

**A MALAYSIAN PROFESSIONAL
COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH
FRAMEWORK FOR ENGLISH FOR
OCCUPATIONAL PURPOSES COURSES**

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Abstract

Malaysian employers have considerable reservations when it comes to graduates' employability skills, particularly their flawed English language competence. Given the challenges faced by higher education institutions in Malaysia to match employers' requirements, there is a need to initiate holistic and comprehensive research on the curriculum practices of current English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) courses. This study sought to better comprehend employers' perspectives, expectations and practices in dealing with the English language demands of the workplace environment. The requirements demanded by Malaysian employers will determine the key definition of professional communication skills for successful workplace functions.

The aim of this study was twofold. Firstly, it intended to define Professional Communication Skills (PCS) by looking at the needs and requirements of Malaysian stakeholders, namely employers, the government and academia. This component explores the requirements, suggestions as well as common practices in relation to English language communication carried out at the workplace in the public and private sectors in Malaysia as voiced by the stakeholders. These valuable facts will help to fulfil the fundamental objective of this study, which is to determine the key definition of professional communication skills identified by Malaysian stakeholders for successful workplace functions. A clearly defined Professional Communication Skills Framework in English is aimed for at the end of this study. Secondly, it also aims to produce an informed, impartial and highly valid PCS framework for English by having the stakeholders thoroughly involved in creating meaning and amending the components within the framework during the validation stage of the study. Additionally, in order to make sure that the framework is not only valid but also achievable, a few experts in the field of teaching English in higher education have looked through the framework thoroughly.

This qualitative study sits within the interpretivist paradigm, where data were primarily drawn from in-depth interviews with 24 respondents in the following subgroups: 1) human resource managers from key multi-national industries (10 respondents); 2) government executives who recruit entry-level employees for public sector (4 respondents) and; 3) EOP instructors and HE liaison officers for industrial training (10 respondents). The data were subjected to rigorous deductive and iterative analysis in which soft systems methodology (SSM) was applied. To assure the rigour, integrity and legitimacy of the research process and its worth, trustworthiness criteria were applied all the way through the study.

Key findings of the study centre on the complexities of graduates' English language workplace literacies, where it was discovered that the balance of breadth and depth of communicative competence should be embedded throughout the system of education, as early as in pre-primary education. Contrary to expectations, the findings illustrate that graduates' personal attributes were rated more important than communicating fluently in the English language. Stakeholders compellingly proposed that these attributes should be stressed during the teaching and learning process in HE institutions and observable measures should be designed to assess the graduates' personal attributes that are desired by stakeholders. The findings also stress the dire need to put emphasis on fluency over accuracy in the HE curriculum.

This study has yielded findings that make an original contribution to both the theory and practice of English language literacies since it adds to the broader view of workplace literacies by unveiling the requirements for English language used in a professional setting situated in a Malaysian context. This study has provided conclusive evidence by documenting Malaysian stakeholders' requirements regarding the workplace literacies of graduates, scrutinising the findings and developing a practical PCS framework for English, using a Communication Competence Model (Morealle, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007) as its point of departure. These outcomes are especially beneficial for informing policy makers'

agendas in producing competent graduates for the future local and global workforce.

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In the name of ALLAH, the most gracious, the most merciful;

‘Thank you Allah for showering me with patience, motivation and determination in completing this remarkable experience.’

The long journey to the finish line is dappled with unexpected events of ordinary and extraordinary happenings. The happiest events involve my family and their support, teaching, and belief in me to complete this audacious journey as well as the risky birth of my twin boys. My goal for this study never changed. It was and is to provide my students the skills they need to effectively communicate with employers, clients and others in their lives.

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Dedication

To my compassionate significant half: Dr Hj Mohd Fadzil Mohd Akhir;

“Thank you, Abang for the support and sacrifices you have made throughout this journey; it can never be measured or repaid; but be assured that it will never be forgotten. This journey would never be as pleasant and rewarding without your endless love and support. I love you.”

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgement	v
Dedication.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Tables	xii
List of Figures.....	xiv
Abbreviations.....	xv
CHAPTER 1	
Introduction.....	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the research.....	2
1.2 Statement of the Problem	5
1.3 Research gap.....	7
1.4 Research aims.....	9
1.5 Research questions	10
1.6 Significance of the research.....	11
1.7 Scope of the Research	13
1.8 Operational definitions of terms	16
1.9 Conclusion.....	17
CHAPTER 2	
Review of Literature	18
2.0 Introduction	18
2.1 Locating the key concepts in the study.....	19
2.1.1 The Communicative Competence Model (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007) 19	
2.1.2 English Literacy in employability.....	24
2.2 Malaysian language education policy	26
2.2.1 English language in Malaysian HEIs.....	33
2.3 Theoretical framework	38
2.4 The Communication Competence Model (CCM)	39

2.4.1	An Overview.....	39
2.4.2	Knowledge (cognition)	43
2.4.3	Communication Skills	44
2.4.4	Motivation.....	47
2.5	English literacy in employability.....	53
2.5.1	Previous studies on employability and employers' expectations.....	53
2.5.2	Workplace literacy: The voice of employers from Malaysian private sectors	56
2.5.3	Workplace literacy: The voice of the Malaysian government	60
2.6	Conclusion.....	65
CHAPTER 3		
	Research Methodology	67
3.0	Introduction	67
3.1	Research aims and objective: revisit	67
3.2.	Research paradigm	68
3.3	Social Constructionism Epistemology	70
3.3.1	Social Constructivism.....	71
3.3.2	Social constructionism and the present study	73
3.3.3	Characteristics referring to who and what is studied	73
3.3.4	Characteristics referring to methodology.....	74
3.3.5	Characteristics referring to methods	75
3.4	Soft Systems Methodology.....	76
3.4.1	Introduction.....	76
3.4.2	Brief Statement of SSM.....	78
3.4.3	Reasons why SSM is appropriate to this study.....	80
3.4.4	Applying SSM as a research model.....	82
3.5	Research Design	91
3.6	Setting.....	93
3.7	Research Methods	93
3.7.1	Focused Semi-structured Interview	94
3.7.2	ATLAS.ti 7.0 as Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)	95
3.8	Sampling Design	96

3.9	Instrument Development	98
3.9.1	Forms of the pilot study	99
3.10	The Study's Trustworthiness.....	102
3.10.1	Lincoln and Guba's Evaluation Criteria.....	103
3.11	Conclusion.....	115
CHAPTER 4		
	Data Analysis.....	116
4.0	Introduction	116
4.1	Data Collection Stages	116
4.1.1	Stage 1: The problem situation unstructured.	117
4.1.2	Stage 2: The problem situation expressed using 'rich picture'	119
4.1.3	Stage 3: Root definition	122
4.1.4	Stage 4: Deriving conceptual model.	121
4.1.5	Stage 5: Adapting conceptual model to the real world.	126
4.1.6	Stage 6: Defining feasible and desirable change.	128
4.1.7	Stage 7: Taking action.	128
4.2	Data Analysis	128
4.2.1	Cognitive Knowledge: Content Knowledge	130
4.2.2	Cognitive Knowledge: Linguistic Competence	133
4.2.3	Cognitive Knowledge: Cultural Competence	136
4.2.4	Cognitive Knowledge: Critical Thinking.....	139
4.2.5	Cognitive Knowledge: Tasking Skill.....	141
4.2.6	Communication Skills: Interpersonal Communication.....	146
4.2.7	Communication Skills: Listening Skill.....	150
4.2.8	Communication Skills: Presentation Skill	152
4.2.9	Communication Skills: Speaking Skill	154
4.2.10	Communication Skills: Non-verbal Communication.....	159
4.2.11	Communication Skills: Writing Skill	161
4.2.12	Motivation: Positive motivation	162
4.2.13	Summary of Data Analysis.....	165
4.3	Data Validation Process	171
4.3.1	Member checking by stakeholders	171

4.3.2	Peer debriefing by experts	174
4.4	Summary and Conclusion	179
CHAPTER 5		
	Discussion of Findings	181
5.0	Introduction	181
5.1	The balance of breadth and depth of strong communicative competence	181
5.2	Personal attribute development: the stakeholders' perspectives	186
5.3	The need for change in the Malaysian higher education curriculum.....	189
5.3.1	Creativity in teaching and learning in higher education.	194
5.3.2	Student-Centred Learning in the Malaysian HE Institutions.	197
5.4	The way forward: Working together	200
5.5	Conclusion	206
CHAPTER 6		
	Conclusion	207
6.0	Introduction	207
6.1	Overview of the study	207
6.1.1	Research aims	208
6.1.2	Research design	208
6.1.3	Research findings.....	209
6.1.4	Research parameters	211
6.2	Substantial and original contribution to knowledge	212
6.3	Implications	215
6.3.1	Suggestions for future research.....	215
6.3.2	Implications for policy and practice	216
6.4	Concluding remarks	220
	References.....	221
APPENDIX		
	APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.....	232
	APPENDIX B: DETAILS OF EXPERT A	237
	APPENDIX C: DETAILS OF EXPERT B	238
	APPENDIX D: DETAILS OF EXPERT C	239
	APPENDIX F: DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS (ACADEMIA)	240

APPENDIX G: DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS (COMPANIES)	241
APPENDIX E: DETAILS OF IMPARTIAL INTER-RATER	245
APPENDIX H: DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS (GOVERNMENT)	246
APPENDIX I: NETWORK VIEW FOR GRADUATES PROBLEMS VIEWED BY ...	247
APPENDIX J: DEDUCTIVE CODING TECHNIQUE IN ATLAS.TI 7.0	248
APPENDIX K: AUTO CODING TECHNIQUE IN ATLAS.TI	248
APPENDIX L: PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK IN ENGLISH	250

List of Tables

Table 2. 1 Areas to evaluate the usefulness of a theory (Dainton and Zelley, 2011)	20
Table 2. 2 Changes of the Malaysian Education policies: summary of events.	32
Table 2. 3 Phases in Malaysian Higher Education	37
Table 3.1 Key stages of the Soft System Methodology and its objectives.....	78
Table 3. 2 CATWOE's characteristics.	86
Table 3. 3 Research Design: Procedure 1	91
Table 3. 4 Research Design: Procedure 2	92
Table 3. 5 Elements of Focused Semi-Structured Interview	94
Table 3. 6 Malaysia's Key Industries and its components.	97
Table 3. 7 Components of measurement errors	99
Table 3. 8 Key differences between think-aloud and probing techniques.....	101
Table 3. 9 Examples of cognitive probes.....	101
Table 3. 10 'Trustworthiness' criteria (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)	103
Table 3. 11 What is an audit trail? (Adapted from Lincoln & Guba, 1985).....	111
Table 4. 1 Definition of CATWOE in this study.....	121
Table 4.2 Findings on Cognitive Knowledge: Content Knowledge.....	132
Table 4. 3 Findings on Cognitive Knowledge: Linguistic Competence.....	136
Table 4. 4 Findings on Cognitive Knowledge: Cultural Competence.....	138
Table 4. 5 Relevant comments on critical skills at workplace	140
Table 4. 6 Findings on Cognitive Knowledge: Critical Thinking	141
Table 4. 7 Findings for Cognitive Knowledge: Tasking Skill.....	143
Table 4.8 Findings for Communication Skill: Interpersonal Skill	149
Table 4.9 Findings on Communication Skill: Listening Skill.	151
Table 4. 10 Findings for Communication Skills: Presentation Skill.	154
Table 4. 11 Findings for Communication Skills: Speaking Skill.	158
Table 4.12 Findings for Communication Skills: Non-verbal communication. ...	161
Table 4. 13 Findings for Communication Skills: Writing.	161

Table 4.14 Findings for Motivation.....	165
Table 4.15 Proposed Professional Communications Skill (PCS) Framework from Data Analysis.....	167
Table 4.16 Communication Skills: Reading Skill	173
Table 4.17 Reporting Peer Debriefing (Spillet, 2003).....	175

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Research Scope	15
Figure 2.1 The Communicative competence framework.....	22
Figure 2.2 Theoretical Framework	39
Figure 2.3 The Communicative Competence Model (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984).....	40
Figure 2.4 Basic components of the Communication Competence Model (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007)	42
Figure 2.5 Four basic subcomponents of interpersonal skills.....	46
Figure 3.1 Checkland’s seven-stage soft systems methodology.....	80
Figure 3.2 Rich picture applied using SSM – an area of concern on the Malaysian graduates’ level of Professional Communication Skills.	84
Figure 3.3 PCS Conceptual Model in this study.....	87
Figure 3.4 Research Design incorporated with SSM.....	91
Figure 3.5 Result after the code-recode process.....	105
Figure 3.6 Codes used for ‘communication skill’.	107
Figure 3.7 Member checking: Codes connect to voice recordings.....	108
Figure 3.8 Audit trail of this study (Screen shot from ATLAS.ti)	114
Figure 4.1 Stage 1: The problem situation unstructured.	118
Figure 4.2 Rich picture: an area of concern on the Malaysian graduates’ level of PCS generated from field data.	122
Figure 4.3 Conceptual model of the study divided into practical phase.....	124
Figure 4.4 Components and sub components of PCS Framework	125
Figure 4.5 Connecting memo and quotations in ATLAS.ti	127
Figure 4.6 Stage 5: Comparing conceptual model to the real world.	133
Figure 4.7 Cognitive skills required by stakeholders.	147
Figure 4.8 Interpersonal skills required by the stakeholders.	151
Figure 4.9 Presentation skills as required by stakeholders.....	155
Figure 5.1 Seven thrusts in National Higher Education Strategic Plan (MOHE, 2012).....	191

Abbreviations

BM	Bahasa Melayu/Malaysia (Malay Language)
CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
ETeMS	English for the Teaching of Mathematics and Science
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ETP	Economic Transformation Programme
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HU	Hermeneutic Unit
IPPTN	Institut Penyelidikan Pendidikan Tinggi Negara (National Higher Education Research Institute)
KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (Intergrated Secondary Schools Curriculum)
KBSR	Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (New Primary Schools Curriculum)
KSSR	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (Primary School Standard Curriculum)
KSSM	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah (Secondary School Standard Curriculum)
MBMMBI	Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuhkan Penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris (To Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and to Strengthen the English Language)
MEC	Malaysian Examination Council
MEF	Malaysian Employment Federation
MIDA	Malaysian Industrial Development Authority
MOE	Ministry of Education

MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOHE-IP	Ministry of Higher Education Implementation Plan
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
MQF	Malaysian Qualifications Framework
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
NEM	National Economic Model
NKEA	National Key Economic Areas
PBS	Penilaian Berasaskan Sekolah (School Based Assessment)
PBL	Problem-Based Learning
PCS	Professional Communication Skills
PSPTN	Perancangan Strategik Pengajian Tinggi Negara (National Higher Education Strategic Plan)
SCL	Student-Centred Learning
SPM Education)	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
TEST	Technical Education and Skills Training
UNESCO Organization	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

“The valuable attributes of research men are conscious ignorance and active curiosity.”
(Whitney, 1937, p. 289).

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

In Malaysia, educating people as human resources is an integral element in realising the government’s vision, as enshrined in the policy of Vision 2020, of achieving the status of a developed and industrialised nation by the year 2020 (Mahathir, 2011). Essentially, higher education institutions are deemed to be crucial agents responsible for the creation and dissemination of knowledge whilst being the centre of science, scholarship and the new knowledge economies (Altbach, 2007). Added to these responsibilities are tremendous expectations for higher education institutions to produce highly skilled and knowledgeable graduates with communicative, creative and critical abilities to meet the demands of current employment scenarios. Integral to these expectations is the extensive use of the English language as a global language and the main medium of communication. Hence, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is an essential ingredient to be cultivated in the higher education agenda to educate and produce young Malaysians as potential human resources to fulfil the needs of the local and international workforce.

The purpose of this research is to develop a Professional Communication Skills (labelled PCS from here onwards) in English Framework to help in supporting English lecturers and instructors teaching EOP courses in Malaysian higher education institutions. The PCS framework will

consist of the communication constructs in English related to PCS skills essential for Malaysian graduates: for instance, verbal and non-verbal communication, interpersonal communication and cultural competence. These PCS skills will include the needs of future employers from the public and private sectors. Therefore, the voices of Malaysian stakeholders, namely the government, multi-national companies and academia, will be explored, analysed and summarised in this PCS Framework. In doing so, a qualitative approach to inquiry couched within the interpretive paradigm for data collection and analysis will be used to facilitate an in-depth and detailed understanding of Malaysian stakeholders' needs in relation to PCS in English. This approach will be further explored in Chapter 3. Stakeholders' direct voices, which highlight the current requirements for entry-level employees, will generate understanding of the useful PCS in English that learners need to master prior to graduation. Using outcomes from the in-depth interviews, the initial PCS Framework (See 4.2.13, Summary of Data Analysis) will be put forward for validation by the same group of stakeholders as well as experts in the field of English in higher education. The finalised version of the PCS framework which has undergone the member checking and peer debriefing processes will be presented at the end of Chapter 4 (See Table 4.17 or APPENDIX L). The validation processes generated fruitful findings in improving the teaching of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and a detailed discussion will be presented in Chapter 5.

This chapter continues with the background of the research, the problem statement, research objectives and questions as well as the significance of the research. It also includes the research framework and the operational definitions of terms used in this study.

1.1 Background of the research

Malaysian employers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the general level of preparedness of graduates as prospective employees. From a considerable amount of research, it has been proven that there is a gap between employers' requirements of entry-level employees and the actual skills of the graduates (Suan, 2004, Malaysian Employers Federation, 2009; Timbuong, 2007; Krishnamoorthy, 2007; Ramli, 2006; UdaNagu, 2006; Isarji et al., 2008 and 2013). Employers' dissatisfaction with graduates is not primarily due to inadequate technical knowledge or skills. Rather, employers have considerable reservations when it comes to the graduates' nontechnical abilities or employability skills, particularly their English language proficiency

(Suan, 2004; Ambigapathy & Aniswal, 2005; Malaysian Employers Federation, 2007; Stapa et al., 2008; Isarji et al., 2008; Isarji & Ainol Madziah, 2008; Sirat et al., 2008). It has been stressed by employers that graduates are not only accepted as employees for knowledge and specific technical competencies, but also for a certain level of communication, social, emotional and critical thinking skills to enable workers, for example, to work in teams, to motivate themselves when confronting challenges, to solve interpersonal disputes, and to tolerate high levels of stress (Ainol Madziah et. al., 2011).

Malaysia's economy has been growing at an annual rate of 6.6% for the past three decades; yet, unemployment rates have increased from 2.6% in 1996 to 3.6% in 2010 (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2011). The numbers show that young graduates, in particular, experience difficulties in securing their first jobs and many graduates hold jobs that do not correspond to their education and expectations. The 1990s saw a series of higher education reforms as well as expansion of higher education. The expansion included a number of public as well as private institutions. Public universities have grown from seven public universities in the 1990s to a total of 21 in 2010 (MOHE, 2007a, 2011a). In 2002, the total number of graduates from Malaysian public higher institutions was 36, 892 and it had increased to 108, 331 in 2010 (MOHE, 2011a), from a variety of disciplines.

Of critical importance to the massive expansion of higher education to these HE institutions are the challenges in terms of the need to plan and support the further expansion of the system and its quality and relevance (Mohamedbhai, 2008). In order to support the expansion, Mohamedbhai (2008) suggests that HE institutions set up an appropriate internal quality assurance mechanism, and equally, establish linkages with all relevant stakeholders – government departments responsible for human resource development, industry and the private sector, their alumni, etc. – in determining the programmes to be offered and the output needed out of the programmes offered. It is important to consider the above factors since research proves that there is a critical link between current unemployment of graduates and improper planning of higher education institutions after a massive expansion when appropriate measures are not taken (Aihara, 2009; Mohamedbhai, 2008).

With the expansion of higher education, greater attention has to be paid to labour market prospects since imbalances may be created between higher education and labour market demands (Kartz-Gerro & Yaish, 2003; Teichler, 2000). Specifically, the Malaysian government has been and is concerned about the level of Malaysian graduate unemployment, the transition from higher education to the workforce and the problems of job mismatches (Baharudin, 2004; Hussein, 2009; Malaysian Employers Federation, 2009; MOHE, 2007; Noor Azina, 2011). The stakeholders in Malaysia have admitted that Malaysian graduates are well trained in their areas of specialization. Unfortunately, however, they lack fluency and competency in English language communication skills (Ainol Madziah et al., 2011; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Ken, Ting, & Ying, 2012; Koo, Pang, & Mansur, 2007; Noor Azina, 2011; Sekharan Nair et al., 2012; Wong & Ming, 2010)

Employers have lamented that poor English competency has hampered graduates' ability to communicate effectively at the workplace. In a national study of HE institutions commissioned by the Ministry, it was found that more than 54% of undergraduate students from 6 universities in Malaysia were considered limited users of English. Overall, 58% were considered limited users of English in writing, while 77% were limited users of English in speaking (Isarji et al., 2008; Ainol Madziah et al., 2011). Some of the specific complaints highlighted by the stakeholder with regard to poor English competency are the following: the graduates are unable to present ideas and explain issues in writing, verbally, and in group discussions; to write reports, project papers, proposals and minutes of meeting; and to negotiate and convey ideas in planned and impromptu situations (Suan, 2004; Chang, 2004; Ambigapathy & Aniswal, 2005; Ngui, 2005; Malaysian Employers Federation, 2007; Isarji et al., 2008; Sirat et al., 2008; Ken et al., 2012).

Various short and long term measures have been introduced, such as the teaching of English in Science and Mathematics in schools and making English courses core courses to be attended and passed in higher education institutions, but despite this, employers have continued to voice their disappointment concerning the English competency of university graduates. In the Malaysian context, for instance, the issue of unemployable graduates has created doubts concerning the efforts of HE institutions in Malaysia to enhance graduates' employability skills, in particular, English competency (Ainol Madziah et al., 2011). Transformation of higher education and

restructuring of the educational system in terms of its effectiveness in producing employable graduates to meet the demands of the job market and to compete in the international arena have been regularly highlighted in the media (Chang, 2004; Suan, 2004; Malaysian Employers Federation, 2007; Timbuong, 2007; Krishnamoorthy, 2007; Ramli, 2006; Uda Nagu, 2006). As a result, Malaysian institutions of higher learning are pushed not only to intensify their efforts to enhance students' English competency, but also to ensure that graduates' English competency is compatible with the needs of industry.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Given the challenges facing higher education institutions in Malaysia, there are strong justifications for this study. Firstly, there is a lack of holistic and comprehensive research on current English for Occupational Purposes (EOP from here onwards) curriculum practices in Malaysian HEIs. 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. 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 unemployability figures standing at a worrying 48.5% (IPPTN, 2010).

The findings gathered of Yunus (2007) are important for this study since he claims that employment in Malaysia was set back by an educational and skills mismatch. This occurred when HE institutions produced a new workforce that could not enter the labour market because of the differences in what they perceived was needed in the market and what was actually needed (Yunus, 2007, Annie and Wong, 2006 and Latisha and Nayan, 2010). To overcome this problem, this research will attempt to determine the key professional communication skills identified by Malaysian stakeholders for successful workplace function. Stakeholders' needs will be embedded in the PCS Framework in English and hopefully this will give a better structure to the EOP courses in Malaysia as well as avoid the skill mismatches perceived by both HE institutions and stakeholders.

Secondly, till today, there is a lack of a systematically structured and informed framework or model for PCS. Because of this, taught courses that should contain PCS in Malaysia HE institutions like English for Occupational Purposes or English for the Workplace tend to take multiple forms. Different HE institutions teach these courses differently according to their own interpretation of the perceived needs of future employers. Though the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE from here onwards) 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. Additionally, the current English for Specific Purposes (ESP) textbooks and course books which are readily available are not suitable for the Malaysian context since they offer a minimum number of exercises (Hayati, 2008), and some of the low quality materials do not offer reinforcement of the communication skills needed for the workplace (Wong and Thang, 2008). ESP and EOP course books are more geared towards examinations, as opposed to preparing graduates for working life. These arguments raise question about academia's emphasis on key PCS in the syllabus and the content of current EOP courses, and whether the courses are taught for the students to pass their final year examinations or to help in upskilling and polishing students' workplace skills.

Hence, this study will explore the actual professional communication skills needed to be taught in HE institutions of Malaysia. By doing so, designers of EOP courses offered in Malaysian HE institutions will have a clear view on what should be stated as the learning outcomes of the courses, since the needs of the stakeholders will be incorporated in the PCS framework. Furthermore, editors of EOP and ESP course books may use the framework to enhance current editions with more suitable materials and exercises as well as incorporate proper methodology in teachers' books on the teaching and learning PCS demanded by stakeholders.

Thirdly, it is evident that there is a mismatch between, or inconsistency of standards by universities 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 university language courses and their actual performance during job interviews. 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 showed 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 HE institutions and their policy makers, and subsequently a greater skills mismatch will emerge. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop a valid and reliable assessment mechanism to eliminate these skills mismatches between stakeholders and HE. 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.

It is clear that the issues highlighted above indicate significant relationships between employability problems and deficiencies in English language literacies of Malaysian university students. A clear disparity exists between the actual performance of the undergraduate students pertaining to their English language literacy and competencies, and the demands of the academic and workforce worlds. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the needs of all the stakeholders involved in order to bridge this gap. It is indeed an important matter to be addressed urgently.

1.3 Research gap

Previous studies have yielded concerns over the quality of education at higher education institutions in Malaysia and many have suggested that it is imperative to discover the underlying factors contributing to graduates' inadequacies, particularly in workplace communication (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Shafie & Nayan, 2010; Sirat, Jamaludin, Lee, & Leong, 2007; UNESCO, 2006; Wahi, 2012; Wong & Ming, 2010). However, the question of how to practically address the issue in assisting EOP lecturers and instructors while taking on board the needs of the stakeholders has rarely been considered. In this study, soft system methodology (SSM) will be used and it will provide a platform to focus on the issues and opportunities of EOP, examine assumptions of stakeholders, and better understand the dysfunctional elements within the EOP syllabus that need to be remedied. This will provide a reality check for the analysis of the situation to date, and is the point where SSM will initiate a process to rethink and re-analyse the

underlying assumptions in order to identify the desirable and feasible options for change and improvement of the EOP syllabus. In this study, the use of SSM would formalise the knowledge and requirements of stakeholders in explicit form, highlight problematic areas and provide recommendations to improve the process. This will be one of the first times that SSM is utilised in dealing with improving English language communication practices and competencies for employability in the English as a second and foreign language context in Malaysia.

Secondly, employers have expressed concern about the lack of quality of the current Malaysian graduates, specifically mentioning their communication skills (Sirat, et al., 2008; Ambigapathy & Aniswal, 2005). This shows that there is a difference between what is being taught in HE and what is expected by employers. Bissett, Cheng and Brannan (2010) stress the importance of focussing on employers' needs to determine the required key communication competencies. Unfortunately, at this stage, little information has been gathered on employers' actual need and the most regrettable part is that EOP lecturers and instructors in HE institutions seem to feel that they have done all that is wanted for the courses (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). Such an outlook has eliminated the need for a time consuming and often expensive syllabus design process (Cowling, 2007). Additionally, most of the studies inquiring into the requirements of employers have been done in a quantitative manner (Omar, Bakar, & Mat Rashid, 2012; Rasul, Ismail, Ismail, Rajuddin, & Amnah, 2009; Yen, Kamariah, Hwa, & Huong, 2009). This study uses a qualitative approach to facilitate an in-depth and detailed understanding (Patton, 2002) of Malaysian stakeholders' needs for PCS in English, specifically addressing their requirements for entry-level employees, particularly Malaysian graduates. Qualitative research is believed to be best suited for this study of the phenomenon of English language workplace literacy practices and the PCS of graduates, since there is little such information provided in the literature (Creswell, 2009). This study helps to fill in the gap in the literature by providing qualitative insights on stakeholders' practices and their requirement with regard to communicating in English at the workplace, especially at entry-level. This study seeks to find answers to the issues evolved by examining the problem itself and by having the 'problem-solvers' or key informants share their insights and experiences in a qualitative manner. Hence, building on the theories and implications informed by previous research, this study conversely turns towards developing an

essential yet absent framework on professional communication skills in English as a second language for Malaysian HEIs.

Finally, this study complements previous research and fills in the information gap in current literature by designing a framework to define the PCS in English. Studies conducted previously in Malaysia have looked at the generic and soft skills for undergraduates in HE institutions (Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Othman, 2012; Rasul, Puvanasvaran, & Keroh, 2009; Sahandri & Hamzah, 2009; Shakir, 2009; Yassin, 2008). All of these did include communication skills in English as an important skill for Malaysian undergraduates to master during their time in HE institutions. Additionally, in the existing literature, the only current framework available for reference for EOP instructors and lecturers is the 'Soft skills module for Higher Educational Institutions in Malaysia' (MOHE, 2006). However, the module covers the communication competencies only in a general way. As a consequence of this, the EOP courses in Malaysian HE institutions tend to take multiple forms, since there is a lack of a systematically structured and informed framework for PCS. Even after the introduction of the module, the ability of graduates to communicate effectively has still been criticised (Abdul Razak et al., 2007; Koo et al., 2007; Sirat et al., 2008) and this requires further investigation urgently. Designing a valid and reliable PCS framework will help in closing the gap between teaching and learning in HE and workplace communication needs. EOP lecturers and instructors in Malaysian HE institutions can benefit from the results of this study since they will be enabled to design and structure their EOP courses according to the needs of stakeholders.

1.4 Research aims

The aim of this study is twofold. Firstly, it intends to define Professional Communication Skills (PCS) by looking at the needs and requirements of Malaysian employers, government and academia. The prevailing reports and remarks on the abundant number of students graduating from public universities with very poor communication skills in English each year over the last decade requires further investigation (Hafizoah & Fatimah Ali, 2010; Chang, 2004; Suan, 2004; Malaysian Employers Federation, 2007; Isarji, et al., 2011). Even after undergoing at least fifteen years of formal English language education, Malaysian graduates are not ready to communicate professionally at the workplace. Malaysian employers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the general level of graduates' preparedness, and they have continued to complain of the

widening gap between the English language requirements needed for employment and the English competency of graduates.

In order to close the gap between these two, a needs analysis will be carried out to understand and to convey stakeholders' needs to EOP instructors. The study intends to explore the common practices of English language communication carried out at the workplace in the public and private sectors in Malaysia. The requirements and suggestions of the stakeholders will help to fulfil the fundamental objective of this study which is to determine the key Professional Communication Skills identified by Malaysian stakeholders for successful workplace functions. It is hoped to arrive at a clearly defined Professional Communication Skills Framework in English by the end of this study.

Secondly, this study aims to produce an informed, impartial and highly valid PCS framework in English to be used not just as a reference for EOP practitioners, but also as a checklist for future employers to assess their entry-level employees. As stated earlier, having a well-defined PCS Framework will help overcome the discrepancy between industry needs and the manner in which university students are being prepared for the workforce. However, it is undoubtedly of far greater importance to have a clearly defined PCS Framework validated by the stakeholders. Having the stakeholders thoroughly involved in creating meaning and amending the components within the framework would ensure that the framework is endorsed by the future employees. The purpose of this validation stage is to ensure that the researcher has taken into account the various needs and requirements of Malaysian stakeholders on the essential English communication skills for the workplace accurately, without including her own preconceptions or faulty interpretation of the analysis. Additionally, to make sure that the framework is not only valid but also achievable, a few experts in the field of teaching English in higher education look thoroughly through the framework. The study aims to create a real-world and hands-on framework which can be practically applied in EOP lessons in Malaysian HE institutions. Therefore, seeking the endorsement of experienced experts will facilitate in fine-tuning the PCS framework in English as well as getting their responses on overlooked elements.

1.5 Research questions

The central research question addressed by this study is:

What are the Professional Communication Skills in English required by graduates to meet stakeholders' expectations upon graduation?

Specifically, this study sought the answers to the following questions:

RQ1 What are stakeholders' needs and theoretical identified communication constructs that support the development of a PCS in English Framework?

RQ2 What are stakeholders' assessments about the relevance of the PCS Framework?

In particular, to develop an understanding of the stakeholders' point of view of PCS in English with regard to employability, the study sets out to answer the research questions by accomplishing the following tasks and meeting the following objectives:

1. Identify the professional communication skills in English as demanded by stakeholders.
2. Define the PCS in English; matching stakeholders' requirements to existing theories of communication.
3. Develop a PCS in English Framework by merging the definitions by all stakeholders into one concise framework.
4. Evaluate the trustworthiness of the PCS in English based on stakeholders' assessments.
5. Evaluate the credibility and transferability of the PCS Framework based on experts' assessment.

In completing the above tasks and meeting the objectives, it is hoped that English lecturers and instructors in Malaysian higher education institutions will be able to incorporate the framework within EOP courses and this will overcome the deficiencies in English for the workplace that is experienced by a substantial number of university graduates.

1.6 Significance of the research

Although there has been considerable discussion among stakeholders about the importance of communication in English for employment, little has been done to assess the needs of stakeholders; especially in the Malaysian context. Furthermore, existing studies have been in the

form of surveys with no specific models constructed to explain the phenomenon. This study seeks to fill in this gap by proposing a Professional Communications Skills Framework, relating the various features of the needs stakeholders and linking them to theories of effective workplace communications.

Learning English from primary and secondary schools right up to HE institutions has not ensured that Malaysian students are fluent in communicating in English upon graduation. This warrants closer scrutiny, since what is taught in education institutions might not satisfy the needs of Malaysian stakeholders, or the syllabi might also be outdated. Resolution of this problem entails going back to stakeholders and asking them what communication skills in English they actually need from graduates who are seeking jobs. Viewpoints of employers, MOHE and academia will be combined and compressed into a framework called the Professional Communication Skills Framework. This framework will be created and validated by stakeholders. There has never been a consensus such as this developed in Malaysia.

PCS is taught in various ways in different institutions of higher education in Malaysia. There is a lack of comprehensive and systematic research on the content, materials, methodology and assessment of such courses. To date, there is no existing comprehensive PCS framework in English that has been sourced from and validated by stakeholders – industries, government and academia.

Currently, there is more than one list of skills to which HE institutions could refer but none from Malaysian stakeholders. This study recommends a common reference framework on Professional Communication Skills for employers, MOHE, policy makers in HE institutions, teaching staff and learners themselves in order to achieve a higher quality output of Malaysian graduates.

This study seeks to eliminate the mismatches between what is required by stakeholders and what is acquired by graduates. By matching the needs of all stakeholders, the PCS framework can contribute to the development of quality education in Malaysia by supporting students and lecturers in HE institutions with a list of communication skills in English to be achieved before graduating in order to be highly employable. The framework can equip them with a coherent and comprehensive checklist of necessary communication skills in English as demanded by stakeholders.

This study also has its practical applications. Among the crucial ones are:

- i. The findings of this study will assist policymakers in formulating initiatives to improve the courses offered at HE institutions.
- ii. The findings of this study will be of great significance in aiding lecturers and teachers in Malaysian HE institutions to teach meaningfully and in context. A higher quality of teaching and learning EOP courses will transpire in HE intuitions and will enhance graduates English language competency.
- iii. Stakeholders lack faith in existing assessments such as SPM, MUET and university language courses (Ainol Madziah et al., 2011), hence, PCS can be used as a benchmark document for them since it is created and validated by stakeholders.
- iv. The PCS Framework can help graduates to be fully prepared to perform work in English by practising various forms of skills listed in it.

1.7 Scope of the Research

This research study involves three aspects of communication competences: knowledge, communication skills and motivation. The following qualitative methods were used to elicit the data required: 1) soft system methodology (SSM); 2) focussed semi structured in-depth interviews. The study covered a total of 24 respondents in the following subgroups: 1) human resource managers from multi-national key industries (10 respondents); 2) government executives who recruit entry-level employees for the public sector (4 respondents) and; 3) EOP instructors and HE liaison officers for industrial training (10 respondents). The data obtained were subjected to CAQDAS analysis, namely ATLAS.ti 7.0 and sits within the interpretivist tradition (See 3.2 Research Paradigm for a more extensive discussion).

Referring to the three basic aspects of communication competences involved in the research process (knowledge, communication skills and motivation) it must be noted that these categories are neither necessarily exhaustive nor mutually exclusive (refer 2.2 Communication Competence Model for a more extensive discussion). The Communication Competence Model (CCM) was chosen for its practicality, simplicity, consistency and accuracy (Dainton and Zelley, 2011). The CCM (Morealle, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007) is ideal as the basis of the study's theoretical

framework because of the adequacy of the given components and subcomponents. It offers systematic ways of characterising the constructs of competent communicators for the workplace in terms that can effectively identify and organise the requirements within L2 instruction. Before making this choice, other scholarly theories were considered, namely theories of interpersonal communication (Miller, 1978; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Floyd, 2009), cultural communication (Hofstede, 1991), leadership communication (Likert and Likert, 1976) and organisational communication (McPhee and Zaig, 2000). However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an in-depth discussion of all these models and theories. The study's main purpose is to discuss the model most apt in the context of the use of communication competence professionally to ensure employability.

Given the scope of the study and the nature of the investigations involved, qualitative inquiry was used as the main method for data collection. There are several reasons for this. First, an in-depth semi-structured interview is best suited for this study of the phenomenon since a detailed understanding of the issue from the perspectives of the participants, particularly in the Malaysian context, warrants the use of qualitative inquiry due to its fundamentally interpretive nature (Creswell, 2009). Second, interviews were conducted with respondents from companies, the government and academia for triangulation purposes. Triangulation means comparing various sources of evidence to determine the accuracy of evidence and it is essentially a way of cross-checking data to establish its credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Additionally, SSM is a seven stage methodology and is largely used in action research to highlight problematic areas and provide recommendations to improve a process. In this study, the seventh stage of SSM (see 4.1.7 Taking action) could not be implemented since time was limited. Taking the PCS framework on board in order to improve the current practises of EOP courses would take some time to execute. It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine the impact the PCS framework has on research practice. However, it would be interesting to discover the benefits that the framework offers in future studies. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the scope of the research described above.

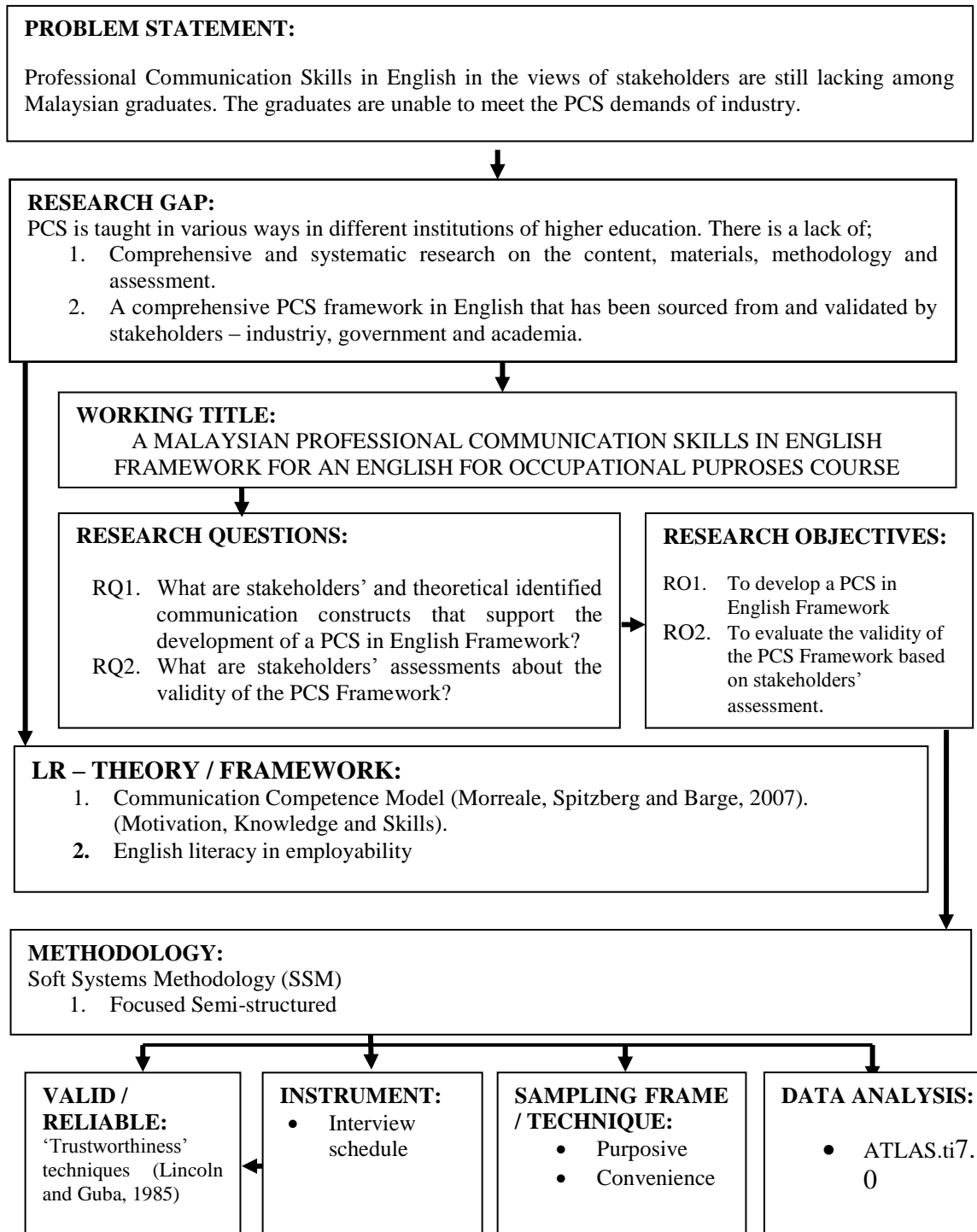


Figure 1.1 Research Scope

1.8 Operational definitions of terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms require clear definition:

Stakeholders: Stakeholders are the individuals, the groups or the organizations that have certain interests concerning the employment of graduates. In particular, this research defines the stakeholders as:

- a. **Employers.** In this research “employers” refers to the private sector, mainly large companies in terms of the number of employees and the annual turnover. The companies chosen came from the top three key industries in Malaysia (as reported in the Malaysia Investment Performance Report 2011), which are the services, manufacturing and agriculture sectors (MIDA, 2012).
- b. **Government of Malaysia.** Agencies in the public sector, especially those who have the authority to recruit new entry-level personnel. Government linked companies (GLC) are also included as part of this group.
- c. **Academia.** These are the policy makers and lecturers in Malaysian HEIs. They are lecturers and language instructors who teach English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) or equivalent courses in Malaysian HEIs. They also have close links with the future employers of the graduates since some of them are industrial training coordinators for their respective universities.

Professional Communication Skills (PCS): In this research PCS is defined as the ability to communicate efficiently at the workplace by effectively using the skills of oral communication, writing, listening and reading. These skills were suggested and validated by the stakeholders.

Higher education institutions (HEI): This research includes HEIs all Malaysian post-secondary education institutions, including public higher education institutions, private higher education institution, polytechnics, and community colleges which offer English for Occupational Purposes programmes. These HEIs are under the aegis of Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) Malaysia.

Soft System Methodology (SSM): This is a structured approach with a set of ordered activities. The rigorous steps in the methodology force explicitness and promote creative and stimulating thinking in fulfilling the objectives of the study. It is a framework consisting of seven steps organized in a special manner such that it leads to the implantation of culturally feasible and systemically desirable changes in human organisations (Checkland, 1986; 1990).

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP): These are courses offered in most HEIs which cover a range of topics that are related to occupational needs such as Workplace Communications, Business Correspondences and Effective Presentations. Learners learn common language functions and how to utilize them appropriately in work situations. Exercises and practical in-class sessions are conducted to give learners an idea of English Communication needs in the workplace.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introductory overview of the thesis. The earlier sections of this chapter introduced the study by discussing the research background and establishing its rationale and aims. The remaining sections presented the research questions and objectives; gaps and the scope of the research were defined, and finally, this chapter defined the terms used in the study as well as the overall research framework of this study.

Subsequently, Chapter Two provides a review of the theoretical and contextual literature that informs this study and discusses the intersecting bodies of empirical research related to the topic under study. Chapter Three then sets out the description of the research paradigm, methods and design of this study in greater detail. Chapter Four reports the results from data analysis collated from the stakeholders' perspectives by using the SSM approach. Chapter Five discusses the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of the study and its parameters, followed by a discussion on the contributions of this study and the implications of the research findings for future research, policy and practice.

'Communication competence is the degree to which a communicator's goals are achieved through effective and appropriate interaction.' (Webster, 1983, p. 266).

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will start with an overview of policy with regard to the English language in the Malaysian education system from the British era until the present-day. This is vital in order to appreciate the national educational goals of Malaysia and the current language policies that underpin them. It will be followed by a detailed statement of the position of the English language in the current context of higher learning institutions in Malaysia, followed by a discussion of research pertinent to the English language, specifically within the context of higher education in the country.

Subsequently, the chapter will put forward a theoretical framework which will operate as a basis for the review of literature. It will firstly discuss at length the model of Communicative Competence (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007) and how this model fits into this study. This will also be discussed in greater detail in a later section of the study (2.3.1 Locating the model in this study). Commencing from the position that communication strategies are essential for successful workplace functions, the other key concept that needs to be clarified is the importance of English literacy for employability. A sub-section within this chapter (See 2.4 English literacy in employability) is devoted to justifying the need to review the area of workplace literacy and showing how the information gained will assist in carrying out this study. It will look into the

needs of Malaysian stakeholders and in particular the communicative skills in English needed by their entry-level employees. The interconnections between these two key concepts will be used as the base of the theoretical framework of this study.

2.1 Locating the key concepts in the study

Before embarking on the extensive analysis of the literature, this section will amplify the two key concepts in this study, namely, the Communicative Competence Model (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007) and the notion of English literacy for employability.

2.1.1 The Communicative Competence Model (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007)

Beyond some of the basic necessities of the workplace, almost everything that matters to humans is derived from and through communication. Spitzberg (2012) asserts,

The 21st century brings with it several trends, including a more service- and information-based society, in which more and more professions will require a broad repertoire of communication competencies, ranging from excellence in face-to-face encounters as well as mediated encounters. Evidence abounds that communication ability is one of, if not the most, important competence that prospective employers expect of their personnel.

(p. 4)

This emphasizes the point that having strong communicative competence is vital not only to the academic success and achievement of students but also to their productivity and effectiveness as employees. Further, Chen et al.(2010) add, regardless of what other qualifications students may possess, if they cannot communicate well in interview contexts, they are unlikely to get the jobs for which they apply.

The CCM model was chosen to be the basis of this study's framework because of the adequacy of the given components and subcomponents. It offers systematic ways of characterising the constructs of competent communicators for the workplace in terms that can effectively identify and organise the requirements within L2 instruction. This then, would allow language policy makers to design instructional programmes and evaluate the language proficiency of their L2

students from within a common or unified perspective. This point is put forth in the seminal paper by Canale and Swain (1980).

These principles serve as a set of guidelines in terms of which communicative approaches to second language teaching methodologies and assessment instruments may be organized and developed. Such a theoretical analysis is crucial if we are to establish a clear statement of the content and boundaries of communicative competence—one that will lead to more useful and effective second language teaching and allow more valid and reliable measurement of second language communication skills.

(p. 1)

Dainton and Zelley (2011) put forward several criteria for evaluating the usefulness of a theory (See Table 2.3). Before choosing CCM to be the support of the framework designed for this research, it underwent examination using Dainton and Zelley's criteria of usefulness: namely accuracy, practicality, simplicity and consistency. In respect of *accuracy*, Dainton and Zelley (2011) suggest that the theory chosen must be supported and it should work the way it says it does and in order to do this, other research studies that have scrutinised CCM were reviewed and it was proven that CCM was transferable and accurate across various fields (Bubaš, Radoševi, & Hutinski, 2003; Irigoin, Whitacre, Faulkner, & Coe, 2002; Keefer, 2011; Limpornpugdee, Janz, & Richardson, 2009; Mino, 2012; Oschell, 2009).

Table 2. 1 Areas to evaluate the usefulness of a theory (Dainton and Zelley, 2011)

Area of evaluation	What to look for
Accuracy	Does the research support that the theory and does it work the way it says it does. Look at the research studies that have examined the theory.
Practicality	Have real-world applications been found for the theory?
Simplicity	Is the theory formulated as simply as possible.
Consistency	Internal → ideas of the theory are logically built on one another External → refers to the theory's consistency with other widely held theories.

With respect to practicality, CCM proved to have real-world applications, especially after the release of the San Diego State University School of Communication Assessment Report (Spitzberg, 2012), which used CCM as the fundamental model in its assessing procedure.

In terms of simplicity, the CCM proposed by Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) is compact, most practical and the simplest in formulating communicative competence compared to previous models.

One of the other models scrutinised was the Model of Relational Competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). This model was based on four variables: motivation, knowledge (cognition), skills (psychomotor skills) and outcomes. This model is an extension of Spitzberg's (1983) and Spitzberg and Hecht's (1984) discussions on their model of relational competence. They define it as follows:

Relational competence is defined as the extent to which objectives functionally related to communication are perceived to be fulfilled through interaction appropriate to the interpersonal context; that is, the model conceptualizes competent communication as appropriate and effective, and casts these at the actor's level of meaning.

(p. 64).

The definition above is based on five assumptions: (i) competence is contextual; (ii) competence is referenced by appropriateness and effectiveness; (iii) competence is judged according to a continuum of effectiveness and appropriateness; (iv) communication is functional; and (v) competence is an interpersonal impression (Spitzberg, 1983). Even though the five assumptions are applicable to the context of this study, and the variables used are enhancements of the earlier models of Canale and Swain (1983 and 1984), yet after extensive reading of this model [see specifically Spitzberg & Hecht (1984) and Oschell (2009)], it was found that although it did identify the requirements to be in place for one to be a competent communicator, it did not say how to acquire these skills, motivations, or knowledge sets. Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) however, manage to define and explain them distinctively and simply, too.

The framework of communicative competence proposed by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006) was also examined to determine the best model for this study. This model is an adaptation of the model of communicative competence proposed by Celce- Murcia et al. (1995). Taking Canale

and Swain's (1984) model as point of departure, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) further divide communicative competence into linguistic, sociocultural, strategic, discourse and actional competencies. They identify discourse competence as the central construct to the model and three other competences (linguistic, sociocultural, and actional) function as determiners to shape discourse competence. Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) assert that *linguistic competence* entails the basic elements of communication, such as sentence patterns, morphological inflections, phonological and orthographic systems, as well as lexical resources. *Sociocultural competence* refers to the speaker's knowledge of how to express appropriate messages within the social and cultural context of communication in which they are produced. *Actional competence* involves understanding of the speakers' communicative intent by performing and interpreting speech act sets. Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006) then claim that strategic competence should be placed at the same level as the rest of the competencies, since its goal is that of building discourse competence while allowing communicative ability to develop in parallel with the other components. *Strategic competence* is concerned with the knowledge of communicative strategies and how to use them. The framework of communicative competence proposed by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flors (2006) is represented as a circle enclosing all five components (see Figure 2.1).

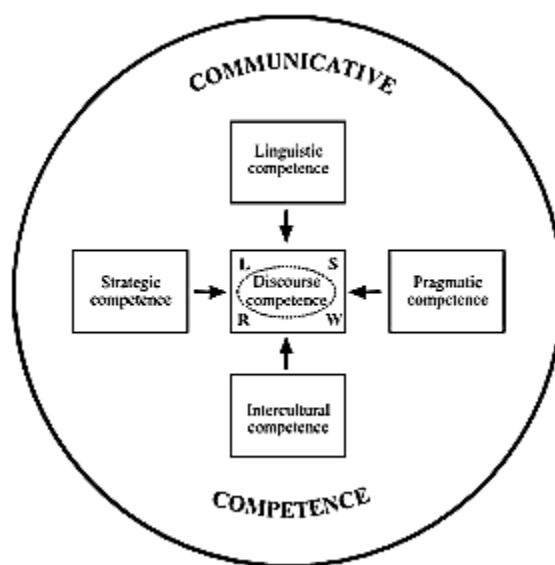


Figure 2. 1 The Communicative competence framework by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006)

Though this framework seems to be highly suitable for this study, it was discovered that it lacked authentication by other researchers and thus it was rather risky to apply its concept since practicality and accuracy as highlighted by Dainton and Zelley (2011) might be jeopardised.

Looking at the aspect of internal and external *consistency* (Dainton and Zelley, 2011), Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) managed to prove that their ideas of the theory were built on one another after various empirical and extensive theoretical studies were conducted (Bagari & Mihaljevi, 2007; Duran & Spitzberg, 1995; Leung & London, 2005; Morreale, 2008; Spitzberg, 2012). It can also be confirmed that the Communicative Competence Model of Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) is consistent with other widely held theories. This will be further discussed later in this chapter (See 2.4 The Communicative Competence Model).

To proceed with the discussion on locating this key concept in this study, it must be stressed that communicative competence is contextual and will vary by situation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). For example, although students may have an understanding of what competence looks like in a traditional classroom setting (Rubin, 1988), they might not understand what competence looks like in a Malaysian workplace context. It is questionable whether English language instructors in Malaysian higher education institutions fully comprehend the actual competence needed and used in the current Malaysian working environment. Hence, understanding the relationships among the components of communicative competence and having guidelines with ample exemplars in a framework would clear the confusion or misconceptions of Malaysian graduates and instructors as to what is needed by stakeholders. More importantly, applying CCM to the PCS framework will help to fill the information gap that currently exists: the lack of any workplace communication competence framework articulated and validated by Malaysian stakeholders.

Underlying this framework development is a common disciplinary interest: namely, the need to generate a broadly acceptable frame of reference that identifies the essential components of PCS defined by stakeholders who are involved in human capital development in Malaysia. Since many EOP courses in Malaysian HEIs are taught differently and without clear direction given by companies or government agencies, this framework may work as a guide for policy makers in HEIs to improve and update their courses. Accordingly, besides emphasising the four language

skills in fostering learners' communicative competence, CCM introduces skills, motivation and knowledge as key constructs in producing competent employees. Locating these key constructs within the PCS framework would enhance the quality of graduates so that they become effective and appropriate communicators.

2.1.2 English Literacy in employability

In essence, the review of related literature above indicates that there is a need for more in-depth studies that provide close-up assessment of the professional use of English language which impedes employment. Most studies presented earlier employed mainly survey methods of study without qualitative in-depth attention to further explore stakeholders' perspectives and experiences with English language communication, which is emerging as the major factor in employability. Studies concerned with workplace communication skills and literacy in English are still limited in number. Therefore, this study will help to fill the gap in the literature by providing qualitative insights on stakeholders' practices and their requirement with regard to communicating in English at the workplace, especially at entry-level. This study seeks to find answers to the issues by examining the problem itself and by having the 'problem-solvers' or key informants share their insights and experiences, utilising a qualitative method of study. Thus, building on the theories and conclusions informed by previous research, this study turns towards developing an essential yet absent framework of professional communication skills in ESL for Malaysian HEIs.

As stated earlier, research in workplace literacies has concentrated less on examining students' English language literacy practices and competencies for workplace life; rather, it has gone a long way in unpacking the more generic lists of competencies for the students to achieve. Hence, this theme needs to be more focussed by critically looking at other elements of workplace literacy practices, which include reading, listening and speaking, specifically in the English language. Despite the lack of competence demonstrated in these skills, they are unfortunately not universally articulated as learning goals in current higher education curricula. Currently, what is stressed by the Ministry of Education is improving the quality of human capital in order to become a high-income nation. Stress is placed on enhancing lecturers' ability to produce innovations in teaching and learning based on student centred learning. While it cannot be denied

that improving teaching and learning methods is important in overcoming the lack of competence of our graduates, it is essential to have this formulated clearly within Malaysian higher education policy.

This study is based on the premise that in order to understand the nature of workplace literacies, it is necessary to investigate stakeholders' understanding of their own practices, whether in the public or private sectors, without making prior assumptions as to which practices are appropriate and effective. Qualitative interviews will help to unfold the needs and requirements of stakeholders with in-depth descriptions that explain and give meaning and solutions to the current problem. This approach addresses criticism over the lack of authentic voices from across the spectrum of stakeholders on the acquisition of professional English communication skills at the workplace as pointed out by Kassim and Ali (2010). An active dialogue in selected venues with the respondents would be able to add richness, breadth and depth to the data on PCS in English.

Aligned with the central aim of this study, the qualitative case study is deemed the most appropriate method to investigate stakeholders' interpretations of PCS given its descriptive, dynamic and authentic nature. Moreover, Kaur and Alla Baksh (2010) conclude, workplace literacy should include not only the productive skill (speaking and writing); therefore, data has to be obtained from multiple sources for a more comprehensive understanding of the workplace literacy needed by stakeholders. Hence, for the purpose of this study, triangulation of data sources will be used to maximise the range of data which can contribute to complete understanding of the concept, as advised by (Carcary, 2009):

an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence should be used

(p. 16).

This study will incorporate workplace literacy within the Communication Competence Model. Communication is possibly the most important of all the employability skills (IPPTN, 2010). Speaking, listening, reading and writing are central to all work practices, which have contextualised applications unique to a work-place and job role, but there are a few other

communicative competencies that should be taught in HEIs as part of graduates' professional communication skills. In the past, these skills (i.e. cognitive competence, cultural competence, critical thinking, tasking skills and motivation) were usually treated separately from workplace literacies (Idrus, Mohd Dahan, & Abdullah, 2010; S. Kaur & Alla Baksh, 2010; Pandian & Abd Ghani, 2005; Shah, 2011; UNESCO, 2012). However, looking at the needs of employers today, these skills should be handled parallel with each other as suggested by previous research (Ainol Madziah et al., 2011; Flowerdew, 2005; IPPTN, 2010; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Pandian & Abd Ghani, 2005; Sirat et al., 2007). Ultimately, the few published works and scarce research in this field of inquiry within the region and local context offers an ideal platform for the conduct of the present study.

2.2 Malaysian language education policy

The following sub-sections detail the background of the English language policy in the Malaysian education system from the British era until today. An introduction to this is necessary to appreciate the Malaysian national educational goals and the current language policies that underpin them. Subsequently the position of the English language in the current context of higher learning institutions in Malaysia is presented, followed by a discussion of research pertinent to the English language specifically within the context of higher education in the country.

The English language holds a complex and ironic status in Malaysia (Lee et al., 2009). It is an 'inherited' language and a 'legacy' of the British colonialists, and has progressed and altered through a long historical journey. It was the medium of education and the language of administration for many years prior to independence in 1957. Through Christian missionaries, the British established English schools with English as the medium of instruction as early as 1816 in Penang. English was then used as the official language for administrative purposes which resulted in the establishment of English medium schools to train prospective administrative employees who were proficient in English. The English schools were established mainly in the urban areas and most of the students were children of the royalty and aristocrats. The students were offered ample opportunities for further education, employment in the civil service and access to scholarships. The curriculum in these schools was patterned after the grammar school curriculum in Great Britain, with the intention of producing junior

administrative officers to support the British administration. Given that the English medium schools were mostly set up within the urban areas, the majority of the student population was non-Malay. The majority of the Malays, who mainly resided in the rural areas, could not benefit from these opportunities (Gill, 2005).

Post-independence to contemporary times has seen English language education largely governed by the political and national aspirations of the nation. In the heyday of post-colonial language planning, the new national government set out to form a common national educational system, attempting to unite the diverse groups of Malaysians. The initial national educational curriculum was designed in view of the recommendations made by the Razak Report¹ in 1956 (Omar, 1987). This was a major influential report prepared by the Education committee intended at creating a national identity with the introduction of common content syllabuses and more importantly, to reduce the role and status of English and select one autochthonous language, Bahasa Melayu² (which was later renamed Bahasa Malaysia)³. The Razak Report significantly gave BM its legitimate status and role as the national language as well as the axis of national unity and integration. Since then, BM has been accepted as the national language and is protected under Article 152 of the Constitution of Malaysia (1957) as stated below,

1. The national language shall be the Malay language and shall be in such script as Parliament may by law provide: Provided that-
(a) no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language; and
(b) nothing in this Clause shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation..

¹The Razak Report or the Education Committee of 1956 was the first Malaysian educational report. The report was named after its chairman, Dato Abdul Razak. In many ways the Razak Report incorporated the ideas of the Barnes Committee and Fenn-Wu Reports (Gaudart, 1987).

² The focus on Bahasa Melayu and English does not mean that there are no other languages, for this multiethnic nation also has Mandarin and Tamil and a host of other minority languages, guaranteed equal opportunity under Article 152 of the constitution (Asmah, 1979: 11).

³ At independence, the government of Malaysia, then called Malaya, chose Malay or Bahasa Melayu as its national language. During that period of strong nationalism, the government did not feel the need to change the name of the language. Later, the racial tensions of the sixties spurred the government to rename the national language as Bahasa Malaysia, the language of Malaysians (Asmah, 1992: 157) Presently, these two terms are used interchangeably: Bahasa Melayu to signify that it is the language of the Malays and Bahasa Malaysia to signify that it is the language of Malaysians (Gill, 2005).

The Education Ordinance 1957 was then amended based on the Rahman Talib Report⁴ (1960) and subsequently, on January 1 1962, the new Education Act 1961 was implemented. The amendment in Rahman Talib Report (1960) stated:

The education policy of the federation is to establish a national system of education which will satisfy the needs to promote the cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, with the intention of making Bahasa Malaysia the national language of the country.,, and (educational) research until 1965 should be concentrated on the Malay language and teaching of it and that research into other languages used in Malaya and the teaching of them should thereafter be introduced.

(p. 46)

With this, the role and status of English were radically reduced. From being the sole medium of instruction in the education system during colonial times, English was ‘relegated’ to being taught in schools as a second language; in fact, in the rural areas where there was almost no environmental exposure to the language, English was virtually a foreign language (Gill, 2005).

Though in the Razak Report, the English language was seen as a ‘foreign ingredient’ to the national identity, the government admitted that mastering the English language would be crucial for the country to progress politically and economically since it has a significant position across the globe (Hashim, 2004). Therefore, English was then declared to be ‘an important second language’ which was retained as the medium of instruction in the former English schools and remained one of the compulsory subjects taught in national schools.

In 1978, the National Language Policy was implemented; English has been taught as a second language and a compulsory subject for all students right from their first year of primary education through eleven years of schooling until the end of their secondary education. It has also been acknowledged as an important language for local and international trade as well as a language that provides an additional means of access to academic, professional and recreational materials. Although it is only taught as a subject in the school curriculum, it is still used quite extensively outside the classroom in some of the urban schools. By 1983, the entire national school system was using BM as the medium of instruction.

⁴The Rahman Talib Report is the second educational report.

In 1979 the Cabinet Report on Education recommended a major review of the primary and secondary school curriculum to meet the developmental needs of the country, which led to the development of the New Primary Schools Curriculum (KBSR) in 1983 and the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (KBSM). The New English Language Curriculum was implemented in schools beginning in 1988, based on a communicative model of language teaching and learning. In addition, the aim of the syllabus was to extend overall students 'English language proficiency in order to meet their needs for English in everyday life, for knowledge acquisition and for future workplace needs' (MOE, 2000).

Subsequently, in 1991, the former Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir Mohamad, announced his Vision 2020, in which the objective was to transform the country into a fully-modern industrialised society by the year 2020. Vision 2020 envisages that Malaysia will become a scientifically and technologically advanced nation by the year 2020 if it can surmount nine challenges (Mahathir, 1991). The challenge that has particular implication for the role of English is: establishing a scientific and progressive society, a society that is innovative and forward-looking, one that is not only a consumer of technology, but also a contributor of the scientific and technological civilization of the future (Prime Minister's Department, 2009). The position of English is more clearly defined: it is to serve as a tool for human resource development and technological advancement in the progress towards achieving developed nation status (Mahathir, 1991).

In 2003, after more than 30 years of using BM as the medium of instruction for all subjects except English, the Malaysian educational system experienced another wave of change with the use of English to teach Mathematics and the Sciences in its educational institutions in line with the growth of ICT and the knowledge-based economy. This move was made following a growing demand of governments, industries and corporations for scientific and technological advancements mostly available in English in the era of economic globalisation. The implementation of English for the Teaching of Mathematics and Science (ETeMS) policy, a brainchild of the former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, was deemed necessary to upgrade the mastery of English among Malaysian students to enable them to access the latest scientific information and knowledge and to communicate and participate effectively in the global context while raising the standard of Mathematics and Science (Syed Zin, 2004). Bearing in mind the

limited duration of interaction, ETeMS was not to be regarded as a complete language development course, but rather one of several support mechanisms introduced by the Ministry of Education to use Mathematics and Science subjects to further develop English language competence to a level that will engender optimal performance in and outside the classroom (MoE, 2004). Furthermore, the former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad was quoted as follows in The Star on 10 October 2002:

We want to create a new generation of Malaysians who are well- educated and able to compete with the developed world. Despite objections from various sectors, the Malaysian Cabinet made a decision on using English as the medium for teaching of Science and Mathematics. The rationale behind selecting these two subjects is the light speed pace of development of these disciplines.

(pg. 2)

However, in 2009, after nine years of its execution, the government decided to retract the ETeMS policy effective after 2012 taking into account feedback received from various parties concerning its implementation. A team of researchers from eight Malaysian HEIs, together with Pembina⁵ (Permuafakatan Badan Ilmiah Nasional) conducted a nationwide study entitled ‘Teacher’s Competency Level in ETeMS and its Implications on Human Capital Development’. It was concluded that ETeMS has been deleterious to students, and it could reduce their intelligence. The PEMBINA report also stated that the ETeMS should be abolished due to poor returns of only 4% in English language achievement (Pembina, 2009). In addition, the report addressed the issue of the lack of English language competency of the ETeMS teachers (Pembina, 2009). Since the teachers are not fully confident teaching in English, it beats the actual purpose of ETeMS which was to further develop students’ English language competence to a level that will produce optimal performance in and outside the classroom (MOE, 2004).

Isahak et. al. (2008) made a call for the reversion of the medium of instruction to Bahasa Malaysia. They claimed that PPSMI had failed to raise learners’ conceptual understanding, knowledge and skills in Mathematics and Science. Additionally, the research discovered the gap of achievement between urban and rural schools had widened during the implementation of

⁵ Pembina is the Malay Education Taskforce (Badan Bertindak Pendidikan Melayu), formed as a response by UMNO (the Malay Political Party) to merge all Malay Education Associations in strengthening Malay education. Pembina is an initiative of the UMNO Supreme Council, formed in 2005, aiming to strengthen human capital development among young Malay citizens.

ETeMS (Jaafar, 2008). However, a study done by Singh, Arba, & Teoh (2010) indicated that neither the use of English nor English/Bahasa Malaysia could provide an advantage for pupils from the rural area in Mathematics tests. Since the language of instruction was considered to be a non-issue by virtue of the test scores not being significantly different, it may be inferred that their low scores were indicative of them having difficulties in understanding Mathematical concepts.

Consequently, in 2011, ETeMS was replaced with a new policy named, '*Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuhkan Penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris*' (MBMMBI⁶) or in English 'To Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and to Strengthen the English Language'. It is believed that the new policy of the Ministry of Education Malaysia can ensure the use of the Malay Language as a medium of communication in all national schools and secondary schools, and to ensure that each child can master both Malay and English well and fluently (MOE, 2012c). MBMMBI is positioned under one of the eleven shifts⁷ that was announced by the MOE in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which was 'to ensure every child is proficient in BM and English language' (MOE, 2012b).

The Ministry of Education Malaysia stated that a regressive strategy should be implemented, where, in a 'Back to Basic'⁸ strategy, the teaching and learning of the language is based on the correct use of the language in an integrated manner and within context (MOE, 2012c). The standard British English Model will be used once more as a guide, which was what had been implemented during the pre-independence era.

⁶ The definition of MBMMBI: i) to uphold BM means to place the language in its rightful position as the national language as enshrined in Article 152 of the Federal Constitution. BM is also the main medium of instruction based on the Education Act of 1996, and ii) to strengthen the English language means to enhance the command of the language as a compulsory language to be learned, the language of communication and of knowledge at the national and international levels (MOE, 2012c).

⁷MOE has identified 11 shifts that will need to occur to deliver the change in outcomes envisioned by all Malaysians. Some of these shifts represent a change in strategy and direction. Others represent operational changes in the way the Ministry and schools have historically implemented existing policies. Regardless of whether it is a strategic or operational shift, they all represent a move away from current practices(MOE, 2012b).

⁸Back to Basics strategy within the English Curriculum is aimed to strengthen the mastering of basic English by focusing on phonics as well as incorporating enjoyable learning elements in the Language Arts module. The learning of Grammar within context will be given specific emphasis in the Grammar module. (MOE, 2012a: p.13).

In this new Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025⁹, the previous curriculum framework of primary and secondary schools in Malaysia, KBSR and KBSM, would be revised to reflect a balanced set of knowledge and skills. A new standardised curriculum would be introduced, known as Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) and Secondary School Standard Curriculum (KSSM). Another big leap in this new policy is the strategy to revamp national examinations and school-based assessments to gradually increase the percentage of questions that test higher-order thinking. The School Based Assessment (PBS) is a holistic form of assessment which assesses the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains encompassing intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical aspects. Thus, the PBS¹⁰ is in tandem with the KSSR as well as the National Education Philosophy.

Since these latest policies have just been implemented, the outcomes are still unclear. However, the MOE is assured that MBMMBI and PBS will produce Malaysians who are proficient in BM and English in all aspects of communication, be it in their daily conversations, when conducting official matters and seeking knowledge, or in their respective careers (MOE, 2012, p18). Another benefit of this policy is that it will create a nation, identified as 1Malaysia, whose citizens possess strong personal resilience and are progressive, dynamic and competitive at the international level (MOE, 2012). Table 2.2 below summarise the events and changes in Malaysian education policies.

Table 2. 2 Changes of the Malaysian Education policies: summary of events.

Year	Event	Position of English Language
1816-1956	British Colonial Education	English medium schools in urban areas.
1956	First Malaysia Educational Report (Razak Report)	BM as the national language (enshrined in Article 152 of the Constitution of Malaysia). All subjects must be taught in BM, except English.

⁹ In October 2011, the Ministry of Education launched a comprehensive review of the education system in Malaysia in order to develop a new National Education Blueprint. This decision was made in the context of rising international education standards, the Government's aspiration of better preparing Malaysia's children for the needs of the 21st century and increased public and parental expectations of education policy (MOE, 2012b).

¹⁰ PBS is carried out continuously in schools by teachers during the teaching and learning process. There are 4 components in the PBS: (i) Central Assessment, (ii) School Assessment, (iii) Assessment of Sports and Co-curricular activities, and (iv) Psychometric Assessment.

1978	National Language Policy	English as a second language, a subject compulsorily taught in all schools from primary to secondary.
1979	KBSR	The new curriculum for schools introduced. Communicative Model was applied for the English language subject.
1988	KBSM	
2003-2009	ETeMS	English language used as medium for teaching Mathematics and Science subjects in schools.
2011	MBMMBI	The policy to uphold BM and strengthen the English language by reinforcing the command of the language: a compulsory language to study as the language of communication and knowledge.
2013 – 2025	Malaysian Education Blueprint	An effort to elevate the education system. MOE proposed eleven shifts to transform it. KSSR, KSSM and PBS implemented.

The above discussion has outlined some of the key movements that have taken place in English language literacy in Malaysia. Clearly, the rise of English was witnessed within the colonial era while its decline was evident amidst nationalism and nation building. The number of colossal changes in the Malaysian education system is evidently one of the major factors of why the problem of this particular study arises. Hulya (2009) stresses that in second language acquisition, learners rely greatly on routines and patterns. The lack of a consistent routine and the dramatic changes in Malaysian education language policies have made it increasingly difficult for language acquisition to happen. Understanding that the students coming in to HEIs are the product of the ever changing educational policy, the literacy landscape has also observed shifts in approaches to English learning in higher education, as will be discussed below.

2.2.1 English language in Malaysian HEIs

At the time of Malaya's independence in 1957, there was no university in the country. Since the birth of the Malaysian Federation in 1963, higher education institutions (HEIs) have undergone a 'democratization and massification' process; globalisation and transnationalisation have increased enrolment, growth of 'for-profits' private HEIs, and worldwide technological advances which have profoundly altered the delivery in HEIs (Morshidi in UNESCO, 2006. p. 103). In line with the aim to be a developed country as stated in Vision 2020, higher education was seen

as vital to Malaysia's economic growth and an important component in turning Malaysia into a regional education hub. Thus, education reforms governing both public and private higher education were tabled in 1996, namely the Education Act 1996, Private Higher Educational Act 1996, National Council on Higher Education Act 1996, National Accreditation Board Act 1996 and the Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Act 1996. These reforms provide the necessary regulatory framework for the liberalisation and privatization of higher education on a larger scale to meet the social and economic needs of the country (Morshidi in UNESCO, 2006. p. 105). According to Lee (2004), education was the most important instrument to achieve national unity, social equality and economic growth. In order to eradicate poverty, a trained and skilled workforce was needed, to increase productivity and hence, the income level of all Malaysians (MOHE, 2007a). Higher education, therefore, became one of the most important means for developing and producing this trained and skilled workforce. More specifically, higher education was visualised as a significant vehicle to improve the socio-economic standing of the disadvantaged Bumiputras (Sirat, 2005).

In view of the importance of higher education in dealing with the socio-economic issues of Malaysia by 2020, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) was established in March 2004. Prior to this, higher education matters were under the Ministry of Education through the Department of Higher Education, which was established in 1995. MOHE is the governing authority for the Malaysian higher education sector, and it oversees HEIs (both public and private higher educational institutions), community colleges, polytechnics and other government agencies involved in higher education activities such as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency¹¹ (MQA) and the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional – PTPTN), to name a few.

In 2011, Malaysia had 20 public universities, 53 private universities and six foreign university branch campuses, 403 active private colleges, 30 polytechnics and 73 public community colleges. However, the 27 teacher education institutions are still under the jurisdiction of the MOE. The increasing demand for higher education in Malaysia has also resulted in a varied

¹¹The national quality assurance agency of Malaysia, known as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), was established on 1 November 2007 under the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007. Its key function is to quality assure all programmes and qualifications offered by higher education providers.

range of course and degree offerings. As stated in the MQA's Annual Report, commencing in 2010, the public HEIs would offer 326 accredited academic programmes at the undergraduate level while the private would offer 1075 programmes (MQA, 2010. p.6). The qualifications awarded by all HEIs (both public and private) in Malaysia registered under laws related to Malaysian education are governed by the Malaysian Qualifications Framework¹² (MQF). The framework specifies that a programme is required to achieve the following minimum credits before an academic qualification can be awarded: certificate (60 credits), diploma (90 credits), bachelor's degree (120 credits) and taught master's degree (40 credits). Masters degrees and PhDs obtained by research do not have credit values.

English is used as the primary medium of instruction at most of the private higher educational institutions in the country. It is however, only used for postgraduate studies at public universities as the bachelor's degree courses conducted at these universities are taught primarily in BM, with the exception of MARA University of Technology (UiTM) and International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Azman (2009) claims that underlying the naturalisation of teaching and learning of English in the Malaysian education system are 'ideological pressures and political dogmas, often emerging from colonial, urban/rural and even local ethnic conflicts and hierarchies' (p. 9). Primarily, in the context of Malaysia, the most powerful influence on the nature of English language programmes is the government's stand concerning the position of English in the National Education System and society at large. Initially, following the National Language Policy in 1970, all universities had adopted the national policy of using BM as the sole medium of instruction. English was relegated to the position of a second language and its role confined to being a means of acquiring knowledge. However, in 2007, MOHE launched the National Higher Education Plan 2007-2010 (MOHE, 2007a), which aims to produce Malaysians who are intellectually active, creative and innovative, articulate, adaptable and capable of critical thinking (MOHE, 2007a, p.7). Based on it, MOHE has produced a profile of desired human capital and among the important attributes related to the English language are the following: graduates should have mastery in BM and English and at least one other global language, and

¹²MQA is entrusted with implementing the national framework known as the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) to accredit higher educational programmes and qualifications, to supervise and regulate the quality and standard of higher education providers, to establish and maintain the Malaysian Qualifications Register and to provide for related matters.

should be able to be good communicators and effective presenters in BM and English (MOHE, 2007a, p.13).

With the increasing use of English in academic contexts, mastery of the language is now a must and is no longer seen as a complementary competence, particularly in the fields of science and technology (Rea-Dickins & Scott, 2007). Realising this importance, the MOHE has made English language proficiency a compulsory requirement for admission to local universities, starting in 1999. The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) is administered by the Malaysian Examination Council (MEC) and it specifically aims to “bridge the gap in language needs between secondary and tertiary education” (Chan & Wong, 2004, p. 35). Explicitly, the objective of the MUET is ‘to measure the English language proficiency of pre-university students for entry into tertiary education and comprises all the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing’ (MEC, 2006, p. 6). In order to be permitted into HEIs, Malaysian applicants must obtain the minimum band demanded by the various faculties of each HEI so as to ensure that they have an adequate level of English ability to cope with the courses in their chosen field of study (Kaur & Nordin, 2006). More importantly, the MUET band scores obtained by students are also used to provide diagnostic information for their placement in English language proficiency courses (Mohamed, 2008).

As an extension to this, the Ministry of Higher Education has instituted several measures to improve the employability of local graduates. One of the measures was the introduction of soft-skills (including mastering the English language and presentation techniques) and entrepreneurship modules for the 2007/2008 academic session in all public universities (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2007, p. 30). It is evident that the curricula in HEIs must also equip undergraduates with appropriate skills to enable them to compete in an ever-changing market. Curricula must be reviewed, and courses that are no longer relevant must be removed (Wahi, 2012). Peer review and industry collaboration must be enhanced in curricula development and evaluation (IPPTN, 2010). Nonetheless, according to Nich (2005), long before the diversification in degree programmes, an English qualification is the most assured ticket of success at the workplace. Shakir (2009) adds that developing the soft skills needed by the employers by interweaving them in current course content is probably the most practical way, but the English language competency issue might not be addressed effectively.

The issues above highlight the importance of a course in Malaysian HEIs which, while taking place in an academic setting, is designed to equip undergraduates with workplace English language competency and practices, in order to meet students' future communication needs after graduation. English for Educational Purposes (EOP) courses then, must be designed with the aim of preparing students with a comprehensive English language for workplace demands as well as encouraging them to develop a critical awareness of workplace practices (Flowerdew, 2005). Currently, the EOP syllabus varies according to HEIs' faculty level. Hence, this study will attempt to create a standardised framework of the EOP course taught in Malaysia HEIs, in accordance with the present-day needs of stakeholders.

To conclude the above discussion, while the primary and secondary school education system in Malaysia is undergoing major reorganisation, HEIs in Malaysia have little choice but to address this issue at the tertiary level, which has led to national policy changes and institutional development in the higher education system in Malaysia (see Table 2.2). Under the new policy framework, higher education has been privatised and public universities have been corporatized, resulting in a sharp growth in the number of tertiary students especially students in the private sector. The MQA accredits all programmes and qualifications that fulfil the set criteria and standards. However, in the midst of expansion, new graduates in Malaysia are not proficient in English and are not marketable in the job market due to this lack of English language proficiency and this is costing the nation a great deal of money (Sekharan Nair et al., 2012). It is agreed that Malaysian HEIs may be producing graduates who are sufficiently knowledgeable in their area of study but inadequate in English Language proficiency (Kassim & Ali, 2010). Therefore HEI's curriculum designers and policy makers should review the current syllabus which emphasises accuracy too much, rather than fluency in the English language.

Table 2. 3 Phases in Malaysian Higher Education

Phase	Events
Pre 1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one university in Malaysia, University of Malaya. • Government emphasised primary and secondary education.
Post 1970 – 1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State controlled universities were established

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic quota admission policy was applied.
Post 1990 – 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of more state-controlled universities. • MQA was introduced to ensure quality mechanisms. • Overseas private HEIs instituted. • Corporatisation of public HEIs.
Post 2000 – present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOHE was formed (2004). • National Higher Education Plan 2007 – 2010

2.3 Theoretical framework

As set out in Chapter 1, this study focusses on defining the professional communicative competence demanded by Malaysian stakeholders. An important starting point is the notion of communication competencies. The study adopts the position of Moreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007), who maintain the necessity of a Communication Competence Model. This theory lays emphasis on the importance of competent communicators who need to learn to adapt to the communication rules of the society to which they belong so that they are able to communicate effectively and appropriately. In their theory, Moreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) declare that communicative competence should have three components namely; cognitive knowledge (i.e. of the subject and knowledge of how to communicate), communication skills (i.e. how to communicate effectively) and motivation to communicate (i.e. desire to engage in communication). These three requirements or dimensions of competence – motivation, knowledge and skills – are used in this research as the foundation of the Professional Communication Skills (PCS) of Malaysian graduates (further discussion on this in 2.3, the Communication Competence Model). The CCM conceptualises the overarching relational communication theory, providing a solid theoretical and applicable structure upon which this current research could design a framework in PCS. This application resolves one of the main problems addressed in the literature review: the lack of a cohesive framework in teaching EOP in Malaysian HEIs.

The second key concept informing the study's theoretical framework is English literacy in employability. It is noteworthy that the main aim of this study is to produce an informed, impartial and highly valid PCS framework in English to be used, not just as a reference for EOP practitioners, but also as a checklist for future employers to assess their entry-level employees. The review of literature on English language literacy for employability, especially in highlighting the voices of the Malaysian private sector and the government, is essential to accentuate and further clarify the issues in this study. This matter will be further clarified in subsection 2.4, English literacy in employability.

In essence, the focus of this study's theoretical basis is the intersection between the Communication Competence model and English literacy in employability. The following discussion on the review of literature will regularly show connections to the present study and justify why these key concepts were chosen. The theoretical framework of this thesis is summarised in Figure 2.2 below.

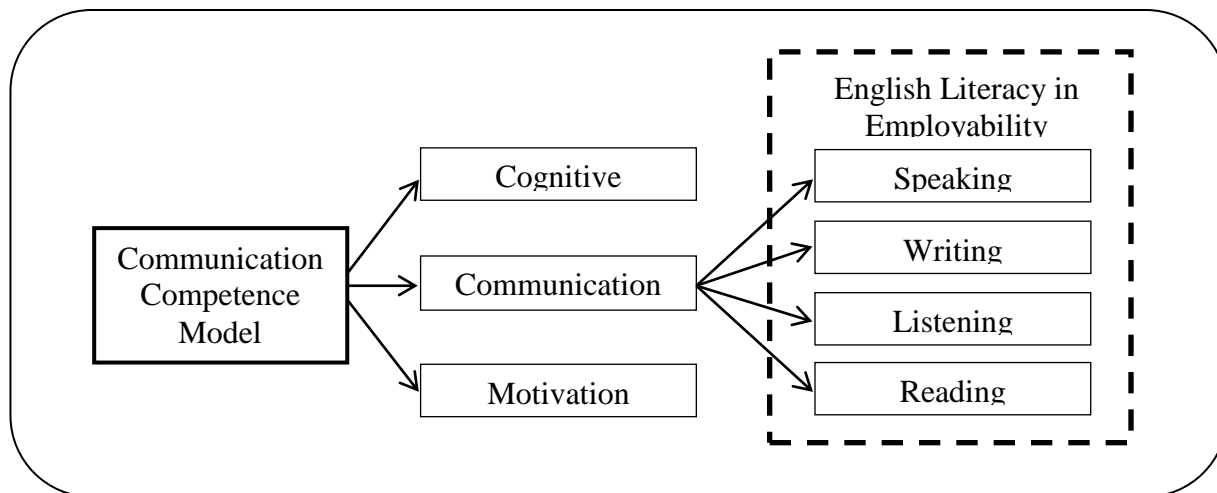


Figure 2. 2 Theoretical Framework

2.4 The Communication Competence Model (CCM)

2.4.1 An Overview

The term Communicative Competence was coined in 1972 by Dell Hymes, a distinguished socio-linguist. He hypothesised that communicative competence is a combination of the

knowledge of communication and the ability to communicate. Social rules and norms are also incorporated into the communicative competence framework. He stressed that competent communicators need to learn to adapt to the communication rules in the society to which they belong so that they are able to communicate effectively and appropriately.

To build on Hymes' findings, Wiemann and Backlund (1980) suggested that communicative competence is a combination of 'knowing what to say and knowing how to say it (communicate)' (p.89). In addition, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984, 1987) added another valuable element of communicative competence, which was motivation to communicate. They declared that communicative competence, should have three important components, namely: cognitive knowledge (i.e. subject knowledge and knowledge of to communicate), communication skills (i.e. how to communicate effectively) and motivation to communicate (i.e. desire to engage in communication). Spitzberg and Cupach's model of communicative competence (as illustrated in Figure 2.4) is also a response to McCroskey's earlier definition of competence as knowledge of appropriate behaviour, distinct from skill and effectiveness.

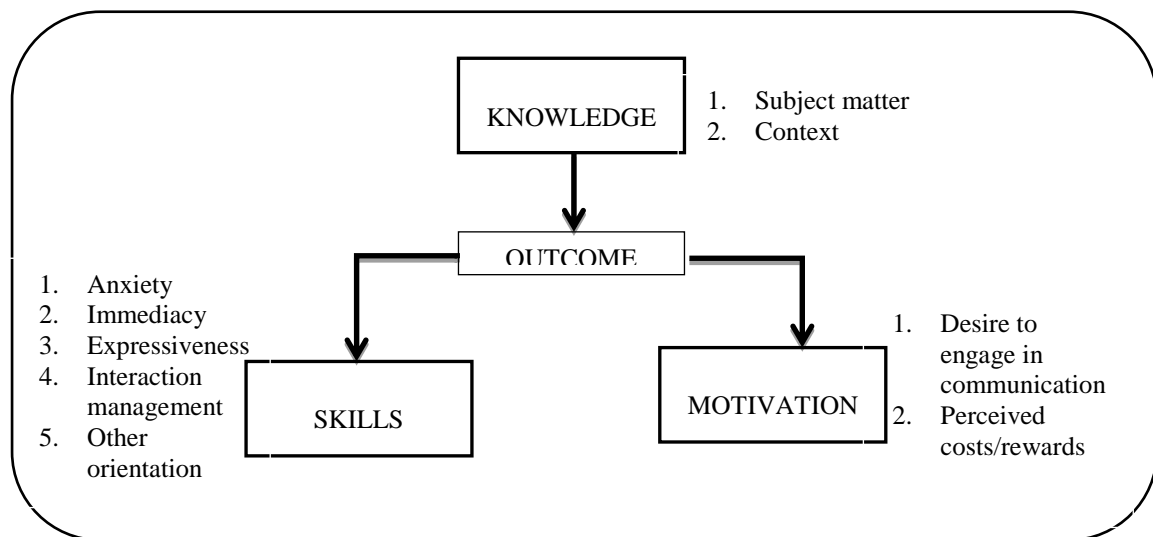


Figure 2. 3 The Communicative Competence Model (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984)

Spitzberg defines communication competence as the extent to which persons achieve desired outcomes through communication acceptable to a situation (2000, p. 9). Morealle, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) add that communicative competence is measured by how effective and appropriate a person is in a given context. They emphasise that achieving competent communication requires

the interplay of two or more communicators using their motivation, knowledge and skills in a given context to create impressions of their *appropriateness* and *effectiveness* (Morealle, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007, pp, 44). Appropriateness and effectiveness are more likely to occur when a person is motivated to communicate, is knowledgeable about communication, and is skilled in communicating in a particular interpersonal relationship and context (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995).

Communicative competence is a construct that represents the extent to which something desired is accomplished through communication in a manner that fits the situation (Morreale et al., 2001). Competence is defined as the perceived effectiveness and appropriateness of a person's communication, in this case professional communication in a workplace context. People must display competence in order to achieve interpersonal objectives, such as disseminating information, gaining compliance, or mediating conflict (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). In the context of communicating efficiently in the workplace, employees must behave in a way that is perceived as competent by their clients, superiors and colleagues in order to be successfully productive and efficient.

In relating communicative and workplace competency, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has defined competencies as the combination of skills, attributes, and behaviours that are directly related to successful performance on the job (Rodríguez-Ulloa, 2008). Competency represents observable and measurable knowledge, skill, ability, behaviours and attitudes associated with excellent job performance, work results or outputs, that define performance in terms of what work is done and how it is done. In the educational arena, competencies are forward-looking; help to clarify expectations; define future professional needs; and focus on the development of curricula, course design, and performance assessment for professional and technical programmes. Effective communication suggests that people are able to achieve desired personal outcomes and are able to control and manipulate their social environment to obtain their goals. Competent communicators are able to identify their goals, assess the resources necessary to obtain those goals, accurately predict the other communicator's responses, choose workable communication strategies, enact those communication strategies and finally accurately assess the results of the interaction. Being competent communicators should clearly be the aim of every HEI's students in Malaysia upon graduation.

In order for graduates to communicate competently at the workplace, there are three basic requirements they must meet. Firstly, they have to be motivated to communicate. Secondly, they have to be knowledgeable about the situation and content in which they are communicating and the kind of communication expected and needed in a certain situations at the workplace. Thirdly, they must be skilled at sending and receiving messages in the workplace context. These three requirements or dimensions of competence – motivation, knowledge and skills – are used in this research as the foundation of the Professional Communication Skills of Malaysian graduates.

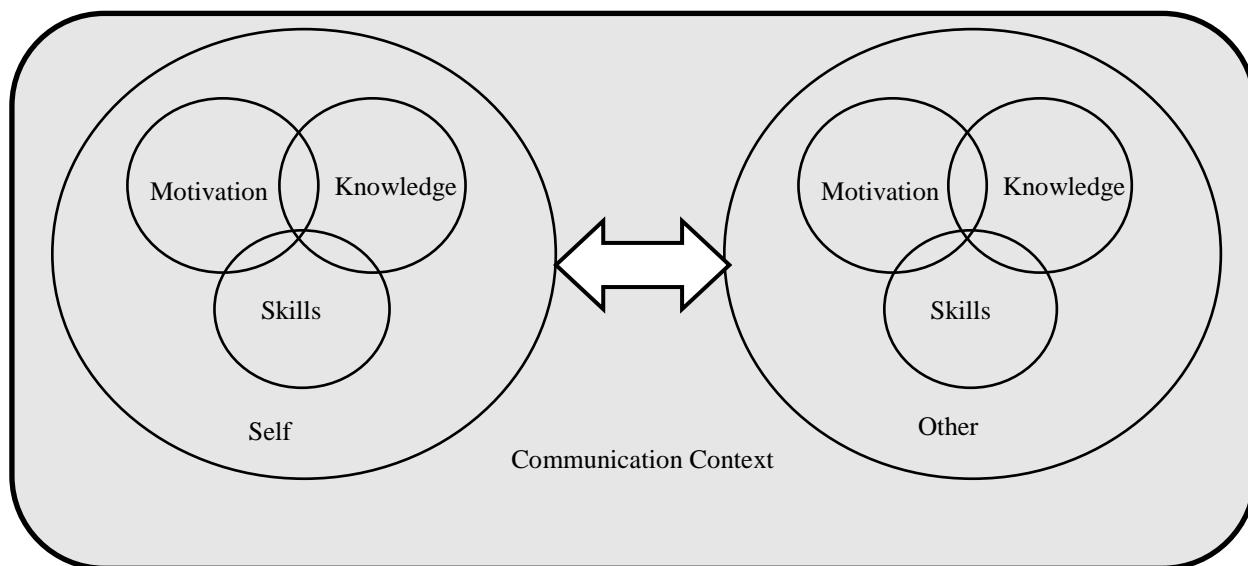


Figure 2. 4 Basic components of the Communication Competence Model (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007)

It should be stated that the component model of competence is not a theory about communication, but rather a model that sets the framework for what makes someone a competent communicator, and this was the reason why this model was chosen for this study. The model has been used as the basis for many other models of competence because of its breadth (Bubaš et al., 2003; Oschell, 2009; Włoszczak-Szubzda & Jarosz, 2012). Using the three key components of CCM as a basis of the study's framework, one should be able to assess and analyse practically the communicative competence of graduates, aspects lacking and points that should be improved in the academic and workplace context. In addition, the three key components bear a direct resemblance to Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning, where Spitzberg (2012) describes competence as constituted of motivation (affect), knowledge (cognition), and skills (psychomotor abilities).

Therefore, the advantage of adopting this framework as the basis of the EOP course syllabus is that the CCM is already intended to ascertain the extent to which the model of communicative competency can be a strong basis in implementing curricular operationalisations.

2.4.2 Knowledge (cognition)

‘Knowledge in communication guides us about what to say and do and tells us the procedures by which we can do it.’
(Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007, p. 37)

As Morreale et.al (2007) explain, knowledge in the context of communication constitutes the what and the how of communication, known as content and procedural knowledge. Content knowledge is what we know about communication: how to form words while speaking or writing, how to gesture, use vocal control and employ physical proximity. It is an awareness of what behaviour is best suited for a given situation. This involves information about the people and context, the communication rules and the normative expectations governing the interaction with a member of the other culture (Morreale et. al, 2001). In this research, graduates are expected not only to communicate in a professional manner at the workplace, but also they must have ample information about the subject matter (Włoszczak-Szubzda & Jarosz, 2012). Therefore, the use of specific jargon and suitable discourse competence is also essential for workplace communication. Having ample subject content knowledge will help to contribute to on-going improvement and expansion of knowledge for the betterment of workplace operations.

Successively, procedural knowledge comes into play during a communication situation. When graduates use the correct language and gestures, maintain proper volume and pitch of voice, and remain conscious of appropriate physical distance, they display proper procedural knowledge of how to communicate in that situation. The subcomponents of knowledge of communication which will be used in the research are as follows:

Knowledge of thinking critically

Critical thinking is the ability to analyse, hypothesise, synthesise and criticise (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007, p. 440). Analysing communication means being able to break it down into its surface meanings and underlying essence (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007). Hypothesising is the ability to draw messages out of implications and engage them in what-if

scenarios. Synthesising is the ability to reassemble communication messages into a coherent whole after they have been analysed. Finally, criticising is the ability to apply standards to evaluate a message to determine its value (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007). Having this knowledge of critical thinking contributes to constructive criticism, as well as resolves arising matters at the workplace.

Sociocultural competence

In line with Hymes's belief about the appropriateness of language used in a variety of social situations, sociolinguistic competence in this model includes knowledge of rules and conventions which underlie appropriate comprehension and language use in different cultural contexts (Hymes in Bagari & Mihaljevi, 2007). This subcomponent of knowledge is essential especially in the Malaysian context since the Malaysian context, consists of several different ethnic groups, and hence, graduates need to understand and use English language functions appropriately in a given intercultural context. In essence, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) define sociocultural competence as the speaker's knowledge of how to express appropriate messages within the social and cultural context of communication in which they are produced. Having sociocultural competence at the workplace can contribute to harmonious relations between superiors, subordinates, colleagues and clients.

Task Skill

Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge define task skill based on ideas contained in the reflective thinking model, the functionalist approach and vigilant interactions (2007, p. 226). The five central task skills are 1) defining the problem, 2) analysing the problem, 3) identifying criteria for solving the problem, 4) generating solutions or alternatives, and 5) evaluating solutions (ibid). Applying these steps during communication, especially in groups at the workplace, can facilitate a well-rounded analysis; it can contribute to productive long-term and short-term strategic planning and effective execution of workplace tasks.

2.4.3 Communication Skills

‘Communication - the human connection - is the key to personal and career success’.

(Meyer, 2006, p.86)

Communication Skill is the actual performance of the behaviours and having the ability to apply effective and appropriate behaviour in the given communication context. For Spitzberg (2000), skills are repeatable behaviours that are usually goal driven and intentional (e.g. set off by motivation factors) and that facilitate the utilisation of diverse types of knowledge for the achievement of goals. Morreale (2008) adds that deliberateness and repeatability are important characteristics of the skill; for an action or behaviour to be considered a skill, it must be performed with intent, and the communicator must be able to duplicate the action. Based on the three factors above (deliberate, repeatable and goal-oriented), Spitzberg (1983) then defines skills in communicative competence as the use of verbal and/or nonverbal behaviour to accomplish preferred outcomes in a way that is appropriate to the context, situation, and the communicators. The subcomponents of the skills in the Communication Competence Model are described below.

Interpersonal Communication

There are many definitions of interpersonal communication. In this research, interpersonal communication is defined as a complex process that involves a sender and a receiver who exchange messages containing ideas and feelings, mixed together, and which also includes social skills and emotional intelligence, both of which can be improved through effort and experience (Dufrene & Lehman, 2012). Within the context of interpersonal communication, Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) further explain it by adding four subcomponents to it: attentiveness, composure, coordination and expressiveness.

Attentiveness is the skill of showing interest in, concern for, and attention to another person in an interaction (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, p. 189). Composure is the skill of appearing in control of one's communication behaviour, and the most common challenge faced by entry-level employees is communication anxiety. As an employer, a composed employee is always viewed as competent, confident, focussed and attentive. Coordination is the skill of managing the flow of interaction (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, p. 193). It is important to have this skill at the workplace since it demonstrates the ability to have smooth conversations without many interruptions or long silences during the conversation. Expressiveness is the skill of animating verbal and nonverbal communication which makes conversation lively, varied and colourful

(Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, p.196). Expressiveness plays an important role at the workplace since the skills of using voice and facial expressions have a great influence on whether the employer and colleagues find someone interesting or uninspiring. These four basic subcomponents of interpersonal skills are further explained in Figure 2.3.

Presentation Skill

The meaning of competent presenter in this study is being credible, clear, vivid, appropriate and having vocal variety during presentation. Speaker credibility is the impression the audience forms of a speaker in a given speaking context at a given time (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, p. 315). Clarity of language in a presentation is achieved by being sensitive to how the meanings of words and phrases vary from one context to another, are concrete and familiar to the audience. Vividness of a language, on the other hand, promotes enthusiasm for a speech by using various figures of speech and imagery. Appropriate language is when one presents information in a way that respects the members of the audience without using biased language or negative connotation. In addition, using vocal variety can heighten and maintain an audience's attention and interest in a presentation. The rate, pitch and volume during an employee's speech may keep the listener's attention and important points can be emphasised in the speech.

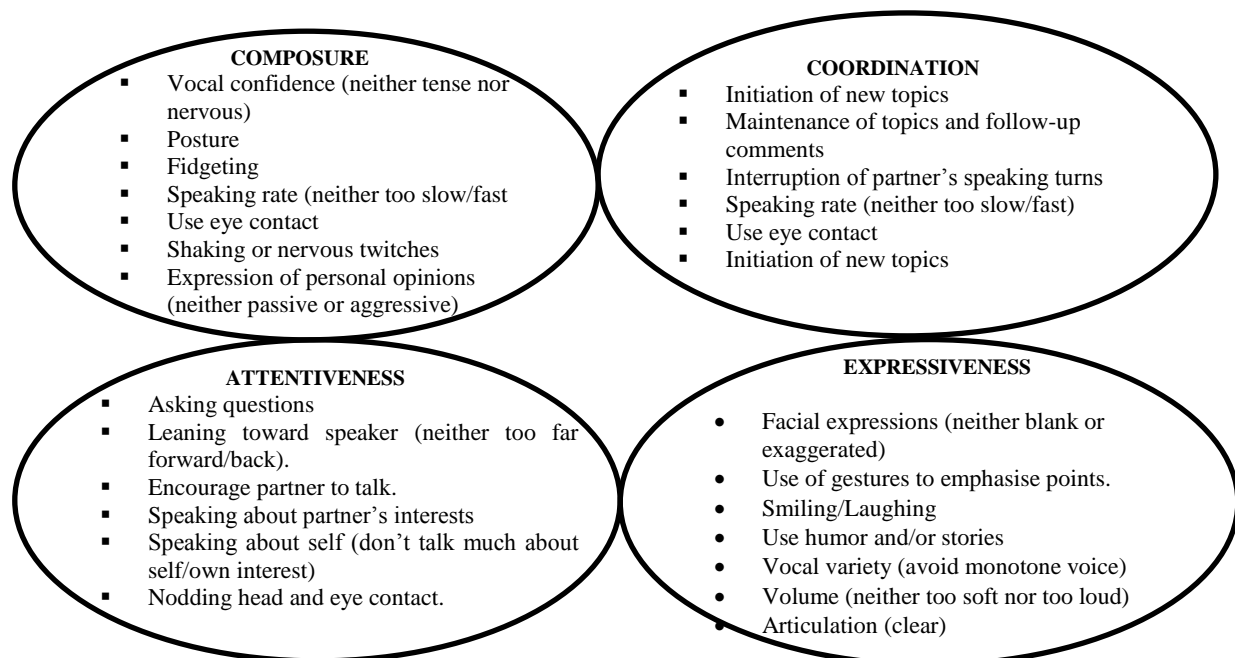


Figure 2. 5 Four basic subcomponents of interpersonal skills

2.4.4 Motivation

The term ‘motivation’ has its origins in the Latin word *movere*, which means movement (Steers, Mowday & Shapiro, 2004). In general, motivation can be described as something intangible, a trigger or drive inside a person that stimulates that person to specific actions or to certain behaviours. This indicates a constant movement, thus motivation is always directed towards something or away from something. Employees continually seek or/and are encouraged to become better and faster. This implies that there is no final goal in motivation, making it a moving target that is never reached (Bernotaite, 2013). This might be good for the productivity at a workplace, but in a long-term perspective, it can be difficult to motivate employees as their demands for ‘reward/motivation’ continuously grow.

Motivation is a complex and multifaceted subject and there are many definitions present that reflect different aspects of it. Furthermore, there are a number of different philosophical orientations regarding the nature of human beings and this contributes to further variance in perception and definition of motivation. Despite the discrepancy in the definition of motivation there are some common elements which are generally shared by all definitions of motivation. The common traits of motivation across theory are concerned with: (1) reasons/situations that energize human behaviour, (2) channels of such behaviour and maintenance and (3) sustainability of this behaviour over time (Steers, et al., 2004).

Most employers today would like to have their employees motivated and ready to work (Bessell et al., 2012), and work is performed by people, and for each of those individual people there is a complex interaction of reasons for them to do the work, to do it in particular ways, to particular standards and with particular levels of energy and enthusiasm. This complex interaction is often summed up in one word: motivation (Latham and Pinder, 2012). The aim of any organisation is to have motivated employees, because such employees work hard, and their diligence is focused on important goals (Urdizkova, 2009). Entry level employees are expected to have ‘voluntary motivated behaviour’ (Lawler, 1973) since this is crucial in determining the effectiveness of organisations. Other factors also have a bearing, as stated by Robertson, Smith and Cooper (1992):

Consideration of questions such as; why do people go to work, why do people work hard, clearly shows that effort and performance at work are determined by ability, temperament and motivation. Despite the often complex interactions between these factors it is possible to develop theories and practical guidelines that focus specifically on motivation without losing sight of the influence of other factors.
(p.97).

Motivation has many different definitions, hence it is important to focus on those that are related to the workplace. For the purpose of this study, the different theories of motivation and how they are relevant to the workplace will be examined. Theories related to the newest generation in the workforce, generation Y, will be investigated since the entry level employees for the workforce nowadays will come this generation.

Generations

Generation Y is the newest generation to enter the workforce, was born between the years 1980 and 2000 (Baldonado, 2013). Other terms associated with Generation Y are ‘Millennials’ and ‘Generation Next’ (Volkert, 2012; Baldonado, 2013). This generation was raised by the Baby Boomers who sought to provide them with numerous opportunities to explore the world, and their parents engaged them with decision making situations from a young age (AIF, 2014). Research by Baldonado (2013) shows that Generation Y is the most diverse generation which consists of a range of racial and ethnic cultural lines which are blurred instead of being clearly defined. The research reveals that the diversity of Generation Y’s friends provides them with exposure to different kind of ideas. Combined with the parents who are always engaged with them, and a good exposure of diverse sets of friends, this generation is primed to think outside of the box and able to tap into divergent ideas. Moreover, Generation Y is constantly wired lifestyles means that they have easy access to information. Asian Institute of Finance (2014) reveals that this generation sees technology as a way of life, instead of as a tool or toy; and they accept technology as being an integral part of every aspect of their lives. It is also discovered that Generation Y is more concerned with high monetary returns (Campbell and Twenge, 2008) and they do not prefer face-to-face socialising since they prefer to use a variety of social networking sites as main source of communication (Lyons, 2011). Due to Generation Y growing up in a

technological era, this affects their social interactions with others and contributes to their low organizational commitment (Lyons, 2011).

Additionally, the young employees are a distinctive group from older, more established employees on a number of characteristics. They have different values, norms, beliefs, perceptions of the world and priorities as they are at a different stage in their lives. The research conducted by Freund (2006) confirms that age and motivation are interrelated. More specifically, the research shows that age has an impact on a person's work motivation and their priorities of various motivational factors change with the employee's age. This may have implications for their relatedness in the workplace. Looking at Generation Y's background, it is important to look at the different types of motivation which affect their relatedness in the workplace.

Motivation Theory

As the major focus of this research is looking at the young employee in the service industry, the two most known and influential theories in this category are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two Factor Theory. According to Maslow's need hierarchy theory, there are five levels of human needs that can be arranged in hierarchical order: physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). An individual starts at the bottom of the hierarchy with some basic needs and as soon as the need(s) on that level are satisfied, they stop serving as a motivator. Instead, the individual directs motivation towards the satisfaction of the next level's need(s). This theory is interesting in relation to the research, since it would allow determining what type of needs drive young employee motivation in the service sector. However since the theory does not include any specific motivational factors, its applicability to the thesis is limited.

A second theory in this category is the Two Factor Theory. According to Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1993), there are two distinctive set of factors influencing employees' job attitude and motivation, namely intrinsic (motivators) and extrinsic (hygiene) factors. Motivators are responsible for employee satisfaction, where hygiene factors are associated with job dissatisfaction. The theory also points out a dual relationship between the motivators and hygiene factors. the Two Factor Theory is consider to be very relevant for the research, since it provides a

set of predetermined motivational factors that can be employed in order to identify and assess importance of motivational factors among young employees in the service sector.

According to Latham & Pinder (2005), work motivation is a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behavior and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration. Psychologically, motivation is a process that results from the interaction between the environment and the individual. It is believed that workers have two fundamentally different orientations towards work. Some perceive work as a means to an end, and are therefore said to be extrinsically motivated. Others are said to be intrinsically motivated and satisfy their need for achievement and self actualization through their work (Thomas, Buboltz & Winkelspecht, 2004).

Additionally, an investigation into motivations for employee engagement shows that Generation Y employees desire greater meaning and personal development of their work (Dulagil, 2012) and engaged employees are both cognitively and emotionally connected to their work and their workplace (Bruinsma, 2004). It is also discovered that the need for autonomy is important for these entry level employees since they will feel as part of a team but still free to express their personal concerns and joys to others (Dulagil, 2012). Hence, it can be presumed that an entry level employee's work engagement is closely related to motivation since Harter et. al. (1992) describe work engagement as 'the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work'(p.21).

Meyer and Gagné (2008) propose that Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a unifying theory to underpin the concept of employee engagement and to explain some seemingly similar findings in relation to employee engagement.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 1985) proposes two over-arching forms of motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing an activity for its own sake out of enjoyment and interest, while extrinsic motivation refers to doing an activity for instrumental reasons (Meyer and Gagné, 2008). SDT comprises of three main components within which are autonomy, competence and relatedness. The need for autonomy is defined as an inherent desire to act with a

sense of choice and volition, from personal interest, and to feel psychologically free (Deci and Ryan, 2000, Ryan and Deci, 2011, Ryan and Deci, 2002). The need for competence refers to mastering one's environment, feeling effective in ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to use and express one's unique capacities (Ryan and Deci, 2002, Deci and Ryan, 2000). Finally, the need for relatedness refers to feeling connected with others and having a sense of belonging at both the individual and the community level (Ryan and Deci, 2002). Need for relatedness is satisfied if people maintain close and intimate relationships, feel part of a team and feel free to express their personal concerns and joys (Van den Broeck et al., 2008).

Urdizkova (2009) advocates that having to achieve a high quality of these components is important since it can immediately reflect in the performance of the employee. Ryan and Deci's (2011) observation that by using appropriate incentives at the workplace, employees who have high quality of SDT are seen to complete harder tasks with better quality as compared to those who are not motivated. Relatedness in the workplace facilitates productive relationships among employees and embodies teamwork, which is an important goal of any management team, including the stakeholders in Malaysia. This shows that motivation plays an important role for stakeholders to choose their future employees since it can have a large effect on the overall productivity and efficiency of an organisation. As Urdizkova (2009) points out, a motivated workforce is the most valuable resource of organisations.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Research by psychologists Ryan and Deci (1994) on Self-Determination Theory indicates that intrinsic motivation, which means doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, will contribute to higher quality productivity. It flourishes in contexts that satisfy human needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 1994). For a workplace setting, it can be predicted that entry level employees will experience competence when challenged and given prompt feedback. They will also experience autonomy when they feel supported to explore, take initiative, develop and implement solutions for their problems. This is agreeable with the research done by Urdizkova (2009), in which students experience

relatedness when they perceive others listening and responding to them. When these three needs are met, students are more intrinsically motivated and actively engaged in their learning.

Numerous studies have found that students who are more involved in setting educational and workplace goals are more likely to reach their goals. Deci and Ryan (2002) discover that when students perceive that the primary focus of learning is to obtain external rewards, such as a grade on an exam, they often perform more poorly, think of themselves as less competent, and report greater anxiety than when they believe that exams are simply a way for them to monitor their own learning. They concluded that such rewards tend to have a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation by undermining people in taking responsibility for motivating or regulating themselves.

Due to a number of positive organizational outcomes, work motivation is continually perceived as an important and relevant subject among academics and practitioners. What makes the subject especially relevant today is the dominance of the service sector, which is characterised by a high level of young labour force participants. Gagne and Deci (2005) discovered that SDT influences young adults' success when they are engaged in independent and purpose-driven behaviour. This is because it is aligned with their values, skills and knowledge (Konrad et. al., 2007). In a similar study, Bernotaite (2013) discovered important evidence for employers whereby Gen Y employees' motivations diminished when deadlines, surveillance and evaluations occurred. On the other hand, Bernotaite (2013) also found out from human resource managers that choices, rewards and autonomy could increase motivation.

Within this research, the purpose of the interview is to gain a management perspective on the matters of motivating young employees and what, in their perception, drives their motivation. The significance of the management perspective in this study is rooted in the ability to approach the phenomenon from a different angle and thereby to gain an in-depth understanding of it.

2.5 English literacy in employability

2.5.1 Previous studies on employability and employers' expectations

A search of the literature has established that a very limited study has been carried out on English language communication practices and competencies for employability in English in the second language context. Additionally, looking at the Malaysian context, research and practical solutions on improving communication practices at the workplace for undergraduates' courses in HEI is still lacking. In general, most studies in developed countries have deliberately dealt with the language, literacy and numeracy needs of the labour force among immigrants or non- native speakers, for example in Canada (Bell, 2000; Duff et al., 2002) Australia (Millar v, 2001) and the United States (Hacker & Yankwitt, 1997). The findings of the above studies appeal for an increase in contextualized, interpretive and critical qualitative studies to examine the experiences, barriers and outcomes associated with language and literacy education.

On the other hand, in the United Kingdom primarily, existing studies in the form of empirical work on employability gave more emphasis on the impact of government policy, organisational strategies, mid-career workers, wider society and educationalists (Bowers-Brown & Harvey, 2004; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Yorke, 2006). Carnevale, Gainer, & Villet (1990) stated that 'employers depend on educators to provide job-ready and training-ready entry-level employees' (p. 236). Teichler (1999) concluded that HEIs should serve three functions when preparing students: the educational function – the cognitive and intellectual capabilities needed to conceive broad knowledge; the training function – the competencies needed to assist students in specific, specialized work; and the socialization function – the 'values, attitudes, social behaviour and the communication skills relevant for action in socio-communicative contexts' (p. 183).

In Malaysia, the quality of education in this country is questioned, in view of the fact that a sizeable number of local graduates remain unemployed (Sirat, et al., 2008). In addition, the changing demands of higher education as a consequence of globalisation have prompted considerable research surrounding the unemployment issues as its central focus (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006; Wok et al., 2007). Many requests and views have been clarified suggesting the need to bridge the gap or mismatch between the available supply of manpower

and the expectations of the potential employers (Abdul Kareem & Othman, 2007; Habib, 2007; Yunus, 2007). The fact that English language determines employability has often been confirmed and discussed in these studies. Sirat et al. (2008) and Hyland & Hamp-Lyons (2002) highlighted in their studies that ensuring graduates can function in English in the workplace is a major issue in Malaysia and many developing countries. They distinctively stressed that graduates have poor mastery of English, especially in the area of communication. This becomes a major factor contributing to unemployment of graduates in addition to low academic achievement and the lack of technical knowledge. It is agreed that graduates from Malaysian universities have been stereotyped as lacking in communication skills and proficiency in English language in most studies.

One prominent study on unemployment problems among graduates from Malaysian HEIs was conducted by Sirat et al. in 2008. Using survey instrument and focus group interview techniques, they identified the reasons why Malaysian graduates are not successful in getting employed. An important finding of this study suggests that the approach in the teaching programme needs to integrate the communication and English literacy skills of the 21st century. They agree that a framework or module on communication skills in English must be designed to assist and train lecturers to design the syllabus and teaching methods (Sirat et al., 2008). The framework designed must be accompanied with a series of training modules to facilitate lecturers in integrating the content and workplace English literacy within their teaching and assessment.

Subsequently, Ambigapathy and Aniswal (2005) conducted a study of 'the University Curriculum, Evaluation of the Graduates' Preparation for the Job Market' involving 214 employers. The findings indicate that most employers require communication skills among graduates, as they are deemed very important from the moment they start work. The findings also bring to light the employers' overall concern over local graduates' low competency in English, as they need more graduates with high written and oral competency in English. However, given the fact that Bahasa Malaysia is used as the medium of instruction in many of the HEIs, it does not come as a surprise to know a high percentage of students chose Bahasa Malaysia as their chosen language for formal and informal oral and written communication, as discovered by Juhdi et al. (2007). Hence, in order to intensify the graduates' English literacy for employability, the use of English in teaching in HEIs must be made compulsory whereby

lecturers should act as models to their students and expose to them current practices at the workplace (Sirat et al., 2008). In addition, Sirat et al. (2008) highlight that the HEIs need to know the skills currently required by the industry, and take them into account in revising the curriculum. They suggested that meetings and discussions between HEIs and industry must be conducted meticulously and more frequently so that exchange of ideas and productive cooperation can aid the development of graduates' skills, particularly in English literacy for the workplace. In agreeing with that notion, Fuhrmann and Grasha (1983) inferred from the findings of their research that HEIs could better meet the needs of their students by adjusting how and what they teach. Therefore, policy makers of HEIs must assess the curriculum and evaluate its purpose in helping students attain employment. Shivpuri and Kim (2004) suggested that higher education should listen to the needs of its stakeholders in industry:

Although employment of their graduates is not the only goal of colleges, it is still important for college administrators and employers to strive for open channels of communication and continuous dialogue in order to recognize, discuss, and resolve these outstanding discrepancies and more effectively serve their common link: the students.

(p.44).

Succeeding previous studies, the Malaysian National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN, 2010) carried out another research to University curriculum and employability needs. Drawing data from focus group interviews and questionnaires, this study provides a constructive information base from which to understand the issue from the viewpoints of the members in industries, academics and graduates, in relation to the current University curriculum. The findings disclose that while the industrial sector prioritises English language competency, most local graduates are found lacking in confidence to converse effectively in the language despite their excellent academic achievements. Correspondingly, the academics call attention to the mastery of English as an important requirement to help students understand lectures and to develop literacy in the workplace after graduation. This study denotes that there is an urgent need to integrate 21st Century literacy skills across all university curricula and the fields of study. In addition, it is recommended that learning and teaching should be conducted entirely in English at all public universities.

2.5.2 Workplace literacy: The voice of employers from Malaysian private sectors

To develop understanding of the predominant role of the English language in the occupational domains, it was necessary to delve into the employers' expectations with regards to the precision of language use. According to Kubler and Forbes (2004), one of the important attributes for student's employability is language proficiency in English and other languages. This refers to abilities in use of the language, the ability to apply the language in appropriate contexts, including the ability to present sustained and persuasive written and oral arguments cogently and coherently with sensitivity to cultural conventions and intended audience at the workplace. It should be highlighted that the language proficiency of graduates is viewed in terms of functional English for workplace environments, which is dissimilar from academic environments. With globalisation, knowledge creation is primarily privileged through English as a lingua franca beyond the native speaker local environment (Koo et al., 2007). Hence, universities need to consider the English language as functional lingua franca within the HEIs environment in order to supply considerable practise for the graduates to be successful after graduation. In order to do so, the specific literacy practices for workplace should be specified.

The review of literature indicates a scant body of research on literacy practices in Malaysian workplaces. One such study which investigated the role all four basic language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening) at the workplace as perceived by employers was by Kassim and Ali (2010). They discovered that the productive skills (speaking and writing) are obligatory upon graduation for engineers from the Malaysian HEIs. However, this finding does not indicate the insignificance of receptive skills (listening and reading) that more focus and stress should be given to the teaching and learning of productive skills in HEI classrooms. A similar result was attained from most employment surveys, whereby more emphasis should be given to speaking and writing skills (MEF, 2004; Ungku Harun, 2004).

A review of literature has discovered that there have been various studies conducted in Malaysia dealing with employers' expectations of potential employees given the need to communicate intelligibly. The focus has moved from studying the exploitation of English in social and informal workplace contexts to the use of English in formal situations in the workplace (Gill,

2002). In the survey done by Ainol Madziah et. al. (2011), they discovered that the respondents, who are 295 employers from fourteen industry sectors in Malaysia, agreed with the high importance of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in English. In addition, Ainol Madziah et. al. (2011) also discovered that companies emphasised productive language skills (i.e. speaking and writing) in the recruitment process since those skills are important to indicate critical thinking and problem solving abilities of potential employees. The emphasis on productive skills is also supported by the finding of the survey whereby all respondents evaluated the English competency of graduates during the recruitment process based on essay writing, face-to-face interviews, written and spoken prompts or given tasks, impromptu speeches, oral presentations, and debates (Ainol Madziah et al., 2011). Koo et al. (2007) had also a similar outcome from their studies, whereby in their quantitative research, the majority of the employers agree that linguistic proficiency is very important to an organisation, especially oral and written communication. The respondents, who were 76 employers from different private sectors in Malaysia, felt that the public universities had not been successful in developing the graduates' productive skills, and some of the companies had to re-train the graduates in these aspects. The employers believed that public universities should train the graduates to be well prepared in oral and written communication upon graduation (Koo et al., 2007).

Yaacob et al. (2005) interviewed four executives from Malaysian international and government link companies (GLC) to identify the proficiency and competencies of English which were highly valued in these corporations. Apart from rating high competencies in English as the main criteria anticipated from job applicants, they highlighted that the ability to speak and write in English effectively is the most important skill valued by the employers in this study. This is because English is widely used in these corporations for different purposes in communication, interaction and business transactions.

Similarly, Wahi (2012) required 13 Human Resource managers from different corporations to rank the importance of the four English language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) via in-depth interviews. One of the main findings of this study was that employers stressed that communicative competence is the most crucial ability demanded of prospective employees given the central exploitation of English in the workplace daily practices. This was highlighted in the findings with regards to the employers' ranking of speaking abilities as the most important skills

valued at the workplace ahead of listening, reading and writing. The overall findings show that all four language skills are considered important or very important skills required by the prospective employers.

Of particular interest to the present study are the elements of English language competencies for workplace adapted in Wahi (2012) from Abdul Razak et al. (2007), based on the data gathered from the survey and interviews with the employers. The workplace literacy competencies are summarised as follows:

- Speaking skills – consist of the ability to speak in social situation like formal dinners, communicating with foreign partners, working together with foreign counterparts, negotiating business matters, giving presentations and reporting.
- Listening skills – encompass understanding meetings and negotiations, receiving instructions and orders and understanding information from various media.
- Reading skills – include reading reports, agreements, minutes of meetings, formal letters, emails and instructions.
- Writing skills – comprise writing proposals, reports, the content of website or Internet.

Another study related to the English language needs analysis in terms the four skills and grammar in the workplace is the one conducted by Talif and Noor (2009). This study involved 86 final year students from various disciplines in four public universities in Malaysia, who were interviewed upon completing their industrial training to investigate whether they were adequately prepared by their respective universities to use English in their working environment during industrial training. Of particular relevance to the current study are the findings on students' feedback regarding the teaching and learning offered by the universities with regard to English language. While the majority of the students were satisfied with the English language courses provided by their universities, they still pointed out the needs for more opportunities and activities that permit them to use the workplace language within their academic settings. Intriguingly, this study strongly suggests the requirement to develop a context-sensitive model of communicative competence which resembles the real world to prepare the university students for employment.

Given the importance of English in multinational companies, Wahi (2012) asked engineers to rate the importance of engineering employees' English communication skills based on three aspects: recruitment, promotion and daily tasks. This highlighted the importance of using English in any situation that necessitates communication using the language, be it verbally or in writing. It was found that communicating in English was considered slightly more important for recruitment and promotion compared to daily tasks. One of the criteria recruiters and employers looked for in their candidates and employees 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. Similarly, Goh and Chan's (1993) study discovered that English communication skills are important for both recruitment and promotion. Hence, over a span of 15 years, the two studies indicated that employers still perceived English communication skills as important for both recruitment and promotion.

Moreover, Splitt (1993) states that one of the challenges in ESP is the need to enhance learners' people-related skills as employees face different types of people at all levels in the organization. Prompted by this, Wahi (2012) sought to find out which groups of personnel engineers in multinational companies most frequently meet and need to communicate in English. The results show that generally the most frequent communication in which English needs to be used is with colleagues, followed by communication with external correspondents, namely clients and suppliers. This finding is in accord with Chang (2004), who states that employers and recruiters look for candidates who are able to communicate with colleagues or customers from local and abroad. On the other hand, in internal correspondence, engineers tend to use English with their superiors more frequently than with their colleagues and subordinates. This indicates the importance of ensuring that superiors or upper level management have a good impression of the engineers' ability to communicate in English. This study discovers that almost 50% of communication is carried out in English, indicating the importance of communicating in English among professional engineers in multinational companies (Wahi, 2012).

Of specific interest to the present study is the study conducted by Sarudin et al. (2008) involving 405 final year students from 6 public universities and 117 participants representing the academic staff, government official and business leaders. This large-scale project, commissioned by

MOHE, was intended to investigate the perceptions of the public and private sectors of the English language proficiency of Malaysian university students. In general, the findings illustrated that most students were limited users of English, particularly in terms of writing and speaking, while they were modest users in listening and reading competencies. One key finding is that these students were generally found to be insufficiently proficient in English to be able to undertake English medium programmes at the tertiary level because of their poor reading comprehension skills, limited writing skills to complete academic writing tasks as well as their restricted ability to express ideas orally, to conduct presentations and to participate in group discussions. With regard to employment, the findings also revealed that the students were inadequately prepared for employment as they lacked the competencies to express their thoughts and ideas, to write reports and to present them orally (Sarudin et al., 2008).

Another important finding also disclosed that most participants mutually agreed that the medium of instruction in BM is the major factor contributing to the students' shortfall in English. Poor proficiency prior to undertaking tertiary studies and their low self-confidence is also another major factor of the lack of English language competence. In addition, another worrisome fact that concerns the academic staff and business leaders is that the students are not proactive in improving their English despite knowing their handicap in the language (Isarji et.al., 2013). For this reason, Sarudin et al. (2008) recommended the minimum of MUET Band 2 for university enrolment. They also emphasised that English should be made compulsory for science and technology disciplines and that more English programmes should be implemented across all university curriculum to ensure that future graduates can perform effectively at the workplace after graduation.

2.5.3 Workplace literacy: The voice of the Malaysian government

Malaysia currently finds itself trapped within a middle-income plateau as reported in the National Economic Model report (NEAC, 2010). In order to reach developed country status by the year 2020, innovative human capital development is a fundamental and critical factor in transforming Malaysia into a high-income country, as designed in the Tenth Malaysia Plan. In reaching that goal, the country is experiencing a transformation in tertiary education through the implementation of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN) which was launched in

August, 2007. This plan provides an overview on how to enhance institutions of higher learning in the country to achieve world class status and at the same time support the national need to produce quality and knowledgeable human capital to meet the nation's needs (MOHE, 2007a).

In addition, MOHE formulated an implementation plan for the development of innovative human capital at tertiary and technical education and skills training (TEST) levels which denotes the importance of human capital development as a national agenda for preparing the required skilled, knowledgeable and innovative human capital in leading the economic growth for Malaysia (MOHE, 2009). MOHE Implementation Plan (MOHE-IP) proves that education is considered as the bedrock because it prepares and supplies the workforce to drive the nation's economy. In brief, the plan aims to nurture, attract and retain local and global talent in the workforce via a fully capable innovation ecosystem. It is designed to promote the development of the highest standards of skills, knowledge upgrading, competencies, work attitudes and motivation. The plan also proposes how to facilitate the translational process from "idea to the-market-place" within tertiary institutions (MOHE, 2009).

One of the five recommendations of MOHE-IP that relates to this study is to intensify the quality of innovative human capital by reviewing, revamping and restructuring/strengthening the curriculum at tertiary institutions, particularly HEIs. MOHE-IP also recommended a borderless transfer of students without compromising standards, between TEST and HEIs and even to industry or vice versa. In doing so, a common standard between all the stakeholders must be clarified. Hence, this study will offer a common reference framework on key competencies in Professional Communication Skills in English for employers, policy makers, education and training providers and learners themselves, to facilitate national reforms and exchange of information among the institutions of higher learning and the community. Furthermore, the PCS framework will help to support other related policies such as employment and other policies affecting youths. By having a common standard, or in the case of this study, a PCS framework, agreed and validated by stakeholders, the vision of borderless transfer of students as stated in MOHE-IP would not be impossible.

On top of that, as a repercussion to such huge changes would be to ensure that there is a stronger connection between HEIs and teachers and students in schools, both primary and secondary.

Students at the tertiary level are the product of the pre, primary and secondary school education. For this reason, all levels of education in Malaysia have embarked on a constructive engagement together to enhance students' employability skills to ensure that they are adequately equipped to compete in an increasingly global and competitive market. Lecturers and instructors from HEIs should be mobilised to instruct, monitor and evaluate the initial human capital development at school level (MOHE, 2009). An important fact was stressed by Professor Asma Ismail, the Chairperson of MOHE-IP in her foreword of the (2009) blueprint:

Education is the bedrock for developing an innovation-led economy as it can create the requisite human capital, especially if driven by dedicated educators driven by a deep passion for their profession. (p vii)

Another essential programme in producing and improving human capital in Malaysia is the Economic Transformation Programme¹³ (ETP) announced by the Prime Minister in 2010. It has been claimed that in order to make a transformative impact on an entire National Key Economic Areas¹⁴ (NKEA), skills and competitiveness of the critical mass of the workforce needs to be addressed (Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia, 2011). It is also recognised that English is seen as the language of progress and development and having workforces equipped with the relevant English skills can give a positive impact in certain major developmental areas (Dumaniga et.al, 2012). Therefore, the interventions that will be proposed for implementation will address the workforce working post SPM, students in technical and vocational schools, tertiary and continuing life-long education (Performance Management and Delivery Unit, 2012). In order to do so, the Malaysian Government announced six Strategic Reform Initiatives¹⁵ (SRIs)

¹³ The Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) was launched by the Malaysian Prime Minister in October, 2010, with announcement of nine projects. It focuses on key growth engines or National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs). It relies heavily on private sector-led growth, describes very specific investments and policy actions and has a clear transparent implementation roadmap with strong performance management.

¹⁴ National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) was first announced in June, 2011. The twelve (12) key areas act as focused approach to economic growth. They receive prioritised government support, including funding, top talent and Prime Ministerial attention.

¹⁵ Strategic Reform Initiatives (SRIs) are the second critical component of the ETP in addition to the 12 NKEAs. The ETP was conceptualised with two key thrusts of focus, through the 12 NKEAs and to be delivered by the 6 SRIs. The six SRIs are Public Finance; Government Role in Business; Human Capital Development; Public Service Delivery; Competition, Standards and Liberalisation; and Narrowing Disparity.

in July 2011. Among the critical SRIs which relates closely with the research are public service delivery and human capital development.

As mentioned earlier, one of the focuses of SRIs is the public service delivery (PSD). The PSD under the SRI programme aims to ensure that the public sector delivers a lean, efficient and facilitative government in both business and public related services as well as to create a high performing civil service. The Chief Secretary to the Malaysian Government, Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan, proclaimed that in order for Malaysia to enhance its global competitiveness, the public sector must transform, and excellence in public service can only be achieved when ideas and policies are well implemented (Performance Management and Delivery Unit, 2012). He emphasised the need to enhance transparency, streamline processes and procedures and ensure that all public servants embrace the vision of “One Service, One Delivery, No Wrong Door” to reinvent Malaysia into a market-led, regionally- integrated, entrepreneurial, and innovative country (ibid, p 222). One of the initiatives in producing high performing civil servants is to open recruitment from both private and public sector for all career level to increase the talent pool, unlike the current system where posts are filled through a rank-and-file based promotion exercise. Since the Government has recognized the need to attract the right talent to be in public service, the Public Service Commission (PSC) as the agency that is responsible for recruitment, needs to ensure that the best talent is recruited. In doing so, one of the strategies is to appoint Human Resource (HR) subject matter experts to become commission members. In addition, a committee was established to develop policies concerning human resource management and to ensure all parties are aligned for effective and efficient recruitment, which includes a clear benchmark of communication skills in English upon recruiting a new member from the public sector. However, this benchmark was still unclear. Hence, this study intends to crystallise and clarify the exact needs of the Government, specifically in recruiting high performing civil servants in view of their requirement of the candidates’ English communication skills at the workplace.

The other focus of SRI that is closely related to this study is Human Capital Development (HCD). In order to make a transformative impact on an entire NKEA sector, skills and competitiveness of the critical mass of the workforce needs to be addressed (Performance Management and Delivery Unit, 2013). A review of skills requirements in the NKEAs shows

that, on the current trajectory, there could be up to 1.0 million job vacancies in 2020 that will be difficult to fill. These range from relatively low-skilled sales assistants and hotel housekeeping staff to high-skilled positions requiring advanced degrees, such as engineers, lecturers, financial analysts and general medical practitioners (Prime Ministers Department of Malaysia, 2012). Therefore, one of the important needs for HCD initiative is to undertake information from stakeholders in providing comprehensive and timely labour market information, in order to be used as a key-decision making tools for workforce planning, especially in the NKEA sectors. This research will then help to correct the mismatch and information gap which currently exist in relation to employability market information, as well as to provide practical solutions to skills-training providers.

In addition, Phang (2006) made a claim that English is used in the majority of industries in Malaysia, particularly in the private sector and multinational companies, and that the only sector still using Bahasa Malaysia is the government agencies. Nonetheless, lack of research from the human resource departments of the government agencies on the issue of English literacy for the workplace makes it difficult to confirm this claim. Nonetheless, Malaysian HEIs have been entrusted to “undertake measures to increase the proficiency of students in English and enhance their ability to access knowledge and undertake research...”, (Economic Planning Unit, 2006: p. 257), in order to be competitive in the global market, but to no avail, as discussed earlier in the thesis. If the status quo persists, the existing gap between the English competency of Malaysian university graduates and the English language requirements of the stakeholders will continue to widen. As a consequence, the issue of unemployable graduates will be exacerbated and the efforts to transform the nation into a high-income economy will incontrovertibly be impeded. Therefore, the findings of this research are critical in solving some of the issues of the incompatibility of the standards applied by universities and industries, but also the lack of a valid and reliable mechanism to assess graduates’ English competency for entry-level employment.

In addition, findings from research associate the situation of poor English language competency among graduates with the government’s decision to change the medium of instruction in schools from English to Malay in 1983 (Awang et al., 2011, Koo & Soo, 2007). It was found that most pre-university students have not been sufficiently exposed to speaking and writing in English during their secondary schooling, but that more attention is driven towards preparing students for

assessments both at the school and national levels (Othman & Krish, 2011) where accuracy is stressed as compared to the more important issue, the fluency of the English language: as a result of this mode of learning, students are at loss when it comes to real world communication (Sekharan Nair et al., 2012)

In the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015, MOE highlights that there is some evidence to suggest that there is a lack of alignment between the national and international assessments in terms of how standards are defined (MOE, 2012c). These discrepancies go some way toward explaining the mismatch between the trends seen in the national examinations and those revealed in the international assessments. One of possible reason for this misalignment of standards is that the national and international assessments have different testing foci. The Programme for International Student Assessment¹⁶ (PISA) for example, focuses on questions that test for higher-order thinking skills such as application and reasoning. Malaysia's national assessments, on the other hand, have a heavier slant towards questions that test for subject content knowledge (MOE, 2012a). Sadly, this culture continues through the HEI's system.

2.6 Conclusion

After a brief introduction of Malaysian language education, particularly emphasising English language education in Malaysian HE institutions, this chapter examined the interconnections between two key concepts, namely the communicative competence model and English literacy for the workplace. It discussed how it would be useful as a base for the PCS framework of the study. Research reviewed here has also shown that there is still much to be learned about English language workplace literacy practices and the competencies of university students specifically within ESL workplace environments. Previous studies conducted in Malaysia have demonstrated the need to study the problems of English among tertiary students from an ideological perspective that takes into account stakeholders' authentic voices and actual

¹⁶ Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international study which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. The tests are designed to assess to what extent students at the end of compulsory education, can apply their knowledge to real-life situations and be equipped for full participation in society. PISA data provides governments with a powerful tool to shape their policy making.

experience to provide insights into the issues under study. It must be pointed out that English language educators must continually focus on designing, discovering, and employing pedagogical approaches that motivate students to learn communication theory, to understand the value of communication competencies, and to apply communication skills effectively to increase academic gains and increase their own level of employability (Mino, 2012). The present study helps to do so and thus, given its objectives and focus, contributes to knowledge in the field. The next chapter discusses the research methodology and procedures employed to examine the research questions.

'Meaning is everything so let's design for it.' (Chambliss and Schutt, 2013, p.76).

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The methodology section consists of several sections starting with the introduction of the Soft Systems Methodology and how it will be applied in the research. The second section provides a brief description of the overall research design and a detailed summary of the research variables is also given in this section. The following sections discuss the setting, participants and sampling design that will be used in this research. Next, a detailed discussion of the two main methods used in the data collection process is given. Finally the issue of 'trustworthiness' will be considered after a discussion of instrument development and forms of testing.

3.1 Research aims and objective: revisit

In giving the rationale for the research methodology in this study, it is important to reiterate the aims and objectives of this study. As mentioned in the first chapter, the aims of this study are twofold. First, it intends to define Professional Communication Skills (PCS) by looking at the needs and requirements of Malaysian employers, the government and academia. The requirements and suggestions provided by the stakeholders help to fulfil the fundamental objective of this study, which is to determine the professional communication skills identified by Malaysian stakeholders for successful workplace function. Secondly, after taking into account the various needs of Malaysian stakeholders concerning the essential English communication skills for the workplace, the PCS framework will be developed, tying in the Communication

Competence Model within it. Subsequently, the PCS will go through a validation process, thus ensuring that the framework produced fulfils the actual needs of all the stakeholders. In order to ensure the framework is not only validated but also achievable, several experts in the field of teaching English in higher education will look thoroughly through the framework. The peer debriefing process is another essential step in assuring validity in this qualitative study.

As disclosed in the subchapter which deals with the statement of the problem in Chapter 1, Professional Communications Skill (PCS) is taught differently throughout Malaysian HEIs. There is a lack of a comprehensive PCS framework in English that has been sourced from and validated by stakeholders – industry, the government and academia which gives rise to skill mismatches as well as the bigger issue of unemployment among graduates. Hence, this study sets out to answer the research questions posed earlier in Chapter 1 by accomplishing the following objectives:

- RO1. To develop a PCS in English Framework; and
- RO2. To evaluate the relevance of the PCS Framework based on stakeholders' assessments.

From a broader perspective, this study represents an investigation of English language for workplace practices and the required competencies through the lenses of Malaysian stakeholders. The knowledge obtained from the research findings will contribute information about, and provide insights into the explicit definition of PCS sourced from the stakeholders and provide a clear and feasible PCS framework to be utilised in EOP classes in Malaysian HEIs.

3.2. Research paradigm

This study sits within the interpretivist tradition, which argues that 'all social reality is constructed, or created, by social actors' (Esterberg, 2002, p. 15). It is couched in three central premises: '(1) humans act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them; (2) the meanings of things arise out of social interaction; and (3) meanings are created (and changed) through a process of interpretation' (Esterberg, 2002, p. 16). Informed by this theoretical orientation, it is assumed that the researcher must gain direct access to the researched participants and their specific contexts to understand how they construct and interpret the meanings of their experiences. This is achieved through 'social interaction' (O'Donoghue, 2007,

p. 9) between the researcher and the researched participants. Consistent with the interpretive stance of this study, the qualitative approach to inquiry was chosen in order to facilitate an in-depth and detailed understanding (Patton, 2002) of Malaysian stakeholders' needs for the PCS in English, specifically addressing their requirements of entry-level employees, particularly Malaysian graduates.

Qualitative research is best suited for this study of the phenomenon of English language workplace literacy practices and PCS of graduates, about which little information is provided in the literature (Creswell, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) write:

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical material that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand.

(p. 4-5)

Van Maanen (1983) defines qualitative methods as:

an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.

(p. 9)

Within the qualitative tradition, this study acknowledges the significant influence of natural settings on participants' behaviour and experiences (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). This study is 'a situated activity' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: p. 4) that seeks to unfold the reality and knowledge that 'take place in real-world settings and [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest' (Patton, 2002, p. 39). This perspective presumes that the participants construct diverse and multiple meanings of their own practices and experiences within their social contexts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Creswell, 2009). Hence, to capture these practices and experiences accurately and 'to make sense of, or interpret [their] meanings' (Creswell, 2009, p. 8), the researcher visited the researched participants' contexts to gain first-hand insights from the "participants' perspectives" (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 7) or "insiders' perspectives" (Merriam, 2009, p. 14) and gather information and resources personally (Crotty, 1998). This

enabled the researcher to explore the researched participants' feelings, beliefs and values pertinent to the issues under study (Schwandt, 2000).

Aligned with its central aim, this study primarily adopts a qualitative approach to inquiry couched within the interpretive paradigm for data collection and data analysis. The direct voices of all the stakeholders involved will be heard using the same stage. Therefore, to generate understandings of the stakeholders' requirements of PCS in English the qualitative case study approach is deemed the most appropriate method given its descriptive, dynamic, and authentic nature. Soft systems methodology will be applied in accomplishing the research objectives.

3.3 Social Constructionism Epistemology

The concept 'epistemology' has been defined from different perspectives depending on the author's orientation. Auerswald (1985, p. 1) defines epistemology as "a set of imminent rules used in thought by large groups of people to define reality" or, "thinking about thinking" and goes on to say that it is "the study or theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge". Keeney (1983) argues that the term 'epistemology' indicates the basic premises underlying action and cognition. Epistemology reflects the rules that individuals use for making sense out of their world (Hoffman, 1981). As Bateson (1977) explains:

All descriptions are based on theories of how to make descriptions. You cannot claim to have no epistemology. Those who so claim have nothing but a bad epistemology. Every description is based upon, or contains implicitly, a theory of how to describe.

(p. 84)

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 157) state that epistemology asks, "How do I know the world"? and "What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known"? Every epistemology implies an ethical–moral stance towards the world and the self of the researcher. It is therefore important for researchers to be conscious of the frameworks they use, the assumptions on which they are based, and the possibility of logical inconsistency (Bateson, 1972). For the purpose of this study, epistemology is defined as the study of the nature of knowledge and justification (Schwandt, 2001, p. 71). In short, epistemology can be understood as justification of knowledge. It needs to be stated that discussions of philosophical epistemology are beyond the scope of this study.

Accordingly, epistemic questions, questions regarding research practice as knowledge creation and the status of the knowledge created, are not considered in this study.

Social constructivism was selected as the epistemological framework of this study. This subchapter will, therefore, describe how social constructivist epistemology informed the researcher's perceptions in defining the framework for planning, implementing and evaluating the quality of this qualitative study.

3.3.1 Social Constructivism

Social Constructivism in its simplest form is just what its name implies social as in a social group or community, constructivism as in building or constructing knowledge. Social constructivism is based on ontology, the nature of being, and epistemology, the nature of knowledge. The epistemological nature of a social constructivist's knowledge is social and experimental, meaning that the researcher works in a social group and uses a trial and error format to discover knowledge. The social group can be very large, as in a race or gender group, or very small, as in a family group. Also, a person belongs to more than one group and can interact with more than one group at one time. Additionally, knowledge to a social constructivist is relative and subjective. Looking closely at the research, it is relative because it depends upon the group of respondents – private companies, the government and academia – to justify the knowledge and one group's knowledge can be different from another group's knowledge. It is subjective because it depends upon what experiences each respondent has had. Those experiences are brought to the group and shared within the group, using the interim PCS framework as a platform. Then the respondents reach a decision consciously about the viability or usefulness of that knowledge, which will take place during the member checking process.

There are three different types of social constructivism: symbolic interaction, social constructionism, and sociocultural constructivism. They are on a continuum that ranges from the most social in nature to the least social in nature. This study employs social constructionism, the middle ground, since it deals with discourse communities. A discourse community is a group with their own common knowledge and language; in this study, the stakeholders have their own common knowledge and language on professional communication skills for the workplace. The

discourse community is the centre of social constructionism: individuals who interact with subjects or events within a discourse community.

Gergen (1999) claims that knowledge is invoked to identify 'behaviours', 'events' or 'entities', and are largely circumscribed by culture, history and social context. Therefore, a social constructionist perspective 'locates meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social, community context' (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996, p. 80). Additionally, Hoffman (1991) states that

All knowledge evolves in the space between people, in the realm of the 'common world' or the 'common dance'. Only through the on-going conversation with intimates does the individual develop a sense of identity or an inner voice.

(p. 5)

Anderson and Goolishian (1986, p. 67) add that we 'live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories and self-descriptions'. Getting the stakeholders involved in an in-depth interview, while describing their needs and requirements regarding the PCS of graduates will help the social-constructionist-researcher understand and develop their needs which contain possibilities that elicit new meaning. According to Rapmund (2000), this co-construction of new realities also assists in externalising the problem as well as in finding a cure for it. It is important to stress that social constructionists are interested in accounts that honour and respect the community of voices inherent in each individual and how these accounts can be respected within a particular system (Rapmund, 2000). It also acknowledges the links between stories (Rapmund, 2000). These links will create a better focus on the construction of knowledge of professional communication skills among Malaysian stakeholders. Social constructionists, therefore, focus on knowledge as power, believing that 'cultural specifications' can exert a real influence on people's lives (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996, p. 80).

On the whole, social constructionists acknowledge the social nature of human life, while at the same time encouraging individuals to tell their own stories. These underlying assumptions of social constructionism form the epistemological basis for the present study. Thus, it informed the researcher's perceptions in designing the method, and in describing the research participants.

3.3.2 Social constructionism and the present study

The inclusion of, and emphasis on, multiple realities and personal experiences in this study makes social constructionism relevant as theory and context. This does not necessarily imply that social constructionism is a better theory than the other existing theories, but rather that it is a more appropriate theory in terms of this specific study. Within social constructionism, the focus is on Malaysian stakeholders who are considered to be in the best position to describe the PCS skills practiced in the workplace. Of importance is how they perceive their experiences, and not whether their reports accurately reflect reality. The notion of accuracy would in essence be judgmental. Thus, a social constructionist epistemology challenges the ways in which Malaysian stakeholders have been delineated and it opens up new possibilities for new meanings and perspectives to be explored. This epistemology also provides the researcher with a set of lenses that enforce an awareness of her own beliefs as well as the way in which she perceives the issues discussed. A social constructionist framework therefore enables the researcher to remain flexible and open regarding the experiences and needs of the stakeholders. This stance allows the researcher to enter into dialogue with the respondents, being aware of her social and cultural context as well as the personal biases she might have, and build on her knowledge during the conversational narratives. In the light of social constructionism, the research attempted to gain an understanding of Malaysian stakeholders' requirements for PCS in English for the graduates.

It is worth declaring that social constructionists acknowledge the equal engagement of research participant and researcher as co-creators of a shared reality. The researcher believes that by creating a space of understanding and by being respectful and curious as a co-participant in the meaning-generating process, she can explore the stakeholders' insights regarding the PCS in English. Social constructionism exemplifies a collaborative and respectful framework in which the researcher co-constructs meaning that opens opportunities for change and growth, particularly for Malaysian graduates who are venturing into the workplace.

3.3.3 Characteristics referring to who and what is studied

Social constructionism is interested, in particular, in the ways in which the world is 'understood, experimented, or produced' (Mason, 1996, p.4) by people's lives, behaviour, and interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.17). It is also takes interested in processes, change, social context

dynamics (Mason, 2006, p.16), and respondents' 'perspectives on their own worlds' (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.7). Further social constructionism is interested in the senses, in the 'meanings' (Maxwell, 1996, p.17), revealed in personal narratives, in life stories (Atkinson, 2005), in accounts, in 'life experiences' (Morse, 2005, p.859), in their different knowledge, and 'viewpoints and practices' (Flick, 1998, p.6), and in what people think and what that thinking 'means, implies, and signifies' (Morse, 2002, p.875). The above characteristics are deemed important in determining the key definitions of professional communication skills in English.

Epistemology profoundly shapes the relationship between the researcher and participants in data collection and analysis. The social constructionist's job is to engage with her participants to jointly create understanding by being alert to multiple ways of seeing and allowing the unexpected to happen. Maxwell (2004) emphasised that the researcher cannot go into the participants' mind while being herself within the constraints of what is ethically and socially appropriate.

3.3.4 Characteristics referring to methodology

In the literature, the term *methodology* is used loosely. Various authors refer to formal theories or schools of thought or methods such as focus groups or observation as 'methodologies'. In contrast, Kaplan (1964) defines methodology as 'the study – the description, the explanation, and the justification of methods, and not the methods themselves' (p. 18). In his terms, Kaplan (1964) explains the aim of methodology as

to describe and analyse . . . methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences . . . to help us to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific inquiry but the process itself.

(p. 23)

Research methodologies or any of the synonyms used to refer to the distinct strategies for approaching qualitative research (see, for example, *A Set of Reconstructed Logics*, Carter & Little, 2007; *Strategies of Inquiry*, Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; *Traditions of Inquiry*, Cresswell, 1998) inevitably refer to the distinct strategies for approaching research and justify the particular methods used in that methodology. Accordingly, methodologies are not a free-for-all where,

metaphorically speaking, anything goes. Several authors remind us that methodology and method do matter. Morse and Field (1995) declare that,

Each of the qualitative methods answers different questions; the methods are distinct and the results provide a different perspective on the phenomenon.
(p. 36)

Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (1994) affirm this view stating,

The methodological question: how can the inquirer (would-be-knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?That is, not just any (original emphasis) methodology is appropriate.
(p. 108)

In this study, the case study was chosen as the most appropriate methodology in answering the research questions. It was chosen since the case study approach can connect complex real-world problems with scientific theory building, as has been laid out in Eisenhardt (1989). It was also deemed the most appropriate research methodology since the phenomenon investigated cannot be separated from its context (Scholz et al, 2006). An implicit definition of what is and what makes a case has been provided in Scholz and Tietje (2002):

A case becomes a case as something specific: it is considered from a specified perspective and with a special interest. A case is unique, one among others and always related to something general. Cases are empirical units, theoretical constructs, and subject to evaluation, as scientific and practical interests are tied to them. Cases are utilized for purposes of demonstration and learning, both in education and research
(p. 28).

3.3.5 Characteristics referring to methods

Epistemological assumptions are translated into distinct methodological strategies. The goal of this qualitative investigation is to understand the complex world of human experience and behaviour from the point-of-view of stakeholders in their knowledge of the PCS needed by entry-level employees. Therefore, the researcher is expected not to have a priori, well-delineated conceptualizations of the phenomenon; rather, this conceptualization is to emerge from the interaction between participants and researcher. Flexibility in design, data collection, and analysis of research is strongly recommended to gain a deep understanding and valid representation of the participants' viewpoints (Sidani & Sechrest, 1996).

Hence, research conducted within a social constructionist epistemology is more likely to involve heavy reliance on the spoken word including conversations, interviews and narratives (Gergen, 2001b; Padgett, 2004). Qualitative methodologies provide the means to seek a deeper understanding and to explore the nuances of experiences not available through quantification. By utilising these methodologies the researcher is able to expand on the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions asked by constructionism.

Epistemology is key to the assessment of the quality of data and of analysis (Angen, 2000) since it influences the way in which quality of methods is demonstrated. Among the steps taken within this study are triangulations of several different data sources, a code-recode process, member checking and peer debriefing process and description as well as inquiry audit. This aspect will be elaborated later within sub-chapter 3.10 (The study’s trustworthiness). The above processes took place in a seven-stage systemic approach called soft systems methodology.

3.4 Soft Systems Methodology

3.4.1 Introduction

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM from here onwards) has been the outcome of extensive and thoughtful research work by Checkland and his colleagues in the University of Lancaster to create a general framework able to tackle ill-structured problems that human being usually face in most of the interrelationships with their fellows (Delbridge, 2011). SSM is a systemic approach, where the systemic view recognises that the parts and internal relations of a system are dependent on its environment (Checkland, 1986; Checkland and Scholes, 1990). Checkland and Poulter (2006) describe SSM as an organized way of tackling perceived problematical (social) situations. It is action-oriented, in that it organises thinking about situations so that actions can be taken to improve problematic situations. SSM is generally applied to situations where there are conflicts among stakeholders or where the goals of a system are debatable (Morcos & Henshaw, 2009). In addition, the core aspects of systems thinking are gaining a bigger picture (going up a level of abstraction) and appreciating other people’s perspectives (Chapman, 2004, p. 14).

Checkland (2000), in his thirty year retrospective review of SSM, affirms that a system can never be studied in isolation, but must be seen in relation to its environment. This approach provides

conceptual tools for modelling the system as well as the environment in which the system is located (Tajino and Smith, 2005). The systemic approach depicts the system's environment as being composed of various interveners and active processes that influence the system (Avenier, 2002). In this study, the stakeholders (industry, government departments of Malaysia, HE institutions and the graduates themselves) are the 'interveners' who are searching for, grasping and creating the best solution(s) of the problematic situation of poor professional communication skills amongst graduates.

Applying SSM in this research will hopefully clarify and explore solutions to the problem as discussed earlier in Chapter 1. Researchers agree that SSM can not only be used to clarify objectives in complex and dynamic problem situations but can also be used to explore actual and future needs (Hassan, 2012; Patel, 1995). Originally SSM was seen as a modelling tool, but Checkland (2000) reveals in his retrospective paper that, in later years it has been seen increasingly as a learning and meaning development tool.

Another reason for applying SSM in this research is because of the wholeness of the system. This concept has been borrowed from the field of biology, where biologists are concerned with studying an organism as a whole entity (Brenton, 2007). SSM views the defined human activity system under investigation as more than just the sum of its parts, and requires the analyst to take a holistic approach. Hence, it is crucial to understand that SSM is a participative approach where involvement from all stakeholders is crucial. According to the views of Rose (1997), Hindle (2011) and Liu *et.al.*(2012), SSM is suitable for social science research, such as this one, since it involves all stakeholders during all stages and it ensures that their views are reflected in the outcomes and their acceptance of the new system by validating the proposed solutions or framework.

In addition, SSM provides an opening whereby the complexity of such human interaction can be investigated, described and hopefully understood. When the situation under study has been understood well by the researcher, the methodology allows the identification of change that is both systemically desirable (in that it will alleviate some of the problems and issues) and culturally feasible (in that participants within the system will be inclined to engage with the changes proposed and the change process itself). SSM encourages learning and understanding

which will hopefully lead to agreed change and the resolution of problems (Warwick and South, 2008).

The version of SSM presented in this study is most closely associated with the work of Peter Checkland, as presented in Checkland and Scholes (1990) and Checkland and Poulter (2006 and 2010). This research takes the stand that SSM is an all-purpose approach most suited to tackling complex problem situations, as it is an approach that adopts experiential learning and uses systemic modelling to structure discussion between groups of participants.

3.4.2 Brief Statement of SSM

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) is a systemic used tool to orchestrate and implement change in the real world in areas concerned with human affairs. It is a framework made up of seven steps organized in a specific manner that leads to the implantation of culturally feasible and systemically desirable changes in human organisations of any kind (clubs, universities, enterprises, industries, ministries, a state, etc.). SSM approaches start with the situation, with its complexity and uncertainty, where an acknowledged part of the problem is to establish and agree what the problem is. So SSM is more about problem-situations rather than problems, and of resolution (improving the situation) rather than solution (solving the problem).

A reflection of SSM through fifty years of reflective experience (Reisman & Oral, 2005) has shown that SSM has been successfully used in making sense of the complex and dynamic interacting web of ideas, issues and views that characterise many social problems, which Ackoff terms 'messes' (Ackoff, 1974, p. 25). During this period of growth, the process model of SSM has emerged and the main stages of the process are described in Table 3.1.

Table 3. 1 Key stages of the Soft System Methodology and its objectives.

Stages	Objective of the stage
1 & 2	Attempts to build the richest possible picture of the problematic situation
3	Aims to select perspectives and build 'root definitions' (key processes that need to take place within the desired system)
4	Produces conceptual models of the defined system.
5	Compares conceptual model with actual situation in order to generate debate with the stakeholders.
6	Outlines possible changes that are desirable and feasible.
7	Involves taking action based on stage 6.

These seven stages of SSM have been applied in several educational research studies (Ison, 1999; Cox, 2010; Delbridge, 2011; Liu et al., 2012; Maqsood, Finegan, & Walker, n.d.; Patel, 1995). The benefits that can be derived from the use of SSM are primarily in its ability to focus on 'soft' issues, to generate a systemic view that contrasts nicely with the rather more quantitative results-driven and analytical quality assurance processes that are traditionally used to assess the effectiveness of a module. As stated by Patel (1995):

The methodology is unique because it enables the analyst to embark on a process of learning about the real world situation being investigated, while simultaneously seeking to improve it by analysing the situation ... and suggesting recommendations for further action to improve the problem situation.

(p. 13)

Soft systems thinking seeks to explore the 'messy' problematic situations that arise in human activity. However, rather than reducing the complexity of the 'mess' so that it can be modelled mathematically (hard systems), soft systems strive to learn from the different perceptions that exist in the minds of the different people involved in the situation (Andrews, 2000). Experiences and needs from all parties involved – companies, the government of Malaysia and academia – are heard and explored. This interpretive approach is strongly influenced by Vickers' (1968, p. 59, 176) who asserts the importance of appreciative systems in dealing with human complexity.

Soft Systems Methodology, in its idealised form, is described as a logical sequence of seven steps (Checkland, 1999, pp. 162-183). These are illustrated in Figure 3.2. Checkland & Poulter (2010) assert that it is most important to note that the sequence is not imposed upon the researcher; a study can commence at any stage, with iteration and backtracking as essential components. SSM encourages researchers to view organisations from a cultural perspective. These people-components can attribute meaning to their situation and define their own purpose for the organisation.

As indicated in Figure 3.1, SSM deals with two kinds of activities, 'real-world' activities involving people in the problem situation and 'systems thinking' activities in the 'conceptual world' where the researcher tries to abstract from the real world and where people from the problem situation may not have to participate.

In essence, SSM is concerned with developing models of purposeful activity (which any situation involving humans will contain), each of which are based on a worldview, and, using the models as notional constructs to explore the situation in order to identify possible appropriate changes. The end point of an SSM-based study may vary, as mentioned by Checkland and Poulter (2006):

Since the learning cycle is in principle never-ending it is an arbitrary distinction as to whether the end of the study is taken to be defining the action or actually carrying it out.

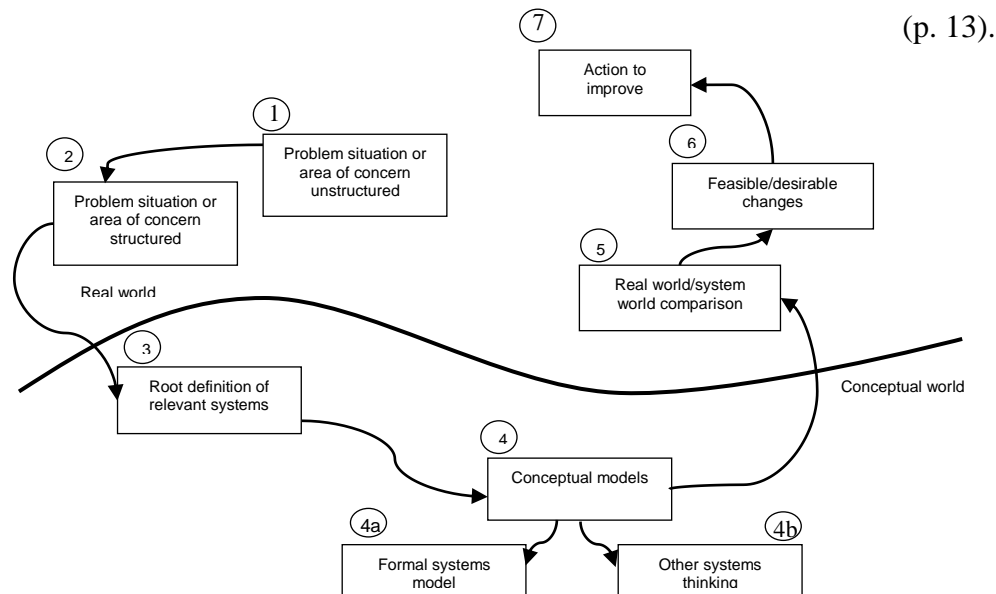


Figure 3. 1 Checkland's seven-stage soft systems methodology.

3.4.3 Reasons why SSM is appropriate to this study

Looking at the definition as a whole, 'methodology' means a structured approach with a set of ordered activities; 'Systems' implies that the approach is holistic, looking at the problem in its wider context; and 'soft' connotes fuzzy, ill-defined situations where there will be differing as well as agreeing perceptions and views.

There are five major reasons why SSM is appropriate for this study. Firstly, the problems of teaching and learning PCS are definitely organisational, ill-structured problems, since the PCS in Malaysia has not been defined by any stakeholders involved. Therefore, using Soft Systems Methodology can help the study to focus on the actual problems regarding PCS faced in human

activities systems. Furthermore, SSM is good at clarifying political and soft, people-oriented issues.

Secondly, there are many different perspectives of the systems needed in defining Malaysian professional communication skills in English. Stakeholders involved are the various companies that would be the graduates' future employers, the Malaysian government, which includes the policy makers, as well as the Public Services Commission of Malaysia, and the universities who are responsible for grooming the graduates' PCS. Being a methodology that can deal with complex organisational and hierarchical situations where those involved may lack common agreement, SSM offers the best solution by giving all parties a proper stage to voice their opinions. It promotes shared thinking and helps to persuade people to work together and find common ground.

Thirdly, the various aspects of the problem are highly interrelated. All parties involved have their own opinions of the essential PCS needed by graduates. To ensure quality and employable graduates and to understand the needs of the stakeholders, a comprehensive PCS should be laid in front of them. These workplace skills must be a match or agreed to by all stakeholders involved. Therefore, as a systemic methodology, SSM is helpful in developing a reasonably holistic understanding of the correlations of the various aspects voiced by the stakeholders.

Fourthly, the main purpose of SSM, as mentioned earlier, is to carry out improvements in a situation which is perceived as problematic. SSM does not attempt to solve the issue of PCS but to facilitate the learning process. It is anticipated that stakeholders would reach common ground in defining PCS, which will thus decrease the problem of skill mismatches. As a result, when the Professional Communication Skills framework in English which is defined and validated is applied, all parties involved in the environment will be in agreement with the changes.

Finally, SSM uses a set of specific techniques and rigorous tools to deal with a "messy" problem. It helps the researcher to provide a structure to the study where the clear steps enhance the clarity of thought and structured thinking. It also helps in giving a complete and wide-ranging view of the problems of PCS. Having the big picture framed in mind does not give space for assumptions but on the other hand it is based in actual facts provided by the stakeholders. The rigorous steps in the methodology force explicitness and promote creative and stimulating thinking. They help

to structure the problematic situation which is complex, especially when the information given during the collection of data proves to be overwhelming. All in all, the SSM applied in the research is important in making this study doable and meaningful at the same time.

3.4.4 Applying SSM as a research model

In undertaking the seven SSM stages as mentioned above, an intense literature review on opinions, experiences and knowledge of the related stakeholders was carried out to develop a rich picture. The objective was to learn about the PCS needed by Malaysian graduates, necessities required by future employers and also the beliefs of the Malaysian government, particularly policies developed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

Stage 1: The problem situation unstructured

‘Experiencing the unstructured situation is recognised as a valuable part of defining both the research problem and the design’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990, p. 81). Following informal discussion with both English instructors in Malaysian HE institutions and human resource staff in Malaysian based companies, it became very clear that there was a lack of coherent information transfer between both parties in relation to defining the issues of graduates’ employability, particularly the precise Professional Communication Skills needed. This lent itself to a soft systems approach.

In stage 1 and 2 the researcher tried to develop the richest picture possible of the problematic situation. The function of these 2 stages was ‘to display the situation so that a range of possible and, hopefully, relevant choices [of relevant systems to be described in the following stages] can be revealed’ (Checkland, 1981, p. 166). Checkland did not provide any examples or descriptions of rich pictures in his earliest book, but then, rich pictures were later shown to be informal drawings accompanied by describing text.

However, Bowen and Shehata (2001) suggest several points for stage 1, which provide a general understanding and wider view of the problem. The procedure for this phase includes the following (Bowen and Shehata 2001):

- a. Gather and examine as much as possible from the available information.

- b. Learn as much as possible about who and what is important in the organisation.
- c. Understand as much as possible about the organisation's specific language.
- d. Pay close attention to the information about how things are done in the organisation.

Stage 2: The problem situation expressed using a 'rich picture'

In SSM 'rich picture' (Checkland, 1981, p. 159) was employed as a method of capturing the problem situation; recognising that different stakeholders have diverse views and experiences to fit their requirements of Professional Communication Skills of Malaysian graduates. Through rich-pictures, such different world-views (known as *Weltanschauungen* amongst SSM scholars) were highlighted. Such pictures could also draw attention to the degree of social interaction and begin to focus on issues which are purposeful and critical, as well as eliminate mismatches and disagreement associated with PCS between the stakeholders involved. The rich picture portrayed all the key players involved in the process and presented a structured view by putting into context the factors affecting the process.

Looking at previous related research with regard to employability issues in Malaysia and expressing them in the drawing of rich pictures for the different world-views of *Weltanschauungen*, a dialogue and debate can be initiated to support the modelling of 'human activity systems' which is perceived as relevant to all stakeholders involved.

Such human activity systems begin to raise and identify institutionalised practices, and explore the social structures in which activity occurs, for instance identifying the role of the 'Human Resource Manager' of certain companies or 'Head of English Department' in any Malaysian HE institutions. Such pictures aim to encourage a holistic rather than a reductionist approach to appreciating the social context of the organisation (Checkland 1999). This consideration of the social and institutional structure, roles and opinions separately from more formalised structures such as organisations or projects is of further value given the dispersed nature of the relationship of education and industry.

Having gathered information from as many of those involved as possible, the problem situation is expressed as a 'rich picture' (Checkland, 1981, p. 159). The idea is to represent pictorially all

the relevant information and relationships' (Platt and Warwick, 1995). The process of constructing the 'rich picture' (Figure 3.3) enabled the main issues to be identified. In this research, the main one was that PCS is taught in various ways in different institutions of HE in Malaysia. In order to work according the rich picture and apply it, it was necessary to present the rich picture, as illustrated below (Figure 3.2).

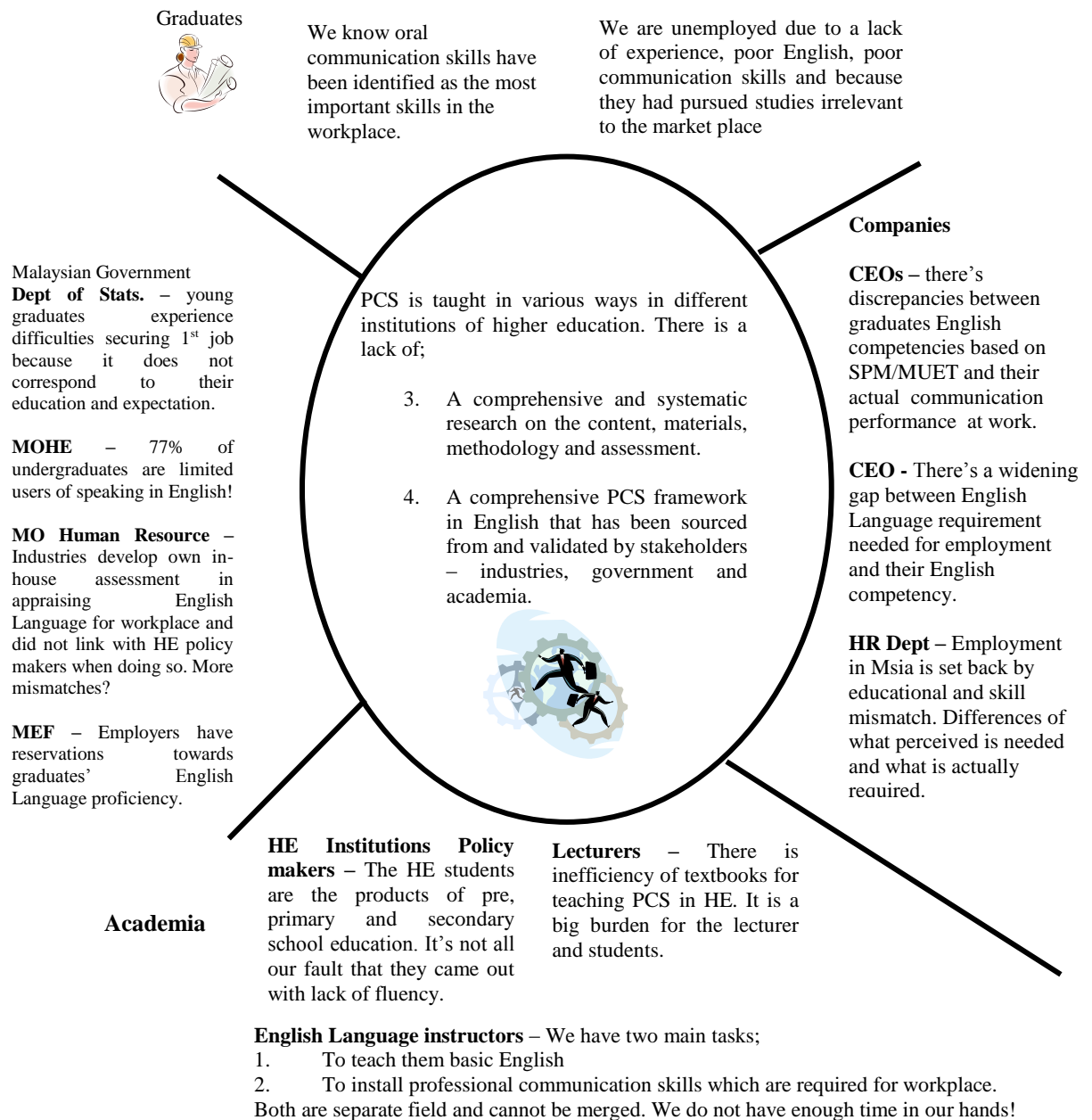


Figure 3. 2 Rich picture applied using SSM – an area of concern on the Malaysian graduates' level of Professional Communication Skills.

Stage 3: Root definitions of relevant systems

Patel (1995) has used SSM's root definitions to identify responsible actors, key transformations, and the knowledge resources that are appropriate to the needs of all stakeholders. A root definition 'expresses the core intention of a purposeful activity system' (Wells, 1995, p. 65) and is structured into three distinct parts: the 'what', the 'how' and the 'why'. The *what* is the immediate aim of the system, the *how* is the means of achieving that aim, and the *why* is the longer term aim of that purposeful activity (Platt and Warwick, 1995).

Another significant characteristic of SSM is that the root definition must include a number of elements, which Checkland and Scholes (1990, p.32) characterise under the mnemonic 'CATWOE':

- Customers -- who are the victims or beneficiaries of **T**,
- Actors -- those who perform **T**,
- Transformation process -- the conversion of input to output,
- Weltanschauung -- the worldview which makes **T** meaningful in a context,
- Owners -- those who have the power to stop **T**, and
- Environment constraints -- elements outside the system.

The CATWOE guideline has a logical connection to the formal systems model in *stage 4a* that is used as a checklist for the model of the system (Referring to Figure 3.1). Each of the elements can be used to identify the problem, to prompt thinking about its connections with other different elements, implement the solution and it also can help in considering the impact on the people involved. The *who*, *what* and *how* questions below (Table 3.2) enable researchers to stimulate thinking about the problem and/or implementing the solution. Ultimately, understanding CATWOE's characteristics in an extensive manner will lead to a clear root definition. Using the elements identified in the 'rich picture' and detailed CATWOE analysis, the following root definition was constructed.

Table 3. 2 CATWOE's characteristics.

C = Customers	Who is on the receiving end? What problem do they have now? How will they react to what you are proposing? Who are the winners and losers?
A = Actors	Who are the actors who will 'do the doing', carrying out your solution? What is the impact on them? How might they react?
T = Transformation process	What is the process for transforming inputs into outputs? What are the inputs? Where do they come from? What are the outputs? Where do they go to? What are all the steps in between?
W = World View (Weltanschauung)	What is the bigger picture into which the situation fits? What is the <u>real</u> problem you are working on? What is the wider impact of any solution?
O = Owner	Who is the real owner or owners of the process or situation you are changing? Can they help you or stop you? What would cause them to get in your way? What would lead them to help you?
E = Environmental constraints	What are the broader constraints that act on the situation and your ideas? What are the ethical limits, the laws, financial constraints, limited resources? regulations, and so on? How might these constrain your solution? How can you get around them?

This clear CATWOE analysis pertaining to this study will be discussed in the next chapter. Once the CATWOE analysis has been done, the clear root definition of PCS will also be uncovered.

Stage 4: Deriving the conceptual model

SSM can be used to develop conceptual models that identify patterns in knowledge activities and such patterns can be used to provide a basis for technical design and organisational and social

intervention (Venters et. al., 2002). Based upon the need to address the problems in developing fluent Malaysian graduate communicators as prescribed by the stakeholders, this study developed the following conceptual model and it is being incorporated in investigations in this research.

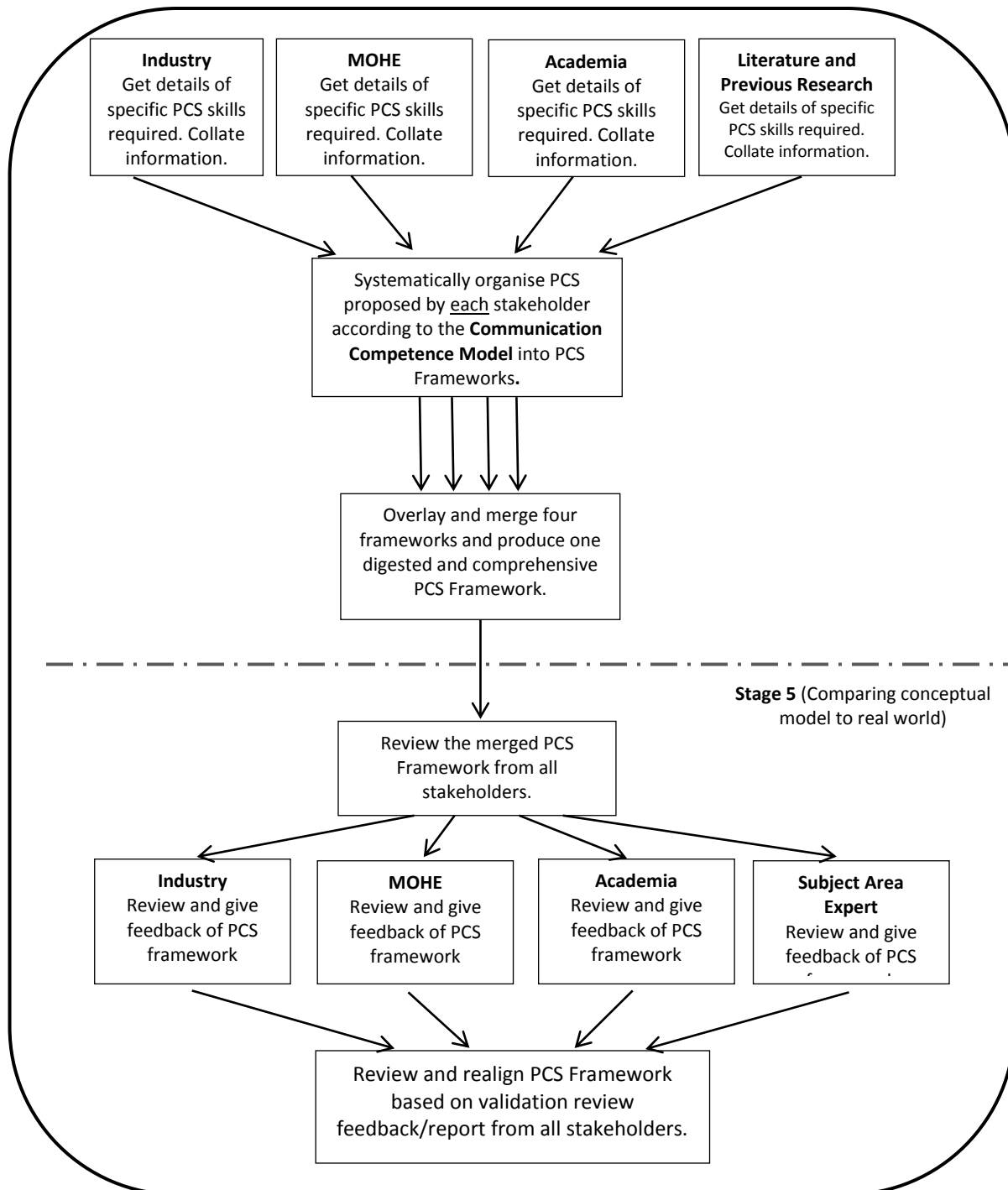


Figure 3. 3 PCS Conceptual Model in this study.

Stage 5: Validating the conceptual model to the real world

The remaining stages are again set in the real world where action can take place. During stage 5 the ideal conceptual model is used to find similarities and differences with the perceived real world model. This is shown in Figure 3.4 (the process below the dotted lines). The comparison between the conceptual model with reality is done by asking for feedback from all stakeholders as well as from an expert on Professional Communication Skills.

During this stage, the researcher leaves the systems thinking (or in this research context, the theories of communications) and initiates the debate concerning desirable feasible changes by setting up discussions which compare the models built in stage 4 with the problem situation expressed in stage 2. As Checkland and Scholes (1990) suggest, to ensure the whole model works, researchers must focus on the intention of building the models, which is to – ‘debate’ (p. 42-43) and ‘accommodate’ (p. 28-30). Checkland (1981) asserts that:

...parts of the problem situation analysed in stage 2 are examined alongside the conceptual models: this should be done together with concerned participants in the problem situation with the object of generating a debate about possible changes which might be introduced in order to alleviate the problem condition.

(p. 177)

The purpose of the conceptual model is to question and debate whether the activities from the model (the skills enlisted in the PCS framework) can be extended to the real world, how well they can accommodate and function in the real world, and also if alternative and better ways of doing them can be suggested. These ‘confrontations’(Checkland & Poulter, 2010, p.176) should comprise the ‘hows’ and ‘whats’ and these four ways are suggested to carry out the confrontations (Checkland & Poulter, 1990, p 78):

1. Informal discussion.
2. Formal questioning (during interviews).
3. Scenario writing based on 'operating' the models.
4. Trying to model the real world in the same structure as the conceptual models (and hence compare them).

In this research, the first two suggestions by Checkland and Poulter (1990) will be implemented. A heavier emphasis will be put on formal questioning during interview sessions with the stakeholders involved.

Stage 6: Defining feasible and desirable change

Stage 6 and 7 are concerned with the implementation of changes to improve the problem situation. In practice, SSM is not as linear as described here. Often iterations are carried out and the debate generated in stage 5 thus draws the attention back to the initial analysis and root definitions. This has taken place in this study during the second interview sessions, when the stakeholders have the chance to look back at what has been discussed during the earlier interview and validate the framework by giving more feedback and criticism.

The PCS framework produced must be systemically desirable as a result of the insight gained from selection of the rich picture (earlier interviews), root definitions and conceptual model building. In addition, Checkland (1981) insists that it must also be culturally feasible given the characteristics of the situation, the people in it, their shared experiences and their prejudices (Checkland, 1981; pp. 181). There are three areas where Checkland suggests that possible changes can occur: in (organisational) structures, in procedures (activities), and in 'attitudes' including changes in influence, expectations, roles, etc. (Checkland, 1981; pp.180).

In defining feasible and desirable changes, focused semi-structured interview will be held. The respondents will debate and accommodate the PCS listed in the framework. The focused semi-structured interview will be discussed in the sub-chapter below.

Stage 7: Taking action

Because SSM enables learning and understanding, the method is a part of the process of transformation (change) to a new desirable system state. Elliman and Orange (2000) recommend SSM as an approach to facilitate effective change and to improve work practice. In their research, they observed that a soft systems approach allows the exploitation of individual and socially constructed group knowledge and experience. This is important since stakeholders in this research, namely company personnel, policy makers in the Malaysian Government and

instructors in academia, can express their ideas and experience of the needed PCS through the effective use of SSM.

In various research studies, many agree that stage 7 may seem to be the last stage, but in human activity systems an apparent improvement simply creates a new situation which unsurprisingly creates new problems (Delbridge, 2011; Morcos & Henshaw, 2009; Tajino & Smith, 2005). The SSM model, in good practice, is cyclic and continual.

All in all, SSM was conceived as a framework for the inquiry into ill-structured situations. It ‘...provides a general set of concepts and an intellectual framework for articulating the search for ‘images of reality’ which are relevant to taking purposeful action within some problem situation’ (Ledington & Donaldson, 1997 p. 18). Checkland’s 7-stage model progresses from finding out about a situation to taking action to improve it. During stages 1 and 2 the problem is still unstructured and expressed by the participants in a rich picture. Stages 3 and 4 involve systems thinking. Root definitions and conceptual models of possibly relevant systems are developed. Stages 5 and 6 aim at ‘find(ing) a version of the real situation and ways to improve it which different people with different worldviews can nonetheless live with’ (Checkland and Poulter, 2006, p. 54). There are different ways to achieve this activity, but an approach used heavily is the one used in the present research: formal questioning during interview sessions (Checkland and Poulter, 2006). Finally, the last stage involves applying the debated and reviewed model in the real world.

3.5 Research Design

The research used three procedures, shown below, to accumulate and analyse data for creating the Professional Communication Skills (PCS) framework.

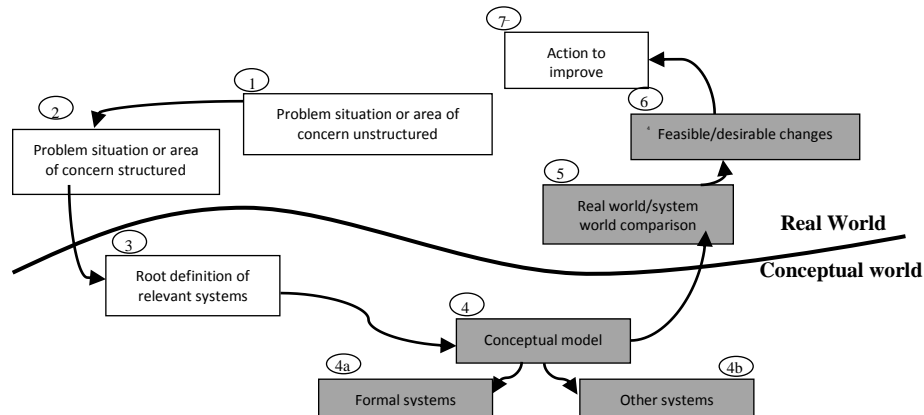


Figure 3. 4 Research Design incorporated with SSM.

Procedure 1, which aimed at answering the first research question, takes place in Stage 4, while Procedures 2 and 3 which answer the second research question take place in stage 5 and 6. The position of research design in Stages 4 and 5 of the SSM is shown in the highlighted areas in Figure 3.4.

In stage 4 of the SSM (see Figure 3.4); the conceptual model is the initial PCS framework which is collated using a ‘formal system’, the Communicative Competence Model (See 2.1.1 and 2.4) and ‘other systems’. The information collected from ‘other systems’ comes from industry, the government, academia as well as the formal government documents. In stage 4, Procedure 1 (

Table 3. 3 Research Design: Procedure 1

Procedure 1 (to answer RQ1)

) takes place:

Table 3. 3 Research Design: Procedure 1

Procedure 1 (to answer RQ1)

The PCS Framework is developed through the following process;

- 1 Conceptualise, collate and systematically organise professional communication skills proposed by industry according to a theoretically supported mapping.
- 2 Conceptualise, collate and systematically organise professional communication skills proposed by government agencies according to a theoretically supported mapping.
- 3 Conceptualise, collate and systematically organise professional communication skills proposed by academia according to a theoretically supported mapping.
- 4 Conceptualise, collate and systematically organise professional communication skills proposed by formal government documents according to a theoretically supported mapping.
- 5 Overlay and merge the four theoretical maps above to construct the PCS framework.

Meanwhile, in stage 5 of the SSM (See Figure 3. 4) the initial PCS framework was reviewed during the second meetings with the interviewed stakeholders. During these sessions, the respondents were invited to comment on the PCS framework and add more information that might be absent or overlooked. In stage 5, where comparison between conceptual and the real world takes place, the preliminary framework was also given to the experts in the field of TESOL, assessment and higher education (See 4.3.2Peer debriefing by experts) to ensure research credibility, dependability and confirmability. The procedures in Stage 5 are grouped as procedure 2 (See Table 3. 4) in the research design.

Table 3. 4 Research Design: Procedure 2

Procedure 2 (to answer RQ2)

The validation of the PCS framework will be carried out through;

1. Review of the PCS framework by the human resource managers interviewed.
2. Review of the PCS framework by recruitment officers from government agencies.
3. Review of the PCS framework by academics teaching professional communication skills in Malaysian universities (three public universities and one private university).
4. Review of the PCS framework by three subject matter experts.

Once feedback and advice were gathered from the industries, government agencies, academia and experts, the PCS framework was reviewed and realigned based on the reports from the second meeting. This third and final procedure within the research design helped to form a well-defined and valid PCS Framework to be used in Malaysian HE institutions. Looking at the SSM, this process took place in Stage 6 where feasible and desirable changes made by the respondents were incorporated in the PCS framework.

3.6 Setting

In this research, three main groups of participants were included and the stakeholders were from companies, government of Malaysia and academia. Looking at the rich picture (Figure 3.2) these three groups of respondents were the groups which have the strongest position in helping to solve the issues of Professional Communication Skills.

It is important to clearly define the population that the survey is attempting to describe. A distinction is usually required between the *desired* target population, or the population that one would wish to cover in the survey, and the *defined* population – a restriction on the desired population due to the practical difficulties. The target population of this research is as follows:

Stakeholder 1 - Companies: The notion of a graduate job is now so varied that it might be simply defined as any job where many of its incumbents are graduates. Hence, it is important to consider the orientation and aspirations of different types of employers chosen to be the representatives of Malaysian companies. The Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA), which is the government's principal agency for the promotion and coordination of industrial development, reports that the top three key industries in Malaysia are the service, manufacturing and agriculture sectors (MIDA, 2012). In the Malaysia Investment Performance Report 2011, it is reported that the service industry was responsible for 49.3 per cent of the GDP (MIDA, 2012). Hence, the sample of participants in the three phases of data collection was selected based on the random sampling of companies drawn from the different clusters of industry in MIDA's classification. The choice of these industries was in line with the New Economic Model (NEM)'s characteristics of Malaysia in 2020.

3.7 Research Methods

This research adopted the SSM seven-stage process whereby Checkland's model progresses from finding out about a situation to taking action to improve it. During stages 1 and 2 the problem was still unstructured and expressed by the participants in a rich picture. Stages 3 and 4 involved systems thinking, which requires the adaptation and implementation of communication models and theories. Root definitions and conceptual models of possibly relevant PCS system were developed. During stage 5, a comparison between the conceptual model in Stage 4 and the

real world took place, while stages 6 and 7 were concerned with the implementation of the changes to improve the problem situation.

During these stages, ATLAS.ti software was used to review related literature as well as to locate themes, variables and their meaning related to PCS in current literature (see 3.7.3 ATLAS.ti 7.0 as Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software for further explanation). Interviewing respondents will be the main source of information collection. These two methodologies will be described below.

3.7.1 Focused Semi-structured Interview

This technique, focused semi-structured interviews, was used to collect qualitative data by setting up a situation that allows a respondent the time and scope to talk about their opinions on the Professional Communication Skills needed by graduates. Using the rich picture and conceptual framework discussed earlier, respondents were asked open-ended questions prepared earlier by the researcher and some questions that arose naturally during the interview (See Appendix A). The objective was to understand the respondent's point of view rather than make generalisations about the issue of PCS. The respondents involved in these sessions were representatives of Malaysian companies, government agencies, members in academia as well as subject experts. The PCS required by the participants were discussed in depth with each interviewee. All of the interviews took place during working hours and took place in the interviewees' respective offices.

Table 3. 5 Elements of Focused Semi-Structured Interview

Element	Focused semi-structured interview
Format	Face-to-face
Size	1-3 person(s)
Length	1.5 to 2 hours (2 sessions, pre and post)
Participants	Selected, by invitation only. Characteristics of policy makers.
Form of data	Conversation (including tone of voice) Body language
Data collection	Audio recording. Transcriptions.
Moderator	Flexible yet focused. Uses interview guide; modify based on pilot and early sessions.
Formats of reporting	Selected quotations.

After each interview, an overview of the interviewees' perceptions and any other points raised were recorded in the PCS template so they could be discussed at subsequent interviews. The outcomes of the discussion and the results of acceptable PCS and how they should be achieved were tabulated.

3.7.2 ATLAS.ti 7.0 as Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)

In particular, the use of ATLAS.ti 7.0 facilitates the triangulation of different data collection techniques, mainly through its capability of assigning different primary documents under the same 'Hermeneutic Unit'. As mentioned earlier, in ATLAS.ti 7.0 several formats of data (text, graphic, audio, and video) can be plugged in under the same 'Hermeneutic Unit'. According to Lewis (2004) ATLAS.ti imports rtf-format files containing a mix of text, tables, and photos with a high degree of success. In addition, ATLAS.ti 7.0 allows the exportation of codes and code families as an SPSS syntax file that can be analysed in a quantitative way. Using ATLAS.ti 7.0 therefore enhances reliability through triangulation of methods and techniques of data collection.

Secondly, in this study, the contributions of other qualitative data analysis experts were sought as a strategy for enhancing reliability. In qualitative data analysis, two types of reliability that researchers should focus on are: Intra-coder reliability – which consists of consistency in the codes of a single coder and Inter-coder reliability – which consists of consistency between the codes when two or more data analysts are involved in the process. In this research, part of the gathered data was given to another researcher for a member-checking process and for separate coding. A comparison of the coding carried out was then made. A third person, another expert in qualitative data analysis, was afterwards used to carry out an expert check on consistency and agreement of the codes. In this endeavour, ATLAS.ti 7.0 was useful because, first of all, the whole data set with the codes is portable. In addition, ATLAS.ti 7.0 allows for flexibility of merging and managing the coding carried out independently by several researchers. Such capabilities are of great importance in enhancing reliability. During one of the peer debriefing sessions with an expert, she requested to see the data and was impressed with the organisation it

offered in assembling all data needed in this study by using one HU. More detailed explanations on the use of this CAQDAS in this research will be explained in ‘The Study’s Trustworthiness’ (subchapter 3.8) as well as in the next chapter where the data collection stages are explained in a more thorough manner.

3.8 Sampling Design

Two sampling designs were implemented in this research for different groups of stakeholders. They were judgement and convenience sampling.

First, judgement sampling (also known as purposeful sampling (Ross, et.al., 2005)) was implemented in choosing the participants from companies and Malaysian government ministries, where the researcher actively selected the most productive sample to answer the research questions. Choosing the right participant was based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself. From the current literature, it was gathered that the best information on PCS needed by the stakeholders would be from the human resource managers and also the industrial training liaison officers in academia who gather in depth information right from the source. This was a more intellectual strategy than the simple demographic stratification of epidemiological studies, though age, gender and social class might be important variables (Marshall, 1996). The process of judgement is based on the assumption that the researcher is able to select elements which represent a ‘typical sample’ from the appropriate target population (Marshall, 1996, p. 78). Secondly, the convenience sampling technique was chosen because it involved the selection of the most accessible subjects. It was the least costly to the researcher, in terms of time, effort and money. Time factors and availability were also issues that had to be considered since many of these human resource and government officers had tight schedules.

Stakeholder 1 – Malaysian Companies: In this research, the first desired target population was the employers from Malaysian companies. Since the number of such employers is vast, the defined employer population will come from the services, manufacturing and agriculture sectors, which are the three key sectors in Malaysia. The components of these three key industries are listed in Table 3. 6. These three key sectors were reported to be the most important to the country’s development by the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA).

Table 3. 6 Malaysia's Key Industries and its components.

Key Industries	Components	Respondents in this study
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tertiary Education • Transportation (Ports, Airports and Shipping) • Finance (Head Offices) • Telecommunications and Courier (Head Offices) • Health 	A1, A2, A3, A4 C4, C6 C7 C9 G2
Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Processing • Chemicals, Petroleum & Pharmaceuticals (to include the oil and gas industry) • Rubber and Plastic Products • Automotive • Electrical & Electronic 	C1, C5 C3 - C2 -
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Subsector (Fisheries, Livestock, Vegetables and Fruits) 	C8, C10

Stakeholder 2 – the Government of Malaysia: To understand the hopes and desires of the Malaysian government on the issue of PCS, two main ministries were chosen as participants in this research. The Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Human Resources were the two selected participants since these ministries are the link between graduates and academia, as well as companies. In addition, the Public Services Commission of Malaysia was also involved in this research, since it acts as the human resource centre for all public sector agencies.

Stakeholder 3 – Academia: The pre-determined population representing Malaysian Academia were lecturers who implement the communication skills syllabi from three universities (2 national and one international). The universities chosen were Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and University College Sedaya International (UCSI). Some of the lecturers chosen as respondents held the position of industrial training liaison for the faculty.

3.9 Instrument Development

This research aims to provide results that are valid, reliable, sensitive, unbiased and complete. Therefore, it was important to be certain that the instruments used actually measure the concepts or behaviours that should be measured; that the data produced represent 'true' values (Fowler, 1995, p. 45) for these measures and do not contain too much random variability; that the questions are sensitive enough to measure important real differences or changes; and that the study covers all the dimensions of the topic under investigation. Instrument development was vital in obtaining quality data. In any research, the instruments are critical in answering the research questions. Thus, the instrument must be valid (measure what it says it measures) and reliable (reports the same result when administered again).

In this qualitative research, precise questioning of the respondents was vital in getting valid and reliable answers. Hence, one of the essential issues to be considered pertained to *language*. Language is a factor that needs to be borne in mind when developing questions and undertaking surveys. It was important that the words that were used were acceptable to the respondents. The existence of different perspectives of different groups in the population, such as the perspectives of different generations, ethnic groups and levels of education, can be a barrier to consistent measurement. If respondents are upset and antagonised because of the use of language that they find offensive for whatever reason, they are less likely to answer the question in an honest manner. Thus, quality of response would be affected. The issue of language is therefore important, and should be addressed both in developing the interview questions and also in training the interviewers. Furthermore, asking poor questions or not having well-trained interviewers would give rise to poor results (Creswell, 1998, p. 73).

The interview questions were developed from the information gathered from the process of building the problematic 'rich picture'. The questions were the outcome from synthesising a vast amount of literature on the needs of the stakeholders and the issues of employability. Testing and validation of interview questions could save a large amount of resources if errors or problems are detected and corrected before the main survey. At the extreme end of the scale, systematic errors which are not corrected at the testing stage of the survey development and get through to the final survey would make the questions unfit for the purposes that they were designed for.

3.9.1 Forms of the pilot study

In this research, testing techniques involved pre-testing or/and pilot testing. Pre-testing involved investigation of possible data quality issues, while pilot testing, also called field testing, was conducted after the pre-testing had produced a set of interview questions that was ready to be tested systematically on a set of respondents. Both types of testing provide information on interview time, and could be used to fine tune the survey cost estimates, and refine the sample size to fit a fixed budget if needed (Marshall, 1996). It also helped the researcher to locate the issues that had not been answered and are considered essential in answering the research questions.

Pre-testing

Pre-testing or ‘trying out’ of a particular research instrument gives advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 1998). Pre-testing questions enabled the researcher to establish whether:

- respondents understand the question, concept or task,
- that they do so in a consistent way, and,
- in the way the researcher intended.

Pre-testing also helped the researcher to be aware of the measurement errors that could occur. Measurement errors helped to identify how and where the interview questions fail to achieve the measurement purpose. Oksenberg *et al* (1991) listed the components of measurement errors as in Table 3. 7.

Table 3. 7 Components of measurement errors

Comprehension problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of vocabulary• Complex sentence structure• Not understanding the nature of the tasks and the rules to respond
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Validity problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents interpreting the same questions in different ways, or • The same way but not in the way the researcher intended.
Processing difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents may be unwilling or unable to retrieve the information necessary to answer the question.
Pronunciation or/and Communication problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These may affect both interviewers and respondents

In this research, the pre-testing technique chosen was a cognitive interview. A cognitive interview is an in depth one-on-one interview. It is a diagnostic tool for pre-testing instruments such as interviews. It focuses mainly on the questions rather than on the survey process, paying explicit attention to the mental processes respondents use to answer survey questions and thus allows covert as well as overt problems to be identified (Creswell, 1998, p. 113).

In addition, this technique was used to assess how respondents formulate answers and understand questions and concepts, the range of likely answers to a question and the level of knowledge needed to answer a question accurately. Thus, this technique allowed both the source of, and reason for, an error in the questions within the interview protocol to be identified. A cognitive interview is qualitative and flexible in nature, being complementary to, rather than a replacement for, traditional field testing or piloting. Collins (2003) offers a comprehensive guide to help novice researchers executing cognitive interview as a pre-testing tool. She suggests two main cognitive techniques:

- think aloud interviewing, and
- probing.

These two methods involve an interviewer asking the respondent about how she or he went about answering the survey question. She sums up the key difference between the two techniques in

Table 3. 8.

Table 3. 8 Key differences between think-aloud and probing techniques

Think-aloud	Probing
Respondent-driven	Interviewer-driven
Lower burden on interviewer as respondent does most of the talking	Lower burden on respondent, as respondent responds to interviewer's questions
Can make the interview more difficult for the respondent	Can make the interview easier for the respondent

Collins (2003) also suggests some probing questions in her 'cognitive method tool kit' to explore comprehension, retrieval, judgement and response processes. These probing questions (as in Table 3. 9) were also used to investigate sources of measurement error and later provided an improvement of the actual interview schedule.

Table 3. 9 Examples of cognitive probes.

Think-aloud/General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did you go about answering that question? Tell me what you are thinking? I noticed you hesitated before you answered – what were you thinking about? How easy or difficult did you find this question to answer? Why do you say that?
Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does the term X mean to you? What did you understand by X?
Retrieval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did you remember that? Did you have a particular time period in mind? How did you calculate your answer?
Confidence judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well do you remember this? How sure of your answer are you?
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did you feel about answering this question? Were you able to find your first answer to the question from the response options shown?

In this study, the pre-testing was done twice and the probing technique was found useful in identifying some vague and redundant questions in the initial interview schedule which were subsequently rephrased.

Pilot testing

The term pilot testing or pilot study refers to mini versions of a full-scale study (also called ‘feasibility’ studies), as well as the specific pre-testing of a particular research instrument such as an interview schedule (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 1998). The primary aims of the pilot study were to test the survey instruments and its operational procedures. Analysis of the field trial data was undertaken to check that the survey items were performing correctly in measuring the outcomes of interest. The experience with the pilot study operations was used to refine instruments and procedures for the main survey. All in all, the main objectives of pilot testing were to assess:

- Questions / instrument design
- Written instructions for interviewers
- Interviewer training manuals and delivery of training
- Timing/costing of the survey
- Processing systems/Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)

3.10 The Study’s Trustworthiness

Morse et al. (2002) argue that qualitative researchers should reclaim responsibility for reliability and validity by implementing verification strategies and self-correcting during the data collection process. They emphasise the execution of rigor or thoroughness within each qualitative design, and move the responsibility for incorporating and maintaining reliability and validity from external reviewers’ judgements to the investigators themselves. Tobin and Begley (2004) write: ‘Rigour is the means by which we demonstrate integrity and competence, a way of demonstrating the legitimacy of the research process. Without rigour, there is a danger that research may become fictional journalism, worthless as contributing to knowledge’ (p. 390). Some researchers suggest adopting new criteria for determining reliability and validity, and

hence ensuring rigor, in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Leininger, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Guba and Lincoln substitute reliability and validity with the parallel concept of “trustworthiness,” containing four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Within these are specific methodological strategies for demonstrating qualitative rigor, such as the audit trail, member checks when coding, categorizing, or confirming results with participants, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, structural corroboration, and referential material adequacy (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

3.10.1 Lincoln and Guba's Evaluation Criteria

Lincoln and Guba posit that trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing:

Table 3. 10 'Trustworthiness' criteria (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

Credibility	Confidence in the 'truth' of the findings
Transferability	Showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts
Dependability	Showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated
Confirmability	A degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.

Lincoln and Guba designated a series of techniques that can be used to conduct qualitative research that achieves the criteria they outline. In this research, their techniques are adopted so as to achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research and are explained as follows.

Credibility assurance

In assessing the credibility of this research, among the techniques used for enhancing credibility during data collection was triangulation across sources. Since the construction of interpretation in ethnographic fieldwork begins during data collection (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the techniques for enhancing credibility in interpretation formation also begin in the field. These techniques include regular negative case analysis and triangulation across researchers. The

technique for enhancing credibility that is considered crucial is member checks. Each of these will be discussed and evaluated in this section.

Triangulation

Triangulation across sources requires the researcher to develop evidence for an interpretation from interaction with several informants and several types of informants as the purposive sampling plan unfolds (Creswell, & Miller, 2010). Triangulation of sources examines the consistency of different data sources from within the same method. Within this study, the sources of primary data were the opinions of human resource managers of Malaysian multinational companies, heads of agencies from the Malaysian government as well as the lecturers in academia. As a validity procedure, triangulation was a step taken by the researcher employing a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas. ATLAS.ti was used to provide corroborating evidence collected through interviews and documents to locate major and minor themes. The narrative account was valid because the researcher went through this process and relied on multiple forms of evidence rather than on a single incident or data point in the study. Moreover, the respondents came from different fields of expertise and backgrounds which ensured a spread of views in the study.

Another method that was used in this study to increase the credibility and dependability of the study was the code-recode procedure. This procedure was done during the data analysis phase of the study following Krefting (1991), who suggests that after coding a segment of data (for instance Code A), a minimum of two weeks interval should be given before recoding it over again (Code B), as if coding it for the first time. Results from Code A and Code B are then compared and discussed. This technique was helpful in auditing thoughts and during data analysis. The incongruent codes were highlighted and discussed in depth with an impartial colleague (see Appendix E for details) who has experience with qualitative methods in order to minimise bias and misjudgement on the researcher's part. Figure 3.5 below describes the agreed codes for the component of 'knowledge of cognition' after it went through the code and recode procedure. All five components of knowledge of cognition (namely content knowledge, cultural competence, linguistic competence, tasking skills and critical skills) are from the Communication Competence Model (CCM) by Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007). The

incongruent codes were discussed with an impartial researcher (for instance ‘courtesy’ and ‘being civil’ within the competence component) and a more pertinent and apt code was generated (in this case, ‘politeness’). In Figure 3.5, the subcomponents were the agreed codes after undergoing the code-recode process as well a discussion with another impartial researcher.

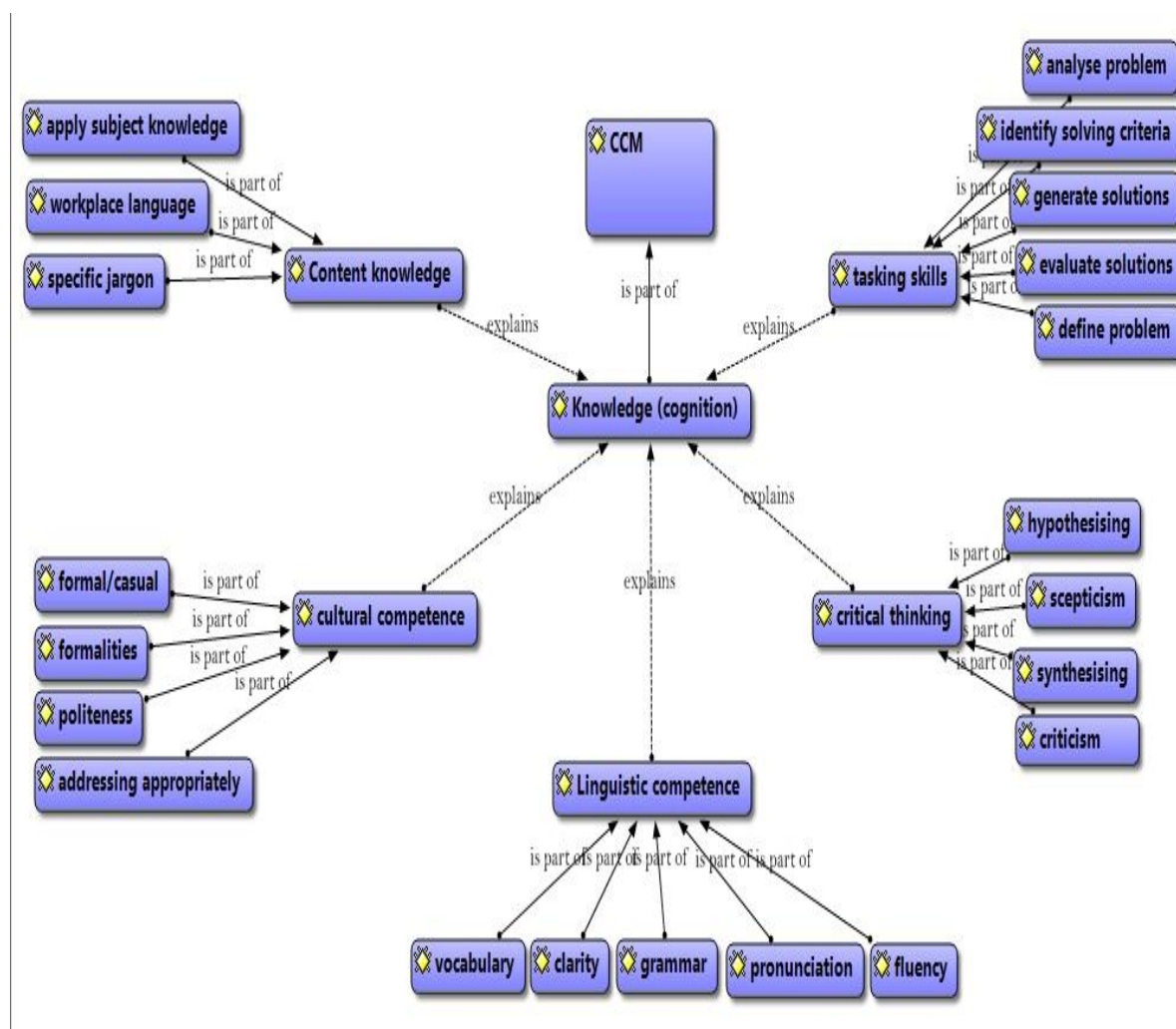


Figure 3. 5 Result after the code-recode process.

In ATLAS.ti 7.0, data was collected in written text format and digital voice recordings. Coding and the triangulation processes can be carried out through the use of ATLAS.ti 7.0 much more systematically and rigorously in comparison to manual coding since interview recordings, annual reports, Human Resource documents, government policies and documents from academia were compiled together in a ‘Hermeneutic Unit’ (HU). ATLAS.ti 7.0 offers various tools to search the

coded texts, to find similarities and dissimilarities, to explore the whole project (usually referred as the HU or to retrieve specific quotations in order to support theory building.

Peer debriefing

Peer review or debriefing is a review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored. A peer reviewer provides support, plays devil's advocate, challenges the researcher's assumptions, pushes the researcher to the next step methodologically, and asks hard questions about methods and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, peer debriefers can provide written feedback to researchers or simply serve as a sounding board for ideas. In this research, the set of interview questions was verified with the supervisor a few times to ensure that the questions would answer the needs of the research. Peer debriefing helped to restructure the overemphasised and underemphasised points as well to clarify any vague descriptions within the interview protocol. By seeking the assistance of peer debriefers, researchers add credibility to a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Additionally, experts from the fields of TESOL, policy and assessment in HE were also included for the validation process. Meetings with these experts were held after completing data analysis and the member-checking process with respondents. These meetings were held in order to obtain feedback in order to amend overlooked points and reflect on the information given by the experts and subsequently, investigate other alternatives in the research process. In this study, three experts from the field agreed to take part in the validation process (See Appendices B, C and D for their profiles). During the meeting with Expert B, she emphasised the sharing of problems and insights faced during the study. Though it seemed to be intrusive at first, it was discovered that the session facilitated in clarifying obscure steps and thoughts in carrying out the steps, particularly in highlighting the result in Chapter 5. Ingenious suggestions which were developed during the discussion sparked more ideas and in all conscience, this peer examination method did build up the researcher's own confidence in this study since these experts were extremely helpful, offering generous constructive feedback.

Additionally, since two of the experts are specialists in qualitative studies, they queried the techniques used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. Expert A requested to see the codes used for a particular subcomponent of the 'communication skill'. This coding scheme (See

Figure 3.6) was shown, explained and exemplified to her during the half-day meeting. Though it was an impromptu request, Expert A was satisfied with its rigour and the thoroughness of the process used to achieve the coding scheme. She was also satisfied with the aptness of the codes used. However, Expert A only looked into the subcomponent of ‘communication skills’ and not other subcomponents.

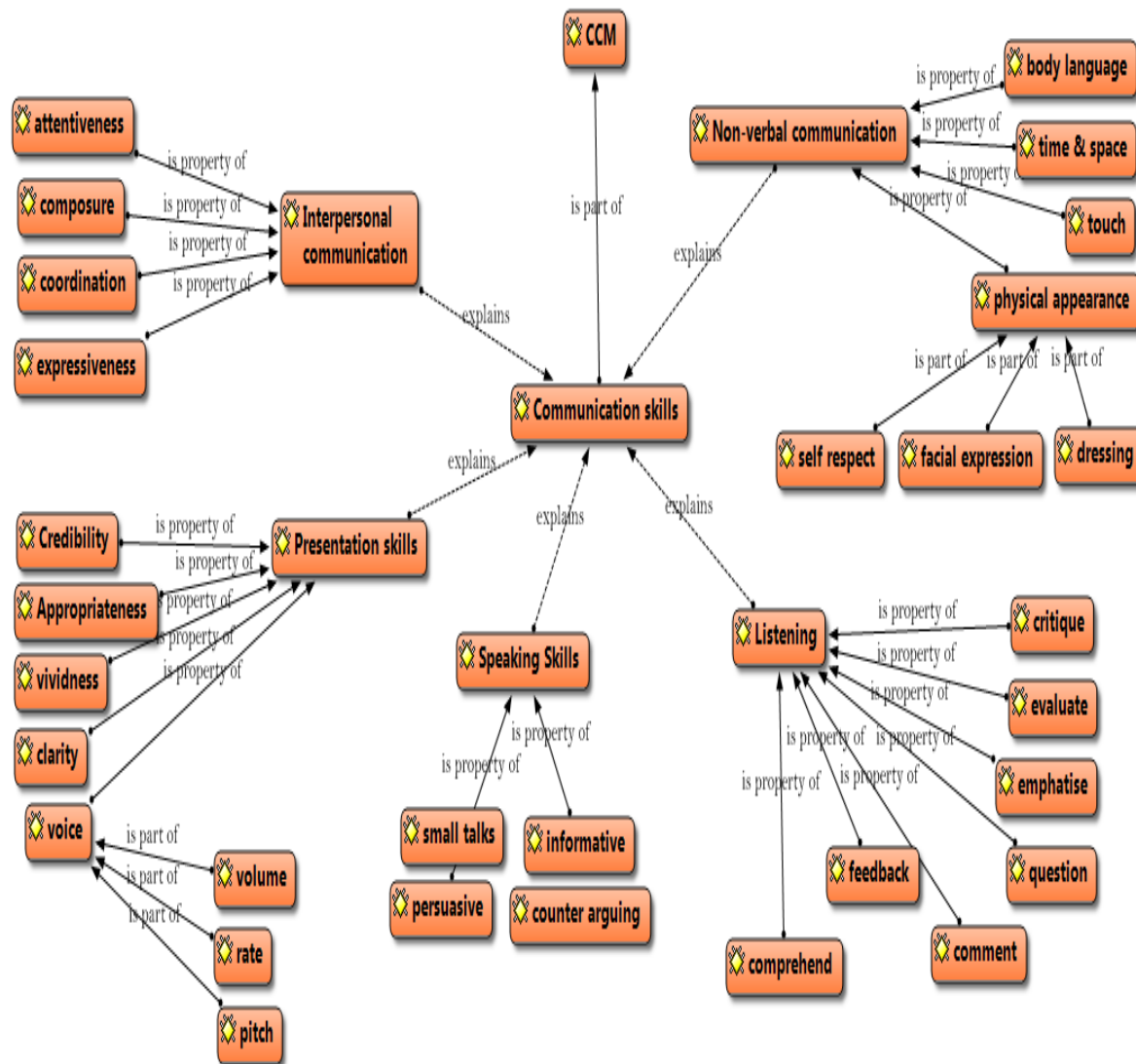


Figure 3. 6 Codes used for ‘communication skill’.

Member-checking

Member-checking is considered an important part of the validation process, where data, interpretations and conclusions are tested with the participants from whom the data were originally obtained. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility since for them credibility is to return data to the subjects for verification (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This process provides an opportunity for participants to correct errors and challenge what are perceived as wrong interpretations and also provides the opportunity to volunteer additional information which may be stimulated by the playing-back process (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). In addition, member checking allows respondents to assess the adequacy of data and findings as well as to confirm and summarise preliminary findings.

During this study, the importance of this technique was tested. One respondent from this study denied not one but many of the facts which had been highlighted as the findings of the study. By recapitulating the previous interview by playing back each refutation she made on the recording stored in ATLAS.ti 7.0 (see Figure 3.7 for graphic explanation on how codes connect to voice) and a discussion held after each playback it was shown that the respondent did mean what she had said in the earlier interview and she admitted that she had failed to recall those occasions.

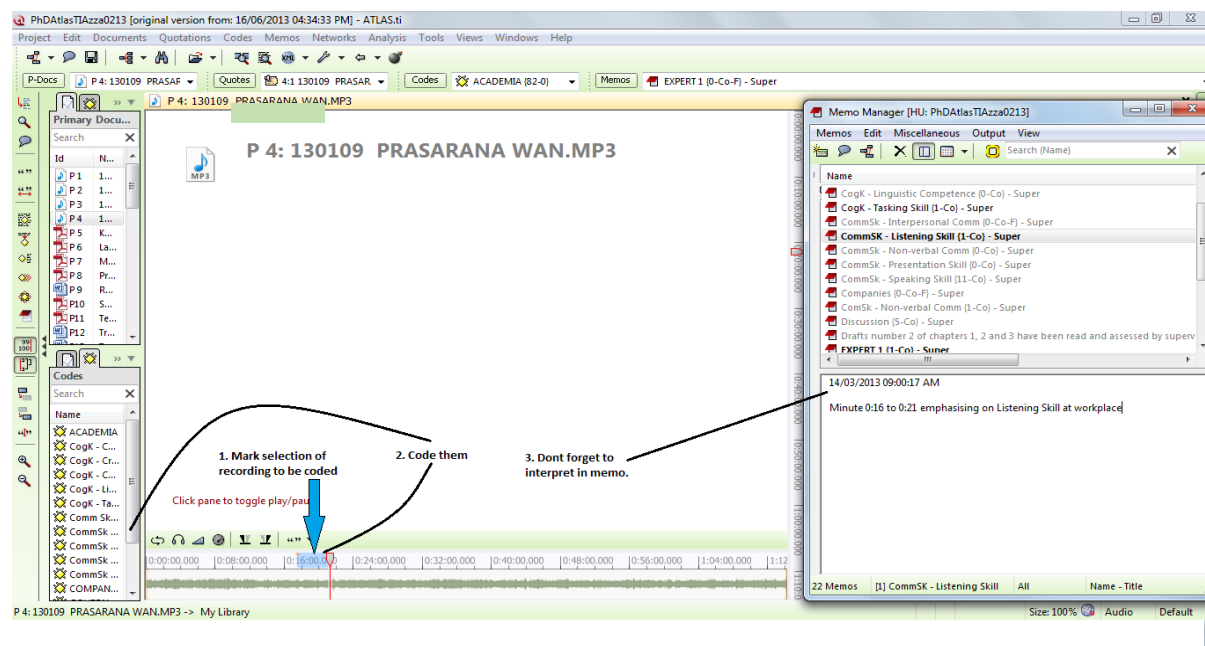


Figure 3. 7 Member checking: Codes connect to voice recordings

Morse (1994) and Angen (2000) offer comprehensive critiques of the use of member checks for establishing the validity of qualitative research. Firstly, they argue that the process of member-checking may lead to confusion rather than confirmation because participants may change their minds about an issue; the interview itself may have an impact on their original assessment, and new experiences (since the time of contact) may have intervened. This may lead to respondents disagreeing with researcher's interpretations. However, in this research, change of mind and debating about the PCS issues were considered healthy since they helped to build a better PCS framework. Restructuring their thoughts and needs relating to PCS helped to keep the framework updated and revalidated. This study also discovered that member-checking created a more in-depth discussion between researcher and respondents on the current findings. This phase creates healthier and more sincere discussions since it increases the respondents' belief in and trust of the researcher.

Angen (2000) adds that both researcher and stakeholder groups in the research may have different stories to tell and agendas to promote, and as a result, conflicting ways of viewing interpretations will occur. Nonetheless, in this particular research, the outcome had been clearly stated and it created a win-win situation for all parties involved. Findings from this study will facilitate the moulding of graduates according to stakeholders' needs so that Malaysia HEIs can generate high quality human capital with highly-skilled labour which is knowledgeable and innovative.

During the member-checking procedure in this research, another meeting was held with the respondents to double-check and validate their statements in the interview sessions. In this second meeting, an initial PCS framework was shown to them to be discussed and validated. Though it was anticipated that there would be some disputes or contests of the initial PCS framework, the discussions and deliberations followed by in-depth, meaningful dialogue were deemed beneficial. Two of the respondents refuted many of the findings, saying that the statements were not theirs, but after putting the voice recorder back on, they admitted that they had failed to recall those statements, and then agreed to the findings indicated within the initial PCS framework. Therefore, having the voice recordings, transcriptions and codes placed in one single HU was especially useful when some of the respondents queried the initial PCS

framework and it was proven that in this research, ATLAS.ti helped to ease the validation process.

All respondents who had been interviewed were then presented with the first draft of the PCS framework. Only one respondent could not be met face to face, so a Skype meeting was arranged. Respondents gave feedback on the framework – the words or phrases used, as well as the way it was displayed. The feedback was not only essential in improving the framework but more importantly it enabled them to validate their own thoughts and ideas which were expanded in the PCS framework.

Transferability assurance

Thick description

Creswell and Miller (2010) evaluate another procedure for establishing credibility in a study by describing the setting, the participants, and the themes of a qualitative study in rich detail. According to Denzin (1989), ‘thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts. . . . Thin descriptions, by contrast, lack detail, and simply report facts’ (p. 83). Payne and Williams (2005) argue that external validity depends on ‘thick description’ of the fieldwork, richness of the data collected and full reportage of the care used in its collection serving two purposes: firstly, to demonstrate reliability and internal validity in the researcher’s account, and secondly, to provide the reader with information necessary to decide whether the findings might be transferable to other settings. Therefore, it is imperative for social researchers to provide a full description of how data collection and analysis has been carried out in qualitative research.

To use this procedure for establishing credibility, researchers employ a constructivist perspective to contextualize the people or sites studied. The process of writing using thick description is to provide as much detail as possible. It may involve describing a small slice of the interaction, experience, or action; locating individuals in specific situations; bringing a relationship or an interaction alive between two or more persons; or providing a detailed rendering of how people feel (Denzin, 1989). The ‘Memo’ feature of ATLAS.ti 7.0 was used to record all descriptions while the data was being analysed and this activity made a remarkable contribution to ensuring both validity and reliability (Rambaree, 2007). In addition, the descriptions were kept in the

‘Memo’ in ATLAS.ti 7.0 as a data set that could be used for additional analysis by the same or other researchers. This ‘Memo’ feature allows readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings or similar contexts.

Dependability assurance

Inquiry audit

An audit trail is established by the researcher documenting the inquiry process through journaling and updating the ‘comment’ section, keeping a research log of all activities, developing a data collection chronology and recording data analysis procedures clearly (Lewis, 2009). As guidance, Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested six elements that comprise an audit trail. These are outlined in Table 3.10 below, which also provides examples of each element.

Table 3. 11 What is an audit trail? (Adapted from Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Audit trail element	Examples
Raw data	Transcripts, audio data, videos, documents, photographic data, field notes, survey results, etc.
Data reduction and analysis products	Condensed notes and summaries, transcript notes, emerging concepts, quantitative summaries.
Data reconstruction and synthesis products	Structure of categories (themes, definition and relationships), findings and conclusions (interpretations and inferences), a final report with connections to the existing literature (on concepts and interpretations).
Process notes	Methodological notes (procedure, design, rationale), criteria of rigour notes (authenticity, trustworthiness).
Materials relating to intentions and dispositions	Inquiry proposal, reflexivity and personal notes, and expectations
Instrument development	Pilot work, interview and survey development of questions, report drafts, or feedback notes

Through this process of documenting a study and a review of the documentation by an external auditor, the narrative account becomes credible. Using ATLAS.ti 7.0, the researcher can ensure that all thoughts and experiences are carefully noted as ‘Memos’ and ‘Comments’. During data collection, notes on observations concerning the context and constraints under which research participants were providing their data and the researcher’s thoughts were also meticulously kept on record and used as additional memos in ATLAS.ti 7.0 under the same HU. In this way, the researcher tried to be critical of the social and cultural environment under which the research participants had been providing the data.

Keeping the audit trail up-to-date was tremendously helpful especially during two occasions in this research. At some stage in the peer debriefing meetings with the experts, records on the primary data were requested in order to ascertain the research plans and implementation. While carrying out data analysis for the research, the memos of the researcher’s personal thoughts, interpretations, and beliefs were also written down for further considerations while constructing theories from the collected data.

In principle, researchers are encouraged to reflect on and record their interpretations, and they are reminded that the validity of their interpretations is dependent on their being able to demonstrate how they were reached (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Mason, 1996). These sorts of reflexive actions are vital for rigour in qualitative social research. Using ATLAS.ti 7.0 therefore brings added value for rigour by providing in-built features that could be easy and simple to use. To demonstrate this, Figure 3.7 presents a screen shot from the study’s ATLAS.ti HU project using the ‘object explorer’ property. When organised effectively, the properties of ATLAS.ti might enable others to see:

Raw data

- Easy access to the raw data (transcript, audio, photos, videos) to support each code/theme

Data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products

- Researcher’s analytical thinking and decision making during the analysis (memos)

- Easy access to linked memos from codes to view the researcher's reflexive notes per phase of the analysis, or the notes on new emergent themes
- Easy access to view the segmented text that characterises each code/theme.

Process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions & Instrument development

- See how the data analysis links to the wider aspects of a research project (methods, criteria of rigour, discussion).
- Researcher's reflexive memos on 'Fieldwork' corresponded with the methods of data collection.
- Researcher's reflections on repetitive themes and major codes were 'memo'-ed as 'Discussion', which then expanded in Chapter 5 where major findings were discussed.
- 'Reflexivity' memo talked about researcher's findings on the connections of theory with the analysed data, as well as other issues on authenticity of the study's findings.
- Methodology issues of combining codes after intense discussion with another impartial researcher (See Appendix E) were made written in reflexivity memo.

It was discovered that such organisation was very useful in helping the researcher to understand and make sense of the qualitative data. Analysis of qualitative data in this study was often a process of moving backwards and forwards. This structure facilitated the fluidity of movement as it allowed the researcher's previous thinking (noted in memos, codes) to influence the current emergent thoughts and especially to dictate issues to be discussed thoroughly in the 'Findings' of the study. For instance, earlier codes could be revisited to reconsider them in later stages of analysis and other important decisions such as combining or creating new codes were also further logged and compiled in the audit trail. Including these notes within the same HU aided the researcher to view all the 'evidence' in the same place.

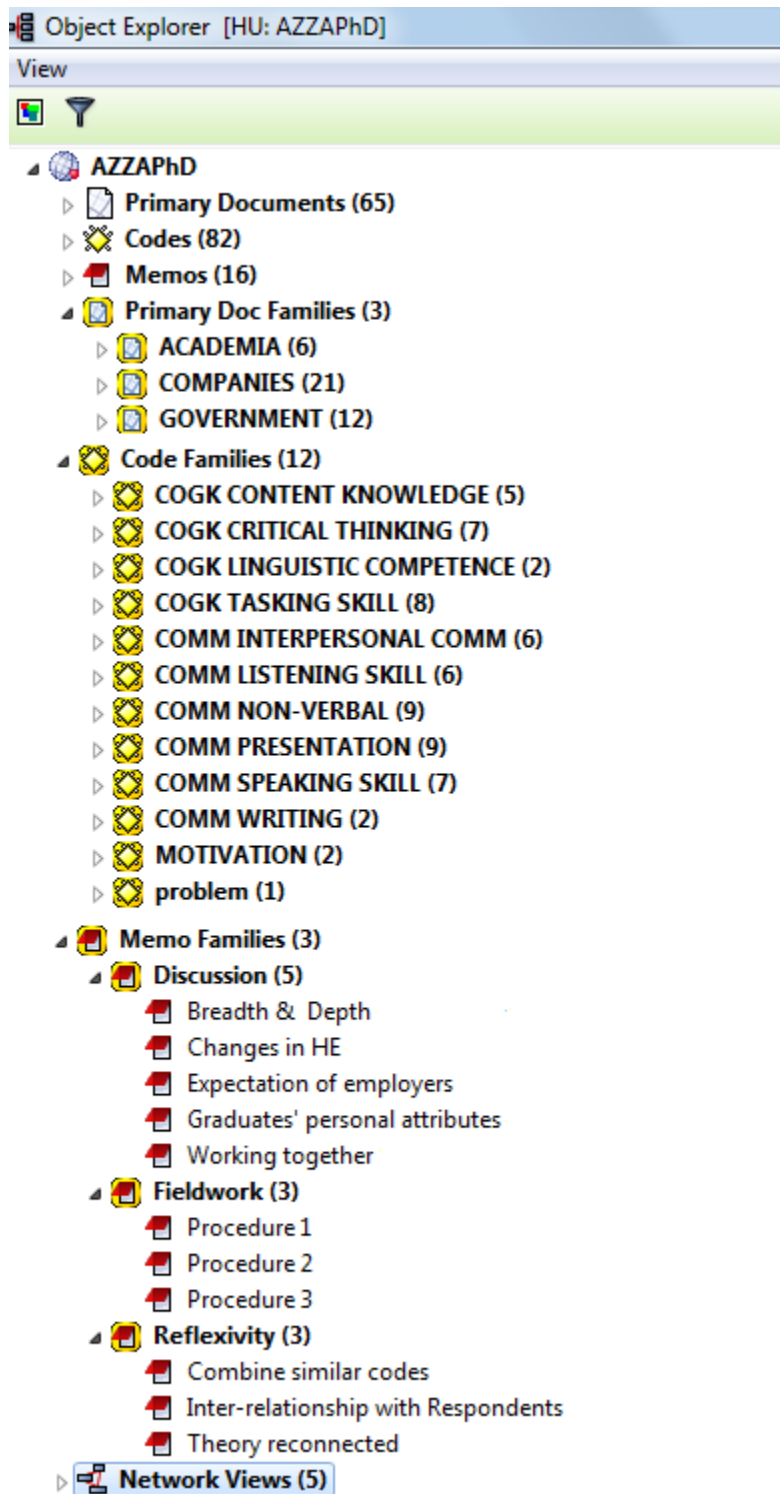


Figure 3. 8 Audit trail of this study (Screen shot from ATLAS.ti)

Confirmability assurance

Lincoln and Guba (1985) again use inquiry audit and triangulation as the techniques for establishing confirmability. These techniques have been explained above (Please refer to 3.10.1 Triangulation).

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter described the research paradigm, design and methods adopted in this study. In summary, this study was couched within the interpretive qualitative approach to inquiry which valued the participants' perspectives, utilised their own voices to explore their needs and requirements of PCS which took place in their own specific contexts in order to arrive at a profound understanding of the case. The chapter also consisted of several sections on the Soft Systems Methodology and how it was applied in the research. Then, the second section provided a brief description of the overall research methodology design. A detailed summary of the research variables was provided above. The subsequent sections discussed the setting, participants and sampling designs that were used in this research. Next, detailed discussions of the two main methods used in the data collection process were provided. Finally, the issue of 'trustworthiness' was deliberated after a discussion on instruments development and forms of testing. Incorporating theory and personal experience in managing the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability during this research hopefully clarify issues of rigour in doing this qualitative study. This research continues by looking into the process of data analysis and preliminary findings.

“Meaning is about interpretation. It is about understanding the world and ourselves not only through invention and discovery, but also through the rigors of re-inventing, re-examining and reconsidering.”
(Faust, 2010, p. 21).

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

4.0 Introduction

In an attempt to answer the overarching research questions outlined at the beginning of this thesis, this chapter presents and discusses the common themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis and synthesis of data obtained from the researched subjects involved in this study. Specifically, this chapter reports on the findings collated from the stakeholders – multi-national companies, government agencies and academia who were the main participants of this study. As explained in Chapter Three, data was collected through semi-structured interviews, annual reports, government reports and EOP course handbooks. This chapter builds on the findings on the stakeholders’ standpoints pertaining to the two guiding research questions addressed by this study:

- RQ1. What are stakeholders and theoretical identified communication constructs that support the development of a PCS in English Framework?
- RQ2. What are stakeholders’ assessments about the relevance of the PCS Framework?

Earlier in Chapter Three, it was clarified that SSM would be the predominant theory applied during the data collection process.

4.1 Data Collection Stages

4.1.1 Stage 1: The problem situation unstructured.

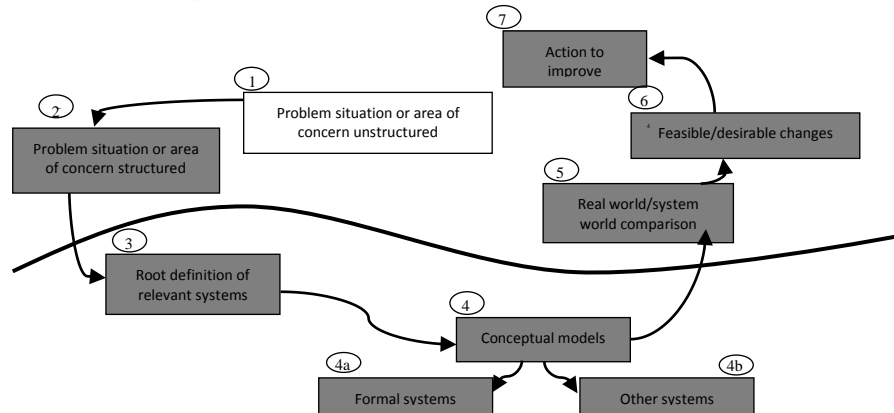


Figure 4. 1 Stage 1: The problem situation unstructured.

In undertaking the seven SSM stages as mentioned above, vast literature review on opinions, experiences and knowledge of the related stakeholders were looked into to develop a rich picture. The objective was to learn about the PCS needed by Malaysian graduates, necessities required from the future employers and also the beliefs of the Malaysian government, particularly policies developed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). 'Experiencing the unstructured situation is recognised as a valuable part of defining both the research problem and the design' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990, p. 98). Following informal discussion with both the English instructors of Malaysian HE institutions and human resource staff of Malaysian based companies, it became very clear that there is lack of coherent information transfer between both parties to define the issues of graduates' employability, particularly the precise Professional Communication Skills needed. This lent itself to a soft systems approach. In stages 1 and 2 the researcher tries to develop the richest picture possible of the problematic situation. To do so, the qualitative portion consisted of 15 semi-structured interview transcriptions with the stakeholders and 29 annual reports published between 2010 and 2013 were analysed with ATLAS.ti, based on the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis as described by Friese (2012).

In order 'to display the situation so that a range of possible and, hopefully, relevant choices [of relevant systems to be described in the following stages] can be revealed' (Checkland, 1981, p. 166), Bowen and Shehata (2001) suggested to follow a set of procedures for this first stage:

- a. Gather and examine as much as possible from the available information.
- b. Learn as much as possible about who and what is important in the organisation.
- c. Understand as much as possible about the organisation's specific language.
- d. Pay close attention to the information about how things are done in the organisation.

In ATLAS.ti as mentioned, all of the data collected from the interview sessions, recordings and transcriptions, as well as the annual reports from the stakeholders are placed in the HU and defined as "primary documents" (PD). This action is essential in order to gather and examine as much as possible from all information and learn as much as possible about the problems raised from various respondents.

All pieces of data in PDs need to be ordered and managed. This is where the procedure called coding comes in as a useful strategy. By coding, quotations were linked together and form thematic groups. In this step, excerpts in interview transcriptions and annual reports (in the form of PDF files) which speak about graduates' workplace literacy problems were highlighted and coded. With the help of the codes in this coding process, we can see the thematic contours of each group of quotations (Konopásek, 2008). Additionally, codes can be selected, commented, ordered, filtered, moved, renamed, split, and linked to each other and they can be viewed in lists, hierarchies or network views (Konopásek, 2008). For this stage, in order to display the problematic issues brought forward from the thoughts of the stakeholders during the interviews, the codes are displayed using network views (See Appendix I).

By using these coding techniques, Stages 1 and 2 of the SSM were done simultaneously. The problematical issues highlighted by the stakeholders were arranged and structured as shown in Figure 4.1, which highlighted the lacking of professional communication skills in English by the current graduates is noticeably a big concern from all stakeholders. This proves the concern highlighted earlier (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Pandian & Abd Ghani, 2005; Sahandri & Hamzah, 2009; Sirat et al., 2007; Wahi, 2012) still exists and the issue of PCS in English has not been solved.

4.1.2 Stage 2: The problem situation expressed using ‘rich picture’.

In SSM rich picture was employed as a method of capturing the problem situation, recognising that different stakeholders had diverse views and experience to fit their requirements of PCS among Malaysian graduates. The rich picture drew attention to the degree of social interaction and began to focus on issues which were critical, as well as eliminating mismatches and disagreement associated with PCS between the stakeholders involved. The rich picture portrayed all the key players involved in the process and presented a structured view by putting into context the factors affecting the process.

Human resource managers from seven multi-national companies, three recruitment managers in various government agencies, as well as English instructors from five universities in Malaysia brought with them different world-views into this study. The different Weltanschauungen were unified as groups of people who could give meaning and create definitions for PCS. From the interview sessions, the respondents also laid down the problems existing in the Malaysian workplace context faced by fresh graduates, mainly in the area of English language communication.

Checkland (1981) did not provide any example or descriptions of rich pictures in his earliest book, but rich pictures were introduced as some kind of informal drawings accompanied by some describing text (Platt and Warwick, 1995). Such pictures aim to encourage a holistic rather than reductionist approach to appreciating the social context of the organisation (Checkland, 1999 and Platt & Warwick, 1995).

In this research, after reviewing the journal articles regarding the issue of the lacking of PCS among graduates, the main issue found was that PCS is taught in various ways in different institutions of HE in Malaysia (as shown in Figure 3.3). The lack of comprehensive PCS framework in English that has been sourced from and validated by stakeholders – industries, government and academia lead to a less comprehensive and systematic teaching and learning of PCS in terms of its content, materials, methodology and assessment. Meanwhile, based on the data collected from the field of study found that there were more issues highlighted by the stakeholders. Those were illustrated in Figure 4. 2 below.

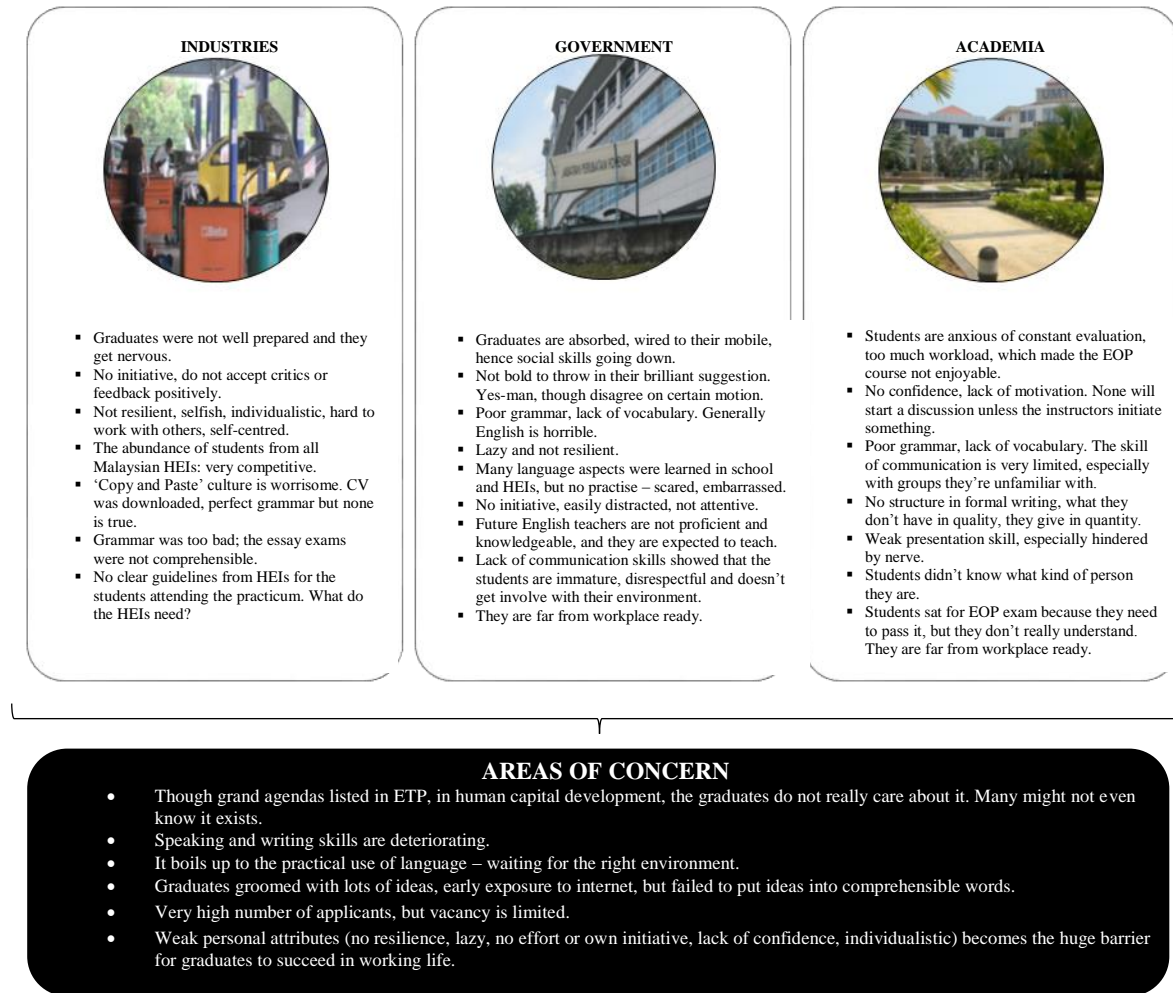


Figure 4. 2 Rich picture: an area of concern on the Malaysian graduates' level of PCS generated from field data.

4.1.3 Stage 3: Root Definition

During this stage, the root definition, as outlined in Table 3.2, was defined by the researcher, after over-looking at the whole problematic scenarios described by the stakeholders during the interview sessions. Hence, prior to define the root system of this study, the definitions of CATWOE were listed in table 4.1 below.

Table 4. 1 Definition of CATWOE in this study.

C = Customers	Malaysian HE institutions students who are lacked of ample PCS upon graduation
A = Actors	Lecturers, English language instructors as well as policy makers in HE institutions.
T = Transformation process	Clear cut PCS Framework initiated and validated by stakeholders which can be implemented during and teaching and learning process in Malaysian HE institutions.
W = World View (Weltanschauung)	The belief that validated PCS Framework by all stakeholders would correct many skills mismatch of the Malaysian graduates and will produce higher quality human capital development.
O = Owner	MOHE, Government of Malaysia Confidentiality issues in certain companies, time availability of high ranked personnel in MOHE.

Combining the elements identified in the rich picture, the subsequent main issues and CATWOE analysis, the following root definition is constructed for Professional Communication Skills (PCS):

PCS is a system that provides a list of necessary skills for workplace communication in English language. PCS framework is initiated and validated by stakeholders (companies, government of Malaysia and academia) in ensuring Malaysian graduates to be highly employable. The PCS framework will feed into the education system and worker training schemes to generate quality workforce with the right skills needed. It ensures greater effectiveness and efficiency in teaching and learning in HE institutions.

4.1.4 Stage 4: Deriving conceptual model.

Venters et al. (2002) further described how SSM could be used to develop conceptual models that identify patterns in knowledge activities. Such patterns could be used to provide a basis for technical design and organisational and social intervention. Based upon the need to address the problems in developing fluent communicators in English amongst Malaysian graduates as described by stakeholders in the rich picture (Figure 4.2), the following conceptual model has been developed (Figure 4.3) and was incorporated in this research.

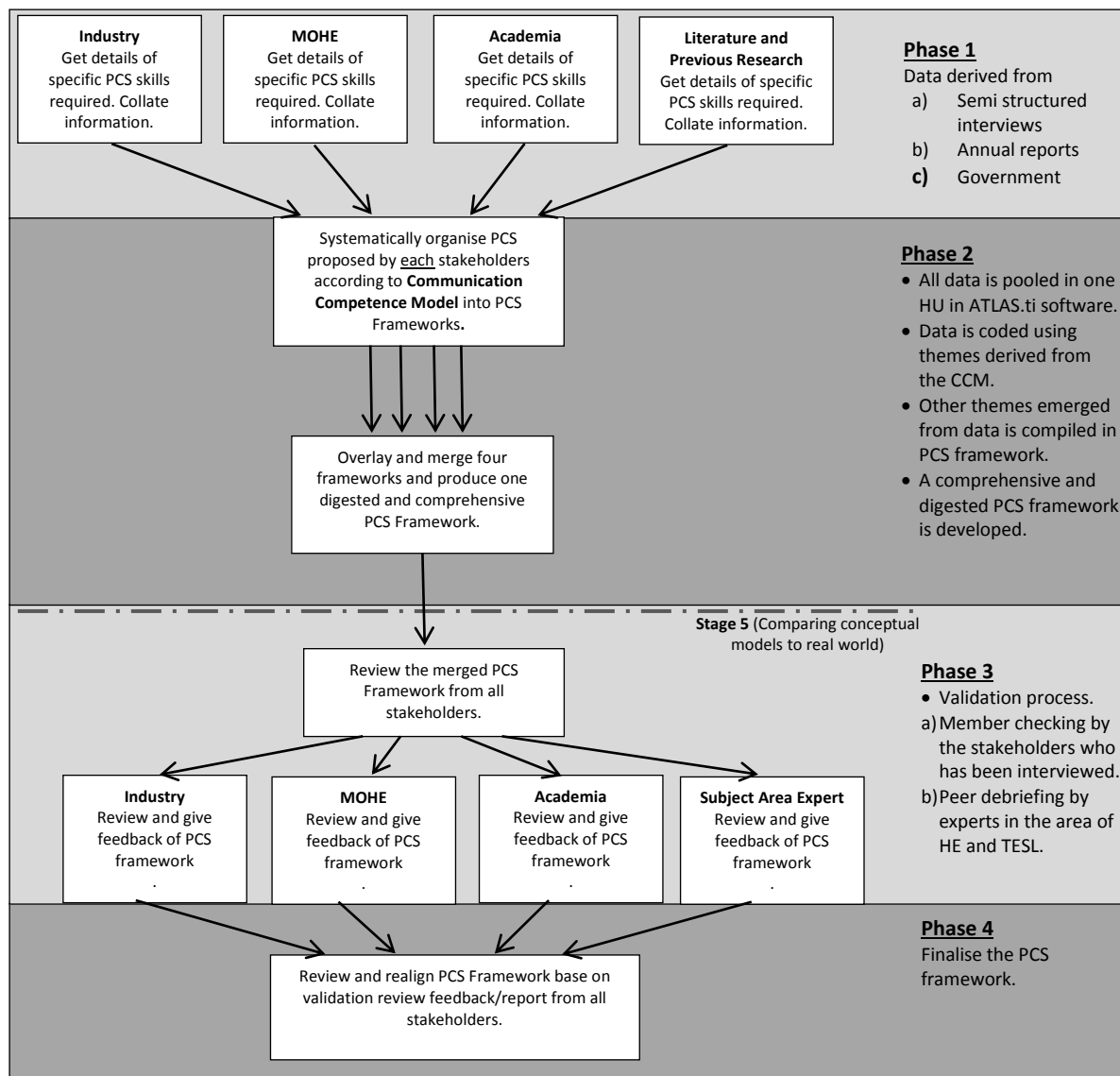


Figure 4.3 Conceptual model of the study divided into practical phase.

Looking at the model, it was divided into four clear and visible phases, which provided a feasible structure to the study. Phases 1 and 2 belonged to this stage, while the rest belonged to Stage 5, whereby this conceptual model was then compared to the real world. Phase 1 covered processes and product gathered from data collection procedures. The interviews sessions with the human resource managers from the industry, government servants who has vast experience recruiting the fresh graduates as well as English instructors from Malaysian academia were conducted and the audio sessions were transcribed. In addition, the annual reports from various private and public sectors were also compiled. Information in regards to Human Resource policies and findings of the latest recruitment patterns were scrutinised to discover the current PCS in need by

the Malaysian stakeholders. Once all the data is pooled together, Phase 2 started by saving them in various formats (PDF, Word documents, Audio, JPEG) and placed it all in one single file called hermeneutic unit (HU) in ATLAS.ti 7.0 software.

In Phase 2, data was coded using themes and keywords derived from the components and sub components of the Communication Competence Model (as shown in Figure 4.4). These components and sub components were discussed in great detail earlier in chapter 2.

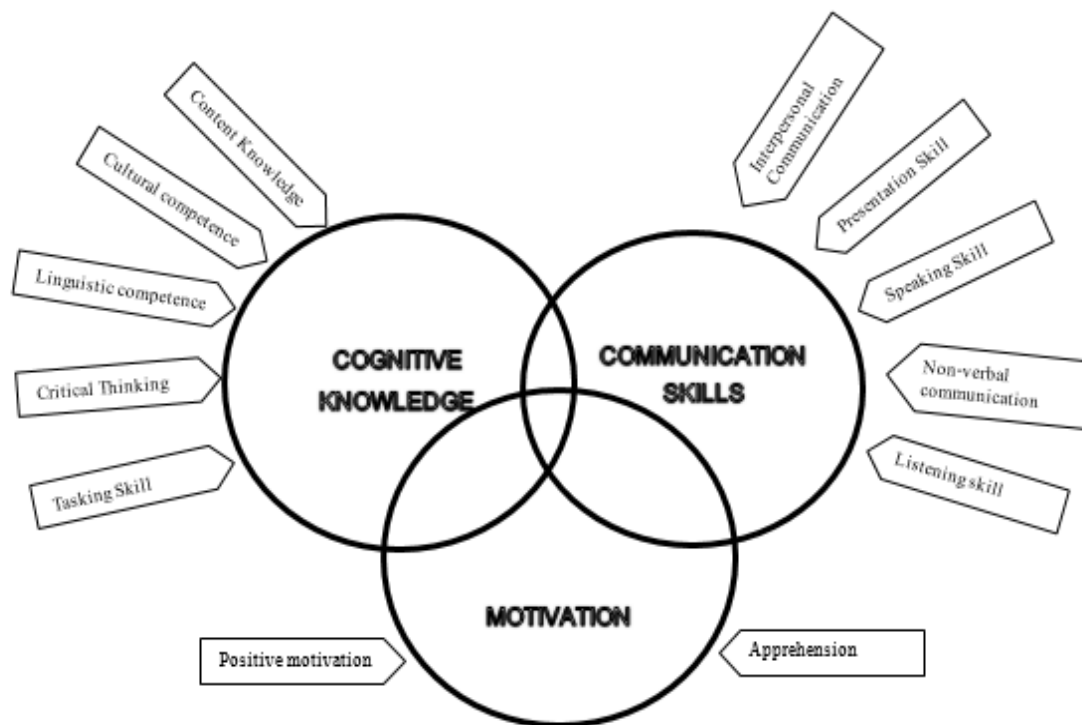


Figure 4.4 Components and sub components of PCS Framework

In using this deductive approach, pre-determined codes were set and while going through interview transcripts and the annual reports, segments which were relevant to certain codes were highlighted, then ‘dragged and dropped’. This systematic approach of having all data, codes and tools in one screen kept the researcher very close to the data, which allowed intense and rich exploration and discovery. (See Appendix K for Deductive coding technique using ATLAS.ti)

Another specific technique used in searching for specific code throughout all primary documents (PDs) was auto coding (See Appendix K for visual detail). Auto coding thoroughly sought for

the exact word match, without having missing even one and did it in a nick of time. Hence, when searching for specific keywords, especially those which were recurrent throughout the PDs, this technique was discovered useful and effective.

After the open coding process was completed using these two techniques, deductive and auto coding, the researcher regrouped the data and critically analysed them again by selecting the core codes that described the real phenomenon of the study. The purpose of selective coding is to answer questions about the phenomena such as when, where, why, who, how and with what consequences, thus giving the concept greater explanatory power (Strauss and Corbin, as quoted in Boychuk, Duchscher and Morgan, 2004, p.608). During this stage, another feature of ATLAS.ti, 'Memo', was used frequently in order to reflect and interpret the relationships between codes and the real world. Friese (2009) opined that memos were used in order to support the researcher in the analytical work, where it creates spaces for reflection, analysis, integration and interpretation. Another advantage of using memos in ATLAS.ti is that they can be linked to the quotations and codes, hence the thoughts are 'captured' within the exact context.

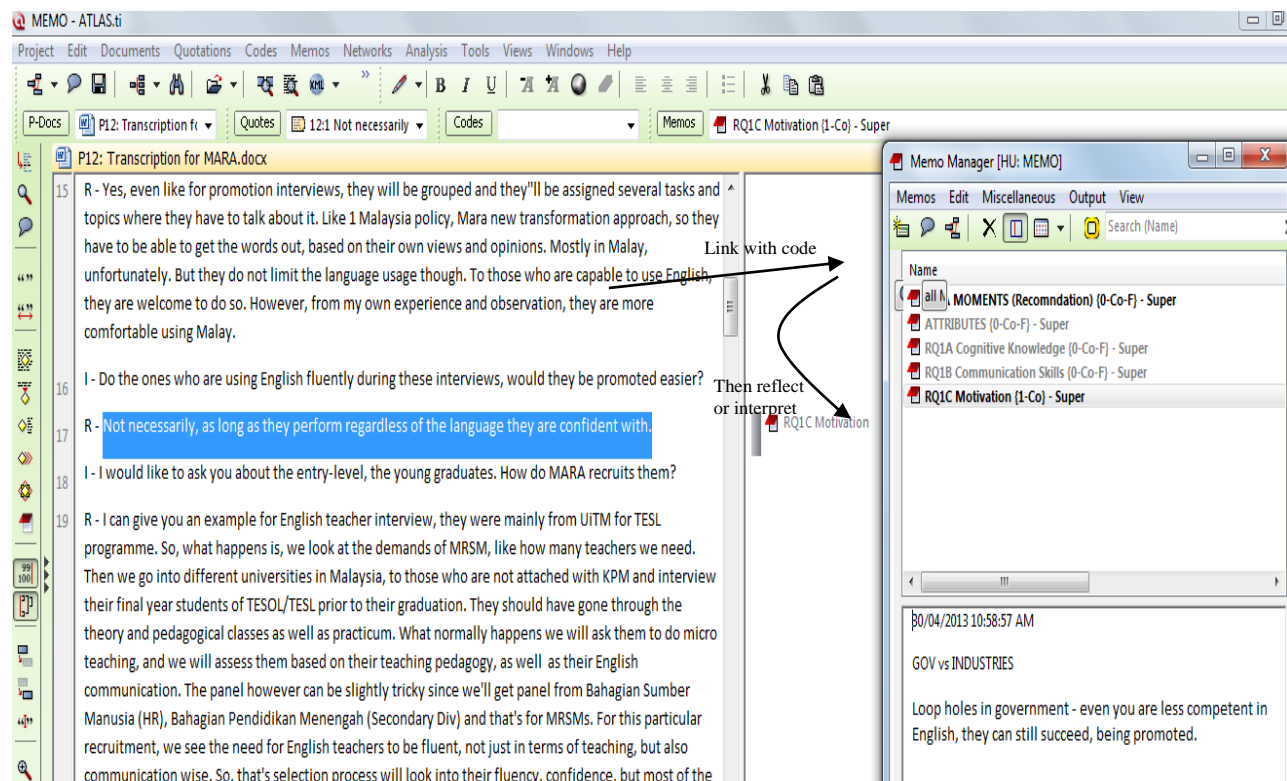


Figure 4.5 Connecting memo and quotations in ATLAS.ti

Due to the vast amount of interpretations involved in this qualitative study, ‘reflexivity’ process was involved in capturing the meaning of data, and more importantly, in interpreting the real meaning of the data. Guillemin and Gilliam (2004) state:

Reflexivity involves critical reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process—what sorts of factors influence the researcher’s construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conduct, and writing up of the research. A reflexive researcher is one who is aware of all these potential influences and is able to step back and take a critical look at his or her own role in the research process. The goal of being reflexive in this sense has to do with improving the quality and validity of the research and recognizing the limitations of the knowledge that is produced, thus leading to more rigorous research.

(p. 65)

However, since the researcher is often the collector as well as interpreter of data, it is sometimes inevitable for confusion and bias to enter the data analysis process. Hence, in order to enhance reflexivity and to improve trustworthiness in the research, a peer debriefer who was also another postgraduate student in the same field was recruited to provide valuable second opinion on the meaning of data as well as the proposed components and sub-components. In this study, the peer debriefer assisted in reviewing the codings of interview data, providing an inspection against biases within the analysis, and also to aid with consistency, credibility and reliability throughout the coding process in order to reinforce the trustworthiness of the work. Additionally, since she was also familiar with the CAQDAS used, the peer debriefer not only challenged the researchers’ analysis and findings, but also helped to provide alternatives or additional ways of coding. It is important to state that this process was performed after all the stages above were completed. The researcher’s coding and memos were provided to the debriefer as well as the full transcriptions of the interviews. Since ATLAS.ti was used, all data (primary documents, codes, memos) was compiled in a neat HU and this process was done in an organised manner.

The final step in phase 2 of this stage in SSM, in order to derive with a basic PCS framework, the emerging categories were classified and re-arranged with a view to analyse the conceptual relationships through a feature called network building in ATLAS.ti 7.0. The conceptual relationships of the sub-components of Professional Communication Skills in English were visualised using the network views (which will be discussed in more detail later in the sub

chapter of ‘Data Analysis’). Within this process, it was made sure that the Communication Competence Model was ‘conceptually dense’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p. 113), which meant embedding the model in a context of descriptive and conceptual writing.

4.1.5 Stage 5: Adapting conceptual model to the real world.

As mentioned earlier, the remaining stages were then set in the real world where action took place. During stage 5, the ideal conceptual model, which will be called the Professional Communication Skills (PCS) framework from this point onward, would be used to find similarities and differences with the perceived real world model. This has been shown in Figure 4.9 (the process below the dotted lines). The comparison between the PCS framework with reality was done by asking feedbacks from all stakeholders as well as an expert on Professional Communication Skills. This stage was essential in answering the second research question of the study which was, ‘What are stakeholders’ assessments about the validity of the PCS Framework?’ This phase was aptly named validation process since the issue of ‘trustworthiness’ was measured during this phase.

Firstly, the member-checking technique was used during this phase to check the credibility of the framework. It is considered an important process of validation when data, interpretations and conclusions are returned to the stakeholders for verification. This process provided an opportunity for participants to correct errors and challenge what are perceived as wrong interpretations and also to provide the opportunity to the stakeholders to submit additional and essential information which may be stimulated by the playing back process (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). In addition, member checking allows respondents to assess the adequacy of data and findings as well as to confirm and summarise preliminary findings. During this phase of the study, all respondents (who came from companies, government agencies and academia) who had been interviewed were then presented with the first draft of the PCS framework. Only one respondent was not able to meet face to face, so a Skype meeting was arranged. Respondents gave feedback on the framework: on the words or phrases used, as well as the display of it. The feedback was not only essential to improve the framework but more importantly was for them to validate their own thoughts and ideas which were expanded in the PCS framework.

Secondly, peer debriefing by experts was another technique used to ensure credibility of the study. Peer debriefing is the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored. A peer reviewer provides support, plays devil's advocate, challenges the researchers' assumptions, pushes the researchers to the next step methodologically, and asks hard questions about methods and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During this research, meetings with three experts in the fields of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and Higher Education (HE) were held. The first expert is a Winthrop Professor from the Education School of University Western Australia. Her specialised areas are HE policy and curriculum assessment. The second was a Professor attached with the National Higher Education Research Institute of Malaysia (IPPTN). He is currently working in Universiti Sains Malaysia and has produced many research regarding Malaysian universities curriculum and employability. He was also the lead researcher for MOHE on the impact of using English in teaching Mathematics and Science in Malaysia. The third expert is a senior lecturer from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu who has written a book on EOP and has handled the EOP course for nearly a decade. She is also specialised in TESL, in particular, in the area of reading.

Prior to the meetings, the expert debriefers were given the draft of PCS framework through email as well as a summary of the study so that they could have a sound assessment on the framework. During the meeting, the experts gave oral feedback to the researcher. This stage helped the researcher to clarify the overemphasised and underemphasised points as well to refine vague descriptions within the PCS framework. By seeking the assistance of debriefers, researchers add credibility to a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Additionally, since the experts have been in the environment and carried with them valuable experiences, they shared their knowledge on the variety of ways to implement the framework – the dos and the don'ts, the loop holes that should be cautioned, the group (of instructors') effort and trust that should be catered to first. These experts not only helped to ensure credibility to the study, but also added more value to it by giving constructive and indispensable thoughts on how to implement the PCS framework in order to tackle the issue of not being competent in the English language communication at the workplace.

The next phase, Phase 4, continues whereby the PCS framework was reviewed and realigned based on the validation review and feedback from the stakeholders. This phase took the centre stage in Stage 6.

4.1.6 Stage 6: Defining feasible and desirable change.

Stage 6 and 7 are concerned with the implementation of the changes to improve the problem situation. In practice, SSM is not as 'linear' as described here, as an ideal stage by stage process. Often iterations were done and the debate generated in stage 5 thus draws the attention back to the initial analysis and root definitions. This took place during the validation sessions, when the stakeholders, who are the influential groups who were closely attached with the problematic issues had the chance to look back at what has been discussed during the earlier interview and validated the framework by giving more feedback and criticism. This step was insisted upon by Checkland (1981, p.181): that the framework must also be culturally feasible given the characteristics of the situation, the people in it, their shared experiences and their prejudices. This also ensured conformity by all parties involved (Delbridge, 2011). In addition, putting into account the experts' constructive thoughts, the PCS framework was then reviewed and realigned. After going through the above process, the final draft of the PCS framework was established.

4.1.7 Stage 7: Taking action.

Because SSM enables learning and understanding, the method is a part of the process of transformation to a new desirable system state. However, this stage would not be applied during this study but it would be acknowledged in the recommendation section of this study.

From various researches, many agrees that stage 7 may seem to be the last stage, but in human activity systems an apparent improvement simply creates a new situation which unsurprisingly creates new problems (Delbridge, 2011; Morcos & Henshaw, 2009; Tajino & Smith, 2005). The SSM model, in good practice, is cyclic and continual.

4.2 Data Analysis

As stated earlier, data analysis was thoroughly done in Stage 4 of this study, applying the seven stages in SSM. During this process, it was made sure that the Communication Competence Model was 'conceptually dense' (Strauss and Corbin, 1994), which meant embedding the model

in a context of descriptive and conceptual writing. In this study, data collection and analysis occurred iteratively. Hence, initial analysis results informed further data collection, especially when new themes emerged and caused amendment of initial theoretical propositions. Yin (2003) claimed that theoretical propositions are used to guide the design of research steps according to their relationship to the literature, policy issues or other sources. Theoretical propositions created a central focus on what should be explored in the study and also reflected researcher intuitions as suggested by Mariano (2001). In this study, the Communication Competence Model (CCM) by Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) was implemented in order to have a sufficient theoretical blueprint to guide the study design, data collection and analysis. An initial thematic framework was developed from the CCM and data collected, and systematically applied to the data. Changes were made to reflect data collected. This was facilitated by the use of ATLAS.ti 7.0 for coding and networking. Figures were developed for each major thematic grouping, which were actually each sub-components of CCM. In ATLAS.ti, this technique is better known as ‘deductive coding technique’. The data collection procedure was posited accomplished when the codes were getting redundant and there were no more new addition of requirements necessitated by all the stakeholders, or to put in Strauss and Corbyn’s (1998) words, the data got ‘saturated’:

A category is considered saturated when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data. Saturation is more a matter of reaching the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive: the ‘new’ that is uncovered does not add that much more to the explanation at this time.

(p. 136)

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, tactics used to enhance rigour in this study included using triangulation of sources, establishing a chain of evidence using ATLAS.ti to track data, systematically relating concepts through use of theoretical propositions with the supervisor, informative feedback during member checking with the stakeholders, and critical comment on interpretations during peer debriefing with expert researchers. In subsequent sections, the data analysis will embrace the theoretical propositions of CCM (as shown in Figure 4.4 earlier) and the findings will be visualised using the network views provided by ATLAS.ti 7.0.

Furthermore, the codes used for the process of data analysis (see Figure 4.12) had gone through the peer examination process. Initially, these codes were chosen from the suggestions and information gained from related literatures on the communicative competence model. Peer examination is based on the same principle as member checks (refer to sub-chapter 3.8 The study's trustworthiness) but this process involves another impartial colleague researcher in discussing the research process and findings. This is to ensure that the codes used were interpreted consistently the same way during the data analysis process. This is confirmed by Krefting (1991) when she admitted that colleagues can also increase credibility by checking categories developed out of data and by looking for disconfirming cases, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) admit this peer examination process can ensure the researcher's honesty and unbiased judgement during data analysis.

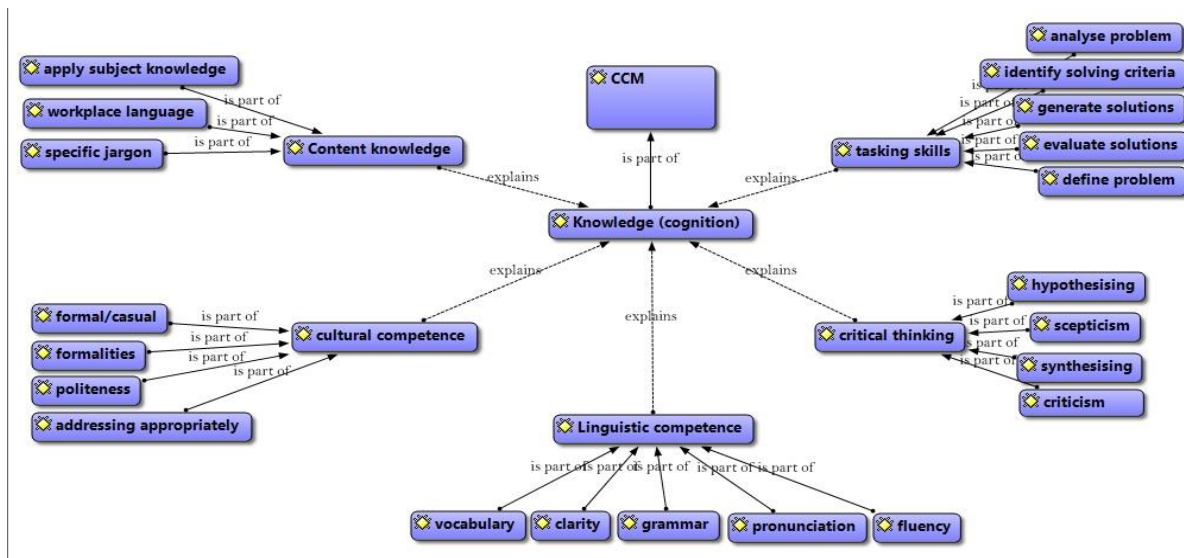


Figure 4.6 Coding for cognitive knowledge

4.2.1 Cognitive Knowledge: Content Knowledge

Graduates are expected not only to communicate in a professional manner at workplace, but they also should carry with them ample information of the subject matter (Włoszczak-Szubzda & Jarosz, 2012). Therefore, the use of specific jargon and having suitable discourse competence is essential for workplace communication. Stakeholders who had responded in this study voiced out their needs for graduates to be equipped with substantial understanding of what they have learned in HEIs, and knowing how to communicate their comprehension of subjects or skills

learned in HEIs with others. Having the ample subject content knowledge will help to contribute to on-going improvement and expansion of knowledge in the betterment of workplace operations.

In this research, it appears that the stakeholders unanimously agreed that having a good subject content knowledge at the workplace is vital. Most of the stakeholders agreed that questions would be asked during the interview sessions in regards with their understanding of their subject matter learned in HEs or/and the content knowledge they had applied during industrial trainings.

The accounts are as follow:

He or she (the interview panel) will ask candidates about their competency on the job – knowledge (and) subject matter (G2).

Looking at the written test given prior to the interview session, we can acknowledge whether graduates were able to transfer their academic knowledge to professional work assignments. This is part of problem solving activity (C2).

If you are finance, you have (to sit for a) finance test. If you're technician, there's a basic technical test (C1).

Graduates need to have built a relevant knowledge base and developed appropriate skills while in HE (G3).

She (the candidate who presented in class) put her knowledge into context, which I think was brilliant (A1).

In a changing economic environment, the degree holder will more than ever need to be capable of applying their knowledge and skills to ensure they are flexible and adaptable in changing labor market conditions (C3).

During the interview, specific competencies will be assessed from the aspects of Attitude-Skill-Knowledge; whether the candidate possess them to match the job and its' responsibilities of a respective post (G2).

Not only that, stakeholders demanded that graduates need to communicate their understanding of the subject content. This was seen as more essential since having the knowledge but not having the tools to share and relate the knowledge to others was considered pointless. The accounts that follow clearly describe the stakeholders' stances:

Looking at how they (graduates) arrange their thoughts on the page will give us an idea whether the candidate understood the problem given, the content knowledge (C5).

Sometimes, I was forced to read four to five pages of essay with loads of grammatical error, (and) not structured. It is hard to understand anything if there were too much errors (G2).

In terms of ideas, the subject content knowledge, they are not bold enough to throw in their suggestions, which is a shame (G1).

In our company, it is vital for graduates to have interaction with others, as well as delivering content knowledge to others (C2).

During the interview, we don't only ask them about their job knowledge, but more importantly, to communicate it by using specific work-related words appropriately in speech and reports (C3).

As educators, we should supply them with enough knowledge and experience in order to have good eloquent communicator (A4).

In the Implementation Plan of Developing Human Capital Report (MOHE, 2009), it was stated that the core mission of higher education is to equip students with knowledge, skills and competencies that they need in the workplace and that employers require, and to ensure that people have more opportunities to maintain or renew those skills and attributes throughout their working lives. This statement is agreed to by other stakeholders:

Graduates need to guard themselves with knowledge so that they are workplace ready (A3).

Future employees will need to have built a relevant knowledge base and developed appropriate skills while in higher education (C5).

All in all, looking at the comments given by the stakeholders, it is discovered that having ample content knowledge in their own subject areas is an essential aspect for graduates to possess before embarking for a job. Owning a strong basis in the subject content knowledge helps to contribute on-going improvement and expansion of knowledge in the betterment of workplace operations. Using the indicators given by the stakeholders above, some of the exemplars of what graduates should achieve upon graduation are listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Findings on Cognitive Knowledge: Content Knowledge.

Sub component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars
Content Knowledge	Contribute to on-going improvement and expansion of knowledge in the betterment of workplace operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a relevant knowledge base for workplace. • Apply their subject content knowledge at workplace. • Manage own learning in order to maintain and renew attributes throughout working lives. • Use specific work-related jargon appropriately in speech and reports.

4.2.2 Cognitive Knowledge: Linguistic Competence

In this study, linguistic competence is a message-focused approach and is interested in the knowledge of rules underlying the use of language, which includes understanding of the topics, words and meanings required in a situation. Linguistic competence, from the point of view of this research, is required for the workplace in order for employees to contribute to a meaningful and effective conversation by using appropriate workplace discourse. In doing so, the linguistic aspects of the English language – namely extensive vocabulary, correct grammar, fluency in writing or speech with clear and accurate pronunciation – will be scrutinised. In addition, linguistic competence refers to all the elements of the linguistic system, such as aspects concerning phonology, grammar and vocabulary, which are needed to interpret or produce a spoken or written text as suggested in the study by Usó-juan and Martínez-flor (2008).

Before rooting in detail on the specific linguistic competence needs of the Malaysian stakeholders, it is important to highlight that the output given by the stakeholders regarding graduates' linguistic competence was significantly disturbing. Given the fact that communicative ability in English is among the main attributes sought by stakeholders, nevertheless, the remarks below provide the contrary;

The written test, they (graduates) have limited word usage (A2).

Words used during assessment, majority of them write using elementary level of word list (G1).

Their vocabulary is not rich, their grammar is rusty (C6).

They could speak English, BUT [emphasising this word using high tone] ‘could’ mean the minimal standard of grammar and vocabulary, not fluent at all (C4).

Well, because of the grammar was too bad, we were not able to understand them (the responses written in the essay) anyway (C7).

For me, lack of vocabulary can be a great issue. They (students) cannot converse without using at least one Malay phrase in a sentence. They always, always [intentionally repeated] refer to their friends for support (A1).

They (graduates) have the ideas but they do not know how to put it in words. Obviously, they cannot organise the words in their minds to make it comprehensible to others (C3).

Having their disapproving thoughts laid, the stakeholders then disclosed the areas which were assessed during recruitment processes. It is important to point out that interview session is not the only step of recruiting new employees. Many of the stakeholders agree that they have to use at least three procedures in their recruitment pattern. The first is matching the best specification and qualification of current vacancy with the graduates’ curriculum vitae (CV) through the online system, whereby ‘the candidate will apply online through MyRecruitment’ (G1) or through ‘Jobstreet, which is the most common job advertisement recruitment used nowadays’ (C5). The second step is calling for the successful online applicants to sit for an exam. Most stakeholders use the 1:10 ratio in recruiting, meaning if there is one vacancy, ten applicants will be called for the next step; ‘when there’s a job vacancy, say we have five posts to be filled, we will pool fifty qualified candidates from the online databank for written exam’ (G2). All stakeholders in this study from government and companies have written assessments prior to the interview sessions. G1 stated there are two written essays which carry equivalent points, ‘writing BM essay and English essay whereby the high quality questions underwent item development assessment, so they were non-bias or non-discriminate questions’. Subsequently, the interview sessions, either one-to-one or group interviews, will be held. All of the steps taken above helped to highlight one of the most important skills for workplace – linguistic competence.

When English language grammar use at workplace was brought to the attention of the stakeholders, many respondents were nonchalant and insisted that sending the message across was more important;

We tolerate grammar errors, the important thing is, the points they want to convey were understood (C4).

Grammar wise, as long as the message is sent over, that's an OK to us (C1).

On the other hand, C3 was a bit strict in accepting candidates who had poor grammatical command, especially in their resumes; 'Applicants with poor resumes, with horrid grammar and spelling, are immediately rejected, unless they have other exceptional features, which was rare'. Having said that, another point made by C3 was worth mentioning since it carried a huge criticism on English language teaching and learning of the Malaysian education system; 'However, I would like to add that university is not the place to focus too much on grammar, they should have learned it before.'

G1 then helped to summarise the importance of lexical knowledge;

That (written test) is an area where things like grammar and punctuation are very important because even at graduate level, the role of graduates at workplace, (they have) to interface with other agencies, to collect other government reporting, to write reports. Even if it is done by e-mail, you are required to have clarity of expression, (must be) well structured.

Stakeholders are in dire need for graduates to organise their spoken and written language during a variety of communication tasks at workplace. Having a substantial lexical and syntax knowledge to be used in workplace communications helps to contribute in meaningful and effective interactions. This will then help in assuring successful execution of workplace tasks. The remarks below provide some insights of stakeholders' point of view:

We need the interviewee who can articulate well with correct vocabulary and pronunciation (G1).

We do not expect fancy words and phrases, but they have to be precise and inform us their findings in their own words (C5).

Ideally we want those who are fluent in English in both (writing and speaking). Let's say their speech is not fluent, at least we want those who write fluently (G2).

We are looking for employees who are sure of themselves, the way you speak, the way you pronounce words. The word choices displayed in speaking and writing shows your maturity and of course, competency in English (C6).

Another aspect highlighted by one of the respondents on the theme of linguistic competence was to have clear and accurate articulation of words during workplace activities. A3 admitted that a job was offered to a candidate ‘owing to the clear diction of the speaker’. C4 then dropped a remark saying that ‘the way they (graduates) pronounce the words, we would know whether they have good listening skills and strong English background. People imitate what they hear’. It is notable that C4’s simple observation stressed the importance of comprehensible input in learning.

The findings on the stakeholders’ requirements presented above have evidently manifested and unveiled the graduates’ problems and incompetence specifically in speaking, reading and writing in English. These technical hitches were vastly associated with their setbacks in acquiring a solid foundation of English grammar rules as well as their deficit knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structure or syntax. To conclude on the requirements of stakeholders on the sub component of linguistic competence, it is agreed that having a strong basis of linguistic competence will contribute to a meaningful and effective conversations, while using appropriate workplace discourse. Table 4.3 below summarise the findings of this sub component.

Table 4. 3 Findings on Cognitive Knowledge: Linguistic Competence.

Sub component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars
Linguistic Competence	Contribute to meaningful and effective conversations using appropriate workplace discourse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise spoken and written language during a variety of communication tasks at workplace. • Present their speech and written work using appropriate vocabulary and fluency. • Clearly and accurately articulate words during workplace activities.

4.2.3 Cognitive Knowledge: Cultural Competence

This subcomponent of knowledge is essential especially in the Malaysian context since it consists of several different ethnicities; hence, graduates need to understand and use the English language functions appropriately in a given intercultural context. In essence, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) define sociocultural competence as the speaker’s knowledge of how to express appropriate messages within the social and cultural context of communication in which they are

produced. Ample sociocultural competence at workplace can contribute to harmonious relations between superior, subordinates, colleagues and clients. The indicator used within this sub-component during data analysis was comments on graduates having sufficient cultural knowledge to speak appropriately depending on the workplace setting, whether it was formal or casual.

Writing in a professional, yet acceptable manner is a skill being sought after at the workplace. Writing an email, memo or filing a complaint in a report need to be addressed professionally, and also in a way which is acceptable culturally. The following excerpts indicate their thoughts:

Graduates should know how to synthesise their thoughts and arrange them in (writing) using a professional manner, meaning, culturally acceptable, not rude (G2).

It is a cultural issue in many respects as people are not used to picking up the telephone or going on an email, filing a complaint against someone they know or someone they had dealings with. But if they need to, they have to do it using the most diplomatic manner (A4).

Besides being a competent communicator in writing, having an exceptional cultural competence is perceived as more important while speaking at the workplace. Given the fact that much communication is done verbally at the workplace, graduates are expected to speak appropriately depending on formal or casual settings. The remarks below provide some examples:

It is important for one to speak their thoughts in a polite manner (G3). Communications (in English) is important in our company. These include high-level workplace communication skills with an emphasis on social and oral English with literacy and cross-cultural skills, (which are) also considered to be important within the process (C6).

How to say no when disagreeing on certain things; how to have diplomatic disagreement, or how not to hurt certain feelings, though you dislike another's ideas. Be polite (C3).

Negotiating with colleagues, use of humor and ability to interact informally with others are important in demonstrating proficiency in a language (C2).

Embarking from the last remark, it was apparent that being culturally fit in a country which has diverse cultures is considered essential as was assessed during some interview sessions. This was affirmed by G2;

We will look at their acceptability among their peers. If you have good social skills, polite and considerate, of course, you will get more friends. But if your social skills are not good, being rude, you don't answer questions when asked, you don't contribute in small talks during coffee breaks, you don't mingle around, we then will know that this candidate is not suitable for the post.

A few respondents have described their agency's appeal for a well-rounded graduate from Malaysian HEIs. It was interesting to discover that the responses include cultural competence as an important factor to be a well-rounded employee.

We sought (for) well rounded employees who not only have sufficient English language proficiency, but also (has) cross-cultural ability and has the potential to adapt (C4).

The 'well-roundedness' [respondent showed inverted commas] includes graduates' personal characteristics and attributes, the diversity of their experiences and skills, as well as being culturally fit into the workplace (G1).

When probed on what 'culturally' fit means, G1 suggested that graduates need to be aware of the context and environment they are in. They need to learn how to 'adapt and reflect.' This exact stand was also voiced by C1 when the respondent expressed on the importance of graduates to be 'alert and mindful' about context awareness at workplace. Graduates' adaptation and reflection on office environment, to be aware on when and how to speak, is crucial in ensuring harmonious relations between superior, subordinates, colleagues and clients. The concerns of the stakeholders discussed above are summed in Table 4. 4 below.

Table 4. 4 Findings on Cognitive Knowledge: Cultural Competence.

Sub component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars
Cultural Competence	Contribute to harmonious relations between superior, subordinates, colleagues and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak and write using the most appropriate register. • Agreeing/Disagreeing with the superior and subordinate in a diplomatic manner. • Adapt with small talks with colleagues, being aware with context awareness.

As a final point, among some interesting responses gathered on the importance of cultural competence, an outlook given by G2 was an eye opener, since it genuinely highlighted the need of our graduates to be adorned with this competency. G2 stated:

If you (the graduates) know that your English is not at top notch, but your social skills are good, (for instance) you have good manners in treating customers – people won't argue and complain about your English. Be polite, smile, say simple greetings, don't talk back and retaliate – graduates should learn to have good manners, if they haven't learned it at home [biting lips], please learn it in university, then.

4.2.4 Cognitive Knowledge: Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the ability to analyse, hypothesise, synthesise and criticise (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007, p. 440). In order to be more adept and successful in any areas of the workplace, the critical thinking skill is one of the many important skills needed from the bottom to the top of the managerial hierarchy. Nevertheless, having the critical thinking skill itself without having the tools to communicate one's thought in a proper manner would not be useful. Hence, this part of the study enlisted the issues brought to light by the stakeholders in regards with having to apply this skill at workplace.

During the interview sessions, stakeholders implicitly stated their needs of graduates who can think critically and reflect their thoughts using proper language. Some of the viewpoints include;
We need employees who have the ability in synthesising their thoughts and arrange them in a professional manner (G1).

Being analytical and critical is helpful, tremendously helpful because critically synthesising reports and articles is frequently used at workplace (C4).

In a meeting, it is important for you to be involved, to agree or disagree. If you state your reasons (why you agree or disagree), it means that you're a thinking person, you're synthesising the issues, being critical to solve a problem, or to create solutions (C4).

Employers want graduates who can display critical thinking required for innovation and anticipation of change (G2).

If you don't know how to work with others, how to accept and give criticism or feedback positively – only know how to condemn people, you won't fill the vacancy (C1).

Others use this sub component as an important element to be assessed during recruitment process. It encompasses all four basic literacy skills and samples of relevant comments that explored the needs to have critical thinking are outlined in the table below.

Table 4. 5 Relevant comments on critical skills at workplace

Critical Skills applied in basic literacy skills for workplace	Relevant interview scripts
Reading	In that test, we ask them to write half page of summary and another half page of critical comments and critiques. This office skill is essential here (G2).
Writing	During this recruitment process, essay writing will prove to us the maturity of the candidates, you analytical skills, synthesising your thoughts and putting them on paper (G1).
Speaking	We have group interview sessions where we look at the way they handle situation, by agreeing or disagreeing on certain notion – how emotional and critical can they be (C2).
Listening	Not just understand, but they respond back to us, being critical too at times. It is important for others to realise that you have grasp the meaning (A1).

All in all, what has been discovered from the stakeholders involved in this study was that critical thinking is required as part of communication tool at workplace because it can contribute to constructive criticism while resolving issues at workplace. Different ways of the usage of this sub component at the workplace can be identified, namely; critically synthesising their thoughts in a professional manner to improve the workplace situation; identify, analyse and solve problems critically and innovatively; and give positive feedback and healthy criticism after

analysing issues at the workplace. The findings on this sub component are displayed in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4. 6 Findings on Cognitive Knowledge: Critical Thinking

Sub component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars
Critical thinking	Contribute to constructive criticism while resolving issues at workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically synthesising their thoughts in a professional manner to improve situation. • Identify, analyse and solve problems critically and innovatively. • Give positive feedback and healthy criticism after analysing issues at workplace.

4.2.5 Cognitive Knowledge: Tasking Skill

Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge define tasking skill based on ideas contained in the reflective thinking model, the functionalist approach and attentive interactions (2007, p. 226). The five central task skills are 1) defining problem, 2) analysing the problem, 3) identifying criteria for solving the problem, 4) generating solutions or alternatives, and 5) evaluating solutions (ibid). Tasking skill applied in this research is similar to problem solving steps as described by Bardwell et al. (1994). Nonetheless, Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) have made theirs simpler and more practical. Tasking skill was also used in this study since the descriptions of tasks were precise and clear; hence data was easily themed and coded using the definitions given by Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007).

Tasking skill is another competence being sought by the stakeholders and many of the respondents included this sub component to be assessed during the recruitment process. Though this skill was discussed in all interviews, nevertheless, the industries took an extra step in assessing this skill. Below are some of the examples of how industries assess graduates' tasking skill by giving them assignments to complete in groups;

We give them (interview candidates) a problem to solve – for example, there are only ten out of twenty shops in one area who has an account with Coke. So, how to approach the other ten? We want to know their creativity, ideas, suggestions, what are their limitations, why they do not want to sell or why

some Mamak are against Coke. They need to generate solutions, provide alternatives then present them to us (C5).

You (Job applicants) are also given a situation where you need to study, plan and present to the directors. (During the process,) they are given a problem to study, and present what they will do with the problem, how to address it and measures they are taking. We ask them to work and present in groups and we will scrutinise those who are over dominating or too passive (C3).

We ask them to distribute some survey to visitors and see how they communicate with them (visitors). We evaluate them on that, how good and efficient they are in getting information, especially from tourists. Then we ask them to analyse the survey and highlight the most important issue brought up by the visitors. During the group presentation, usually the panels will probe them on why do they think their issues were crucial (C2).

We ask our candidates to apply ‘fun theory’ in making our products more attractive – marketing wise. In a mixed group of various degree holders from marketing, accountancy, engineering, actuarial science, mathematics backgrounds, they need to come up with a marketing concept to rebrand the readily available merchandises. The group who has great creativity and feasible ideas, gets to present their concept to our CEO and oh, of course, a job, too [smiling] (C6).

During this process, graduates were expected to organise the team and their thoughts together in solving workplace problems. Using their critical thinking skills, they need to define problems and identify measures for solving them. Solutions to the issues must be addressed in a creative and practical manner. As exhibited above, stakeholders like C2 will not accept the solutions easily, but they will ask more questions in order to ensure the candidates can evaluate their own solutions and give more alternatives. The rigorous process of recruiting ‘helps our company to employ the best among the best’ (C3).

Additionally, some respondents claimed that tasking skills were also important during speaking, reading and writing for workplace context. Organising thoughts on paper, laying your points politely and disagreeing civilly whilst generating more productive solutions and alternatives are important skills that graduates should master upon graduation.

When you write or speak, if you state your reason (for disagreeing) it means you’re a thinking person, you are synthesising the issue. Being very critical at the same time to solve a problem or to create a solution (G2).

One of (components being) tested in essay writing (during recruitment process) is the flow of thought (C4).

If you cannot skim and scan the content or gist of the article, it will be problematic. This is a simple task when we give them an article to summarise and comment about new policies, they fail to do so (G1).

All in all, from the responses taken from the stakeholders, it was discovered that applying these steps during communication, especially in groups at the workplace, can facilitate a well-rounded analysis. Graduates who are equipped with this competence can contribute to productive long-term and short-term strategic planning and effective execution for workplace tasks. This is because they are able to organise their thoughts and solve workplace problems and issues systematically, while disagreeing politely in generating better solutions and alternatives in workplace issues. Graduates are also able to synthesise issues at work and evaluate solutions individually when mastering the tasking skill.

The findings from this sub component are displayed in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4. 7 Findings for Cognitive Knowledge: Tasking Skill

Sub component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars
Tasking skill	Contribute to productive long-term and short-term strategic planning and effective execution of workplace tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise thoughts and solve workplace problems and issues as a team. • Disagreeing politely in generating solutions and alternatives in workplace issue. • Synthesise issues at work and evaluate solutions individually.

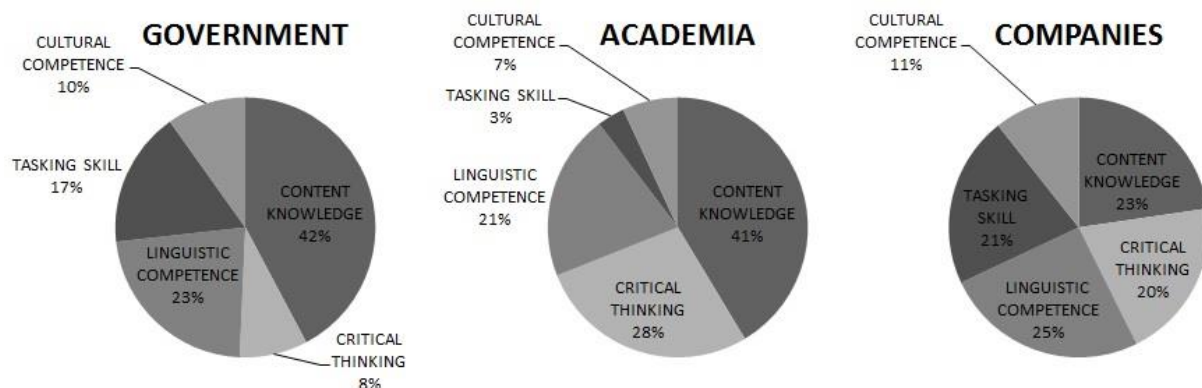


Figure 4.7 Cognitive skills required by stakeholders.

The data in Figure 4.7 were compiled from a number of sources, which are language instructors from academia, human resource managers from multi-national companies as well as executive officers in the government agencies. Figure 4.7 shows the distribution of cognitive knowledge skills as mentioned by the stakeholders. Knowledge of subject matter and linguistic competence were seen as the most important sub skills for all three stakeholders, whereby 65% of the cognitive competences discussed by the government executives were on these two sub skills, 62% by the academia and 48% by the companies. These high percentages are in agreement of Expert A (See Appendix A) when she accentuated on the role of language instructors in higher education to reflect and improvise modules and teaching performance by maintaining a high level of subject content knowledge within the English for Specific Purposes courses and incorporating up-to-date linguistic competence as required by other stakeholders. After completing needs analysis at the end of every semester, language instructors need to rectify any potential gaps within the EOP course as quickly as possible by integrating the gaps from the subject content knowledge with creative teaching techniques, i.e. task based learning and problem based learning. Expert A stressed that accuracy in structuring lessons, creating resources, giving tasks and assessments is paramount in responding to what stakeholders require. Jacobs and Farrell (2001:6) give their definition and explain the benefits of content based instruction:

‘Curricular integration serves to overcome the phenomenon in which students study one subject in one period, close their textbook and go to another class, open another textbook and study another subject. When various subject areas are taught jointly, learners have more opportunities to see the links between

subject areas. By appreciating these links, students develop a stronger grasp of a subject matter, a deeper purpose for learning and a greater ability to analyse situations in a holistic manner’.

Thus, content-based instruction gives EOP a global and constructivist sense which is beneficial both for the learner and for the teaching itself, which gains coherence and a wider perspective. From the perspective of the discourse competence, a content-based approach is associated with the academic genres. The materials for language learning are those texts used in other subject-matters, with all their discourse features (cohesion, coherence, rhetorical structure, etc.) as well as the tasks are normally performed in other subject-matters (map-reading, problem-solving activities, etc.). Thus, a discourse-oriented type of instruction may help improve not only the communicative competence, but also general academic competences the learner must control during their university experience.

Tasking skill was less emphasised by respondents from Academia. This skill was mentioned only 3% of the time which was the least mentioned sub skills of cognitive knowledge by those representing academia. On the other hand, human resource managers from the companies believed that this skill was one of the skills that entry level employee should master upon graduation since it was mentioned 16 times (21%) during the interview sessions. The executives from the government agencies also agreed on the importance of tasking skill by bringing up the importance of tasking skills 12 times (17%) during the interview.

Another important aspect mentioned quite frequently during the sessions was critical thinking skills. It was mentioned more by the members from academia (28%) and companies (20%) than those from the government agencies (8%). A3 mentioned that critical thinking skills must be included within her subject since it was one of the essential skills mentioned in The National Higher Education Strategic Plan. A few respondents aligned this skill with a creative teaching method which is problem-based learning (PBL). A6 enriched the meaning of PBL in higher education by saying that PBL is a ‘carefully constructed, open-ended problems which help in developing critical thinking skills. Through such problems, students encounter concepts in contextually rich situations that impart meaning to those ideas and it is proven that it enhances their (the students’) retention’. A3 added that ‘Through PBL, students learn how to learn, how to

ask the right questions to arrive at solutions’. Members from the companies (C1, C3 and C7) hoped that future undergraduates can be taught on how to work in groups and solve issues given at workplace. A1 responded by saying, ‘in my class, EOP is handled in groups. The group format teaches students the power of working cooperatively, fostering not only valuable communication and interpersonal skills, but also a sense of community in which diversity becomes a strength, enhancing the learning experience for all’. Therefore, PBL addresses the real concern of industry that fresh graduates must come prepared with problem-solving skills with high critical thinking skills and be able to communicate effectively across disciplines and work with others to solve problems.

4.2.6 Communication Skills: Interpersonal Communication

In this research, interpersonal communication is defined as a complex process that can be described in simplified terms by a sender and a receiver who exchange messages containing ideas and feelings, mixed together, which also includes social skills and emotional intelligence, both of which can be improved through effort and experiences (Dufrene & Lehman, 2012). Within the context of interpersonal communication, Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) further explain it by adding four sub components, namely attentiveness, composure, coordination and expressiveness.

Among the four sub components explained by Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007), composure and attentiveness were the two most conferred among the stakeholders (refer to Figure 4.20). Composure, or the lack of it, was the main reason why Malaysian graduates were still unable to speak comfortably with others. The evidences from the stakeholders are as follow;

‘... but they (the candidates) are lacking of courage to speak’ (A2).

‘There were plenty of frazzled nerves’ (G2)

‘Basically, the general ability of the graduates is mediocre, and it gets worse of hindered by nerves’ (C2).

‘When one is nervous, they tend to forget many things, especially what they have learned in lectures’ (C5).

‘So, I believe that small things like that can be a problem at workplace, being too nervous, not knowing how to handle their nerves, then to be not professional and rude at the same time’ (A3).

‘They are lacking of confidence, composure which made it worse when the panel ask you to speak in a language that they are not fluent with. Intimidated, maybe.’ (G1)

In order to overcome this problem, the respondents suggested for the graduates to be prepared when they plan to come for an interview.

‘Prepare your attire, materials like CV and resume – if you come in (for an interview) prepared, you would not be as nervous’ (C1).

‘I’m not blaming them. Sometimes they can communicate, but because they are not well prepared, so they get nervous, and then, they could not deliver (during the interview)’ (C2).

When the respondents were probed on what were their expectations during the recruitment process, C5 answered simply, ‘When we have group interview session, we look at their personality, their appearance, their composure, the way they handle the situation when agreeing and disagreeing on certain motions – how diplomatic, emotional or critical one can be’ (C6). Another added, ‘so, in the selection process, we will look into their fluency, but more importantly, their confidence and maturity’ (C5).

An interesting point highlighted by one of the respondents on the issue of graduates’ attentiveness in communication was how rapid is face-to-face communication is deteriorating. G2 proclaimed that the graduates ‘do not actually communicate with each other, even to the people who are sitting next to them, while waiting to be called during the interview. Some of them said *salam*¹⁷ or other greetings, and that’s it. They are absorbed, no, they are wired to their mobiles. This is why I think our students’ social skills are going down rapidly. It is sad’.

However, ‘once in a blue moon’ (G2) there will come candidates who are ‘able to speak comfortably’ (C4), and with ‘confident’ (A2). An interesting case was highlighted by C3 on an exceptional candidate who was very attentive and passionate about the offered post (a nurse).

¹⁷ To give a salutation meaning ‘peace’, used widely, especially in Islamic countries.

‘She (the candidate) told the interview panel that she was willing to do whatever it takes to get the post. She has been taking care of her diabetic mother since she was in Form 1 (13 years old). Brought up in a poor family, she went and peep through the window of the local government clinics, and see how the nurses uses syringes and blood pressure machines. She learned how to clean her mom who suffered from gangrene from YouTube. Her brothers paid for her tuition fees to be a nurse. I mean, how can we say no to exceptional stories like this. Of course she was accepted! Being passionate about a job, and actually being comfortable to tell us the story during the interview shows that she was attentive and willing to learn.’ (C3)

In sum, stakeholders agree that interpersonal communication is an important skill since it can contribute to diplomatic and matured communication between superior, subordinate and clients. Therefore, upon graduation, graduates who have empowered with this skill can speak comfortably with employers, without feeling apprehensive and nervous. They also can pay attention to workplace communication activities, without getting distracted easily, especially with handheld electronic devices. Being attentive is revealed important by the stakeholders since graduates can build good rapport with superiors, subordinates and clients. Part of having good interpersonal communication skills is that graduates need come to interviews, meetings and other workplace events well prepared whereby they are ready to express themselves maturely and diplomatically during those events.

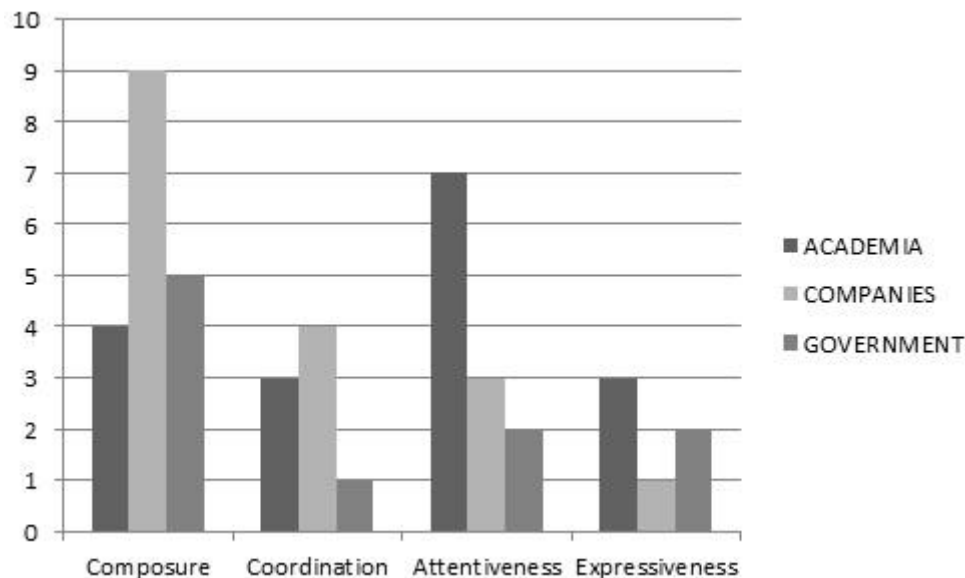


Figure 4.8 Interpersonal skills required by the stakeholders.

Referring to Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge's (2007) four basic components of interpersonal skills (See Figure 2.5), composure, coordination, attentiveness and expressiveness, were four of the terms used to code the interpersonal skills. Maintaining ones' composure was the most important component needed by the new undergraduates. Having 'good vocal confidence' (C2 and G1), 'relaxed body language' (G2, A4 and G5), ample eye contact (C3) as well as sharing own experiences and beliefs in a positive and light manner (G1) were deemed important by the stakeholders. Attentiveness was also deemed important, especially by the members of academia, since it could show the newly graduates' maturity and conscientiousness, as well as being focussed at workplace. This communicative competence should be developed within EOP lessons, and other courses taken by the students of Malaysian higher education institutions by employing student-centred learning in classroom. Meta-analyses papers that synthesize results from numerous individual studies confirm positive influences of student-centred learning approaches to teaching on academic performance, attitudes toward learning, and communication skills. In light of the growing evidence on the effectiveness of student centred learning approaches, Handelsman et. al. (2004) stated 'there is mounting evidence that supplementing or replacing lectures with active learning strategies and engaging students in discovery and scientific process improves learning and knowledge retention' (p.35).

G3 stated that expressiveness by new entry level employees was important because it 'provided them with the ability to communicate with others at all levels of the organisation'. He added that ones' assertiveness to be expressive could be 'the most crucial factor to push their ideas forward in a positive, not aggressive manner'. 'We need young employees to be bold and creative in their ideas and expressive in relaying them to us' (G3).

Table 4.8 below is the summation of the findings for interpersonal communication in this study.

Table 4.8 Findings for Communication Skill: Interpersonal Skill

Sub component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars
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Interpersonal Communication	Contribute to diplomatic and matured communication between superior, subordinates and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak comfortably with employers, not hindered with nerves. • Pay attention to workplace communications activities and do not get distracted easily (with electronic devices). • Attentive in formal or informal workplace communication which can help build rapport with superiors, colleagues and clients. • Well prepared prior to workplace meetings and planned activities in order to express opinions maturely.
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4.2.7 Communication Skills: Listening Skill

Let it be stated that the author concurs with Rasul, Puvanasvaran and Keroh (2009) assertion that ‘listening involves receiving, attending to, interpreting, and responding to verbal messages and other cues, such as body language in ways that are appropriate to the purpose’ (p. 27). Stakeholders involved in this study claimed that listening skill is an important receptive skill to be grasped by graduates upon graduation

Good listening skills at the workplace helps entry-level employee to blend in with the working environment. C3 stated:

‘Being able to fit in at graduate level is being able to fit in during a meeting and fully comprehend what is going on around them. (They need) to be able to quickly understand any technical issues, (state) things they either agree or disagree with or things that they don’t understand and to able to speak up and say, “I don’t understand, can we talk about this in more detail?”’

Asking questions to clarify one’s understanding is a good way to show others that graduates fully comprehend what is going on around them during meetings, briefings, seminars, conferences and presentations. In addition, stakeholders acknowledge positive responses such as disagreeing politely during meetings and negotiations if better ideas can be brought up, as voiced by G3: ‘if you dislike one thing or disagree on a motion, you have to speak up and justify.’

Nonetheless, some employers are puzzled with some of the young graduates since many displayed their understanding of discussion or directions from body language evidence, unfortunately, they could not verbalise them when asked. A2 commented on this trend: ‘They do

understand our instructions, but they do not know how to reply, they do not know how to respond to our requests and instructions’. C4 then insisted that ‘an explanation (of what has been comprehended) was needed to create mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener’. So, ‘the least that we want them to achieve (in workplace communication) is to understand and communicate back, to respond to the customer, verbally or written’ (C5). Therefore, it is learned that responding appropriately in writing or speech after understanding instructions or questions from colleagues or superiors is important to show that one is equipped with good listening skills at work. Graduates from science faculty are shown to have better listening skill, since A4 admitted that they do ‘not just understand us, they respond back to us, being critical too, at times. As compared to arts students, they hardly respond back, even when we ask them direct (yes-no) questions.’ Hence, it is found critical for graduates to give feedback when asked since this shown their commitment and understanding at workplace.

Then again, in specific jobs, the listening skill is perceived to be one of the essential skills in ensuring a successful career. G2 explained, for occupations like doctors and nurses, ‘bedside manners should be wonderful, and listening is the other key (skill). At times, patients just need someone to listen to them, to talk about small matters. Try to sharpen your listening skill, because it might save a life’. Additionally, having good listening skills help graduates to build good rapport with their bosses and colleagues, as agreed by G1; ‘It (listening) helps a lot in the job. Listening can help someone to understand the superiors and colleagues better. That skill helps you to bond easier and make team work works.’ In sum, Table 4.9 displays the compilation of findings on listening skill for workplace from this study.

Table 4.9 Findings on Communication Skill: Listening Skill.

Sub component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars
Listening Skill	Contribute to successful working relationships and effective execution of tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask if one does not understand instruction by superior, colleagues and clients. • Disagree politely if better ideas can be brought up during meetings and negotiation. • Respond appropriately (speech or non-verbal communication) after understanding the instructions, questions, etc. from superior, colleague • Fully comprehend what is going on around them at workplace. • Give feedback when asked by colleagues, superior

-
- and clients after fully understanding the situation.
 - Responds to clients' complaints
 - Understanding others during briefings, seminars, conferences and presentations.
-

4.2.8 Communication Skills: Presentation Skill

One of the key skill in communication looked for by employers is oral communication, especially the ability to deliver powerful and effective presentations. In this research, let it be declared that the explanation of effective presentation skill for workplace in this study accords with Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007) whereby it consists of the ability of the graduates to present informatively and persuasively with appropriateness, credibility, clarity and vividness. In addition to that, this study also admitted the need of another important aspect of presentation as suggested by Rafe (1990), which is motivating listeners to accept new ideas, alter an existing belief, or act on a given principle.

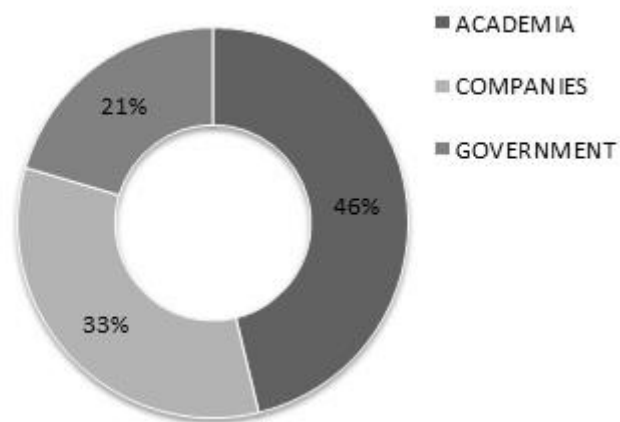


Figure 4.9 Presentation skills as required by stakeholders.

Based on the data (see Figure 4.9), 46% represents 58 responses from the academia stressed on the importance of developing presentation skills in higher education. It was significantly higher than what was expected by the government executives (21%, 27 responses) on presentation skill. Though the differences of responses were recorded, it did not indicate that government and industry took presentation skill lightly.

Employers have high expectations for young graduates to have good presentation skills in order to share their creative ideas with their colleagues and superiors. Being informative and presenting the information in an interesting manner are demanded at the workplace nowadays. The excerpts below clearly exemplify the requirements of the stakeholders;

‘They (Graduates) have to present in good language, fluent and informative. We do not expect fancy words and phrases but they have to be precise in informing us their findings (using) their own words.’ (G2)

‘If they (graduates) have written reports, they have to present their findings in meetings. And sometimes (they have) to show what they found in a simpler manner.’ (G3)

‘During the presentation, they need to tell us what they had learned and how they can help to improve (by giving solutions and alternatives).’ (C4)

‘They (employee candidates) are given a problem to study, and then present what they’ll do with the problem, how to address the measures they’re taking.’ (C5)

‘(Graduates) need to make their ideas clear, so that everyone could understand (them), without having to read their mind. Graduates need to respond to all queries posed by clients.’ (G1)

‘(During the recruitment process) there’ll be group discussion. So then, they need to present, to tell the panel the experience they had in English Language.’ (G1)

In providing clear and vivid presentations as well as to keep spectator’s attention, graduates must be equipped with the ability to exploit a range of presentation skills. G1 explained that during the recruitment process, the panel ‘do not look only at the end product (individual oral presentation), but they watch them discuss and present, all in English’. In addition, C5 described their recruitment pattern as ‘unique and rigorous’ since the candidates were asked to ‘improvise on the readily available merchandises to meet the expectation of current customers’. The candidates were asked to practically perform a quick market survey prior to group discussion and group presentation. ‘They were allowed to use any presentation method they want; they have to be creative and innovative to capture the panel’s attention. Their output should inform employers that they can come up with new innovative measures in improving merchandises’ (C5). Additionally, graduates were expected to have the knowledge to present with the help of

computers and other applications as a management tool. C6 explained that during ‘presentations for (higher) management (team) – the chairman, company committee board – we (employers) do our slides in English.’

All in all, the findings for presentation skill for workplace as established by the respondents of this study are displayed in Table 4.10 below.

Table 4. 10 Findings for Communication Skills: Presentation Skill.

Sub component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars
Presentation Skill	Contribute to sharing of ideas and thoughts effectively with superior, colleagues and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to share ideas with colleagues creatively. • Able to persuade clients to accept their ideas by explaining in a simple yet interesting manner. • Inform superiors of new innovative measures in improving workplace. • Keep spectator’s attentions using range of presentation skill, with the help of IT as a management tool. • Responding to enquiry from the clients.

4.2.9 Communication Skills: Speaking Skill

One of the dominant features identified during the in-depth interview in the workplace practices of the fresh graduates in this study is speaking. Indeed, a substantial emphasis is designated for speaking as an essential component for almost all stakeholders involved. The following sub-sections discusses the students’ speaking practices located in workplace setting by drawing attention to the various speaking activities as vital components entailed in ensuring productive and appropriate verbal interactions for effective workplace execution. Since all stakeholders deliberated long and wide on the issue of speaking skills, the sub-sections will be divided into three parts, discussing the needs and views of each stakeholder separately; academia, government agencies and industries.

Respondents from academia stressed on the importance of audience. Syllabuses in Malaysian schools, from KBSM to KSSR had stressed the importance of processing information and presenting it to a different variety of audience (MOE, 2000, 2012a). Nevertheless, the graduates

were still underestimating the power of audience when they speak. The remarks given as evidence of this issue are as below;

‘Most of them (graduates) will casually come to the front and start their presentation, without greetings, opening remarks, even though they have learned it previously in the Public Speaking course. Very disrespectful to the audience. Just imagine they do this in front of a big client at work [shaking head].’ (A4)

‘In public speaking classes, they really want to talk about their study-related issues, but they need to be aware of their audience (who came from different departments and faculties). To make life easy, they tend to choose topics which are too general. And sadly, our students found it difficult to describe simple or general topic in the most interesting way.’ (A1)

However, there was a special case mentioned by A1 of having a quiet and timid student in the classroom and watching her final year public speaking presentation;

‘She submitted her project power point presentation earlier to me and I was not sure whether she could present her findings from her final year project to a multi-discipline audience, but she promised me she would try her best. And to my surprise, during the presentation day, the timid girl bloomed into a confident speaker. She speaks fluently, using different vocabulary to suit the audience. The most wonderful thing was, she understood what she was talking about because she tried to apply her findings into different situations that suit the audiences’ experience. Fantastic, it was.’ (A1)

C9 agreed on the issue of identifying one’s audience when speaking since the human resource manager asserted, ‘Graduates have to have skills in dealing with other people. We are dealing with our customers, the end users, and also with our colleagues and bosses. So we need communication skills. Speaking and listening skills are among the important things other than technical background that graduates need to have’.

Furthermore, lack of specialist vocabulary was detected as another area that needed a lot of work by our graduates, in order to be a competent speaker at workplace.

‘I think the lack of vocabulary can be a great issue. They cannot converse without using a Malay phrase in a sentence. They always refer to their friends to support them during conversations’ (A2)

‘It’s a pity, they (graduates) have the ideas, marvellous ones too, discussed during group discussions. But they cannot put them into cohesive justification,

in proper word when asked during presentation. Being brilliant, but not able to share it with the world, that is not what I call a brilliant worker.’ (A4)

‘For not having enough words in their vocabulary bank on their subject matter, speaking English will restrict them from being involved.’ (A1)

‘We need an interviewee who can articulate well, using the correct vocabulary and pronunciation’ (G3)

‘In this round, we need the graduate to tell us what they had learned, and how they can help to improve (the company). They have to present in a good technical language, fluent and informative. We do not expect fancy words and phrases, but they have to be precise and can inform us their findings using their own words.’ (C4)

On the contrary, this was not the case for graduates of nursing and medicine. In commenting on this issue, a stakeholder reasoned that graduates who have a medical background need to have a learned the skill to inform patients in an enlightening and reassuring manner with proper intonation and simple word choices, so that patients and family members would understand the medical situations. Using excessive medical jargon would only increase their anxiety. This was indicated in the following expression;

‘University should expose them with language that they are going to use outside the campus gates. Follow examples of some doctors graduated overseas, they can communicate well to me as a patient. Their learning process in their respective universities taught them how to make patient calm, using soothing voice and good choice of language. They learn how to break the news with the most delicate way. This should be taught since it cannot be picked up on the spot at workplace.’ (G2)

Returning to the last quote of C4 that was mentioned earlier, being clear and precise is important in solving issues at the workplace. Additionally, speaking clearly and precisely is an integral part in persuading others to accept ideas and opinions using well-defined explanations. Some other respondents also commented on this by stating:

‘Graduates need good speaking skill in dealing with other people; customers, bosses, colleagues and even subordinates, so they need to explain in a clear and precise manner. This will prevent confusions.’ (C9)

‘How can workers understand clearly, and then explain precisely? They need to have the understanding of the product because you need to recommend it to the shop.’ (C5)

The point brought up by C5 must be highlighted, whereby graduates need to understand what they want to explain. They themselves need to be persuaded before persuading others to accept their ideas and opinions. Without clear-cut understanding of an issue by graduates, explanations and clarifications would be messy and incomprehensible.

In addition, there were some evidences to suggest that graduates who plan to work must also be able to respond to inquiries or problems on issues which are within their area of specialty. In doing so, employers would have more confidence in recruiting a mature and reliable worker. The opinions were indicated in the following expressions:

‘We need workers who can understand and respond. We are theme park coordinators and operators; we need them to speak in order to respond to inquiries, to solve issues and to help our customers. We need them to speak fluently so that they can minimise the communication breakdown. We want our customers to be happy.’ (C2)

‘Some graduates from science background do not just understand us, they respond back to us, and being critical too at times. As compared to the (graduates from) arts background, they are more passive and needed a lot of encouragement to complete activities. This hindered productivity.’ (A2)

Further analysis of the data on speaking skills revealed that stakeholders demanded the new generation of employees not only can communicate fluently with correct grammar and proper use of technical jargons, but also they are able to participate actively in workplace discussions by stating reasons for agreeing or disagreeing without interrupting the speech of colleagues or superiors. This was detected in the following quotations:

‘It is important for one to learn to speak their thoughts in a polite manner. Yes, you can voice your disapproval but do it nicely, not arrogantly and being selfish. If you state your reason, it means you are a thinking person, you are synthesising the issue; being critical to solve a problem or to create a solution.’ (G3)

‘You (Graduates) have to voice out your concern, it is up to the boss or the (members in) meeting to decide; but you have the power within you to throw your opinion to be shared. But if you just know how to criticise people’s view, and not giving positive feedback, being negative and passive all at the same time, I’m sorry, you don’t belong here, or anywhere else.’ (C1)

‘You just cannot say ‘No’, then state no reason. No one will take you seriously. You need to sell your ideas, give alternatives. A good boss will see your potential.’ (G2)

A marked contrast was voiced by C4, whereby in his field of work, engaging small talks with superiors, colleagues and especially clients in informal environments is considered as an essential communication skill for the job. C4 claimed that ‘some graduates might be brilliant at doing accounting, for example, but if they cannot make small talks, like, football scores during the weekend or the latest fuel saving car on the road, talks which can help to put customers at ease; unfortunately, their forms will be on the KIV (keep in view) stash’. This suggests that employers, in recruiting new staff, do look at the whole package, including the ability to make and sustain informal conversations. On top of that, having a new recruit who can initiate contact and conversation, as well as requesting information on the phone is valued. G1 and A4 stressed on the importance of graduates who can ‘make formal phone calls’, ‘connected to the right person’(A4), then ‘request information clearly’ (G1) and ‘ask questions to clarify and for double-checking’ (A4). In making those requests, graduates should maintain ‘politenesses and ‘formality, without being too friendly or too rude’ (A2).

Taking everything into account, the preceding analysis discovered that speaking skills is one of the most important core components in PCS. The findings above have listed a list of criterion needed by stakeholders in having employees who can contribute to productive and appropriate verbal interactions at workplace. The summary of the findings are displayed in Table 4.11.

Table 4. 11 Findings for Communication Skills: Speaking Skill.

Speaking skill	Contribute to productive and appropriate verbal interactions at workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform audience (superiors, colleagues and clients) in an enlightening manner. • Contributing ideas and give opinions in group discussions. • Persuade superiors, colleagues and clients to accept ideas and opinions using well-defined explanations. • Use specialist vocabulary in a correct manner. • Give clear instructions to solve issues at work. • Initiating contact, requesting information on the telephone. • Seeking information from others at work. • Responding to enquiries/problems from superior/clients. • State reasons for disagreeing without interrupting the speech of colleagues or superiors • Discussion work schedules and procedures. • Engage small talks with superior, colleagues and clients informally. • Telephone conversations skill – answering inquiries, giving instructions.
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4.2.10 Communication Skills: Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication, though not the integral part demanded by stakeholders, was still mentioned several times during the interview process. Nonverbal communication ranges from facial expression to body language. Gestures, tones, signs, and use of space are also important in nonverbal communication, as suggested by Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge (2007). Non-verbal communication or body language is an important part of how people communicate, and was mentioned during the interview. Hand and arm gestures, touch, and eye contact (or its lack) are a few of the aspects of non-verbal communication that may vary significantly depending upon cultural background.

The first impression of graduates' physical appearances gives a big impact on the recruitment panel. Clothing apparently communicates an important message about the 'unspoken' capabilities that the graduates carry with them during recruitment sessions. G2 admitted that they 'assess on interviewees' appearance and look' since 'there are certain dress code rules that (graduates) have to consider'. Similarly, C3 also stressed that 'grooming' is one of the criteria assessed during interview session. C10 gave a straight forward advice to the young graduates by saying:

‘Be well-prepared for your interview; your attire, materials like CV and resume. If you come in prepared, you won’t be as nervous’ (C10)

Similar results have been obtained by Chen et al. (2010) whereby not being well-prepared will heighten anxiety and nervousness which will effect performance. In this research, the capability of controlling nerves during encounters with people at the workplace, particularly the superiors and clients is needed to make the communication highly professional. A few of the remarks are given below:

‘Being too nervous, not knowing how to handle their nerves, they tend to be not professional and rude – small things like that can be a problem at workplace.’ (A2)

‘When foreigners were approaching them, they started to get anxious [translated], started to agitate. This is a poor service that we can give to the customer and it gives bad impression to them.’ (C2)

‘Sometimes they (graduates) can communicate, but because they are not well prepared and the so they get very nervous, white faces, so they could not deliver there (at the interview space).’ (C8)

Contrary to expectations, there are still graduates who are ignorant about others’ cultures, though they live in the multi-ethnic society like Malaysia. G2 stressed that graduates should ensure and be aware that their body language is not offensive during conversations with colleagues, superiors and clients by stating, ‘Touch between opposite gender is inappropriate for Muslims, hence graduates should be aware of that however liberal you are outside office doors’ (G2). Lacking of the awareness of this non-verbal communication might actually embarrass the boss, clients and themselves.

Facial expression was also mentioned by the stakeholders. G1 affirms, ‘Giving a service with a smile and good explanation will actually help the customers to let go of the ‘shortcomings’ [translated]’, while wearing a ‘bossy’(C3) look made others felt unwelcomed and ‘clients can easily picked on your small flaws’ (C7). Hence, having pleasant facial expressions contribute to ease and comfort during face to face workplace interactions.

Last but not least, a component which was mentioned by the stakeholders was punctuality. Graduates are expected to be on time in all workplace functions and it is a way to show your boss, clients, colleagues and subordinates that they are being respected. Arriving earlier than the

boss and clients during meetings proves to them that graduates are ‘reliable’ (C6) and can be ‘a man of his words’ (C9). C2 announced that in their company, a culture of respecting time is established, ‘when meetings started at 8.30 a.m., we have to be there by 8.15’.

Concluding this section, we can say that clothing, physical appearance, body movement, facial expressions and time management exemplify the importance of nonverbal means of communication. These non-verbal codes (Table 4.12) strongly influence the way other people perceive us as reported by the stakeholders.

Table 4.12 Findings for Communication Skills: Non-verbal communication.

Non-verbal communication	Contribute to the ease and comfort during interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately dressed according to workplace occasions. • Be on time in all workplace functions. • Control own nerves in meetings with superior and clients in order to be less agitated. • Ensure their body language is not offensive during conversations with colleagues, superiors and clients. • Wear pleasant facial expression.
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4.2.11 Communication Skills: Writing Skill

It is important to highlight that writing skill was not actually mentioned in the CCM (Moreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007). However, during this data analysis procedure, writing skill was mentioned several times by the respondents which show the importance of this skill to be inserted in the PCS framework. All stakeholders in this study have written assessments prior to the interview sessions. G1 stated there are two written essays which carry equivalent points; ‘writing BM essay and English essay whereby the high quality questions underwent item development assessment, so they were non-bias or non-discriminate questions’. Most of the respondents in this study admitted they developed their own assessment items for the written test, according to their own specific needs.

Table 4. 13 Findings for Communication Skills: Writing.

Writing Skill	Contribute to effective execution of tasks at work and making the work flow efficient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filling in forms. • Write memo. • Write formal business letter • Write minutes of meeting • Write a summary of articles • Write for the company's website • Write formal/informal email messages • Write items for newsletter • Write reports using office template.
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4.2.12 Motivation: Positive motivation

What is an undisputed fact is that any EOP course should be needs driven, and has an ‘emphasis on practical outcomes’ (Dudley-Evan & St. John, 1998, pp.1). Another undisputed fact is that having a clear purpose for communicating also promotes motivation (Dornyei, 2001). The outcome of the analysis of this study proves the same. Academics agree that graduates who ‘found their purpose’ (A2) in speaking, reading, listening and writing in English would perform better than those who are ‘too complacent’ with what they have. This group tends ‘not to move forward and does not work harder’ (C6).

The results were relatively uniform that all stakeholders agree that having good command in English language communication can secure a job for graduates at the beginning and it also will definitely help them in climbing the workplace ladder. They insisted that this should be a big motivation for graduates since become proficient in English acts as ‘a big ticket or a passport’ (C10) in ‘securing a post in big companies’ (C4) which ‘offer a good sum of wage annually’ (C2). Others added;

‘We do internal promotions, almost 50% of internal promotions. It is a good motivation for our workers to work hard. They need to perform their job well, and has high English communication skill.’ (C5)

‘The most important thing is motivation. They (graduates) have to be motivated, they have to realise that English is not something spooky and hard. It is essential for workplace.’ (A3)

‘If you communicate every day in English, surely you will improve on your communication. It is important because the graduates need to undergo a probation period before they become a permanent member of the company. We assess on their usage of English communication for workplace. Hey, who

doesn't like theme park, especially the perks we are giving them is great. Great staff price for family members, good over time pays, to name a few.' (C2)

'They need to conquer this language (English). There's a lot of opportunity in Public Sector, to grow and to develop yourself, as long as you are willing.' (G2)

'As long as you are willing' (G2) is an imperative challenge set by the stakeholder and it agrees with Carter (1983), whereby he believed that self-direction is important in the sense that it turns learners into users of the language. With the opportunities in front of the graduates, they need to have 'positive attitudes, for instance, proactive, hardworking, high motivation and curiosity driven' (C9) before embarking in the workplace setting. In this study, it is proven that having the ability to communicate confidently at the workplace in English should be a big motivation for graduates to learn and practise the language, since having mastered the skill, they can choose any career path they want.

With nearly forty thousand applications annually (and the number is growing since the booming of numbers of HEIs in Malaysia recently), G2 insisted that only 'the cream of the crops' will be chosen and many were 'cut off' because they did not do well in the English writing assessment given. When asked what were the motivations for the graduates to apply in this sector, G2 replied,

'I think our facilities are very conducive – in Putrajaya. In addition, our perks are very good - housing and vehicle loans, pension, free hospital services to spouse, kids and parents. Furthermore, being an officer in this sector leaves a remarkable impression, especially for parents and family in 'villages' [translation].'(G2)

Government agencies understand that they have a role to play in motivating their employees to speak better in English. Nevertheless, the process of changing the policies to give priority for an easier promotion when staff have good English communication can take a bit more time. G1 admitted,

'I know, it should be a big motivation if English can be a catalyst for them to step up at on the workplace ladder, isn't it? We should look into this since our motto for this transformation approach is global entrepreneurship education. To be global, one have to master at least another international language and the most that is used currently is English. We are working (towards) it, I'm not trying to name and shame, but it's a slow process.

For that reason, G2 has openly warned the graduates not to use the above reason not to master workplace communication in English. G2 advised the graduates to change their perception, especially the Malay graduates, whereby they assumed jobs can easily be secured though one has poor grasp of English language communication.

‘It is more on perception, that is Malay (graduates), there would be more Malays (working as government servants) so it is easier to communicate. So they choose to be in the public sector, because they know that if they join the private sector, they need to communicate more in English. So, since they’re lacking of it, they turn to public sectors. No, this is not your escape route. We expect young and fresh graduates like you to have positive vibes to bring into the office, to show your subordinates that an officer like you can talk the talk and walk the walk. You should be a role model to others, communicate well and confidently. So, learn how to use English language from the start. It will secure you a job, that’s a promise.’ (G2)

The last advice of G2 should be a wakeup call for all graduates. Knowing that communicating fluently and confidently is one of the factors eyed by the private and public sectors, it should be a good motivation for them to explore and experiment on it throughout their secondary education and HE days.

Nevertheless, dissatisfaction with one’s performance in the past can lead to a decreased self-efficacy and also to a loss of motivation; it can also result in anxiety that let learners give up learning (Brunton, 2009). It is proven that learners who feel anxious in their language learning, whether during primary and secondary or post-secondary education, may find their study less enjoyable, and which may lead to low motivation and low achievement in language learning (Gregersen, 2005). After interviewing lecturers and English instructors of EOP, it was discovered that the same issue can be applied in Malaysia HEI context. Graduates were disclosing their incompetency in English language communication was caused by their dislike of assessment. Some of the comments are as follow;

‘EOP students regularly enjoy the course because there are a lot of activities in them but they are not enjoying the assessment. EOP course has a lot of speaking, listening, reading activities, lots of interesting activities. They can be fun without too much grading.’ (A2)

‘We try hard to make the class fun and meaningful, but the assessments are a lot, not just for them, for us, too. Not putting everything into evaluation, because students are anxious of evaluation. When they know things are being

assessed, they will be less relaxed and more agitated. When it's a burden, they don't enjoy the class, when they don't enjoy the class, the lessons are useless. Back to square one.' (A4)

'The Malaysian education systems have always had assessments and exams. In terms of practicality, sad to say, most of them are not transferable at workplace. I am looking at the English language per se. For me, I don't think we have to be so much on grammar. It is the least interesting part of English, and I don't blame the student to find it hard and boring. It is hard. That is why the products nowadays are lacking of the proficiency, accept for those in the urban areas like KL (Kuala Lumpur) and JB (Johor Baru). When it is difficult, they won't enjoy it. In the end, they choose not to use it.' (A3)

Finally, by looking at the table below, we can conclude that by having positive motivation and good learning experience in communicating in English can contribute to a high possibility of getting hired and in long term, job satisfaction. This is because, it is discovered that by being fluent and proficient in English communication at the workplace, one can be promoted easier. The summary of findings that had been discussed earlier was also included in the table.

Table 4.14 Findings for Motivation

Positive motivation	Contribute to job recruitment and satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware that communicating fluently and confidently in English language can help secure a job in public and private sectors. • Understand that speaking, listening and writing in good English will benefit them in terms of climbing up the workplace ladder quicker. • Be confident in speak English publicly to superiors, colleagues and clients. • Control own anxiety while speaking to an unknown group of new clients.
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4.2.13 Summary of Data Analysis

The findings from the analysis of data above were presented below as the Professional Communications Skill (PCS) Framework (

Table 4.15). This initial framework had to pass through the stakeholders again for them to reconfirm their thoughts on the PCS the new graduates should bring with them to the workplace.

Table 4.15 Proposed Professional Communications Skill (PCS) Framework from Data Analysis

Professional Communication Skills Framework				
Core Component (Communicative Competence Model)	Sub Component	Indicators	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars: ‘Upon graduation, graduates should be able to...’
Cognitive Knowledge	Content Knowledge	Specific jargon, Discourse competence	Contribute to on-going improvement and expansion of knowledge in the betterment of workplace operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a relevant knowledge base for workplace. • Apply their subject content knowledge at workplace. • Manage own learning in order to maintain and renew attributes throughout working lives. • Use specific work-related jargon appropriately in speech and reports.
	Cultural Competence	Cultural knowledge to speak appropriately depending on setting (formal/casual)	Contribute to harmonious relations between superior, subordinates, colleagues and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak and write using the most appropriate register. • Agreeing/Disagreeing with the superior and subordinate in a diplomatic manner. • Adapt with small talks with colleagues, being aware with context awareness.
	Linguistic Competence	Vocabulary Grammar Fluency Pronunciation (clearly and accurately)	Contribute to meaningful and effective conversations using appropriate workplace discourse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise spoken and written language during a variety of communication tasks at workplace. • Present their speech and written work using appropriate vocabulary and fluency. • Clearly and accurately articulate words during workplace activities.
	Critical thinking	Hypothesising Synthesising Criticism Scepticism	Contribute to constructive criticism while resolving issues at workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically synthesising their thoughts in a professional manner to improve situation. • Identify, analyse and solve problems critically and innovatively. • Give positive feedback and healthy criticism after analysing issues at workplace. •

	Tasking skill	<p>Defining problem</p> <p>Analysing the problem</p> <p>Identifying criteria for solving the problem</p> <p>Generating solutions or alternatives</p> <p>Evaluating solutions</p>	Contribute to productive long-term and short-term strategic planning and effective execution of workplace tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise thoughts and solve workplace problems and issues. • Argue politely in generating solutions and alternatives in workplace issue. • Synthesise issues at work and evaluate solutions individually.
Communication Skills	Interpersonal Communication	<p>Composure</p> <p>Coordination</p> <p>Attentiveness</p> <p>Expressiveness</p>	Contribute to diplomatic and matured communication between superior, subordinates and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak comfortably with employers, not hindered with nerves. • Pay attention to workplace communications activities and do not get distracted easily (with electronic devices). • Attentive in formal or informal workplace communication which can help build rapport with superiors, colleagues and clients. • Well prepared prior to workplace meetings and planned activities in order to express opinions maturely.
	Presentation Skill	<p>Appropriateness</p> <p>Credibility</p> <p>Clarity</p> <p>Vividness</p> <p>Voice (rate, pitch, volume)</p>	Contribute to sharing of ideas and thoughts effectively with superior, colleagues and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to share ideas with colleagues creatively. • Able to persuade clients to accept their ideas by explaining in a simple yet interesting manner. • Inform superiors of new innovative measures in improving workplace. • Keep spectators' attentions using range of presentation skill, with the help of IT as a management tool. • Responding to enquiry from the clients.
	Speaking skill	<p>Informative</p> <p>Persuasive</p>	Contribute to productive and appropriate verbal interactions at	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform audience (superiors, colleagues and clients) in an enlightening manner. • Contributing ideas and give opinions in group

		Small talks Counter arguing	workplace.	<p>discussions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuade superiors, colleagues and clients to accept ideas and opinions using well-defined explanations. • Use specialist vocabulary in a correct manner. • Give clear instructions to solve issues at work. • Initiating contact, requesting information on the telephone. • Seeking information from others at work. • Responding to enquiries/problems from superior/clients. • State reasons for disagreeing without interrupting the speech of colleagues or superiors • Discussion work schedules and procedures. • Engage small talks with superior, colleagues and clients informally. • Telephone conversations skill – answering inquiries, giving instructions.
	Non-verbal communication	Physical appearance (first impression) Body communication Touch Voice Time and space	Contribute to the ease and comfort during interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately dressed according to workplace occasions. • Be on time in all workplace functions. • Control own nerves in meetings with superior and clients in order to be less agitated. • Ensure their body language is not offensive during conversations with colleagues, superiors and clients. • Wear pleasant facial expression.
Communication Skills	Listening Skill	Comprehend Evaluate Emphasize Critique	Contribute to successful working relationships and effective execution of tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask if one does not understand instruction by superior, colleagues and clients. • Disagree politely if better ideas can be brought up. • Respond appropriately (speech or non-verbal)

				<p>communication) after understanding the instructions, questions, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully comprehend what is going on around them at workplace. • Give feedback when asked by colleagues, superior and clients after fully understanding the situation. • Responds to clients' complaints.
	*Writing Skill	*not part of CCM.	Contribute to effective execution of tasks at work and making the work flow efficient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filling in forms. • Write memo. • Write formal business letter • Write minutes of meeting • Write a summary of articles • Write for the company's website • Write formal/informal email messages • Write items for newsletter • Write reports using office template.
Motivation	Positive motivation	<p>Willingness to communicate</p> <p>Appreciating non-verbal communication</p>	Contribute to job satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware that communicating fluently and confidently in English language can help secure a job in public and private sectors. • Understand that speaking, listening and writing in good English will benefit them in terms of climbing up the workplace ladder quicker. • Be confident in speak English publicly to superiors, colleagues and clients. • Control own anxiety while speaking to an unknown group of new clients.

4.3 Data Validation Process

Member checking is primarily used in qualitative inquiry methodology and acts as a quality control process whereby this process seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview (Barbour, 2001; Byrne, 2001; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During this validation stage, stakeholders were presented with the initial draft of the PCS Framework, prior to the meetings for their evaluation. During the second face-to-face interview with them, stakeholders were politely required to give feedback and constructive criticism to the PCS Framework, according to the workplace needs. Some changes were made and were reported in the sub-section 4.3.1 below.

Subsequently, in making the PCS framework more well-defined, easily understood and also feasible, it was disclosed to three experts in the fields of Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Assessment and Higher Education. In this research, since all three of them have been in the field for a substantial period and had produced an impressive amount of journal papers on the above mentioned fields, their insights and expertise to critique the PCS Framework were valuable in order to improve its validity and credibility. Their feedback is discussed in the forthcoming sub-section 4.3.2.

4.3.1 Member checking by stakeholders

Member checking is basically what the term implies – an opportunity for stakeholders to check and approve particular aspects of the interpretation of the data they provided (Doyle, 2007; Merriam, 1998). It is a ‘way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants’ experiences’ (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). Stakeholders were not given full transcripts of the narratives they contributed during interview sessions, but they were actually presented with the preliminary findings of the PCS framework. Participants may be asked to edit, clarify, elaborate, and at times, delete their own words from the narratives; although Creswell (2009) stressed that member checking is best done with ‘polished’ (p. 191) interpreted pieces such as themes and patterns emerging from the data rather than the actual transcripts. Using a transcribing approach of using partial transcripts, as suggested by Carlson (2010), would help to focus on the stakeholders’ main contributions and not be distracted or embarrassed in looking back at the accounts where they were off topic. It is worth reiterating that trustworthiness is

gained when the data presented were ethically and mindfully collected, analysed, and reported in a respectable way. The member checking report below will be answering the core questions of who, when and what as recommended by Spillett (2003) (See Table 4.17).

Who?

All stakeholders interviewed, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 3 (see Table 3. 6 Malaysia's Key Industries and its components) were re-interviewed to reconfirm their statements as well as to probe for bias analysis. Since all of the stakeholders were responsible in recruiting new employees in their respective agencies, their perspectives are invaluable in ensuring the PCS framework has covered all aspects of workplace literacies in ensuring optimum and high quality communication held at the workplace. They were encouraged to provide a 'second opinion' on the meaning of data as suggested by Barber and Walczak (2009). Even though this process can be seen as similar to the long-established inter rater reliability, which focuses on training people to evaluate data in the same way, there were other fundamental differences. Stakeholders were urged to clarify subjectivities and provide alternative interpretations as well as to add new views in creating the PCS Framework which is more robust and vetted. This is agreeable with Spillett's (2003) suggestion which was to use a diverse group of participants to offer different perspectives or expertise.

When?

After completing the data analysis stage, with the initial findings embodied in the PCS Framework, ten face-to-face interviews were held, including three using Skype. Face-to-face meetings were found to be an effective practice for improving the credibility during this stage of the study. Unfortunately, five other stakeholders could only respond via email since the time factor was an issue. It is important to add that this validation process should be carried out promptly after the data analysis so that the stakeholders would be able to recall about what they have suggested during the preliminary interview. In this study, the all post data collection meetings took place about three weeks after the first. Each session took less than an hour to complete. Only two meetings (G2 and C4) were longer since the stakeholders scrutinised the PCS framework and compared and contrasted it with their current recruitment checklists (which were private and confidential).

What?

One critical component which was overlooked during the initial data analysis was reading skills at workplace. Since reading was not highlighted in the Communication Competence Model, the researcher had left this component unobserved. Fortunately, this discovery was highlighted by G2 during the first of all meetings scheduled. Therefore, amendments were made prior to the other fourteen meetings. The addition of the subcomponent is displayed in Table 4.16 below.

Table 4.16 Communication Skills: Reading Skill

Reading Skill	Contribute to proficient job execution and high quality results at workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read official job related forms before signing.• Read own work contracts.• Read business reports and agreements• Read office memo and notices.• Read email messages, fax and formal letters.• Read technical manuals.• Read agenda and minutes of meetings.• Read work related books and articles.
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Pertaining to the same subcomponent of Reading Skill, G2 and C4 both had asked to add other sub skills into this component. G2, after going through the agency's internal documents to compare and contrast with PCS Framework, had agreed to all sub-components listed. Nonetheless, she added another important scope, which was to read formal literature to be summarised. G2 explained that new employees who came from universities 'need to be familiar with reading articles from journals and other formal government statements or annual reports of companies'. She added,

'Bosses do not have time to read all articles. During meetings or discussions, the superiors will ask the newbies to make a summary on the latest issue on whatever new policies. They expected them to know how to find it (the related articles), read and understand it. Summary could be presented orally or in written. But before summarising, they need to read.' (G2)

Moreover, C4 announced that another essential sub component was overlooked, which was reading newspapers and work-related magazines. C4 claimed that ‘newspaper reading is important for graduates to be alert with the happenings around themselves and in the world.’ Relating to this claim, C9 has earlier stated that graduates nowadays had ‘very limited general knowledge’. Lack of reading newspapers and other work-related magazine ‘affects small talks among colleagues’ (C2) which resulted them being ‘isolated’ (C6) from the conversation. Therefore, adding C4’s criticism would be useful in solving a few workplace issues brought up by other stakeholders.

G9 described the initial PCS framework as ‘too detail’ and ‘too much’. He admitted it was ‘all the things that we hoped from the graduates, but we cannot assess all of them’. After probing for his vision of an ideal PCS Framework, his advice was to make it ‘more compact with fewer columns’.

Aside from the points mentioned above, other stakeholders were agreeable with the findings of this study. G1, C8 and A2 admitted that the PCS Framework was ‘comprehensive’ and ‘easily understood’, while C2 announced that it is ‘marketable’. G3 proclaimed that ‘this framework can be applicable here and now’. This situation then is agreeable with Kvale’s (1995) notion of ‘pragmatic validity’, which was a way to determine an interpretation of truthfulness, by looking at its utility. Koelsch (2013)

4.3.2 Peer debriefing by experts

Lincoln and Guba (1985) generated the concept of peer debriefing in their book *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Peer debriefing, in this research, is mainly a tool for qualitative researchers to validate the study, specifically the PCS Framework. Lincoln and Guba (1985) insisted that experts who were expected to provide feedback should be unbiased and additionally, they should understand qualitative methodology and know enough about the research topic in order to be able to provide feedback and support the research (Wallendorf, 1989). Feedback should be used to amend oversight points, reflect views on the information given from experts and subsequently, investigate other alternatives in the research process. Spillet (2003) suggested that the report about peer debriefing may address the following questions dictated in Table 4.17 below.

Table 4.17 Reporting Peer Debriefing (Spillet, 2003)

Reporting Peer Debriefing	
Who?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who were the peer debriefers? • What kind of perspectives or expertise did they bring to the research? • How did the characteristics of the debriefers balance the skills or values of the student researcher?
When?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many peer debriefing sessions were held? • Over what time span? • How long was each session? • What concrete products (e.g., analytical matrices) did the debriefers review? • In what manner did debriefers dialogue with dissertation students about how their subjectivity affected their research?
What? (Outcomes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did the researcher change or confirm as a result of the debriefing process? • Were there any emergent methodological decisions (e.g. when to stop collecting data) and how were these reached? • What was the nature of the relationship between the debriefers and the student researcher? • In what ways did debriefing activities enable students to become aware of and explain their effects on the research?

In this section of the report, Spillet's (2003) suggestion would be implemented in order to have a clear and organised report of the validation process.

Who?

Three experts were involved in this debriefing phase. Firstly, Expert A (see Appendix B for detail), who is a Senior Honorary Research Fellow of the Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia. She is the co-ordinator of the professional Doctor of Education program and served as Dean of Graduate School of Education. The former editor of Education Research and Perspectives Journal, her expertise lies in qualitative studies including interpretivist

approaches (interview studies, case studies, perspectival studies). Her in depth knowledge on qualitative approach, focusing her key research on English curriculum policy and practice, as well as good teaching and learning, is valuable in highlighting issues that might have been overlooked.

Secondly, Expert B (See Appendix C for further detail), is currently the Head of International Literacy Research Unit of Universiti Sains Malaysia, as well as a research fellow in National Higher Education Research Institute of Malaysia. His areas of specialisation are English language studies, literacy studies and teaching and learning languages in HE. He has produced a vast amount of books, book chapters and journal articles in the aforementioned fields based on the Malaysian context in national and international journals. His passion and experiences in enhancing literacy skills and workplace literacy in HEIs, which was portrayed in many of his publications, may help in addressing issues which were poorly emphasised. His recommendations and suggestions in improving the PCS Framework would enhance the trustworthiness of the study, since it helps to address the issues of credibility and transferability.

Thirdly, Expert C (refer to Appendix D for further detail), is a senior lecturer in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. Her field of study are reading in a second language, attitude and motivation in language learning, reading, writing and critical thinking as well as curriculum design in HE.

When?

The three separate meetings with the experts were held after the feedback from the member checking process has been updated. Prior to the meetings, the experts were given materials to review in advance of each meeting, including a summary of this research and its findings, which was the PCS framework. It was discovered that this simple preparation helped to facilitate discussion during debriefing meetings. The experts were free to probe and query any part of the study in order for them to have a clear understanding on why and how the framework was developed. They were told earlier that their responses and constructive feedback were needed in making sure that the PCS framework produced was clear, feasible and transferable in the HEIs' context. Sessions took ninety minutes to two and a half hours to complete, whereby healthy

discussions were held and exchange of views took place in deliberating the issues of professional communication skills amongst graduates.

All three experts were overwhelmed with the feedback gathered from the respondents. Two of them asked for the interview schedule, to inspect the kinds of questions asked during the interviews with the stakeholders. One of them requested for the coding summary listing and memos. This was when ATLAS.ti had proven to be practical and versatile whereby all of the requested items were laid in front of them since all of the information was in one HU. It is admittedly true that these three experts were passionate, yet very rigorous about their work, and they were also eager to share their knowledge and experience to novice researchers. Those sessions increased the researcher's own understanding on the study, especially when one of the experts stressed that explaining confidently on our own findings help us to clarify own thoughts and understanding on the research.

What?

Initially, just by looking at the PCS framework and the short summary given through email, the experts were agreeable that the framework was substantial in catering the EOP course. During the meetings, all of them enquired on the whole process of data collection, analysis and member checking procedures. Since Expert A was very fluent in qualitative research, she probed with critical and substantial questions in ensuring the data collected was valid and reliable, even querying the options that were deliberately not chosen to be done in the study. She also asked the origins of the words in the 'Indicator' column and suggested to obliterate it since it could create 'confusion' by readers. She also said that the words were too generic, but it was made specific according to this study's context since the exemplars were clearly stated in the PCS framework. She pointed out that even without the column, the interpretation of meaning would be easier and less to digest. Hence, following her suggestion, the column entitled 'Indicators' was deleted.

Another concern raised by her and Expert B was the issue of saturation and how the study chose to stop data collection. Since two days prior to the meeting with Expert A in Perth, two interviews were done and transcribed, but yet to be analysed. Showing her those two transcriptions and proving to her there were no new emerging themes, properties and dimensions within the close categories of PCS were seen in the data, they both agreed that for this study, it

was a good time to stop collecting since additional data would be counterproductive. However, Expert B stressed that saturation is ‘a matter of your scope of study’ since if the researcher took longer to dwell into the data, potentially, there would be new properties to emerge. However, he agreed at this stage, by looking at the detail in the PCS Framework, new properties found would not change or intensify the result of the study.

Additionally, all three experts were interested with the application of SSM in the field of education. A unanimous confirmation was given by all experts on the advantage of using this clear and systematic, yet rigorous methodology, which had successfully facilitated organisation of the complex process. They agreed that SSM allowed active participations of different stakeholders and fostered joint ownership of the problem solving process. The issue of sampling was also brought up by the experts. They believed that the purposeful sampling applied in this study increased in-depth understanding since the participants involved have direct experience recruiting new graduates as well as some who had first-hand experience teaching EOP in HEIs. Selecting information from the rich experience of the stakeholders ensures the credibility of the information gathered.

Expert C was more interested in looking at the practical ways of applying the PCS framework in EOP courses. She doubted the feasibility of including all components in the current course in her university, though much of it was actually being applied in the current EOP course. However, Expert B insisted that these teachable components cannot be taught only in EOP courses but should be highlighted during subject specific courses in the degree programmes. Hence, he suggested that the framework is to be used not exclusively for EOP courses, but as a clear guide for all courses offered in the Malaysian HEIs. Successively, Expert A proposed for the course to be taught intensively prior to students leaving for their industrial training. She admitted that many graduate training schemes practised all over the world, including Malaysia, had been successful in improving participants’ ability in communicating at workplace. By having the intrinsic motivation to perform well at workplace during industrial training, students will concentrate and relate to PCS framework better, rather than teaching the course for the whole year, without giving them a space to practice afterwards. Furthermore, mastering the professional communication skills would definitely be a springboard for the students to prove their worth to

their future employers and they might be able to secure jobs in the organisations, where they worked at by utilising PCS, freshly taught in EOP courses.

Expert C finally added that the title of the framework should stress that it is focusing on the English language. Looking at the current Malaysian context, Expert C admitted that there are many of generic frameworks on employability, mainly in Bahasa Malaysia. Making the title of PCS framework more specific in which to add the word English within the title, would make the framework more easily identified by EOP and other ESP instructors, as well as HR managers of multi-national companies who deals mainly in the English language

All in all, the detail probes by the experts were useful to seek the truth and verification of data. In sum, essential questions were asked and answered during peer debriefing meetings with the experts (Appendix 1). This process clearly highlighted the issue of trustworthiness of the study. Though the process of locating the right experts and arranging meeting times were complicated, this stage was admittedly an essential and crucial stage in this research. Feedbacks and suggestion were implemented, hence the approved Professional Communication Skills Framework in English is presented in Appendix L.

4.4 Summary and Conclusion

At the onset of this chapter, the seven stages of SSM were predominantly applied and explained in describing the ways the research was carried out. Stages four and five of the SSM in this research was dedicated purely to discuss the common themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis and synthesis of data obtained from the researched subjects involved. The succeeding sub-chapter reports on the findings collated from the stakeholders – multi-national companies, government agencies and academia who were the main participants of this study. Using the deductive approach to data analysis, the interview transcriptions and annual reports were scrutinised using the ATLAS.ti 7.0 software. Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge's Communication Competence Model was used as the basis of the PCS required by the Malaysian stakeholders. Sub-chapters 4.1 and 4.2 were dedicated in answering the first research question of this study namely,

RQ1. What are stakeholders and theoretical identified communication constructs that support the development of a PCS in English Framework?

In an attempt to obtain comprehensive understanding on the stakeholders' point of view on the future workforce, this chapter has also presented and described issues raised by the researched employers concerning the graduates' PCS produced by the local universities. To encapsulate the stakeholders' requirements from the graduates, the Professional Communication Skills Framework in English (PCSiE) was disclosed.

Subsequently, sub-chapter 4.3 was dedicated to answering the second research question of this study, which was,

RQ2. What are stakeholders' assessments about the relevance of the PCS Framework?

Stakeholders had verified the PCS in English framework, amended their views and points according to the current needs. Additionally, the comments and feedback from the experts of the field were appended to complement the PCS in English and to make the framework more feasible and practical.

In conclusion, this chapter has offered some depictions on the stakeholders' perspectives and expectations of future workforce, particularly in the area of communication in English at workplace. It also covers the issue of quality in qualitative inquiry. The following chapter will discuss these findings in relation to germane literature.

"Any government worth its salt must be every bit as concerned with the humanities as with technologies."
(Sterling, 2010, p. 11).

Chapter 5

Discussion of Findings

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings of this study according to the significant themes that emerged and are explained in the context of the existing body of knowledge pertaining to English language workplace literacies and employers' expectations with regard to English language. Whenever possible, the findings of this study are compared with previous findings in the literature. The discussion extends the review of the main theoretical insights on the complexities of workplace literacies, including the balance of breadth and depth of strong communicative competence voiced by the stakeholders, the stakeholders' great interest in the development of graduates' personal attributes, the need for change in the Malaysian higher education syllabus, as well as some discussion on ways to move forward, on how to work together to improve the current situation as suggested by the literature as well as by research findings.

5.1 The balance of breadth and depth of strong communicative competence

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, research in workplace literacies has concentrated less on examining students' English language literacy practices and competencies for workplace life; rather, it has gone a long way in unpacking the more generic lists of competencies for the students to achieve. Hence, elements of workplace literacy practices, which include reading, listening and speaking, specifically in the English language must be critically looked into since solid workplace literacies will help in shaping strong communicative competence for graduates' professional use. Unfortunately, despite the high levels of incompetence demonstrated in these

types of skills as shown in previous research (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Mohd Radzuan & Kaur, 2010; Sekharan Nair et al., 2012; Shakir, 2009; Singh et al., 2010; Wahi, 2012), they are still regrettably not universally articulated as learning goals in current higher education curricula.

In this study, it has been confirmed that high grades and excellent results on the graduates' transcripts carry less weight with employers, although they are positively correlated with attributes that are valued. Though measureable signals like grades are associated with better career opportunities (Clarke, 2008), they do not fully assurance that one is employed upon graduation. Mackey (1999) states in his book *Pushing the Envelope*:

I know of a large, publicly held company that would never hire an A student as a salesperson, because anyone whose grades conformed so closely to the conventional wisdom was sure to lack a quality the company values much more than rote knowledge: creativity.

(p. 166)

The findings coincide with the study by Noor Azina (2011) where she found that there was very little variation in CGPA between employed and unemployed graduates. This explains why the overall academic performance does not affect the chance of getting employed. Human resource managers who were among the respondents of this study agreed that besides being able to apply subject content knowledge at the workplace, having convincing cultural competence and substantial linguistic competence as well as having well organised tasking skills are part of the essential cognitive knowledge that graduates should bring to the workplace. They agreed that, besides looking at measurable indications like grades, some of the respondents were more interested in looking at the graduates' extracurricular activities and other leadership positions they might have held in HEIs. G2, in the interview session, mentioned holding a position in clubs, the students' representative council, or even being class representatives gave an indication to the employer that 'graduates have encountered more communicative experiences in a different context and situation'. Hence, having breadth of communication exposures while participating in extracurricular activities in HEIs leads to more job offers and this finding is positively correlated with studies done by Barkley et al. (1999) and Sagen et al. (2000). G2, a respondent in this study strongly put forward his opinion that, for the betterment of human capital in the future, 'the best kind of education is one that teaches the next generation to speak and think for themselves. That is more important and valuable than passing exams'.

The English language is widely regarded as the international lingua franca of business and commerce (Kirkpatrick, 2007) and it is not surprising that the majority of the respondents of this study use a substantial amount of English (along with Bahasa Malaysia), as an important language for internal and external communication at the workplace. The main question of concern by employers in Malaysia is not so much the amount of English that is taught to potential employees, but how useful and practical it is for employment purposes and industry growth. A number of studies of workplace English in Malaysia which cover a range of sectors including engineering (Awang & Ramly, 2008; Zaharim, Yusoff, Omar, & Mohamed, 2009), accounting (Yassin, 2008), management (Zakaria, Mohamed Zainal, & Mohd Nasurdin, 2011), art and design (S. Kaur & Alla Baksh, 2010), business (Faizah, 2011), education (Wong & Ming, 2010), and ICT (Ramakrishnan & Yasin, 2011) have produced consistent findings about the importance of mastering productive and receptive communication skills in HEIs which stress relevant workplace-specific language. This would serve to prepare them well for their future workplace in their areas of specialisations. Hence, it is not surprising that the findings of this study agree by and large with those reported in the studies above. Data from the in-depth interviews proved that the respondents in this study highly valued productive (speaking, writing, and presentation) and receptive skills (listening and reading) (See Table 4.17). The findings reported here represent only a small sample of multinational companies, government agencies and academia operating in Malaysia and are by no means conclusive. Yet, the in-depth nature of the interviews has yielded rich data of how English is used in the Malaysian workplace. One interpretation of this would be that the employers are not actually looking solely at the breadth of graduates' experience in using the language, but they also desired graduates who have depth and a rich understanding of applications of the English language at the workplace. A human resource manager of a multinational company, C3, admitted that 'English has the potential to enhance career opportunities for those who master it'. It is reasonable to conclude that in order to master English language communication at the workplace as required by the stakeholders, a balance of breadth and depth of communicative competence in English is vital to enrich our graduates with strong PCS.

The responsibility of creating a balance between breadth and depth of PCS cannot be left alone to HEIs. The Malaysian education system should respond to this issue of the lack of competency

of our graduates in mastering English for the workplace from the very beginning. In chapter 2, it was mentioned that the rise of in the standard of English was witnessed during the colonial era while its decline was evident during the period of intense nationalism and nation building. The number of massive changes in the Malaysian education system is evidently one of the major factors of why the problem dealt with in this study arose. Krashen (1982. p.90) stresses that in second language acquisition, learners rely highly on routines and patterns. The lack of a consistent routine and the dramatic changes in the Malaysian education language policies made it increasingly difficult for language acquisition to happen. In order to deal with this problem in the short term, the most valuable experience that HEIs can offer the graduates is through internships.

In designing or re-evaluating any degree programme, be it Engineering, Education or the Biological Sciences, an EOP practitioner interviewed in this study stressed that one of the programme learning objectives (PLO) which must be given proper emphasis is communication skills. This PLO must be introduced gradually through relevant courses so that by the end of the students' academic study, they would have acquired the communication skills needed by professionals at the entry-level and beyond. During the member-checking phase, most respondents from academia admitted that a single course like EOP cannot cater to the demands of the stakeholders as specified in the PCS framework. Nonetheless, they believe that the PCS framework in English is an extremely valuable guide for programme designers in deciding which components and sub components of communication skills must be taught in which degree programme. They believe that teaching and learning of PCS skills should be spread throughout the whole programme.

This finding, which is consistent with that of another empirical study (Wahi, 2012), is not surprising, given EOP practitioners' emphasis on the need to diffuse the teaching and learning of PCS throughout the 3 years of students' learning in HEIs. Becker-Lenz and Müller (2009), in their longitudinal study on the development of professional competencies in the Social Work degree course, discovered that professional ethics (consisting of central values and a basic ethical attitude specific to the profession) had to be taught through as many subjects as possible in the degree programme. Teaching professional ethics at the end of the semester (like EOP does) would not create as many opportunities and as much practise as is crucially needed by the students. While the main focus of the EOP course at Malaysian HEIs is to build English

language communicative proficiency and skills which graduates can effectively use in looking for jobs and use at the workplace, this PCS framework emphasises a more holistic view of the communication skills that ought to be possessed by prospective employees in their chosen fields. This can only be achieved through consistent training throughout the 3 or 4 years of students' academic life on campus. It is emphasized that constant practise of PCS is crucial throughout the education system.

This finding coincides with the suggestions voiced by the Scottish government in the report entitled "Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching" (Scottish Government, 2008). This is another step forward that can be taken by the Malaysian government in order to introduce PCS skills from an early age. In that report, the Scottish Government set a target where every child and young person aged three to eighteen is entitled to expect their education to provide them with a curriculum which is coherent throughout their schooling years. It includes opportunities to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work (including career planning skills) with a continuous focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing throughout pre-primary to secondary 3. The broad general education includes well planned experiences as well as outcomes across all the curriculum areas. Introducing PCS from the start would offer a massive breadth of meaningful experiential learning which would benefit human capital development, as envisaged by the Malaysian government.

To overcome this problem of poor PCS skill of our graduates, a 'crash-course' was proposed by the stakeholders. Participants in this study suggested that graduates who went through internships or industrial training sessions which relate closely to the courses they were attending in HEIs were helped in enriching their specialist vocabulary, developing their tasking skills, writing proper reports using office templates as well as learning how to use unfamiliar machines by reading manuals. The findings provide conclusive support for the studies of Norwood and Henneberry (2006) and Briggeman and Norwood (2011). They discovered that internships have greater worth than grades, awards, leadership positions as well as multiple language skills. They also stress that the value of an internship is more than five times greater when the internship is related to the job. A respondent in this study, C1, claimed that students who have already graduated also agreed that internship courses were very helpful in increasing their awareness of

the world around them (Ramakrishnan and Yasin, 2011) However, Zaharim et al. (2009) reported that the internship has no value unless it is related to the job.

All in all, setting the curriculum in higher education institutions is not a one person show. There are many factors involved in developing the course curriculum. In order to fulfil the government's agenda that emphasizes human capital development, accurate and careful planning should be carried out, especially at the HEI level. The balance of breadth and depth of communicative competence should be spread throughout our system of education. The traditional thinking that a university is the sole knowledge provider needs to be re-examined.

5.2 Personal attribute development: the stakeholders' perspectives

Earlier in Chapter 2, it was reported that Malaysian employers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the general level of preparedness of graduates as prospective entry-level employees. Employers insisted that there is a gap between the skill requirements for entry-level employment and the skills of entry-level job applicants, mainly in English competency (Ainol Madziah et al., 2011; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Sekharan Nair et al., 2012; Wahi, 2012). During the interview sessions held in this study, all respondents were requested to answer questions on their perception as employers of other skills that influence positively or negatively on an entry-level employee's work readiness.

Contrary to expectations, most of the respondents of this study insisted that personal attributes such as 'a positive attitude, integrity, humility, resilience, complaisance, honesty, receptiveness, initiative, willingness to learn, capable of working with others, optimism and trustworthiness' (G1, G2, C1, C2, C3, C4, C6 and A1) were rated more important than communicating fluently in English Language. One of the respondents interviewed during this study admitted that the company he was working with strongly believes in 'recruit on attitude', and they evaluated and scrutinised the new recruits personal attributes during the group interview and group tasks during the recruitment sessions. This result closely matches those obtained by Suter et al. (2009). In his study, his respondents acknowledged and repeatedly stressed the importance of communication in an inter-professional healthcare environment. Another similar finding was by Salleh, Sulaiman, & Talib (2010) where they discovered that employees' personal traits and skills are the most important contributing factor to being employed. They suggested that the skills include

courtesy, honesty, flexibility, eye contact, self-direction, personal energy, a good attitude, a positive work ethic and the desire to learn and be trained. Additionally, Shafie & Nayan (2010) discovered that the participants in their study chose personal attributes as the most important employability skill. Personal attributes proposed in their research included loyalty, commitment, honesty, integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal presentation, common sense, positive self-esteem, a sense of humour, motivation, adaptability, a balanced attitude to work and home life and the ability to deal with pressure (Shafie & Nayan, 2010).

During the member checking process in this study, some respondents questioned the preliminary PCS framework since it did not include these personal attributes in the framework. After deliberating with them and explaining that these attributes do not fit into the definition of PCS, the stakeholders agreed but compellingly proposed that they should be stressed during the teaching and learning process in HEIs. The decision not to include values, attitudes and personal qualities in the PCS framework is consistent with Mayer's Key Competencies, which is a set of 'competencies essential for effective participation in the emerging patterns of work and work organisation' initiated by the government of Australia (Future Skills Needs Secretariat, 2007, p. 23). A3 acknowledged the decision and added, 'attitude and values in life should not only be taught in a subject during university; that is wrong. The young ones should have these values instil within them from the start in primary schools during religious and moral education studies'. Another respondent, C5, added that since there was an overabundance of graduates in the Malaysian labour market, 'human resource managers needed to look for other factors as an additional to academic qualification. Positive vibes and energy into the company as a result from positive personal attributes is the key for employability'.

Turning this around, by looking at the issue of overabundance of graduates, we raise the concern of the need for a continuing massive supply of graduates against shifting employment structures. It is important for the Ministry of Education and policy makers as well as industries to look closely at the role of HEIs, whether the HEIs' role is just the same as of a factory, producing massive amounts of workers for the labour market, or it is to be the birthplace of selective graduates with well-developed intellects and a high level skills together with essential personal attributes. With a large student load in each course, limited time and strict curricular demands, differentiated instruction during teaching is near impossible (McTighe & Brown, 2005). In order

to survive it all, some lecturers choose to teach everything without incorporating personal attributes development within their courses and hope students get something out of them automatically. To avoid this, since employers highly value positive personal attributes like loyalty, commitment, honesty and integrity, policy makers should find a solution so as to make these attributes directly observable. In other words, there should be an objective measure (Webber, 2008) that signals to employers whether a graduate possesses desirable attributes like being good team players or being highly reliable graduates.

From the preceding discussion it is clear that stakeholders require the personal attributes of graduates in HEIs to be more objectively measured. These demands should be catered to and given greater emphasis since it appears to be a fundamental factor of employability for entry-level employees. This coincides with Kiley and Cannon's (2000) suggestion, which is to address the general attributes and attitudes incrementally as students go through the university. Similarly, Lim et al. (2011) propose that policy makers make it a requirement for HEI students to assess their own attributes and generic skills on a yearly basis and this formative assessment should be used to track students' progress towards self-improvement in the course of their studies

Taking into account that stakeholders involved in this study placed high importance on the development of personal attributes, short-term measures should be adopted in order to fulfil this need without delay. The Workplace Ethics module, which deals with the development of personal attributes, may be taught overtly during EOP lessons. A similar result is found in Lim et Al. (2011) and they suggest that professional ethics be promoted via covert methods such as weaving ethics into courses throughout the duration of the programme of study.

All in all, graduates who wish to be competitive should fulfil employers' requirements. This study has proved that having good grades or even a good command of English does not guarantee employment for Malaysian graduates. Employers are looking for graduates who carry with them positive personal attributes such as a good positive attitude, integrity, humility, resilience, complaisance, honesty, receptiveness, initiative, willingness to learn, not being individualistic, being optimistic and trustworthiness.

5.3 The need for change in the Malaysian higher education curriculum

While attempting to deal with challenges of globalisation and human capital development, the Malaysian Government has to solve immediate problems such as rising graduate unemployment, declining quality of graduates (in relation to current needs of the private sector), and an inappropriate curriculum (see Ambigapathy and Aniswal, 2005; Morshidi et al. 2003, 2004; UNESCO, 2006). The private sector has argued that public universities are responsible for the number of unemployed graduates. As for higher education, the need to change is essential due to the need to survive and to remain relevant.

It is stated yet again that new graduates in Malaysia are not proficient in the English Language (UNESCO, 2012). They are still not widely marketable in the job market due to poor English language competency, even though it has been admitted that graduates with good English proficiency are vital as manpower in the nation's quest to create a K-economy where the knowledge of the populace would be a pulling factor in attracting foreign direct investment (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2012). Thus, it can be concluded that mastery of English language by graduates is closely related to our economic survival in this era of globalisation. The education system should take serious steps to improve the PCS in English since it is the core 'remedy' to this problem.

A respondent in this research strongly suggested that the Malaysian higher education system should emphasize fluency over accuracy where 'tutorials and assignments given to our graduates need to develop their presentation, interpersonal and non-verbal skills' (G2). A few other human resource managers involved in this study agreed that our HE syllabus does not create ample opportunities for students to try out and practice 'TED¹⁸-like presentations' as well as role-plays in cultivating positive personal attributes. The findings in this research generally agree with those obtained in previous studies. Morshidi et. al's report in Employability of Graduates in Malaysia (UNESCO, 2012) mentions that HEI curricula should be restructured to improve employability. Findings in that report reveal that the employers believe that university curricula should be

¹⁸TED is a nonprofit organisation devoted to 'Ideas Worth Spreading'. It started out in 1984 as a conference bringing together people from three worlds: Technology, Entertainment and Design. TED talks brought forward powerful speakers with extraordinary voices in local communities who have a unique story or an unusual perspective. TED speakers usually convey their ideas which are worth spreading in a dynamic way.

revamped, and that employers should provide input into the subjects being taught. Furthermore, more time should be given to practical experience. Those findings were similar to the findings in this study where respondents stressed the importance of industrial training. Additionally, human resource managers interviewed suggested that lecturers should get real-world industry work experience and convey this experience to their students. In another research study, Sekharan Nair et al. (2012) showed that the current HE syllabus emphasizes workbook drilling to master grammatical accuracy and this causes students to feel at a loss when it comes to real world communication. This reinforces our view that there is a dire need for curriculum designers and policy maker to review the Malaysian HE curriculum and one issue to be considered seriously is the emphasis on fluency over accuracy.

National Higher Education Strategic Plan beyond 2020

In order to foster the development of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia, the Federal Government announced the National Higher Education Strategic Plan beyond 2020 in August 2007. It is the most comprehensive plan launched till date and it intends to transform Malaysian higher education system. It aims to help HEIs achieve world class standard and make Malaysia a hub for higher education in Southeast Asia (Ministry of Higher Education, August 2007). This plan was divided into four phases as follow: Phase I – Laying the foundation (2007 – 2010); Phase II – Strengthening and enhancement (2011-2015); Phase III – Excellence (2016 – 2020) and Phase IV – Glory and sustainability (beyond 2020).

Within the National Higher Education Strategic Plan Phase 2, the seven thrusts had remained as emphasis as HE institutions in Malaysia have to incorporate the key performance indicators outlined in the strategic planning into their institutional agenda and implement a comprehensive strategic plan in line with government strategic planning (MOHE, 2012). The strategic plan focuses on seven strategic thrusts as illustrated at Figure 5.1.

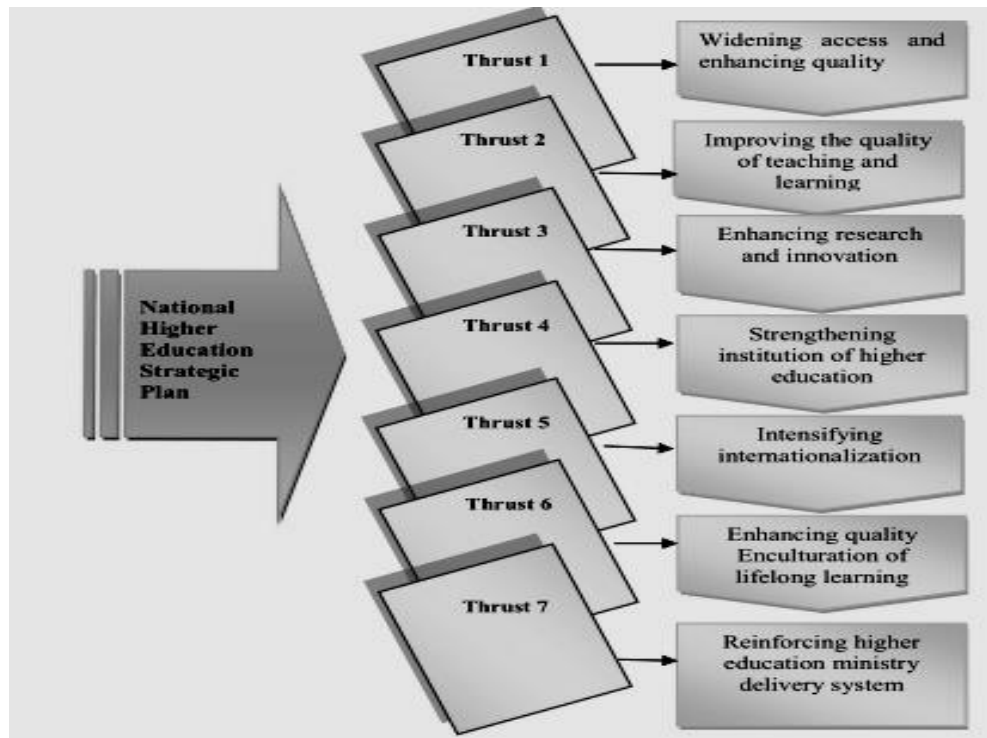


Figure 5. 1 Seven thrusts in National Higher Education Strategic Plan (MOHE, 2012)

From the eye of this research, academia is regarded as the backbone in these efforts to strengthen the national higher education system that will enable Malaysia to achieve its mission of becoming the hub of education in the region. In order to ensure the successful execution of the strategic plan, the government has established 23 Critical Agenda Projects or CAPs, each with its own objectives, indicators and targets (Embi, 2011). This CAP is divided into five pillars: (1) governance (2) leadership (3) Academia (4) T&L and (5) R&D (MOE, 2012). The CAPs also cover other areas such as Apex University agenda, internationalisation, graduate employability, Mybrain 15, lifelong learning, quality assurance, development of holistic students, industry-academia, e-learning, top business school, and centre of excellence, entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer program.

By developing holistic students, this research considers that the Malaysian government has focused their efforts to develop a new learning culture for Malaysian undergraduates, which means that the structural changes in teaching and learning in the university can lead to cultural and higher quality workplace changes. One of the main goals of CAP is to develop and enhance the culture for quality. If structural changes should have any effect on the quality in education, it

depends on the attitudes, values, perception and knowledge from the members of academia, and the students, too, since they must see it as a necessary step to embark on the changes.

This study discovered that though there are jobs being offered, our stakeholders are reluctant to accept graduates since they lack essential qualities. This proves that being knowledgeable in the area of study is not a passport to secure a job anymore. Additionally, respondents mentioned during the interviews that lecturers should be aware of the changing nature of work; much work today requires multi-tasking and technological savvy. A chalk and talk lecture series and working entirely with text books will inhibit graduates ability to meet growing stakeholders' demands. Similar results were found in Ramakrishnan and Yasin (2011), where it is suggested that since most of the Malaysian universities' course contents are based on textbooks, it further strains graduates' ability to fulfil the requirements set by future employers. Their study proposed that interactive coursework should be introduced more and that the course content should not be based on textbooks but on multimedia, which includes networks and hyperlinks. Suggestions in the study by Ramakrishnan and Yasin (2011) are important in ensuring our graduates will be more technologically savvy as required by the respondents from this study. Wise incorporation of emerging and latest technologies into the university curriculum will give rise to a high quality, student-centred learning experience. Research in the field of student-centred learning has shown that students are incapable of constructing their own knowledge in a teacher-centred classroom whereas they are more independent and autonomous if they have experienced being 'active participants' in the classroom, as well as being partners who contribute to reaching the required outcomes of a course or programme (Geven, 2010).

A shift of methods of delivery within higher education from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning in all Malaysian HEIs should be a policy at national level. Having graduates and future workforce as partners in the construction of knowledge is a radically different view to seeing them as consumers, or as individuals who simply reproduce knowledge. The latter is unfortunately the product that the Malaysian HEIs are massively producing currently. Implementing student-centred learning carries several implications which must be confronted in the HE curriculum. Firstly, studies should be organised differently where focus should be centrally given to students' needs. Some practical examples stressed by Geven (2010) are the freedom to choose components within curricula, small classrooms and teaching groups, a low

student-staff ratio and more counselling services (both study and career). On a higher level, it requires a change of practice within the classrooms themselves. Students should learn to become critical citizens, to challenge the status quo. And before teaching the students to become critical, the lecturers have to change their attitudes (Pedersen & Liu, 2003). Training for lecturers is an essential step before embarking into student-centred learning since it cannot be denied that there would be some who are resistant to change. Some of the members of academia interviewed could foresee that some lecturers would appreciate the change as a positive measure that will bring out the best from the graduates; however, there would be others who would not feel the same way. Since curriculum revision requires changes in lecturers' roles and behaviour, some see them as 'additional work, unlearning of old skills and acquiring new ones' (A3). However, the majority of members of academia interviewed in this study agreed that a shift in the curriculum could help in handling expectations and demands on PCS set by stakeholders. The finding is reinforced by the suggestion of Arokiasamy (2010) that at the institutional level, if learning is linked to social change, pedagogy can help reinvent higher education institutions as a community as relevant and positive influences in a sustainable future. Hence, this is more evidence to prove that there is a need for change in the current university curriculum since it gives added value to graduates' academic credentials so that they are able to distinguish themselves from others who hold similar degrees in the competitive labour market.

Discussing the matter of academic staff in Malaysian HEIs, almost all the institutions surveyed indicated that they were short of academic staff, particularly instructors of English for Occupational Purposes courses, as reflected in the high staff to student ratios. This is not a desirable situation and affects the quality of teaching and learning in the institutions. Perhaps a more serious consequence of having academic staff who are over-burdened with teaching and related assignments is that research in the institution suffers. Equally serious is the fact that, inevitably, in the long run, the heavy teaching load and other related duties will take a toll on the health of the staff. With teaching assuming an increasing importance, several of the institutions have realised that it was important to train staff in pedagogical and other skills, especially as they have to deal with large numbers of students. The higher education system in Malaysia is still in a state of flux, and new reforms are required to smoothen the running of the system and to address new developments and challenges (Sirat in UNESCO, 2006).

However, HEIs cannot stand alone in today's market as they cannot handle these new expectations and demands by themselves. Establishing joint labs is a new form of university-industry collaboration. They serve as a new way of improving the quality of teaching and training high-quality talents, which means it is a beneficial supplement to traditional higher education. Industry and HEI collaboration also provides the University with a taste of the 'real world', enabling staff to gain valuable practical experience, and feedbacks that knowledge to students (Karim and Bashur, 1997). As there are a number of factors that cause unemployment among graduates in the job market, there should be immediate action taken by the HEIs. HEIs need to re-engineer the current curriculum to supply quality graduates to satisfy stakeholders' needs in the job market. Needs analysis should be carried out regularly in order to understand the current needs of stakeholders. The following section will further deliberate on ways forward for all the stakeholders to work hand in hand in overcoming the issues of the serious lack of PCS among our graduates.

5.3.1 Creativity in teaching and learning in higher education.

With English language becoming compulsory to pass by all undergraduates in higher education beginning 2015 (Mohd Najib in the 2015 Budget Speech), there could not be a better time to find inspiration in language teaching and learning. Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia has been trying to encourage higher education teachers and subject communities to consider the role of creativity in students' learning and their experiences of learning (MOHE, 2011b).

The concept of creativity in general is still difficult to define, in spite of numerous empirical investigations within different scientific disciplines and qualitative ones within human and social sciences. Carter (2004) presents an overview of the construct from a variety of perspectives including psychological, pragmatic, psychometric, psychodynamic, biographical, cognitive and sociocultural approaches. His conclusion is that a "systems" approach, which takes into consideration the multiple components of creativity, is probably the most valuable one. Csíkszentmihályi is also positive that 'Creativity is not the product of single individuals, but of social systems making judgments about individuals' products' (cited in Carter 2004: 37). One of the numerous definitions claims: 'Creativity is an all-pervasive feature of everyday language. ... Linguistic creativity is not simply a property of exceptional people but an exceptional property of

all people' (Carter 2004: 13). Zawada (2006) claims that this view fails to account for the ability of all human beings to create and innovate in various ways and for various motivations. Similarly to Carter (2004), Maybin and Swann (2007) also talk about the democratization of creativity and examine recent work by researchers who claim that creativity in language is not only a property of especially skilled and gifted language users, but is pervasive in routine everyday practice. Language users who creatively design meaning are the focus of attention, with the consequence of interactional functions of creativity being demonstrated during or after lessons.

Looking at the data drawn in this research, it is suggested that linguistic creativity and language teaching should not be separated in L2 classroom discourse. If language instructors looked for real life sample sentences to illustrate ambiguity in literary sources instead of relying on examples from grammar books, they would make an important step in combining literature and language teaching. L2 learners' literary and linguistic knowledge ought to be exploited in an interactive way in order to offer them the possibility to become not only better users of the second or foreign language but also better human beings. In case creativity is applied to teaching, old issues are dealt with in new ways, in which workplace setting and language play may function as language teaching and learning tools contributing to intellectually challenging, pedagogically stimulating and enjoyable lessons. Creativity in language learning energizes students to think and to use language in new ways. Sadow (2010) highlighted that by injecting stories and humour whenever possible, motivation grows and develops. Hence, if language instructors use them regularly, the group, pair, and single-person activities allow students to communicate on a vast array of subjects and try on an endless series of linguistic strategies.

The main finding of this element of the research is that it is not appropriate to separate employability-related projects from other learning and teaching initiatives; rather they should integrate within the student learning experience. There should be a direct alignment between employability learning for all and institutional strategies. It is believed from the data gathered from this research that the new employability agenda for higher education should consist of a matrix of inter-related areas and requires an holistic approach with institutional strategies driving the implementation of employability across the curriculum. This research suggests that it should involve:

- i. Curriculum integration of employability skills
- ii. Extra-curricular activities (work experience, volunteering and personal development planning)
- iii. Vocational and work based provision
- iv. Partnerships with employers
- v. Research and innovation

The boundaries between these areas become more permeable and there is a move towards integration and collaboration. This collaborative culture fosters the continuing professional development of students, academic staff, graduates, employees and employers at the workplace.

Within the classroom practice in higher education, creativity may be applied by choosing stimulating materials and tasks, developing a critical approach to the foreign or second language linguistic and cultural space. By making them active participants, while connecting them with valuable meaningful tasks and practices, both instructors' and students' creativity are utilized in promoting transferable skills. This can be best nurtured through a combination of analysis of language macro- and micro-features with direct language experience and practice based on spoken and written texts and their contexts. Incremental progression and cyclical revision will facilitate consolidation and further creative development, for example by using task based learning and problem based learning. Creativity challenges language instructors and students to be involved in taking risks (as opposed to the 'reproduction' paradigm that implies a more secure and unchallenging method).

Classroom practice can capitalise on the creative materials. Through authentic texts students will be experiencing the target language as it occurs naturally as well as the pragmatics, that is, interpretation of its utterances in context. This can be enhanced by spoken texts with a visual component as found typically in television broadcasts and films, where speakers and listeners can be seen in an interpersonal context and non-verbal phenomena can be observed which reinforce the verbal exchanges, such as paralinguistic functions of gesture, facial expression and body language. Students will also receive explicit information for a more conscious learning of the semantic, grammatical and phonological characteristics of the target language, which is English. With this compounded assistance, students can themselves be creative in their foreign or second language learning process.

5.3.2 Student-Centred Learning in the Malaysian HE Institutions.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning is the second thrust out of the seven strategic thrusts of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan. This second thrust, as outlined by the Ministry of Higher Education, generally aims to produce confident students with a sense of balance and proportion. To realise this national aspiration, holistic programmes that cut across all disciplines and focus on communication and entrepreneurial skills need to be designed. In addition, dynamic and relevant curriculum and pedagogy must be reviewed and enhanced, along with benchmarking both components with leading international institutions. At both school and university levels world-wide, and currently in Malaysia, there has been a call for a move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning. Why? The answer is simply the need to provide students with learning opportunities that promote creative and critical thinking, active student engagement, value judgement, and transferable skills especially in preparing the undergraduates for the workplace.

The concept of student-centred learning (SCL) began to emerge as early as 1905. It was first introduced by Hayward, taken up by Dewey in 1956, and later expanded into a general theory of education by Rogers and other prominent educationists such as Froebel, Piaget and Knowles. According to Brandes and Ginnis (1986: 12) in their book *A Guide to Student-Centred Learning*, the main principles of student-centred learning are:

- The learner has full responsibility for his/her learning
- Involvement and participation are necessary for learning
- The relationship between learners is more equal, promoting growth and development
- The teacher becomes a facilitator and resource person
- The learner experiences confluence in his education (affective and cognitive domains flow together)
- The learner sees him/herself differently as a result of the learning experience.

In a nutshell, through such learning, learners will transform their passive role into a more active one, consider their own paths in learning, and establish a mutual relationship with their language instructors. Additionally, in SCL, many instructors use a reflexive approach, which is the act of self-creating, self-adjusting and self- reconsidering the process of learning and its outcome for

the benefit of both teachers and learners. Apart from that, learners are engaged in authentic tasks. They are given specially allocated time on tasks about real life situations, to participate actively and personalize their thinking towards better considerations. Other approaches include multiple forms of scaffolding, which is the use of higher level thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation during self-organized learning. This helps prepare learners' mind at being deliberately alert to how they think, feel, operate and consciously adjust their learning so it is aligned and relevant to their level of interest and competency. Instructors also use various modes of communication to lead learners in adjusting the task difficulty level to match their own competency. This would boost active communication between teacher-learners and learners-learners. In meeting diverse learners needs, the instructor need to do some planning for lessons, bearing in mind the various discrepancies among individual learners. Positively, instructors should use learners' differences well and blend them together by assigning teamwork activities and encouraging them to verbalize thought with other teammates. In addition, hands-on approaches are encouraged and a cross-cultural teaching lesson is adopted to meet the different custom for standard behaviour, rites, symbols and values of learners by allowing them to share, define, describe and preserve their respective culture through their own eyes.

In light of the findings and discussion of the study, the following recommendations are advanced. Firstly, instructors need to apply constructive alignment in their courses and programme designs. To achieve this, it is proposed that training that emphasizes on the practice of reviewing the curriculum, delivery and assessment be given to all university lecturers. The teaching and learning centre or the centre of academic development of each HE institutions should take the leading role in providing such training to all university lecturers. This should be done continuously to ensure quality of both the curriculum and the teaching and learning process.

Secondly, instructors should strive to engage learners actively in classroom activities, especially in the use of technology. While many indicated that they use technology frequently, they are not using it to the fullest extent possible. Training has to be conducted not on how to use Learning Management Systems per se but on how to integrate technology into their teaching and learning process. Thirdly, in doing so, it is important that instructors understand the role of an SCL instructor so as to provide a rich environment to learners. Without interaction and accountability

on the part of the learners, active learning will not take place. It is critical that instructors must have a plan before actual learning sessions, as this will heighten achievement of the objectives in the later stage of the lesson. Planning and preparation before class is essential to ensure learning objectives are met. It is essential for language instructors to put in more efforts into getting students to be involved in higher order learning. Activities that require students to brainstorm and solve problems may develop this much needed skills. Additionally, case studies and the problem based learning (PBL) approach will contribute to the development of higher order thinking skills as students will have to apply, analyse and make judgements.

Searches in the Internet on PBL in EOP have produced limited results or links to the use of PBL in teaching language skills in EOP. However, as reviewed earlier, according to Duffy and Cunningham (2007) and Sim (2006), if PBL can be used successfully in the domains of medicine, it can also be used in other domains, and in this instance, in EOP. Besides that, Ramakrishnan and Yasin (2011) experimenting with PBL in EAP also produced very favourable results in enhancing learner-centred classroom and self-directed learning. The core feature of the use of PBL in learning the language skills in an EOP classroom will be learning the language skills in the context of solving related problems.

Murray-Harvey et al. (2004) state that the approach in PBL which is based on the constructivist's principles of teaching and learning will ensure a successful learning outcome of the target content, and a development of the generic skills such as higher order thinking skills, problem-solving skills, thinking skills, teamwork skills, communication skills, time management skills, and information skills (Malek, Karim, Othman, Mohin, & Abdul Rahman, 2013). They add that these qualities which are fostered through PBL are much sought after by employers, and graduates should not be found lacking in any of them. Therefore, by tackling EOP syllabus using PBL method, it will satisfy the needs of the stakeholders. This step is also in line with the Malaysian National Higher Education Plan whereby it suggested HE institutions to re-engineer the current curriculum to supply quality graduates since HEI plays a very important role in producing good quality workforce for government and industry. The stakeholders will then make full use of these products to become more competitive in the local and international market.

5.4 The way forward: Working together

Since the early 1990s, the Malaysian government has argued that universities should make a greater contribution to raising the global competitiveness of the Malaysian economy (Mahathir, 1991). In the 1990s, HEI were encouraged to engage more fully in the regional development agenda and government decided to play a more active role in encouraging greater collaboration between business and higher education. The National Higher Education Plan 2007-2010 recognises that higher education has a potentially critical role to play as one of the key drivers of productivity growth through knowledge transfer between universities and businesses. The government made it clear that stronger partnerships would be encouraged between HEI and other agencies charged with promoting economic development.

Malaysian HE institutions offer a number of products, services and ‘outputs’, ranging from graduates, the facilitation of workplace learning and professional development, through to research and consultancy (Embi, 2011). For university-employer engagement to take place there needs to be a degree of accord between supply and demand. Employer demand for a particular service needs to be matched by university supply. To date, the most obvious form of employer engagement with HEI is through the recruitment of graduates. Observing a gap between what employers want (or think they want) and what is supplied by HEI is not a new finding (Jacob, Huui, & Ing, 2000; G. Kaur & Singh, 2008; H. Lim, 2008). A key issue here is the extent to which a systematic link between employers and HEI can be established.

This study suggests that having the stakeholders to launch more formal graduate programmes can lead to more active engagement with HEI in terms of the recruitment process, for example by dealing with HEI careers services or attending careers fairs. More significant levels of engagement involve situations in which employers contribute to the learning process in educational institutions in regard to:

- funding;
- work placements;
- standard setting;
- course design;
- assessment;
- involvement in / contribution to teaching, lecturing or workshops;

- releasing staff for workforce development activities.

In addition to the production of skills, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2013-2025 identifies research and development, and knowledge and technology transfer as key areas in which employers and universities need to interact if Malaysia wants to be globally competitive. Based on the UK experience, a link with an individual university department in response to a specific business need was the most common way by which employers had become involved with the development of courses and the undergraduate curriculum (Hogarth et al., 2007). Applying this in a Malaysian context is seen as beneficial to all parties involved. Employers' engagement with an HEI may reduce the search and productivity costs of graduate recruitment in a number of ways. By engaging with an HEI by creating a benchmark or standard setting within the course design, employers may be able to indirectly groom the suitable graduates. Additionally, with their vast experience in the industry, their involvement in lecturing, teaching or sharing sessions during workshops will be invaluable in preparing the graduates for the workplace. Such engagement might take the form of establishing relationships with selected HEIs that offer specific and relevant degree programmes, by establishing channels by which selected graduates are directed towards the employer for possible recruitment or by establishing opportunities by which the employer can try out potential graduate recruits (for instance through work placements). For the employers, the benefit of such engagement can reduce costs of recruitment (for instance by eliminating much of the need to screen large numbers of applicants and reducing some of the need to select amongst graduates). Potential gains to employers come in the form of greater productivity and lower turnover costs arising from a better match between a recruit and the needs of the business.

At its best, employer-HEI engagement is a mutually beneficial relationship with both business and universities reaping rewards from the link. Employers that engaged with HEIs may reap a number of business benefits. These included access to:

- a supply of skilled graduates and post-graduates for recruitment;
- highly skilled scientists and researchers;
- the latest research and cutting-edge technology;
- international networks of academics; and
- continuing professional development for their staff and management.

On the other hand, HEIs also stand to benefit from links with employers and business. The benefits of an employer-HEI link include:

- an enhanced role in regional and national economic development;
- access to funding not earmarked for specific purposes;
- access to research funding;
- access to real world problems and an opportunity to market ideas;
- access to new facilities and equipment;
- incentives to recruit, reward, and retain academic staff.

Additionally, one of the contributions of this study is the framework of the core PCS in English as identified by Malaysian stakeholders. Without consensus on a shared competency framework, teaching English for Occupational Purposes courses remains haphazard, resulting in the production of graduates with varying communication skills for the workplace. It has been argued that ‘only with good definitions and true understanding of the types of ‘collaborator’ competencies we expect our professional trainees to demonstrate will we be able to teach and evaluate this construct more successfully’ (Suter et al., 2009, p. 98). This would imply a shared understanding of PCS and its core elements. Furthermore, to take PCS a step forward, to adequately equip a quality Malaysian workforce which meets the challenges and demands of the new age labour market, ‘the nexus between output of graduates and industry needs, the university and the workplace, and the higher education system and the lifelong learning system needs to be further strengthened’ (Lim et. al., 2011, p. 45).

The PCS framework can contribute to the development of Malaysia’s quality education by supporting and students and HE institutions’ lecturers with a list of communication skills in English to be mastered before graduating in order to be highly employable. The framework can equip them with a coherent and comprehensive checklist of necessary communication skills in English as demanded by stakeholders. A respondent of this study stated strongly that steps should be taken ‘to improve English proficiency and competencies even at earlier stages in the lives of young persons’ (A2). Another suggested that more ‘hard work and strong passion’ (G1) are needed in education our graduates, ‘especially those who came from the villages’ (A1). This parallels Noor Azina (2011) who says that challenges are more pronounced for graduates who originate from rural areas because they are less exposed to speaking in English and almost all of

them study in public universities where Bahasa Malaysia is used as the medium of instructions. However, many of these shortcomings can be overcome if the government, academia and employers are ready to work together to move forward. In order to do so, during the interview sessions the stakeholders were invited to contribute their thoughts and viewpoints on some practical considerations on how to improve our graduates' PCS. Their considerations on ways to move forward are listed below. It must be mentioned that some of these findings closely match those in previous studies (Gill, 1999; G. Kaur & Singh, 2008; S. Kaur & Alla Baksh, 2010; Omar, Abdul Manaf, Helma Mohd, Che Kassim & Abd. Aziz, 2012; Rasul et al., 2009; SCANS, 1991; Shafie & Nayan, 2010; Sirat, Jamaludin, Lee, & Leong, 2007; Wahi, 2012).

Suggestions for policymakers:

1. Establish, as a highly important national goal, a policy that every student should complete secondary school possessing sufficient employability skills, particularly the basic PCS both in BM and English, as well as enhance the development of personal attributes from primary school.
2. Necessitate all HEIs and schools to include components for teaching up to date PCS.
3. Design a standardised national assessment that permits educational institutions to certify the levels of employability competencies, particularly the PCS that the students have achieved.
4. Assist and encourage continual research by researchers in HEIs of ways to enhance PCS by involving schools, HEIs, employers and other stakeholders.
5. Continuous professional development support from the Ministry of Education to increase teachers' and instructors' competence in teaching PCS.

Suggestions for schools/HEIs administrators:

1. Include the development of PCS among the explicitly stated institutions' goals.
2. Create meaningful programmes which are long-term and in-depth, where students can practice their PCS regularly and properly guided for an extended period.
3. Structure programmes in keeping with local needs i.e. programmes should reflect the kinds of employers in the community and local environment requires. More places for training and practicum should be available.

4. Solve the issue of large teacher to student ratios in order for students to obtain better attention and support. Small groups would learn better, especially in aspects of PCS in English.
5. Provide support for instructors including setting up professional development courses to improve their pedagogy techniques in teaching PCS, allow interdisciplinary projects so students can apply PCS using their subject content knowledge, and fully support the PCS instructors in generating meaningful materials for teaching PCS courses.
6. Create a standardised performance assessment to be used across disciplines in order for graduates to add in information to be submitted to prospective employers.
7. Supply detailed documents for supervisors on expectations of what is to be learned during industrial training. Documents should include the PCS skills and personal attributes. This is to emphasise to the students the importance of employability skill development both at school and at the workplace.

Suggestions for teachers/educators/language instructors:

1. Accommodate stakeholders' requirements as stated in the PCS framework by creating modules or lessons that replicate key features of the real workplace setting; assign students tasks and role plays similar to communication used at the workplace.
2. Instil and strengthen the values valued by stakeholders, namely positive personal attributes and strong competence in PCS, even more highly than job specific skills, to ensure employability.
3. Motivate students and actively communicate with them to practice their PCS regularly, inside and outside English language classrooms; provide monitoring and encouragement to help them achieve success.
4. Practice what you preach. Express excellent work values through classroom instruction. Model attention to quality, thoroughness and a positive attitude.
5. Provide feedback and healthy criticism in guiding students to be creative employees by offering a good appraisal system, for instance, peer mentor-mentee programmes.
6. Be creative in transmitting knowledge and fulfilling learning objectives set by policy makers by exploring real working life instructional strategies, as opposed to textbooks and a rigid syllabus.

7. Facilitate students to realise their strengths and positive qualities and build on them.
8. Participate in professional development activities that enhance delivery in teaching PCS and other employability skills.

Suggestions for employers:

1. Create a direct link with schools and HEIs to communicate the critical importance of instilling employability skills in students by instituting short seminars, talks, workshops and free consultations. Mock interview sessions with real human resource managers and talks on what they expect in the curriculum vitae and resumes will accentuate the students' learning experience.
2. Collaborate with local schools and HEIs to provide learning experiences that will foster students' development of employability skills. Allow students to participate in high quality industrial training programmes.
3. Cater to professional development support for employees' PCS by developing internal training programmes to equip present employees with the full range of basic, higher order and affective employability skills.

All in all, in order to improve graduates' PCS, it should start from school. Programmes designed should always be relevant to the needs of industry. Respondents in this study believe that industrial training and practical work experiences are two important elements that contribute to learning, as well as constant visits to the industry workplaces and vice versa. The strong networking between industry and HEIs creates better and meaningful learning experience since many applications towards theoretical components can be practiced and more contemporary knowledge currently practiced at the workplace can be brought into the classroom. To conclude, it must be stressed that students themselves need to understand the importance of equipping themselves with PCS and positive personal attributes to stay competitive. Students who are serious in improving their employability skills can obtain and strengthen their work-readiness by going through industrial training or practical training or by getting help from the place of study to gain the ability to apply knowledge effectively in their future workplace or even by working part-time during their university lives.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present a discussion of the findings in this study. The key findings of this study were discussed according to the significant themes that emerged and were explained in the context of the existing body of knowledge pertaining to English language workplace literacies and employers' expectations with regard to English language. Whenever possible, the findings of this study were compared with previous findings in the literature. The discussion has covered a number of points worth reiterating: the balance of breadth and depth of strong communicative competence voiced by the stakeholders; the stakeholders' great interest on the development of graduates' personal attributes; the need for change in the Malaysian higher education syllabus; as well as some discussion on ways to move forward, on how to work together to improve the current situation, as suggested by the literature and research findings.

“The measure of greatness in a scientific idea is the extent to which it stimulates thought and opens up new lines of research.” (Dirac, 1968, p. 15).

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis and is presented in three main sections. It begins by providing an overview of the study, the aims, design, key findings and parameters of the research. Next, the chapter presents a discussion of the original contributions this study makes to the extant knowledge on English language academic literacies. The chapter ends with the implications of the findings for theory, practice and future research that may be of interest to academic researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

6.1 Overview of the study

The purpose of this research was to develop a Professional Communication Skills (PCS) in English Framework. Building on the investigation using stakeholders’ perspectives on their needs and requirements of fresh graduates, the researcher hoped to develop their insights into a practical PCS in English framework, which could be applied directly in EOP classes in HEIs. This study is appropriate and imperative in the present context of Malaysia since there much concern about the quality of graduates who have failed to meet the expectations of prospective employers on account of their deficiencies in communicating in English. This study was prompted by the need to a provide quality learning experience in EOP classes. The needs analysis is also important in order for HEIs to produce future graduates with adequate skills and

abilities to meet the demands and standards of the local and international workforce for high quality human capital development (MOHE, 2009).

6.1.1 Research aims

The aim of this study was twofold. First, it intended to define PCS by looking at the needs and requirements of Malaysian employers, the government and academia. This component explored the common practices involving English language communication carried out at the workplace in the public and private sectors in Malaysia. The requirements and suggestions of the stakeholders would help to fulfil the fundamental objective of this study which was to determine the key definition of professional communication skills identified by Malaysian stakeholders for successful workplace function.

Secondly, after taking into account the various needs and requirements of Malaysian stakeholders on the essential English communication skills for the workplace, a PCS framework in English was developed. Subsequently, the PCS framework was brought to the stakeholders' attention again for validation. In addition, in order to ensure that the framework produced is not only validated but also achievable, several experts in the field of teaching English in higher education institutions would look thoroughly through the framework. Peer debriefing process was an essential step in assuring validity in this qualitative study.

6.1.2 Research design

Given its primary objective to generate understanding of the topic under study through the lenses of the key stakeholders, the qualitative case study approach couched within the interpretivist paradigm was employed for data collection and data analysis in this study. The direct voices of Malaysian stakeholders have been given limited coverage and have rarely been heard in previous research. The perspectives of the stakeholders were collected primarily from ten Human Resource managers, three government officers who were in charged of recruiting new staff for public service departments and seven English language instructors from Malaysian academia. Data was collected by means of in-depth interviews. Complementing these data were annual reports as well as Malaysian government official reports. In the tradition of qualitative research, the data were read reiteratively and analysed rigorously through a deductive process of

identifying the recurring and salient themes using the Communication Competence Model as the basis.

Since an abundance of data was expected and collected, soft systems methodology (SSM) was applied in order to deal with complex organisational and hierarchical situations where those involved may lack of common agreement. SSM offers the best solution by giving all parties a proper stage to voice their opinion. It promotes shared thinking and helps to persuade people to work together and find common ground. The rigorous steps in the methodology force explicitness and promote creative and stimulating thinking. It helps to structure problematic situations which are complex and messy when the information given during the collection of data is overwhelming. All in all, SSM applied in this research was important in making the study doable and meaningful at the same time.

6.1.3 Research findings

This study has been able to give informed answers to the guiding research questions set out at the beginning of this thesis. The key findings that have emerged from the data of this study are summarised and presented below according to the research questions.

a) What are stakeholders and theoretical identified communication constructs that support the development of a PCS in English framework?

In this study, it is confirmed that high grades and excellent results on the graduates' transcripts, , are not highly regarded by employers, but they correlate positively with attributes that are valued. Essentially, the findings draw attention to the overall perceptions shared by the participants of this study of the importance of breadth and depth of strong communicative competence as a shared responsibility by schools and HEIs. The responsibility cannot be left alone to HEIs. The Malaysian education system should respond to this issue of the lack of competence of our graduates in mastering English for the workplace by introducing syllabi that cater to this from the very beginning of the school system.

The findings highlighted stakeholders' scepticism of the English that is being taught to potential employees and about how useful and practical it is for employment purposes and industry growth. They stressed the inclusion of detailed productive and receptive skills in the PCS framework since these communication strategies need to be mastered in order for our graduates

to be high quality human capital for Malaysia. A pedagogical shift from text-books to instructional working-life strategies, preferably internet related, were seen as important by the respondents. Additionally, lecturers and English instructors in HEIs were advised to model the correct PCS and allow more opportunities to practice them in and out of the lecture rooms.

It was stated in Chapter 5 that one of the important steps to be taken in order to improve students' PCS was to make some essential transformation in the Malaysian HE syllabus. The mastery of the English language by graduates is closely related to our economic survival in this era of globalisation. The education system should take serious steps to improve the PCS in English since it is the core 'remedy' to this problem. The current HEI curriculum did not impress the stakeholders, looking at its end product. Stakeholders suggested that the Malaysian higher education system should emphasize fluency over accuracy. Employers should provide input into the subjects being taught. Furthermore, more time should be given to practical experience. The current HE syllabus which emphasizes workbook drilling to master grammatical accuracy should be stopped since it causes students to be at a loss when it comes to real world communication. This reinforced our view that there is a dire need for curriculum designers and policy maker to review the Malaysian HE curriculum; one issue to be scrutinised is the emphasis on fluency over accuracy.

Subsequently, issues of overcrowded classrooms in HEIs emerged from the discussions with stakeholders. Employers faced the same issue of the having to cater to a massive supply of graduates against limited workplace vacancies. The study then highlighted the importance of the Ministry of Education, policy makers and industry to look closely at the role of HEIs; whether the role of HEIs is similar to that of a factory, producing massive amounts of workers for the labour market or they could be the birthplace of select intellectual graduates with high level skills and desirable personal attributes. With a large student load in each lecture, limited time and strict curricular mandates as is the present case, differentiated instruction during teaching is near impossible.

b) What are stakeholders' assessments of the relevance of the PCS framework?

Subsequently after interviewing the stakeholders and preliminary findings were formed, member checking and peer debriefing processes were held. During these sessions, more in-depth discussions on the PCS for the Malaysian workplace were clarified. One of the most frequently raised issues was graduates' personal attributes. Contrary to expectations, most of the respondents of this study insisted that personal attributes like positive attitude, integrity, humility, resilience, complaisance, honesty, receptiveness, initiative, willingness to learn, not being individualistic and capable of working with others, optimism and trustworthiness were rated more important than communicating fluently in the English Language and good grades. Hence, policymakers at the national level should ensure, as a highly important national educational goal, that every student complete school education possessing sufficient employability skills, and prioritise the development of personal attributes as early as in primary school. From the preceding point it is clear that stakeholders required personal attributes of graduates in HEIs to be more objectively measured. These demands should be catered to and given greater emphasis since it is a fundamental factor in the employability for entry-level employees.

6.1.4 Research parameters

The disparity that exists between the actual performance of Malaysian graduates pertaining to their English language literacy and competencies and the demand for the English language and literacy in the academic and workforce worlds was investigated in this study. The stakeholders' views, expectations and requirements of prospective employees have been demonstrated to be robust and thorough, as reflected by the participants in this study. As an outsider to the employer communities, the researcher attempted to explore the specific PCS in English required by the stakeholders from the graduates. In doing this, consistent with the interpretive stance of this study, the qualitative approach to inquiry was chosen to facilitate an in-depth and detailed understanding of the needs of the stakeholders.

As with all such studies, there are limitations that offer opportunities for further research. This study was not able to delve in-depth into EOP practitioners' perceptions on the PCS framework in English. Only a few English language lecturers and a few experts who were involved as

participants of this study gave their input on the practicality of the PCS Framework. Much work remains to be done on the feasibility of applying the PCS in HEIs. Unfortunately, at present, such a goal seems remote.

Another aspect of this study which the researcher considers as an important limitation was her inability to ascertain PCS in English required by medium and small industries. It was a considerable challenge to collect data for the present study and it was impractical to add more participants. However, future studies could explore the requirements of small and medium industries as well as the insights of English language practitioners in HEIs to provide a broader perspective and a more comprehensive picture of the stakeholders' overall requirement for English language workplace literacies. It has to be emphasised that the findings and conclusions of this study can only be generalised to the population from which the sample of interest has been drawn. However, the notion of 'transferability' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 67) or 'proximal similarity' (Patton, 2002, p. 99) may be applied to generalise the findings with similar contexts, though caution must be exercised with the transfer of findings given the limited number of participants in the present study. Studies of a larger number of participants are deemed necessary to consolidate the findings. Applying mixed methods may confirm and enhance the findings of this study.

Practical implementation of the PCS framework in English in EOP courses in Malaysian HEIs poses a number of problems. Since the stakeholders provided an exhaustive list of requirements for the entry-level employee, it may seem impossible to teach everything needed within a course. To put the framework into practice was beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, further work is required in order to implement the PCS framework in Malaysian HEIs.

6.2 Substantial and original contribution to knowledge

The present study has yielded findings that add an original contribution to both the theory and practice of English language literacies, focussing on the higher education level. Firstly, it adds to the broader view of workplace literacies by revealing the English language literacy practices in a professional setting situated in a Malaysian context. This study has provided conclusive evidence by documenting Malaysian stakeholders' requirements of workplace literacies for the graduates, scrutinising the findings and developing a practical PCS framework in English using a

Communication Competence Model (Morealle, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007) as its point of departure. Previously, these skills (i.e. cognitive competence, cultural competence, critical thinking, tasking skills and motivation) were usually treated separately from workplace literacies (Idrus et al., 2010; S. Kaur & Alla Baksh, 2010; Pandian & Abd Ghani, 2005; Shah, 2011; UNESCO, 2012). This study differs from previous research in that the skills suggested were treated in parallel with each other. Additionally, since the participants involved in this study came from a variety of professions, it creates a standardised and generic template for all courses in HEIs and can be applied across the board. Future research can delve into PCS in English for specific careers by using the current outcome as a foundation. Hence, the development of the PCS in English framework represents one of the main contributions of this study.

Secondly, since many EOP courses in Malaysian HEIs are taught differently, without clear direction provided by industry or government agencies, this study has made a contribution towards providing a PCS framework which may work as a guide for policy makers in HEIs to improve and update their courses. Besides emphasising the four language skills in fostering learners' communicative competence, it introduces skills, motivation and knowledge as other key constructs in producing competent employee. Locating these key constructs in the PCS framework would help graduates be effective and appropriate communicators, as required by the stakeholders. This contributes to the existing body of knowledge and the findings of the present study can make a significant contribution to policy makers, educators and researchers alike, interested in finding solutions to graduates' unemployment issues.

Thirdly, this study has uncovered an implicit aspect that is unique to the context of this study of Malaysian graduates' workplace literacies practices and competencies. It has led to the key insight and sheds light on the stakeholders' urgent need of graduates, not just equipped with PCS in English, but also with certain essential professional attributes or qualities. Stakeholders in this research require future employees to have good, positive attitudes alongside strong PCS in English.

Fourthly, this study may stimulate debate on the use of soft system methodology (SSM) in the field of education. As suggested by Morreale et. al., 'communication assessment has become a permanent part of the fabric of academic life in higher education' (2011, p. 269). Current EOP

courses must be subjected to periodic review; hence an in-depth needs analysis is required. This review is essential to deal with issues of skills mismatches as mentioned earlier in the statement of the problem in Chapter One (see heading 1.2 Statement of the Problem). It is clear that in addition to the views already expressed, views of stakeholders are essential to capture a complete picture of the current problematic situation. Since SSM encourages learning and understanding of human activities, its use in this study has gone some way towards explaining the complex and dynamic interacting web of ideas and views of stakeholders' in defining PCS. This, to the researcher's knowledge, is the first time that SSM has been used in Malaysia to assess a course.

In addition, It was mentioned in Chapter Two (see heading 2.1.5), that past studies on workplace communication skills mainly employed survey methods without qualitative in-depth attempts to further explore stakeholders' perspectives and experience with English language communication. In-depth interviews helped to unfold the needs and requirements of the stakeholders with thorough descriptions that explained and gave meaning and solutions to the current problem. This approach addressed criticisms over the lack of authentic voices from across the spectrum of stakeholders on the acquisition of professional English communication skills at the workplace, as pointed out by Kassim and Ali (2010). Furthermore, before this there has not been any study that was concerned predominantly with both workplace communication skills and workplace literacy in English. Therefore, this study helps to fill in the gap in the literature by providing qualitative insights into stakeholders' practices and their requirement with regard to communicating in English at the workplace, especially at entry-level. This study provides conclusive evidence of PCS since it sought answers to the issues by examining the problem itself and by having the 'problem-solvers' or the key informants to share their insight and experiences, utilising a qualitative research method. Hence, building on the theories and implications informed by previous research, this study turns towards developing an essential yet absent framework on professional communication skills in ESL for Malaysian HEIs.

Last but not least, research in workplace literacies, as stated earlier in Chapter Two, has been concerned less with examining students' English language literacy practices and competencies for workplace life; rather it has gone a long way in unpacking the more generic lists of competencies for students to achieve. Despite the great lack of competence demonstrated in these skills, they are unfortunately not universally articulated as learning goals in current higher

education curricula. This study has identified more clearly the underlying elements of workplace literacy practices. They were included as an integral part of the PCS Framework in English In this study

6.3 Implications

The findings of this study have implications for future research, policy and HEIs practices.

6.3.1 Suggestions for future research

The results of this study suggest a number of new avenues for research. The current study contributes new knowledge and new dimensions to the understanding of the PCS in English as required by stakeholders. Research on HE students' English language workplace literacies in Malaysia is still scarce and there are still broad opportunities for further research. This study provides a basis for such research agendas through its in-depth study of English language workplace literacies for employability as demanded by multi-national companies, government agencies and academia in Malaysia. This study is an opening for other researchers interested in delving into the topic further with regard to specific professions, for example, PCS in English for Medical Graduates, Accountants, Counsellors, English Teachers, the Police Force, to name a few. Additionally, similar studies to the one reported here need to be carried out periodically to ensure stakeholders' requirements are up-to-date, and also to further confirm or contradict conclusions made in this study.

As mentioned earlier, this study employed a qualitative approach. This implies that application of the quantitative or mixed method approach to gather data from a larger numbers of participants, including small and medium sized companies, is deemed necessary since it can provide empirical validation of the constructs within the PCS framework. Additionally, this study can also be replicated to discover the PCS required by stakeholders in Bahasa Malaysia, French, Arabic, Mandarin, Tamil or other languages used all around the world. To discover the similarities and differences between the PCS required in different languages might highlight the issues of inter-cultural awareness in the context of the workplace.

In practical terms, possible research designs to test the feasibility of implementing the PCS framework in Malaysian HEIs with extended empirical examination which includes views of

EOP instructors as well as the achievements of graduating students' would complement the knowledge generated from this study. Multi case studies or action research can be carried out to ascertain the practicality of the PCS framework in English. Additionally, research on course assessment may be carried out to compare what current EOP courses offer in Malaysian HEIs with what is proposed in the PCS in English framework in this study. Another practical study that can be carried out to enhance the findings of this study is to design a survey for current graduates, to investigate their perceptions of their level of achievement based on what the stakeholders have suggested in the PCS framework.

Looking at the handling of the data validation process, on-line video conferencing is an important option for other researchers to consider. Since face-to-face meetings are important to promote collaborative and fruitful discussion, technology such as video conferencing could allow researchers to carry out the member checking and peer debriefing process in a more practical manner. There were times during this research that meetings were needed to be rescheduled a few times due to participants' work schedules or location. Hence, optimising the facilities of on-line video conferencing would allow the researcher and participants to benefit from both verbal and non-verbal communication in face-to-face meetings.

Finally, since this study has looked into the notion of motivation, future research should look into more practical solutions on ways to motivate students in HEI classrooms. Since this construct was found essential in this study, more in-depth research on motivation in relation to making EOP classes more interesting and meaningful should be carried out.

6.3.2 Implications for policy and practice

As a way to improve the PCS of graduates and go beyond current limitations, the researcher wishes to make the following points with regard to policy and practice:

Firstly, this study contributes previously unexplored insights into the concerns and experiences of Malaysian stakeholders in relation to the teaching of English language workplace literacies at tertiary level and, consequently, in meeting the expectations of potential employers after graduation. The study suggests that English language workplace literacy learning is complex and highly contextualised, particularly in the multilingual context of education in Malaysia. The

findings indicate the need for policy makers and educators alike to understand the requirements of stakeholders in order to have graduates who are equipped with PCS before venturing into the .

This may well imply that workplace literacies teaching and learning should not be confined to HEIs, but should be taught at every level of the Malaysian education system. Given the dominant role of English for understanding and constructing knowledge, the mastery of the language among students of all ages is deemed necessary as this will also enhance their employment prospects. A strong constant education system which is continuous from pre-school to tertiary level is central to building language competency in individuals. Inconsistencies in the educational model in Malaysia might have contributed to the deterioration of English language proficiency level of Malaysian learners in schools and universities over the last thirty years. In order to ameliorate the situation and ensure the products of the Malaysian education system are successfully employable, findings from this study might offer good indicators of what is actually needed by stakeholders and needs to be implemented in the curriculum. Ultimately, the task of producing graduates who are prepared with PCS cannot be left only to HEIs but is the responsibility of the entire continuum of the education system, including the primary, secondary, and post-secondary education stages. All education institutions must together discharge the role of developing individuals who contribute to society.

Secondly, as far as government policy is concerned, one of the vital shifts introduced in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MOHE, 2012) was to ensure every child is proficient in the English language. In order to do this, the government is committed to upskilling English teachers so that they are proficient according to international standards. Those who have yet to pass the Cambridge Placement Test will receive intensive upskilling. In addition, the government is also transforming teaching into a profession of choice by offering a lot of incentives, professional trainings and career development opportunities based on competency and performance, not tenure. Exposing teachers to the findings of this study during their professional development courses will help to highlight the importance of PCS from an earlier stage of learning. This will certainly offer learners more time for practice and optimise their exposure to the English language.

Thirdly, this study identifies the desired workplace qualities from the viewpoint of employers. The findings of this research may be useful in future research that investigates the mismatch between the employers' expectations and graduating students' PCS in English. If the Malaysian government and the universities are serious in fixing the problem of low quality graduates, there is a need to reconsider radically the education and training needs of undergraduates. HEIs should look at the findings of this study seriously, diagnose the bad practices and develop plans to improve their programmes and services, particularly with respect to the balance between theory and practice and to match educational content to industrial needs and English language competencies.

This study also suggests that course assessment needs to be carried out periodically in HEIs to establish and develop links between the universities and the industry. This is crucial as the workplace has often experienced unexpected changes pertaining to knowledge and technology. The universities must be alert and take cognisance of the need to constantly upgrade, improve and equip future graduates with the necessary employability skills required at the workplace so that they will be well prepared to meet the demands of the future local and global workforce. Having human resource managers from multi-national companies and recruiting executives from government agencies to stress to learners that English offers opportunity and motivate learners in HEIs on the PCS needed for the workplace is one practical application of this study that can be applied in HEIs.

The results presented in this study imply HEIs must understand the needs of their students, and provide courses that meet these needs. It should also be highlighted that English language learning at the tertiary level should move away from the emphasis on grammar to a communicative language approach that provides more platforms for students to develop their communicative abilities through classroom exchanges and assignments that promote the acquisition of English. It is vital to provide additional and multiple English language opportunities and exposure in the university environment. In light of the current expectations of integrative skills and English language competencies in the 21st century workplace, the university curriculum needs to be revised in order to address the needs of the contemporary workplace. Graduating students need to be trained sufficiently and be given more opportunities in using the English language in preparation for the language needs of the workplace and other

PCS needed by the prospective employers. Failure to address these issues will lead to producing low quality graduates , and thus the goal to produce quality human capital as projected in the Malaysian Economic Transformation Programme (Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia, 2012) will not be achieved.

Fourthly, as a result of the growing importance of English and the government's open support for the language, universities have to reorient their practices on the use of English on campus. An extensive use of English must be emphasised across the entire university community in order for the learners to achieve mastery of the language, by providing them with more opportunities to use the language formally or informally. In order to enhance learners communication skills as advised by the stakeholders, HEIs can also take an informal approach to the development of students' PCS by encouraging their participation in language based clubs or activities, for instance the Book Club, Writer's Club, Drama Club, Speaker's corner, Public speaking (TED-based), to name a few. Incentives from the policy makers of HEIs for these clubs may enhance learners' speaking, reading, writing, listening, presentation and interpersonal communication skills as suggested by the stakeholders in this study. The more exposure the learners have in a stress-free and fun environment the more it will help them to use the language comfortably.

The PCS framework in English was developed in response to what was identified by stakeholders as graduates' communication skills needs at the workplace as entry-level employees. The PCS framework is made up of three components: cognitive knowledge, communication skills and motivation. In the light of the results of the study, a variety of methods and materials which can be used to actively engage learners in the learning process, with particular emphasis on meaningful situated language use at the workplace, can be explored, designed and developed. Producing a text book and teacher's guide out of the PCS framework would be very useful and practical for EOP instructors. The PCS framework can also serve as a standardised guideline for all Malaysian HEIs in teaching EOP courses, according to the mould that has been set by the stakeholders. This fits in with West's (1994) suggestion that findings from needs analysis must be translated into appropriate course objectives, course materials and pedagogical methodology.

Finally, more exploration and evaluation of pedagogical strategies that aim at preparing our learners to be high quality employee must be carried out. Such exploration will need to focus more attention on applying the PCS framework in English in Malaysian HEIs. One practical suggestion this study makes is that the PCS components should not only be taught in one unit of EOP, but should be dispersed in different subjects, including subject content courses in the degree programme. This ensures that all the components are taught in meaningful contexts. Having a support English unit in each faculty that is devoted to teaching specific workplace English literacy (for instance, English for Marine Scientists, English for Food Technologists and English for Accountants) may help in targeting specific English needs for the workplace. Coordination between each faculty and the English language unit is essential in ensuring opportunities for learners to use the language in a specific and meaningful context. Teaching the PCS components solely in EOP classes would not be enough in catering to the expectations of the stakeholders, as was discovered in this study. Another strategy would be to teach PCS intensively before the undergraduates leave for their industrial training. Cooperation between the industrial relation officers in each faculty and EOP lecturers would be extremely helpful in this respect.

6.4 Concluding remarks

This study is timely in view of the large number of graduates who are deemed to be unemployable mainly due to their poor language and communication competencies in English. Graduates with good English proficiency are vital in the nation's quest to create a K-economy. This study provides a detailed account of the English language workplace literacy practices needed by learners. The expectations of prospective employers were compiled into a practical PCS Framework in English. The findings provide avenues for further investigation, verification and improvement of the current structure of the EOP courses taught in Malaysian HEIs. More importantly, the findings of this study call for a situated response in policy, research and practice that addresses issues on teaching the required language skills for the workplace as identified by the stakeholders at ground level.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



A MALAYSIAN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FRAMEWORK FOR GRADUATES.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Name: _____ Title: _____
Name of Agency: _____
Department: _____ Designation: _____ Tel
No: _____ Email: _____ Date: _____
_____ Signature: _____

Introduction

The lack of professional communication skills among Malaysian graduates has become a matter of national interest and concern. I am conducting a research, as part of my Doctor of Philosophy degree in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, on this matter with a focus to develop a Professional Communication Skills (PCS) Framework created and validated by Malaysian employers, government and academia. The fundamental objective of this study is to determine the key definition of professional communication skills identified by Malaysian stakeholders for successful workplace function.

I would like to include your agency to be involved in my study. I believe that because you are actively involved in the human resource development of your organisation, you are best suited to speak to on various issues, such as the list of communication skills required by entry-level. I hope that I will get your assistance and support in gaining insights in order to develop the PCS Framework by looking into your current policies and practices.

BACKGROUND EXPERIENCE

1. To begin, I'd like to learn about your experience working in this agency as well as your previous experience working with others (if any)
 - a. What is your job scope in this agency?

GENERAL ISSUES

2. I believe that Peneraju also works hand in hand with fresh graduates. Can you please explain...
 - a. Thrust 3 and 4 programme is a graduate employability enhancement scheme offered by your agency. Why do you think it was important to do this?
 - b. Please give me an overview of the graduate recruitment patterns employed by your agency for programmes in Thrust 3 and Thrust 4? How are these graduates chosen to be part of the programme?
 - c. Does your agency have SOPs (*standard operating procedure*) for this? (i.e. sets of interview questions or tests to apply for Thrust 3 and 4 programmes)?
 - d. Can I have a copy of the document for my research purposes?
3. What would be the typical background for fresh graduates, in terms of qualification levels and disciplines (or anything else you would like to add)?
 - a. Does your agency take on more local graduates or graduates from abroad or local for Thrust 3 and 4 programmes? Why?
 - b. Do you feel there are any advantages and/or disadvantages related to taking on board Malaysian graduates in the programmes? (probes)
 - c. In general, what skills do/should graduates bring to workplace?
 - d. In your experience, how employment-ready have the local graduates generally been, in terms of:
 - Professional (or vocational) training?
 - Communication skills?
 - Any other issues you would like to comment on?

- e. How would PENERAJU define 'workplace readiness', which also be the products from your programme?

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Thank you. I would like to discuss with you the Professional Communication Skill requirements in your agency.

4. What kind of English language skills in your experience are typically required to work as a new employee?
5. How satisfied do you generally feel about the **English standards** of our graduates who apply to you?
 - a. Can you give me any examples of this in relation to:
 - Interview performance?
 - Work performance, for those you employ (presentation skills)?
 - Any other social or professional contexts (meeting – in house/client)?
6. If you do notice problems related to English language ability, are these in the area of the applicant's (or worker's):
 - General English ability (e.g. grammar)?
 - Fluency? Limited vocabulary?
 - Vocation-specific language skills (e.g. professional jargon)?
 - Writing ability for reports?
 - Public speaking skill
7. Are there any groups you consider more likely to have these types of problems? (any examples of this? i.e race, locality, gender, academic background: science or arts)
8. Which universities graduates do meet your expectations, and which don't?

Looking at a more focussed area in your agency:

9. What tests or screening measures, if any, are used to identify the English proficiency levels of applicants for professional (vocational) programmes in your organisation?
10. Are any particular strategies implemented to assess this at interview? Any specific SOPs?

- a. Can you share the document with me for the purpose of research?
- 11. Can you give some estimation of the proportion of applicants likely to be rejected on the basis of
 - a. Communication Skills (language)
 - b. Interpersonal Communication (appropriateness, attentiveness)
 - c. Non-verbal communication skills (time, space, appearance)
- 12. Overall, what are your perceptions of the PCS that the graduates require for workplace readiness in Malaysia? In terms of:
 - a. Communication Skills
 - b. Interpersonal Communication
 - c. Non-verbal communication skills
 - d. Are there other skills that influence positively or negatively on their employment?

MOTIVATION

Thank you, can we talk a little about the motivational factors on improving PCS adopted by your agency.

- 13. Before that, do you have any specific English language levels required for professional (or vocational) registration in your agency? Or are you satisfied with the results from SPM/MUET/EOP courses in universities?
 - a. Does your agency offer in-house training for English communication for Thrust 3 and 4 participants? If not, why?
 - b. Is there any Professional Development courses being offered in your agency to enhance their Professional English Communication Skills?
- 14. In your opinion, does having better PCS in English helps in climbing the workplace ladders faster for the graduates? May I know why?
- 15. Does your agency offer any incentives to your staff who have stronger PCS?
- 16. All in all, what are the motivations do you think the graduates should have in mastering PCS, specifically in English?

IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING IN HE

Thank you for patiently answering my questions. Finally, I would now like to ask for your thought about the role the HEI in improving PCS.

17. What links, if any, have been established between your professional body and educational institutions in order to improve this problematic situation?
18. If no, can you think of any that might be useful in the future?
19. In general, how do you feel Malaysian graduates as compared to other new graduates from international universities in terms of employment performance and contribution? (probe for any examples) ← to know elements that can be added in EOP courses
 - a) Looking at the MUET examination results, does the scale in the assessment justify the actual competency the graduates possess? For example, an A in EOP means they are very competent in English at workplace. ← questions are asked to discover stakeholders' trust on the quality of EOP courses offered in universities.
20. Do you have any suggestion in order for universities to improve the EOP courses offered?
21. In your opinion should organisations spend time and money re-training employees for professional communication.

Thank you for your cooperation and support in answering these questions.

Thank you also for the documents you have shared with me.

APPENDIX B: DETAILS OF EXPERT A

Personal Particulars

Current Position	: PROFESSOR Senior Honorary Research Fellow Graduate School of Education
Contact details	: Graduate School of Education The University of Western Australia (M428) 35 Stirling Highway CRAWLEY WA 6009 Australia
Qualifications	: MA MEd <i>W.Aust.</i> , PhD <i>Murd.</i>
Key research	: Curriculum policy and practice, English education studies, language, literacy and learning, social discourse studies, teaching and learning, higher education, classroom studies, gender studies, gifted and talented children, qualitative studies.
Publications	: Publications include two books, five resource books and more than thirty articles and book chapters.

APPENDIX C: DETAILS OF EXPERT B

Personal Particulars

Current Position	: PROFESSOR School Of Languages, Literacies and Translation Head, International Literacy Research Unit. Fellow, National Higher Education Research Institute
Contact details	: School Of Languages, Literacies and Translation Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Minden, Penang, MALAYSIA
Key research	: English language literacy, reading, TESL/TESOL, sociolinguistics, higher education and employment, ICT education and teacher education, quantitative and qualitative research.
Publications	: Publications include thirty books and a significant number of articles and book chapters.

APPENDIX D: DETAILS OF EXPERT C

Personal Particulars

Current Position	: SENIOR LECTURER Department of Communication and Languages
Contact details	: Faculty of Social Development Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Kuala Terengganu, 21030 Terengganu.
Qualification	: BA (TESL), MA (TESL) <i>North Texas State</i> , Ph.D <i>Universiti Malaya</i>
Key research	: Humanities, Linguistics And Literature, Applied linguistics, Second language reading, metacognition, reading strategies, motivation, English for workplace.
Publication	: Publications one resource book and journal articles.

APPENDIX F: DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS (ACADEMIA)

Name : A1

Current Position : LANGUAGE INSTRUCTOR

Contact details : LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT,
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA TERENGGANU.

Highest Qualification : Masters of Education

Work experience : 5 years teaching English in higher education.

Name : A2

Current Position : SENIOR LECTURER/INDUSTRIAL TRAINING LIASON
OFFICER

Contact details : INBIOSIS,
UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA, SELANGOR.

Qualification : PhD

Work experience : 9 years teaching in higher education.

Name : A3

Current Position : SENIOR LECTURER

Contact details : LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT,
UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA, KEDAH.

Qualification : PhD

Work experience : 10 years in teaching English in higher education.

Name : A4

Current Position : LECTURER

Contact details : SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, UCSI.

Qualification : PhD

Work experience : 4 years in teaching English in higher Education.

APPENDIX G: DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS (COMPANIES)

Name : C1

Current Position : HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER

Contact details : PERMANIS MALAYSIA,
BANDAR BARU BANGI, SELANGOR.

Qualification : BSc

Work experience : 12 years in HR Department.

Name : C2

Current Position : HUMAN CAPITAL ASSOCIATE

Contact details : THEMED ATTRACTIONS AND RESORTS
KHAZANAH NASIONAL, JOHORE.

Qualification : BSc

Work experience : 4 years recruiting for Khazanah Nasional

Name : C3

Current Position : HUMAN RESOURCE EXECUTIVE,

Contact details : PETRONAS SPONSORSHIP UNIT, KLCC.

Qualification : MBA

Work experience : 4 years recruiting for entry level employee.

Name : C4

Current Position : HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEPARTMENT

Contact details : PRASARANA MALAYSIA, KL.

Qualification : BA Comm

Work experience : 13 years in various HR units

Name : C5

Current Position : HUMAN RESOURCE OFFICER

Contact details : F&N AND COKE MALAYSIA SDN BHD.,
SUBANG JAYA, SELANGOR.

Qualification : BSc

Work experience : 8 years in human resource department.

Name : C6

Current Position : HUMAN RESOURCE RECRUITMENT OFFICER

Contact details : AIR ASIA MALAYSIA, LCCT, SEPANG.

Qualification : MBA

Work experience : 7 years in various human resource departments.

Name : C7

Current Position : HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER

Contact details : CELCOM MALAYSIA, PETALING JAYA.

Qualification : BComm

Work experience : 12 years' experience in recruiting new staff.

Name : C8

Current Position : HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER

Contact details : PADIBERAS NASIONAL MALAYSIA (BERNAS),
ALOR SETAR, KEDAH

Qualification : BA

Work experience : 7 years in BERNAS

Name : C9
Current Position : HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER
Contact details : CIMB BANK, DAMANSARA, KUALA LUMPUR.
Qualification : BSAcc
Work experience : 10 years in banking industry.

Name : C10
Current Position : HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCE DIVISION
Contact details : NESTLE MALAYSIA SDN BHD,
CHEMBONG, REMBAU, NEGERI SEMBILAN.
Qualification : BComm
Work experience : 15 years recruitment experience.

APPENDIX E: DETAILS OF IMPARTIAL INTER-RATER

Personal Particulars

Current Position	: PhD CANDIDATE
Contact details	: Faculty of Law Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor.
Qualification	: Master of Comparative Laws, <i>International Islamic University of Malaysia</i> Bachelor of Laws (LL.B Hons.) <i>International Islamic University of Malaysia</i> Certified trainer of ATLAS.ti
Key research	: Qualitative studies using ATLAS.ti, cyber law, law and information technology.

APPENDIX H: DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS (GOVERNMENT)

Name : G1

Current Position : HEAD ASSISTANT SECRETARY (RECRUITMENT)

Contact details : PUBLIC SERVICES COMMISSION MALAYSIA,
PRECINT 4A, PUTRAJAYA

Qualification : BA

Work experience : 6 years in recruiting public service officers.

Name : G2

Current Position : HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCE DIVISION

Contact details : MAJLIS AMANAH RAKYAT (MARA),
JALAN RAJA LAUT, KL.

Qualification : MBA

Work experience : 4 years leading the HR division.

Name : G3

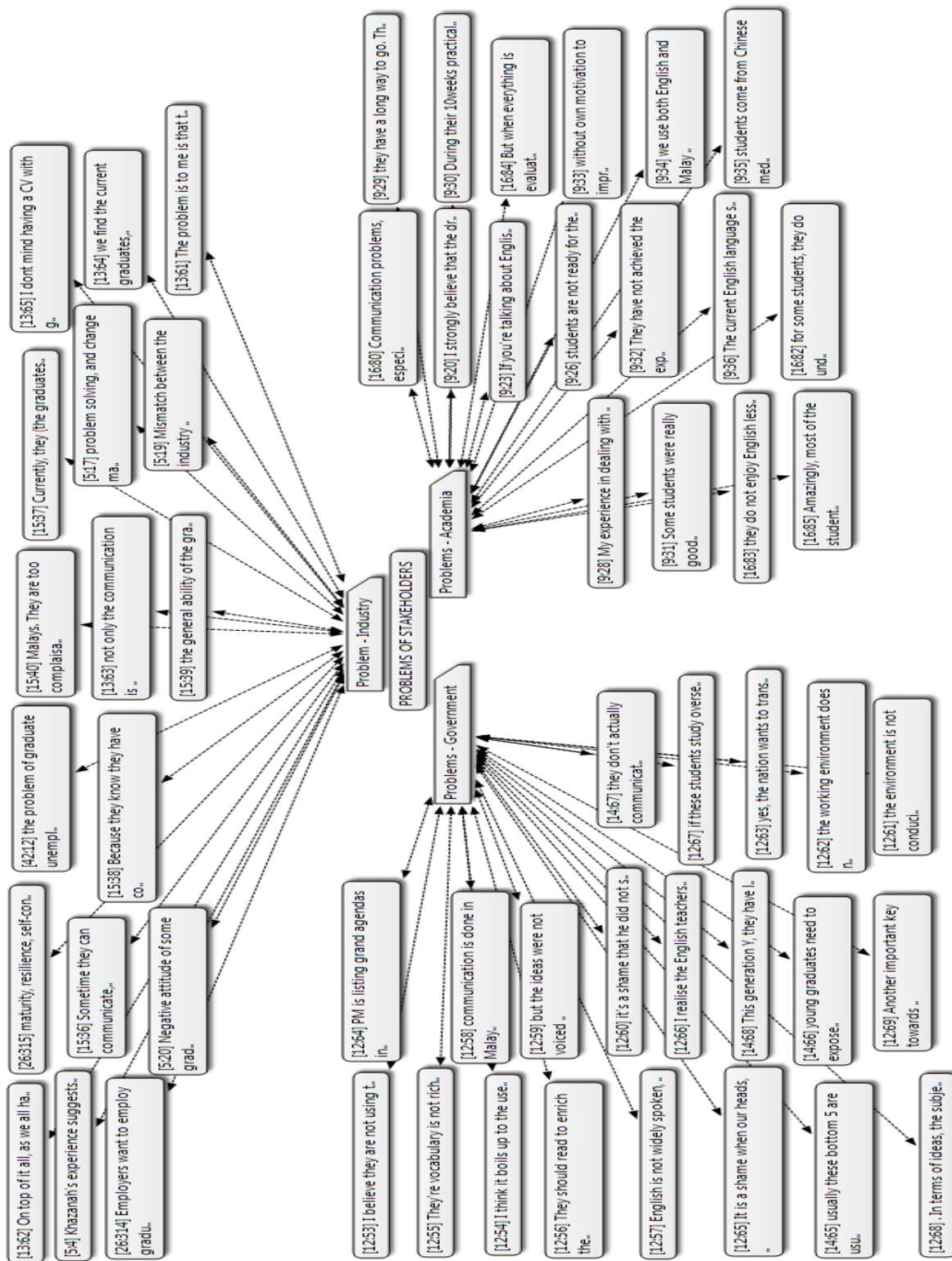
Current Position : HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Contact details : MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION MALAYSIA,
PUTRAJAYA.

Qualification : BSc

Work experience : 6 years in recruiting

APPENDIX I: NETWORK VIEW FOR GRADUATES PROBLEMS VIEWED BY STAKEHOLDERS



APPENDIX J: DEDUCTIVE CODING TECHNIQUE IN ATLAS.TI 7.0

The screenshot displays the ATLAS.ti 7.0 interface. The main window shows a document titled "P12: Transcription for MARA.docx" with the following text:

multinational companies. We have group interview sessions, where we look into their personality, their appearance, their composure, the way they handle the situation by agreeing or disagreeing on certain motions - how emotional or critical can they be.

During the panel-interviewee session, my head is very particular about appropriately acknowledge the panel, how courteous the interviewee can be. The panel usually wants to know the stand of the interviewee on certain current issues, (sample the water shortage in KL, to know how knowledgeable they are on current issues, this may be sometime a problem solving skill as well. And of course, to understand them, we need the interviewee who can articulate well with correct vocabulary and pronunciation. Grammar wise, as long as the message is sent over, that's an OK to us.

And of course, prior to all that, we do have writing exams, done in English and Malay. An example maybe, 'What is your opinion on the 1 Malaysia policy. What are ways to improve it'. The question itself is asking them to define 1Malaysia in their own words and understanding, then to evaluate and give feedback. This is what we always do in an organisation. Looking at how the arrange their thoughts on the page will give us an idea, whether the candidate is up to date on his general knowledge. Usually the first impression counts, number 1, the length of writing. We ask our candidates to type them down and save it into a repository. So we have standardised handwriting. If the page exceeds a page and a half, this means that this candidate has potential since they put their knowledge and experience in words. Synthesising their thoughts and arrange them in a professional manner. Meaning, culturally acceptable, not rude. Not that they can state their political stance, not that, but do put them in mature words.

The bottom panel shows a list of codes (ACADEMIA, CogK - Content Kno..., CogK - Critical Thinki..., CogK - Co..., CogK - Linguistic Co..., CogK - Tasking Skill, Comm Sk - Speaking..., CommSk - Interperso..., CommSk - Listening..., CommSk - Non-verb..., CommSk - Presentati..., COMPANIES, GOVERNMENT, PROBLEM) and a search bar. The right panel shows a list of codes (CogK - Critical Thinking, CommSk - Interpersonal Comm, COMPANIES, CommSk - Presentation Skill, GOVERNMENT, CogK - Tasking Skill, PROBLEM, CogK - Linguistic Competence, CommSk - Listenir, CogK - Linguistic Competence, GOVERNMENT, CogK - Linguistic Competence, CommSk - Listenir, CogK - Tasking Skill, GOVERNMENT, Comm Sk - Speaking Skill, GOVERNMENT, CommSk - Non-verbal Comm, GOVERNMENT, CogK - Linguistic Compe, GOVERNMENT, CogK - Critical Thinking, CogK - Linguistic Competence, CogK - Cultural).

APPENDIX K: AUTO CODING TECHNIQUE IN ATLAS.TI

The screenshot displays the ATLAS.ti software interface with the 'Auto Coding Dialog' box open. The dialog is used to configure search parameters for auto-coding text. The main window shows a document titled 'P14: Transcription for PUBLIC SERVICES COMMISSIONS OF MALAYSIA.docx' with text about the challenges of being a young graduate in a niche area. The 'Auto Coding Dialog' box contains the following elements:

- Select Code:** A dropdown menu showing 'CogK - Linguistic Competence (L77-0)'.
- Enter or select Search Expression:** A text area containing the search expression: 'ARTIFICIALLIGHT=^lamp^lantern^candle^ CLOSERELATIVE=^father^mother^brother^child^sister COLORS=^green^red^blue^yellow^brown^pink^magenta^gray DAY=^day^night^noon^evening^morning'.
- Scope of Search:** Radio buttons for 'Selected PD' (selected), 'PD Family', and 'All current PDs'.
- Create quotation from match extended to:** Radio buttons for 'Exact Match', 'Sentence', 'Multi Hard Returns', 'Word', 'Single Hard Return', and 'All Text'.
- Buttons:** 'Start', 'Code it', 'Skip it', 'Stop', and 'Close'.

The background interface shows a list of codes on the left and a hierarchical tree of codes on the right, including categories like 'ACADEMIA', 'GOVERNMENT', 'PROBLEM', and 'COMPANIES'.

APPENDIX L: PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK IN ENGLISH

Core Component (Communicative Competence Model)	Sub Component	Requirement for workplace	Exemplars: ‘Upon graduation, graduates should be able to...’
Cognitive Knowledge	Content Knowledge	Contribute to on-going improvement and expansion of knowledge in the betterment of workplace operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a relevant knowledge base for workplace. • Apply their subject content knowledge at workplace. • Manage own learning in order to maintain and renew attributes throughout working lives. • Use specific work-related jargon appropriately in speech and reports.
	Cultural Competence	Contribute to harmonious relations between superior, subordinates, colleagues and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak and write using the most appropriate register. • Agreeing/Disagreeing with the superior and subordinate in a diplomatic manner. • Adapt with small talks with colleagues, being aware with context awareness.
	Linguistic Competence	Contribute to meaningful and effective conversations using appropriate workplace discourse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise spoken and written language during a variety of communication tasks at workplace. • Present their speech and written work using appropriate vocabulary and fluency. • Clearly and accurately articulate words during workplace activities.
	Critical thinking	Contribute to constructive criticism while resolving issues at workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically synthesising their thoughts in a professional manner to improve situation. • Identify, analyse and solve problems critically and innovatively. • Give positive feedback and healthy criticism after analysing issues at workplace.
	Tasking skill	Contribute to productive long-term and short-term strategic planning and effective execution of workplace tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise thoughts and solve workplace problems and issues. • Argue politely in generating solutions and alternatives in workplace issue. • Synthesise issues at work and evaluate solutions individually.

Communication Skills	Interpersonal Communication	Contribute to diplomatic and matured communication between superior, subordinates and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak comfortably with employers, not hindered with nerves. • Pay attention to workplace communications activities and do not get distracted easily (with electronic devises). • Attentive in formal or informal workplace communication which can help build rapport with superiors, colleagues and clients. • Well prepared prior to workplace meetings and planned activities in order to express opinions maturely.
	Presentation Skill	Contribute to sharing of ideas and thoughts effectively with superior, colleagues and clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to share ideas with colleagues creatively. • Able to persuade clients to accept their ideas by explaining in a simple yet interesting manner. • Inform superiors of new innovative measures in improving workplace. • Keep spectators' attention using range of presentation skill, with the help of IT as a management tool. • Responding to enquiry from the clients.
	Speaking skill	Contribute to productive and appropriate verbal interactions at workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform audience (superiors, colleagues and clients) in an enlightening manner. • Contributing ideas and give opinions in group discussions. • Persuade superiors, colleagues and clients to accept ideas and opinions using well-defined explanations. • Use specialist vocabulary in a correct manner. • Give clear instructions to solve issues at work. • Initiating contact, requesting information on the telephone.

Communication Skills			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking information from others at work. • Responding to enquiries/problems from superior/clients. • State reasons for disagreeing without interrupting the speech of colleagues or superiors • Discussion work schedules and procedures. • Engage small talks with superior, colleagues and clients informally. • Telephone conversations skill – answering inquiries, giving instructions.
	Non-verbal communication	Contribute to the ease and comfort during interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately dressed according to workplace occasions. • Be on time in all workplace functions. • Control own nerves in meetings with superior and clients in order to be less agitated. • Ensure their body language is not offensive during conversations with colleagues, superiors and clients. • Wear pleasant facial expression.
	Listening Skill	Contribute to successful working relationships and effective execution of tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask if one does not understand instruction by superior, colleagues and clients. • Disagree politely if better ideas can be brought up. • Respond appropriately (speech or non-verbal communication) after understanding the instructions, questions, etc. • Fully comprehend what is going on around them at workplace. • Give feedback when asked by colleagues, superior and clients after fully understanding the situation. • Responds to clients'

			complaints.
	*Writing Skill	Contribute to effective execution of tasks at work and making the work flow efficient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filling in forms. • Write memo. • Write formal business letter • Write minutes of meeting • Write a summary of articles • Write for the company's website • Write formal/informal email messages • Write items for newsletter • Write reports using office template.
	*Reading Skill	Contribute to proficient job execution and high quality results at workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read official job related forms before signing. • Read own work contracts. • Read business reports and agreements • Read office memo and notices. • Read email messages, fax and formal letters. • Read technical manuals. • Read agenda and minutes of meetings. • Read work related books and articles.
Motivation	Positive motivation	Contribute to job satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware that communicating fluently and confidently in English language can help secure a job in public and private sectors. • Understand that speaking, listening and writing in good English will benefit them in terms of climbing up the workplace ladder quicker. • Be confident in speak English publicly to superiors, colleagues and clients. • Control own anxiety while speaking to an unknown group of new clients.