

Conceptualizing English Workplace Communication Needs Of Professional Engineers: The Challenges for English Language Tertiary Educators

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Abstract

Mastery of English oral communication skills is an advantage to employees in their workplaces. In the engineering industry, professional engineers possessing English oral communication skills are at an advantage; either for executing daily tasks or for promotion and career advancement. This paper aims to conceptualize and highlight the communicative events whereby engineers need to have a set of appropriate English communication skills in order to function well in their workplaces. At the same time, this poses great challenges for English language educators in the Malaysian Higher institutions whereby they must train and equip engineering undergraduates with adequate English communication skills in order for them to function effectively in their future engineering workplaces and to tackle the issue of graduate unemployment as a result of lack of English communication skills.

Keywords: English communication skills, language and communication needs, communicative events, engineering graduates, engineering workplace communication, graduate unemployment

INTRODUCTION

Importance of English in Engineering Workplace

The emergence of English language as the international language for global business interactions has had effects in many workplaces entities across Asia (Bolton, 2008; Curtis, 2012). In these workplaces, as a lingua franca (Kirkpatrick, 2010), English language has not only become a language used for communicating with global business partners (Riemer, 2002) but also has significantly been used in daily operations among employees (Warschauer, 2000). Similarly in engineering workplaces, English oral communication skills have become a necessity in engineers' daily workplace communication (Riemer, 2007). The scenarios where employees need to use English language in their daily task executions are known as 'communicative events' (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Moslehifar, & Ibrahim, 2012) where by the expectancy of a certain level of proficiency of English language skills need to be exhibited by the engineers for workplace communication efficiency. The needs to display these language skills are tantamount to the success of the execution of workplace events and tasks by engineers in their daily routines.

English Language Need and Communicative Events for Engineers in engineering Workplace

English is widely used for communication in business sectors and the term 'language needs' is used by researchers to describe studies which investigate in detail the nature of language needed by certain employees in workplaces (Kaewpet, 2009; Kassim & Ali, 2010). English language needs for engineers can be studied and analyses from engineers' involvement in communicative events in engineering