IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDER ROLES IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ADDRESSING EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS AMONG MALAYSIAN YOUTHS

Tan Shiu Kuan[1]*
Puspalathaa Armum[1]
Agnes Indra Chokkalingam[1]

[1]Faculty of Education, University Kebangsaan Malaysia
*Corresponding author

_____

Abstract: There is a growing consensus among the employers and employees on the need for effective communication in the workplace. The youths in the school-to-work transition, however, encounter barriers, particularly in communication, and perceive stumbling blocks in the path of employment. This is an extended challenge among the youths due to communication apprehension. This paper reviews the existing literature on barriers to effective communication and roles in developing communication skills among young people with communication apprehension. With all things considered, we seek to develop a theoretical framework that encompasses potential factors conducive to the communication competence of Malaysian youths. These factors include personal, family and community factors. The proposed framework is focusing on how the present educational setting, society, government and employers are able to contribute in addressing this matter. Thus, it is expected to provide an intensive solution in addressing the communication barriers faced by the youths through a multi-entity engagement.

Keywords: Communication Competence, Employment Barriers, Framework, Stakeholder Engagement, Youths

Introduction

Youth is characterised as the period and process of development from childhood to adulthood (Allen & Land, 2008). In this life span, most of them earn their freedom to participate in their desirable activities, or contribute to their favourable fields. After completion of the minimum academic requirement, youths either pursue studies further with a higher grade, or start considering their career choice. These days, however, many young people find it difficult to

secure employment or even to engage in the labour market (O'Connell & Russell, 2005). Among all candidates, youths, especially aged between 15 and 25 who undergo transition from school to work, receive considerable attention concerning their competence to contribute to the economy of the country (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016).

In today's job market, soft skills have become critical among employees. In view of the fact, the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (2006) has determined seven soft skill elements to be introduced and incorporated into the curriculum of every undergraduate course. These elements include leadership, communication, critical thinking and problem solving, lifelong learning and information management, teamwork, entrepreneurial skill, as well as moral and professional ethics. Among all soft skills, communication as the process of conveying information and common understanding from one person to another (Keyton, 2011), is frequently referred as one of the most essential skills required among employees. In a recent survey undertaken by Yuzainee, Zaharim and Omar (2010) in the year 2009, the findings reflected the significant role of communication skills in employment. Despite the knowledge of science and engineering system approach, a total of 300 employers from the engineering sectors in Klang Valley area perceive communication skills as the top weakness among local graduates, yet the most required skill based on the model of Malaysian Engineering Employability Skills. Erratically, in the same discussion on the preferred entry-level employability skills, the least required skill in the selection of ten main employability skills is 'engineering system approach'. It apparently highlights the importance of communication skills during youth development, or the earlier the better during childhood development.

Effective communication skills are essential. Through effective communication, learners can shape their ideas, concepts, and initiatives by communicating effectively with the right skills (Mahmud, 2014). It brings advantages for an individual across development, particularly towards employability and workplace readiness. During youth, communication with others is a vital skill required. However, communication apprehension has frequently been highlighted as one of the barriers to communication development. In relation to communication apprehension, McCroskey (1977) defined the term as an individual level of fear or anxiety associates with either real or anticipated communication with others. People who experience high communication apprehension are generally perceived to be low in assertiveness and responsiveness (Knutson & Lashbrook, 1976). In support of McCroskey's findings, within recent years, many local researches have pointed out communication apprehension among undergraduates and graduates that ultimately impacts their communication behaviour, performance, communication competence, as well as on other essential aspects of their lives (Azrizal, 2014; Darmi & Albion, 2012; Foo, 2011; Tom, Johari, Rozaimi, & Huzaimah, 2013; Zumusni, Ismail, Singh, & Elias, 2010). In certain occasion, although they have adequate input of the language, their feeling of reticence, shyness, introversion, and social anxiety still influence their ability to communicate. In most cases, it could be the challenge particularly among the youths with lower academic achievement.

Another factor that contributes toward the deterioration of communication skills is related to language proficiency (Shakir, 2009). When we are referring to communication, we always associate its barrier to language acquisition as language is essential for communication. In Malaysia, the implementation of the New National Education Policy in 1970 marked the amalgamation of a system having Malay language as the medium of instruction, whereas English as the second language. Both languages remain significant status in a multi-racial country to promote serenity and harmony among nation. Subsequently in the year 2012, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 encouraged bilingual proficiency to ensure every

child to be, at minimum, proficient in the Malay language as the national language and language of unity, and in English as the international language of communication. Youths, especially those who are not keen on the specific language, turn to be introvert when they are required to speak in the language and eventually tend to stay away from interacting. Nevertheless, their poor language proficiency could as well relate to the learners who are still inhibited by their social factors, namely the lack of motivation and interest to learn the language (Thang, Ting & Nurjanah, 2011), hence largely impact their confidence during communication and presentations (Samuel & Bakar, 2008).

In view of the importance of communication and its barriers among youths that limit their performance in the society or the workplace, the researchers aim to seek potential role players in supporting this population and addressing this critical matter. These prominent stakeholder roles include the society, educational institutions, employers, and policy makers. In particular, the society requires cooperation from the family, friends, neighbourhood and community to promote optimal communication competency.

Developing communication skills and its stakeholder roles

Communication is the process of sharing ideas, information, and messages with others. It includes listening, writing, speaking, as well as non-verbal communication, for instance facial expressions and body language, visual communication (the use of images or pictures, such as painting, photography, video or film) and electronic communication, namely telephone calls, electronic mail, or satellite broadcasts (Mallet-Hamer, 2005).

As communication is said to be essential in one's life to convey information to others as well as to equip oneself towards employability, it is important to look into the relationship between communication skills and youth development, and identify the influential roles particularly important in developing communication skills.

Society

In exploring the role of society in communication development, we aim to look into three potential stakeholders, comprising family, friends, as well as neighbourhood and community, who may largely contribute in addressing employment barriers among youths.

Family

Family plays a significant role in an individual's communication development due to the fact that family is the first grounder of children's character, values, and intellectual standards (Kamijani & Maher, 2007). If parents are not used to discuss their own feelings and emotions openly or communicate to their children, the children do not have effective models for daily interaction or for discussion of feelings (Kelly et al., 2002).

The family communication has a meaningful role in the youth's communication competence. As supported by Cummins (2001), when parents are able to spend time with their children, either to discuss issues with them or leisurely chat with them in a way that develops their mother tongue vocabulary and concepts, children come to school well-prepared to learn the school language and succeed educationally. It is due to the fact that children's knowledge and skills transfer across languages from the mother tongue they have learned in the home to the school language.

To elaborate further, research findings showed that children who enrol in pre-school programmes tend to be more committed to learning and earn higher incomes in later years. Nevertheless, some poor families have neglected their essential role in sending their children for education, for the reason that they are financially restricted, or geographically constrained. To aid the poor, more efforts should be channelled into getting the children into pre-school programmes by raising the awareness of their parents about the importance of pre-school education and by providing financial assistance to the families (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). In brief, caring and supporting families offer the primary and pivotal aid to their children, ahead of all other influential parties.

Friends

Friendship is an important aspect during youth periods. Understand the nature of peer influence can help support as they enter the society. Friendship has an impact on the way of dressing, speaking, anti-social behaviours and many other areas of the adolescent's life (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009). It allows youths to practise and foster effective social skills neccesary for future success (Guzman, 2007). In the contrary, not having friends might lead to social isolation and limited social contacts due to the lacking in opportunities to develop new relations and social interactional skills (Tomé, Matos, Simões, Camacho, & AlvesDiniz, 2012).

Peer relationships encompasses positive or negative features. Positive features of friendships comprise trust, communication and willingness to help, whereas negative features include disloyalty and rejection (Sebanc, 2003). When an individual involves in friendships with positive features, they will feel accepted by their peers and thus are expected to engage in prosocial behaviors and positive peer relationships (Sebanc, 2003; Spira & Fischel, 2005). This relationship supports the development of communication based social skills, which helps improve academic achievement (Raver, 2002; Sebanc, 2003).

There are debates on the positive or negative influences from friends. However, the researchers highlighted the motivation a friend could provide to lead an individual to productive endeavors. As one gravitates toward encouraging and supporting peer groups during youth period, they tend to look into the bright side and strive to reach the peak in their lives.

Neighbourhood and community

Language is a tool to communicate with others. It is a primary means of communication, and communication takes place within some sort of social context at all times. It is essential to acquire an understanding and recognition of the connections between a language and the people who use it for effective communication (Amberg & Vause, 2009). Hence, every individual should be aware of the importance to acquire as a minimum a language, to relate oneself to the community.

Malaysia as a multi-racial country is rich in different languages. Of all languages and dialects, Malay and English play a significant role in labour market demand. For this, youths who are comfortable with own mother tongue may find it very difficult when they involve themselves in the society. In our country, the presence of ethnic groups with different languages ensures that language plays a significant role not only in access to jobs and employment (University of Colombo, 2004), but also as a means to communicate with people in the community. Therefore, all citizens in the country, including youths, play a role in acquiring languages that bring unity

among the nation. As such, it will be helpful in increasing their self-esteem, reducing their sense of loneliness, and improving their overall satisfaction with life.

Educational institutions

After family, which described as the first school for an individual to experience learning richness and content, the educational environment plays a deserving role (Fallahchai & Darkhord, 2011). In Malaysia, the Form Three Assessment (Pentaksiran Peperiksaan Tingkatan 3, PT3) is considered the minimum academic requirement. Most of the students go further to reach the Malaysian Certificate of Education (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, SPM) in the secondary level of education. Without financial restriction, most of them will pursue studies in college or university, whereas the less fortunate ones start involving themselves in the workforce. Many youths at this school-to-work transition, however, have a hard time making career decisions. Even though some are aware of their direction, they have anxiety in certain barriers, for instance communication barrier that might affect their performance in this first contribution to the labour market.

In 2011, Malaysia achieved high participation rates at the primary level at 96% and 82% at upper secondary level (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). Nevertheless, the achievement gaps between urban and rural schools remain a critical issue to be resolved. Findings suggested students from poor families are likely to perform less well compared to students from middle-income and high-income families. Slowly but surely, this socio-economic gap help to widen the urban-rural disparity since rural income levels are generally below those of urban areas (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013).

In consideration of the needs to revamp the present education system, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 was launched in September 2012 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012), aiming to produce students with strong analytical and problem-solving capabilities, a good bilingual command, and effective social networking to meet the needs of the new economy.

Educators

School is a setting that promotes interpersonal relations, which are important for youngsters' personal and social development (Ruini et al., 2009). The quality of an education system is very much dependent on the quality of its teachers. Weaknesses in teacher competencies therefore are a serious impediment to overall education quality in the country (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013).

Educators need thoughtful commitment, but not ill-considered actions to aid the youths. They need to consider new roles and different ways of trying to meet the needs of a diverse youth population, visualise what they want to do, and eventually work together with the parents, businesses, religious community, human service agencies, government representatives, and youths to create opportunities (Thornburg, Hoffman, & Remeika, 1991). As supported by Gurcharan and Garib (2008), educators play the role to assign learners working-related communicative activities, subsequently interact with learners and provide necessary monitoring and encouragement to help them achieve success.

Language centres

In enhancing communication competence, language is frequently referred as the means to transmit information to others. To cater to the needs of the public to improve their languages, many language centres are established to offer skills-related or job-related courses. To capitalise on youth's communication strengths, it is vital to strategize relevant communication enhancement programmes that optimise interaction opportunities.

Malaysia as a multi-racial country with a population consists of Malay, Chinese, Indian, as well as other indigenous races, is rich in different languages. Due to the purpose of forging one nationality, Malay language becomes the official language of Malaysia. Simultaneously, communities commonly practise English as this is the international language widely used to communicate with others, particularly in the workplace in this day and age. As a result, both languages influence employment mechanisms in the Malaysian job market for youths. To aid the youths with low proficiency in Malay or English language, the researchers suggested language classes start at the beginner level, where basic presentation skills, for instance how to organise an individual presentation, ways to begin and end a presentation, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication skills are taught to offer the best of help to the learners. Apart from that, implementing phonetic activities in the language centres may help alleviate their apprehension of being unable to pronounce unfamiliar words (Tom et al., 2013).

Communication-related activities

In a recent study undertaken by Tom et al. (2013), the results revealed that, among the selected 49 pre-diploma students from rural areas in Sarawak, most of the learners dislike public speaking and group discussions and they are uncomfortable speaking in English due to their low level of English language proficiency. It is indeed a valuable finding to help language educators get rid of the types of communication-related activities that may cause communication apprehension, hence look for better means in order to assist the target group in communicating using the target language. Instead of conducting activities that may lead to negative outcomes, language educators need to contribute efforts in using fun speaking activities, such as songs, poems or board games, that might encourage the learners to speak, and at the same time bring down their anxiety levels.

Employers

To increase youths' acquisition of communication skills, employers undoubtedly play a part by aiding them in different ways. One of the examples is that, the employers organise in-house trainings on language courses related to job requirements for their staff development (Darmi & Albion, 2013). Gurcharan and Garib (2008) went further to say that, employers, who are familiar with the job market's needs, take responsibility to communicate and collaborate with schools to provide learning experiences that will foster learners' development of communication skills despite developing internal training programmes to equip employees with required basic skills.

Hence, it goes without saying that socially responsible employers who appreciate and recognise the contributions of their employees will cultivate the full potential of all employees and raise confidence in them to communicate among colleagues.

Policy makers

The country is developing and on the track for betterment, however, the government should always look back and never neglect the new blood. It is important to design programmes not only to provide youths with work experience and career development education, but also to improve their career self-efficacy and psychological well-beings. As an evidence, Loughead, Lui and Middleton (1995) who designed a 7-week summer career development programme for inner city impoverished youths found that youths show improvement in their career planning and job searching skills, but failed to change their self-concept. As a consequence, the core barrier was not thoroughly eradicated. Apart from that, government should at all time direct resources toward the objectives to increase language teachers' capacity for youths' benefits, as well as to engage participation of the private sector in providing learning opportunities for learners and employees (Gurcharan & Garib, 2008).

Language policy in employment

Given the desire of the country to become a developed nation by 2020, the government develops constructive policies that are of helpful to increase the supply of highly skilled and trained human resources.

In a multi-racial country such as Malaysia, mono language policy in employment is viewed to be futile to the economy development of the country as it is motivated by xenophobic sentiments and targeted to discriminate against employees with diverse backgrounds. As the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported, the number of charges filed relating to English-only policies has significantly increased from 91 to 443 charges between 1996 and 2000 in the United States (Gevertz & Dowell, 2014). Hence, the disturb minds and discordance in the workplace ultimately impact the performance of an individual.

It reveals the importance of language policy in employment in a country. In most applications, English as the global language and Malay language as the national language are frequently utilised in the labour market. In support of cultivating employees with good communication skills, the training and acquisition of skills among workers should be introduced as a life-long process in order to provide youths more opportunities to participate in language courses and skills training to meet the demand for skilled human resources. In this country which consists of different races, the policy however should not neglect the usage of other languages. It is to say that, proficiency in other languages could be of necessary precondition for acquiring a job for some occupations.

Publicity on communication and needs in media

Networks provide differential access to resources that include opportunities, skills, information, social support, and sociability (Mesch, 2012). In relation to the availability, many studies upheld the socio-economic determinants of physical comprising income, education, gender and ethnicity that cause inequality in accessing to information and communication technology (ICT). To explain further, there is a wide range of web tools provided, but underprivileged young people from often lack knowledge or language proficiency to understand and utilise the facilities.

To publicise programmes and important information to disadvantaged youths, it is recommended that the government uses youth-friendly language in materials intended to inform the public and enhance the use of social media for that purpose. Apart from that, the

government puts effort to employ campaigns explaining the importance of community engagement and to promote volunteerism among youths to aid them whenever necessary.

Framework

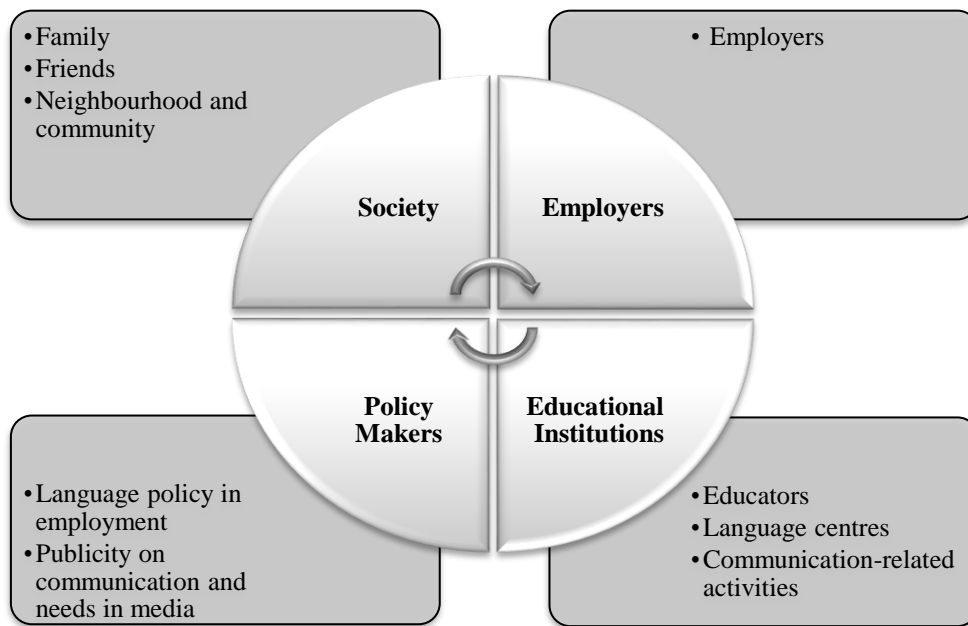The synthesis of all potential factors forms the core of the conceptual model as outlined below in figure 1.

Figure 1: Communication Engagement Conceptual Model

Discussion

Youth communication engagement is the most challenging task in bridging the hurdles towards successful life journey. As such, the population requires support from the four key stakeholders, namely the society, educational institutions, employers and policy makers. Each entity plays a prominent role in communication engagement which at the end makes a positive difference on youth development.

Among all entities, the weightage is more on society contribution with support of family, friends, neighbourhood and community. To explore further, each party prepares youths and engages them in different context or styles. Family as the first ground helps engaging children and youths in effective communication in custody circumstance. As they grow, the youths build relationship with friends and neighbours. Both parties in most situations create comfortable interactions with youths, thus gradually enhance their communication capability. With adequate language acquisition and minimum communication apprehension, youths are ready to engage themselves in bigger society and interact with the community when necessary.

Apart from that, youths may enhance communication and language acquisition through learning as an approach in educational institutions. This potential stakeholder plays a significant role in preparing youths for employment in future. Subsequently to aid youths,

employers continue hold the role to build confidence and capability in communication through beneficial trainings and courses. Not only that, policy makers contribute in policies and relevant acts to promote communication development among youths. Figure 2 illustrates communication engagement framework and roles of the stakeholders in addressing employment barriers.
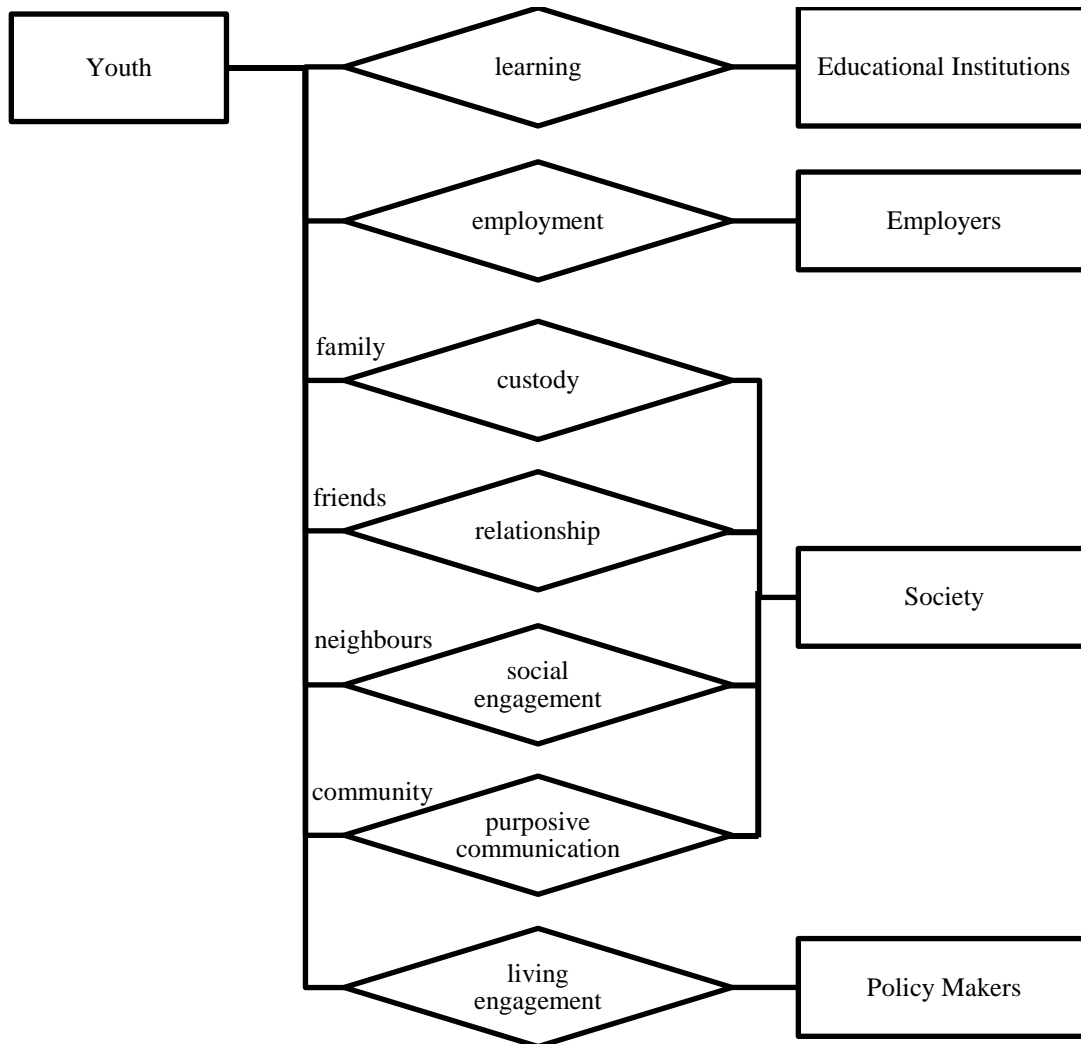

Figure 2: Communication Engagement Framework

In viewing the existing literature and findings, the researchers recommend this framework as the platform to be developed into an instrument to be tested in a pilot study among youths. For the next step, the framework is referred in order to engage relevant interventions among youths to cultivate effective communication.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper aims to review existing literature on barriers to effective communication among youths and roles of the stakeholders in addressing the matter. While consensus exists among the key stakeholders and employees about the importance of

communication skills in the workplace, we develop a theoretical framework that we hope can provide suggestions for further research on developing communication skills and encouraging an optimal competency of communication among youths. Nobody takes full responsibility for the problem. However, we can define the role of each stakeholder in the solutions and accept our rightful responsibilities for significant contribution to the matter. As one might expect, maintaining long-term youth development is essential to eventually benefit society as a whole. Thus, it is important to gather national power by requesting maximal support from all potential roles to help diminishing youths' communication apprehension for better preparedness in the workplace. In so doing, future researches and on-going evaluation on this area will help consolidate the capabilities of youths to meet the challenge thus sustain in employment, and then strive towards abolishing the barriers.

References

Allen, J. P., & Land, D. (2008). Attachment in adolescence. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment. Theory, research and clinical applications* (2nd ed., pp. 363–381). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Amberg, J. S., & Vause, D. J. (2009). *American English: History, structure, and usage.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Azrizal, M. (2014). *Communication apprehension among first-year engineering degree students of Universiti Malaysia Perlis.* Paper presented at the Proceeding of Symposium of International Language and Knowledge (SiLK 14). Retrieved from http://dspace.unimap.edu.my/dspace/bitstream/123456789/34633/1/SILK%202014_21.pdf

Cummins, J. (2001). Bilingual children's mother tongue: Why is it important for education? *Sprogforum, 7*(19), 15–20. Retrieved from http://www.lavplu.eu/central/bibliografie/cummins_eng.pdf

Darmi, R., & Albion, P. (2012). *Exploring language anxiety of Malaysian learners.* Paper presented at the 2nd Malaysian Postgraduate Conference (MPC). Retrieved from https://eprints.usq.edu.au/21981/1/Darmi_Albion_PV.pdf

Darmi, R., & Albion, P. (2013). *Malaysian graduates: What and why.* Paper presented at the 3rd Malysian Postgraduate Conference (MPC). Retrieved from https://eprints.usq.edu.au/24010/1/Darmi_Albion_MPC2013_PV.pdf

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2016). *Labour force participation rate by state, 1982–2014.* Retrieved from http://www.data.gov.my/data/ms_MY/dataset/labour-force-statistics-malaysia-1084

Fallahchai, R., & Darkhord, F. (2011). A comparative analysis of family communication patterns with academic achievement in Bandar Abbas City male and female students of third grade guidance school. *Journal of Life Science and Biomedicine, 2*(2), 29–33. Retrieved from http://jlsb.science-line.com/attachments/article/13/JLSB-2012-B6,%2029-33.pdf

Foo, A. T. L. (2011). Communication apprehension among Malaysian accounting students: A temperament perspective. Paper presented at the 1st Annual Young Researchers International Conference and Exhibition (AKEPT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Gevertz, D. E., & Dowell, A. C. (2014). *Are English-only policies in the workplace discriminatory of national origin?* Retrieved from American Bar Association website:

https://apps.americanbar.org/litigation/committees/civil/articles/spring2014-0514-are-english-only-policies-workplace-discriminatory-national-origin.html

Gurcharan, G. K., & Garib, S. K. (2008). Malaysian graduates' employability skills. *Unitar E-Journal 4*(1), 15–45. Retrieved from http://repository.um.edu.my/66328/1/UNITAR%20E-JOURNAL_Gurvinder%20%26%20Sharan.pdf

Guzman, M. R. T. (2007). *Friendship, peer influence, and peer pressure during the teen years.* Retrieved from http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/html/g1751/build/g1751.htm

Kamijani, M., & Maher, F. (2007). The comparison of child raising style between the parents who own conduct disorder children and the parents who own normal children. *Knowledge and Research in Applied Psychology, 33*, 63–94.

Kelly, L., Keaten, J. A., Finch, C., Duarte, I. B., Hoffman, P., & Michels, M. M. (2002). Family communication patterns and the development of reticence. *Communication Education, 51*(2). 202–209. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634520216506

Keyton, J. (2011). *Communication and organizational culture: A key to understanding work experience.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Knutson, P. K., & Lashbrook, W. B. (1976). *Communication apprehension as an antecedent to social style.* Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, San Francisco, California.

Loughead, T. A., Lui, S., & Middleton, E. B. (1995). Career development for at-risk youth: A program evaluation. *Career Development Quarterly, 43,* 274–284. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1995.tb00868.x

Mahmud, M. M. (2014). Communication aptitude and academic success. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 134,* 125–133. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.230

Mallet-Hamer, B. (2005). *Communication within the workplace*. Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.390.3976&rep=rep1&type=pdf

McCroskey, J. C. (1977). Oral communication apprehension: A summary of recent theory and research. *Human Communication Research, 4,* 78–96. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1977.tb00599.x

Mesch, G. S. (2012). Minority status and the use of computer mediated communication: A test of the social diversification hypothesis. *Cahiers de la Méditerranée, 85,* 71–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211398865

Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2012). *Preliminary Report: Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025.* Putrajaya, Malaysia: Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Ministry of Higher Education. (2006). *Development of soft skills for institutions of higher learning.* Serdang, Malaysia: Universiti Putra Malaysia.

O'Connell, P. J., & Russell, H. (2005). *Equality at work? Workplace equality policies, flexible working arrangements and the quality of work.* Dublin, Ireland: The Equality Authority.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2013). *Southeast Asian Economic Outlook 2013: with perspectives on China and India.* Retrieved from www.oecd.org/dev/asia-pacific

Padilla-Walker, L. M., & Bean, R. A. (2009). Negative and positive peer influence: Relations to positive and negative behaviors of African American, European American, and Hispanic adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 32*, 323–337. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2008.02.003

Raver, C. C. (2002). Emotions matter: Making the case for the role of young children's emotional development for early school readiness. *Social Policy Report, 16,* 1–20.

Ruini, C., Ottolini, F., Tomba, E., Belaise, C., Albieri, E., Visani, D., … Fava, G. A. (2009). School intervention for promoting psychological well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, 40,* 522–532. http://dx.doi.org /10.1016/j.jbtep.2009.07.002

Samuel, R., & Bakar, D. (2008). The effectiveness of 'VELT' in promoting English language communication skills: A case study in Malaysia. *International Journal of Education and Development using ICT [Online], 4*(3). Retrieved from http://ijedict .dec.uwi.edu/viewarticle.php?id=559

Sebanc, A. M. (2003). The friendship features of preschool children: Links with prosocial behavior and aggression. *Social Development, 12*(2), 249–268. http://doi.org/10.1111 /1467-9507.00232

Shakir, R. (2009). Soft skills at the Malaysian institutes of higher learning. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 10*(3), 309–315. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-009-9038-8

Spira, E. G., & Fischel, J. E. (2005). The impact of preschool inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity on social academic development: A review. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 46*(7), 755–773. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2005.01466.x

Thang, S. M., Ting, S. L., & Nurjanah, M. J. (2011). Attitudes and motivation of Malaysian secondary students towards learning as a second language: A case study. *3L: Journal of Language, Linguistics and Literature, the Southern Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 17*(1), 40–54. Retrieved from http://ejournals.ukm.my/3l/article /view/974/890

Thornburg, K. R., Hoffman, S., & Remeika, C. (1991). Youth at risk; Society at risk. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(3), 199–208. https://doi.org/10.1086/461647

Tom, A. A., Johari, A., Rozaimi, A., & Huzaimah, S. (2013). Factors contributing to communication apprehension among pre-university students. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 2*(8), 665–669.

Tomé, G., Matos, M. G., Simões, C., Camacho, I., & AlvesDiniz, J. (2012). How can peer group influence the behavior of adolescents: Explanatory model. *Global Journal of Health Science, 4*(2), 26–35. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/gjhs.v4n2p26

University of Colombo. (2004). *Employment strategy papers: School-to-work transition of youth in Sri Lanka.* Sri Lanka: University of Colombo.

Yuzainee, M. Y., Zaharim, A., & Omar, M. Z. (2010). *Employability skills for an entry-level engineer as seen by Malaysian employers.* Paper presented at the Global Engineering Education Conference (EDUCON), 2011 IEEE. http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/EDUCON .2011.5773117

Zumusni, W., Ismail, N., Singh, D., & Elias, S. (2010). ESL students communication apprehension and their choice of communicative activities. *ASEAN Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2*(1), 22–29.