NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR WORKPLACE ENGLISH SPEAKING COURSES FOR UNIVERSITY ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN THE KWARA STATE OF NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

The globalization of world markets which led to the hegemony of English language over all other languages has required experts and professionals from different fields of specialization to equip themselves with English communicative abilities and skills with which to communicate effectively with their clients and partners at the local level, and with their counterparts at the international level. Nonetheless, a review of research shows that a vast number of graduate engineers lag behind in the required English language speaking skills in the workplace. This is usually as a result of mismatch between the language skills taught in the university and the communicative skills used in the workplace. Due to the extra-ordinary importance frequently attached to the spoken English in the workplace worldwide which indicates the necessity of producing graduate engineers with workplace communicative competency, this study was an attempt to investigate the respondents' perceptions on the type of English courses taken by both undergraduate engineering students at a public university in the Kwara State of Nigeria and industry workers in the state. It also sought to compare how they self-rated their speaking interaction and production skills as well as their perceptions on the importance of speaking interaction and production sub-skills at workplace. In an effort to actualize this end, an online survey through questionnaire was conducted to obtain information from both groups of respondents. The questionnaire, which was adopted and adapted from different sources, was piloted on a group of university engineering students in Malaysia using SPSS which gave the reliability result of Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of 0.763 and 0.801. The data were then elicited from the respondents and were subsequently analyzed using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The researcher found that the type of English courses taken by undergraduate engineering students in the Kwara State of Nigeria is English for Proficiency, while those of industry workers in the state are English for Occupational Purpose. Industry workers rated their own level of speaking interaction and production skills higher if compared to students. Moreover, industry workers perceived more speaking interaction and production sub-skills to be important at workplace, unlike the university students. The study concluded with a suggestion for the restructuring of the university' English curriculum for engineering students so as to equip them well for their future workplace communication.

ملخص البحث

إنّ عولمة الأسواق العالميّة التي أدّت إلى هيمنة اللّغة الإنجليزيّة على جميع اللّغات تطلّبت من الخبراء والمهنيّين من مختلف مجالات التخصّص تزويد أنفسهم بالقدرات والمهارات التي تمكّنهم من التواصل باللّغة الإنجليزيّة تواصلاً فعّالاً مع عملائهم وشركائهم على المستوى المحلّي ومع نظرائهم على المستوى الدّولي. ومع ذلك، لقد تبيّن من خلال مراجعة الدّراسات السابقة أنّ عدداً كبيراً من المهندسين الخرّيجين من الجامعة يعانون من تدنّي مستوى مهارات التحدّث باللّغة الإنجليزية المطلوبة في أماكن العمل. هذا عادةً ما يكون نتيجة عدم التوافق بين المهارات اللّغوية التي تدرّس في الجامعة ومهارات التواصل المستخدمة في مكان العمل. نظراً للأهمية القصوى للتحدّث بالإنجليزية في أماكن العمل عالمياً والتي تشير إلى ضرورة إنتاج المهندسين الخرّيجين ذوي كفاءة الاتّصال المطلوبة في مكان العمل، بحثت هذه الدراسة في تصوّرات المستجيبين لنوع دورات اللغة الإنجليزية التي يأخذها كلا طلاب الهندسة الجامعيين بإحدى جامعات حكومية في ولاية كوارا، نيجيريا والموظفين المهندسين في الولاية، كما سعت أيضًا إلى مقارنة كيفية تقييمهم لمهاراتهم في التفاعل الخطابي والإنتاج الخطابي بالإضافة إلى تصوّرهم لأهمية المهارات الفرعيّة المندرجة تحت التفاعل الخطابي والإنتاج الخطابي في مكان العمل. ولتحقيق هذه الغايات المنشودة ، تم إجراء دراسة استطلاعيّة عبر الإنترنت من خلال الاستبيان للحصول على معلومات من كلا المجموعتين من المجيبين. ثمّ بعد ذلك تمّ تجريب الاستبيان – المعتمد من مصادر مختلفة – على مجموعة من طلاب الهندسة الجامعيّين في ماليزيا باستخدام SPSS والذي أعطى نتيجة موثوقية لمعامل كرونباخ ألفا 0.763 و 0.801. ثم تمّ جمع البيانات من المستجيبين وتمّ تحليلها فيما بعد باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي والاستقصائي. ثمّ توصّل الباحث إلى أنّ نوع دورات اللّغة الإنجليزية التي يتلقّاها طلاب الهندسة الجامعيّين في ولاية كوارا هي الإنجليزية لأغراض عامة، في حين أنّ الموظّفين في المصانع في الولاية يتلقّون الإنجليزية لأغراض وظيفيّة، وأنّه صنّف الموظّفون مستوياتهم الخاصة من التفاعل الخطابي والإنتاج الخطابي أعلى بالمقارنة مع الطلاب. علاوة على ذلك، رأى الموظّفون أهمّية أكبر عدد من مهارات فرعية للتفاعل الخطابي والإنتاج الخطابي في مكان العمل بالمقارنة مع الطلاب الجامعيّين. واختتمت الدراسة باقتراح لإعادة هيكلة المناهج الدراسية في اللغة الإنجليزية لطلّاب الهندسة من أجل تجهيزهم بشكل جيّد للتّواصل في مكان العمل في المستقبل.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English for Specific Purposes.

………………………………..
Lilisuriani Abdul Latif
Supervisor

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Co-Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English for Specific Purposes.

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Nuraihan Mat Daud
Dean, Kulliyyah of Languages
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Abdul-Lateef Solihu

Signature .... Date ....

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Due to the globalization of world markets, the emergence of English as the first language of engineering worldwide has required that graduate engineers be well equipped with not only technical knowledge but also communicative abilities. This is because their success of their professions lies on them having a good command of the English language (Rajprasit, Pratoomrat & Wang, 2015). Kim (2013) corroborated that engineers all around the world are obliged to use English for many aspects of their jobs because English is used as the language of most international organizations and publications in the engineering field. Thus, most non-native English speaking engineers would encounter disadvantages in their professional terms if they are not proficient in the language. Moreover, as Sheth (2016) contended, employers are no more interested in looking for engineering nerds who would spend their working hours busy with calculators and machines. Rather, preference is given to those who are capable of communicating efficaciously in English, expressing ideas clearly within the purview of workplace communicative events.

However, many reports have shown that despite the expertise of graduate engineers in their practical oriented disciplines, a vast number of these professionals lack English speaking skills necessary for technical discussions, business negotiations and daily conversations with their foreign counterparts and customers (Gashaye, 2015; Joungtrakul, 2013). For instance, in Thailand, both novice and experienced engineers are faced with English difficulties resulting in lack of competency in communicating at

work, especially in oral and written modes (Jarupan, 2013). Kim (2013) also acknowledged that Japanese graduate engineers who work with well reputed industries lack confidence in commanding good English orally at work, while they are only good at reading and writing. Adnan, Mohd Radzuan, Kassim and Muzab (2014) found out that one of the factors that lead to unemployment of most Malaysian graduate engineers is their inability to showcase the English speaking skills required to communicate efficiently at work.

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

Despite the fact that English speaking skills are of great importance to graduate engineers to conduct their workplace activities (Ali & Kazempourian, 2017; Hossain,

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

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

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

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

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Thus, the rationale for conducting this study is juxtaposed by the fact that having been informed about the importance of English speaking skills in the workplace worldwide, and the phenomenon of mismatch in view between undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in many parts of the world over the communicative skills that are important at workplace, there is lack of information on the perceptions of these two stakeholders on the importance of English speaking skills at the workplace in Nigeria as a whole and the Kwara State in particular. Therefore, making the Kwara state of Nigeria a focus, this study is designed to identify the perceptions of undergraduate engineering students on the importance of English speaking interaction and production skills in the workplace in comparison with those of industry workers. It will also compare how students and industry workers self-rate their level of speaking interaction and production skills so as to identify the possible gap between the students' present situation and what are actually required of them by the actual workplace communicative situations.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.2.1 Engineering in Nigeria

According to Akinsanya and Omotayo (2013), engineering is "a profession in which the knowledge of the mathematical and natural science gained by study, experience and practice is applied with judgement to develop ways to utilize economically, the materials and forces of nature for the benefit of mankind" (p. 94). Engineers are entrusted with the task of designing and building projects that satisfy basic human needs (such as potable water, food, housing, sanitation, energy, transportation, communication, resource development and industrial processing) as well as rectifying environmental problems (such as creating waste treatment facilities, recycling

resources, cleaning up and restoring polluted sites as well as protecting or restoring natural ecosystems) (The World Federation of Engineering Organizations' Committee on Technology, 2002).

The late 19th century saw the emergence of engineering in Nigeria when the Public Works Department (PWD) was set up in Lagos in 1896 by the then southern government. This department, which comprised three different sections, (civil, mechanical, and electric) shouldered the task of proffering solutions to the engineering problems in the Southern Nigeria. Having attained independence in 1960, both Northern and Eastern regions established their respective PWDs to ensure the ubiquity of engineering services in all the three regions of Nigeria (Rai; 2001; Usifo, 2007).

In 1966, the Nigerian council for scientific and industrial Research (NCSIR) was set up and later led to the establishment of International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan (IITA) in 1967, Kaduna Polytechnic in 1968, and Yaba College of technology in 1969. The formation of a council called Nigerian Council for Science and Technology (NCST) led to the promulgation of Nigerian Steel Development Authority (NSDA) Decree of 1971, and the Industrial Training Fund (ITF). In the same year, the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN) was also established. Subsequent to the discovery of petroleum, the Petroleum Technology Development Fund was formed for a proper training of the Nigerians who were working as engineers, geologists, scientists and management in the petroleum Industry. This gave rise to the creation of Petroleum Training Institute, Warri. In 1977, the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) was founded, while the Ministry of science and Technology was born in 1980 with the dissolution of Science and Technology Act number 1 of January 1980 (Inkani, Mashi & Yaro, 2014). This actually led to the establishment of several polytechnics and universities of technology to cater for the

increase in the number of students who aspired to study in the engineering field. In 1987, the National Science and Technology Fund (NSTF) was empowered to finance activities having to do with science and technology. In an attempt to ensure that raw materials were developed and supplied sufficiently to local industries, the Nigerian government formed Raw Materials Research and Development Council (RMRDC) in 1988 (Asonmwonriri & Igbinovia, 2012).

The Decree No. 39 of 1987 which made provision for the establishment of Raw Materials Research and Development Council (RMRDC) to enhance the development of raw materials was amended in 1992, while a risk fund realized from the value added tax or surcharge on imported raw materials was provided (Animalu, 2003). The Federal Ministry of Science and Technology was re-established and strengthened in 1993 and since then it has maintained a stable functioning till date (Inkani, Mashi & Yaro, 2014).

In the realization of the important roles played by Science and Technology in accomplishing economic development, it was declared that Nigeria shall relentlessly run its economy on Science and Technology because nowhere in the world today a country's economy can move forward without the aforementioned. Hence, in the last few years, a great emphasis has been laid on the growth of Science and Technology for the purpose of actualizing the dream of economic development (Nigerian Policy of Science, Technology and Innovation, 2011).

The justification for identifying the perceptions of the aforementioned stakeholders (i.e. undergraduate engineering students and industry workers) on the importance of English speaking skills at engineering workplaces lies on the fact that Nigeria is currently moving towards radical improvement in Science and Technology as stated in its policy that "there is an urgent need for adherence to quality and international standards in carrying out scientific, industrial and commercial activities

for global competitiveness" (Nigerian Policy of Science, Technology and Innovation of 2011, p.17).

Therefore, to ensure that this goal is actualized, there is need to find out the perceptions of the two sets of respondents on the English speaking skills required of Nigerian graduate engineers for their workplace activities. Finding out the perceptions of these stakeholders in this regard can help to educate students and motivate them to develop the skills required.

1.2.2 Use of English in Nigeria

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

English is maintained as the lingua franca in all sectors of life in the Nigerian society and perceived as one of the valuable legacies left by the British colonialism (Sunday, 2013). The main reason for that from the outset is obviously the fact acknowledged by Afolabi (2016) that Nigeria has a Muslim dominated north and a

Christian occupied south with a number of at least 250 ethnic groups who speak 100 absolutely different languages. The language diversity in Nigeria has been the major factor that influences the use of English nationwide and even at open markets (Sunday, 2013; Udofot, 2015).

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

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The emergence of English as the major language of Science and Technology has posed a difficult challenge to a vast number of engineers who are non-native English speakers; making it incumbent upon them to upgrade their language skills to meet the international standard (Kim, 2013). This is because English has not only become the language to carry out their daily professional activities at the local level, but also the medium of communication with their professional and business partners worldwide (Adnan et al., 2014). Therefore, expectations of university engineering graduates' employers are so high that they include a wide range of competencies such as linguistic capabilities, information and technology (ICT) and many others (Sheth, 2016). However, research indicated that a huge number of undergraduate engineering students have failed to meet the English speaking skills expected of them by potential employers (Atai & Asadi, 2013; Chen, Chang & Chang, 2016; Hossain, 2013). Furthermore, recent studies have shown a mismatched perception of the importance of English

speaking skills in the workplace between undergraduate engineering students and industry workers (Ali & Kazempourian, 2017; Bozic & Pintaric, 2018; Sothan, 2015). In addition, after a long search through the literature, it is found that not enough needs analysis has been conducted to ascertain the English speaking skills required from Nigerian university engineering students by potential employers despite the importance of English language in the country. Moreover, despite the frequent reports of gaps between what is taught in the university and the communicative skills required in the workplace (Atai & Asadi, 2013; Rajprasit, Pratoomrat, & Wang, 2015), the possible gap that may exist in Nigeria has not been ascertained.

Therefore, this study will identify the importance of English speaking interaction and production skills in the workplace as perceived by undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria. In addition, it will compare how students and industry workers self-rate their level of speaking interaction and production skills so as to ascertain the possible gap between them. It will also find out their perceptions on the type of English courses taken by them both in order that the possible gap between the communicative skills taught in the university and those required in the workplace be realized.

1.4 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This study aims to:

1. Identify the type of English courses taken by undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria

2. Compare how undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria self-rate their speaking interaction skills

3. Compare how undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria self-rate their speaking production skills

4. Identify the perception of undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria on the importance of speaking interaction sub-skills at workplace

5. Identify the perception of undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria on the importance of speaking production sub-skills at workplace

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The awareness of the research problem will throw some light on the questions this study is designed to answer. Thus, data shall be collected from the respondents to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the type of English courses taken by undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria?

2. How do undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria self-rate their own speaking interaction skills?

3. How do undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria self-rate their own speaking production skills?

4. How do undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria perceive the importance of speaking interaction sub-skills at workplace?

5. How do undergraduate engineering students and industry workers in the Kwara State of Nigeria perceive the importance of speaking production sub-skills at workplace?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The identification of the English speaking skills required at the engineering workplaces in Nigeria as well as the speaking interaction and production skills of undergraduate engineering students therein is necessary for designing a course and developing course materials that would best suit Nigerian engineers' language needs. Also, identifying a possible mismatch in the perception of the two sets of respondents involved in this study can actually help to guide the thoughts of undergraduate engineering students in Nigeria and motivate them to develop the skills required.

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.7.1 EOP (English for Occupational Purpose)

Zahid (2013) contends that a vast number of applied linguists have classified ESP into English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The former relates to teaching of language skills that are pertinent to workplace communicative situations, while the latter is the teaching of language skills that are specific to different disciplines. Dudley-Evans and St. John, (1998) further categorize English for Academic Purposes (EAP) into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), expounding that the former approaches the teaching of general language skills that are applicable to various disciplines, while the latter concentrates on teaching language skills that are specific to a particular discipline.

1.7.2 Needs Analysis

According to Iwai et al. (1999) as cited by Suleiman and Zamir (2016) "the term needs analysis generally refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the needs of a particular group of students" (p. 88). Researchers have emphasized needs analysis as the major basis for devising syllabuses, designing courses and developing materials in language training (Khalid, 2016). From these definitions, it can be said that needs analysis is a process of eliciting information from a target group of learners, teachers, sponsors and other educational stakeholders to identify the particular language skills necessary for learners to be developed, the rationales for their development and to determine the best suitable teaching/learning method.

1.7.3 English Speaking Skills

In an attempt to give a brief description of English speaking skills, throwing some light on what scholars regard as speaking is crucial for a clear understanding of its subordinates. Burns and Joyce (1997) as cited by Leong and Masoumeh (2017) define speaking as "an interactive process of making meaning that includes producing, receiving, and processing information" (p. 35). Abd El Fattah (2006) considers speaking skills as competences and underlying abilities with which speaking proficiency is characterized. These underlying abilities possess some structures made up of different components "with some sort of interaction and interrelationship between them" (p. 40). Hence, CEFR (2018) categorizes these speaking skills into oral production and oral interaction. According to the source, the former is the production of speech to be received by an audience of one person or more such as public address (information, instructions, etc.), addressing audiences (speeches at public meetings,

university lectures, sermons, entertainment, sports commentaries, sales presentations, etc.), while the latter is the employment of reception and production strategies in which the language user serves as both listener and speaker with one or more interlocutors. Examples are transactions, casual conversation, informal discussion, formal discussion, debate, interview, negotiation, co-planning and practical goal-oriented co-operation (Council of Europe, 2018).

1.7.4 English Speaking Sub-skills

Speaking sub-skills in a second language are a number of skills that are required from learners to achieve a significantly high level in the speaking skills earlier mentioned. Kohutova (2016) reiterated that the language speaking sub-skills which learners need to develop in order to attain a substantial level of communication proficiency are producing connected speech; the ability to interact; talking round gaps in their knowledge; speaking in a range of contexts; and balancing accuracy and fluency (p. 4).

According to CEFR (2018), to elevate one's level in speaking, one must possess the ability to transact, make casual conversations, informal and formal discussions, participate in debates, interviews, negotiations, co-planning and practical goal-oriented co-operation, and give public address such as speeches at public meetings, university lectures, sermons, entertainment, sport commentaries, sales, and presentations.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presents the discussion of background of the study which is three-fold. First of all, the need for undergraduate engineers to prepare themselves with the necessary English speaking skills for their future workplace is briefly discussed. This is followed by the presentation of the historical background of engineering in Nigeria so

as to provide the readers with an insight to the status enjoyed by engineering profession therein as well as the roles played by the government to make engineering education accessible to the Nigerian populace. Also, the use of English language in Nigeria is elaborated to stress its importance as a lingua franca in all sectors. The statement of the problem, the statement of purpose and the research questions are also presented. As a number of previous needs analysis studies of workplace English communication skills have identified a mismatch in perceptions between or among stakeholders as to the importance of these skills, this study sought to identify the perceptions of the two stakeholders in this study on the importance of English speaking interaction and production skills at workplace as well as compare how students and industry workers self-rate their levels of these skills so as to identify the possible gap between the present speaking skills possessed by students and what employers expect from them. This chapter also highlights the significance of the study which is all about the gap to be filled by this study. Finally, definitions of the key terms used are presented.