Towards a CEFR Framework for Workplace Communication: Students' Perceptions of the Sub-Skills, Use and Importance of Language Productive Skills (LPS)

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ABSTRACT

The ever-changing demands of the workforce due to current trends have led to the need for universities to equip their graduates with the necessary soft skills to increase their employability. As a result, the implementation of CEFR in language curricula was emphasised to address this matter. However, research on how CEFR could be implemented into a university's workplace communication course is severely lacking. Moreover, there is room to further enhance existing CEFR frameworks for workplace communication. Thus, this preliminary study was conducted to investigate students' perceptions of the use and importance of language productive skills (LPS) at the workplace towards developing a CEFR framework for workplace communication. The study adopted the quantitative approach through questionnaires to gauge students' perceptions of the use and importance of LPS at the workplace. A total of 354 students from various faculties under the clusters of science and technology, business and management, and social sciences and humanities participated in the study. The responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study's findings show that, generally, students' perceptions regarding the use and importance of speaking skills in the workplace are congruent to the CEFR scale for formal discussions. However, the use and importance of writing skills do not match the current available scale under CEFR to cater

to workplace communication. Thus, future research calls for curriculum developers to identify relevant descriptors needed for written workplace communication.

INTRODUCTION

Graduate employability and the increasing need to set higher standards in university curricula has been well acknowledged by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia. However, past studies have shown that the English proficiency level of new graduates in Malaysia is a high concern, particularly regarding poor communication skills (Agus et al., 2011). The current situation is severe enough that universities in Malaysia have been subject to criticism in producing graduates with a low level of English proficiency, which has made it difficult for the students to market themselves to join companies and businesses (Dzulkifly, 2018). Even more concerning is that industries in Malaysia have also made it clear that they would not hire graduates who do not meet the minimum level of language proficiency required (Sarudin et al., 2013).

In 2003, the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC) was established in Malaysia, which led to the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to boost Malaysian education to international standards (Hazita Azman, 2016, as in Uri & Aziz, 2018).

This initiative was part of the plan under the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which highlighted poor English proficiency as one of the top five issues faced by Malaysian graduates, which needed to be given considerable attention as deliberated further in the second shift (Malaysian Ministry of Blueprint, 2013). The adoption of CEFR into the education system, however, has been gradual. For instance, CEFR was adopted in phases whereby the first phase (from 2013 to 2015) focused on teachers' levels of English proficiency. The second phase (2016) sought to match the education level from pre-school to teacher education against the CEFR standards, while the third phase concerns ELSQC's role to evaluate, review and revise the implementation of CEFR (Foley, 2019). Thus, as CEFR has been gradually adopted into the design of courses and assessments, with its prevalence becoming clearer in recent years, the implementation of the standards in Malaysian schools and universities is still difficult to gauge.

CEFR is a set of scales that are used to describe users as Basic (A1, A2), Independent (B1, B2) and Proficient (C1, C2). It is distinguished by its 'can do' design which describes the extent to which language users can demonstrate their abilities rather than focus on the deficiency of their skills. It is the most widely adopted language proficiency framework worldwide, and its use is relevant for the design and development of language policies, curricula, and assessments in many parts of the world (Foley, 2019). The CEFR framework was recently updated in 2018, signalling new

and is still undergoing much research and progress. However, it should be emphasised that the framework was not designed as a standardising tool; rather, it is a tool that can be used to facilitate curriculum design and development and does not focus on what practitioners need to do or even how to do it (Council of Europe, 2001). Thus, in the context of countries' courses and examinations, the learning and assessments designed may be guided by CEFR but must ultimately be based on what the learners should do in the target language in their context (Foley, 2019).

Over the past several years, much research has been conducted on the design and development of courses that align with the proficiency standards of CEFR. According to Harsch and Seyferth (2020), one challenge faced by language course providers is shifting from institution and educator-defined tests aligned to current education standards to tests aligned to an internationally recognised framework. However, in designing courses that match the current education standards and an internationally recognised framework, there is also a dire need to align such course designs to the learners' current needs and the industry. Thus, there is a need for such standards to reflect the industry's current needs and practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The utilisation of CEFR as a proficiency scale for curriculum development has not escaped criticism in current research. One significant criticism raised by Barni (2015), for instance, was highlighting that the use of CEFR has led policymakers to use the proficiency level to impose gatekeeping strategies without conducting a thorough needs analysis. This form of needs analysis for curriculum development, especially pertaining to understanding and meeting the needs of the industry, has been implied in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025, as the blueprint emphasises the need for universities to work with the industry for better curriculum design and delivery (Mustafa, 2019). Furthermore, according to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), as outlined in the Programme Standards Language (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2018), higher education providers are obligated to conduct regular curriculum reviews by engaging professional bodies, government agencies and the industry.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), for an effective course design to take place, there is a need to focus on identifying the needs of learners and the needs of the industry. It is important, as the aim of a language course should be to uncover the competence level and how a person can acquire that competence. Thus, there is a need first to engage the learners to understand their perspectives and thoughts of the current curriculum, what they foresee may be useful in the future, and where they currently stand, as this will help inform the university of the changes that may be necessary to be done on the existing curriculum. Thus, the first step to the learning-centred approach to course design is Hutchinson and Waters (1987) in Figure 1.
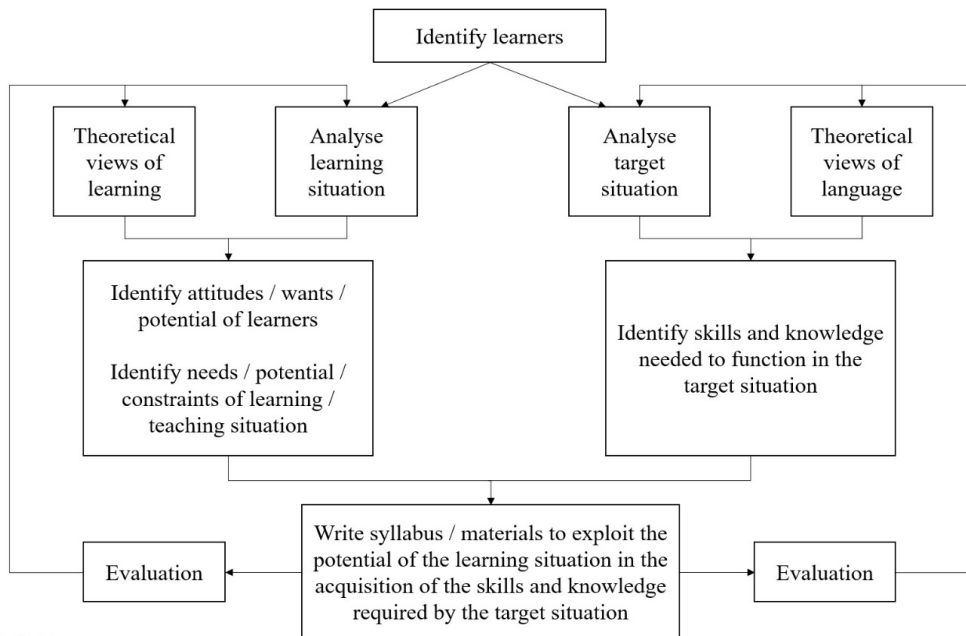
Figure 1. A learning-centred approach to course design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 74)

Based on Figure 1, one of the first steps to a learning-centred approach to course design is to understand the views of learning, the learning situation, as well as the attitudes, wants, and potential of the learners, along with possible constraints in the learning or teaching situation. In addition, it highlights the crucial role that the learners play in the curriculum design, which has not been fully addressed in the Programme Standards Language set by the MQA as the programme standards only emphasised the need to engage professional bodies, government agencies, and the industry (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2018).

Numerous needs analyses have been conducted to understand better the language and communication needs of employers in Malaysia to address the challenge of language proficiency affecting graduate employability. Past studies have looked at the importance of the English language for employment (Sarudin et al., 2013; Tajuddin et al., 2015; Zainuddin et al., 2019) as well as specific needs of the industry (Hee & Zainal, 2018; Isnin et al., 2018; Perinpasingam et al., 2015). Past needs analyses have looked into the skills and subskills required to communicate well in the context of workplace and professional communication.

However, while many past studies focused on the needs of employers, very few studies have looked at the perspectives of students in particular to understand their viewpoints and challenges, which is a criticism that has been given by

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) on the practice of conducting a needs analysis. For instance, Tajuddin (2015), who conducted a qualitative study, found that for speaking skills in the professional context, the main requirement is the ability for graduates to contribute to productive and appropriate verbal interactions. On the other hand, for writing, the main requirement is to contribute to the effective execution of tasks at work and make the workflow efficient. However, this study was conducted via interviews with three stakeholders: employers from Malaysian companies, representatives from a couple of ministries in Malaysia, and lecturers from three universities.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), for universities to design a curriculum that can meet the needs of both

students and the industry, there is a high need to analyse the needs of students in light of the target situations where such required skills will be used. Thus, this study was conducted to understand the learners' perspectives on the importance and perceived use of language productive skills in the workplace. Additionally, this study takes a step further to compare the stated skills against the current CEFR scales for speaking and writing as a preliminary study towards the development of a CEFR framework for workplace communication.

In the context of this study, the CEFR scale that is considered most relevant to workplace communication is the CEFR speaking scale for formal discussion and meetings, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

CEFR Speaking Scale for Formal Discussions and Meetings (Council of Europe, 2001)

	FORMAL DISCUSSIONS AND MEETINGS
C2	Can hold his/her own in a formal discussion of complex issues, putting an articulate and persuasive argument at no disadvantage to native speakers.
C1	Can easily keep up with the debate, even on abstract, complex, unfamiliar topics. Can argue a formal position convincingly, responding to questions and comments and answering complex lines of counterargument fluently, spontaneously and appropriately.
B2	Can keep up with an animated discussion, identifying arguments supporting and opposing points of view accurately. Can express his/her ideas and opinions with precision, present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly.

Table 1 *(Continued)*

	FORMAL DISCUSSIONS AND MEETINGS
B2	Can participate actively in routine and non-routine formal discussion. Can follow the discussion on matters related to his/her field, understand in detail the points given prominence by the speaker. Can contribute, account for and sustain his/her opinion, evaluate alternative proposals and make and respond to hypotheses.
B1	Can follow much of what is said related to his/her field, provided interlocutors avoid very idiomatic usage and articulate clearly. Can put over a point of view clearly, but has difficulty engaging in debate. Can take part in a routine formal discussion of familiar subjects conducted in a clearly articulated speech in the standard dialect and involves the exchange of factual information, receiving instructions or the discussion of solutions to practical problems.
A2	Can generally follow topic changes in formal discussion related to his/her field, which is conducted slowly and clearly. Can exchange relevant information and give his/her opinion on practical problems when asked directly, provided he/she receives some help with formulation and can ask for repetition of key points if necessary. Can say what he/she thinks about things when addressed directly in a formal meeting, provided he/she can ask for repetition of key points if necessary.
A1	No descriptor is available.

One point of interest that should be noted here is that there does not seem to be an existing CEFR scale for written communication in the context of formal or workplace/professional communication. Thus, the following research objectives were formed, and the research questions were constructed as a preliminary step to close this identified gap.

Research Objectives

1. To identify students' perceptions of the importance of language productive skills for employability.

2. To identify students' perceptions of the most important language productive sub-skills needed at the workplace.

3. To evaluate the sufficiency of the CEFR framework to test the identified language productive skills and subskills.

Research Questions

1. What are students' perceptions regarding the importance of language productive skills for employability?

2. What are students' perceptions of the most important language productive sub-skills needed at the workplace?

3. How accommodating is the current CEFR framework in testing the identified language productive skills and subskills?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study utilises the quantitative approach utilising survey questionnaires to identify the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Labaree, 2009). The focus of the quantitative approach the application of scientific methods in the collection of data, which constitutes the possibility of generalisation based on the samples (Daniel, 2016). The questionnaire was adopted and adapted from the syllabus of a course called English for Professional Interaction offered at a Malaysian public university. The questionnaire items were formulated based on the course content encompassing forms of communication, language functions for interpersonal communication and workplace interaction, and considerations for professional interaction (Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, 2016).

From that, the study adopts the descriptive research design, which involves making detailed descriptions of the phenomena being studied (Singh et al., 2015, p. 111). As for the population and samples concerned, the population refers to Bachelor Degree students of Malaysia where 354 samples were selected via simple random sampling where 86.2% are from Public Universities (UA) and 13.8%

from Private Institutions (13.8%). These respondents range from Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, Year 4, Year 5, and above. Furthermore, the respondents' fields of study are separated into three different fields – science and technology, social sciences and humanities, and business and administration.

Regarding their working experience, 61.3% of the respondents have had working experience, while the remaining 38.7% do not. Those who have had working experience claimed to have worked between five months or less to more than two years in a variety of working fields, specifically oil and gas, retail, self-employed, food and beverages, corporate, recruitment, human resources, education, fitness and sports, film, performing arts, building, property, engineering, medical and health, photography, information technology, hotel and tourism, accountancy and finance, laboratories, delivery services, customer service, call centres, attachment, and manufacturing.

An online survey questionnaire was self-administered to the samples via Google Forms comprising nominal, ordinal and mainly Likert scales (Singh et al., 2009). The application of the Likert scale is to measure the respondents' attitudes in terms of their agreement or disagreement based on the items (Albaum, 1997). Therefore, it is essential in analysing the data for inferential statistics (Singh et al., 2009). The data was then collected and proceeded for analysis. Inferential statistics were utilised for the present study, specifically frequency statistics, descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings were then compared to two CEFR scales that seemed

to be the most suitable for the language productive skills for formal communication in the context of the workplace, which is the Formal Discussion (Meetings) scale and the Overall Written Interaction scale from the document "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment" (Council of Europe, 2001).

RESULTS

Research Question 1–What are the students' perceptions regarding the importance of language productive skills for employability

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics on the students' perceptions regarding the importance of language productive skills (LPS) for employability, and their perception of the university's curriculum in preparing them with the skills. For example, the mean score for item "Language productive skills are important for future employability" recorded M=4.64 (SD=0.557). In contrast, for item "The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills," recorded M=4.64 (SD=0.841). Furthermore, the students were asked about their confidence in the sufficiency of their LPS for the workplace in item "I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace," which recorded a mean score of M=3.72, SD=0.763.

Table 2

Importance of language productive skills for employability

	M	SD
Language productive skills are important for future employability	4.64	.557
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	3.98	.841
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	3.72	.763

1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Slightly Agree, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

Additionally, independent samples t-tests were conducted to test the mean differences with all three items in Table 3b based on the respondents' educational institutions – public universities (UA) and private institutions (US); and their working experience. The results are as follows:

Table 3a

Mean Comparisons between UA and US

	Edu. Ins.	M	SD
Language productive skills are important for future employability	UA	4.64	0.562
	US	4.61	0.533
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	UA	3.98	0.843
	US	3.94	0.841
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	UA	3.71	0.767
	US	3.78	0.743

Table 3b

Independent Samples T-Test (Institutions)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Language Productive Skills are Important for Future Employability	Equal variances assumed	0.017	0.895	0.354	352	0.724
	Equal variances not assumed			0.368	66.355	0.714
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	Equal variances assumed	0.276	0.600	0.163	352	0.871
	Equal variances not assumed			0.163	64.485	0.871
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	Equal variances assumed	1.045	.307	-0.572	352	0.567
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.586	65.536	0.560

Based on the results from Table 3a, it appears that more UA students agree that LPS are important for future employability and that the university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient LPS. On the other hand, more US students are confident that their LPS are sufficient for the workplace. However, based on the independent samples t-test in Table 3b, there was no significant difference between the variables (p=0.05).

Table 4a

Mean Comparisons between Working Experience

	Have you had any working experience	M	SD
Language Productive Skills are important for future employability	Yes	4.62	0.565
	No	4.66	0.546
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	Yes	4.00	0.825
	No	3.95	0.869
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	Yes	3.83	0.722
	No	3.54	0.795

Table 4b

Independent Samples T-Test (Working Experience)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Language Productive Skills are important for future employability	Equal variances assumed	0.650	0.421	-0.692	352	0.490
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.697	296.735	0.486
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	Equal variances assumed	2.011	0.157	0.506	352	0.613
	Equal variances not assumed			0.500	278.160	0.617

Table 4b *(Continued)*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	Equal variances assumed	9.299	0.002	3.529	352	0.000
	Equal variances not assumed			3.453	268.644	0.001

Concerning Table 4a, the students with no working experience agree that LPS are important for future employability. Furthermore, the students with working experience agree that the university curriculum prepares them to attain sufficient LPS and are more confident that their LPS are sufficient for the workplace. Table 4b shows the independent samples t-test between the variables; there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the students with working experience and without working experience for the item "I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace," (p=0.05).

The mean differences were also compared between the respondents' field of study (FoS), specifically, science and technology (ST), social sciences and humanities (SH), and business and administration (BA) and also based on their years of study (YoS). ANOVA was conducted, where the results are as follow:

Table 5a

Mean Comparisons between Fields of Study

		N	M	SD
Language productive skills are important for future employability	ST	90	4.51	0.604
	SH	148	4.73	0.489
	BA	116	4.62	0.585
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	ST	90	3.93	0.790
	SH	148	3.96	0.864
	BA	116	4.03	0.854
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	ST	90	3.57	0.704
	SH	148	3.82	0.738
	BA	116	3.71	0.824

Table 5b

ANOVA (FoS)

		df	F	Sig.
Language productive skills are important for future employability	Between Groups	2	4.477	0.012
	Within Groups	351		
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	Between Groups	2	0.423	0.656
	Within Groups	351		
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	Between Groups	2	3.075	0.047
	Within Groups	351		

Table 5c

Multiple Comparisons (FoS)

Dependent Variable	(I) FoS	(J) FoS	Sig.
Language productive skills are important for future employability	ST	SH	0.003
		BA	0.159
	SH	ST	0.003
		BA	0.112
	BA	ST	0.159
		SH	0.112
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	ST	SH	0.817
		BA	0.393
	SH	ST	0.817
		BA	0.473
	BA	ST	0.393
		SH	0.473
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	ST	SH	0.014
		BA	0.189
	SH	ST	0.014
		BA	0.240
	BA	ST	0.189
		SH	0.240

In comparing the mean differences between the FoS as showcased in Table 5a, more SH students agree that LPS are important for future employability and are confident that their LPS are sufficient for the workplace. However, more BA students agree that the university curriculum prepares them to attain sufficient LPS. Albeit the overall ANOVA results in Table 5b which indicate no significant differences in all three items, based on Table 5c, there is a significant difference in the agreement that LPS are important for future employability between the ST and SH students (p=0.05).

Table 6a

Mean Comparisons between Years of Study

		M	SD
Language productive skills are important for future employability	Y1	4.58	0.591
	Y2	4.60	0.547
	Y3	4.76	0.471
	Y4	4.92	0.272
	Y5	4.50	0.905
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	Y1	4.06	0.720
	Y2	3.93	0.837
	Y3	4.00	0.991
	Y4	3.88	0.864
	Y5	3.83	1.193
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	Y1	3.78	0.753
	Y2	3.66	0.745
	Y3	3.71	0.773
	Y4	3.81	0.749
	Y5	3.58	1.084

Table 6b

ANOVA (YoS)

		df	F	Sig.
Language Productive Skills are important for future employability	Between Groups	4	3.162	0.014
	Within Groups	349		
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	Between Groups	4	0.572	0.683
	Within Groups	349		
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	Between Groups	4	0.549	0.700
	Within Groups	349		

Table 6c

Multiple Comparisons (YoS)

	(I) YoS	(J) YoS	Sig.	(I) YoS	(J) YoS	Sig.	(I) YoS	(J) YoS	Sig.	(I) YoS	(J) YoS	Sig.	(I) YoS	(J) YoS	Sig.
Language Productive Skills are Important for Future Employability	Y1	Y2	0.731	Y2	Y1	0.731	Y3	Y1	0.040	Y4	Y1	0.004	Y5	Y1	0.648
		Y3	0.040		Y3	0.066		Y2	0.066		Y2	0.006		Y2	0.547
		Y4	0.004		Y4	0.006		Y4	0.207		Y3	0.207		Y3	0.140
		Y5	0.648		Y5	0.547		Y5	0.140		Y5	0.028		Y4	0.028
The university curriculum prepares students to attain sufficient language productive skills.	Y1	Y2	0.216	Y2	Y1	0.216	Y3	Y1	0.661	Y4	Y1	0.340	Y5	Y1	0.377
		Y3	0.661		Y3	0.588		Y2	0.588		Y2	0.807		Y2	0.708
		Y4	0.340		Y4	0.807		Y4	0.562		Y3	0.562		Y3	0.534
		Y5	0.377		Y5	0.708		Y5	0.534		Y5	0.862		Y4	0.862
I am confident that my language productive skills are sufficient for the workplace.	Y1	Y2	0.229	Y2	Y1	0.229	Y3	Y1	0.554	Y4	Y1	0.866	Y5	Y1	0.398
		Y3	0.554		Y3	0.722		Y2	0.722		Y2	0.381		Y2	0.725
		Y4	0.866		Y4	0.381		Y4	0.577		Y3	0.577		Y3	0.611
		Y5	0.398		Y5	0.725		Y5	0.611		Y5	0.402		Y4	0.402

Based on the mean differences between the YoS as reported in Table 6a, the Y4 students are in the highest agreement that LPS are important for future employability and also the most confident that their LPS are sufficient for the workplace. Aside from that, the Y3 students are in the highest agreement that the university curriculum prepares them to attain sufficient LPS. Based on the ANOVA in Table 6b overall the mean differences are not significant but based on Table 6c, the mean scores between Y1 and Y4 in "language productive skills are important for future employability," are significant (r=0.05).

Research Question 2 – What are the students' perceptions of the most important language productive sub-skills needed at the workplace?

Regarding Table 7, the most important written communication sub-skill perceived by the students are writing reports (91.2%, N=323), followed by writing external emails (79.4%, N=281) and writing internal emails (75.7%, N=268). On the other hand, the least important sub-skill according to the students would be online chatting (42.4%, N=150), writing on company social media sites/websites (54.5%, N=193) and writing memos (59%, N=209). The other items recorded frequency statistics between 59% (N=209) to 69.2% (N=245).

According to the data in Table 8, the students perceived that presentations (89.8%, N=318), meetings (85.3%, N=302), and interviews (75.1%, N=266) to be so. As for the least important sub-skill, the students perceived that teleconferences (48%, N=170), dialogues (51.1%, N=181), and video conferencing (51.4%, N=182) fall under. As for the other items, the perceptions of importance were between 58.5% (N=207) and 74.9% (N=265).

Table 7

Students' perceptions on the most important written communication LPS at the workplace

Item	N	%
Writing reports	323	91.2
Writing internal emails	268	75.7
Writing external emails	281	79.4
Producing minutes of meeting	222	62.7
Preparing presentation slides	245	69.2
Writing memos	209	59
Writing business letters	216	61
Online chatting	150	42.4
Writing on company social media sites / websites	193	54.5
Writing proposals	240	67.8

Table 8

Students' perceptions on the most important spoken communication LPS at the workplace

Item	Frequency	%
Presentations	318	89.8
Idea pitching / product pitching	254	71.8
Teleconferences	170	48
Video conferencing	182	51.4
Internal phone calls	221	62.4
External phone calls	265	74.9
Meetings	302	85.3
Interviews	266	75.1
Dialogue	181	51.1
Round table discussion	249	70.3
Making appointments	207	58.5

Research Question 3 – What are the language productive skills needed by the students for the workplace?

Table 9 and Table 10 describe the findings on the students' needs on LPS regarding workplace communication. Based on Table 9, most of the students claimed that the written communication LPS needed is clear, concise, and complete writing (86.4%, N=306) followed by formatting documents (85.9%, N=304) and the usage of appropriate words/jargon (84.2%, N=298). Coherent writing is the least written communication LPS needed, with only 59.3% (N=210) claiming so. The other two items, sentence structure and grammar, recorded frequency statistics of 80.5% (N=285) and 76.6% (N=271), respectively.

Table 9

Written communication LPS needed by students

Item	N	%
Grammar	271	76.6
Sentence Structure	285	80.5
Usage of appropriate words / jargons	298	84.2
Format of document	304	85.9
Coherent writing	210	59.3
Clear, concise and complete writing	306	86.4

On the other hand, Table 10 shows the spoken communication LPS needed by the students with the highest skill needed is speaking confidently (92.1%, N=325), along with negotiation skills (76.8%, N=271) and speaking tone (74.2%, N=262). On the other hand, the least required skill needed by the students is articulation (41.4%, N=146), subsequently voice projection (58.6%, N=207) and pitch and volume (59.5%, N=210). The other skills, persuasion skills, voice clarity, and pronunciation, recorded demand of 65.7% (N=232), 67.4% (N=238) and 71.7% (N=253), respectively.

Table 10

Spoken Communication LPS Needed by Students

Item	N	%
Persuasion	232	65.7
Negotiation	271	76.8
Speaking confidently	325	92.1
Pronunciation	253	71.7
Articulation	146	41.4
Voice projection	207	58.6
Pitch and volume	210	59.5
Tone	262	74.2
Clarity	238	67.4

DISCUSSION

From the research conducted, we have identified that all the respondents generally agreed that the LPS is important in the workplace. There exists no difference between UA and US. Generally, students in the fourth year of their studies had a higher agreement that LPS is important for the workplace. An assumption could be made that because the students in their fourth year are closer to their industrial attachment and graduating, they have come to a higher realisation of the importance of LPS for workplace communication. Interestingly, social science students have the highest agreement that LPS is important for future employability. Also, students with working experience reported that they are more confident in their LPS as sufficient for the workplace.

In terms of the language forms and functions that were considered as important, the findings were divided into spoken and written communication. For spoken communication, the respondents believed that presentations, meetings and interviews were the most important spoken forms of workplace communication. They reported confidence, negotiation and intonation as the most important skills. In the CEFR

scale for formal discussion (meetings), students could achieve the C1 or B2 level if they can "keep up with the debate, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics", "keep up with an animated discussion", "argue a formal position convincingly, responding to questions and comments and answering complex lines of counter argument fluently, spontaneously and appropriately", and "express his/her ideas and opinions with precision, present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly".

The data of this study are congruent to the literature of CEFR. Therefore, it assists a curriculum developer to design a syllabus, content and assessment for future language courses for spoken communication.

In contrast, the respondents believed that the most important forms are reports, external emails and internal emails for written communication. To do this, they believed that the most important skills are knowing the usage of appropriate words and jargon, formatting, and using clear and concise writing. When viewing the CEFR scales for writing, there did not seem to be a clear scale that could be used for written workplace communication. For the CEFR scale of overall written interaction, students could achieve the C1 or B2 level if they can "express him/herself with clarity and precision, relating to the addressee flexibly and effectively" and "express news and views effectively in writing, and relate to those of others".

The data in this study is not congruent to current CEFR literature because the current scale does not seem to comprehensively capture the necessarily written skillsets for workplace communication (Tables 8 and 9). Thus, curriculum developers must identify the CEFR scales to determine the LPS needed for written workplace communication.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this research was conducted as a needs analysis to identify students' perceptions of the use and importance of language productive skills (LPS) for workplace communication. The study was conducted as a preliminary study towards the development of a CEFR scale for workplace communication that can better reflect the needs of the industry to address Malaysian students' language proficiency and increase their employability. The findings from the study found that the perceptions for speaking skills generally match the scale available for CEFR's formal spoken communication. However, it did not match any available CEFR scale for written communication. This study has several implications. Firstly, for future curriculum development of language courses, this paper's findings help universities design relevant language proficiency/EOP courses. Secondly, it allows teaching practitioners to make informed decisions on the content of their language classes and courses. Thirdly, this study could form a framework for a CEFR-aligned scale for workplace communication in universities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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