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Paper submitted to Persidangan Kebangsaan Penyelidikan dan Inovasi dalam Sistem Pendidikan dan Teknik dan Vokasional (CIETVET 2012), 25-26 September 2012, Politeknik Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

English proficiency and employability: Polytechnic students' notions of what it takes to get them employed

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Of late, various quarters have expressed their concern with the employability of graduates, and communication skills and English proficiency are among the factors frequently highlighted by the government and potential employers. However, the views of would-be graduates entering the job market have received less attention. This study examines the polytechnic students' notions of the factors that increase their employability. A survey was conducted among polytechnic students in Kuching, Sarawak. The questionnaire encompassed items on likely means to secure their first job, the relative importance of factors that influence employability as well as their knowledge of and confidence in writing good CVs, job application letters and performing in job interviews. As the majority of polytechnic students are post SPM school leavers, they do not have working experience. The results indicate that while they have some idea on the value of good qualifications to secure good jobs, they may not be fully aware of the importance of being proficient in English or the implications of poor mastery of English on their job hunting prospects. Their lack of familiarity with resume, cover letter and job interview underscore the importance of English courses which prepare them for communication in the workplace.

Keywords: English proficiency, employability, polytechnic, job application

Introduction

Thus far, research on communicative abilities of employees in the workplace setting has pointed to inadequacies in language and communication skills (Crosling & Ward, 2002; DuPre & Williams, 2011; Kaur & Kaur, 2008; Vincent & Fadhil, 2009). Even UK graduates have been reported to lack language skills (Graduate Prospects, November 2011). In Canada, Hall, Keely, Dojeiji, Byszewski, and Marks (2004) found that medical graduates lack specific patient-physician communication skills and a good understanding of English terms and idioms. In Australia, Crosling and Ward (2001) found that Business/Commerce undergraduates from Monash