

An Analysis of Workplace English Speaking Courses for University Engineering Students in the Kwara State of Nigeria

Abdul-Lateef Solihu (Corresponding author)

Kulliyah of Languages and Management, International Islamic University Malaysia

Email: latsal2000@yahoo.com

Lilisuriani Abdul Latif

Kulliyah of Languages and Management, International Islamic University Malaysia

Received: 02/07/2020

Accepted: 10/08/2020

Published: 01/09/2020

Volume: 1 Issue: 3

How to cite this paper: Solihu, A. L., & Latif, L. A. (2020). An Analysis of Workplace English Speaking Courses for University Engineering Students in the Kwara State of Nigeria.

Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature, 1(3), 25-35

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46809/jcsll.v1i3.26>

Copyright © 2020 by author(s) and Global Talent Academy Ltd. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Abstract

The globalization of world markets which has led to the hegemony of English language over other languages requires graduates from different fields of specialization to equip themselves with English communication skills to communicate effectively in local and international workplace contexts. This study was conducted to investigate the English speaking skills needed by engineering students in the Kwara states of Nigeria. A survey was carried out to compare how the respondents' (undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria) self-rated their speaking interaction and production skills and to observe their perception of the importance of speaking interaction and production sub skills for workplace communication. The study concluded with suggestions for creating a better perception of the importance of English speaking skills among engineering students and creating a better workplace English curriculum so that students' workplace speaking skills can be improved.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, English Speaking Skills, Workplace, English Speaking Courses, University Engineering Students

1. Introduction

Due to the globalization of world markets, the emergence of English as the first language of engineering worldwide has required that graduate engineers be well equipped with not only technical knowledge but also communicative competence. This is because their success in their professions lies on them having a good command of English language (Rajprasit, Pratoomrat & Wang, 2015). Narayan, Raj, and Raj (2015) corroborated that engineers all around the world are obliged to use English in many aspects of their jobs since English is used as the language of most international organizations and publications in the engineering field. However, most non-native English speaking engineers would encounter difficulties using professional terms if they fail to enhance their proficiency in the language. Moreover, as Sheth (2016) contended, employers are no more interested in looking for engineering nerds who would spend their working hours busy with

calculators and machines. Rather, preference is given to those who are capable of using English for efficacious communication, expressing ideas clearly within the purview of workplace communicative events.

However, many reports have shown that despite the expertise of graduate engineers in their practical oriented disciplines, a vast number of these professionals lack the English speaking skills necessary for technical discussions, business negotiations and daily conversations with foreign counterparts and customers (Gashaye, 2015; Joungrakul, 2013; Singh & Kaur, 2019). For instance, in Thailand, both novice and experienced engineers are faced with English difficulties resulting in lack of competency in communicating at work, especially in oral and written modes (Jarupan, 2013; Siddoo, Sawattawee, Janchai, & Thinnukool, 2019). Kim (2013) also acknowledged that Japanese graduate engineers who work with well reputed industries lack confidence in commanding good spoken English at work, while they are only versed at reading and writing. Adnan, Mohd Radzuan, Ab Rahman, Mohamed, Saidin and Ahmad Nasir (2019) found that one of the factors that has led to unemployment of most Malaysian graduate engineers is their inability to showcase the English speaking skills required to communicate efficiently at work.

According to CEFR (2018) (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), oral communication skills are classified into two: namely spoken interaction and spoken production. Oral interaction, is the ability of a language user to employ reception and production strategies to act alternatively as a speaker and a listener with one or more interlocutors so as to construct conjointly, through the negotiation of meaning following the co-operative principle of conversational discourse. Oral interaction, according to CEFR (2018), includes transactions, casual conversation, informal discussion, formal discussion, debate, interview, negotiation, co-planning and practical goal-oriented co-operation. Oral production, on the other hand, is the language user's ability to produce an oral text to be received by an audience of one or more such as public address (information, instructions, etc.), addressing audiences (speeches at public meetings, university lectures, sermons, entertainment, sport commentaries, sales presentations, etc.). This, according to the source, may involve reading a written text aloud, speaking from notes, or from a written text or visual aids (diagrams, pictures, charts, etc.), acting out a rehearsed role, speaking spontaneously, and singing (Council of Europe, 2018).

Despite the great importance of English speaking skills to graduate engineers in conducting their workplace activities (Ali & Kazempourian, 2017; Hossain, 2013; Kim, 2013; Tinh Le, 2016), researches have shown some instances of perception mismatch between undergraduate engineering students and industry workers on the workplace English speaking needs of graduate engineers (Ali & Kazempourian, 2017; Bozic & Pintaric, 2018). Moreover, presence of discrepancy is also conspicuous between the English communication skills taught to university engineering students and those required by employers (Atai & Asadi, 2013; Gashaye, 2015; Siddoo et al., 2019). Considering the importance of English speaking skills in the workplace and the reports on frequent mismatch of expectations between the stakeholders on the communicative skills required of graduate engineers, it becomes essential that a needs analysis is conducted in order to be clear as to the exact speaking skills required of graduating engineers in the Kwara State of Nigeria to carry out workplace activities.

Needs analysis, according to Richards, Platt and Weber (1992) as cited by Khalid (2016) is "the process of determining the needs for which the learner or group of learners required a language and arranging the needs according to their priorities" (p. 41). This information gathering process, according to Dudley Evans and St. John (1998) as cited by Rahman (2015), aims to accomplish the following three objectives:

First, needs analysis aims to know learners as people, as language users and as language learners. Second, needs analysis study also aims to know how language learning and skills learning can be maximized for a given learner group. Third, needs analysis study aims to know the target situations and learning environment so that data can appropriately be interpreted (p. 26).

It is apparent, at this juncture, that identifying the specific English speaking needs of undergraduate engineering students in the Kwara State of Nigeria for an effective workplace communication cannot be properly achieved without determining their perceptions on their necessities, wants, and lacks (Hutchinson & Water, 1987 as cited by Penh, 2017).

Thus, the rationale for conducting this study is juxtaposed by the fact that there is a plethora of studies on the importance of English speaking skills in the workplace worldwide some of which unveil a phenomenon of perception mismatch between undergraduate engineering students and industry workers on workplace communicative skills. However, there is lack of information on the perceptions of these two stakeholders on the importance of English speaking skills in the Nigerian workplace as a whole and that of the Kwara State in particular. Therefore, focusing on the Kwara state of Nigeria, this study is designed to compare how students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria self-rate their level of speaking interaction and production skills. It also seeks to identify the perceptions of undergraduate engineering students on the importance of English speaking interaction and production skills in the workplace in comparison with those of industry workers.

1.1 Use of English in Nigeria

Udofot (2015) affirmed that the development of English language in Nigeria and other African British colonies has been triggered by their past colonial experience and the adopted education system. In recent decades, English has become so widely practiced in Nigeria that it has achieved prominence both in the workplace, in the media and as a language of education along with the three major indigenous languages (Sunday, 2013). Therefore, it is not only made a compulsory subject on its own from the first year of primary education, but also assigned the role of instructional medium for other subjects from the fourth primary year to the tertiary level (Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2013). Nevertheless, classroom instructions are maintained in English from the first year of primary school in urban centers although switching to

English in the fourth year of primary education is, to some extent, proven to be challenging in the rural areas due to shortage of teachers (Udofot, 2015).

English is maintained as the lingua franca in all sectors of life in the Nigerian society and perceived as one of the valuable legacies left by the British colonialism (Sunday, 2013). The main reason for that from the outset is obviously the fact acknowledged by Afolabi (2016) that Nigeria has a Muslim dominated north and a Christian occupied south with a number of at least 250 ethnic groups who speak 100 absolutely different languages. Language diversity in Nigeria has been the major factor influencing the use of English nationwide and even at open markets (Sunday, 2013; Udofot, 2015).

Moreover, the use of English language at workplaces in Nigeria is prevalent due to the unifying status it enjoys among the different Nigerian ethnic groups at work. It is further elaborated that English is compulsorily used when addressing a superior staff at work regardless of whether the interlocutors can communicate in the same local language. Therefore, most jobs in Nigeria require the prospective workers to possess the competency that would enable them to communicate in English (Christopher, 2016).

2. Literature Review

The English language, which was once the language of the people of Anglo Saxon origin, is now being used worldwide as the major means of communication regardless of diversity in culture, race, and nationality. The use of English is widely accepted not only within daily social communication contexts, but also in various fields of study and professions. As Ab Rahman et al. (2019) contended, the English language is regarded as the most widespread communication medium used in the international business, science, diplomacy and other various professions. It is also a lingua franca among people of diverse cultures and languages at the international level. Narayan, Raj and Raj (2015) also affirmed that people who are involved in different fields and professions widely use the English language as a means to acquire information, climbing the ladders in their various academic fields to reach the apex of success in their endeavors, conducting and publishing their studies, as well as discharging their working duties in their respective working areas. In other words, English is perceived as a universal dominant language of communication, education, and occupation (Baker, 2006 as cited by Pandarangga, 2015).

With regard to Science and Technology to which engineering belongs, Foyewa (2015) recapitulated that although the English language has never been formally proclaimed by the World Scientists Association as the major language of Science and Technology, nearly all the activities conducted in the field are in English. Therefore, the demand for good communication skills in engineering is increasingly high due to the globalization influences on all spheres. High proficiency in English is not required for pursuing one's engineering academic career in local and foreign universities, but is also a major factor that determines the success of graduate engineers at their workplace all around the world. As Ahmad, Esa, Selamat, Asri, Suhaili, Padil and Jamaludin, Jaslina (2015) reported in their study, modern industries highly demand for engineers with proficiency in not only technical skills, but also in non-technical skills like communication, team-work and interpersonal skills. Some other studies even emphasized that communication skills are given more priority than technical skills (Clement & Murugavel, 2015; Gerek & Efeoglu, 2015; Matturo, 2013).

Moreover, the multifacetedness of engineering requires today's engineers to possess a wide range of communication skills. As Singh and Kaur (2019) asserted, the lack of or insufficient communication skills only underrates the fame of practicing engineers. As an engineering professional, it is necessary for one to possess a wide range of communication abilities and skills with which to communicate with clients from different fields. Failure to express one's ideas in a proper and advanced language is definitely a failure to the profession.

Obviously, as asserted by Spence and Liu (2013), oral communication (persuasion, negotiation, oral presentation, group discussion, and socialization among partners) and written communication (e-mails, meeting minutes, presentation slides and project reports) commonly occur in the context of international engineering workplace communication. However, Rajprasit (2015) emphasized that oral communication skills are given priority by employers in that although knowledge and tech-savviness are highly required in industry workers, the need to present information with outstanding communication skills cannot be undermined. Keyton et al. (2013) further alluded to the importance of workplace oral communicative competence when they identified the predominant ten communication behaviors in the workplace as listening, asking questions, discussion, sharing information, agreeing, suggesting, seeking feedback, getting feedback, answering questions, and giving explanation.

To sum up, it is apparent that the English language enjoys the status of lingua franca in engineering. Therefore, success of graduate engineers today would largely dependent on their ability to communicate in an outstanding level of English within the context of local and international workplaces.

2.1 Perceptions on the Importance of English Speaking Sub-Skills (Interaction and Production) in the Workplace

Ekola (2016) carried out a study to identify the language needs of Finish professional scientists by focusing on the communicative challenges posed by the use of English among researchers in Finland, and comparing between the language needs of these professionals and their current language proficiency in order to identify the vacuum to be filled. In efforts to attain this objective, a qualitative approach through the use of semi-structured interview was adopted to obtain information from a group of eight academic Science researchers (five men and three women) who were working with the Finish Environment Institute. The participants had to take DIALANG test to determine their English language proficiency. The study found the respondents' overall proficiency level for oral communication and speech production skills was to be at

CEFR level B2 (independent user), while their proficiency at both reading and writing was at C1 (proficient user). When comparing the B2 proficiency level reached by the respondents for speaking with the needs analysis results, there appeared to be a vacuum left to be filled. The findings signaled that spoken interaction skills needed for seminar and conference participations are important in the workplace although they were found to be challenging. In addition, negotiation skills were also regarded as important by the respondents but needed some improvement. The researcher concluded with a suggestion for the organization of language training in order for the research population to be well equipped for workplace communication scenarios.

More so, Zivkonic (2014) conducted his study to present the specifics for oral presentations for undergraduate students at the College of Applied Technical Sciences & Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, University of Niš, Serbia, in order to improve their presentation competency for the success of both their academic and future professional careers. A questionnaire designed to obtain information from the respondents (students of the above college and faculty) about their attitudes (opinions, preferences and reactions) towards the importance of oral presentation skills both in the classroom and workplace was adopted. The analysis of students' responses revealed the followings: Firstly, classes in which oral presentation is used are more interesting than those with traditional methods (teacher-centered pedagogy), for oral presentation assists students to take an active role in forming new understanding. Secondly, oral presentation skills prepare students to address one of the communicative scenarios in their future workplace. Thirdly, it prepares students to collaborate with classmates and colleagues and thus, equips them to tackle one of the workplace challenges. Moreover, the findings showed that through oral presentation, students do not only develop critical thinking, but also help them to get accustomed to other communication skills like discussion and debate with which they can succeed as professionals or academia. Also, it enables students to share ideas with their colleagues through progress report and findings of research. Lastly, the results suggested that being able to produce an effective presentation will improve their leadership skill which is central to building their career.

Raprasit (2015) carried out a study to identify how Thai engineers would self-assess their English competency for workplace communicative scenarios, and their perceptions about the use of language at the international workplace. In order to obtain sufficient amount of data to respond to the questions posed by the study, the use of mixed method via questionnaire and interview was employed. The questionnaire was used to collect information from a group of forty respondents who were Thai operative engineers working with international companies in Bangkok with branches in Norway, United Kingdom and United States of America. Four of these respondents willingly volunteered themselves to be interviewed. The data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using frequency, mean, standard deviation, and percentage, while the information obtained from interview was transcribed and arranged thematically to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that English proficiency was considered as a criterion for job recruitment, routine work and job promotion. Secondly, interpersonal communication such as persuasion, discussion, social and informal conversation, giving instruction, oral presentation, and negotiation were reported as frequent between Thai engineers and their foreign colleagues at work. Thirdly, English proficiency of respondents seemed to be at a fair level, with reading at a higher level than the other skills.

Siti Dewi, et al. (2016) also investigated the English communicative events at a Malaysian welding industry as well as the English communication skills required of workers therein. The researchers employed a questionnaire some parts of which were adopted and adapted from previous related studies and distributed them to a group of undergraduate students of Engineering Technology in Welding from two universities in Malaysia. These students were chosen based on workplace communication experience derived in their previous industrial training program. The findings signaled that out of the four main communicative skills, speaking appears as the most important in the workplace communicative context, followed by reading, listening and writing respectively. Moreover, the findings revealed that English is usually used in formal meetings, especially with external correspondents, trainings and seminars, external networking, presentations, giving instructions and explanations and teleconferencing. Certain other tasks such as informal discussion on tasks and jobs, dispute resolution, negotiation with team members, taking part in teleconferencing, building relationship and conversing informally and socially take place in the workplace, but not necessarily in English language. The study thus recommended that an ESP course be designed taking into account the workplace specific English speaking needs of university engineering students to help them fit into workplace.

Another related study is the one conducted by Spence and Liu (2013) to identify the English language needs of process integration engineers at a well reputed semi-conductor manufacturing industry in Taiwan. In this study, the researchers prepared an online survey questionnaire and a face-to-face interview which were answered by a group of process integration engineers working in the industry. The results indicate that similar to other Asian Pacific nations, process integration engineers in Taiwan were involved in various frequent English communicative events such as writing and reading of emails, memos and reports, with oral communicative events like teleconferences, meetings and presentations, discussing tasks and job duties, and social conversations with foreign customers/vendors.

Although virtually all the above mentioned studies signal the crucial importance of English speaking skills at engineering workplace as well as some instances of mismatch in the perceptions of respondents on their importance, it can be noticed that not much research has focused on the importance of English speaking skills at the Nigerian engineering workplace. Also, not much needs analysis research has been carried out in Nigeria to investigate the perceptions of undergraduate engineering students and industry workers on the importance of English speaking sub-skills in the workplace. Therefore, this study seeks to compare how undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria self-rate their spoken

interaction and production skills. It also attempts to identify how these two groups of respondents perceive the importance of English speaking sub-skills at the Nigerian Workplace.

3. Methodology

The present study employed a quantitative method of data collection. It used a questionnaire adapted and adopted from Habbash and Albakrawi (2014), Common European Framework of Reference for Languages according to the Council of Europe (2018), a webpage of Kyushu University Japan (www.chem.kyushu-u.ac.jp/gcoe/eng/symposium), and Yasmin and Hanim (2014). A number of two hundred respondents was involved; hundreds of whom were undergraduate students who were randomly chosen from the engineering faculty of a public university in the Kwara State of Nigeria, while the other hundred respondents were graduate industry workers who were purposively chosen from different engineering workplaces in the state.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented on the basis of the data collected. As it is conspicuous through the data collection instrument used (questionnaire) that the study is quantitative in nature, the use of SPSS is adopted, and specifically, the Independent Sample T- Test is used to describe as well as compare and contrast between the variables. Some of the data analyzed are reported in the form of percentage and further presented in line charts.

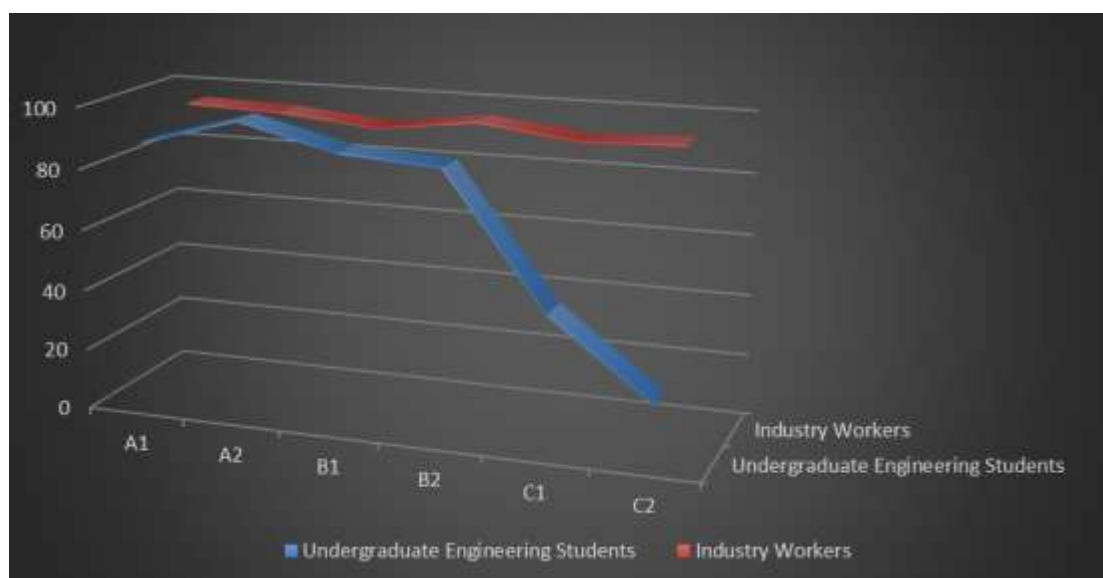


Figure 4.1 Respondents' Self-rating of their English Spoken Interaction Skills

Figure 4.1 presents the descriptive analysis of the respondents' (both students and industry workers) self-rating of their speaking interaction skills. The majority of students rated their speaking interaction skills to be at CEFR B2 level (independent user), while most industry workers rated theirs to be at CEFR C2 (proficient user) level as well.

Specifically, the majority of students (eighty-eight percent) perceived that they possess the ability to interact in a simple way in English (CEFR rating scale 'A1' i.e. 'basic user'). Also, most industry workers (ninety-five percent) perceived they possess this ability. Most students (ninety-seven percent) perceived themselves as having the ability to communicate in simple and routine tasks in English (CEFR rating scale 'A2' i.e. 'basic user').

Similarly, the majority of the industry workers (ninety-four percent) perceived they also possessed this ability. Moreover, the majority (eighty-nine percent) of the students felt that they could deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling in an area where English is spoken (CEFR rating scale 'B1' i.e. 'independent user'). Likewise, the majority (ninety-one percent) of the industry workers perceived they possessed this ability. Also, the majority (eighty-seven percent) of the students perceived that they had the ability to interact in English with a degree of fluency and ease (CEFR rating scale 'B2' i.e. 'independent user'), while most of the industry workers (ninety-five percent) felt that they had this ability.

However, only forty-four percent of the students perceived they possessed the ability to express themselves fluently in English without much thought and planning (CEFR rating scale 'C1' i.e. 'proficient user'), whereas the majority (ninety-one percent) of the industry workers perceived they possessed this ability. Lastly, only nineteen percent of the students felt that they possessed the ability to take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion in English (CEFR rating scale 'C2' i.e. 'proficient user') although the majority (ninety-two percent) of the industry workers felt that they possessed this ability.

In summary, these findings show that the undergraduate engineering students in the Kwara State of Nigeria thought they possessed an average level of spoken interaction skills, while the industry workers self-rated theirs as high. This signals that the level of English spoken interaction skills expected in the workplace is much higher than what the students are able to do while they are at university. This fact is evident in the industry workers' self-rating shown earlier. Therefore, students should realize the need to improve their level of English spoken interaction skills as an endeavor to prepare themselves for their future workplace communication challenges.

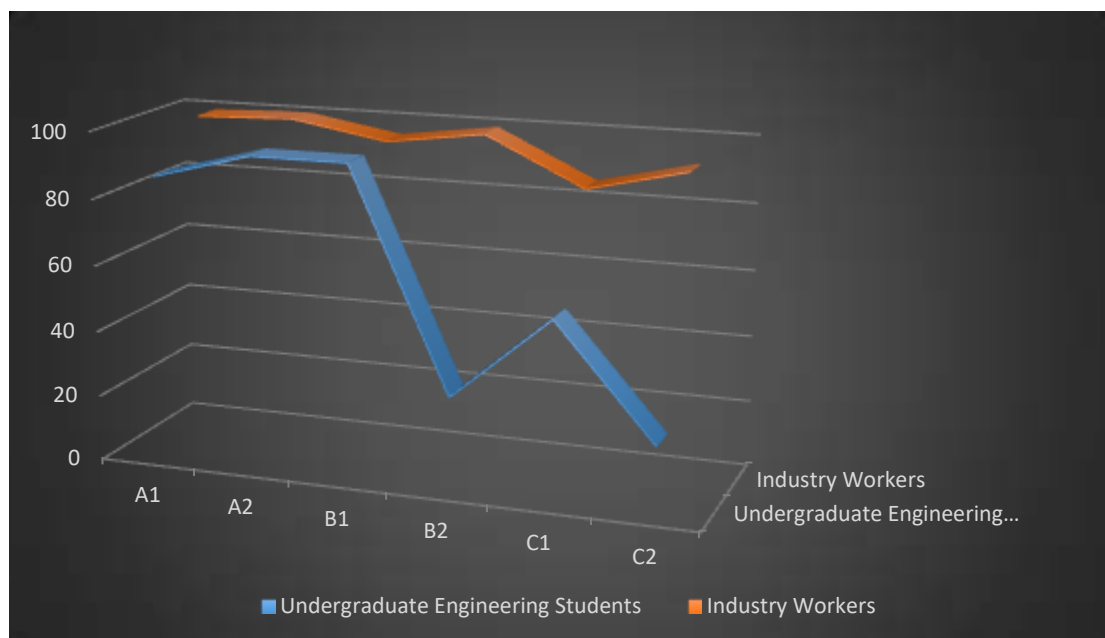


Figure 4.2 Respondents' Self-rating of their own English Spoken Production Skills

Figure 4.2 above presents the descriptive analysis of the respondents' (both students and industry workers) self-rating of their own speaking production skills. Most of the undergraduate engineering students rated their speaking production skills to be at the overall level of CEFR B1 (independent user), while the industry workers rated theirs to be at the overall level of CEFR C2 (proficient user) as well. Thus, this graph shows a wider gap between students' spoken production skills and those of workers.

Specifically, the majority (eighty-six percent) of the students felt that they had the ability to use simple phrases and sentences to describe in English where they live and people whom they know (CEFR rating scale 'A1' i.e. 'basic user'). Also, most of the industry workers (ninety-nine percent) perceived they had this ability. Most of the students (ninety-four percent) perceived themselves as having the ability to use a series of phrases and sentences in English to describe, in simple terms, their families and other people, living conditions and their educational background (CEFR rating scale 'A2' i.e. 'basic user'), while all the industry workers (one hundred percent) felt they also possessed this ability. Moreover, the majority (ninety-four percent) of the students felt that they could connect phrases in a simple way to describe experiences and events, their dreams, hopes and ambitions in English. They felt that they could briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans; and narrate a story or relate a plot of a book or film (CEFR rating scale 'B1' i.e. 'independent user'). Likewise, the majority (ninety-five percent) of the industry workers perceived they had this ability.

Nevertheless, only twenty-eight percent of the students perceived they had the ability to present in English, clear detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to their field of interest. They also thought they could explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options (CEFR rating scale 'B2' i.e. 'independent user'), whereas most of the industry workers (ninety-nine percent) felt they had this ability. Furthermore, fifty-four percent of the students perceived they possessed the ability to present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion in English (CEFR rating scale 'C1' i.e. 'competent user'), but the majority of the industry workers (eighty-five percent) perceived they got this ability. Lastly, only twenty percent of the students felt that they got the ability to present a clear, smoothly flowing description or argument in English (CEFR rating scale 'C2' i.e. 'competent user') even though the majority of the industry workers (ninety-two percent) perceived they had it.

To sum up, the overall findings suggest that the undergraduate engineering students in the Kwara State of Nigeria felt they possessed a low level of spoken production skills compared to industry workers who perceived their spoken production skills to be high. Moreover, based on the self-rating of own spoken interaction and production skills, it is evident that while the students did not feel they can perform well in speaking English, they felt that they could do the spoken interaction better than the spoken production skills.

However, the industry workers maintained that they could perfectly do both. The findings of the overall respondents' self-rating of their own spoken interaction and production skills agree with Chen, Chang and Chang (2016) who found that the level of English speaking skills of Taiwanese undergraduate students at a Taiwanese college of technology was low compared to the level used in the workplace. At this juncture, students should realize the importance of the aforementioned speaking skills in the workplace and thus, improve themselves to the required standard. More importantly, there is a lot to do by the Nigerian university education policy makers to ensure that the English courses taken by undergraduate engineering students are redesigned in such a way as to contain sufficient oral communication activities with which students can acquire the CEFR spoken interaction and production skills that are highly required in the workplace.

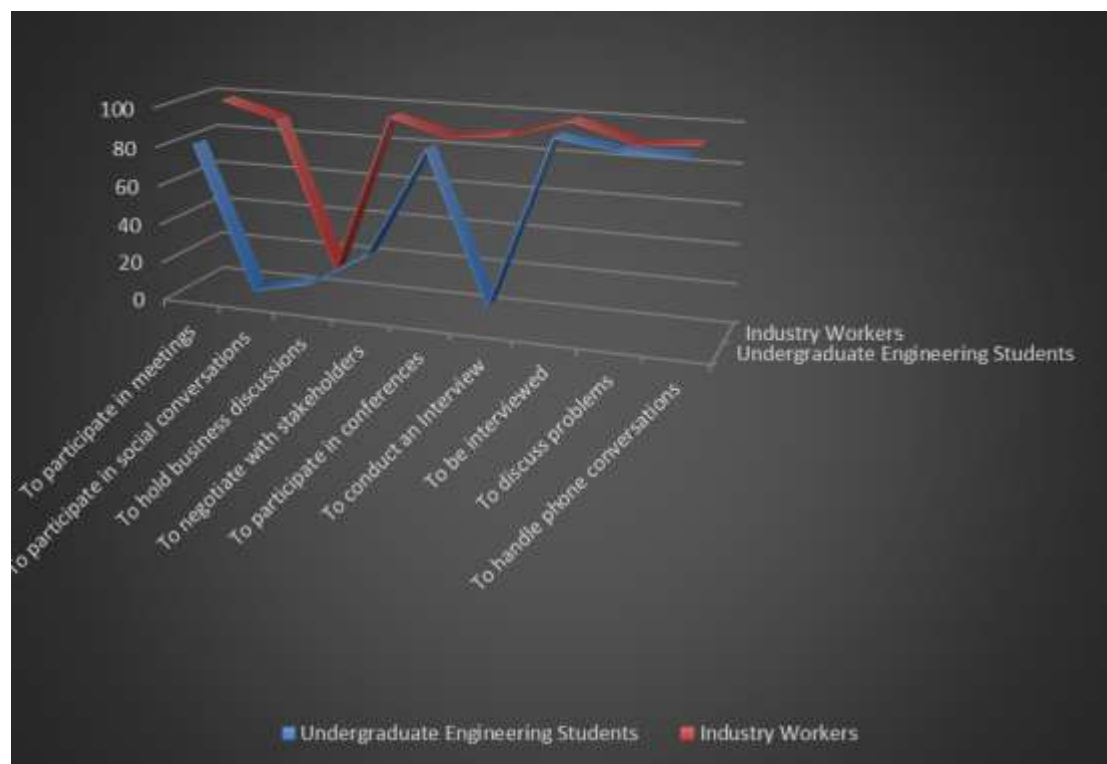


Figure 4.3 Respondents' Perceptions on the Importance of Spoken Interaction Sub-skills at Workplace

Figure 4.3 above presents the analysis and results of the respondents' perceptions on the importance of spoken interaction sub-skills in the workplace. The findings showed that, out of the nine spoken interaction sub-skills, there is a major difference in perceptions between the undergraduate engineering students and industry workers on three sub-skills. The students saw five speaking interaction sub-skills as important in the workplace, while the remaining four sub-skills were perceived by them as unimportant. The industry workers, however, saw eight speaking interaction sub-skills as important in the workplace, while only one sub-skill was not considered by them as important.

To be precise, most of the students (ninety-seven percent) perceived being interviewed (To be interviewed) as important in the workplace. Similarly, most of the industry workers (ninety-nine percent) perceived it as important in the workplace as well. Also, the majority (ninety-three percent) of the students perceived the importance of discussing problems (To discuss problems) in the workplace, while most of industry workers (ninety percent) considered it as important in the workplace as well. Moreover, handling phone conversations (To handle phone conversations) was perceived as important in the workplace by the majority (ninety-two percent) of the students, while the majority (ninety-two percent) of the industry workers perceived it as important as well. Similarly, participating in conferences (To participate in conferences) was perceived to be important in the workplace by 87 percent of both students and industry workers. More so, participating in meetings (To participate in meetings) was considered as important in the workplace by the majority (81 percent) of the students, while most of the industry workers (ninety-eight percent) perceived it as important as well. Conversely, holding a business discussion (To hold a business discussion) was not considered as important by most of the respondents since only fourteen percent of the engineering students and thirteen percent of the industry workers perceived it as an important sub skill.

However, only thirty-two percent of the students perceived negotiating with stakeholders (To negotiate with stakeholders) as important in the workplace, whereas most industry workers (ninety-five percent) perceived this sub skill to be important. More so, only thirteen percent of the students perceived conducting interviews (To conduct an interview) as an important speaking sub-skill in the workplace which is opposite to the ninety percent of the industry workers who felt that this sub skill

was important. For the sub skill of participating in social conversations (To participate in social conversations), only seven percent of students perceived it to be important in the workplace while it was perceived to be important by the majority (ninety percent) of the industry workers.

Overall, both the undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria were unanimous that participating in meetings and conferences, being interviewed, discussing problems, and handling conversations are important in the workplace, while holding business discussions is unimportant. Nonetheless, students thought that participating in social conversations, negotiating with stakeholders and conducting interviews are not important in the workplace, whereas the sub skills were perceived by the industry workers as important. This shows that the perception of students on the importance of speaking interaction skills in the workplace is different from that of industry workers. More specifically, there is a difference that can be regarded as statistically significant between the overall mean score of undergraduate engineering students ($M=3.49$, $SD=0.254$) and that of industry workers ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.251$); $t = 21.9$, $P = 0.00$, $P < 0.05$.

The perception difference found between the undergraduate engineering students and the industry workers on the importance of English spoken interaction sub skills in the workplace is in agreement with Kazempourian (2017) who reported a mismatch in perception between university engineering students and practicing engineers in Iran. This, as stated earlier, suggests a lack of strong link between the higher educational institutions in the Kwara State of Nigeria and the workplace. One of the consequences of lack of strong relationship between industries and universities is the inadequate awareness of students on the important workplace communication activities for which they should be preparing themselves as future employees.

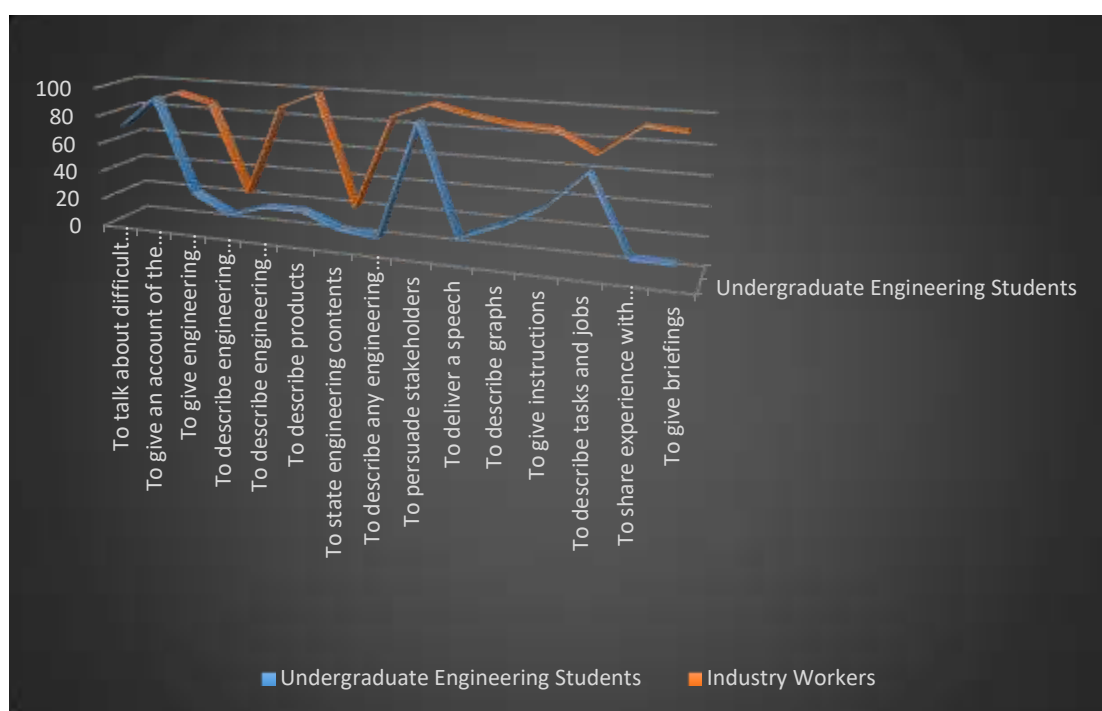


Figure 4.4 Respondents' Perceptions on Spoken Production Sub-skills at Workplace

Figure 4.4 above presents the analysis and results of the respondents' perceptions on the importance of spoken production sub-skills in the workplace. The findings show a major difference in the perception between the undergraduate engineering students and the industry workers in nearly all speaking production sub skills. Out of the 15 speaking sub skills grouped under the spoken production skills, the students perceived only four sub-skills as important in the workplace, while the other 11 sub-skills were not considered by them as important. However, the industry workers perceived all these speaking sub-skills as important in the workplace, apart from two sub-skills which were not considered by them as important.

To elaborate, most of the students (ninety-four percent) perceived giving an account of the available engineering services in the company (To give an account of the available engineering services in the company) as important in the workplace. Likewise, the majority (ninety-three percent) of the industry workers also perceived it as important. Moreover, persuading stakeholders (To persuade stakeholders) was perceived as important in the workplace by the majority (ninety-one percent) of the students. Similarly, most of the industry workers (ninety-seven percent) considered it as important too. Talking about difficult engineering concepts (To talk about difficult engineering concepts) was perceived as important in the workplace by a large number (seventy-two percent) of the students, while the majority (eighty-two percent) of the industry workers felt that

it is important. Furthermore, a good number (sixty-seven percent) of the students perceived describing tasks and jobs (To describe tasks and jobs) as important in the workplace. Likewise, it was perceived as important in the workplace by a large number (seventy-two percent) of the industry workers.

Conversely, describing engineering instruments (To describe engineering instruments) was considered as important in the workplace by few respondents. Only fifteen percent of the students perceived it as important, while only twenty-four percent of the industry workers felt its importance. Similarly, only thirteen percent of the students perceived talking about engineering contents (To state engineering contents) as important in the workplace. Likewise, only twenty-one percent of the industry workers perceived it as important.

Nevertheless, only twenty-three percent of the students perceived giving engineering presentation (To give engineering presentations) as important in the workplace, while it was perceived as important by the majority (eighty-seven percent) of the industry workers. Moreover, only twenty-three percent of the students perceived the importance of describing engineering measurements (To describe engineering measurements) in the workplace, whereas the majority (eighty-eight percent) of the industry workers perceived it as important. Also, describing products (To describe products) was perceived as important by only twenty-three percent of the students, while it was perceived as important by most of the industry workers (ninety-nine percent). Giving the description of an engineering process (To describe any engineering process) was considered important in the workplace by only ten percent of the students. However, it was perceived as important by the majority (eighty-seven percent) of the industry workers. In addition, only sixteen percent of the students perceived the delivery of speech (To deliver a speech) to be important in the workplace, while most of the industry workers (ninety-one percent) perceived it as important. More so, only a small number of the students (twenty-seven percent) perceived the importance of graph description (To describe a graph) in the workplace, whereas the majority (eighty-seven percent) of the industry workers considered it as important. Giving instructions (To give instructions) was perceived important by a number of the students less than average (forty-one percent). However, it was perceived to be important by the majority (eighty-six percent) of the industry workers. Also, only fourteen percent of the students felt that sharing experience with the public (To share experience with the public) is important in the workplace, while most of the industry workers (ninety-two percent) perceived it as important. Lastly, giving briefings (To give briefings) was perceived to be important in the workplace by only fourteen percent of the students, whereas the majority (eighty-eight percent) of the industry workers perceived it as important.

Overall, the majority of undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria are unanimous that talking about difficult engineering concepts, giving an account of the available engineering services in the company, persuading stakeholders, and describing tasks and jobs are important within the purview of workplace communication scenarios. In addition, the majority of these two groups of respondents are also unanimous that describing engineering instruments and talking about engineering contents are not important in the workplace.

Nonetheless, there is perception mismatch between the students and industry workers on the importance of other spoken production sub-skills in the workplace. The following spoken production sub-skills are considered unimportant in the workplace by the students, whereas they are all perceived as important by the industry workers: giving engineering presentations, describing engineering measurements, describing products, describing any engineering process, delivering a speech, describing graphs, giving instructions, sharing experience with the public, and giving briefings. This altogether suggests a difference that can be regarded as statistically significant between the two groups of respondents given the overall mean score of undergraduate engineering students ($M=3.06$, $SD=0.36$) and that of industry workers ($M=4.04$, $SD=0.20$); $t = -23.95$, $P=0.004$, $P<0.05$.

The perception mismatch between the two groups of respondents found with regards to the importance of spoken interaction sub-skills in the workplace also demonstrates itself in the spoken production skills. This shows that even though oral communication skills have been prioritized by employers over a decade (Rajprasit and Hemchua, 2015), most of the novice engineers are still being rated as somewhat deficient in this regard (Rajprasit, Pratoomrat and Wang, 2015). For this perception gap to be properly bridged, there is need for a holistic orientation to guide students into the real picture of workplace communication and inculcate in their minds the fact that their success as practicing engineers in the future lies on their abilities to showcase a high level of English speaking skills within the realm of workplace communicative events. This will help them to realize the importance of all speaking sub-skills perceived to be important in the workplace by industry workers and thus, improve their speaking performances accordingly.

5. Conclusion

This study sought to compare how undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria self-rate their own English spoken interaction and production skills, as well as identified their perception on the importance of English spoken interaction and production sub-skills in the workplace. The results of the data analyzed through the use of SPSS indicate that the students rated themselves to be up to B2 of CEFR rating scale (independent users) at spoken interaction skills, while the industry workers rated themselves to be up to C2 of CEFR rating scale (proficient users). Also, the students rated themselves to be up to B1 of CEFR rating scale (independent users) at spoken production skills, while the industry workers rated themselves to be up to C2 (proficient users). As for the importance of speaking sub skills in the workplace, the industry workers perceived more spoken interaction and production sub-skills as important in the workplace than students.

This study serves as an important source for ESP course designers in their efforts to prepare a suitable workplace English speaking course for undergraduate engineering students. This information is especially essential to the academics in the Kwara State of Nigeria if they were to produce graduate engineers who are not only tech-savvy, but are also capable of communicating effectively in the English language within the scope of workplace communicative events.

It is well understood that this study focused on the importance of workplace English speaking skills for undergraduate engineering students. Hence, further studies are suggested to investigate the importance of speaking skills among other undergraduates. Studies on graduates' and professionals' perceptions of other communication skills such as listening, reading, and writing should also be carried out as the findings are useful in preparing university students better for workplace communication. In addition, as this study was conducted in only one public university in the Kwara State of Nigeria, it is recommended that further studies are carried out in other universities in countries where English is used in the workplace.

Based on its findings, this study also recommends that an ESP course on workplace English speaking skills for undergraduate students be designed as a measure to fill in the identified communication vacuum between students and industry workers. It is further recommended that the course should focus mainly on the English speaking skills considered to be important at the target situation (i.e. workplace) of the undergraduate students. Speaking sub-skills and others regarded as important at the workplace should also be addressed thoroughly in the suggested course. The course should have a focus on language functions along with forms so as to ensure that students are equipped with the exact workplace English speaking needs. Having designed the course, the materials to be selected or developed should make use of authentic workplace English speaking learning materials (online or offline materials) that paint a clear picture of the workplace communication activities and thus, help students to practice the workplace English speaking skills right from their school environment.

References

- Rahman, A. F., Mohamed, A., Saidin, K., & Ahmad Nasir, N. (2019). Exploring perceptions of employers on communication skills among fresh graduates. *Practitioner Research*, 1, 69-85.
- Mohamed, A. A., Radzuan, N. R. M., Kassim, H., & Ali, M. M. A. (2014). Conceptualizing English workplace communication needs of professional engineers: The challenges for English language tertiary educators. *Selangor Business Review*, 1(1), 1-9.
- Afolabi, T.A. (2016). Language attitudes and the issue of dominance: The Nigerian experience. *Journal of English Language, Literature & Culture*, 1(3), 21-29.
- Ahmad, Esa, Selamat, Asri, Suhaili, Padil & Jamaludin, Jaslina (2015). Applications of soft skills in engineering program at polytechnic malaysia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 140, 115 – 120.
- Ali, A.R. & Kazempourian, S. (2017). English needs analysis of electrical engineering students, graduates and companies: A step toward employability. *Journal of Language Horizons, Alzahra University*, 1(1), 77-93.
- Atai, M. R., & Asadi, S. A. (2013). Assessing academic and professional English language needs of Iranian railway engineering students: A triangulated evaluation study. *ESP across Culture*, 10(1), 35-54.
- Chen, I., Chang, Y. & Chang, W. (2016). I learn what I need: Needs analysis of English learning in Taiwan. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(1), 1-5.
- Christopher, N.M. (2016). Linguistic diversity, code-switching and language shift in Nigeria. *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences*, 3 (7), 381-393.
- Clement, A., & Murugavel T. (2015). English for employability: A case study of the English language training need analysis for engineering students in India. *English Language Teaching*, 8(2), 116-125.
- Council of Europe. Council for Cultural Co-operation. Education Committee. Modern Languages Division. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Council of Europe (2018). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Language Policy Unit, Strasbourg. Retrieved from www.coe.int/lang-CEFR
- Dewi, S. Z.Z., Akma Azlin, M.Z., Noranisah Abu Bakar, S.B., & Sumaiyyah, O. (2016). English language communication needs at workplace as perceived by students. *Journal of Science & Engineering Technology*, 3(2), 27-31.
- Ekola, T. (2016). *English language needs and language proficiency of academic professionals as a basis for developing language training. A case study of environmental researchers*. An unpublished Master's dissertation. Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä.
- Foyewa, R.A. (2015). English: The international language of science and technology. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 3(5), 34-41.
- Gashaye, A. (2015). An investigation of the present situation communicative needs in an ESP context: Civil engineering students in focus. *English for Specific Purposes World*, 16(48), 1-19.
- Habbash, M.M. & Albakrawi, H.T. (2014). Needs Analysis of engineering students' English needs at the University of Tabuk. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(38), 68-75.
- Keyton, J., Caputo, J. M., Ford, E. A., Fu, R., Leibowitz, S. A., Liu, T., Polasik, S. S., Ghosh, P. & Wu, C. (2013). Investigating verbal workplace communication behaviors. *Journal of Business Communication*, 50(2), 152-169.
- Khalid, A. (2016). Needs assessment in ESP: A review. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 12(6), 38-46.

- Kim, H.H. (2013). Needs analysis for English for specific purpose course development for engineering students in Korea. *International Journal of Multimedia and Ubiquitous Engineering*, 8(6), 279-288.
- Narayan, R.S., Raj, B.P., & Raj, J.A. (2015). Impact of English on the career of engineering students: A brief overview in G (local) context. *Journal of the Institute of Engineering*, 11(1), 182-188.
- Nigerian National Policy on Education (2013). 6th Edition. Yaba: NERDC Press.
- Rajprasit, K., Pratoomrat, P., Wang, T., Kulsiri, W., & Hemchua, S. (2014). Use of the English language prior to and during employment: Experiences and needs of Thai novice engineers. *Global Journal of Engineering Education*, 16(1), 27-33.
- Sheth, T.D. (2016). Communication skill: A prerequisite for engineers. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 3(7), 51-54.
- Siddoo, V., Sawattawee, J., Janchai, W., & Thinnukool, O. (2019). An exploratory study of digital workforce competency in Thailand. *Helion*, 5, 1-12.
- Singh, D., & Kaur, G. (2019). Professional communication skills in English for non-native English speaking engineers: challenges and a proposed teaching framework. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering*, 8(2), 595-599.
- Spence, P., & Liu, G. (2013). Engineering English and the high-tech industry: A case study of an English needs analysis of process integration engineers at a semiconductor manufacturing company in Taiwan. *English for Specific Purposes*, 32, 97-109.
- Sunday, S.D. (2013). Language policy: Nigeria and the role of English language in the 21st century. *European Scientific Journal*, 9(17), 1-21.
- Tinh, L. (2016). *Needs analysis of English for mechanical engineering students in the Vietnamese context*. PhD. Thesis. Victoria University of Wellington
- Udofot, I. (2015). The English language and education in Nigeria. *Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association*, 14(2), 17-23.