ORAL COMMUNICATIVE NEEDS OF FRONTLINERS
AT INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CENTRES

AHMED Z D RAZAIYNEH

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

2017

ORAL COMMUNICATIVE NEEDS OF FRONTLINERS AT INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CENTRES

AHMED Z D RAZAIYNEH

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE / MESL

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

2017

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

Name of Candidate: Ahmed Zayed Deeb Razaiyneh

Matric No: TGB120062

Name of Degree: Masters of English as A Second Language

Title of Project Paper/Research Report/Dissertation/Thesis ("this Work"):

ORAL COMMUNICATIVE NEEDS OF FRONTLINERS AT
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CENTRES

Field of Study: ESP

I do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

(1) I am the sole author/writer of this Work;
(2) This Work is original;
(3) Any use of any work in which copyright exists was done by way of fair dealing and for permitted purposes and any excerpt or extract from, or reference to or reproduction of any copyright work has been disclosed expressly and sufficiently and the title of the Work and its authorship have been acknowledged in this Work;
(4) I do not have any actual knowledge nor do I ought reasonably to know that the making of this work constitutes an infringement of any copyright work;
(5) I hereby assign all and every rights in the copyright to this Work to the University of Malaya ("UM"), who henceforth shall be owner of the copyright in this Work and that any reproduction or use in any form or by any means whatsoever is prohibited without the written consent of UM having been first had and obtained;
(6) I am fully aware that if in the course of making this Work I have infringed any copyright whether intentionally or otherwise, I may be subject to legal action or any other action as may be determined by UM.

Candidate's Signature   Date:

Ahmed Z D Razaiyneh

Subscribed and solemnly declared before,

Witness's Signature   Date:

Dr. Siti Zaidah Zainuddin

Designation: Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This study identifies the English language needs of the frontliners of international student centres (ISC) of the highest ranked public universities in Malaysia and determines what is required for them to accomplish their job functions efficiently and effectively. More specifically, this study aims to suggest the appropriate steps and methods required to overcome the communicative language problems encountered by ISC frontliners. It focuses on the oral communicative sub-skills used during interaction with international students. This study uses the concurrent triangulation strategy using quantitative and qualitative approaches to cross validate, corroborate the findings, and to complement the weaknesses and strengths of the two methods. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions are used to gather information for this research. The findings of the study indicated that most of the ISC frontliners seemed to show similarities with their perceived English language needs. The staff considered listening and speaking skills as the two most required skills for them to perform their required job functions efficiently. Most of the ISC frontliners stated that the most important skills are oral communicative skills and the ability to communicate effectively with students. The findings revealed that ISC frontliners require more improvement in the proficiency and fluency in speaking skills such as speaking with the correct pronunciation and intonation, conveying messages, and explaining instructions clearly and accurately. In addition, it is vital that the ISC frontliners improve their interactive skills such as asking questions and confirming details, offering alternatives, negating requests, and adopting turn-taking strategies. The findings showed that the majority of ISC frontliners were positive towards the need for an English language course to help them improve their English language proficiency. Based on the findings, a two hour weekly, 14 weeks, intermediate course for ISC frontliners was developed.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengenal pasti keperluan bahasa Inggeris oleh barisan kakitangan hadapan pusat pelajar antarabangsa (ISC) daripada universiti awam terbaik di Malaysia dan menentukan apa yang diperlukan bagi mereka untuk mencapai fungsi tugas mereka dengan cekap dan berkesan. Secara khususnya, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mencadangkan langkah-langkah dan kaedah yang sesuai yang diperlukan untuk mengatasi masalah komunikatif yang dihadapi oleh barisan hadapan ISC. Ia memberi tumpuan kepada sub-kemahiran lisan komunikasi semasa berinteraksi dengan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa. Kajian ini menggunakan strategi triangulasi serentak dari pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk mendapat kesahihan, menyokong penemuan dan sebagai pelengkap kepada kelemahan dan kekuatan kedua-dua kaedah. Soal selidik, temubual separa berstruktur dan perbincangan kumpulan fokus digunakan untuk mengumpul maklumat untuk kajian ini. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti daripada barisan hadapan ISC seolah-olah menunjukkan persamaan dengan keperluan bahasa Inggeris yang dilihat oleh mereka. Kakitangan memerlukan kemahiran mendengar kemahiran komunikasi lisan kerana kedua-dua kemahiran yang paling diperlukan bagi mereka untuk melaksanakan fungsi tugas mereka dengan cekap. Majoriti barisan hadapan ISC menyatakan bahawa kemahiran yang paling penting adalah kemahiran komunikasi lisan dan keupayaan untuk berkomunikasi secara berkesan dengan pelajar. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa barisan kakitangan hadapan di ISC memerlukan lebih banyak peningkatan dalam kecekapan dan kefasihan dalam bertutur seperti bercakap dengan sebutan dan intonasi yang betul, menyampaikan mesej dan menjelaskan arahan dengan jelas dan tepat. Di samping itu, ia adalah penting bahawa barisan hadapan ISC untuk meningkatkan kemahiran interaktif seperti bertanya soalan dan mengesahkan butiran, menawarkan alternatif, menidakkan permintaan dan menerima pakai strategi mengambil giliran. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti barisan hadapan ISC adalah positif

ke arah keperluan untuk kursus bahasa Inggeris untuk membantu mereka untuk meningkatkan penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris mereka. Berdasarkan kepada dapatan kajian, mingguan dua jam, 14 minggu, tentu perantaraan untuk barisan hadapan ISC telah dibangunkan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express a deep sense of gratitude and my heartfelt thanks to my mentor and supervisor, Dr. Siti Zaidah Zainuddin, who has taken immense trouble to help, guide and encourage me to complete this thesis. Her continuous encouragement played a very crucial role in motivating me to keep on moving especially at times when I felt so discouraged.

Next, I want to thank Dr. Teoh and the other students from the Post-Graduate Club for monitoring my progress and listening to the problems I faced while doing my research.

Finally, I would like to extend my warm appreciation to my family especially my mother for her unconditional love and concern, my father for his sacrifices and support, my brothers and sisters; Amani, Amal, Mohammed, Mahmoud, Shahd, and all my friends for giving me continuous support in conducting this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ISC: International Student Centre

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

NA: Needs Analysis

TSA: Target Situation Analysis

PSA: Present Situation Analysis

LSA: Learning Situation Analysis

FL: Frontliner

IS: International Student

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The current study analyses and identifies the English language needs and the problems encountered by the staff of International Students Centres of the highest ranked public universities in Malaysia based on their perception of these needs. More specifically, this study aims to suggest the appropriate steps and methods required to overcome these language problems.

This chapter consists of the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions and significance of the study.

1.1.1 Background of Study

One of the visions shared by all Malaysian universities in Malaysia is to establish their reputation as a regional hub for higher education for students from across Asia and the rest of the world. Malaysia aims to be the sixth-largest education exporting country by 2020 with a target of 200,000 international students (The Sun Daily, 29 January 2015). This includes the continuous expansion of Malaysia's capacity in hosting international students for higher education, with a target of 250,000 international student enrolment by 2025 (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2015-2025). As improving its universities world ranking is also part of the nation's agenda, most universities, especially the research universities, are taking in a lot of international students.

Morshidi (2008) recognized that after the 9/11 incident, Malaysia has become the hub of education for the Middle Eastern and South Asian regions. Such students come from various countries and have differing cultures and experiences such as South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Palestine. Most of these

international students encounter difficulties in adjusting to a new environment particularly in terms of language and culture (Andrade, 2006; Sherry, 2010; Alavi & Mansor, 2011).

Naidoo (2006) states that several universities face a lot of challenges due to the increasing number of international students such as cultural diversity, learning styles, students' demands, programs and study atmosphere. Thus, universities are anticipated to solve these issues to assist international students throughout their education endeavour in Malaysia. In order to attract more foreign students, universities should understand the issues of international students and to assist them.

International Student Centres (henceforth ISC) were established to support international students and help them solve their issues. One of the jobs of ISC is to conduct a full time and exchange international students' registration and orientation program, arrange accommodation, manage financial aid and scholarships, and assist in visa processing for students. They also need to give effective services to their students by building a personal relationship with each student using suitable skills, tools and procedures (UM, 2016). To help them function well, ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities are expected to be competent in English language because English is the lingua franca, as these interlocutors are from different cultures and speak different mother tongues. A needs analysis is essential in identifying their English language needs.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the verbal communicative language needs of ISC frontliners working in Malaysian public universities. It focuses on the English language needs of employees who deal directly with the international students.

1.1.2   English language in Malaysian workplace

Malaysia is a multicultural society which contains a diverse number of ethnic groups, religions, customs, traditions, languages and cultures. Every ethnic group has their own language of communication. However, the Malay language is the official language of the country, while English plays the role of L2 in the country. Karim (1987) narrates that Malay language always encounters a firm opposition from the English language across the country. Even though the national policy is to use the Malay language in all formal matters, people still prefer speaking in English rather than their local languages (Jariah Mohd Jan, 2003, p. 43). Few studies have examined the use of languages and the ways of communication in the government and private sectors in the country. Ting (2002) for example investigated the English language competence of the support staff working in a Malay organization, and found that the staff faced problems in communicating in English. This was mainly because the job specification or scope does not require them to speak in English. Therefore, Ting (2002) emphasized the need to start teaching English competence especially oral skills in schools so that students can at least communicate basic things.

Most Malaysians are either bilingual or multilingual; thus, communication among them switches from one code to another. The use of code switching or word borrowings are common even at the workplace. Kaur and Singh (1994) saw an inclination among Malaysians to code switch (Jariah Mohd Jan, 2003, p. 45). Analysing language in a public-sector organization, Jariah Mohd Jan (2003) examined many parts of formal communication and found that there was code-switching from Malay to English among government officers. The analyses of communication showed the linguistic power among government officers to manipulate the issues, to discuss the rights, and to take control of the situation while interacting with others. Another study which examined the use of English and its forms of communications in the workplace was led by Briguglio (2003).

The researcher studied English as a global language in two multinational companies in Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur. Initially, it was found in Seacargo International in Kuala Lumpur that both written and spoken English were crucial, particularly for assessors to do their job efficiently. Although face-to-face communication was considered crucial, high importance was given to written communication. To my knowledge, there are more or less no studies on the language in Education services specifically in institution/university settings in Malaysia. Therefore, this research is carried out to explore and investigate the ways language is used in communication with international students by the ISC staff in Malaysian universities.

1.1.3 The Development of Educational System in Malaysia

This section is crucial because it indicates if this group of ISC frontliners belong to the pre-independence era or after independence era when Bahasa Malaysia had replaced English language as the medium of instruction in schools and the standard of English proficiency was declining. They would therefore require more time to familiarize themselves with the demands of their daily job functions, in relation to the specific use of the English language at their workplace.

1.1.3.1 English in the pre-independent years

In the pre-independent years, English was taught as the first language and was the medium of instruction in the English schools in Malaysia (Platt & Weber, 1980:12). Undeniably, English in the colonial and post-colonial era was important for multiracial Malaysians to climb up the socioeconomic ladder. Even though the objective of learning English was instrumental at that point in time, English was still used as lingua franca by those who were educated in the English medium.

It was apparent that Malaysia had a system of education which had four separate sets of schools identified by the language medium before independence (Asmah Haji Omar,1982:48).

    i.   The English schools (English was used as medium of instruction)

    ii.   The Malay schools (Malay was used as medium of instruction)

    iii.   The Chinese schools (Mandarin was used as medium of instruction)

    iv.   The Indian schools (Tamil was used as medium of instruction)

1.1.3.2 English after independence

After independence, various efforts were taken to develop a national system of education, which emphasized on the unity of Malaysians. The Razaq Report (1956) suggested a national educational system that would mould the people into one nation with the use of Malay as the national language. They recommended a common content syllabus for all schools with the students learning the same subjects in schools despite the fact that the medium of instruction was different (Ho, 2004).

The main action taken to achieve the objective mentioned above was the conversion of the medium of instruction from English to Malay in the English schools beginning from 1968. The conversion of the English schools into national schools, which used the national language as the medium of instruction, was completed in 1982. Then, the Malaysian schools were categorized into national schools (former Malay and English schools which now use Malay as the medium of instruction) and national type schools (using Chinese or Tamil as the medium of instruction). In both categories, English is taught as a compulsory subject. Thus, English is considered as the second most important language and taught as the second language in Malaysia.

1.2   Problem Statement

Universities need to a have high number of international students in order to push up their world ranking (UNESCO, 2014). Thus, most of the Malaysian universities try to increase the number of international students in order to hit the government's target to make Malaysia the sixth-largest education exporter by 2020 (The Sun Daily, 29 January 2015). In University of Malaya (henceforth UM) alone, there are 9,043 postgraduate students and 35% of them are international students from 84 countries. In addition, UM has 792 undergraduate students coming from 45 countries, and this is excluding a huge number of exchange students (ICR UM, 2016). The high number of international students in the university heightens the importance of the International Student Center (ISC). This is where all international students deal with various issues such as registration, orientation programs, arranging accommodation and processing visa. The main lingua franca for communication between local staff, in particular the frontliners, and international students is English. In a lot of instances, interactions and communications end up in miscommunication. As a result, services which need prompt attention become halted.

Although ISC frontliners and international students use the English language during interaction, their English language proficiency has different levels. For example, the international students enrolling in Malaysia are expected to have obtained a minimum a band of 6.0 for IELTS or at least scoring 550-600 for the paper-based to become enrolled (UM, 2016; UPM, 2016; UKM, 2016). Such requirements show that the international students have better proficiency in English. On the other hand, most of the staff at international student centres in Malaysian universities come from an educational system where the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia which may affect their general English proficiency. This brings out some oral communication problems and increases the chance of misunderstanding between the ISC staff and international students. Their

misunderstanding leads to mismanagement due to the difference of English proficiency between the ISC staff and international students.

Therefore, the ISC staff in Malaysian public universities need to have sufficient English language proficiency in order to handle every situation they face as they are always expected to respond in a positive and an appropriate way to handle the international students with different backgrounds. Therefore, the current study analyses and identifies the English language needs and the problems encountered by the staff of international student centres of the highest ranked public universities in Malaysia based on their perception of these needs. More specifically, this study aims to suggest the appropriate steps and methods required to overcome these language problems.

1.3   Objectives

This study is carried out to conduct a needs analysis to investigate the oral communicative needs of the frontliners of International Student Centres of public universities in Malaysia while interacting with international students as part of their daily job tasks. Identifying the oral communicative needs and challenges encountered by the ISC frontliners will be used to propose an English language course designed to boost the oral communicative skills of the ISC frontliners. Thus, the overall purpose of this study is to carry out a needs analysis of the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities and propose a course design based on the findings.

1.4   Research Questions

1. What are the English language oral communicative challenges encountered by the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities?

2. What are the English language oral communicative needs of the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities?

3. What are the oral communicative language sub-skills that need to be emphasized in a proposed English language course for the ISC frontliners?

1.5 Significance of study

The current study is a preliminary step to analyse the English language proficiency and needs among the frontliners of international students' centres (ISC) of public universities in Malaysia. It identifies the specific language needs that can help in developing goals, objectives and content for a specific language training program. Identifying the needs will also help in recommending appropriate steps and methods to overcome the language issues between the ISC staff and international students.

The main purpose of this study is to identify the English Language communicative problems faced by the frontliners of International Student Centres. By identifying the language problems, early corrective measures can be taken to rectify the weaknesses for employees to perform better in their daily tasks. In students' service, ISC frontliners' English language proficiency and interpersonal communicative skills are vital to handle every situation. Therefore, this study will bring out some suggestions and recommendations to address the English Language communicative issues of the ISC frontliners in Malaysian public universities. The findings of the study will be beneficial for pedagogical implication in improving the teaching of English language skills and reviewing the current frontliners' program curriculum.

1.6 Conclusion

In chapter one, the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study were presented.

Chapter two reviews the relevant literature related to the study such as the English language communicative challenges and needs of ISC frontliners, the job specifications of International student centres, ESP improvement, ESP modules and components of needs analysis. It also presents some studies of English language needs in the service industry and for ISC frontliners.

Chapter Three describes aspects of the general methodological design of the current study. Besides the necessary explication of the overall research design, the instruments used and the ethical issues, descriptions of the nature of context, as well as the main data selected will be presented. Next, the research procedure will be detailed step-by-step and explained.

Chapter four presents and discusses in detail the results of the three research questions of this study. Based on the results from research questions one and two, an English language course design will be proposed to boost the oral communicative skills of the ISC frontliners.

Chapter five concludes and summarizes the thesis by first iterating the major findings of this study and then presenting its theoretical and pedagogical contributions. This chapter ends with some suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to the present study. The focus is on works related to oral communicative needs and in this respect, the English language needs, because in an English-speaking working environment where employees learned English as a second language, there is a general need to use English for communication, study and work (Sifakis, 2003). This thesis also reviews the theoretical relevance of ESP to the current study. Needs analysis as an important component of ESP and how this particular component is employed in other similar service oriented industries.

2.2   International Student Centres in Malaysian Public Universities (ISC)

Malaysia has planned its future on the robust level of student mobility and the global competitiveness of its higher education systems. Students not only from the ASEAN region would be able to find better opportunities for academic excellence in Malaysia but also extends to students from other regions around the world. In realizing this, HEIs are also very sensitive to what the institutions have to prepare to increase the overall amount and the quality of the international students. Malaysian higher education institutions and their staff are on the 'front lines' of the campaign to raise the level of attractiveness of the education on offer in Malaysia to international students from around the world. Their responsibilities extend from recruiting and admitting students, to welcoming them on campus, and ideally supporting them through to successful completion of their degree programmes.

Student services represent a potentially powerful tool for enhancing the quality and sustainability of the overall internationalization agenda of Malaysian higher education, not to mention its global competitive position. At the same time, providing meaningful support services for international students increasingly stands out as 'the right thing to do'. Moving across national, cultural, and linguistic borders is a complex human experience, as is integrating oneself into a new and potentially very different academic culture.

To remain competitive, Malaysia must differentiate itself from the increasing number of performers in the internationalization circle, not only by providing a high-quality education, but also by developing a best reputation as the most helpful environment for the international students in the world.

2.2.1 Job Specification of International Student Centres (ISC)

International student centre (ISC) was established to provide full support to international students. ISC also provides an extensive range of programs from orientation programs to ongoing cultural events to help the international students to adjust their cultural life on campus. Some of the job specifications of the international student centre are: assisting full time students as well as exchange international students in the registration and orientation program; assisting in managing accommodation; supervising financial aid and scholarships; organizing cultural exchange programs and assisting attachment with foster families; supervising the activities of students; and processing visa matters. They are also required to provide effective service to all international students by building a personal relationship with each student and using the appropriate skills, tools and techniques (UM, UPM, 2016).

Same as UM and UPM, International Student Service Division (ISSD) at UKM provides facilities for potential and existing international students such as academic

counselling, immigration information, student activities and support services. The functions of the centre include: introducing different types of visa applications for scholars, students and their dependents; establishing different curricular and extracurricular activities and functions for the students at institute, national and global platforms; advising students and scholars on various prosperity essentials such as health issues, accommodations, career counselling, and other relevant daily activities. (UKM, 2016).

2.3   English for Specific Purposes (ESP): Definitions and Improvement

Since the 1960s, English for Specific Purposes (henceforth ESP) has been rising as a distinctive department in various fields such as business, hospitality and education. The ESP is a focused-English teaching and learning condition which contains different teaching/instruction and learning methods compared to General English (henceforth GE). The major difference between the ESP and GE depends on the learners and the methods of learning. The ESP students have been in touch with English previously and they only learn the English language to develop their professional skills for performing specific professional activities (Robinson, 1991). Therefore, the development of the ESP course was constructed on the assessment of the needs and purposes and the relevant events which require the English language. It focuses more on the context than the grammar and the language structure. ESP covers a wide range of subjects fluctuating from Medical or Business Sciences to Hospitality and Tourism Organization. The crucial point of the ESP is that the English course cannot be educated as an alternative course separated from the students' real wishes. It has to be integrated into the subject material area imperative to students (Robinson: 1991). Though, GE and ESP fluctuate in learners' nature, it is also the purpose of teaching. In the GE training, all the language skills such as the reading, writing, listening and speaking were equally used. Nevertheless, the ESP requires an analysis to determine the most important language skills which were mostly used by the

students, and the syllabus was made consequently. For instance, an ESP system may focus on expanding writing skills in the Business Administration learners to make them easier for the graduates' work.

It is important for the ESP practitioners and the researchers to recognize the antiquity and the development of ESP, relevant definitions and terminologies, the leading features of ESP, as well as the required valuation procedures. They must know these important features in order for them to carry out the research activities to develop an ESP programs. In this perception, this section of study discusses the growth, concept and history of ESP. The study also clarifies the concept of essential analysis, the constituents needed for analysis in the ESP program, and the most important theoretical models required in the assessment of the fundamental features in the field of ESP.

ESP appeared as a particular field in the 1960's. The rise of ESP was caused by numerous incidences such as the Second World War (1945), the rise of science and technology, the rapid growth in scientific research, the higher use of English as the intercontinental linguistic, the growing global learners in Australia, UK, and USA, and the increase in the economy power of the oil-rich countries (Middle East). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) reported that in the ESP framework, results of the past incidences caused peoples around the world to desire studying the English language as it had linguistic importance in the arenas of business, commerce, science, medicine and the technology. The development of the ESP training program occasioned from students' needs for ESP in agreement with their jobs or professions portrayal. Since the developing years, ESP has developed a vigorous and state-of-the-art action inside the Teaching of English as a Second or Foreign Language movement (TESL/TEFL) as recommended by Howatt (1984).

The ESP was defined as a method to learn a language based on the learner's need (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). It simply reports that ESP does not contain a specific type of linguistic training materials and method. Strevens (1980) suggested the basics of the ESP includes the learners, learning contexts, and the language needed were based on the importance of the need of ESP.

Robinson (1991) highlighted the primary needs required for the analysis of the ESP. His definition was established on two significant criteria and the number of features which were considered as the most important features for ESP. According to Robinson (1991), ESP is normally goal-directed and that ESP courses develop from a needs analysis, which aims to specify as closely as possible what exactly it is that students have to do through the medium of English. He further defined that ESP is an innovation which comprises practice, teaching, training, education, and depends on the three main pillars of the knowledge: language, pedagogy and the fields of the learners/students.

The definition of ESP was also provided by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). Similar to Strevens (1980), they also considered the variable and absolute characteristics to define the ESP. The variable and the absolute characteristics of ESP according to them are explained below:

Adaptable characteristics

    i.   ESP might be designed or associated to the precise disciplines.

    ii.   ESP might be used in explicit teaching conditions with diverse procedure compared to GE.

    iii.   ESP is intended for the students at the advanced level or in the classroom activities. Nonetheless, it can also be designed for secondary/minor level students.

iv.   ESP is normally planned for the college levels or university level.

v.   Most of the ESP courses contain basic knowledge that can be introduced to the beginners.

Absolute characteristics

i.   ESP is proposed to come across particular basics for the learners.

ii.   ESP uses the essential method and the actions of the disciplines.

iii.   It is placed on the linguistic/language skills, as well as discourse.

The ESP is usually categorized into two main divisions: English for Educational or Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Professional or Occupational Purposes (EOP). The EAP mostly relates to any English training that narrates to the desires of the academic study. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) argued that in EAP the English for Science and Technology (EST) is recognized as an important area. However, English for Legal Purposes (ELP) and English for Medical Purposes (EMP) have been expanding their importance too. Most recently, the English for Economics, Management and Finance has become crucial to the MBA programs. Robinson (1991, p.14) argues that "EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) involves work-related needs and training". Dudley-Evans and St. John (1980) clarified that EOP comprises specialized devotions in medication, management, business and law, and occupational determinations for non-professionals in pre-and post-work conditions. For example, English for Medical Purposes concentrates on working doctors, whereas, the English for Business Purposes is established for the business communication. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) reported that "EOP is also known as EVP (English for Vocational Purposes) and VESL (Vocational English as a Second Language)".

15

2.4   ESP and Needs Analysis

The term 'analysis of needs' was originally introduced and used in the West Bengal state of India in 1920s. West (1994) stated this term 'needs' covers what beginners are required to do in the targeted language condition and how initiatives/beginners may learn the subject linguistic within the specific time. By 1960 the study 'English for Specific Purposes (ESP)' had emerged at the Makerere Seminar in 1961 at West states.

Needs analysis is the most important element in ESP. It is the cornerstone of the ESP and grows to anchors a focused course (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Robinson (1991, p7) reported that "needs analysis is generally regarded as critical to ESP, although ESP is by no means the only educational enterprise which makes use of it". (Strevens, 1980) proposed that the analysis of needs is an essential task for an LSP teaching. LSP is more apprehensive with technical dissertation. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p53) contended that "any language course should be based on needs analysis". Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p.121) state that "needs analysis is the process of establishing the *what* and *how* of a course". Dudley-Evans & St John (1998, p126) stress the following three aspects of needs analysis:

  i.   "Needs analysis aims to know learners as people, as language users and as language learners".

  ii.   "Needs analysis study also aims to know how language learning and skills learning can be maximized for a given learner group".

  iii. "Needs analysis study aims to know the target situations and learning environment so that data can appropriately be interpreted".

It can be understood that the needs analysis is a critical phase in proceeding to developing and designing a linguistic course, fabricating things for learning and teaching. West (1994) stated that it is basically a realistic action focusing on specific situations.

Hence, in the ESP/EAP context, it is critical in getting the features of the language which are decisive for specific teaching/learning. Robinson (1991) suggested that the analysis of needs is not just for defining: "the what and how of a language of teaching". Furthermore, it was suggested that the needs analysis should be repetitive in order to be gathered in an influential course. It is also suggested that it would lead to a very useful record of patrons, experts, and learners.

The ESP beginners need to accept the needs of analysis. The major reasons of the needs analysis were the ex-students, people studying or working in the fields, learners, employers and clients, booklets related to the field, co-workers and the ESP examination in the field. The prime tools for implementing needs analysis education are the analysis of reliable texts, questionnaires, organized interviews, discussions, assessments and observations. It is essential for ESP beginners to bring out a study based on needs analysis preceding to designing and developing an ESP course and curriculum, select an appropriate teaching method and other related ways which require analysis of the needs. In short, there is no course designing without analysing learners' needs first.

To summarize, the linguistic needs analysis was a procedure that should be carried out according to materials selection, syllabus and course, and learning and coaching method and the assessment. The ESP consultants must be able to employ the outcomes of the needs analysis exploration they perform to design a language course according to the level and needs of learners. The major procedures for implementing such studies are organized interviews, questionnaire surveys, analysis of reliable spoken and written scripts, observations, assessments and deliberations.

2.4.1   Needs Analysis Components in ESP

The various constituents of language needs analysis were used to examine various issues and focuses in linguistic learning, designing and teaching. Some ESP researchers

such as Robinson (1991) and Munby (1978) suggested that Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Learning Situation Analysis (LSA), Present Situation Analysis (PSA) are the essential constituents for evaluating the needs of beginners in language learning.

2.4.1.1 Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

The Target Situation Analysis denotes a method analysing needs that emphases on recognizing the students' necessities in an academic and professional language situation. The most basic TSA processes were planned to conclude 'how much English' remained used. Robinson (1991) claims "needs analysis which focuses on students' needs at the end of a language course, can be called a TSA (Target Situation Analysis)", this term was also introduced and discussed by Chambers (1980). (Munby, 1978) formulated one of the best-known frameworks of TSA method for analysing needs. He presented a communicative process for needs containing a set of constraints in which information based on the learners' aim may be designed. Munby's model has been widely argued and studied. There are comprehensive databases of its valuable characteristics. For instance, attitudes and micro-skills are utilized as specifications for the subsequent course. A supportive perception, organized by Munby, related to the target-level actions for some professions, scholars/learners may need a little accuracy. For that reason, as suggested by Munby (1978) that, TSA might be the pinpoint period at which 'good enough' job competency is touched.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, p123) defined TSA as, *"TSA refers to task and activities learners are/will be using English for target situation".* They stated TSA normally utilizes the questionnaire as the instrument. Further, as they also explained:

> *"TSA includes objective, perceived and product-oriented needs. The objective and perceived needs are derived by outsiders from facts, from what is known and can be verified. Therefore, 'to be able to spell English words correctly' is an objective/perceived need. Product-oriented needs are derived from the goal or target situation".*

<div align="right">Dudley Evans & St John (1998, p. 123)</div>

2.4.1.2 Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

Present Situation Analysis (PSA) seeks to establish what the students are like at the beginning of their language course (Robinson, 1991, p.8). Further, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) also argue that PSA evaluates the weaknesses and the strengths in the learning experiences and the language skills. On the other hand, Richterich and Chancerel (1980) presented a formula for the most widespread range of the devices to establish the PSA method. They suggested three basic sources of the information as: the language teaching formation, the students or learners themselves, and the 'user-institution', for instance the learners' work place. For each of those, ESP beginners pursue information about their particular stages of capability, their assets, and their opinions on the language learning and teaching. Further, they recommended that the ESP learners may have to learn the nearby culture and society, the approach thought to the learning, and to the English language and usage of a target language. Further, McDonough (1984, p.67) reported that the PSA method contains 'fundamental variables' that should obviously be studied before considering the TSA method. In training, a trainee is expected to find and seek info for connecting to both PSA and TSA at the same time. Consequently, needs analysis may be taken as a mixture of Present Situation Analysis (PSA) and Target Situation Analysis (TSA).

2.4.1.3 Learning Situation Analysis (LSA)

The term "Learning Situation Analysis" describes a particular and process-oriented analysis of needs. It also guides the learners to what they actually need to study. Dudley-

Evans and St. John (1998) reported that the terminology LSA explains the actual methods of learning the language with appropriate skills. According to them, LSA also refers to why do learners want to learn the language.

2.4.2 ESP Models of Needs Analysis

The ESP field contains a number of scholars who follow the analysis of the needs such as McDonough (1984), Munby (1978), Robinson (1991), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Jordan (1997), West (1994) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998). These scholars suggested different models of ESP needs analysis; the models are almost similar to a certain extent and can be used to help the learners to study the English language. This section contains the critical review about the provided models by the pioneers of the ESP field

2.4.2.1 Munby (1978) Model

The Munby's (1978) model of 'Communicative Syllabus Design (1978)' was considered as the most common model for analysing linguistic ESP needs. Munby's model consists of two stages and the heart of the model is the Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) and the interpretation of the profile of needs. Information about the respondent identity and language competency are input into the CNP which consists of a number of parameters (purposive domain, setting, interaction, instrumentality, dialect, communicative events and keys, and target level). After the data gathered under these various variables have been analysed, a profile of needs is obtained to determine what the respondent actually required to perform his or her job requirements.

The overall idea behind Munby's concept is to identify the profile of needs such as the communicative needs of ISC Frontliners when dealing with students' problems or enquiries. An evaluation (measurement instrument) is then build to identify the objective that is required to achieve the needs and the "why" of the selection. The model aims at

exploring detailed and complex aspects relating to learner's profile of needs under the various variables that affect communication. The outcome of the processing data identifies what the learner needs to know in order to function effectively in his or her target working environment (Munby, 1978: p.32-42).

2.4.2.2 McDonough (1984) Model

McDonough (1984) provided the integrated method for the ESP needs analysis. Firstly, the method suggested that the learners can be at the centre of the organization. Secondly, the "needs" were not considered as fixed, but changing and developing. The third feature was that the scheme has complexity which permits the needs analysis must be performed under altered perspectives such as training institutions, learners and the supporting members. The fourth phase of the method/procedure was about the great interdependence of the decisions and decision-makers. Finally, the technique also contains the degree of explicitness and details which might diverge with the necessities of dissimilar conditions/surroundings. That model was measured as an effective model for the ESP needs analysis, although it has some of the limitations. Firstly, this model cannot focus perfectly on the learning needs. But it only focuses on target and current necessities; it also did not highlight further important features of ESP needs analysis, such as necessities and deficiencies so this study does not employ McDonough integrated model.

2.4.2.3 Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Model

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also proposed another model for ESP needs analysis. This model proposed a distinction between "target needs" and "learning needs." Target needs indicate "what the learner needs to do in the target situation" (p.54) and learning needs mean "what the learner needs to do in order to learn" (p.54). Necessities are determined by "what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target

situation, which includes the linguistic features such as functional, structural, lexical and discourse features. Lacks are the gaps between what the learners already know about the necessities and what the learners' lack. Furthermore, the learners might have some ideas of what their needs are and these needs are called Wants. However, this model does not consider the linguistic analysis, means analysis, discourse analysis and genre analysis, which are prioritized by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998).

2.4.2.4 Dudley-Evans and St John' (1998) Model

Most recently the ESP model of needs analysis was presented by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998). The details of the model are explained in Figure 2.1
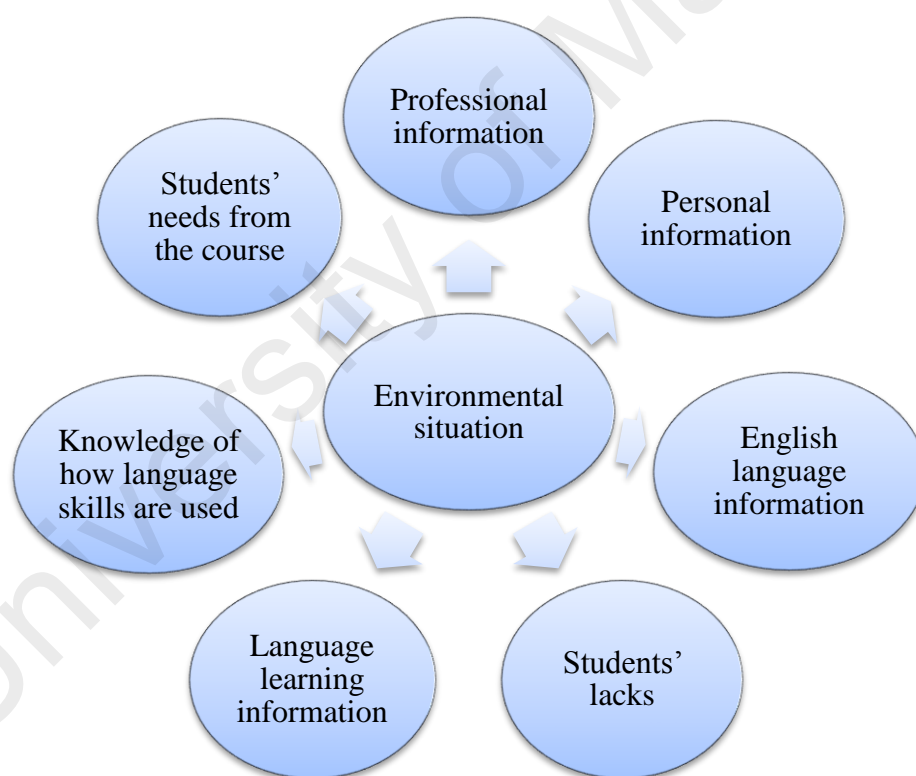
Figure 2:1 ESP Model of needs analysis (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998)

Figure 2.1 clearly explains the model proposed by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). The proposed model may be considered as the very wide-ranging method for the examination of the ESP needs. The model focuses:

i.   Professional information about the students: Target Situation Analysis and Objective Needs (TSA) is the professional information such as the task and the activities the learners will be using English for.

ii. Personal information about the students: Wants, Means and Subjective Needs or Subjective Analysis are personal information about the learners such as their previous learning experiences, cultural information, reasons for attending the course and expectation of it, and their attitude towards English.

iii. English language information about the students: Present Situation Analysis (PSA) is the information on their current skills and language use. This allows ESP teachers to find out what the learners lack.

iv. The learners' lacks: The gap between the Present Situation Analysis (PSA) and the Target Situation Analysis (TSA).

v.   Language learning information: The effective ways of learning skills and language in determining the learners' learning needs (Learning Situation Analysis).

vi. Knowledge of how language and skills are used in target situation: Discourse Analysis or professional communication information about how the language and skills are used in Target Situation Analysis (TSA).

vii. Students' needs from the course: Wants of the course.

viii. Environmental situation: Information about the environment in which the course will be run (Means Analysis).

This model was established by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) on the linguistic needs/wants, and it is pragmatic and practical which covers all the aspects, like, Present Situation Analysis (PSA), Learning Situation Analysis (LSA), Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Means Analysis (MA), and other less important methods. The proposed model contains four of the most important components for ESP needs analysis such as Present Situation Analysis (PSA), Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) and Means Analysis (MA). The proposed components were clearly defined in their works, which were also used by several researchers in their models.

After all, the needs analysis contexts in the ESP method was very wide. Some thoughts such as opinions of the different stakeholders including learners, English language teachers, subject-specialists and ESP learners may also be considered for the comprehensive investigations of the ESP needs. Some deliberations are very essential for performing every analysis for needs since they might disturb the application of the research, the design and growth of syllabus and course, as well as the training and methodology program. The recent design and progress in the need analysis for the ESP framework witnesses the development of advanced and more malleable theoretical contexts of the needs analysis.

2.5   ESP Course Design

Richards et al (2001, p.66) defines course design as "the development of a language programme or set of teaching materials". Course design, however, should not be understood as having the same meaning as syllabus design. Richards et al (2001, p.67) distinguishes course design from syllabus design where the latter is defined as "generally referring to procedures for deciding what will be taught in a language programme". According to Richards et al (2001, p.67), course design "includes how a syllabus will be carried out". For example:

i. What teaching method and materials will be needed to achieve the objectives.

ii. How much time will be required.

iii. How classroom activities will be sequenced and organized.

iv. What sort of placement tests, achievement tests and other tests will be used.

v. How the programme will be evaluated.

However, Hyland (2006 p. 52) states that a curriculum is defined as "a plan of what is to be achieved through teaching and learning and identifying what will work in reaching the course aims and a way to evaluate the learners' progress". Designing a curriculum involves analysing the need analysis and setting up reachable goals for the learners. Widodo and Park (2014) further explain that a curriculum design involves seven procedures which are:

i. Analysing the needs analysis

ii. Formulating the objectives

iii. Selecting the instructional content

iv. Designing the instructional content

v. Selecting the instructional activities

vi. Designing the instructional activities

vii. Selecting the instructional evaluation

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), a syllabus has to explain what the successful learner will know by the end of the course. This syllabus is concerned with the nature of language used by learners in their workplace. The syllabus has to be structured in the order of priorities as this helps the learners pay more attention to specific areas. The designer of the syllabus/curriculum decides the contexts in which the language is used in terms of the activities and the time allocated for these activities. These factors can influence the quality of learning a new skill related to their work. Learners also take part

in the development of the curriculum as they know which skills they want and have to improve in order for them to improve their work.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) explained that the information about the learner's needs can be collected through numerous ways. The numerous ways include questionnaires, surveys, interviews, attitude scales, job analysis, content analysis, observation and informal consultations with sponsors, staffs and learners.

The language teaching offered in an ESP course of this study will be tailored to the specific learning and language communicative needs of ISC frontliners. Analysing the specific needs of a specific group, in this case the ISC frontliners, is important as it helps to determine which aspects have to be prioritized in a curriculum. Designing a curriculum should be adapted with what the ISC frontliners can and could not do in English communication at their workplace. In this study, the researcher collects the information of the learners' needs through questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions.

2.6   Components of Speaking Skills

Speaking and listening skills are often associated with each other in all communicative settings. Listening is a skill considered as a receptive skill as it is an action that does not require output, instead it requires input. The act of absorbing any information and the process of understanding the meaning of the information is what we define as listening. In contrast to the listening skill, the speaking skill is considered as the productive skill as it requires the speakers themselves to produce input. The process of providing information to other participants is known as the speaking skill. For ISC frontliners, speaking skills are important as the nature of their job requires them to interact with international students from all over the world. When interacting with these students, ISC frontliners have to

perform a variety of communication acts such as enquiring, interrogating, informing, and explaining.

Syakur (1987) stated that there are five components of speaking skills. They are as explained in Figure 2.2:
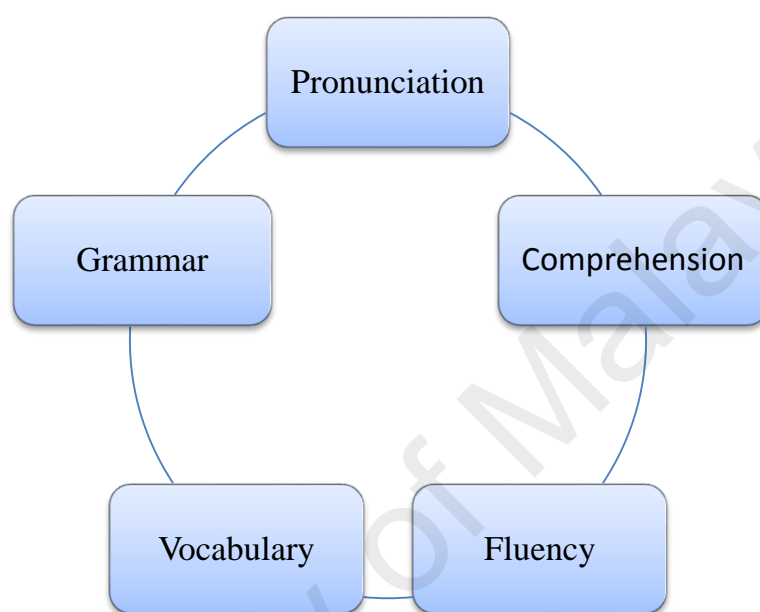
Figure 2:2 Components of speaking skills, Syakur (1987)

i. Pronunciation: It is the way for learners to produce clearer language when they speak. It deals with phonological process that refers to the component of grammar made up elements and principles that determine how sounds vary and pattern in a language. Moreover, pronunciation includes all those aspects of speech which make for an easily intelligible flow of speech, including segmental articulation, rhythm, intonation and phrasing, and more peripherally even gesture, body language and eye contact (Fraser, 2010, p.6).

ii. Grammar: It is defined as "a systematic way of accounting for and predicting an ideal speaker's or hearer's knowledge of the language. This is done by a set of rules or principles that can be used to generate all well-formed or

grammatical utterances in the language". (Purpura, 2004, p.6). It is required for learners to arrange a correct sentence in conversation.

iii. Vocabulary: Richards and Schmidt (2002, p.580) define vocabulary as "a set of lexemes including single words, compound words and idioms". It means the use of appropriate diction in communication. Having appropriate vocabulary will make it easier to learners to express their ideas, feeling and thoughts.

iv. Fluency: It usually refers to express oral language freely without interruption. Fluency is defined as the ability to speak fluently and accurately. Signs of fluency include a reasonably fast speed of speaking and only a small number of pauses. From that statement, can be concluded that fluency is about a speaker's skill in the speed of speaking and not spending a lot of time to convey the message.

v. Comprehension: It is a subject to respond to speech as well as to initiate it. It is important to understand the message received to be able to respond correctly.

These components can be used to make ESP learners improve their speaking skills and for the present study, can be used to find out which are the communicative skills most necessary for the ISC frontliners in carrying out their various duties and tasks. It is hoped that this study will provide information on the communicative sub-skills frontliners lack and need to perform efficiently.

2.7   International students' motivation for studying in Malaysia

Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia reported that Malaysia is presently categorized as the 11th in world by UNESCO rankings in expressions of international learners' learning in the country (Benjamin, 2010). Malaysia is currently accommodating a great number of international students at undergraduate, postgraduate and post-doctorate

levels. Consequently, it can be reflected as one of the major priorities for international scholars to continue their education in the country.

The international students came from several places with various social and cultural experiences and backgrounds, having different categories of abilities, talents and levels of the English prominence (Sovic, 2009; Bektas, 2008). Therefore, international learners are anxious to get use to and mix with the new people and the new ways of thinking and learning. International students face more difficulties to adapt to the new atmosphere/situation. They encounter several problems in expressions of communication and cultural differences, language difficulties, loss of societal sustenance, financial and academic problems, health and recreational issues and psychological problems (Lin and Yi, 1997; Hus, 2003; Yeh and Inose, 2002; Steele, 2008; Andrade, 2006; Al-Zubaidi and Rechards, 2009; Sovic, 2009; Lui, 2009; Sherry, 2010; Alavi and Mansor, 2011).

Moreover the results from the studies specified that the problems confronted by the foreign learners can be classified into the four categories: 1) common living requirements; such as transportation and housing environment, adjusting to food, dealing with health care anxieties and financial problems; 2) academic complications, such as the method of teaching and lack of expertise in the English language; 3) socio-cultural problems, such as recreational problems and suffering culture shocks; (4) psychological treatments, for instance experiencing depression, loneliness, homesickness, worthlessness and feeling isolated (Ying and Liese, 1994; Kaczmarek et al., 1994; Lin and Yi, 1997; Tseng and Newton, 2002; Mustapha, 2010; Al-Zubaidi and Rechards, 2009; Alavi and Mansor, 2011).

Hence, the universities were projected to overcome the challenges such as differences in learning styles, cultural variety, varying demands of students providing with higher choices of destinations, study environments and educational programs (LeBlanc and Nha,

1997). Consequently, to motivate the international learners, learning institutions particularly the universities must recognize the different challenges and obstacles faced by the international students and have to offer them as much support as they can.

2.8   Past studies on needs analysis

Oral communication is one of the most significant skills in the English language that all learners must have to assure that they can use it proficiently in their professional works (Clagett, 1997). As per Stivers et al, (2000) opinion, the oral communication skill of the English language can be considered as an important skill for workers/employees to continue their tasks efficiently in the workplace. However, Kasim and Ali (2010) categorized the practice of oral communication skills in the workplace such as multi-national enterprises as; meetings, telephonic exchange, giving oral presentations, casual work related opinions, demonstrating and explaining to colleagues and subordinates.

Recently, the significance of training the stakeholders with better oral communication skills in English language has developed with the future demands in the present workplace communications. It was reported by Stevens (2005) that the employers/workers thought that in the short-term expertise in linguistic skills can be considered as a tough factor for the occupation. He further mentioned that a number of learners with a low expertise at English language skills cannot be employed because of clients' expectations. In workplace frameworks, employees/staff needed oral communication skills in the English linguistic to get success in their respective fields, as they may arrange various forthcoming tasks such as meetings, negotiations and presentations.

Although studies on ISC frontliners have not been conducted before, a number of studies in the area of ESP such as engineering, nursing, travel agents, front desk officers in hotels and hospitals, have been carried out worldwide. The following paragraphs show an overview of the past studies in the field of ESP such as student service, business,

medical tourism and hospitality which are related to the present study. The target groups of all these studies are frontliners. These studies are reported according to their relevance to the current study from most related to less related.

Surentharan (2016) investigated the spoken communication needs of Information Desk Personnel in Libraries (LIDP). The main aim of this study was to conduct a needs analysis to identify the spoken communication needs of the LIDP while catering to the demands and requests of the international students. By identifying their spoken communication needs, their spoken communication skills are identified and incorporated into a proposed English language course design. This study is the most related to the present study because it investigates the spoken communication needs of Malaysian employees during interaction with international students to propose an ESP course based on these needs. The present study aims to achieve the same objectives. This study involved a questionnaire, survey, interviews and observations to obtain the relevant data. The findings revealed that the LIDP lack sufficient practice in pronunciation, inadequate knowledge of vocabulary, lack sufficient knowledge of grammar and the inability to understand foreign accents. These are the spoken communication needs that are incorporated into the proposed English language course in boosting the LIDP's spoken communication skills.

Ng (2006) aimed to gain some insights into the English language needs of the Help Desk Personnel (HDP) working at the customer service department in five electronics companies. The study focused on the language sub-skills during interactions with clients and also within the organization. The instruments used to gather information for this research were questionnaires, structured face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews. The current study uses the same methods except the telephone interviews which is replaced by group discussion interviews with international students. The

questionnaire of this study also adapted from Ng (2006), but the focus in the current study on speaking and listening sub-skills only. It was found that the English needs of the HDP are in relation to their job specification. The majority of the HDP stated that the most important skill is the communicative skills and the ability to interact effectively with clients. Similar findings were found in the current study. Additionally, there is also a need to improve their ability in mastering the telephone skills to ensure effective communication over the telephone.

Singaran (2016) conducted a study to examine the spoken English language needs and challenges faced by Information Desk Personnel working in shopping malls in Malaysia. The main aim of this study was to conduct a needs analysis of Information Desk Personnel in shopping malls, explore their needs, problems faced in terms of speaking skills and propose a course design focusing on speaking skills. This study is considered related to the current study because it aims to achieve the same objectives. The key findings also match with similar findings of the current study. It showed that the English language, especially speaking skills are important for the Information Desk personnel. The participants agreed that speaking is the major skill they use most in their job routine and findings reveal that grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency are important aspects of their speaking skills.

Another study related to English language needs of frontliners was conducted by Menon (1999) to identify the English language needs of front line staff in a private hospital to determine what is required for them to accomplish their job functions efficiently and effectively. The research methodology employed involved questionnaires, interviews (both semi-structured and informal), job observation and examination of related documents. The findings revealed that the Front-Line Staff need all the basic language skills at different degrees of importance, particularly speaking, listening and its

various related sub-skills. The findings also indicated that the front-line staff need some basic formulaic structures to enable them to carry out their tasks. However, to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, these staff members would have to learn a much wider range of structures. This is because they are required to cope with many different situations and people.

Tan (2009) attempted to evaluate whether competency of the four English language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, grammar competence and vocabulary knowledge, are required by the staff of a business class hotel, in order for them to perform their required job functions efficiently and effectively. He employed a questionnaire, interviews, observations and authentic documentary research to obtain the relevant data. The findings of the study indicated that the majority of the Front Office staff seemed to show similarities with their perceived English language needs. The staff considered writing and speaking skills as the two most required skills followed by reading and listening skills, and vocabulary knowledge ranked as the least important skill, while in other studies, speaking and listening were considered as the most required skills. Results from interviews and observations also showed that they were positive towards the need for an English language course to help them to improve their English language proficiency. The findings revealed that proficiency of all the four English language skills including grammar and vocabulary knowledge are very important and required in order for them to perform their required job functions efficiently and to achieve the required quality customer service standards which are positive guests' comments and "zero complaints" as stipulated by the hotel's vision statement.

Karuthan (2015) investigated the English language communicative challenges and needs faced by nurses engaged in Medical Tourism in Malaysia. His study does not target the frontliners in the service sector as the previous studies do, but it is still related to the

current study because it aimed to achieve the same objectives using similar methods. Additionally, Nurses can be considered as frontliners when they interact directly with foreign patients. This study aimed to identify the English Language communicative challenges and needs of these nurses and to identify the language skills required in a proposed English Language curriculum for the nurses.

The results revealed that the majority of the nurses especially the new, junior nurses faced problems understanding spoken English and had difficulty speaking in English. Nurses cited different accents, slang, idiomatic phrases and rapid pace of spoken English making it difficult to understand patients. These nurses' use of Basic English, at times sounding curt and rude, did not aid in building rapport with patients. The findings indicated that nurses faced problems in reading and writing nursing documents in English. Often grammar, spelling mistakes, code-switching and use of Manglish were observed. Use of Malay, was common. Interestingly, Malaysian nurses often resorted to getting help from other proficient nurses when encountered with English communication problems. The findings revealed, almost all the nurses wanted to improve their English language skills and were interested in enrolling for a two to three-hour class per week. The needs of the nurses include improving general proficiency of the language, focusing on all four skills, grammar and medical vocabulary. From the interviews, recommendations such as being exposed to authentic work–related situations and reviewing previous written reports and appointing a clinical instructor to help new nurses were made.

Based on the findings, a three hour, 12 weekly, intermediate course for nurses in the medical tourism sector was developed. Although, this study focuses on the four language skills; speaking, listening, reading and writing while the current study focuses only on the oral communicative needs; speaking and listening, but similar findings were revealed from both studies such as; the need to get help from other translators when they cannot

understand the speaker and the need to improve their English skills through special English course. The nurses preferred a three hour, 12 weekly course while the ISC frontliners preferred a two hour, 14 weekly course. Both, nurses and ISC frontliners face problems to understand different accents and slangs.

In addition, a needs analysis on English Language Use in Tourism study was conducted by Nawamin Prachanant (2012) with 40 tourism employees. He used a set of questionnaire to find the needs of the staff and the findings have shown that speaking is most important skill and the three most relevant functions in using English language are giving information, providing services and offering help. In addition, his findings also showed that problems related to English use are the inability to understand foreigners' accents, inappropriate words and expressions, inadequate vocabulary, and lack of grammar knowledge. In short, his findings relate to the importance of speaking skills of the current study as these staff lack the ability to communicate using the language with customers in various ways and the ISC frontliners to face the same problems when they communicate with international students.

From the previous studies, it can be concluded that English plays a major role as a worldwide language or lingua franca in many local and multinational organizations in Malaysia and it dramatically increased, therefore, ISC staff must be able to communicate efficiently both outside and inside the workplaces. However, Kassim and Ali (2010) stated that most of the staff, including the student service sector officials also confronted a lot of difficulties while communicating in English and regularly encounter difficulties in fluent speaking while giving oral presentations, in meetings and delivering public speaking. It was found from the previous discussions that the communication problems in the offices were mostly associated with low-proficiency in the English (Stevens, 2005), and the skills gaps between the prospects of the companies and what the institutions

proposed to the learners (Smith, 2000). Therefore, this study will be focused on investigating the oral communication wants/ needs of ISC frontliners at their workplace.

2.9   Conclusion

Various kinds of research on the needs analysis of English for Specific Purposes has been conducted on groups of people from different occupations which include engineers, trainees, nurses, front line receptionists in a hotel, hospital, consultants in a private firm, and clerks. In this study, the researcher looks at another front-line profession that is International Student Centre (ISC) of public universities in Malaysia.

This chapter presents the review of extant literature relevant to the research issues as an attempt to understand the aims of the present study. It discusses the English language communicative challenges and needs of ISC frontliners, the job specifications of international student centres, definition of ESP, ESP improvement, ESP modules and components of needs analysis, approaches in ESP course design, listening and speaking skills, and international students' motivation for studying in Malaysia. It also presents some studies of English language needs in the service industry and for ISC frontliners. In the following chapter, the research design and the research method will be presented.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide descriptions of the steps taken by the researcher to carry out the study identifying the English language needs of the front-line staff of international student centres of public universities in Malaysia. The methodology employed aimed at gathering the necessary data to make informed analysis of their oral communicative needs, the problems faced by the staff and the possible steps available for them to improve their quality of communication at their workplace. It covers in detail the necessary information pertaining to the target group, the research design, the method of data collection and the statistical techniques used by the researcher.

3.2   Research Design

This study adopts sequential explanatory mixed methods approach in its analysis through collecting quantitative data first (QUAN) followed by collecting qualitative data second (qual). It places priority on quantitative (QUAN) data collection and analysis. The qualitative data will be collected to explain the results of the quantitative data in more depth.
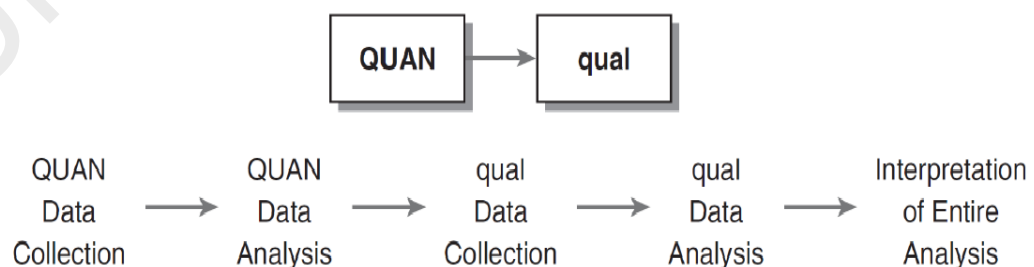
Figure 3:1 Sequential Explanatory Design

Mixed method, as the name suggests, uses more than one method for the investigation of a phenomenon of interest so as to minimize the limitations associated with the method and also to enhance confidence in the findings (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) explains that researchers use a mixed method approach to expand the understanding from one method to another and confirm the findings from different data sources.

Concurrent triangulation strategy is a form of mixed method that has been emphasized by Creswell (2009). This strategy uses the quantitative and qualitative approaches to cross validate and corroborate the findings. This strategy is adopted to complement the weakness in one method with the strengths in another method (Creswell, 2009). This study uses the concurrent triangulation strategy using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The quantitative method of using a questionnaire is used to identify the English language oral communicative challenges of the ISC frontliners of public universities in Malaysia as well as their English language communicative needs. A questionnaire is used as it elicits very specific information on the area of inquiry. In this case, questionnaires can elicit more information from a larger number of subjects. The information on the English language communicative need and challenges among ISC frontliners is collected through distributing questionnaires to many employees.

To validate the findings from the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and students' focus-group discussions using the qualitative method were used. These methods were used to get in-depth information on the English language communicative needs and challenges of the ISC frontliners. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to paint a better in-depth picture of the problem at hand.
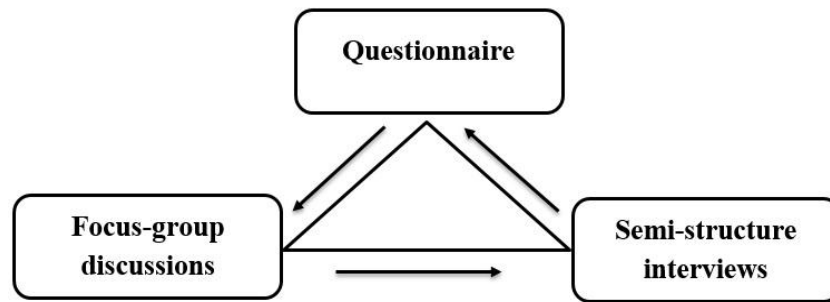
Figure 3:2 The concurrent triangulation strategy

The concurrent triangulation strategy that uses both the quantitative as well as the qualitative is important to this study. The quantitative aspect gathers information on the English language communicative needs and challenges of the ISC frontliners in large number through the use of a questionnaire. The qualitative aspects gather in-depth information as well as to validate the findings of the English language communicative needs and challenges using semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions. Figure 3.2 visualized the approach taken for the study.

3.3   Sampling and Contexts of the Study

The respondents in the questionnaire survey were the front-line staff of international student centres in the three selected universities. All respondents in the three selected universities, namely, Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Universiti Putra Malaysia are working in the front line of the International Student Centres including the visa units. These universities were chosen because they take a lot of international students, as part of becoming global universities (UNESCO, 2014). A total of 30 employees from the three universities completed the questionnaire. Two out of the three universities gave permission for the interview session. A total of five ISC frontliners who answered the questionnaire were interviewed. Two of the interviewed participants were working at the visa unit counter of the ISC and three at the front office. Three focus group

discussions were held with groups of international students at the target universities. Twelve international students –four students in each group- were selected randomly from seven different countries; Nigeria, Palestine, Bangladesh, Iraq, Somalia, Jordan and Iran. Figure 3.3 visualized the sampling and contexts of the study.
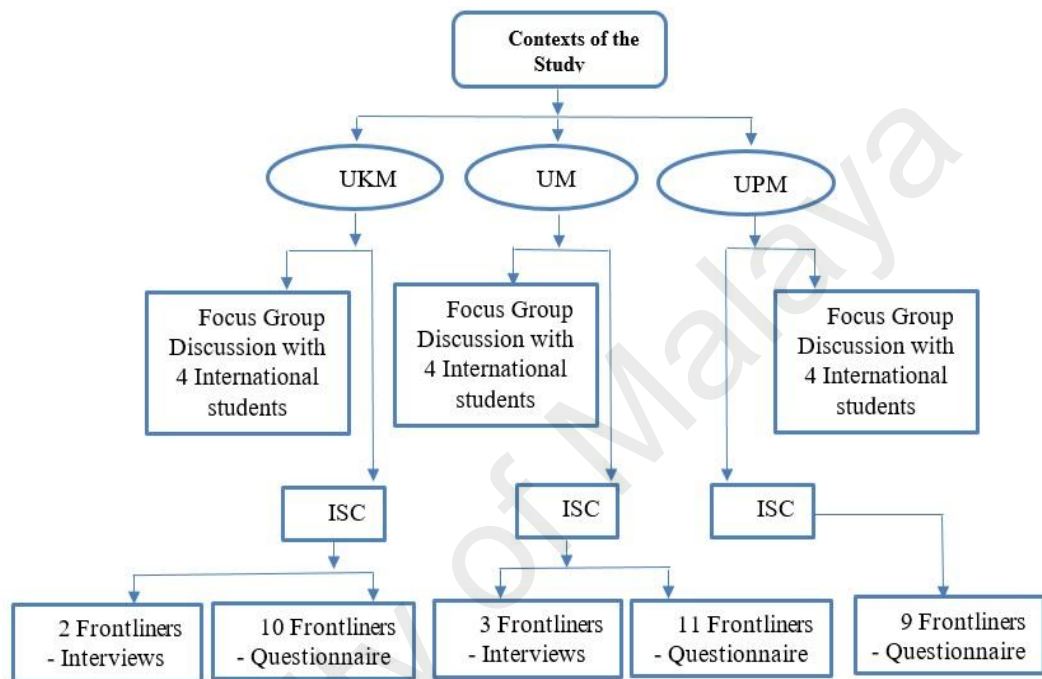
Figure 3:3 Sampling and Contexts of the Study

3.4 Research Instruments

Several instruments were used for the purpose of collecting the relevant data and documenting them. In the quantitative part of the research, a questionnaire was developed and used while in the qualitative part, semi-structured interview guidelines were designed to facilitate the interview sessions with the ISC frontliners and the focus groups discussion with the students. The instruments used in this study are described as follows:

3.4.1 Questionnaire

The primary instrument used in this study is the questionnaire. Questionnaires are an inexpensive way to gather data from a potentially large number of respondents. A good questionnaire forms an integrated whole. The researcher weaves questions together so they flow smoothly. It includes introductory remarks and instructions for clarification and measures each variable with one or more survey questions. There are two key principles for good survey questions: avoiding confusion and keeping the respondent's perspective in mind. Good survey questions give the researcher valid and reliable measures. They also help respondents feel that they understand the question and that their answers are meaningful (Neuman, 1997).

The first step in designing a questionnaire is to clearly define the topic of the study. A clear, concise definition of the study will yield results that can be interpreted unambiguously. Having a clearly defined topic has another important advantage: it keeps the questionnaire focused on the behavior or attitude chosen for study. The questionnaire should include a broad enough range of questions so that it can assess behavior. The questionnaire should elicit the responses without much extraneous information. The type of information gathered in a questionnaire depends on its purpose. Most questionnaires include questions designed to assess the characteristics of the participants. These characteristics are called demographics. Demographics are often used as predictor variables during analysis of the data to determine whether participant characteristics correlate with or predict responses to other questions in the survey (Bordens & Abbot, 2002).

In this study, the questionnaire was adapted from Ng (2006)'s questionnaire but the focus on speaking and listening sub-skills only. The current study uses the same methods used by Ng (2006) except the telephone interviews which is replaced by focus group

discussions with international students. As the qualification and proficiency levels differ from one respondent to another, the questionnaire was designed in a simple and straightforward manner to avoid confusion and difficulties in answering the questions. It was divided into sections A, B, and C for easier reference. Section A was designed to obtain an overall picture of the respondents' background. Section B was included to elicit information regarding the respondents' perception of their lacks when performing their daily duties. The respondents were asked to rank the importance of mastering the language skills. This is crucial for identifying the needs and wants that they need to improve, in order to function effectively and efficiently. Section C looked at the respondents' views and perceptions towards a recommended ESP programme training in the future.

Both open and close-ended questions were used in the questionnaire though mainly close-ended questions were asked. The routine of mechanically choosing from the options given by close-ended questions may only hinder the respondents from expressing their views truthfully so adding extra open-ended questions will allow a free expression of opinions. The close-ended questions were based on the Likert Scale (1932) by asking respondents to specify their level of agreement to each of a list of statements were used in this questionnaire. Likert Scale items are commonly used to investigate how respondents rate a series of statements by having them circled or otherwise mark the numbered categories. The questionnaire used can be seen in Appendix A.

3.4.2   Semi-structured Interviews

To further understand and validate the information gathered from the questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted among the frontline staff of international student centres of public universities in Malaysia. The semi-structured questions were generally on self-evaluation, problems faced by ISC frontliners,

experiences encountered by them when using English, and recommendations on the usage of English. The main prompts/questions are: is proficiency in the English language skills important for the front-line staff in carrying out their duties; how would you rate the present English language proficiency among the frontline staff at ISC; what are the oral communicative speaking and listening sub-skills they encounter during their daily duties when interact with international students, and how they expect to benefit from an ESP course to improve their English proficiency. Refer to (Appendix B).

3.4.3 Focus-group Discussions

To validate the responses of the questionnaire, focus-group discussions were held with groups of international students at the target universities. These students were selected randomly from several countries to participate in the focus group discussion. Some of the main prompts/questions are: how do you rate the English language proficiency of ISC frontliners and what difficulties do you encounter when listening and speaking to them and to what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the English oral communication skills of ISC staff at your university. They also were asked if they think an English language course will be useful for ISC staff to improve their oral communication skills. Refer to (Appendix C).

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

In this study, the data gathering procedure consists of two phases. In the first phase, the data was collected through a questionnaire which was distributed to the front-line employees who work in the international student centres of public universities in Malaysia namely; UM, UKM and UPM to identify the English language communicative needs and the problems encountered by them based on their perception of these needs. Thirty questionnaires were given to the managers of the international student centres of the three participating universities to be distributed to the ISC frontliners. In the ISC of

the three participating universities, the managers distributed the questionnaires to the frontliners. The researcher was not able to distribute the questionnaire personally because of the university policy. After two weeks, the researcher managed to collect 30 questionnaires from the three universities: eleven from UM, ten from UKM and nine from UPM.

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the ISC frontliners and focus group discussions were held with groups of international students at the target universities. Out of the three universities, only two universities allowed the researcher to conduct interviews among the staff. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five employees among the frontline staff of ISC, two from UKM and three from UM. Two of the participants were working at the visa unit counter of ISC and three in the front office. The third participant from UM was a senior supervisor at the ISC. She was interviewed after the first analysis of the data to explain the difference between the results from the questionnaire and interviews. A list of questions was given to the interviewees before the semi-structured interview session started. This was done to ensure that the respondents were aware of the types of questions that would be asked. This was important to have the right focus and to keep the interviews brief, as the time available for the interviews was very short in the university environment. With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were digitally recorded then transcribed and coded.

In regards to collecting data from the focus-group discussions, a semi-structured guideline was prepared to facilitate the discussion. Three focus group discussion were conducted by the researcher in a private study rooms at the selected universities without the presence of the management staff from the university to ensure sincere feedback from the respondents. The discussion lasted for about twenty minutes with four international

students from each university. The students' feedback was digitally recorded then transcribed and coded.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire will be presented in Chapter 4 in the form of frequency counts, rank order relationship which then will be converted into percentages to present the findings in the form of tables and figures. Next, responses and comments from semi-structured interviews sessions and focus group discussions will be presented in a descriptive manner to validate and support the data from the questionnaire. The results are presented in Chapter 4.

3.7 Pilot study

Prior to the actual questionnaire distribution, a pilot study was conducted to determine whether it was comprehensible and could be used as a tool to gather information. This is important to ensure that research is plausible and it is capable of providing accurate information to the research. It was administered to two senior frontliners at ISC of University of Malaya. Based on the pilot test results, a few ambiguous words were replaced with words which could be well understood by the participants.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Documents such as a Permission Letter from the researcher's university, and respondents' consent forms were given to the managers of the international students' centers (ISC) of these three universities to get permission to conduct the research at their workplace. Out of the three universities, only two allowed the researcher to conduct interviews among their staff.

3.9   Conclusion

This chapter has provided information on the research design, the selection of the respondents, the research procedures that followed, the tools used, and the methods of data collection and data analysis. The next chapter will discuss the findings and results from the data analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISSCUSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the analysis and the findings of the data. The data gathered through the questionnaire was followed by focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to explain the results of the quantitative data in more depth. Analysis places priority on quantitative data. Frequency counts and percentages are used to present the findings of the data, and the percentages obtained are calculated to the nearest decimal unit only (e.g. 28.33% ≈ 28.3%). The scoring method of the questionnaire, is based on the Likert Scale (1932), as explained earlier in Chapter 3 of this study.

The findings from the analysis of data will be used to determine the answers to the following research questions presented earlier in Chapter One.

1. What are the English language oral communicative challenges encountered by the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities?

2. What are the English language oral communicative needs of the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities?

3. What are the oral language sub-skills that need to be emphasized in a proposed English language programme for the ISC frontliners?

4.2 Background information of the respondents

The first part of the questionnaire elicits information about the respondents. The analysis of the data will help to provide a clearer description of the ISC frontliners.

The data mainly relates to factual information such as personal details of the respondents like age, sex, race and marital status. It also elicits information about academic background like level of education and the length of service in workplace. The respondents are front line staff of international student centres from three public universities. Prior to answering the questionnaire, the respondents and their universities requested the researcher to ensure their anonymity in the report. Therefore, their identities are kept confidential. A total of 30 respondents were selected for this study.

4.2.1 Age and Medium of Instruction

The majority of the respondents (43.3%) and (36.7%) are from the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups, respectively. While (10%) are from the 35-39 age group, and only (6.7%) from the 20-24 age group. Only one respondent is above 40 years old.
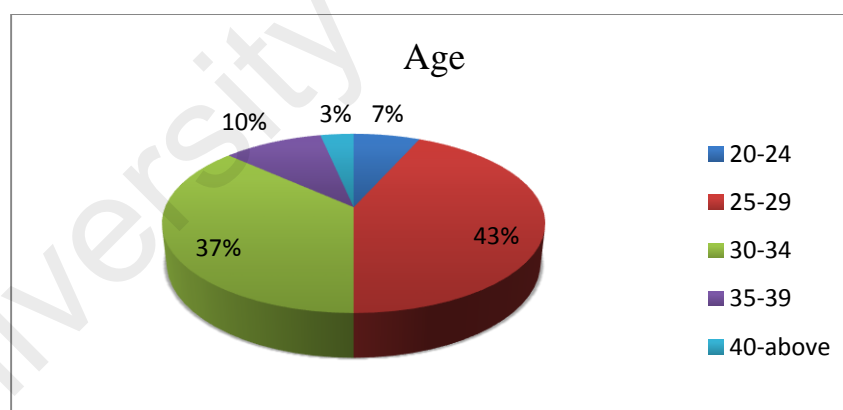
Figure 4:1 Age of respondents

4.2.2 Gender and Marital status

Of the total 30 respondents, 23% of them are males and 77% are females. This shows most of the respondents are females. Hence, the figures revealed that most of the frontliners are young females between the ages of 20 to 34 years old.
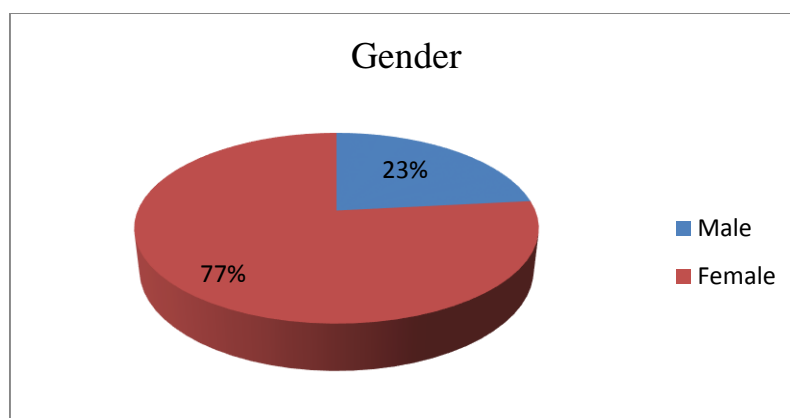
Figure 4:2 Gender of respondents

Regarding the marital status of the respondents, 53.3% of them are married while 46.7% are single. The married staff were mostly from the older age group, and they were mostly females. The results are presented in Figure 4.2.

4.2.3   Race and first language

Of the 30 respondents, only one is Chinese and the rest are Malay while there are no Indians or other races. Analysis of their native language indicates that the majority of the staff (96.7%) stated that the Malay language is their native language, and this is followed by the Chinese language. This indicates that all the ISC frontliners are not native speakers of the English language. Since all the staff are not native speakers, it can be deduced that there are some staff may have problems with the English language skills especially on the communication level, during the course of their daily job tasks.

4.2.4   Highest academic qualifications

Fifty-five percent of the respondents are diploma holders which means that they have been exposed to English for a period of 14 years. Of the 30 respondents, 18% of them are graduates. Meanwhile, 10% of them have HSE/ STPM and 20% have

MCE/SPM qualification while only one respondent has SRP/PMR qualification which means he has been exposed to English for a period of only nine years. The results are presented in Figure 4.3.
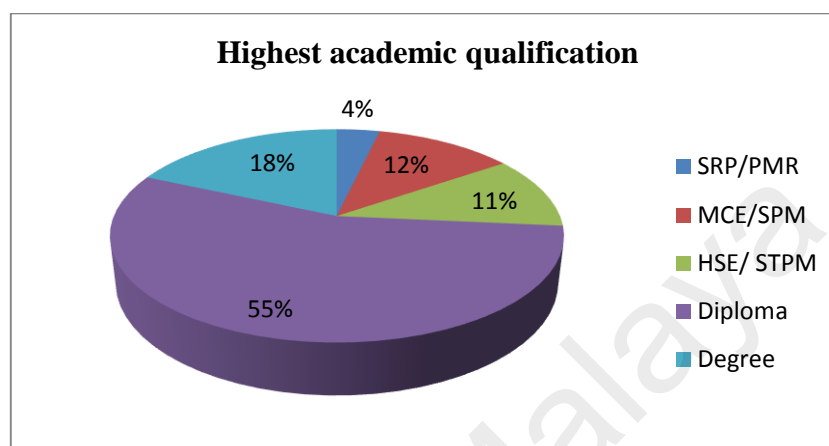
Figure 4:3 Highest academic qualifications

This group of frontliners had at least 9 to 11 years of exposure to the English language. Logically, this means that the staff should have a fair level of proficiency in English. This means that when a syllabus is designed to improve their communicational skills it will not necessitate the designer to consider the rudiments of the language.

4.2.5 Length of service

Fourteen of the respondents have worked in the ISC centers for 2-3 years, only one of the respondents have worked for 4-5 years while eleven frontliners have worked for more than five years. Four respondents have worked for less than one year.

To support the earlier findings, the analysis of the above data concurred with the fact that the respondents were fairly 'new' in their present jobs because of their

relatively young ages. It was noted that only 36.7% of the frontliners had worked for more than five years in their present positions and 60% of the staff had been working for less than 2 or 3 years. The results are presented in Figure 4.4.
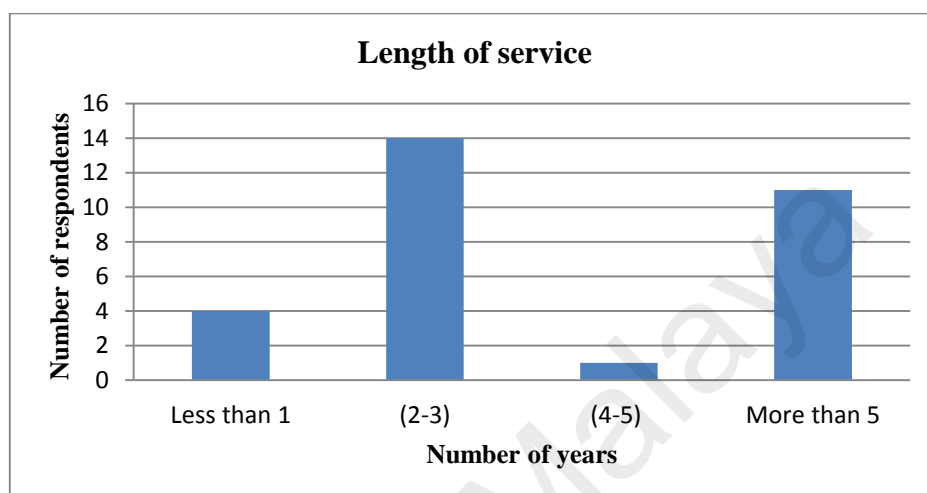
Figure 4:4 Length of service

Therefore, it can be deduced that the frontliners of international student centres being studied, are newcomers who are relatively young and hence, do not have many years of working experience in the student service industry. Since, most of the respondents are still at the learning stage, they would therefore require more time to familiarize themselves with the demands of their daily job functions, in relation to the specific use of English language at their workplace.

4.2.6   ISC frontliners' perceptions towards their English language proficiency

This section reports on the results from the analysis on Section A of the questionnaire. In the analysis, the majority of the respondents (70%) regarded English language proficiency as very important in their work, while (30%) of the

respondents regarded English language proficiency as important. None of the staff believes that English language is not necessary for their daily job tasks. This could be attributed to the fact that they believe that the mastery of English language is essential for the frontliners of international student centres, where the main task is attending to international students from various nationalities and language backgrounds. Hence, it can be deduced that, all the staff do use English language at work because English is the only common language between the interlocutors.

Figure 4.5 shows 13.3% of the respondents indicated that they are very confident in using English in their professional domain. More than half (60%) of the respondents are confident in using English, and 26.7% of the respondents lacks confidence.
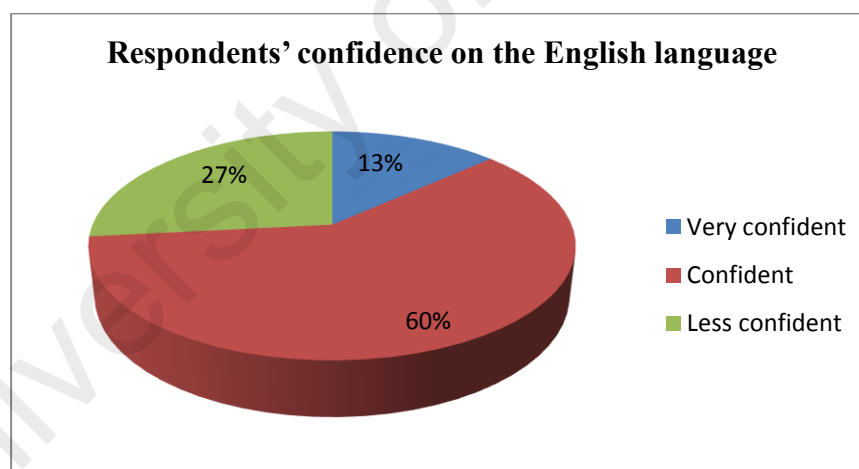
Figure 4:5 Respondents' confidence on the English language

The analysis indicates that although all of the respondents regarded English as important and very important, a quarter of the frontliners lack confidence using the language. This figure is considered significant because frontliners are required to be

confident when using the language. Therefore, it is important for the respondents to improve their English language proficiency.

The analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire was supported by the interviews conducted during the course of this study. The findings from the interviews revealed that the four interviewees were positive towards the English language. All the interviewees felt that English is used widely to communicate within their work environment. A frontliner who was in charge at the counter said,

"English is very important because we are involved with international students and all students who come here can speak only English". (FL1_UKM).

FL1_UM also concurred on the importance of the English language for the front-line staff in carrying out their duties. He said,

"... since we are now dealing with international students, so the English language is very important for the frontliner to deliver the information, ask and answer questions to the students". (FL1_UM)

From the interviews, the participants conceded that they use English in the office when they interact with international students. FL1_UKM said,

"... since we are at the international department, so of course we use fully English with most of students because this is an international department". (FL1_UKM).

In contrast, if the communication is among the staff in the back office or during break time when they are out of duty, then the interaction takes place in Bahasa Malaysia.

"*... if in the morning, I use English all the time but now I use my Malay language only, so maybe I use English around five hours only*". (FL1_UKM).

This response indicates that the only exposure to and practice in English that respondents are likely to get would be in the workplace. Course designers need to be aware of this trend of English usage when they decide on the level of the materials. It is also important that the content of the language course should only be work related in order to motivate the respondents since these respondents do not seem to use English often when they are outside the workplace. Another consideration is that the only opportunity they would have to practice English would be at their workplace.

4.2.7 International students' perceptions towards the English proficiency of ISC frontliners

All the international students from the three groups of the target universities revealed that mastering the English language is vital for the international student centre personnel as their capability in using the language can have a significant impact on their effectiveness and providing quality student service. An international student from UM said,

"Of course, the language proficiency is very important for the front desk employee because actually if there is a problem in the language, how come he will give me a good service?!" (IS2_UM).

Responses from the three students' focus-group discussions indicated that in the International Student Centre, communication skills are important when dealing with a wide variety of international students. Another student said,

"As I know the language is the foundation of the communication and understanding each other so I do believe that language proficiency is very important for them". (IS3_UM).

It is important for ISC frontliners to have a student-focused attitude besides using verbal skills to build good rapport. Therefore, good communication through a common language is an essential requirement for functioning efficiently in a multicultural setting.

Information derived from the students showed that the limited proficiency of the ISC frontliners prevents them from constructing effective sentences together to form a comprehensible and appropriate response. This definitely hampers their efforts to interact with others. They further suggested that the ISC frontliners should have more training in conversational skills.

"... if the speaking skills of the front desk staff are good and quite understandable, it will be much better and it will save the time of students" (IS1_UM)

Hence, it is important for ISC frontliners to be proficient in the communicative skills and English language sub-skills. IS4_UKM said,

"I think sending them to English course is good especially when they focus on communication skills". (IS4_UKM).

The frontliners are often the first point of contact for international students and they are also a critical component in how the international students judge the university. IS2_UM said,

"... their language proficiency affects the quality of service". (IS2_UM).

Therefore, the international students expect the staff at their International Student Centre to be able to handle them by projecting empathy and showing problem-solving abilities that could satisfy them.

4.3 Analysis and Discussion of Research Question One: Oral communicative challenges faced by ISC frontliners

This section will present and discuss the findings obtained from the questionnaire in collaboration with findings from the semi-structured interviews with ISC frontliners and focus-group discussions with international students from the target universities in order to answer the first research question.

What are the English language oral communicative challenges encountered by the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities?

This section will report the results from the analysis of Section B of the questionnaire. Section B1 is related to the listening sub-skills and section B2 is related to the speaking sub-skills. It looks into the language abilities of the respondents. The respondents were asked about their perceived strengths and weaknesses in English language oral communication, listening and speaking skills. The statements in this section of the questionnaire had four options which were Not a problem (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3), and Very often (4).

In order to achieve the stated objective, the ISC frontliners must have the right tools to work with, one of which is competency of the English language, and the other, the thirst to improve on their inadequacies. There is a need to speak correctly in English and understand it, to use it to express their thoughts and opinions. There is also the need to listen to and understand it, when it is spoken by native English

speakers such as the Americans, British or Australians, or non-native speakers such as Asians, Arabs and Europeans

This will provide the ISC frontliners, the opportunity to be on par with their peers from other countries where English is used, either as a first or second language, as a means of communication, and as a common global language. If they do not make an effort to overcome with their language inadequacies, they will be left behind and will not be able to achieve the government's plan to "make Malaysia the sixth-largest education exporter by 2020" (The Star, 2012), (The Sun Daily, 2013).

Therefore, it is important to evaluate the language needs of the ISC frontliners to assist the staff to realize their communicative problems so that remedial steps can be taken to overcome them and assist the staff to express themselves effectively and confidently in English. By being able to convey and converse competently in English, ISC frontliners will be able to provide the required communicative efficiency and proficiency and thus, make the necessary efforts to achieve the government's plan to "make Malaysia the sixth-largest education exporter by 2020" (The Sun Daily, 2013), (The Star, 2012).

4.3.1   Listening Sub-skills

This section will report the results from section B1 of the questionnaire based on a collection of 22 statements. Section B1 is on the communicative challenges of the respondents. The most problematic sub-skills will be discussed first in nine statements followed by less problematic sub-skills in 13 statements. The first four challenges of the listening sub-skills faced by ISC frontliners will be presented in Figure 4.6 and the rest will be discussed later.
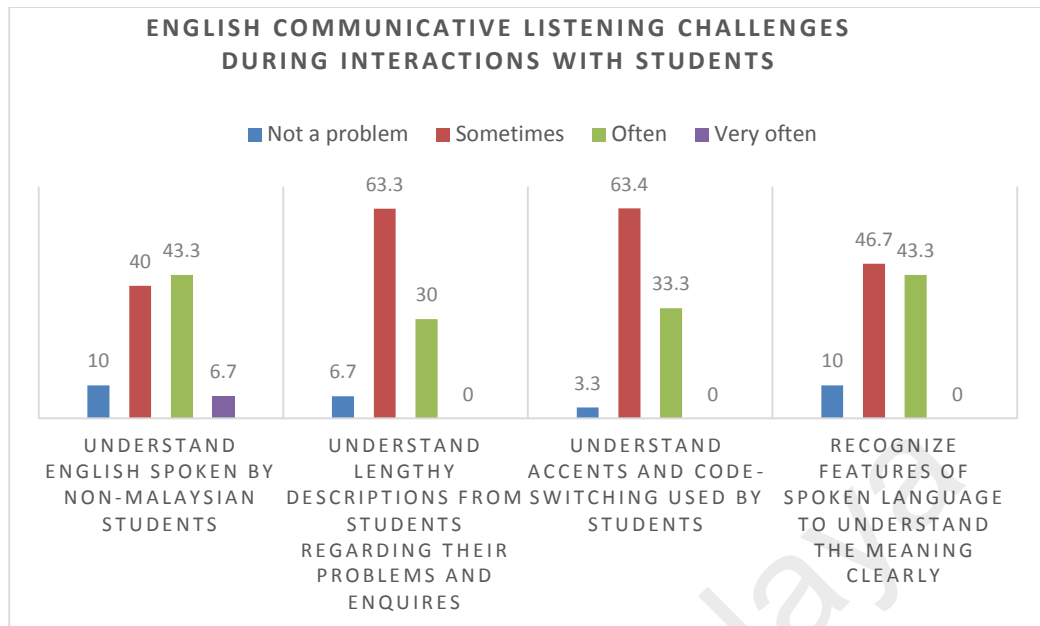
Figure 4:6 English communicative listening challenges during interactions with students (1)

As depicted in Figure 4.6, 43.3% of the respondents stated that they often face problem in comprehending the English spoken by native or non-Malaysian speakers and 6.7% of the respondents stated that they could very often understand English spoken by non-Malaysian speakers. However, 40% of the respondents indicated that they sometimes have a problem in understanding the English language spoken during interactions. Most of the respondents (63.3%) indicated that they sometimes face a problem in understanding lengthy descriptions of problems and enquires from students.

Sixty-three-point four percent of the respondents stated that they sometimes face difficulty in understanding accents and code-switching used by Non-Malaysian students, especially in English language and Bahasa Malaya. 46.7% of the respondents considered themselves weak in recognizing features of spoken language such as the tone, voice quality, rate of speech and also volume uttered by the

students. While 43.3% of the respondents indicated that they often could recognize the features of spoken language.

Although the frontliners of ISC are expected to be proficient in the listening sub-skills during interactions with students, most frontliners admit that they are weak in the four listening sub-skills. This lack could be because they are not familiar with various accents such as American, Australian or Arabic accents. Their inability to understand lengthy description could be due to a lack of vocabulary, and the weakness in recognizing features of spoken language is because of limited experience or exposure.

Based on the results shown in Figure 4.7 which presents another five communicative listening challenges.
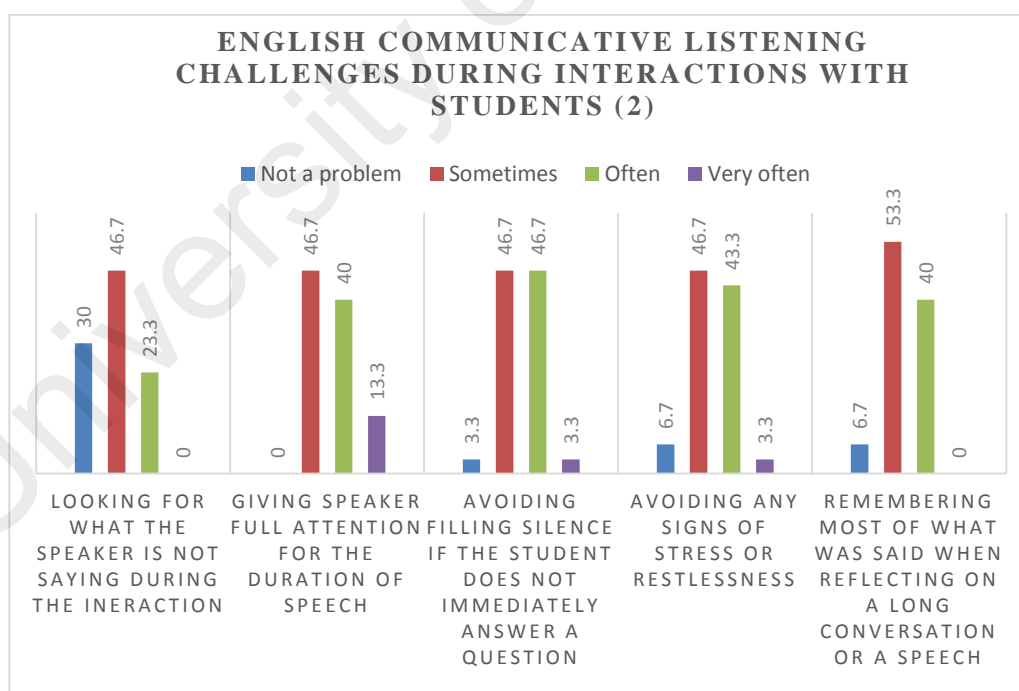
Figure 4:7 English communicative listening challenges during interactions with students (2)

Overall, the frontliners seem to have major problems in English listening sub-skills. The most problematic areas in listening are: giving the speaker full attention for the duration of speech, avoiding filling silence if the student does not immediately answer a question, avoiding signs of stress or restlessness and remembering most of what was said when reflecting on a long conversation or a speech.

Forty-six-point seven percent of the respondents indicated that they sometimes face difficulty when they try to look for what the student is not saying during the interaction. Similarly, the same percentage of the respondents stated that they sometimes fail to give the speaker their full attention for the duration of his/her speech, while 40% of the respondents said they often cannot give full attention to the speaker even when they are not especially interested. However, more than (53.3%) of the respondents have difficulties when they are reflecting on a long conversation, a speech, a presentation, or a meeting, and they could not easily remember most of what was said by the student during the interaction. 43.3% of the respondents indicated that they often try to avoid any signs of stress or restlessness, such as crossing and uncrossing one's legs, looking at their watch, gazing out of a window, or yawning. While 46.7% of the respondents stated that they sometimes show some signs of stress or restlessness during interactions with students.

This lack could be due to the fact that the frontliners of international student centres are newcomers who are relatively young and hence, do not have many years of working experience in the student service industry. Since, most of the respondents are still in the learning stage, they would therefore require more time to familiarize

themselves with the demands of their daily job functions during interactions with students at their workplace. A frontliner from UM confirmed this finding,

> *"... because I'm a new staff here for six months, I can't understand everything, I can't understand certain problems ..."*
> (FL1_UM)

The majority of the respondents indicated that they are often do not face difficulty in the listening sub-skills presented in Figure 4.8. So, these thirteen listening sub-skills are considered as less problematic for the ISC frontliners.
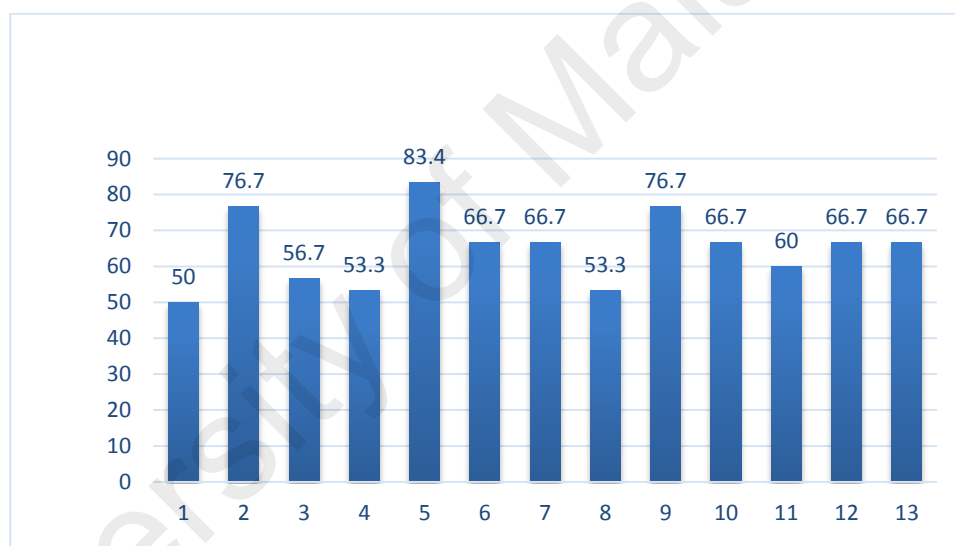
Figure 4:8 English listening sub-skills during interactions with students

These listening sub-skills are: (1) Separating out the verbal and non-verbal messages when they are listening to someone, (2) asking questions to clarify anything they do not understand or to check that they have received and heard the message correctly, (3) reflecting understanding back to the speaker with both verbal and non-verbal actions, (4) making that support known when agreeing with the speaker, (5) trying to keep an open mind and pushing to the back of the mind any

opinions they might already have on the subject, (6) taking notes to assist recall, (7) reflecting the speaker's body language, (8) waiting until the speaker has finished before reflecting on the subject matter or formulating questions, (9) looking at the speaker and trying to make eye contact, (10) encouraging the speaker, for example by saying "Go on …" or "Tell me more"?, (11) trying to understand and sharing the feelings with the speaker, (12) reflecting feelings back to the speaker, and finally (13) Focusing attention on whom you are communicating with only.

International students from different parts of the world have different accents and slang which Malaysian frontliners are not used to. From the interviews, all of the respondents reported that they frequently had difficulties within interacting with foreigner students especially when they were not familiar with the accent and English language pronunciation of that country. According to two ISC frontliners, students who have strong accents are from the African and Middle East regions of the world. The staff sometimes do not understand the students' pronunciation and the fast pace. One frontliner said when she was asked about the difficulties encountered when listening to international students, "*Some other students talk very fast*" (FL2_UKM)

This problem was also reported by the international students during the focus-group discussions. According to them, some young frontliners have problems with the foreigners' accents, slang, and pronunciations. When the ISC frontliners interacted with the international students whom they have difficulty in understanding, they tend to lose confidence in their language ability and their ability to perform their duties.

4.3.2 Speaking Sub-skills

The speaking sub-skills shown in this section are very much related to the task performed by the ISC frontliners. Data in this section shows the speaking sub-skills challenges as perceived by the respondents when interacting with international students in their working domain. This section will report the results from section B2 of the questionnaire based on a collection of 29 questions classified under 14 major speaking sub-skills which are discussed further.

4.3.2.1 Delay in speech during the interaction with students

The first major speaking sub-skill is the delay in speech during the interaction with students which has two sub-skills; delay in speech or language development during the interaction with students, and slow or delayed response during the interaction with students. The percentage occurrence can be seen in Figure 4.9.
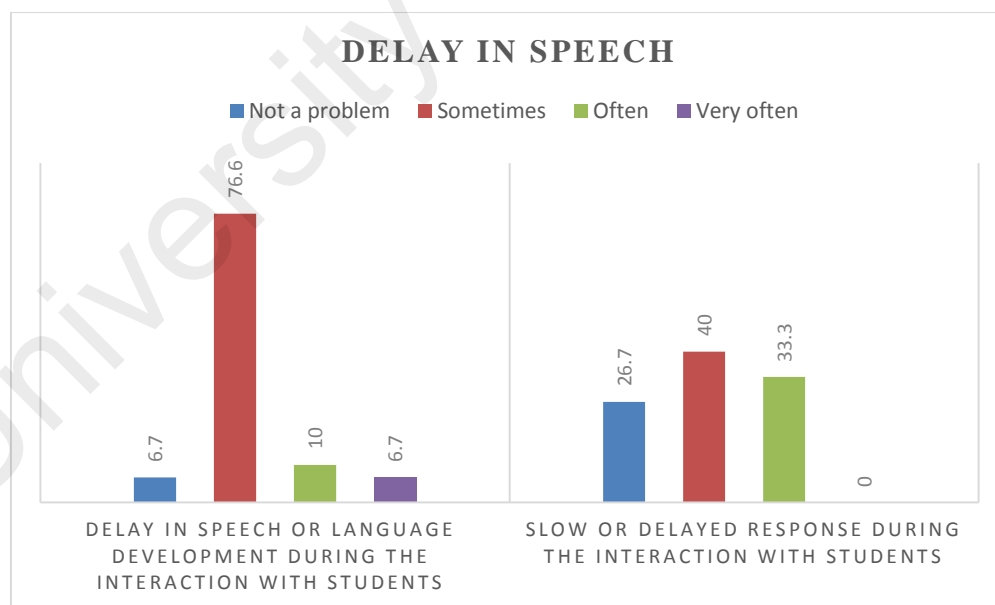
Figure 4:9 Delay in speech during the interaction with students

Based on the results shown in Figure 4.9, 10% and 6.7% of the respondents indicated that they often or very often, respectively, have problem when they respond to speech. However, 76.6% of the respondents stated that they sometimes

make delays in speech or language development during the interaction with students. 33.3% of the respondents often make slow or delayed response, while 26.7% of them considered it as not a problem.

4.3.2.2 Speaking with in-correct grammar during the interaction with students

Speaking with correct grammar is an important sub-skill during interactions with students as this sub-skill will help the respondents to convey the right information to the students.
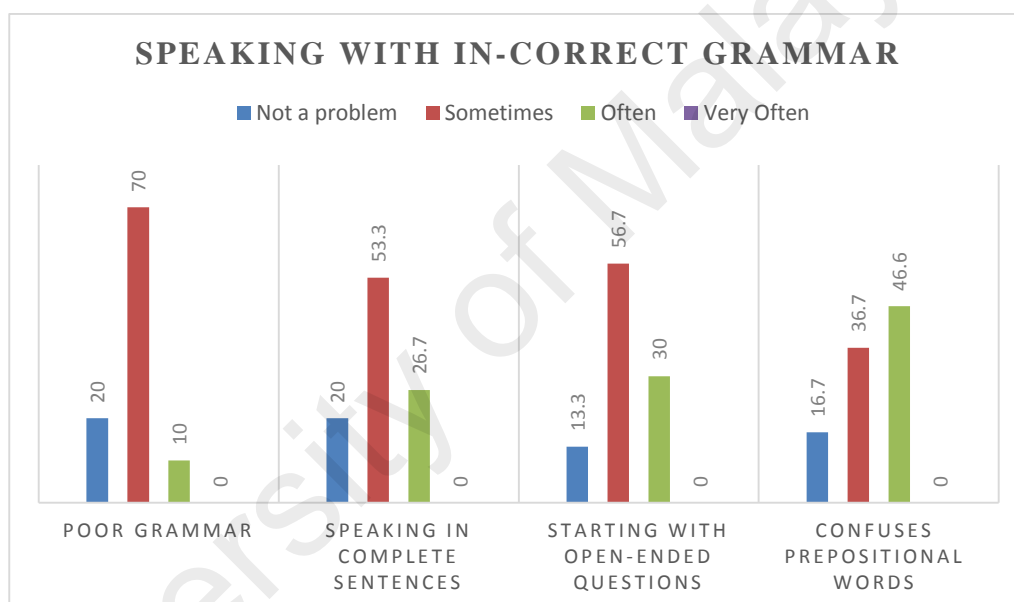
Figure 4:10 Speaking with in-correct grammar

Based on results presented in Figure 4.10, 70% of the respondents stated that they sometimes speak with poor grammar. Sometimes, most of the respondents have difficulty speaking in complete sentences. Only 20% considered it as not a problem.

Similarly, 56.7% of the respondents stated that they sometimes have difficulty getting started with open-ended questions and 30% stated it as a serious problem they often face. The data also showed that 46.6% and 36.7% of the respondents

indicated that they often or sometimes, respectively, feel confused when they use prepositional words such as "on" and "in". In total, most of the participants gave more importance to grammatical rules of speaking.

4.3.2.3 Convey messages and explain instructions clearly and fluently

From table 4.1, it can be seen that most of the respondents face problems when they convey messages and try to explain instructions to the students.

Table 4.1 Convey messages and explain instructions clearly and fluently

Statement	Not a problem	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
1. Difficulty organizing and expressing thoughts.	16.7%	66.7%	16.6%	0%
2. Difficulty summarizing.	10%	53.3%	30%	6.7%
3. Uses few descriptive words.	6.7%	50%	43.3%	0%
4. Loses his/her way in sentences or fails to finish longer sentences.	10%	66.7%	23.3%	0%
5. Speaks mostly in phrases or single sentences.	10%	50%	36.7%	3.3%
6. Trouble rephrasing a point if he/she is not understood the first time.	20%	36.7%	43.3%	0%
7. Difficulty with word retrieval. (finding the words, he/she wants to say)	3.3%	56.7%	40%	0%
8. Speech lacks fluency and rhythm.	23.3%	40%	30%	6.7%

Of the 30 respondents, 66.7% of them believe that they sometimes have difficulty organizing and expressing their thoughts before speaking to the student. While more than half of the participants 53.3% stated that they sometimes face difficulties in

summarizing their ideas or the message they intend to convey to the students. Meanwhile, 30% of the respondents considered it as a problem they often face. In addition, 80% of the respondents believe that they sometimes or often have trouble when rephrasing a point if they did not understand what was said by the student the first time.

The majority of the respondents (90%) indicated that they sometimes or often lose their way in sentences or fail to finish longer sentences in their conversation with students. Apparently from Table 4.1, 90% of the respondents speak mostly in phrases or single sentences. Moreover, 50% of the respondents, sometimes, use only a few descriptive words, where 43.3% of them stated it as a problem they often face when they communicate with students. Similarly, the majority of the respondents indicated that they have difficulty with word retrieval and finding the words they want to say. However, only one respondent considered it as not a problem at all. As it is noticeable from table 4.1, the majority of the participants in this study believed that they lack fluency in speaking English and face problems when they interact with students which affect their ability to provide high quality service and achieve maximum student satisfaction.

4.3.2.4   Speak with correct pronunciation and intonation

Correct pronunciation and intonation enable speakers to convey their thoughts and ideas clearly. Poor performance in these speaking sub-skills was indicated by most of the respondents.
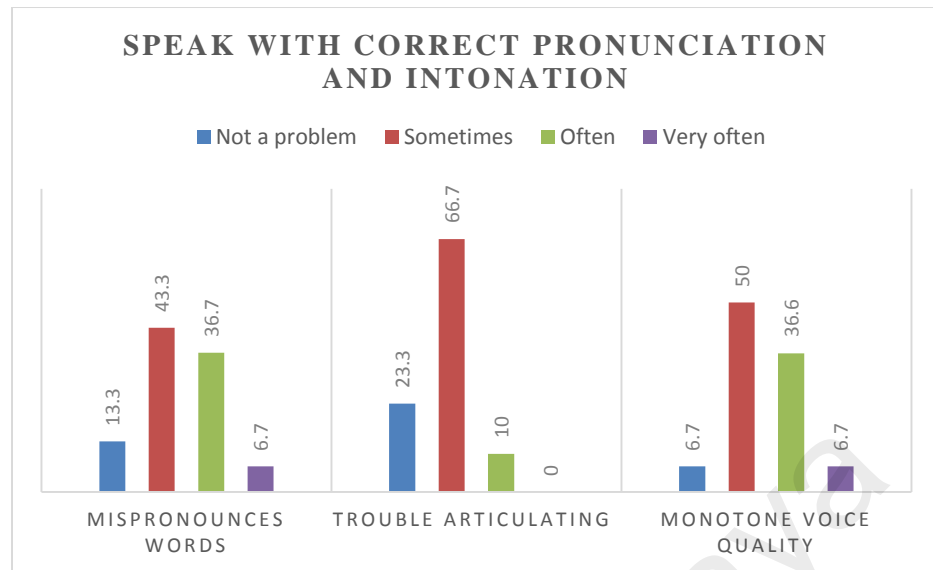
Figure 4:11 Speak with correct pronunciation and intonation

Forty-three point three percentage of the respondents indicated that they sometimes do not have the ability to speak with correct pronunciation and intonation, also another 36.7% of the respondents believe that they often make mispronunciation mistakes.

Based on the results shown in Figure 4.11, the majority of the respondents indicated that they have difficulties in using a variety of tone and were unable to avoid monotony by speaking at a normal speed with rising and falling inflictions. Voice tones can express mood, while the speed at which the respondents speak can convey a sense of urgency to accomplish the task given. However, 23.3% of the respondents claimed that they do not face trouble when they articulate certain sounds, while the majority stated it a speaking problem they sometimes or often face.

4.3.2.5 Setting challenges during the interaction with students

Avoiding typical interactions with students in noisy environments, speaking in front of a group and talking on the phone are considered as setting speaking

challenges encountered by ISC frontliners. The percentage occurrence can be seen in Figure 4.12.
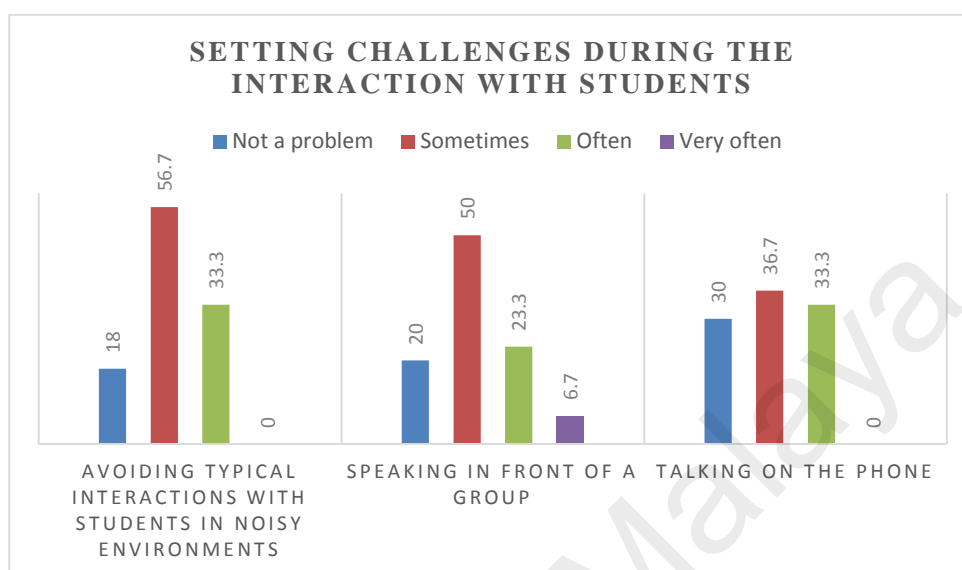
Figure 4:12 Setting challenges

As it is noticeable from Figure 4.12, most of the respondents prefer to avoid interactions with students in noisy environments and only 18% of the respondents can communicate with students in noisy environments without problems.

Half of the respondents, sometimes face difficulty speaking in front of a group of students. Also, it is hard for 30% of the respondents to speak in front of a group where they often and very often face difficulty to conveying the message confidently.

In addition, 30% of the respondents can talk on the phone without problem. On the other hand, 70% of participants feel sometimes or often it is not easy to talk to the students on the phone regarding to their requests or complains.

4.3.2.6 Interpret and make inferences correctly

ISC frontliners should be competent in interpreting and making inferences correctly. However, Figure 4.13 shows that majority of the respondents have difficulty in interpreting and making inferences during their conversation with international students.
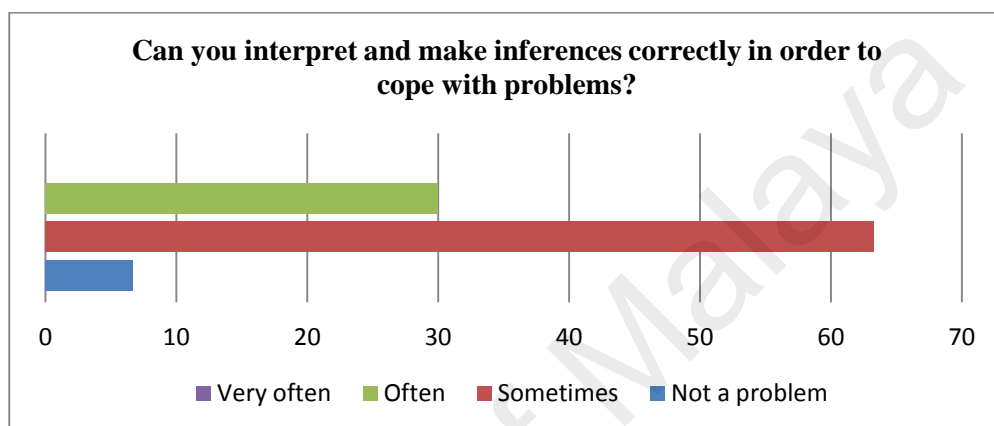
Figure 4:13 Interpreting and making inferences

Of the 30 respondents, the researcher has observed that 30% of the respondents revealed that they often interpret and make inferences of questions or problems posted by students. However, 63.3% of the respondents stated that they sometimes face a problem in this sub-skill when performing their duties and they frequently misunderstand the student. This shows a lack of training and it affects the quality of service and the student's satisfaction.

4.3.2.7 Respond spontaneously to complaints

Competency in this speaking sub-skill is important because professional ISC frontliners should be able to respond immediately and provide prompt responses.

Do you respond spontaneously to complaints by giving suggestions and offering advice?
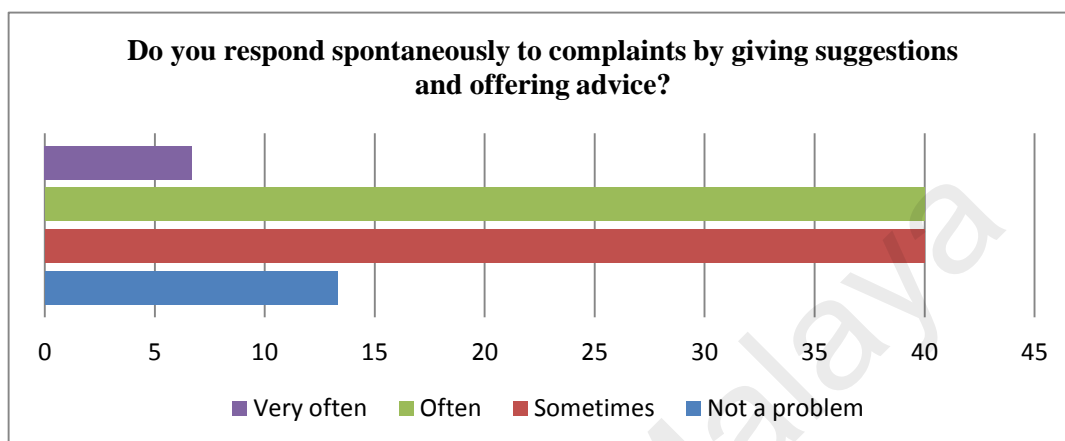
Figure 4:14 Respond spontaneously to complaints by giving suggestions and offering advice

In dealing with complains, ISC frontliners should provide a professional service. Based on Figure 4.14, 40% of the respondents were able to respond spontaneously to complaints by offering assistance immediately. On the other hand, 40% of the respondents indicated that they sometimes have problems in responding spontaneously to complaints by students.

From the focus-group discussions, some international students indicated that they sometimes feel not satisfied when the language becomes an issue and when ISC frontliners can only communicate in simple English, using direct translation from Malay to English. Their sentences are often short, sounding curt and rude. This manner of response is considered rude and unprofessional as not enough explanation or clarification which is expected from the ISC staff is provided to the student.

4.3.2.8 Use of fillers or pauses to prevent communication breakdown

Suitable use of fillers or pauses helps to gain time to think when there are difficulties during conversations.
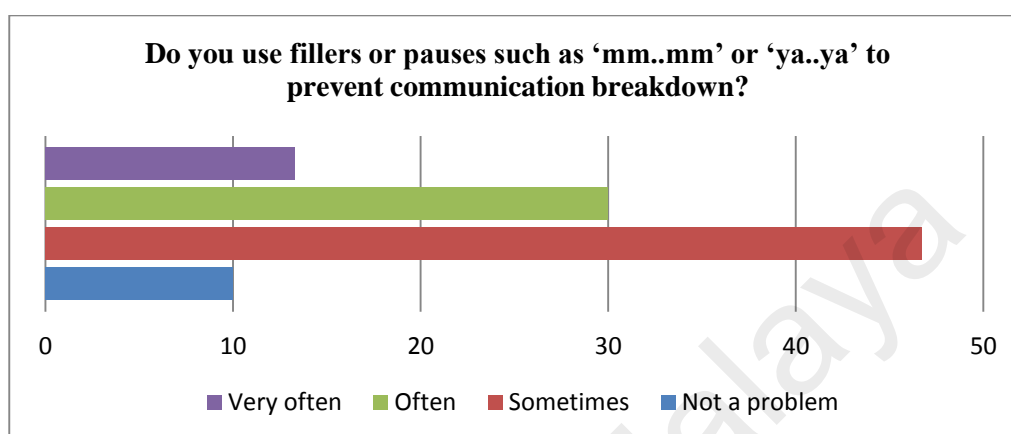
Figure 4:15 Using fillers or pauses

The data presented in Figure 4.15 shows that 46.7% of respondents indicated they sometimes face a problem in using fillers or pauses and 30% stated that they often manage to use fillers or pauses during their interaction with students.

In addition, 13.3% of the respondents indicated that they very often use fillers or pauses such as "Well, now let me see" or "the thing is" in order to gain time to search for suitable words. This happens when the respondents encountered situations which are not available in the guided manual of frequently asked questions.

4.3.2.9 Ask questions and confirm details

Asking questions and confirming details by giving reflective questions and repetitions are important sub-skills during interactions with students as this sub-skill will help the respondents to have a clear picture of the situation faced before suggesting solutions to overcome it. The percentage of this sub-skill can be seen in Figure 4.16.
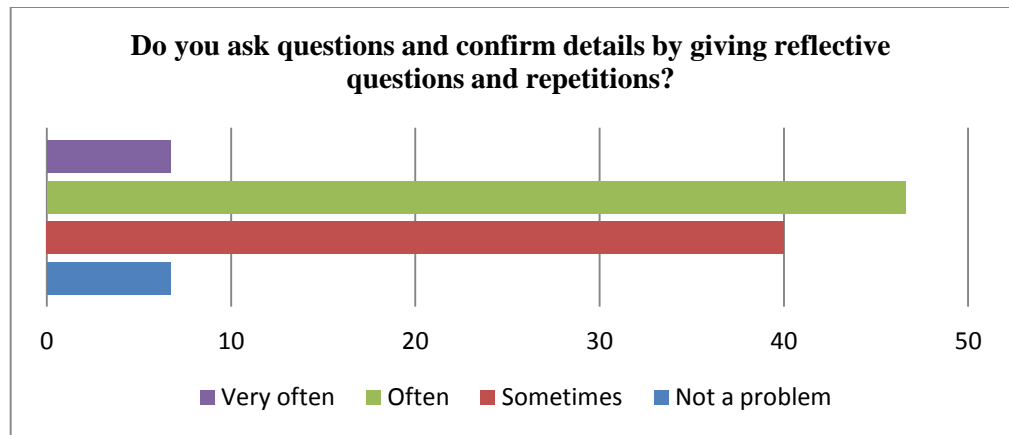
Figure 4:16 Asking questions and confirming details by giving reflective questions

Besides, they are also required to paraphrase enquiries by students in order to ensure the intention of the students is correctly understood. However, 40% of the respondents do not have the ability of asking questions and confirming details. While more than half of the respondents are good at asking questions, and confirming details with students.

4.3.2.10 Speak correctly and confidently

As for speaking correctly and confidently, which is very important when handling demanding students, the data is presented in Figure 4.17.
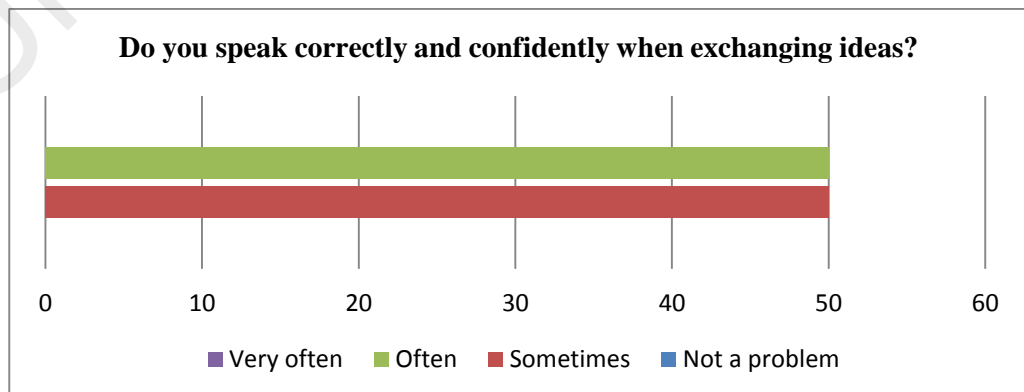
Figure 4:17 Speaking correctly and confidently

Figure 4.17 shows clearly that half of the respondents indicated that they are sometimes able to speak correctly and confidently when speaking in English. While the other half stated that they often speak correctly and confidently.

From the interviews, three out of four employees indicated that they are often not able to speak correctly and they also lack confidence when speaking in English. Therefore, they need to improve this sub-skill to be able to speak confidently. A frontliner who was in charge at the counter said, "*I feel afraid to face international students because I am not good in English*". (FL2_UKM)

To explain the difference between the results from the questionnaire and interviews, the researcher interviewed a senior supervisor from UM ISC, she commented;

"Maybe they are confident to speak in general but when it is about grammar or mistakes, they know they are not very good. I encourage our staff to talk even if it is wrong, it is ok just to speak up. If you speak more, you will be more confident and if you do not speak at all, you will not improve your language." (FL3_UM).

".. they can understand what you want to say and they can explain in a simple way. But to express [in] very good language, proficiency is a bit difficult." (FL3_UM).

4.3.2.11 Adopt turn-taking strategies

Turn-taking strategies such as overlaps, interruptions, back channelling and latching are useful in a productive and effective conversation. When a speaker observes turn-taking rules, he or she displays high involvement in the conversation. This is essential as it helps students to complete unfinished utterances or particularly when the student is having problems in describing and using certain terms. The result of this sub-skill is presented in Figure 4.18.
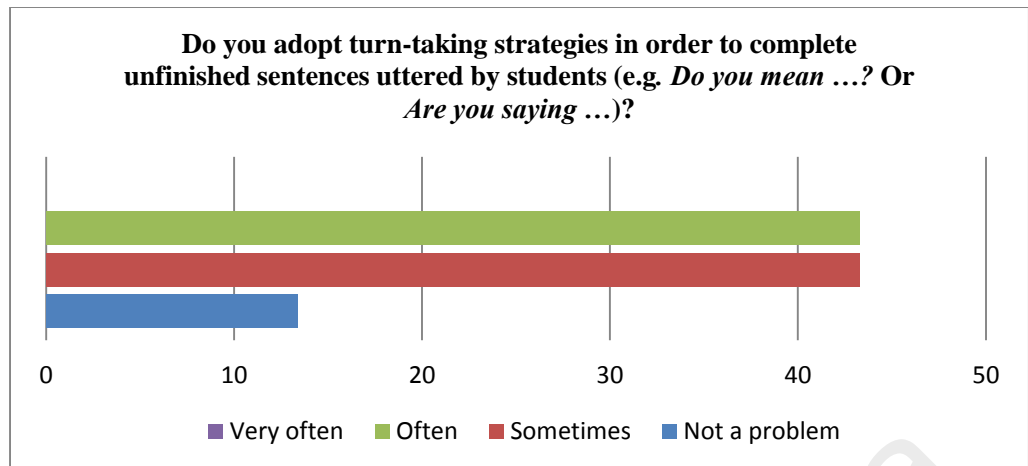
Figure 4:18 Adopting turn-taking strategies

Based on Figure 4.18, 43.3% of the respondents indicated that they sometimes adopt the turn-taking strategies such as latching which is, to complete unfinished sentences uttered by the students and to avoid communication breakdown. The same percentage of the respondents (43.3%) stated that they are often able to adopt turn-taking strategies in order to complete unfinished sentences uttered by students

4.3.2.12 Ask for clarification and respond to information

In any conversation, the participants should seek clarification in order to avoid confusion. Figure 4.19 explains how ISC frontliners ask for clarification and respond to information.
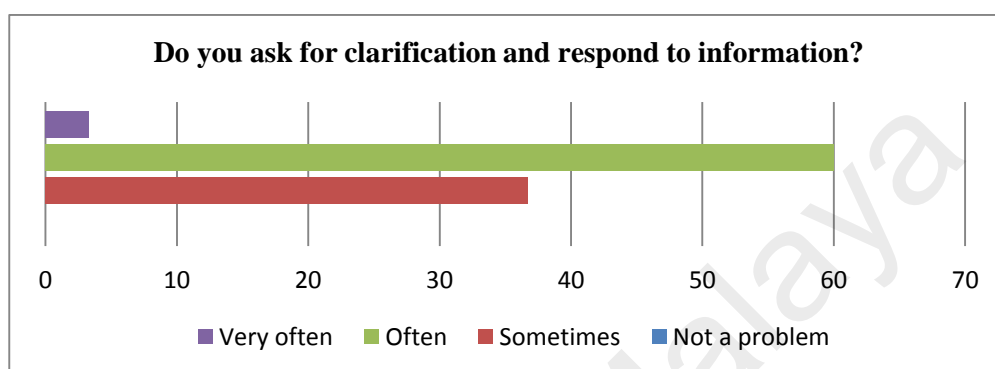
Figure 4:19 Asking for clarification and responding to information

Of the 30 respondents, more than 60% indicated that they often ask for clarification before proceeding to give suggestions and solutions in order to solve problems posed by the students. In addition, 36.7% of the respondents stated that they are weak when facing situations that require them to ask for clarification such as "Do you mean ...?" or "What do you mean?" and responding to information by students.

4.3.2.13 Turn down requests politely

It is important for ISC frontliners to structure their language and thoughts in order to negate the student's request tactfully. They should avoid using expressions such as "Impossible" or "I don't think so". Figure 4.20 presents how the respondents turn down requests.
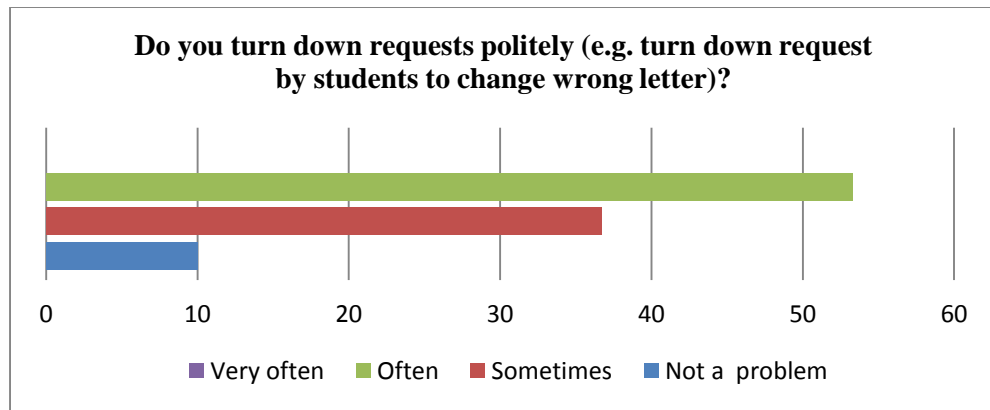
Figure 4:20 Turning down requests politely

Based on Figure 4.20, 53.3% of the respondents were often able to employ a tactful and careful way to negate or turn down the demand of the students. 40% indicated that they were sometimes good in this speaking sub-skill and sometimes they feel that they are weak. Whilst, 10% only of the respondents claimed that they do not have any problem when negating requests by students.

4.3.2.14 Offer alternatives to solve problems

Figure 4.21 answers the question of how ISC frontliners offer alternatives like making arrangements and appointments in order to solve students' problems.
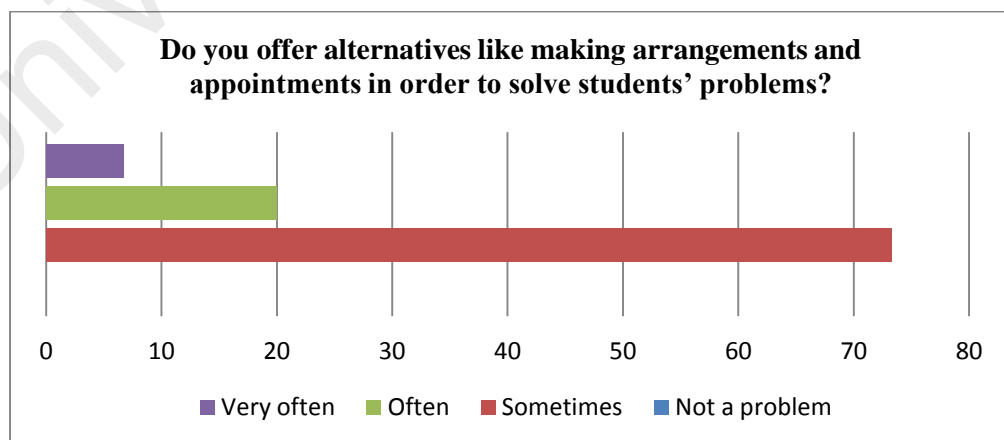
Figure 4:21 Offering alternatives to solve problems

The ability to offer alternatives is important. Rather than focusing on what is not possible, the frontliners can structure their language and thoughts to express what is possible by offering alternatives, giving options and focusing on what can be done.

With regards to that and based on Figure 4.21, 73.3% of the respondents showed that they sometimes offer alternatives and options and sometimes they do not offer options in order to try and find possible solutions. Besides, 20% of the respondents often offer suitable alternatives and options and were able to assure and convince students with other suggestions and positive solutions.

4.3.3 Summary and discussion of the oral communicative challenges encountered by ISC frontliners

The findings reveal that the ISC frontliners do have problems with the two language skills of listening and speaking. Here are some of the ISC frontliners' answers when they were asked to rate their English communicative skills.

> *"... maybe most of us are Malay and English is [a] second language for Malaysians but the staff here [believe that their listening and speaking skills] are not very good"* (FL2.UKM)

> *"... I [am] afraid to face international students because I am not good in English ..."* (FL1.UKM)

> *"... for the staff, oral communication proficiency, I think [it's] fifty-fifty"* (FL1.UM)

The international students gave the same impression when they were asked the same question during the group-discussion regarding the ISC frontliners' proficiency.

> *"... in my perception, they need to improve their English and since of that English is most common language in University of Malaya, we or I can give them like maximum 7 out of 10"* (IS3.UM)

The focus-group discussions with international students gave different views regarding these oral communicative sub-skills. Most of the international students believe that ISC frontliners need to improve their communicative skills. On the other hand, some of the international students feel satisfied enough with the ISC frontliners' current level of oral communicative skills.

> *"Actually, I give them good. You know, because some employees can understand your issue and they assist you so I'll give them good"* (IS2. UM)

The majority of the ISC frontliners indicated that they are proficient in some significant listening sub-skills. These listening sub-skills are: Separating out the verbal and non-verbal messages when they are listening to someone, asking questions to clarify anything they do not understand or to check that they have received the message correctly, reflecting understanding back to the speaker with both verbal and non-verbal actions, as well as making that support known when agreeing with the speaker, trying to keep an open mind and pushing to the back of the mind any opinions which they might already have on the subject. They are also able to take notes to assist recall, reflecting on the speaker's body language, waiting until the speaker has finished before reflecting on the subject matter or formulating questions, looking at the speaker and trying to make eye contact, trying to understand and sharing the feelings with the speaker, reflecting feelings back to the speaker, and finally encouraging the speaker, for example by saying "Go on …" or "Tell me more".

International students from different parts of the world have different accents and slangs which the Malaysian frontliners are not used to. Some frontliners just could not comprehend what is spoken by foreign students especially those with heavy accents, from places such as Australia, America, Middle East, India, China and Japan.

> *"... we can't understand what students ask because some of country they pronounce different, from other countries like Africa, Nigeria, suddenly we can't understand what they asked me because it is different pronounce"* (FL2.UM)

> *"... we are talking English in different accents and it is challenging for them to understand different accents of different nationalities"* (IS2.UM)

When the frontliners do not understand what was said by the speakers, it could sometimes end up with miscommunication. As a result, services which need prompt attention become halted. This finding is similar to that of Ng (2002), and Karuthan (2015).

Based on the results shown in Figure 4.6 and 4.7, overall, the frontliners seem to have some major problems in language listening sub-skills. The most problematic areas in listening are: giving speaker full attention for the duration of speech, avoiding filling silence, avoiding signs of stress or restlessness and remembering most of what was said when reflecting on a long conversation or a speech. The majority of the respondents stated that they sometimes fail to give the speaker their full attention for the duration of his/her speech. This finding corroborates with the findings in the study by Ng (2006). An international student from UPM said;

> *"... sometimes they interrupt me when I ask a question and don't let me finish my idea or leave the conversation to talk with another staff ..."* (IS4.UPM)

However, more than half of the respondents have difficulties when they are reflecting on a long conversation, a speech, a presentation or a meeting and they could not easily remember most of what was said. 46.7% of the ISC frontliners stated that they sometimes show some signs of stress or restlessness during interactions with students. When these issues were discussed with the students, an international student from UM commented;

> *"It depends on the person after all but in general I do find some difficulties in understanding them and some topics especially if we go deep to the conversation and sometimes I feel lost and have to ask them 'please can you repeat again?' ..."* (IS3.UM)

The majority of the participants in this study believed that they lack fluency in their English speaking sub-skills and face problems when they interact with students which affects their ability to provide high quality service and achieve maximum student satisfaction. This finding is similar to that of Tan (2009), Singaran (2016) and Surentharan (2016).

Focus-group discussions with international students gave a similar view regarding the proficiency level of the frontliners. The students further highlighted that limited proficiency and lack of confidence hinder comprehensible and appropriate responses. They added that during interactions, a majority of the ISC frontliners have problems communicating in English when participating in discussions. All the students reflected that they prefer more proficient staff,

especially in communicative skills, as this is important for the frontliners in order to render high quality student service.

> *"It's better to improve their language skills and ... because the understanding level is very important because they will provide better service and faster service if they understand us and we understand them"* (IS2.UM)

> *"... if the speaking skill of the front desk staff are good and quite understandable, it will be much better and it will save a lot of time of students"* (IS1.UM)

From the questionnaire, (40%) of the ISC frontliners are found to be weak sometimes in asking questions and confirming details by giving reflective questions and repetitions. They also do not attempt to repeat questions and to confirm details given by students. A student from UM said;

> *"... when they talk sometimes so weak you can't understand what they said and you have to ask them 'sorry what have you said', you have to repeat again and sometimes they don't understand what you said and they also do a process you don't want it so you have to repeat what you have said, sometimes they didn't ask you what do you want"* (IS4.UM)

Meanwhile, the questionnaire analysis also indicated that the ISC frontliners are weak in speaking correct pronunciation and intonation and also when conveying messages.

> *"I have to speak slowly. I have sometimes to repeat the question twice and honestly, I have to ask them to repeat the question also. The pronunciation, I have also difficulties to understand most of the time"* (IS3.UKM)

> *"... sometimes I find some difficulties when they talk in low voice so I can't understand what they say so I have to ask them to repeat again and also I face some troubles with their accents because in the first time I can't understand the accent but I think now better"* (IS4.UM)

Similarly, they are weak or very weak in speaking fluently, negating requests and offering alternatives. This is especially true in situations where they have to negate or turn down student's requests. Similar findings were reported by Ng (2006).

As mentioned earlier, the ISC frontliners are less proficient when they face challenging and demanding students or when they are required to respond spontaneously to long questions posed to them. Due to the lack of English language proficiency, the frontliners tend to give simple and incomplete explanations and sometimes no explanation. (73.3%) of the ISC frontliners showed delays in responses. This can be hard over the conversation when the ISC frontliners show hesitation and pauses when the students ask too many questions because they are not able to convince the student due to their limited English vocabulary and proficiency. This finding corroborates with the findings in the study by Ng (2006) and Surentharan (2016). A frontliner from ISC UKM explained;

> *"Once I face the student who can't speak in English or can't understand in English, it makes me difficult to explain again and again. And I will ask some other students who come from the same country to explain to him"* (FL1.UKM)

But the international students have different opinions. The participants from UPM and UM focus group-discussions said;

"... sometimes they will use Malay with English when they can't answer your question, so you have to understand the whole sentence just to figure out what they want" (IS2.UM)

"I do find some difficulties in understanding them especially if we go deep to the conversation and sometimes I feel lost and have to ask them 'please can you repeat again?' They also use Malay English like for example they say 'Apa' most of the time or okay 'lah' so yeah I have to ask them to repeat the question or repeat the whole sentence" (IS3.UM)

This lack could be due to the fact that the frontliners of international student centers are newcomers who are relatively young, whereby 60% of them have worked in the ISC centers for less than 2-3 years and hence, do not have many years of working experience in the student service industry. Since, most of the respondents are still in the learning stage, they would therefore require more time to familiarize themselves with the demands of their daily job functions during interactions with students at their workplace.

ISC frontliners also seek the help of translators when they interact with international students. They indicated that some of the international students can't speak very well or convey the message. In this case, the ISC frontliners have to get the help from an assistant or translator.

"Once I face the student who can't speak English or can't understand English, it makes me difficult to explain again and again. And I will ask some other students who come from the same country to explain to him" (FL1.UKM)

The translator is the third party between the staff and the student and his or her role is to translate the staff's instructions into the language the students know and

understand. The assistant or translator may be other students from the same country or friends. This finding corroborates with the findings in the study about "The English language needs of nurses in medical tourism in Malaysia" by Karuthan (2015), where it is reported that the Malaysians nurses needed the help of a "translator" in order to communicate with their international patients who speak in English.

It can be concluded that the ISC frontliners need more improvement in the proficiency, accuracy and fluency in the English language as well as speaking with the correct pronunciation and intonation, conveying messages and explaining instructions clearly. Meanwhile, from the international students' perspective, the ISC frontliners lack interactive skills, as they are sometimes unable to convince, assure and persuade. This could be due to the ISC frontliners using only English in the workplace. This causes the lack of practice in using the English language. However, they seem to lack confidence when the well-structured speech does not go as planned or when posed with challenging questions. This is particularly true when the ISC frontliners are facing demanding students. As a result, they are not able to react flexibly using the English language.

4.4   Analysis and discussion of research question two: Oral communicative needs of ISC frontliners

It is pertinent in this section to stress the English language communicative needs of these ISC frontliners. This part will attempt to underline the English language needs, in particular the target needs of ISC frontliners in their daily job performance. Target needs refer to the learner's language requirements in the target situation, be it occupational or academic. (Hutchinson & Water, 1987:55). This section answers

the second research question depending on the results from analysis of section 3B of the questionnaire based on a collection of 20 statements.

What are the English language oral communicative needs of the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities?

The aim of this section is to find out the degree of importance of the English communicative sub-skills to identify the respondents' needs. The sub-skills presented in this section are analysed according to the degree of importance relevant to the working domain of the respondents. The analysis of this section will help to identify areas that should be emphasized to provide high quality service and to achieve maximum student satisfaction.

A point to be noted is that, there is a varying degree of importance pertaining to the four language skills. The ISC frontliners placed more emphasis on listening and speaking skills as compared to writing and reading skills. Assistant officer at the counter said,

> *"We are at this department dealing with international students, so without English knowledge we can't communicate with the student so English skills, I mean listening skills are very important in related to communication. If we can't listen what they are saying, what they are asking, we can't communicate with them and it will be hard to deliver the information".* (FL1_UKM)

This may be due to the fact that, they most of the time do interaction with students during the course of their respective daily job functions.

4.4.1 Listening Sub-skills

Based on the results from section 3B of the questionnaire, it is shown in Figure 4.22, the majority of respondents indicated that it is important to master the listening sub-skills.
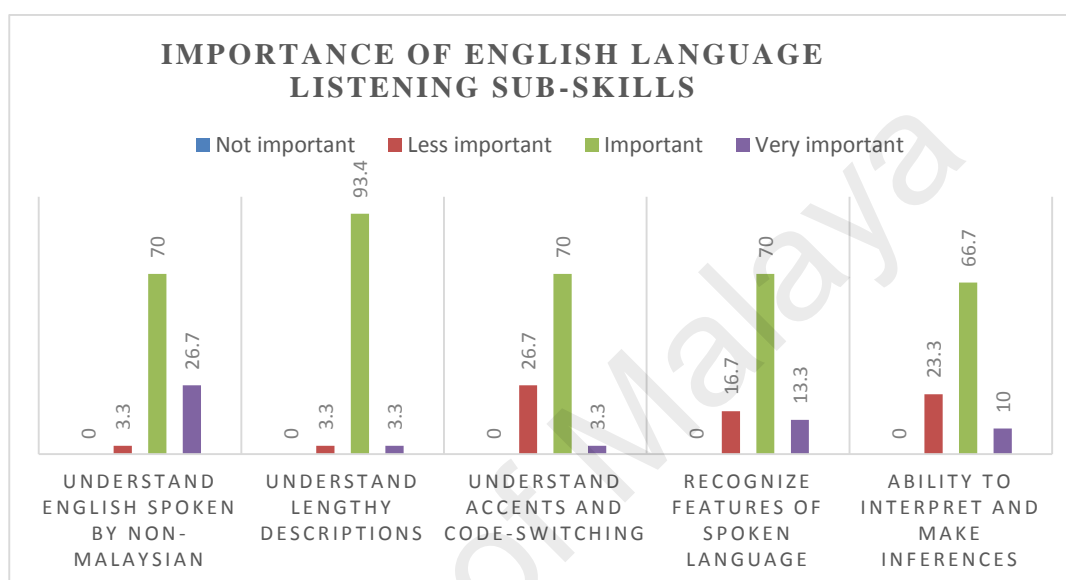
Figure 4:22 Importance of English language listening sub-skills during interaction with international students

Of the 30 respondents, 70% of them stated that the ability to understand English spoken by non-Malaysian students is important and 26.7% said it is very important. The majority of respondents (93.4%) believe that it is important to understand lengthy descriptions spoken by students. This maybe because the first point of contact for the international students is usually the front desk of ISC. Moreover, their ultimate aim is to provide high quality service to achieve maximum student satisfaction. These abilities are important as they reflect the professionalism of ISC frontliners via personal conversation.

Seventy percent of the respondents reported that it is important for them to understand accents and code-switching, while 26.7% of them believe that this sub-skill is less important for them. As for the ability to recognize features of the spoken language such as the tone, voice quality and rate of speech, 70% of the respondents indicated that it is important. Whilst, 13.3% of the respondents reflected that it is very important to recognize features of spoken languages as it helps them react effectively to students' requests. Furthermore, 76.7% of the respondents indicated that the ability to interpret and make inferences correctly in order to cope with problems is important and very important. While, 23.3% of them considered it as less important.

4.4.2 Speaking Sub-skills

The analysis of the subsequent data aimed at supporting the idea that, if there are listening skills problems then naturally, there will be related speaking skills problems since the two skills are closely interrelated. Table 4.2 represents the respondents' view on the importance of the speaking sub-skills in the workplace.

Table 4.2 Importance of English language speaking sub-skills during interaction with international students

Speaking sub-skills	Not important	Less important	Important	Very important
1. Ability to respond spontaneously to complaints by giving suggestions and offering advice.	0%	13.3%	76.7%	10%
2. Ability to use filled pauses such as 'mm..mm' or 'ya..ya' to prevent communication breakdown.	0%	63.3%	36.7%	0%
3. Ability to ask questions and confirm details by giving	0%	16.7%	73.3%	10%

reflective questions and repetitions.				
4. Ability to speak correctly and confidently when exchanging ideas.	0%	20%	56.7%	23.3%
5. Ability to adopt turn-taking strategies in order to complete unfinished sentences uttered by students (e.g. *Do you mean …? Or Are you saying …?*).	0%	30%	53.3%	16.7%
6. Ability to convey messages clearly and fluently.	0%	13.3%	53.4%	33.3%
7. Ability to ask for clarification and responding to information.	0%	10%	66.7%	23.3%
8. Ability to offer alternatives like making arrangements and appointments in order to solve students' problems.	0%	23.3%	53.4%	23.3%
9. Ability to turn down requests politely (e.g. turn down request by students to change offer letter).	0%	13.3%	63.4%	23.3%
10. Ability to End / transfer calls politely.	0%	3.3%	90%	6.7%
11. Ability to explain instructions clearly.	3.3%	3.3%	83.4%	10%
12. Ability to Ask for clarification.	3.3%	3.3%	83.4%	10%
13. Ability to give direction.	3.3%	3.3%	83.4%	10%
14. Ability to Speak in a group.	3.3%	3.3%	93.4%	0%
15. Ability to help students to complete details in forms.	3.3%	10%	76.7%	10%

The results revealed that the majority of the ISC frontliners felt that communicating with the students in English is important. This is indeed important since they are the frontliners of the university, and the needs to communicate well with the students are of the utmost importance.

Based on the results shown in Table 4.2. The majority of the respondents felt that all these sub-skills were either important or very important. Only some of the respondents considered certain sub-skills as less important, for example:

1. Ability to use fillers or pauses such as 'mm..mm' or 'ya..ya' to prevent communication breakdown.

2. Ability to adopt turn-taking strategies in order to complete unfinished sentences uttered by students.

Eighty percent of the respondents stated that the ability to speak correctly and confidently was important. In addition, more than 90% of the respondents felt that they need all of the following speaking sub-skills when they interact with students:

1. Explaining instructions clearly.

2. Asking for clarification.

3. Giving direction.

4. Speaking in a group.

5. Helping students to complete details in forms.

6. Ability to End / transfer calls politely.

The data clearly show that only 13.3% of the respondents ranked the ability to respond spontaneously to complaints by giving suggestions and offering advice as less important, while 76.7% and 10% stated it as important and very important, respectively. 36.7% of the respondents indicated that it is important to use filled pauses in conversations with students, while 63.3% of them considered this sub-skill as less important. This could be due to the fact that ISC frontliners considered using filled pauses as unprofessional. Thus, it is not considered as a need or important sub-

skill. However, 30% of the respondents viewed the sub-skill of adopting turn-taking strategies in order to complete unfinished sentences uttered by students as less important.

Based on the analysis shown in Table 4.2, 73.3% of the respondents reflected that it is important to be able to ask questions and confirm details using reflective questions or by repetitions. These skills will establish the student's needs quickly and guide the student closer to accepting the suggested solution. However, 16.7% of the respondents found this sub-skill as less important. Thus, it is considered as a need or important sub-skill.

Furthermore, 66.7% of the respondents ranked the ability to ask for clarifications and respond to information as important. Meanwhile, 23.3% of the respondents placed this sub-skill as very important, thus, showing that none of the 30 respondents find this sub-skill as not important at all, only three respondents ranked it as less important.

Fifty-three-point four percent of the respondents agreed that the ability to offer alternatives in order to solve problems is an important sub-skill to be mastered, while 90% of the respondents stated that is important to be able to end or transfer calls politely. None of the respondents stated any of these sub-skills as not important. This is because students usually evaluate the staff and the university based on the service provided. The majority of the respondents, (63.4%) and (23.3%), indicated the ability to negate and turn down student's request politely is important and very important, respectively. This also implies that none of the respondents find this sub-skill as not important.

The majority of the respondents indicated the following speaking sub-skills as of top importance sub-skills because they are more challenging to handle and required high level of conversational and interaction skills. These sub-skills are: (1) Responding spontaneously to complaints, (2) conveying messages clearly and fluently, (3) asking for clarification, (4) turning down requests politely, (5) ending or transferring calls politely, (6) explaining instructions clearly, (7) asking for clarification, (8) giving direction, (9) speaking in a group, and (10) helping students to complete details in forms. Theses sub-skills are visualized in Figure 4.23.
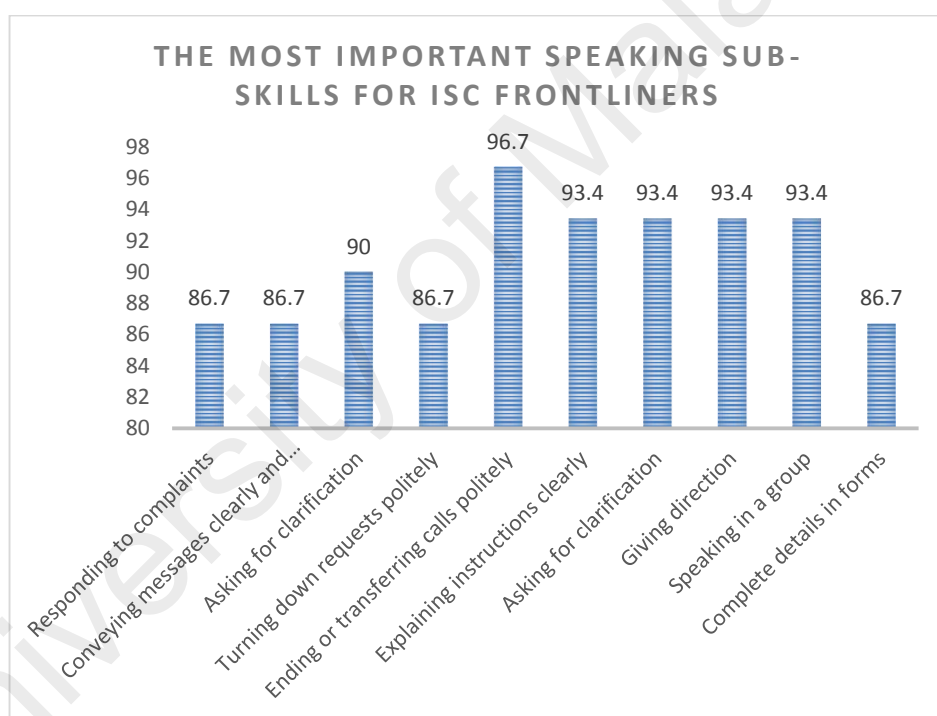
Figure 4:23 The most important speaking sub-skills for ISC frontliners

4.4.3 Summary and discussion of the English Language Needs of ISC Frontliners

There is a varying degree of importance pertaining to the oral communicative skills. The survey questionnaire and interviews suggest that the ISC frontliners placed more emphasis on listening and speaking skills. This finding corroborates with the findings in the study by Ng (2006), Tan Aun (2009) and Singaran (2016). FL1_UKM said,

> *"We are at this department dealing with international students, so without English knowledge we can't communicate with the student so English skills, I mean listening skills are very important in related to communication. If we can't listen what they are saying, what they are asking, we can't communicate with them and it will be hard to deliver the information".* (FL1_UKM).

This may be due to the fact that, most of the time they interact with students during the course of their respective daily job functions.

Findings from the questionnaire showed that (96.7%) of the ISC frontliners ranked listening sub-skills such as understanding English spoken by Non-Malaysian students and understanding lengthy descriptions by students as important and very important sub-skills. Furthermore, the listening sub-skill of understanding English spoken by non-Malaysian or native speakers is considered a need because the respondents are representing international centre and their jobs require them to attend to a diverse range of students and they may lack practice or opportunities communicating with native speakers. The listening sub-skill of understanding lengthy descriptions is regarded as important because the ISC frontliners need this sub-skill as they have to understand many lengthy descriptions from the students in

their daily tasks which make it easier for the staff to attend the students' requests. These findings are similar to that of Ng (2006)

The majority of the respondents indicated that the ability to recognize features of the spoken language such as the tone, voice quality and rate of speech as important because it could help them to attend the students. Furthermore, 76.7% of the respondents indicated that the ability to interpret and make inferences correctly in order to cope with problems is important sub-skill which makes it an important need for ISC frontliners to react effectively to students' requests.

Ninety-six-point seven percent of the respondents stated that understanding lengthy descriptions is important. In addition, 97% of the respondents also regarded understanding English spoken by non-Malaysian as important. Among the five listening sub-skills, these two sub-skills are prioritized. Therefore, it can be concluded that these are the top needs among ISC frontliners in order to perform better during interactions with international students.

It is interesting to note that most of the ISC frontliners indicated that speaking sub-skills such as asking for clarifications and responding to information and also negating requests as important sub-skills to master. This is because these sub-skills require fluent and accurate responses. It is therefore essential for the ISC frontliners to respond to unexpected requests or demands from students by negating requests correctly and politely.

The ability to ask questions and confirm details using reflective questions or by repetitions is considered an important need because this sub-skill will establish the student's needs quickly and guide the student closer to accepting the suggested

solution. Furthermore, majority of the respondents ranked the ability to ask for clarifications and respond to information as important because this sub-skill can effectively help the respondents to act promptly based on the purpose of the conversation and immediately establishes what the student requires. In addition, the ability to negate and turn down student's request politely is considered as an important need for ISC frontliners. This is because appropriate way of negation to request will convince and prevent putting the students in an embarrassing position. Thus, it helps in building a positive relationship between the students and the university.

Data from Table 4.2 also revealed that the majority of the ISC frontliners ranked important the ability to master the sub-skills of speaking correctly and confidently, conveying messages fluently, and offering alternatives to solve problems. These sub-skills are important needs ISC frontliners should master when dealing with international students. These abilities indicate that the staff are responsive and efficient. It also reflects the university's image and demonstrates the competence of the ISC frontliners showing them as highly motivated.

However, responding spontaneously to complaints, conveying messages clearly and fluently, turning down requests politely, ending or transferring calls politely, asking for clarification, giving direction, speaking in a group, and helping students to complete details in forms are considered as the most important sub-skills because they are more challenging to handle and required high level of conversational and interaction skills.

In short, the ability to master English communicative skills will enhance the ISC frontliners' effectiveness as well as that of the university. The university expects

them to project the empathy, knowledge and problem solving abilities that could keep international students happy.

4.5   Analysis and Discussion: Research Question Three

In this section, the analysis on recommendations for an English language programme for ISC frontliners is discussed to answer the third research question. This part will report the results from analysis on section C of the questionnaire based on a collection of 10 questions.

What are the language skills that need to be emphasized in a proposed English language programme for the ISC frontliners?

4.5.1   Recommendations for English language course

In this sub-section, the analysis on recommendations for an English language course is divided into four parts:

  i.   Views on English language.
  ii. Course preference.
  iii. Duration of course.
  iv. Need for examination.

4.5.1.1   Views on English language

Table 4.3 Respondents' views on English language

1. I love English and English literature	2	6.7%
2. English is a useful communication tool	25	83.3%
3. I use English only when I need to.	3	10%

Eighty-three-point-three percent of the respondents viewed the English language as a useful communication tool. While 10% of the respondents stated that English

language is only used when it is needed, two respondents or 6.7% expressed love for the English language and English literature.
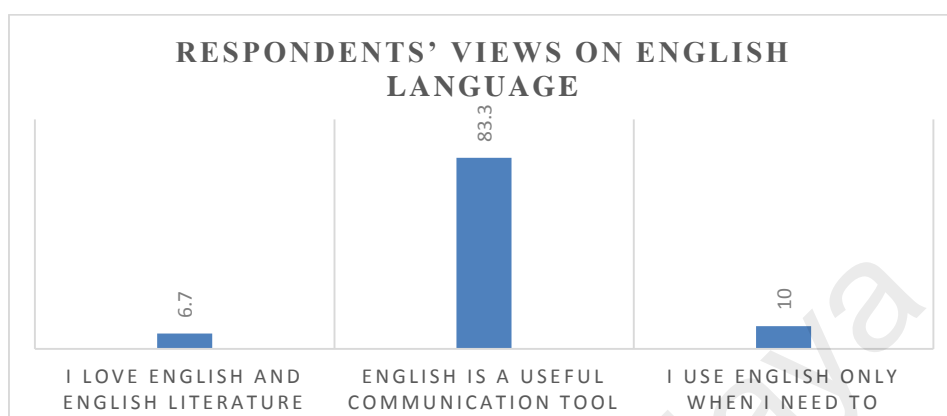
Figure 4:24 Respondents' views on English language

In short, the majority of the respondents consider English as a useful communication tool. This may be due to the fact that the frontliners need to communicate in English as their job specification is attending to international students. In addition, they need to use English when communicating with their superiors and colleagues.

4.5.1.2 Course preference

It is interesting to note that all the respondents intend to take up the English language course offered by their centre as it is presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Distribution of respondents by intention to take up English course

Respondent's need to attend up an intensive English course	Percentage
1. Yes	100%
2. No	0%

In terms of the language programme, Figure 4.25 shows the distribution of respondents by intention to take up English course.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS' BY PREFERENCE OF COURSE

53.4	43.3	3.3
ENGLISH FOR WORKPLACE	ENGLISH FOR COMMUNICATION	BASIC ENGLISH PROFICIENCY
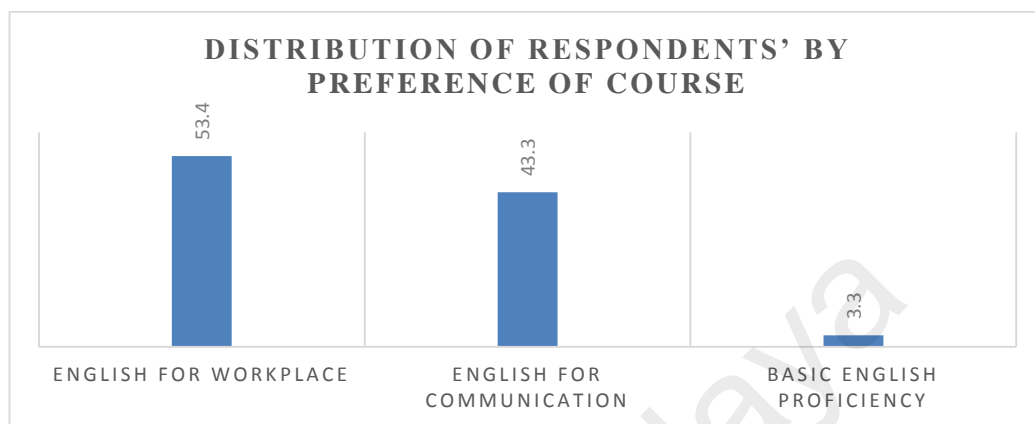
Figure 4:25 Distribution of respondents by intention to take up English course

The results indicate that more than half of the respondents (53.4%) favoured English for workplace. whilst 43.3% of the respondents preferred English for communication as the type of English language programme. Only 3.3% of the respondents preferred Basic English proficiency as the type of programme needed.

Table 4.5 Respondents' needs for English course

Why do you need to attend up an intensive English course?	Percentage
3. I need English to communicate effectively in my present job	100%
4. I hope to improve my job promotional aspects	40%
5. My employer encourages me to do it	26.7%
6. The constant dealing with various groups of people	40%

For the above question presented in Table. 4.5, the respondents have the choice of selecting more than one answer by ticking where necessary. The results indicate that all the respondents need an intensive English course to help them to communicate effectively in their present job. In addition, 40% of the respondents stated that they need it also to improve their job promotional aspects. Similarly, 40%

of them need to take up this course to deal better with various groups of people. 26.7% of the respondents indicated that they intend to take the course because their employers encourage them to do it.

The participants were also asked to give reasons for their need to attend an English language course. Based on Figure 4.26, it was found that the ultimate aim of the respondents in attending the English language course organized by their universities is to speak better English. This was indicated by 80% of the respondents.

REASONS FOR ATTENDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE
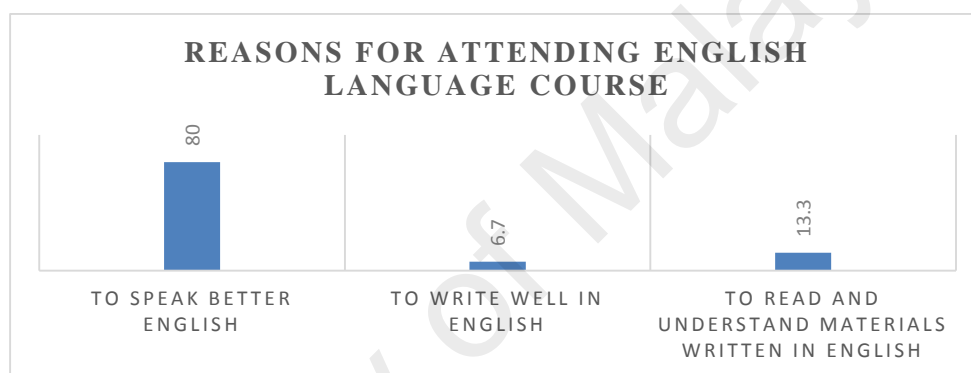
Figure 4:26 Reasons for attending English language course

This is attributed to the job specification of ISC frontliners where the major task is handling international students enquires. Therefore, the correct conversational skills and techniques are vital, as they need to be effective in oral communication. 13.3% of the respondents wanted to be able to read and understand materials written in English. In addition, 6.7% of the respondents wanted to write well at the end of the course.

4.5.1.3 Duration of course

Based on Table 4.7, 60% of the respondents preferred to spend two hours a week in the programme. This could be due to more than half of them (53.3%), being married and having family commitments. 30% and 10% of the respondents indicated

that they would like to spend four and six hours a week respectively on the programme.

Table 4.6 Duration of course

How much time would you like to spend on the English course?		
2 hours a week.	18	60%
4 hours a week.	9	30%
6 hours a week.	3	10%
How do you want this course to be carried out?		
Continuously	25	83.3%
Yearly	5	16.7%
Biannually	0	0%

Table 4.6 indicates that 83.3% of the respondents preferred the course to be carried out continuously as they felt that it would be a more effective, modular way of learning. For 16.7% of the respondents, they preferred the course to be carried out every year. None of the respondents preferred it to be carried out biannually.

4.5.1.4   Need for examination

More than half of the respondents (56.7%) wish to take English language examinations. Some of the respondents stated in the questionnaire that the examinations help to motivate and encourage them to learn. Besides, examinations can also evaluate their progress in the English language. On the other hand, 43.3% of the respondents do not wish to sit for examinations without writing any justifications. The results are visualized in Figure 4.27.
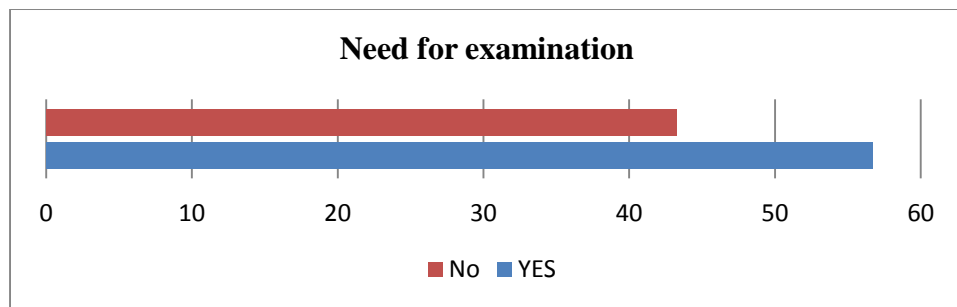
Figure 4:27 Need for examination

4.5.2 Summary of the Needs for English language programme

All the respondents agreed that they would like to have a specified English course or programme organized by their universities and conducted by experts in English. They preferred a course that will help them to perform more efficiently in their daily duties and communicate better. This means an ESP course would be more suitable compared to just General English. The respondents would prefer a course that specializes in effective communication. These findings are similar to that of Ng (2006), Aun (2009), Karuthan (2015), Singaran (2016) and Surentharan (2016). As the respondents in all these related studies preferred to take up an ESP course to overcome their communicative language challenges.

All the respondents clearly felt that they needed an English course to improve their proficiency to communicate effectively. This was the main reason cited by the respondents regarding their need for English. Besides, another reason would be their dealings with various groups of international students in the course of carrying out their duties to solve a problem. As gathered from the interviews, performance in their career is an important factor and this is only possible if they are able to communicate effectively with students. Other reasons cited during the interviews were the encouragement by superiors and to improve their chances for a promotion. This information is also confirmed by data from the questionnaire.

The respondents indicated that they lack confidence when speaking in English. Therefore, they expect to improve this sub-skill at the end of the course. Frontliner FL1_UKM said,

> *"I expect from this course to be confident to talk in English because I think most of the Malaysians people have a difficulty in that". (FL1_UKM).*

Another frontliner from the same ISC said,

> *"I am afraid to face international students because I am not good in English, so once I attend that course I will be more confident. I will try to understand some statements or what I do not understand. I will learn how to speak very well with them".* (FL2_UKM).

To improve communication skills, ISC frontliners need opportunities to interact in ways as close as possible to the kinds of interactional experiences found in the real settings. In addition, the English programme should be task-based learning using authentic materials related to their daily jobs in their workplace.

From the interviews, all the participants feel that the week-long class will be a burden on them, because of the extra hours that they need to put in weekly and this could also be due to more than half of the respondents being married and having family commitments. Hence, it was not a very popular choice.

> *"Two hours should be enough because we don't have much time after work" (FL3_UM)*

On the other hand, most of the participants prefer to spend two hours only per week on the programme. From the interviews, four out of five frontliners indicated

that it is more effective if the English language programme is carried out continuously. This helps them to develop their confidence in using the target language when communicating with students. A re-check of the questionnaires confirmed the aforesaid conclusion.

Focus-group discussions with international students from the three target universities showed that the ISC frontliners at their universities need to improve in communicative skills as most of them faced problems communicating in English during the interaction with them. On the whole, the international students perceived the English language level of the ISC frontliners as satisfactory. This is because proficiency in English is one of the requirements to consider when recruiting any frontliner. The students also suggested an English language programme that emphasizes on English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) so that the participant could use English to perform occupational duties effectively.

> *"Absolutely language is the mother of understanding as I said*
> *so conducting any course or even sending them for six-months*
> *English course to improve it is actually a good way to improve the*
> *service in ISC"* (IS3_UM)

They further noted that near native accuracy in English language is not the most important factor. What is important is that the ISC frontliners must be able to comprehend whatever message they come across as effectively as possible.

> *"I think actually because they are not exactly native speakers,*
> *they are okay as they can deliver the message ..."* (IS1_UKM).

4.6   Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed the results of the three research questions of this study. The results of the first research questions identified the various English language communicative challenges faced by ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities through analysing the questionnaire and coding the interview sessions and group discussions. The results from research question two identified the English language communicative needs of the ISC frontliners and ways to improve their oral communicative problems. From the first two research questions, information on the language skills that need to be emphasized in a proposed English language programme were identified. In the last section, information on the English language learning preferences were gathered from the questionnaires, as well as also being found from the interview sessions and the focus-group discussions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Introduction

This concluding chapter is aimed at providing a clearer idea pertaining to the English language needs of the ISC frontliners of Malaysian universities in relation to the oral communicative sub-skills which are listening and speaking. It is primarily concerned with highlighting the implications of the study and the recommendations to improve the communicative skills of the ISC frontliners in a professional context.

The data on the communicative English language needs were obtained through questionnaires, interviews and focus-group discussions. The data were obtained through the analysis of the stated methodology employed and the subsequent findings as mentioned earlier in Chapter Four (4) of this study. From the analysis of the data, this final chapter concludes with a summary of the important points and the findings in line with the research questions presented earlier in Chapter One. They are:

1. What are the English language oral communicative challenges encountered by the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities?

2. What are the English language oral communicative needs of the ISC frontliners of Malaysian public universities?

3. What are the communicative language skills that need to be emphasized in a proposed English language programme for the ISC frontliners?

5.2   Implications to the study

The study reveals the characteristics of the oral communication of ISC frontliners, which are inclined towards listening and speaking sub-skills. The findings reveal that the spoken form of the language does indeed play a major role in the front line of ISC. Thus, the implication of the study gives rise to the need for an ESP course design aimed at helping the ISC frontliners to develop their oral communicative skills in order for them to be able to express their ideas more precisely, to organize their communicative skills and to commit fewer grammatical errors.

In this case, an ESP course is more suitable compared to an EGP course. This is because ESP is designed to meet the specified needs of the learners (Strevens, 1989) and it is goal-oriented (Robinson, 1991). It is also suggested that knowledge of the listening skill and speaking skill should be given greater attention as the ISC frontliners employ these skills most when performing their daily tasks in the workplace.

From the interviews, the participants conceded that they use English in the office when they interact with international students. In contrast, if the communication is among the staff in the back office or during break time when they are out of duty, then the interaction takes place in Bahasa Malaysia. Therefore, it is suggested that ISC frontliners use the English language when they are speaking to their colleagues in the formal settings and also during their daily conversations. This would encourage the ISC frontliners to learn the language and increase accuracy and proficiency. Another way of helping the ISC frontliners to improve their speaking skills would be to make it compulsory for the new staff to use English during their probation period.

From the findings, the majority of ISC frontliners lack confidence in speaking and expressing themselves. As such, the ISC frontliners should be exposed to more interactive activities by using real language situations related to their daily tasks. Based on this need, the researcher suggests a task-based syllabus as it will help to teach the learners ways to carry out one or several particular tasks, rather than teach them particular language points or structures (Long, 2014). This is a possible way to stimulate more informative talk and to provide more support for the learners by introducing activities that are more structured and organized around a definite purpose or objective. There might be some advantages in placing greater focus on purposeful, task-based activities for developing skills in the use of spoken language for communicative purposes. Thus, task-based instruction takes a stronger stand in communicative language teaching for ISC frontliners.

The instructor who organizes task-based activities will be required to do careful planning and to give consideration to providing appropriate pictorial and textual stimuli with suggestions and guidelines for their exploitations. This will encourage interaction in the course of interpreting and discussing the stimulus material (Rahman, 2010). However, grammar and vocabulary should not be neglected. They will be contextualized rather that taught as principles and rules (Rahman, 2010).

It is recommended that there should be variety in the learning activities in the programme. This is to make the class more enjoyable and less routine, thus motivating the learners to learn. Variety can be introduced at different levels to make effective use of both the listening and speaking skills. Problem solving and role playing are another way to adopt the oral communicative activities.

It is also suggested that the programme should provide ample opportunity for learner participation. This is the most direct way to encourage communication with minimal teacher domination (Rahman, 2010). At the most general level, learner participation means that learners are allowed to have as much participation as possible. Learners are encouraged to work in pairs or groups in the communicative activities such as interviews, dialogues, one-to-one conversations or role plays.

In order for such activities to be fruitful, the activity must be carefully planned and the learners must have a specific task. There should be a limited but reasonable period of time for completing the task and there must be time allowed for feedback such as correction, checking and reconciliation of the various responses.

In their responses, the ISC frontliners have consistently indicated a need to use English for communication or communicative purposes. They are in favor of an English programme that would emphasize speaking and listening skills and provide them with enough practice in the language situations which are similar to the tasks they encounter in their daily activities in the workplace. Their ultimate objective of attending an English language course is to speak better English.

In conclusion, the researcher suggests that an English language programme which caters to the needs of both the ISC frontliners and the international students would be the best. However, it is the researcher's view that no courses would help the ISC frontliners if they were not prepared to make additional effort to use the oral communicative skills whenever there are opportunities to do so.

5.3 Proposed English language course for ISC frontliners of public universities in Malaysia

This course is designed to equip the ISC frontliners with the necessary oral communicative skills, and enable them to communicate more confidently and effectively in their jobs. Specifically, they will be exposed to listening and speaking skills used in realistic interaction scenarios and authentic day-to-day tasks. Appropriate consideration will be given to the development of hospitality and student service related vocabulary.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course: Interactive English: Listening and Speaking Skills for ISC Frontliners
Level: Intermediate
Hours: 2 hours per week
Medium of Instruction: English

5.3.1 Course Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, learners should be able to

1. Demonstrate the ability to speak spontaneously and effectively in their workplace.

2. Speak and listen in a simple exchange and in an everyday context with the students.

3. Interpret and respond correctly to authentic listening discourse in in their workplace.

4. Discover cultural and social differences in listening and speaking.

5. Ask questions to obtain specific information and clarify understanding.

6. Make polite requests using appropriate terms.

7. Use stress, intonation and pronunciation to be understood and make meaning clear.

8. Listen for details using key words to extract specific meaning.

9. Produce grammatically correct structures when responding in English.

10. Demonstrate a significant expansion of vocabulary.

5.3.2 Course Description

This course allows for learners to have as much participation as possible by employing a variety of learning activities such as; role-play, presentations, discussions, grammar development exercises, vocabulary expansion activities, YouTube recordings, audio listening of CDs, and direct instruction.

There will be a final listening and grammar exams in the end of the course worth 30% and 20% respectively of the final mark. In addition, learners will have a variety of speaking tests during the course worth 50% of the final mark. They will be evaluated as illustrated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Course Assessment

On-Going Assessment		100%
Speaking	Role-Play	20%
	Group Discussion	20%
	Oral Presentation	10%
Listening	Listening Test	30%
Grammar and Vocabulary	Grammar and Vocabulary Test	20%

5.3.3 Recommended *Textbook*

Perkins, P.S. (2010). *The Art and Science of Communication: Tools for Effective Communication in the Workplace,* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

5.3.4   Summary of the most important oral communicative language skills

Based on the findings of the present study, Table 5.1 represents the most important oral communicative language skills that need be emphasized in a proposed English language course for the ISC frontliners:

Table 5.2 Summary of the most important oral communicative language skills

Sub-skills		Needs		Problems		Target week
		Important/ very important	Less important/ not important	Not a problem	It is a problem	
Speaking	Ability to respond spontaneously to complaints by giving suggestions and offering advice.	√		√		Week three + five + ten
	Ability to ask questions and confirm details by giving reflective questions and repetitions.	√			√	Week two + five
	Ability to speak correctly and confidently when exchanging ideas.	√			√	Week four + eight
	Ability to adopt turn-taking strategies in order to complete unfinished sentences uttered by students (e.g. *Do you mean ...?* Or *Are you saying ...?*).	√		√		Week nine
	Ability to convey messages clearly and fluently.	√			√	Week two + eight + twelve

	Ability to ask for clarification and responding to information.	√		√		Week two
	Ability to offer alternatives like making arrangements and appointments in order to solve students' problems.	√			√	Week ten + twelve
	Ability to turn down requests politely.	√		√		Week seven
	Ability to Explain instructions clearly.	√			√	Week twelve
	Ability to Speak in a group.	√			√	Week four + thirteen
Listening	Ability to understand English spoken by non-Malaysians.	√			√	Week one + five
	Ability to understand lengthy descriptions from students.	√			√	Week three + eleven
	Ability to understand accents and code-switching used by students (e.g. Arabic mixed with English).	√			√	Week one + six
	Ability to recognize features of spoken language (tone, voice, quality, rate of speech, volume) to understand the meaning clearly.	√			√	Week six + five
	Ability to interpret and make inferences correctly in order to cope with problems.	√			√	Week three

5.3.5 Course Content and Weekly Schedule

The following tables describe what the learner is expected to do to achieve the course outcomes. Each table presents at least one basic communicative skill followed by its component skills. It also presents the knowledge and understanding of each component skill.

Week 1

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Speak clearly to be heard and understood in simple exchanges.	Use stress and intonation to make speech comprehensible to a sympathetic native Speaker	- Show awareness of syllable stress in familiar words - Place stress on key words in utterances
	Articulate the sounds of English to be comprehensible to a sympathetic native speaker	- Pronounce phonemes adequately to be comprehensible and to make meaning clear

Week 2

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Ask questions to obtain specific information	- Ask for personal details - Ask for clarification	- Form *wh-* and closed questions with correct intonation - Use the question form of the simple present tense of common verbs, using contractions where appropriate - Form questions with common modals - Understand and use a range of question words

Week 3

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Make statements of fact clearly	Give a description	- Recognize requests for personal information and respond in different appropriate ways - Use contracted forms - Spell words aloud - Incorporate giving information into an interaction
	Deal with another person's misunderstanding	- Use suitable grammar, e.g. Prepositional phrases, indefinite article - Use common adjectives to describe people, places and things - Recognize misunderstanding and correct it - Use stress to make meaning clear

Week 4

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Speak and listen to simple exchanges and in everyday contexts	Take part in social interaction	- Greet and respond to a greeting - Express thanks - Use appropriate intonation patterns
	Take part in more formal interaction	- Be able to introduce self - Give personal information - Show awareness of norms of personal space and eye contact

Week 5

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Listen for the gist of short explanations	Listen for gist in short explanations and narratives	- Identify key words - Respond to listening
	Listen for gist and respond in a face-to-face situation	- Signal listening by using markers - Ask for clarification and repetition
Listen and respond to requests for personal information	Listen and respond to requests for personal information	- Recognize different *wh-* question words - Answer in different ways

Week 6

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Listen for detail using key words to extract some specific information	Listen for grammatical detail	- Recognize different kinds of utterances: question, statement, instruction - Recognize appropriate grammatical forms for the level
	Listen for phonological details	- Understanding and responding to sentence stress - Recognize intonation patterns - Recognize and discriminate between individual sounds

Week 7

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Make requests using appropriate terms	Make requests: ask for things or actions	- Make requests with or without modals - Be aware of polite intonation patterns - Prepare the listener for a request

Week 8

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Make relevant contributions and help to move discussions forward	Follow and participate in a discussion or conversation	- Recognize where a speaker is stating a fact or expressing an opinion, and be able to respond appropriately - Identify a wide range of structures, vocabulary and intonation patterns used in expressing feelings, and be able to respond appropriately

Week 9

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Respect the turn-taking rights of others during discussions	Ask about people's feelings and opinions	- Be able to form a range of different question types, including alternative and tag questions
	Understand the turn-taking process	- Use appropriate language for offering a turn to another speaker - Be able to recognize suitable points for interruption and use appropriate language for interrupting politely

Week 10

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Respond to criticism and criticize constructively	Respond to criticism and criticize constructively	- Understand that successful co-operation involves people being able to deal with and offer criticism in constructive ways, in order to agree the best solution - Know a range of ways to make and respond to constructive suggestions - Be able to choose from a range of modal verbs and conditional forms to criticize action and make positive suggestions

Week 11

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Listen to, understand and follow lengthy or multi-step instructions and narratives on a range of topics and in a range of contexts	Listen to a narrative or conversation	- Recognize context, including the level of formality
	Listen and respond, adapting to speaker, medium and context	- Recognize the speaker's feelings and attitude, expressed overtly and/or through pitch, stress and intonation and be able to respond appropriately

Week 12

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Use appropriate phrases for interruption and change of topic	Use appropriate phrases for interruption and change of topic	- Use appropriate phrases, adapting register according to the situation and topic
Adapt contributions to discussions to suit audience, context, purpose and situation	Express views, opinions, feelings and wishes	- Express opinions, agreement and disagreement, using different registers to suit a range of situations

Week 13

Basic skills	Component skills	Knowledge and understanding
Support opinions and arguments with evidence	Support opinions and arguments with evidence	- Use appropriate phrases for introducing evidence into a discussion
Use strategies intended to reassure	Use strategies intended to reassure, e.g. body language and appropriate phraseology	- Understand that direct disagreement is uncommon in discussions in English and be able to use more tentative forms of disagreement

Week 14

Assessment	- Listening Test - Grammar and Vocabulary Test

5.4   Limitation of Study

As only 30 frontliners from three International Student Centres were involved, the findings of this research may not reflect the needs of all ISC frontliners in Malaysia. However, it is hoped that a similar study on a larger scale will be conducted. It has to be noted that the results obtained through this study are only valid to the subjects involved in this study and should not be extended to other departments of ISC.

Another shortcoming of the study was that the researcher was not given permission to interview other stakeholders such as directors and managers to investigate their expectations. It was not granted as it was against the university policy. All three universities that participated in the study cited university policy as the main reason for this rejection. This study was also limited by the short interview time given for the

interview sessions. Some interviews could only be conducted during the free time of the interviewees.

The researcher also wanted to conduct field observation by observing the ISC frontliners at the work place, especially when they were interacting with international students and other ISC staff. This request by the researcher was also rejected. Nevertheless, the findings from this study can provide an insight into the English language needs of the ISC frontliners. In brief, despite the limitations, this research makes a valuable contribution to ESP for ISC frontliners' literature knowledge base.

5.5   Suggestions for further research

As this is a small-scale research that focused on only three International Student Centres of public universities in Malaysia, it is recommended that ISC of other public and private universities of Malaysia need to be investigated. It is also suggested that studies in other fields related to the student service industry should be investigated.

Field observations at the work place would be helpful in investigating and understanding the situation better. Interviewing managers and supervisors will further help in investigating English language challenges among the ISC frontliners. Interviews with the ISC stakeholders such as directors and higher managers would help to identify what is expected from the frontliners.

A good understanding of the English language needs of the ISC frontliners can serve as a strong foundation for conducting an effective ESP programme. It is also hoped that a task-based curriculum can be designed and serve as a training syllabus for ISC frontliners.

5.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, the proposed English language curriculum for the ISC frontliners was explained in detailed. The course syllabus including the course outcome, course description, course content, teaching methodology and assessment were described in detailed. A weekly schedule of the English language curriculum was also provided. The implications, recommendations and limitations of the study and possible future research suggestions were also included.

REFERENCES

Alavi, M., & Mansor, S. M. S. (2011). Categories of problems among international students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *30*, 1581-1587.

Al-Zubaidi, K. O., & Rechards, C. (2010). Arab Postgraduate Students in Malaysia: Identifying and overcoming the cultural and language barriers. *Arab World English Journal*, *1*(1).

Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International education*, *5*(2), 131-154.

Tan, S. A. (2009). *Evaluating the English language needs of front office staff of a business class hotel/Tan Seng Aun* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Malaya).

Bektaş, D. Y. (2008). Counselling international students in Turkish universities: Current status and recommendations. *International Journal for the advancement of Counselling*, *30*(4), 268-278.

Bordens, K. S., & Abbott, B. B. (2002). *Research design and methods: A process approach (Fifth Edition).* San Francisco: McGraw Hill.

Briguglio, C. (2003). Gathering linguistic data from two multinational companies: Intercultural communication in the workplace. *In Proceedings from the 5th ABC European convention.* Lugano, Switzerland.

Chambers, F. (1980). A re-evaluation of needs analysis in ESP. *The ESP Journal*, *1*(1), 25-33.

Clagett, C. A. (1997). Workforce Skills Needed by Today's Employers. Market Analysis MA98-5.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge university press.

Fraser, H. (2010). Cognitive theory as a tool for teaching second language pronunciation. *Fostering language teaching efficiency through cognitive linguistics*, 357-379.

Ho, W. C. (2004). Use of information technology and music learning in the search for quality education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *35*(1), 57-67.

Howatt A. P. R. (1984). *A history of English language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hsu, P. Y. (2003). *An assessment of counseling needs of international students at University of Wisconsin-Stout Spring 2003* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Stout).

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes*. Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K. (2006). *English for academic purpose: An advance research book*. London: Routledge.

Jordan, R. R. (1997). *English for academic purposes: A guide and resource book for teachers*. Cambridge University Press.

Kaczmarek, P. G., Matlock, G., Merta, R., Ames, M. H., & Ross, M. (1994). An assessment of international college student adjustment. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, *17*(4), 241-247.

Karim, N. S. (1987). *The Development of a" Bahasa Melayu Tinggi" Variety in Modern Malay*. de auteur.

Karuthan, A. (2015) *The English language needs of nurses in medical tourism in Malaysia* (Unpublished Master dissertation). University of Malaya.

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.

Kaur, B. (1994). A case study of turn-taking. (*Unpublished MA dissertation), University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*.

LeBlanc, G., & Nha, N. (1997). Searching for excellence in business education: an exploratory study of customer impressions of service quality. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *11*(2), 72-79.

Likert, R. (1932). A technique for the measurement of attitudes. *Archives of psychology*.

Lin, J. C. G., & Yi, J. K. (1997). Asian international students' adjustment: Issues and program suggestions. *College student journal*. *Vol 31(4), Dec 1997, 473-479.*

Liu, M. (2009). Addressing the mental health problems of Chinese international college students in the United States. *Advances in Social Work*, *10*(1), 69-86.

Long, M. (2014). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. John Wiley & Sons.

Menon, R. (1999) *English language needs of front line staff in a private hospital: a needs analysis* (Unpublished Master dissertation). University of Malaya.

McDonough, J. (1984). *ESP in perspective: A practical guide*. Taylor & Francis.

Jariah, Mohd Jan (2003). Code-switching for power wielding: Inter-gender discourse at the workplace. *Multilingua*, *22*(1), 41-57.

Morshidi, S. (2008). The impact of September 11 on international student flow into Malaysia: Lessons learned. *IJAPS*, *4*(1), 80-95.

Munby, J. (1978*). Communicative Syllabus Design*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mustapha, S. M., Rahman, N. S. N. A., & Yunus, M. M. (2010). Perceptions towards Classroom Participation: A Case Study of Malaysian Undergraduate Students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *7*, 113-121.

Naidoo, V. (2006). International education A tertiary-level industry update. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *5*(3), 323-345.

Neuman, W. L. (1997). Social research method: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Ng, S.G. (2006) *English language needs of help desk personnel in the electronics industries* (Unpublished Master dissertation). University of Malaya.

Omar, A. H. (1982). *Language spread and recession in Malaysia and the Malay Archipelago* (pp. 198-213). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Perkins, P. S. (2010). *The art and science of communication: Tools for effective communication in the workplace*. John Wiley & Sons.

Platt, J. T., & Weber, H. (1980). *English in Singapore and Malaysia: Status, features, functions*. Oxford University Press.

Prachanant, N. (2012). Needs analysis on English language use in tourism industry. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *66*, 117-125.

Purpura, J. E. (2004). *Assessing grammar*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc..

Rahman, M. M. (2010). Teaching oral communication skills: A task-based approach. *ESP world*, *9*(1), 1-11.

Richards, J.C. et al. (2001). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richterich, R., & Chancerel, J.L. (1980). *Identifying the Needs of Adults Learning a Foreign Language*. Strasbourg: Pergamon Press.

Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Dictionary of language and applied linguistics (3rd ed.)*. England: A Pearson Education Book.

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

Sherry, M., Thomas, P., & Chui, W. H. (2010). International students: A vulnerable student population. *Higher education*, *60*(1), 33-46.

Sifakis, N. C. (2003). Applying the adult education framework to ESP curriculum development: an integrative model. *English for specific purposes*, *22*(2), 195-211.

Singaran, S. (2016) *Spoken communication needs analysis for information desk personnel* (Unpublished Master dissertation). University of Malaya.

Sovic, S. (2009). Hi-bye friends and the herd instinct: International and home students in the creative arts. *Higher Education*, *58*(6), 747-761.

Steele, K. D. (2008). *Perceptions of Chinese international students in Singapore: Adjustment issues and support* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto).

Stevens, B. (2005). What communication skills do employers want? Silicon valley recruiters respond. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *42*(1), 2.

Stivers, B. P., Campbell, J. E., & Hermanson, H. M. (2000). An assessment program for accounting: Design, implementation, and reflection. *Issues in Accounting Education*, *15*(4), 553-581.

Strevens, P. (1980). *Teaching English as an international language: From practice to principle*. Alemany Pr.

Surentharan, S. (2016) *Spoken communication needs analysis of information desk personnel in libraries* (Unpublished Master dissertation). University of Malaya

Syakur, S. (1987). *Language testing and Evaluation*. Surakarta. Sebelas Maret University Press.

Ting, S. H. (2002). Is English needed in a Malay workplace?. *RELC Journal*, *33*(1), 137-153.

Tseng, W. C., & Newton, F. B. (2002). International students' strategies for well-being. *College Student Journal*, *36*(4), 591.

UNESCO (2014) *Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All*. Education for All Global Monitoring Report. Paris: UNESCO.

West, R. (1994). Needs analysis in language teaching. *Language teaching*, *27*(01), 1-19.

Widodo, H. P., & Park, G. G. (2014). *Moving TESOL Beyond the Comfort Zone: Exploring Criticality in TESOL*: Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated.

Yeh, C., & Inose, M. (2002). Difficulties and coping strategies of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrant students. *Adolescence*, *37*(145), 69.

Ying, Y. W., & Liese, L. H. (1994). Initial Adjustment of Taiwanese Students to the United States The Impact of Postarrival Variables. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *25*(4), 466-477.