Identifying English language needs among administrative support staff in a Malaysian Public University: A preliminary study

Mohd Zulfadli Mat Husin [a,1,*], Noor Raha Mohd Radzuan [b,2]

[a] Registrar Office, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16310 Bachok, Malaysia

[b] Centre for Modern Languages, Universiti Malaysia Pahang, 26600 Pekan, Malaysia

[1] zulfadli.mh@umk.edu.my *; [2] nraha@ump.edu.my

* corresponding author

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

English skills particularly in conversation are essential in workplace situations especially in the context of higher learning institutions. Little attention is being given to examining the needs of English communication skills and issues related to administrative support staff at their workplace particularly at public universities. A questionnaire was adopted to gauge the English language needs of support staff, their English skills perception as well as usage at the workplace. Data were collected from a group of 40 support administrative staff from Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) involving three administrative departments. The findings were gathered using survey and analyzed using content descriptive analysis. The results of the study revealed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that having a good English ability will increase their chance of being promoted to a higher position. Data also revealed that staff use English mostly during interaction with foreign staff and students. In addition, staff perceived that they need to improve their English writing skills the most. This study hopes to give better insight towards English proficiency among administrative support staff and explicit policy on English language at workplace. Therefore, English continuous professional development programmes should be developed and introduced to assist in improving their English language abilities.

1. Introduction

English has been known to be one of the main important elements towards the development in terms of education and business especially in the South East Asian countries. English is used as a lingua-franca of the business world and has been assigned to be the "working language of ASEAN countries" (Kluensuwan et al., 2019). In Malaysia, English has been recognized as the second language in Malaysia beside Malay as the official language (Afip et al., 2019). English language has been taught since preschool and has become a compulsory subject for students to pass both in primary and secondary school (Afip et al., 2019). Due to this early exposure to English language, employers expect their employees to be able to communicate in English effectively to serve in different communicative tasks. The role of the English language in the employment sector, whether in public or private, is very significant as organizations rapidly embrace more and more foreign stakeholders into their environment (Hassan & Ong, 2019).

Based on the importance of English language at the workplace, numerous studies were conducted on the needs for Malaysian students to have good English communication ability (Jalleh et al., 2021; Diana & Su-Hie, 2017; Isarji et al., 2013; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018; Ngah et al., 2011; Singh & Harun, 2020; Singh et al., 2021; Su-Hie et al., 2017; Talif & Noor, 2009; Vicky et al., 2016). These studies concluded that a Malaysian graduate's employability is being influenced by academic performance as well as their communicative competence, especially using the English language effectively. However, as higher education institutions develop their programmes on employability and providing the necessary platforms for undergraduates to have good English competencies, little attention is paid on its administrative staff's English language needs. The staff in higher education institutions such as in public universities need to have a better grasp on using English as communication tools so that together with academic staff, they can create a blended and conducive environment that encourages the use of English language inside and outside the workplace as well as attracting outstanding overseas talents.

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), the 19th public university in Malaysia established in the year 2006 under the Ninth Malaysia Plan proposal. Its first campus was situated in Pengkalan Chepa, Kota Bharu and UMK focused on entrepreneurship and enterprise education. Currently, UMK has three (3) campuses situated in Kota Bharu, Bachok and Jeli with an estimated 1300 staff from academic and administrative. Out of those administrative staff, 450 are support staff who are placed in various schemes such as N for administrative, F for information technology and W for finance. The Administrative Support Staff can be considered as one of the backbones behind the implementation and ensuring the general management and human resource management of UMK up and running smoothly. Hence for UMK, not only the graduates need to be proficient in English with the purpose of employability, the staff who are part of the ecosystem of tertiary education also need to be able to converse in English. As the internationalization process rapidly takes place in UMK, the university starts to employ more foreign staff and students. Consequently, UMK has started to focus on ensuring all staff are able to communicate in English effectively. The institutional policies have been put forth by UMK top management such as introducing and implementing English as the medium of instruction in all academic and research settings. However, little attention has been given towards improving administrative staff English communication skills and this internationalization issue can be regarded as an important issue which will influence higher education institutions significantly (Yonezawa, 2018).

Over the years, needs analysis has been identified by researchers as well as educators to be one of the important elements to be considered in improving learners' competence or performance either in the context of education or workplace (Jalal, 2016; Singh & Harun, 2020). In defining the term needs, three (3) elements should be looked into which are necessities, lack and wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Within the context of the workplace, what staff need to know in order for them to communicate better in English are necessities. The gap that exists between the English proficiency of the staff and their employer's or superior's target are defined as lacks. Administrative staff's subjective needs such as to improve their English writing skills are known as wants.

In addition to that, Berwick (1989) gave definition to the term needs as "the gap between the current situation and the anticipated future state" (p. 52). Brown (1995) defined needs analysis as the activities involving collecting information that will cater the needs of identified learners. Needs can also be defined as the gap that is required to be filled which refers to the knowledge that learners know or do not know about a certain language (Robinson, 1991). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) explained that need analysis include the target and learning needs. Considering those definitions and concepts, needs in the workplace in this study can be referred to as the gap between an employee's current English competency level and the employer's expectations. Furthermore, target English needs can be viewed as the employees' needs and what they should do in certain English communicative contexts within workplace environment. In addition, learning needs in this study can be described as actions that employees need to do in their English learning process at workplace.

Several studies on English language needs at the workplace have been conducted, for instance, in banking sectors (Muthiah, 2003), supply chain (Puteri Zarina et al., 2020), engineering industry (Hiranburana, 2017; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Kluensuwan et al., 2019; Ngah et al., 2011; Subramaniam et al., 2020; Tinh, 2018) and graduates' employability (Lee & Koo, 2015; Singh & Harun, 2020). In order to design English for Specific purposes courses within the context of occupational context,

several studies which were conducted within the south East Asian countries were worth to be considered although the employees were in different fields.

A study by Karachedee (2017) explored the needs of English communications skills of Thai employees as perceived by their superiors who were at management level in a selected Thailand's multinational company. The findings suggested that as most of the employees were perceived to have insufficient English communication skills and, their unsatisfactory performance in dealing with foreign customers, suppliers and visitors due to low level of English proficiency, would negatively affect not only themselves but also the company's reputation. Listening and speaking skills in English were found to be the most needed skills by those diploma-holder employees as perceived by their superiors, however, based on the data from the employees themselves, it was reported that listening skill was the skill that they needed to improve the most. Nevertheless, it was highlighted that the English communication skills needed differ according to several factors such as the employee's working experiences, education levels and job description (Karachedee, 2017). The scope of the current study is different from a study by Karachedee (2017). The current study focuses on administrative staff of a Malaysian public university whereas Karachedee (2017) focuses on selected Thailand's multinational employees. The difference in English requirements at the respective population's workplace between Thailand and Malaysia greatly influence their perceptions of English usage at the workplace.

A study conducted by Jusoh et al. (2018) examined the level of apprehension in four (4) settings which were during group discussion, meeting, interpersonal and public speaking among non-academic officers at a Malaysian public university. They found out that public university non-academic officers showed moderate levels of apprehension and the highest level of apprehension was found in English public speaking context. The study also concluded that female officers were more apprehensive in all those four communicative settings compared to men (Jusoh et al., 2018). In contrast to the study by Jusoh et al. (2018) which focused mainly on the four settings, the current study expanded the communicative settings at the workplace to 15 tasks that administrative support staff may involve in and use English. In addition to that, Jusoh et al. (2018) proposed to have continuous in-house training to reduce the level of anxiety among staff, especially the non-academic staff.

A study by Hee and Zainal (2018) which was conducted in a Malaysian pest control industry shared some insights on the understanding of communication requirements of employees at the workplace. The study focused on English communication needs of service technicians and it was found that those technicians were often involved in communication activities in their working life especially in giving suggestions, providing advice to customers, making and answering phone calls, and writing and replying to emails (Hee & Zainal, 2018). Therefore, the study suggested that speaking, listening and writing skills were the essential skills to be considered as part of the proposed syllabus for English courses for these service technicians. In addition, the study highlighted that having good English communication skills may bring a positive impact on customers which eventually improves the business.

A qualitative case study was carried out by Gaspar and Hartanto (2019) to identify the English training program design, implementation and evaluation among administrative staff at the University of Surabaya. The program was conducted starting from January until August 2017 with the aim to equip administrative staff with English communication competency (Gaspar & Hartanto, 2019). The study concluded that the English language training program which had been modelled based on the ADDIE course design was successful. The study justified that finding based on the participants' satisfaction level and level of attendance which were above the target. Other findings from the study suggested that university administrative staff showed positive perceptions towards the implementation of English language training courses. One noticeably limitation from this study was that the testing instrument needed to be improved in order to measure the progress of the participants as the study's measurement tool using pre and post-test was not consistent thus unreliable.

A recent study related to administrative staff use of English language in a northern Malaysian public university was conducted by Jassim (2020). The study used questionnaires and interviews in investigating the English language use and needs among the public university administrative staff and international students. Based on the findings, Jassim (2020) concluded that administrative staff used

English language in both administration and non-administration related tasks. From the interviews with two international students, it was reported that effective communication occurred between them and the administrative staff. Even though sometimes hiccups did occur during the interaction, the administrative staff claimed that they applied a variety of pragmatic strategies such as repetition, pronunciation adjustment, and clarification to ensure successful communication. The study also highlighted that administrative staff put high priority on the needs to improve their English grammar and enrich vocabulary repertoire. Administrative staff also expressed that more chances should be given to them to practice their conversation skills in English (Jassim, 2020).

Hassan and Ong (2019) carried out a study with the aim of investigating English usage and sources of difficulties in using English among island tourism staff at hotels situated in Perhentian and Redang Islands. The study revealed that respondents perceived English is very important as they need to communicate with international tourists. The findings also showed that respondents agreed that their two main sources of difficulties in using English were tourist's accents and English grammar (Hassan & Ong, 2019).

Based on those studies mentioned, it is notable that only a few studies are being conducted to explore English usage within the context of Malaysian public universities. To date, only a few studies (Abdullah, 2014; Jassim, 2020; Jusoh et al., 2018; Yuit & Imm, 2009) were carried out focusing on English usage among Malaysian administrative staff of public university, thus it is essential to conduct a needs analysis on the use of English language among administrative support staff especially in the context of UMK. The findings of this study will provide insights among administrative staff who are also involved in interaction with foreign stakeholders. Furthermore, this study will yield data on the language needs, particularly by the administrative support staff and may be useful in designing a syllabus for a professional development course, focusing on enhancing their English communication skills. The following research questions were formulated to achieve the objectives below;

1. What are the perceptions of the administrative support staff towards the use of English at their workplace?

2. Which communicative workplace tasks do administrative support staff use English language the most and the least?

3. What skills do staff require in an English competency course at workplace?

2. Method

The present study aims to obtain the perceptions of the administrative staff on the use of English of certain communicative events at their workplace. The selection of a quantitative approach for answering the research objectives in this study is due to its benefits of replicability and generalization (Daniel, 2016). Taking into account the samples, objectives and pattern found in this study, the results can reflect a wider population. Moreover, taking into account examples of the use of samples, instruments, procedures and data analysis procedure in this quantitative method study, other researchers can replicate the study in different time and place but still will get the same data interpretation.

Non-probability convenience sampling was adopted in this study and a total of 40 respondents out of 168 administrative support staff (from Grades N19 to N36) was selected. Convenience sampling method was selected for this current study as it is uncomplicated and economical to gather data from the respondents. It is costly in term of expenses and time to adapt systematic or stratified sampling towards the whole populations (168 administrative support staff) (Cohen et al., 2018). Other than that, the use of convenience sampling in this study was based on the availability of the respondents to take part in the survey. As such, out of 168 administrative support staff, 40 of them were available and took part in this study.

All respondents were currently working with 3 different departments, namely Registrar Office, Academic Department and Students Affairs and Alumni Department. Differences between N19 and N29-N36 staff are as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences between N19 and N29-N36 staff

Grade	Minimum education requirement	Job Description
N19 (Administrative Assistant)	Malaysian Certificate of Education or Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). Malaysian Certificate of Education or SPM is a public examination that students take at the end of 11 years of schooling (primary and secondary)	Responsible for clerical work involving filing systems, preparing and mailing letters and assisting officers or other staff with administrative tasks
N29 – N36 (Assistant Officer)	Malaysian Higher School Certificate or Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) / Matriculation Certificate or Diploma certificate	Responsible to assist Administrative Officers in respective departments to complete any tasks related to human resource, administrative, research, finance and academic

To gather participants' level of English proficiency, they are required to key in their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) results in the survey too. MUET is administered by the Malaysian Examination Council and regarded as one of the predictors to check on one's English language proficiency (Othman & Nordin, 2013). MUET consists of tests in four (4) skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. MUET results are mostly being used for university entrance for Malaysian students with a minimum score of Band 3 depending on the course applied (Othman & Nordin, 2013). For Malaysian University undergraduate courses, the differences can be referred in the Table 2.

Table 2. MUET Score Requirement

Malaysia University Undergraduate Courses	Minimum MUET Score
Arts and Social Science	Band 2
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics	Band 3
Law and Medicine	Band 4

Five, Four and Three-point Likert-scale questionnaire was employed to measure the respondents' English language needs and different items used different scale ranges. Item 6 used a 5-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 – very weak to 5 – very proficient, item 7 and 11 used a 4-point Likert scale which ranges from 1-Sometimes to 4- Always. Item 8 also used a 4-point Likert scale ranges from 1-Little to 4 – tremendous and item 12 used a 3-point Likert scale ranges from 1-Low to 3-High.

The scale had a high level of internal consistency as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 (George & Mallery, 2003). This questionnaire was adapted from Kluensuwan et al. 's (2019) study because it explored the English needs for Thai engineering workers which is similar to the objectives of this current study. The questionnaires used in the current study consist of 12 items (which are relevant to the aim of the study) out of 38 items from the questionnaires used in Kluensuwan et al.'s (2019) study. In addition, the words in the items used in the questionnaires were also replaced from engineering discourse to human resource discourse to fit the context of this study. Examples of the replacement items were "explain problems(faults) of machines/equipment" changed to "assisting in interview sessions", "customers/professionals" changed to "foreign staff and students" and "Work in overseas plants" changed to "work at another place/university". The questionnaires were divided into 3 parts: Part A on demographic information, Part B on perception towards English use at the workplace and Part C on English proficiency, self-rating and suggestion toward areas of improvement.

The questionnaires were distributed via email to 40 respondents through Google Form. However, only 34 respondents answered and returned the questionnaire. The data were analyzed and presented in the forms of frequency and percentage. Table 3 illustrates the respondent's demographic background. Majority of the respondents were female (76%) and most of the respondents aged between 30 to 39 years old (68%). Respondents for the current study mostly are from N19 (41%) and

N29 until N36 (50%). Surprisingly, most of the respondents in the current study hold bachelor degrees (56%) even though the academic requirements for the support staff job entry are SPM and STPM/Matriculation or Diploma certificates. It is also worth noting that the majority of the respondents scored MUET within the range of Band 3 and below, with Band 1 (6%), Band 2 (35 %) and Band 3 (23%). Only 15% of the respondents scored Band 4 and 3% achieved Band 5 in the MUET test.

Table 3. Demographic Information

Profile	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	26	76
	Male	8	24
	Total	34	100
Age	20 and below	0	0
	21 – 29	6	18
	30 – 39	23	68
	40 – 49	4	12
	50 and above	1	2
	Total	34	100
Jobs Grade	N19	14	41
	N22 – 26	3	9
	N29 – 36	17	50
	Total	34	100
Education Background	SPM	2	6
	STPM/Matriculation/Diploma	12	35
	Bachelor Degree	19	56
	Master Degree	1	3
	PhD	0	0
	Total	34	100
MUET Results	Band 1	2	6
	Band 2	12	35
	Band 3	8	23
	Band 4	5	15
	Band 5	1	3
	Band 6	0	0
	Never Took	6	18
	Total	34	100

3. Findings and Discussion

Descriptive analysis was carried out with the purpose of answering research questions in this current study. The data of administrative support staff's English language usage at the workplace was analyzed using Minitab Software Version 19. The data is then being presented in table form and arranged accordingly to answer the research questions of this study.

3.1. Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the administrative support staff towards the use of English at their workplace?

Table 4 shows the Mean and SD on respondents' perceptions towards their estimated English usage in daily life. The mean score which is 2.38 indicates that most respondents seldom use English in their daily life. This illustrates that respondents are reluctant to use English in their daily conversation either at the workplace or at home. One possible reason behind the low usage of English in administrative support staff was the dominance of Malay which is the official language of the university administration. Support staff mostly speak and write in Malay which is also the national language of Malaysia.

Table 4. Perception on Estimated use of English in daily life

Items	M	SD
Estimated use of English in Daily life	2.38	0.49

Furthermore, ethnic Malays comprise the majority of the administrative support staff in most universities thus creating a monolingual environment at work (Yuit & Imm, 2009). On the contrary, Jalal (2016) reported that managers from several industries (i.e. Law, Plantation, Telecommunication, Broadcasting, Finance and Engineering) claimed they always used English on communicating and interacting inside and outside of their workplace. In addition, the study reported only a small percentage of managers rated seldom used English in their daily life. One possible explanation was that being at the management levels, those respondents needed to deal and communicate with their respective company's stakeholders from various countries and cultural backgrounds in which English is mostly being used as the main medium. As such they heavily used English compared to administrative support staff who heavily used Malay in daily life.

Table 5. Perceived impact of English on career advancement

Impact	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Little	1	3%
Fair	10	29%
Strong	18	53%
Tremendous	5	15%

53 percent of respondents believed that English proficiency strongly impacts staff career advancement (refer to Table 5). 15 percent of them agreed that English proficiency has a tremendous impact on work advancement while only 3 percent said little impact and 29 percent claimed it was fair. The English language is being considered to be one of the critical aspects that can help staff in their career advancement particularly in the context of higher learning institutions such as UMK. Career advancement can be defined as the ascending movement of an individual's career wherein an individual can advance by moving from support level to an officer level or change jobs scheme from administrative into academia within the same university or with another university. For example, a support staff can apply or get hired into higher grades (from N19 to N29) or a higher level such as officer level (from N19 to N41). Referring to the findings, a significant high percentage of respondents perceived that English competencies strongly impacts career advancement. It is likely that the reason behind this high percentage is that the UMK top management constantly highlighted the needs for staff to master the English language and due to the emphasis, several human resource policies have been implemented in relation to the English language issues in UMK. Similar results had been found in engineering sectors (Kluensuwan et al., 2019; Tinh, 2018), Thailand's multinational companies (Karachedee, 2017), pest control industry (Hee & Zainal, 2018) and supply chain industry (Puteri Zarina et al., 2020).

Table 6. Perceptions on work opportunities from having good English ability

Work Opportunities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Promoted to Higher Position	10	29%
Attend Overseas Training	7	21%
Work at Other Place	8	24%
Study Abroad	6	18%
Earn Better Paid	2	6%
Others	1	3%

Table 6 above showed the frequency and percentage of respondents' perceptions on work opportunities resulting from good English ability. Work opportunities in this study refers to the chance of being promoted to a higher position, chance to attend overseas training with the aim of improving productivity, earning better pay grade, chances to get better jobs at another organization and chances to further study abroad. 29 percent of respondents perceived that by having good English ability, they may have better chances to be promoted to a higher position and another 24 percent claimed that they can apply for work at other companies or institutions, while 21 percent suggested they will have better opportunities to attend training abroad. 18 percent of respondents said with good English, they should be able to further their study abroad and another 6 percent said they can earn better pay as a result they have good English ability. Only 1 percent mentioned they can communicate better. Overall, administrative support staff agreed that by having good ability in English they can be promoted to higher positions. This finding is consistent with Clement and Murugavel's (2018) survey which focused on Indian corporate employees from IT companies such as IT administrators, project managers, system administrators and analysts. They found that the majority of respondents perceived that poor English communication skills can harm individuals' chances of getting promoted (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). It is likely that from an administrative support staff point of view, those who have good ability in English will have more interaction and better engagement with foreign staff and students and eventually that ability can significantly assist in their promotion.

3.2. Research Question 2: Which communicative workplace tasks do administrative support staff use English language the most and the least?

Table 7 displayed the respondents' mean scores towards the frequency of using English in the communicative workplace tasks. The highest mean score indicates high frequency of English use whilst the lowest mean score indicates low frequency of English use. The highest mean score was revealed to be 'Socializing and Entertaining Foreign Staff/Students' with 2.53 indicating that high frequency of English use in this communicative task at their workplace. This was followed by 'Giving and Receiving Explanations Over the Phone' (M = 2.29, SD = 0.84) and 'Assisting in interview sessions' (M = 2.00, SD = 0.95). The lowest mean score was 'Describing Statistics/Performance' (M =1.59, SD = 0.70). Majority of the tasks scored below average (M = 1.84). In relation to communicative workplace tasks, the findings found that most UMK administrative support staff used English when they had to socialize and entertain foreign staff and students. Human Resource support staff, for example, need to be able to use English effectively in their communication with those foreign staff as they are going to interact with foreign staff regularly to explain about human resource procedures, benefits, performance and service. As UMK is rapidly growing, there is an increasing number of international staff and students' recruitment. As such the need for all UMK staff, especially the administrative support staff to master the English language, particularly in speaking skill is becoming more significant. This finding is consistent with the claim by Jusoh et al. (2018) that university administrative staff mainly use English when dealing with foreign staff or students. Similarly, Hassan and Ong (2019) reported that within the tourism context, English is being used the most during inquiring about international tourist's information and needs. In contrast, Karachedee (2017) reported that most Thai multinational employees required training in listening skills as they mostly used English during telephone communication with both internal and external customers.

Table 7. List of communicative workplace tasks using English

Tasks	M	SD
Socialize and Entertain Foreign Staffs/Students	2.53	0.90
Give and Receive Over the Phone	2.29	0.84
Assisting in an interview session	2.00	0.95
Give Instructions	1.85	0.78
Give Advices to Staffs/Students	1.82	0.76
Describe Causes and Effects of Problem	1.82	0.80
Describe Job Responsibility/Scope	1.82	0.76
Make an Appointment	1.76	0.74
Explain Procedures and Guidelines	1.74	0.75
Attending Meeting	1.71	0.80
Express Opinions	1.71	0.72
Define and Clarify Meaning	1.71	0.76
Discuss Problems	1.65	0.69
Make an Oral Presentation or A Report	1.62	0.74
Describe Statistics/Performance	1.59	0.70

3.3. Research Question 3: What skills do staff require in an English course?

Table 8 showed respondents' self-rated proficiency based on English language skills. Most respondents rated their best English skill was Reading with a mean score of 3.65 followed by Listening (M =3.44), Writing (M =3.18), Conversation (M =3.15) and Public Speaking (M =3.06). Moreover, most respondents rated their overall English skills scores above average (M =3.21). This indicates that although respondents were confident with their English ability in skills such as reading, listening and writing, they were still weak in public speaking. This overall score was in contrast with Kluensuwan et al. (2019) study who reported that Thai employees rated their English self-rating scores below average. Administrative support staff rated their public speaking skills in English to be the lowest, indicating that they encountered problems whenever they needed to do public speaking in English at the workplace. The reasons behind this might be because of the lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes in front of other people. This public speaking skill finding was consistent with the results from studies by Abdullah et al. (2017), Hee and Zainal (2018) and Kluensuwan et al. (2019). The current study strongly suggests that support staff need to improve their English-speaking skills especially involving conversation and public speaking.

Table 8. The self-rated proficiency in English language skills

Skills	M	SD
Reading	3.65	0.77
Listening	3.44	0.66
Overall	3.21	0.69
Writing	3.18	0.67
Conversation	3.15	0.74
Public Speaking	3.06	0.65

Table 9. Recommendations for English course contents

Contents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
General English Such as Greeting and Socializing	12	35%
Technical English Relating to Human Resource and Administration	11	32%
Business English Such as Discussion, Negotiation, Giving Oral Presentation, Attending Meetings	11	32%

Table 9 displayed respondents' recommendations for the contents they wished to have in their English course. 35 percent of them required general English contents and 32 percent suggested both technical English and Business English. Most respondents agreed on proposing 'General English Such as Greeting and Socializing' contents in their English training courses. The recommendation corroborates the earlier claim in which respondents mostly used English when they socialize and entertain foreign staff. As such, they perceived the best content for the English training course is 'General English' in which the course will involve enhancing their skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Furthermore, the General English course usually aims to assist staff to increase their vocabulary such as in socializing and greeting people as well as to increase their confidence in using English at the workplace (Yunus et al., 2012). With these suggestions, the syllabus designers and course developers will be able to create the most relevant activities for the English courses.

Table 10. Perceived English skills that need improvement

Skills	M	SD
Writing	2.59	0.56
Speaking	2.56	0.66
Listening	2.32	0.64
Reading	2.29	0.63

From Table 10, it was revealed that UMK administrative support staff mostly need English Writing skill with a mean score of 2.59, followed by Speaking (M =2.56), Listening (M =2.32) and Reading (M =2.29). Most UMK administrative support staff claimed that they need to improve on their English writing skills. In contrast, Karachedee (2017) reported that Thailand employees perceived listening skills to be the skill most needed for improvement. However, the findings from the current study was consistent with Saleh and Murtaza (2018) study in which their respondents perceived the need to master English writing skills the most as most companies use English in written documents. The same explanation can also be interpreted towards public university administrative staff who need to write emails, reports and letters in English, besides communicating verbally with foreign staff and students. Possible areas of improvement related to English writing skills would be structuring sentences, finding ideas, grammar and vocabulary (Kluensuwan et al., 2019; Singh & Harun, 2020).

4. Conclusion

This paper has put some attention on the feedback from administrative support staff on the significance of English language use at higher learning institutions, particularly in UMK and also their needs for the English language to perform effectively in their workplace. These administrative support staff strongly believed that being competent in English language may help them in career advancement and they acknowledged that their current English skills are not at an acceptable level which needs proper enhancement. Furthermore, they agreed that they need to use English mostly with foreign staff and students at their workplace. It is also found that administrative support staff highlighted the needs to improve their English writing skill more than other skills. These findings could benefit the ESP syllabus designers and materials developers to produce relevant training or course contents and materials for human resource staff in general and administrative support staff of UMK specifically.

There are several implications from this study and one of those is in terms of the language policy of the university. The top management of Malaysian public universities should give priorities in introducing a policy to encourage more English usage among administrative staff at the workplace with the purpose of giving more opportunities for staff to practice their English language skills among themselves as well as to serve the international staff and students. Furthermore, the human resource

development department of Malaysian public university also needs to put forth a comprehensive English continuous professional development curriculum to develop and assist all university staff to enhance their English competencies and eventually support the university's internationalization agenda.

The sample selected for this study was specifically administrative support staff who are currently working in UMK; thus, the results obtained in this study may not be applicable to administrative support staff in other Malaysian public universities. It is recommended that future studies to get better and deeper understanding of the English communication needs through observations on the interaction between administrative support staff interaction and their co-workers, students as well as lecturers. In addition, focus group discussion with supervisors made up of the officers and academicians to see their views on the use of English by the support staff at the workplace could also be used as one of the data collection methods in future studies.

Declarations

Author contribution	:	The main author carried out the study with the guidance from the co-author. Both authors discussed the results of the study and contributed to the final version of the manuscript.
Funding statement	:	The research is non-funded
Conflict of interest	:	The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Additional information	:	No additional information is available for this paper.

REFERENCES

Abdullah, A. T. H. (2014). Communication apprehension in using English language among non-academic officers at a Public University in Malaysia. *International Journal of Education and Research*, *2*(12), 361–370.

Abdullah, N. S., Zainal Abidin, A. A., Zaini, Z., & Wahab, P. (2017). The English language needs of employees in selected islamic institutions in Malaysia. *Jurnal Sultan Alauddin Sulaiman Shah*, *4*(2).

Afip, L. A., Hamid, M. O., & Renshaw, P. (2019). Common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR): Insights into global policy borrowing in Malaysian higher education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *17*(3), 378–393. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2019.1578195

Berwick, R. (1989). Needs assessment in language programming: From theory to practice. In R. K. Johnson (Ed.), *The Second Language Curriculum* (pp. 48–62). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524520.006

Brown, J. D. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum : A systematic approach to program development*. Heinle & Heinle.

Clement, A., & Murugavel, T. (2018). English for the Workplace: The Importance of English language skills for effective performance. *The English Classroom*, *20*(1), 41–50.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539

Daniel, E. (2016). The usefulness of qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in researching problem-solving ability in science education curriculum. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *7*(15), 91–100. https://doi.org/2222-288X

Diana, P.-Y. L., & Su-Hie, T. (2017). Parents' perceptions of selecting language of instruction for their children's primary education in Malaysia. *LSP International Journal*, *2*(1), 49–61. https://doi.org/10.11113/lspi.v2n1.18

Gaspar, B., & Hartanto, Y. (2019). Assessing the design and implementation of English Training Program for the University of Surabaya administrative staff. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *9*(1), 69–79. ojs.pnb.ac.id/index.php/SOSHUM/%0A

George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows step by step : a simple guide and reference 11.0 update*. Allyn and Bacon.

Hassan, N. S. I. C., & Ong, R. L. T. (2019). Island tourism employees' perceived importance and challenges of English communication. *LSP International Journal*, *6*(1), 39–53. https://doi.org/10.11113/lspi.v6n1.83

Hee, S. C., & Zainal, A. Z. (2018). Analysing the english communication needs of service technicians in the pest control industry. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *26*(2), 1079–1096.

Hiranburana, K. (2017). Use of English in the Thai workplace. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, *38*(1), 31–38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2015.10.002

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purpose* (p. 188). https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511733031

Isarji, S., Noor, Z. M., Zubairi, A. M., Ahmad, T. B. T., & Nordin, M. S. (2013). Needs assessment of workplace English and Malaysian graduates' English language competency. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, *21*(SPECIAL ISSUE4), 88–94. https://doi.org/10.5829/idosi.wasj.2013.21.sltl.2141

Jalal, T. S. T. (2016). Workplace english: An analysis of communication needs. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management*, 1379–1388.

Jalleh, C. M., Mahfoodh, O. H. A., Singh, M. K. M. (2021). Oral communication apprehension among Japanese EFL international students in a language immersion program in Malaysia. *International Journal of Instruction*, *14*(2), 155–178. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2021.14210a

Jassim, L. L. (2020). Administrative staff's use and learning of English to communicate with international students. *Research Journal of English*, *5*(4), 169–188.

Jusoh, Z., Engku Atek, E. S., Syed Omar, S. N. M., & Abdullah, A. T. . (2018). Investigation into non-academic staff communication apprehension in using English language. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, *8*(9), 677–685. https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.1.2018.89.677.685

Karachedee, P. (2017). *Needs for English communication skills of Thai employees in a multinational company* [Burapha University, Thailand]. http://digital_collect.lib.buu.ac.th/dcms/files/55921456.pdf

Kassim, H., & Ali, F. (2010). English communicative events and skills needed at the workplace: Feedback from the industry. *English for Specific Purposes*, *29*(3), 168–182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.10.002

Kluensuwan, P., Chaisiri, T., Poomarin, W., & Rungruangsuparat, B. (2019). Needs analysis of English for engineering staff in the Electronics Industry in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya and Pathum Thani, Thailand. *NIDA*, *24*(36), 64–90.

Lee, S. S., & Koo, Y. L. (2015). Examining linguistic proficiency in the multilingual glocal workplace: a Malaysian case study. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *15*(1), 46–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2014.985305

Miskam, N. N., & Saidalvi, A. (2018). Investigating English language speaking anxiety among Malaysian undergraduate learners. *Asian Social Science*, *15*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v15n1p1

Muthiah, P. (2003). English language proficiency at the workplace: Expectations of bank officers in Malaysia. *Asian Englishes*, *6*(2), 64–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2003.10801119

Ngah, E., Radzuan, N. R. M., Fauzi, W. J., & Zainal Abidin, N. A. (2011). The need for competent work ready English language learners. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *29*, 1490–1499. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.389

Othman, J., & Nordin, A. B. (2013). MUET as a predictor of academic achievement in ESL teacher education. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, *13*(1), 99–111.

Puteri Zarina, M. K., Rosly, S., Nurain, J., Ismail, A., & Khalid, N. (2020). The use of English among supply chain workers in Malaysia. *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering*, *9*(3), 2001–2005. https://doi.org/10.35940/ijitee.c9227.019320

Robinson, P. C. (1991). *ESP today : a practitioner's guide*. Prentice Hall.

Saleh, N. S., & Murtaza, S. F. (2018). English language use in Malaysian Government and private civil engineering workplaces. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, *6*(3), 84. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.6n.3p.84

Singh, A. K. J., & Harun, R. N. S. R. (2020). Industrial trainees learning experiences of English related tasks at the workplace. *Studies in English Language and Education*, *7*(1), 22–42. https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v7i1.16064

Singh, M. K. P., Jo, Y. L., & Ching, S. S. (2021). Urban English learners' perceptions towards the influence of second language identity on employment opportunities in Malaysia. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 29*(1), 7-45. https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.1.02

Su-Hie, T., Marzuki, E., Kee-Man, C., Jecky, M., & Jerome, C. (2017). Employers' views on the importance of English proficiency and communication skill for employability in Malaysia. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *7*(2), 315–327. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i2.8132

Subramaniam, G. K. J., Abdullah, F. P., & Portorajo, H. M. (2020). In-house English communication skills' needs for Engineering workplace : Feedback from Human Resource Development. *International Journal of Computational Engineering Research (IJCER)*, *08*(August), 40.

Talif, R., & Noor, R. (2009). Connecting language needs in the workplace to the learning of English at tertiary level. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, *17*(2), 65–77.

Tinh, L. C. (2018). *Needs analysis of English for mechanical engineers in the Vietnamese context* [Victoria University of Wellington]. http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/handle/10063/6973

Vicky, C., Ting, H. L., & Yeo, J. Y. (2016). Investigating English language anxiety among UiTM Sarawak undergraduates. *Journal of Creative Practices in Language Learning and Teaching (CPLT)*, *4*(1), 50–62.

Yonezawa, Y. (2018). Management of internationalization in japanese universities: Towards the development of collaborative relationship between academic and administrative staff. *Higher Education Forum*, *15*, 39–62. https://doi.org/10.15027/45646

Yuit, C. M., & Imm, L. G. (2009). Needs versus wants: Comparing job-related and personal needs of non-academic university employees for english language training. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, *17*(2), 187–203.

Yunus, M. Z. M., Raof, A. H. A., Rahman, R. A., & Amin, A. M. M. (2012). The need of English Language Training Programs in continuing education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *56*(Ictlhe), 396–404. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.668

Supplementary Material

PROPOSED COURSE SYLLABUS

By the end of the course, participants will be able to

- Write clear and concise emails, memos and letters in English
- Converse with co-workers, students, foreigner in English
- Understand the meaning and application of work-related vocabulary

The language components that will be taught by instructors in this proposed course design are as follow;

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Listening
- Grammar (embedded)
- Vocabulary

The proposed course structure along with the topics are as follow;

Proposed Course Structure

Unit	Content	Task	Tools
1	Ice Breaking	Small Introduction Small talk	
2	Socialization	Giving Introduction / Farewell speech	Youtube
3	Talking about Favourite Hobbies	Speaking Small Group Interaction	Youtube, Google Translate
4	Spell it Right	Pronunciation Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Online Dictionary, Kahoot!
5	Superstar	Speaking Acting	Google Translate, Youtube
6	Reading at Work	Reading report, notices, emails and memos	Technical texts on website, Youtube,
7	Business Visit	Presentation of job description, department, future work	UMK Website, Chart
8	Email and Letters Correspondence	Writing emails and letters	Email templates, Letter templates

In terms of assessments, after completion of each unit, learners will be assigned with a written/speaking task based on the contents that they learned. These tasks will then be collected and analyzed by instructors and being compiled toward the end of the course. From these completed assignments, instructors will be able to monitor the progress of learners. Aside from that, instructors will collaborate with the Human Resource Department in determining the supervisor for each learner taking the course. Each supervisor for each learner who comes from support staff will then be asked to rate or give some assessment toward their staff' performance related to English communication ability.