector influence on a local market/regional economy. *Education +Training*, *50*(4), 276–288. https://doi.org/10.1108/00400910810880524.

Hee, S, C, & Zainal, A. Z. (2018). Analysing the English Communication Needs of Service Technicians in the Pest Control Industry. *PERTANIKA Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 26*(2), 1079-1096.

Herbert, I., Rothwell, A., Glover, J.L., & Lambert, S.A. (2020). Graduate Employability, Employment Prospects and Work-Readiness in the Changing Field of Professional Work. *The International Journal of Management Education, 18*(2).

Holmes, A. & Miller, S. (2000). A Case for Advanced Skills and Employability in HE. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 52*(4), 653-664.

Hovde, M. R. (2005). Preparing Students for Global Engineering Workplace Communication. *American Society for Engineering Education*. IL/IN Sectional Conference, Session C-T-3-1, 1-8.

Jackson, D., & Collings, D. (2018). The influence of Work-Integrated Learning and paid work during studies on graduate employment and underemployment. *Higher Education, 76*(3), 403–425.

Keane A., & Gibson, I. (1999). Communication Trends in Engineering Firms: Implications for Undergraduate Engineering Course. *International Journal Engineering Education, 15*(2), 115-121.

Knight, P. T. & Yorke, M. (2002). Employability through the curriculum. *Tertiary Education and Management,* 8(4), 261-276.

Koo, Y.L. (2006). Exploring Reflexive Puriliteracy as theory and practice in multilingual/cultural contexts. *3L Journal of Language Teaching, Linguistics and Literature,* 11, 79-98.

Koo, Y.L. (2007a). Mindful PluriLiteracy (PL) For Multilingual Learners: Sustaining Diverse Cultures in Language and Literacy Education. In Ambigapathy Pandian, Koo Yew Lie & Peter Kell. (Eds.), *Innovation and Intervention in ELT: Pathways and Practices (*pp. 26 – 45). Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia Press.

Koo, Y.L. (2007b). The pluralist literacies of Malaysian Chinese learners in Higher Education. In P. Kell & G. Vogl. (Eds.), *Higher Education in the Asia Pacific: Challenges for the future (*pp. 178 –201. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.

Kubler, B., & Forbes, P. (2004). *Student Employability Profiles Engineering. Enhancing Student Employability.* Coordination Team (ESECT), the Higher Education Academy.

Levitt, S. R. (2001). Communication Literacy for 21st Century Engineering Education in *Proceedings of the 2001 American Society for Engineering Education Annual & Exposition*, (pp.1-8).

McKay, J. (2007). Business News: Employers complain about communication skills. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Retrieved June 1, 2020, from http://www.post-gazette.com.

Moreau, M. P. & Leathwood, C. (2006). Graduates' employment and the discourse employability: A critical analysis. *Journal of Education and Work*, *19*(4), 305- 324.

Muhammad Sabri, S., Taufik, I., & Saiful, A. (2016). An Insight into Internship Program for Undergraduate Arabic Language Learners in Malaysia. *The Online Journal of IslamicStudy, 4*(1), 28-37.

Nelson, S. (2003). Engineering and Technology Student Perceptions of Collaborative Writing Practices. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *46*(4), 265-275.

Norback, J. S. & Hardin, J.R. (2005). Integrating Workforce Communication into Senior Design. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 48*(4), 413-426.

Norcahyo, R., Della, P., Irawan, D.A., & Ronaldy, J. (2018). How Organisational Culture, Transformational Leadership, and Job Characteristics Affect Employee Engagement at PT XYZ. *PERTANIKA Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 26*(T), 1-12.

O'Leary, S. (2017). Graduates' experiences of, and attitudes towards, the inclusion of employability-related support in undergraduate degree programmes: trends and variations by subject

discipline and gender. *Journal of Education and Work, 30* No. 1, 84-105, doi: 10.1080/13639080.2015.1122181.

Pardo-Garcia, C., & Barac, M. (2020). Promoting employability in higher education: A case study on boosting entrepreneurship skills. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *12*(10), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.3390/SU12104004

Paretti, M. C. & Burgoyne, C. B. (2005). Work in Progress – An Integrated Engineering Communications Curriculum for the 21st Century. *IEEE Xplore, F3F*, 5-6.

Patil, A.S. (2005). Global Engineering Criteria for the Development of the Global Engineering Profession. *World Transactions on Engineering and Technology Education, UICEE*, 1-4.

Perinpasingam, P.T., Arumugam, N., Thayalan, X. & Maniam, M. (2015). Needs Analysis on the Importance of English Language Skills for Workplace: Trainee Architects. *International Review of Basic and Applied Sciences, 10*, 129-137.

Pinto, L. H., & Pereira, P. C. (2018). I wish to do an internship (abroad)': investigating the perceived employability of domestic and international business internships. *Higher Education*, *78*(3), 443–461. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0351-1

Rameez, A. (2019). English Language Proficiency and Employability of University Students: A Sociological Study of Undergraduates at the Faculty of Arts and Culture South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL). *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *9*(2), 199. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n2p199

Raybould, J., & Sheedy, V. (2005). Are graduates equipped with the right skills in the employability stakes*? Industrial and Commercial Training*, 37(5), 259–263.

Renganathan, S., Karim, Z. A. B. A., & Li, C. S. (2012). Students' perception of industrial internship programme. *Education and Training*, *54*(23), 180-191. https://doi.org/10.1108/00400911211210288

Schnell, L. M. (2006), "Work in Progress: Impacting Global Engineering Education For New College Graduates", *IEEE,* S1C, 18-19.

Schworm, S. K., Cadin, L., Carbone, V., Festing, M., Leon, E., & Muratbekova-Touron, M. (2017). The impact of international business education on career success - Evidence from Europe. *European Management Journal*, 35*(4)*, 493-504.

Shukla, D. (2012). Employability Skill among Professionals–Chagrin of HR Executives in Indian Labor Market: A Study on Engineering Graduates of Bhopal City. *VSRD International Journal of Business and Management Research*, *2*.

Sides, C. & Mrvica, A. (2017). *Internships: Theory and Practice,* Routledge, New York, NY.

Silva, P., Lopes, B., Costa, M., Seabra, D., Melo, A. I., Brito, E., & Dias, G. P. (2016). Stairway to employment? Internships in higher education" *Higher Education*, *72*(6), 703 - 721. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9903-9

Skovholt, K. (2006). Email Copies in Workplace Interaction. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, *12*(1), pp. 1-25.

Teichler, U. (2009). *Higher education and the world of work: Conceptual frameworks, comparative perspectives and empirical findings*. The Netherlands: Sense.

Tholen, G. (2014). Graduate employability and educational context: a comparison between Great Britain and the Netherlands. *British Educational Research Journal*, *40*(1), 1-17.

Thomas, G. F. (2007). How Can We Make Our Research More Relevant? Bridging the Gap between Workplace Changes and Business Communication Research. *Journal of Business Communication*, *44*(3), 1-15.

To, W.M. & Lung, J.W.Y. (2020). Factors influencing internship satisfaction among Chinese students. Education + Training, *62* (No. 5) 543-558. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-01-2020-0023

Valo, M. (2000). Experiencing work as a communications professional: Students' reflections on their off-campus work practice. *Higher Education*, *39*(2), 151-179.

Vest, D., Long, M., Thomas, L., & Palmquist, P. (1995). Relating Communication Training to Workplace Requirements: The Perspective of New Engineers. *IEEE Transactions on*

Professional Communication, *38*(1), 11-17.

Wharton, C. Y., & Horrocks, J. (2015). Students' perceptions of employability within their degree programme: Highlighting the disparity between what academics believe is included and the student experience. *International Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education*, *March*, 10. Retrieved Octber 1, 2020, from http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/pages/docdetail/docs/paper/students-perceptions-of-employability-within-their-degree-programme-highlighting-the-disparity-between-what-academics-believe-is-included-and-the-student-experience

Wilton, N. (2012). The impact of work placements on skills development and career outcomes for business and management graduates. *Studies in Higher Education, 37*(5), 603–620.

Zainuddin, S.Z.B., Pillai, S., Dumanig, F.P. & Phillip, A. (2019). English language and graduate employability. *Education + Training, 61*(No. 1) 79-93. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-06-2017-0089.

Zehr, S.M. & Korte, R. (2020). Student internship experiences: learning about the Workplace. Education + *Training, 62*(3), 311-324.

Ziegler, R. (2007). Student Perception of "soft" skills in Mechanical Engineering. *ICEE, 1-4.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MANJET KAUR MEHAR SINGH
School of Languages, Literacies and Translation,
Universiti Sains Malaysia.
manjeet@usm.my