

## **The Picture of Workplace Oral Communication Skills for ESP Jordanian Business Graduate Employees**

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### **Abstract**

*The present study aims at investigating the diverse forms of oral communication, particularly in English, ESP Jordanian business graduate employees practise in the diverse workplace settings. A survey questionnaire was distributed in 2010 to employers of Isra University business graduate employees (with Bachelor of Business degrees) to establish the picture of workplace oral communication for them. Out of a pool of 96 relevant companies, 24 completed the study survey questionnaire. The data from the survey were computer analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Information was coded according to the survey questions, and cross tabulations and frequency information were determined. The study revealed that business graduate employees require experience and instruction in a range of oral communication settings and that they will be disadvantaged in the workplace if they lack such skills.. It is recommended that these should be embedded in oral communication activities in a university business curriculum. In this study, the researchers have provided information on workplace oral communication in an area where there appears to be little detailed information available. However, there is room for further research issues that could include a more comprehensive study of university and workplace responsibilities for oral communication development, particularly in English because of the rapid rise of internet communications, issues of the nature of informal communication between supervisors and employees at work and issues of manifestations of linguistic politeness and differences that informal communication takes across diverse industry sectors. (240 wds.)*

**Keywords:** workplace; oral communication; business graduate employees.

### **Introduction**

Oral communication in English in the workplace, particularly for business graduate employees is an area where there is limited research available. In recent years, an increasing number of university and college students in Jordan speak their home language, Arabic other than English, which can put added pressure on the kinds of linguistics, cultural and academic support these students, particularly business graduates, may require in their education and in the workplace. Communication challenges also surface in the workplace for business graduate employees, in particular during internship placements or active employment following graduation. That is why calls have been made for business graduate employees to be proficient in oral communication skills so that they can function effectively in the workplace. Consequently, there has been impetus to include English oral as well as written communication skills development in undergraduate course design since English has become the language of communication, commerce, e-commerce and the internet among the parties concerned in the workplace, and movements in this direction have occurred. This study aims to provide specific information on the nature of the English oral communication needs and uses of business employees who graduate from Isra University, Jordan.

### **Literature Review**

The literature on workplace oral communication that follows indicates that it is an important aspect of the workplace, and that business graduate employees require effective English language skills in this domain if they are to be successful in their business careers.

This puts added pressure on the kinds of linguistic support these business graduate employees may require in their education at university and in the workplace as well. Bizzell (1989, 483-486) asserted that for successful workplace communication, business graduate employees require more than the formal ability to present well and a range of formulaic expressions. Successful communication is context-dependent and therefore embedded in its particular discourse community. Carnavale, Grainer and Meltzer (1990, 34) said in the workplace, successful oral communication reflects the specific internal and external influences on the particular company. Internally, communication is underpinned by an understanding of the nature of businesses, their purposes for operating, their structures, and how these affect decision-making within the tapestry of explicit and implicit power structures in the organization. Carnavale et al. also pointed out that oral communication skills are required to navigate the complex social waters of the organization.

For example, business graduate employees may not realize that workplace communication practices are more censured, than those of the academic environment. Carnavale et al. (1990, 31) stated that team work is a tool for achieving flexibility and adaptability, enabling a workforce to remain competitive. As well as working with staff from diverse backgrounds, the teams may also be cross-functional, meaning that team members communicating with each other must bear in mind differing disciplinary backgrounds. These team members need to know how to understand each other, communicate their own thoughts and beliefs and listen to what others have to say. That is, a degree of rapport and perhaps trust is the basis of a well-functioning group, and it would seem that informal communication and exchanges for building relations are significant for this purpose. Carnavale, et al (1990,159) pointed out that the changing nature of business further underscores the importance of oral communication skills. With the increasing use of technology, issues of quality, innovation and competitiveness, oral communication skills take on a higher workplace focus. Indeed, Mellinger (1992, 79-109) pointed out that oral communication and social interaction are the means for achieving occupational activity, enabling employees to learn and acquire new skills which facilitate the development of solutions to problems.

Workplace oral communication reflects the pervasive, i.e., widespread and powerful role of language and communication in human society. As Halliday (1994, 22) explained, communication is more than merely an exchange of words between parties, it is a sociological encounter and through exchanges of meanings in the communication process, social reality is created, maintained and modified. The researcher also explained that the interpersonal component is evident in language and communication and it is integral to communication. It refers to the relative status and position of the parties communicating and is for establishing and maintaining social relations. In turn, the interpersonal component is composed of three elements: the status of the parties in the relationship, the contact or degree of familiarity, and the effect, which is the emotional charge embedded in the communication, or the speaker's viewpoint or attitude to the topic. Kaplan (1994, 245-262) said that cultural patterns of communication and assumptions that may differ from western expectations can be transferred into English by speakers for whom

English is a second language. Business graduate employees need to be equipped with an understanding of these differences in order to navigate difficulties that may arise. In the United States, Van Horn (1995), reporting on a survey of employees in New Jersey, claimed that oral communication is seen by employers as vital, but, interestingly, is an area for which graduates lack preparation. Scollon and Scollon (1995) found that most business graduate employees' communication is more informal in nature, which represents an inductive approach wherein the minor points are presented first, from which the main point, or conclusion, is derived. However, the researchers categorized corporate discourse as goal-directed, based on objectivity and rationalism. Thus, the preferred forms of communication are focussed, tending towards the use of anti-rhetorical, positivist, empirical, deductive, individualistic, egalitarian and publicly and institutionally sanctioned forms and discourse. This raises a further consideration in relation to workplace communication. The researchers also commented that although there is a preference for deductive strategies for the introduction of topics, the type of communication seems to depend on the nature of the relationship between the parties communicating. They argue that the deductive structure is commonly used in client relationships, but a more inductive strategy is typical between colleagues where there is an exchange of free information. Witherspoon and Wohlert (1996, 375-399) said in a workplace with personnel of different ages, genders and national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, it is evident that, as employees' communication is shaped by differing cultural values and norms, the result will be variation in preferred modes of interaction. Thus, these elements are vulnerable to interpretations that differ from the speaker's intent.

For successful communication, speakers need to look beyond their own cultural lens. More specifically, Koonce (1997, 34-39) pointed out that varying cultural norms and values resulting in different styles and values between men and women can interfere with successful communication. It seems that men often seek resolution of problems, whereas women tend to seek understanding. Liu and Beamer (1997, 51-66) stated that externally, the increasingly globalised nature of the business world impacts on communication processes. Which many organizations now operating across national boundaries, the need for business graduate employees to have cross-cultural understanding is underscored. According to Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997), formal meetings, a means for sharing ideas, are intertwined with team work, and indeed can be seen as the critical modes of such communication networks. However, despite the notion of a meeting as a forum for inclusion and communication, its style may also be susceptible to the climate prevailing in the organization. The researchers classified the two meetings they investigated as either the generic- functional model, or the structural model, and argue that communication within these types of meetings differs. In the former, a hierarchical or top down mode is evident, whereas the latter is more co-operative in arrangement.

They argue that such a style affects the dynamics of the meeting: in the hierarchical model, the tension is between the chair and the group, and in the co-operative model, it is between the groups within the meeting. Woodilla (1998, 31-50) described the scope of conversations in the workplace as fragmented managerial interactions, or during meetings forming the backbone of organizational work, or labeled as gossip essential to a network of office relationships. The researcher said through conversation, relationships between individuals are established, shared meanings are developed, and contested meanings are made visible. The researcher also said for many ESL newcomers, the only opportunity they have for conversing in English is in the workplace. Many ESL newcomers do not live in English or they do not live in the culture either, which is another reason why small talk can be so difficult. In Australia a government Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) (ACNeilson, 1998) studied into employer satisfaction with graduate skills listed oral communication skills third out of the seven skills sought in new graduates. The importance of these skills, i.e., oral communication skills is also confirmed by the DETYA survey, where some organizations complained that business graduate employees have limited understanding of both how business operates and the interrelations of the different parts of the organization. Changes in the nature of work in contemporary organizations are affecting the relative status and position of the parties in communication processes.

In hierarchical organizations, positions are clearly defined and thus modes and topics of communication are obvious. According to this survey, a significant feature of contemporary organizations is team work, wherein groups of business employees work together to achieve a common goal. It indicated that employees place most weight in recruitment on academic achievement (because it is seen as indicative of the capacity to learn), intellectual capacity and motivation, which are difficult to assess through other means. What is more, the DETYA survey focuses on the people with whom business employees communicate orally, inter-and intra-department, and inter-company and indicates that recruiters also pay attention to business graduates' interpersonal skills as employees must be able to relate to people on all levels in the organization. Crosling and Ward (1999) indicated that 56% of oral communication assessment is devoted to formal presentation in the Monash University Faculty of Business and Economics curriculum. Koustoukakis (2000, p. 4) pointed out that the survey of Australian employers which was released by the Minister for Education, Youth and Training, Dr. David Kemp, indicated that employers are looking for graduates who have the capacity for independent and critical thinking. Much research on spoken discourse/interaction has taken place in American and Canadian contexts.

Examples included Li's (2000, 58-87) case study of the way one Chinese immigrant woman learned to make requests in the workplace. Li not only looked at the level of directness in the speech act performance, but also the development of her subject's social identity as she becomes a fully-integrated, English speaking worker. Another study conducted by Duff, Wong and Early (2000, 9-57) focused on the complexities of intercultural communication and language socialization at work with regard to the participation of non-native English speakers in a program combining ESL training and nursing skills. Data came primarily from interviews and not direct observations; however, the researchers were able to note the contrast between the instructional focus of the classroom component of the program and the actual communication requirements of the diverse workplace. The researchers highlighted the fact that for many of the participants in their study, to be a successful communicator at work, required more than learning English, technical and academic discourse (oral and written), and the requisite medical knowledge and skills.

The study also involved the ability to interpret body language, understand colloquial expressions, and the native language of other staff and clients who were also second language speakers. With regard to oral communication training, Kalantzis and Cope (2000) recommended that programs focus on the development of interpersonal and group skills, the ability to present and defend a report orally and in writing and the skills required to write quality e-mails that are not only technically sound but also clear in their attention to form, grammar, and style. These workplace challenges are formidable challenges for all engineering students, but more so to ESL workers who are not only adapting to the micro-culture of the new workplace, but also to the macro-culture of their new environment requiring them to crossover into a different life world. The rapid rise of internet communications, particularly, in the form of e-mail, has brought about an unprecedented rate of communicative exchange between individuals of differing cultures and linguistic backgrounds. With regard to computer-mediated interactions, Warschauer (2001, 207-212) said e-mail communication has many benefits: it provides learners with the opportunity to use the target language in authentic communication, which can result in improved cultural awareness, increased participation, fluency and language proficiency. According to Crosling and Ward (2002, 41-57), oral communication predominates at all levels of workplace activity.

These two researchers found in their surveys of workplace oral communication business, engineering and (IT) practice take place in an intensely oral culture, not necessarily in formal speaking events, but interpersonally in small groups, and on teams almost daily. The researchers also discovered that for the most part, the oral performances that are central in daily practices are conversational and informal. Because vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation can take years to develop, Freeman (2003, 157-167) advised instructors to focus on learning strategists, that will provide students with more immediate results, such as ways to initiate and maintain a conversation. The researcher suggested providing students with weekly takeaway conversational strategies so that they can develop more confidence. Building confidence in their language skills increases the likelihood of them speaking English more often. According to the researcher, students who have particular pronunciation difficulties are advised to find a tutor who can help them on a one-to-one basis. Bayley and Schecter (2003) conducted a study to document both written and oral linguistic behavior in particular workplace contexts due to the large numbers of new immigrants in the workforce who are English language learners.

Through discourse analysis, ethnographic interviews and participant observation, the researchers gained an understanding of how minority workers are positioned in encounters and interactions with their co-workers, supervisors and employers in a workplace setting. Laroche (2003) discussed the particular difficulties foreign trained professional engineers in Canada have communicating technical information in English. Some of these include presenting information at meetings which can captivate an audience, and participating in all-day interviews without undue fatigue if they are applying for jobs in research environments. With regard to e-mail communication, the researcher noted that some of the most common issues pertain to the amount of background and personal information, tone, grammar and spelling. McAll's (2003, 235-250) study revealed that where work is language-centered (as opposed to language-marginal) and heavily involved in establishing communication networks, it tends to be in English. Operating instructions, process sheets and technical terms are all in English, and as such, the dominant language group ultimately exercises control over conception, production and management. In order for ESL engineers to advance into the areas where language use is most prevalent, they are required to have attained not only sufficient skills in their trade, but also a high level of proficiency in English. According to McAll, language competence comes to be a convenient tool for discriminating against other language groups in an apparently legitimate way, since no one can deny the importance of language in order to function in areas of the labor market where language is necessary to the work process.

More importantly, the researcher also asserted that native English speakers are more inclined to maintain the status quo because by providing access to language competence, they increase the competition for jobs, and their own chances of gaining or maintaining access to viable employment. According to Byrnes (2005, 282-302), ESL students required instruction in oral skills, primarily interpersonal communication, which includes computer-mediated correspondence, and professional conversation in order to acquire linguistic and intercultural competence in a workplace setting. For example, a program which includes communicative and thematic or content-based pedagogy is effective in enhancing the learning of communication skills. The curriculum that is based on genre-based pedagogical tasks with the integration of cultural content and language helps learners acquire not only a comfortable competence but also a high level of cultural literacy.

It also helps them engage in, interact with and synthesize information, work through tasks in teams to solve real problems and, once again, engage in interactive communication practices. De Lange, Jackling, and Gut (2006, 365-386) and McDonald (2007, 52-55) suggested that accountancy graduates entering the workplace often begin their careers with inadequate oral communication skills. However, existing studies into the need for communication skills in accountancy display a number of limitations, foremost among which is a general lack of differentiation between oral communication skills and interpersonal and written communication skills. Cheng and Fox (2008, 307-333) investigated the difficulties faced by ESL students and how they adjust to their studies at the university level. These two researchers went on to say that communication challenges can also surface in the workplace for students during internship placements or active employment following graduation. Myles (2009) discussed the challenges that ESL engineering students have in acquiring oral competency, including commuter-mediated communication, while on their full time work placements.

The research described the kinds of oral communication that take place in such an environment, and addressed specific communication and cultural challenges ESL interns can face with regard to participating in meeting and team projects, and engaging in small talk and professional interactions and follows with suggestions for curriculum that addresses both linguistic and cultural functions of communication. The lack of well-grounded empirical data concerning precisely what oral communication skills are sought in accountancy led Gray (2009) to investigate the importance of a range of specific oral communication skills for accountancy graduates in New Zealand, as perceived by chartered accountancy professionals. The initial study involved the production of a questionnaire that was sent to 760 New Zealand Chartered Accountancy (CA) firms, and which identified twenty-seven specific oral communication skills, divided into areas of collegial communication, client communication, communication with management, listening skills, and general audience analysis skills. Respondents were asked to rate the frequency with which new graduates possessed this skill. A number of the individually identified skills explicitly or implicitly addressed the ability to adjust oral communication to a diverse workplace: these skills included explaining or making a topic intelligible to colleagues, explaining concepts to clients and using/adjusting vocabulary to diverse/ specific audiences. Findings from the initial study indicated not only that New Zealand accountancy employers considered oral communication skills in general extremely *important* in new graduates (91 % of respondents considered them either '*essential*' or '*very important*', and 64 % reported '*always*' taking oral communication skills into account as hiring factors), but also that the desired skills were depressingly seldom in evidence.

To summarize, oral communication is as integral to and as powerful in the workplace as it is in the social life of business graduate employees. This applies to ESP Jordanian business graduate employees whose real picture of workplace oral communication skills is lacking. Consequently, this study is an attempt to provide a precise understanding of the nature of workplace oral communication for ESP Jordanian business graduate employees.

### **Significance of the Study**

The ESP Jordanian business graduate employees entering the workplace often begin their careers with inadequate workplace oral as well as written communication skills, particularly in English, which can put added pressure on the kinds of linguistic, cultural and academic support these employees may require in their education and in the workplace. There is also a general agreement that speaking English in the workplace, particularly in large companies in the banking, insurance and manufacturing industry as well as other companies that include service, retail and government has become more, not less, important. However, existing studies generally lack well-grounded empirical data concerning precisely what oral communication skills are sought in the local business workplace. This study attempts to investigate the picture of ESP Jordanian business graduates' oral communication skills in the workplace, in particular, where English has become the language of the internet, commerce, e-commerce and communication among the business parties concerned.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is an attempt to provide a precise understanding of the nature of workplace oral communication, particularly in English for ESP Jordanian business graduate employees as well as the forms that this communication takes in the workplace. In other words, the present study aims at answering the following questions:

1. *How much are workplace oral communication skills used in business graduate employees jobs?*
2. *What is the importance of workplace oral communication for recruitment, job success and promotion?*

3. *What workplace group (s) do business graduate employees communication with orally?*
4. *What form(s) can workplace oral communication with similar status staff take?*
5. *What form (s) can workplace oral communication with supervisors take?*
6. *What form (s) can workplace oral communication in meetings take?*
7. *What form (s) can workplace oral communication in team work take?*

## **Methodology**

### **Study Instrument and Procedure**

The researchers of the present study used a survey questionnaire to establish the nature of workplace communication for ESP Jordanian business graduate employees for Isra University – Amman, Jordan and seek information on the importance and frequency of oral communication in the jobs of these graduates, the people with whom they communicate orally, and the forms that this communication takes in the workplace. The present study questions required ratings on a scale of 1-5 where, on the questionnaire for *frequency* of oral communication and *importance* of particular forms of oral communication, respectively, 1 was the lowest rating, labelled *little use* or *not important at all* (the latter meaning not used very much and having little effect on job achievement), and 5 the highest rating, labelled *lots of use* or *very important*. The final section of the survey questionnaire was open-end in nature and asked for further comments on graduate business employees and oral communication.

The survey questionnaire was distributed in 2010 to employers of Isra University with (Bachelor of Business degrees). The relevant employer companies were derived from Isra University graduate destination survey data and from the list of companies that attend Isra University for careers fairs. Out of a pool of 96 relevant companies, 24 completed the survey. Recruitment coordinators and Human Resource personnel in these companies were sent the survey after initial phone contacts. These staff members were asked to pass the survey questionnaire on to the appropriate people within their organizations.

### **Sample of the Study**

The present study sample consisted of 24 companies: 16 *large companies* of more than 200 employees, five *medium-sized* with less than 200 but more than 50 employees, and three *small*, with less than 50 employees. Of these, eight were *chartered accounting companies*, four were in *the banking or insurance industry*, five were in *the manufacturing industry*, and seven were *other companies* that included *service, retail* and *government*. This is displayed in Tables 1 and 2 in the (Appendixes) that appear at the end of this manuscript.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the surveys of the present study were computer analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Studies (SPSS). Information was coded according to the survey questionnaire and cross tabulations and frequency information were determined.

## **Results**

### **1. Results related to study question number 1:**

*- How much are workplace oral communication skills used in business graduate employees' jobs?*

The percentages of employer respondents and frequency of business graduate employees' use of oral communication in the workplace are shown in Table 3 in the Appendixes. Without specifically identifying forms of oral communication, 84 % of the employer respondents stated that oral communication occurs at the highest levels on a five-point scale, where five is the highest (*constantly* 39 %) and 4 is the next highest (*often*, 45%). The significance of oral communication in the business graduates' jobs is also reflected in the employers' comments in the *open-ended section* of the *survey questionnaire*. The employers state that oral communication skills are:

- *One of the most vital components for business graduate employees' success in the workplace, both in the short and long term. (Service Industry).*
- *Fundamental to the growth, development and success of any business graduate. So often it is oral communication skills that distinguish between a high performer and an average performer. (Service Industry).*

As for business graduate employees' oral communication abilities, one respondent from a chartered according company stated that.

- *Some business graduate employees don't even have basic oral communication skills and confidence in answering phones, talking to clients, etc.*

## 2. Results related to study question number 2:

- *What is the importance of workplace oral communication for recruitment, job success and promotion?*

The survey questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the importance, or impact of oral communication skills *on recruitment, job success and promotion* in their companies. The results can be shown in Table 4 in the Appendixes. These results indicate that oral communication skills are important for all of these aspects: *recruitment, jobs success and promotion*. Considered in relation to the highest rating on the five-point scale (*very important*), oral communication is more important for *recruitment* than for *job success* and *promotion*, but considered in relation to the highest two levels on the scale (*very important and important*), oral communication is marginally more important for *job success* and *promotion* than for *recruitment*. As shown in Table 4 (95 %) of employer respondents perceived oral communication as *very important* and *important* for *promotion* (61 %) and for *job success* (34%), while the figure for *recruitment* was (85 %).

## 3. Results related to study question number 3:

- *What workplace group (s) do business graduate employees communicate with orally?*

In order to determine the workplace parties with whom business graduate employees communicate orally, the study survey questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the frequency of oral communication with various workplace groups across *status, department and company lines*. The results are displayed in Table 5 in the Appendixes. The results overall in Table 5 indicate a pattern, wherein the study business graduate employees' oral communication occurs principally *with their own department of the company*, followed by *communication with personnel in other departments*, and then *with those outside their companies*. *Within their department*, (80 %) of the survey questionnaire respondents rated oral communication as occurring *frequently* and *often* (10%) rated it as *sometimes* followed by (10 %) rated it as occurring *occasionally*, while (66 %) rated it as *frequent* and *often with personnel in other departments*, 20% rated it as occurring *sometimes* and (14%) as occurring *occasionally* followed by (62 %) rated it as *frequent* and *often* for those of *similar, higher and lower status in other companies*, (23 %) rated it as occurring *sometimes* and (15 %) as *occasionally*. *Within their own department*, most oral communication is with *staff of similar status* followed closely by communication with *supervisors* and then with *lesser status staff*. Once again, business graduate employees' oral communication with *less status* and *with similar status staff in the same department* and *with their supervisors* was rated as *constant* and *often* by (80 %) of employer respondents.

## 4. Results related to study question number 4

- *What form (s) can workplace oral communication with similar status staff take?*

These forms of oral communication are displayed in Table 6 in the Appendixes. As displayed in this Table oral communication can take many forms, ranging from spontaneous *informal conversation* for which the content cannot be planned, to *participation in meetings*, which usually occurs with a set agenda. The present study survey questionnaire respondents selected from a range of alternatives that included *informal work – rated discussions, following instructions and responding orally; networking* which is developing contacts for advice and information; *persuading; giving feedback, negotiating with clients and employees; giving oral presentation; chairing/ leading discussions* and so on. The most frequently occurring form of oral communication for *similar status staff*, in the same company department was *informal work-related discussions*, rated *constantly* and *often* by (83%) of the employer respondents. The second most frequently- used form of oral communication was *following instructions*, rated *constantly* and *often* by (66 %) of respondents. The third most frequent oral communication form was *informal social conversation*; (54 %) of employers rated it as occurring *constantly* and *often*. *Networking for advice and information* was rated as used *constantly* and *often* by (47%), of the respondents. *Instructing, explaining and demonstrating* received much lower ratings: used *often* by (41 %) of the respondents. *Persuading colleagues* was rated (37 %) as used *constantly* and *often* and *giving feedback to colleagues* was rated as used *constantly* and *often* by (25%).

### 5. Results related to study question number 5:

- What form (s) can workplace oral communication with supervisors take?

The present study survey questionnaire respondents were asked to consider the degree of their business graduate employees' oral communication with their supervisors in terms of *promoting employees own strengths and weaknesses, presenting new ideas alternative/ strategies; informal conversation; informal work – related discussions and meetings; following instructions and responding orally and building relations*. The results are shown in Table 7 in the Appendixes. These results reflect the supervisor's role as a guide for newer business employees as they adjust to their jobs. *Following instructions* and *responding orally* was seen as the most frequently used form of oral communication by the largest percentage of respondents (66 % ranked it as *constantly* and *often*). The second most frequently used form of oral communication was *informal work- related discussions* (65 %), followed by *building relationships* which was rated by (62%) of the respondents as being used *constantly* and *often*. The next most common oral communication form was *informal conversation* (49 %) and then communication that involved *promoting the employees' own strengths and weaknesses* (40 %) and the least – used oral communication form was *negotiating conditions* (39 %) rated it as (*constantly* and *often*).

### 6. Results related to study question number 6:

- What form (s) can workplace oral communication in meeting take?

The survey questionnaire respondents were asked to consider the importance of the participation of business graduate employees in meeting in terms of *oral presentation; taking part in discussion; chairing/ leading discussions and persuading*. The results are shown in Table 8 in the Appendixes. As seen in this Table *participation in meetings* on the part of business graduate employees was ranked at (79 %) for *constantly* and *often*, while *giving formal presentations* was supported as being used *constantly* and *often* by (49 %) of the respondents. *Persuading in meetings* and *chairing/ leading discussions* were both seen by (47 %) of the respondents as being used *constantly* and *often*.

### 7. Results related to study question number 7:

- What form (s) can workplace oral communication in team work take?

The range of oral communication forms for team work in the present study survey questionnaire covered *building relations; informal conversation; conflict resolution; negotiating and leading/ persuading*. Table 9 that appears in the Appendixes displays the forms of oral communication most often by business graduates used in team work. The largest percentage of the employer respondents indicated that the most used type of oral communication in team work was that of *building relations with fellow team members*, (70 %) rating it as used *constantly* and *often*. *Informal conversation with team members* was rated as used *constantly* and *often* by (66%) of the respondents; while *negotiating with team members* was rated by (45 %) as used *constantly* and *often*. *Leading and persuading team members* was next in terms of use at (42 %) and the final form of oral communication was *conflict resolution*, (38 %) of respondents rating it as *constantly* and *often*. The oral communication involved in team work, therefore, operates to consolidate collaborative activity, and foster good relations between team members.

### Discussion

The picture of workplace oral communication for business graduate employees that emerges from the data is that oral communication skills are *important* and *frequent*. That is oral communication skills take on a higher workplace focus. As shown in Table 3 (in the Appendixes), (84 %) of the employer respondents stated that workplace oral communication occurs at the highest levels on a five-point scale, where five is the highest (*constantly* 39 %) and four is the next highest (*often*, 45 %). The significance of oral communication in the business graduate employees job is also reflected in the employer respondents' comments in the open-ended section of the present study survey questionnaire. Surveyed company employers considered workplace oral communication skills in general either *essential* or *very important*. They reported that they always take oral communication skills into account as hiring factors. (Carnavale, Gainer & Meltzer, 1990; Mellinger, 1992; Van Horn, 1995; ACNeilson, 1998; Crosling & Ward, 1999 & Gray, 2009) support this study result. Table 4 (in the Appendixes) displays the three workplace areas investigated for sensitivity to oral communication skills, i.e., *recruitment, job success* and *promotion*. The present study survey questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the impact of oral communication skills on these three workplace aspects in their companies.

Again, the results displayed in Table 4 indicate that oral communication skills are important for all of these workplace aspects. However, there are slight differences between the perceived importance of *recruitment*, *job success* and *promotion*. Considered in relation to the highest rating on the 5-point scale (*very important*), workplace oral communication is more important for *recruitment* than for *job success* and *promotion* but considered in relation to the highest two levels on the scale (*very important* and *important*), oral communication is marginally more important for *job success* than for *recruitment*. This interesting study finding is consistent with the that of Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) (ACNelisons', 1998) survey, wherein employees indicated that most weight in *recruitment* is placed on academic achievement (because it is seen as indicative of the capacity to learn), intellectual capacity and motivation which are difficult to assess through other means. Overall though, the differences are small.

As shown in Table 5, (in the Appendixes) most business graduate employees' oral communication occurs *within their own company department*, with *personnel in other departments and with similar status staff outside employees' companies*. Within their own company department, (80%) of the present study survey questionnaire respondents rated oral communication as occurring *frequently and often*, (10 %) rated it as *sometimes* followed by 10 % ranked it as occurring *occasionally*, while (66 %) rated it as *frequent and often with personnel in other departments*, (20 %) rated it as occurring *sometimes* and (14 %) rated it as *occasionally*, followed by (62 %) rate it as *frequent and often* for those of *similar, higher and lower status* in other companies, (23 %) rated it as occurring *sometimes* and (15 %) as *occasionally*. This interesting study finding brings us to the conclusion that the business graduate employees in the companies surveyed do communicate with a range of personnel at all levels of workplace activity, i.e., *personnel of similar, higher and lower status*, in line with the view expressed in the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) (ACNeilson, 1998) study into employer satisfaction with business graduate employees' skills. This is also confirmed by (Halliday, 1994; Crosling & Ward, 2002 & Gray, 2009). However, the present study business graduate employees' oral communication, as indicated in Table 5, seems to be largely centred on their *home department*.

In the researchers' view, the predominance of oral communication with *personnel of similar status and supervisors within the same company department* would be expected of new employees who are likely to be learning the processes for their jobs. Table 6 (in the Appendixes) shows that the most often used forms of oral communication are *informal work-related discussion, following instructions and informal social conversation*. This study result is confirmed by (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Crosling & Ward, 2002) who discovered that for the most part, the oral performances that are central in daily workplace practices are *conversational and informal*. Table 7, (in the Appendixes) reflects the workplace supervisor's invaluable role as a guide for newer workplace business graduate employees as they adjust to their workplace jobs. The most frequently used forms of workplace oral communication were *following instructions and responding orally, informal work-related discussions, building relationships, informal social conversation, presenting new ideas, promoting the employees' own strengths and weaknesses, and negotiating conditions*. It seems that in business graduate employees and supervisors' relationships, there is a strong training or initiation focus as, presumably, the present study business graduate employees are mastering suitable workplace oral communication practices under their workplace supervisors' guidance.

This interesting study finding could be, according to Koutsoukis (2000), seen at odds with a recent survey of Australian employers released by the Minister for Education, Youth and Training, Dr. David Kemp. The survey indicated that company employers usually look for business graduate employees who have the capacity for "*independent and critical thinking*". This approach could intervene in a supervisor – workplace business graduate employee relationship that emphasizes the following of instructions and the learning of particular workplace oral communication practices. As shown in Table 8 (in the Appendixes), *participation in discussions/conversations during meetings*, which is perceived as important for *job success*, was the most frequently used form of oral communication and it was ranked at (79 %) for *constantly and often*. This study result shows that *discussions/conversations during meetings* form the backbone of organizational work and that they are essential to a network of office relationships, i.e., through *discussions/conversations during meetings*, relationships between business graduate employees are established and shared meanings are developed. This justification receives support from Bargiela- Chiappin & Harris, 1997; Woodilla, 1998 & Myles, 2009). Once again, Table 8, (in the Appendixes) shows that the present study business graduate employees' *formal presentation* in the workplace environment /setting was ranked at (49 %) for *constantly and often*.

This study result indicates that *formal presentation* is to be included in the university business/ commerce curriculum because although it does not feature prominently in business graduate employees' workplace oral communication, business graduates may be required to *present formally* at times. The significance of formal presentation receives support from Crosling & Ward, 1999). The present study survey questionnaire respondents claimed that *formal presentation* on the part of business graduate employees is seen as vital, but, interestingly, is an area for which they lack adequate preparation. This may be because there is a contrast between the instructional focus of the classroom component of university business/ commerce program and the actual and diverse workplace oral communication requirement. (Duff, Wong & Early, 2000) give support to this interesting piece of information.

With regard to *formal presentation training*, Kalantzis and Cope (2000) recommended that university business/ commerce programs focus on the ability to present and defend a report orally and in writing. This workplace challenge is a formidable challenge for all ESP Jordanian workers who are not only adapting to the micro-culture of the new workplace environment, but also to the macro-culture of their new environment which requires them to crossover into a different lifeworld. In order for ESP Jordanian business graduate employees to function in areas of the labor market where the English language use is most prevalent, they are required to have attained a high level of proficiency in it. This, of course, provides them with the opportunity to use English in authentic workplace communication which can result in increased participation, fluency and language proficiency. These justifications receive support from Warschauer, 2001 & McAll, 2003). It is worth mentioning that persuading in meetings and chairing and leading discussions were both seen by (47%) of the study survey questionnaire respondents as being used *constantly* and *often*.

Table 9 (in the Appendixes) shows that the present study business graduate employees' participation in team work was also seen as important for job success, and the most often used forms of oral communication were *building relations with fellow team members* (41 % *constantly* and 29 % *often*), *informal conversations with fellow team members* (28 % *constantly* and 38 % *often*) and *negotiating with fellow team members* (21 % *constantly* and 24 % *often*). This study result shows that team work is a forum for communication and it serves as a tool for achieving flexibility and adaptability, enabling a workplace environment to remain competitive. That is, a degree of rapport between the parties engaged in the communication and perhaps, trust exists among the present study workplace business graduate employees and their employers via team work, which is a significant feature of the present study companies surveyed. Carnavale, Gainer & Meltzer, 1990; Bargiela – Chiappini & Harris, 1997; ACNeilson, 1998; Crosling & Ward, 2002; Laroche, 2003, & Myles, 2009 confirm this study result.

The present study findings raise several issues in relation to undergraduate preparation for workplace oral communication of which the most striking is that oral communication is essential for a successful professional career. It should, therefore, be a top priority in university business/commerce education. Carnavale, Gainer and Meltzer, 1990 support this study finding. The present study researchers quote them as saying "*workplace oral communication skills are required in the workplace environment to navigate the complex social waters of the organization*". The present study researchers believe that while school ought to provide its students with the generic skill of being able to speak with confidence, more pieces of research are needed to determine the optimal balance between the responsibility of the university and that of the employer company. In the present study researchers' views, university business / commerce curriculum should focus on extending the generic oral communication skills acquired at school to workplace oral communication skills such as those required for *group presentation and discussion, individual presentation, an ability to approach an issue critically and to hold one's ground in discussions, an ability to be assertive when presenting one's views, and the ability to work successfully in groups or teams*, optimally of a cross-gender, cross- cultural and multi-disciplinary nature in the completion of projects.

The role of the employer companies in the present study researchers' view would be to adapt these acquired oral communication skills to a more job focussed workplace environment. The present study researchers do believe that through exchanges of meanings in the oral communication process, business graduate employees' social reality is created, maintained and modified. This interesting idea is in line with that of (Halliday's, 1994). What is more, the present study business graduate employees' only opportunity for conversing in English is in the workplace environment. Once again, this does form the backbone of organizational work atmosphere. This is confirmed by (Woodilla, 1998).

In the present study researchers' views, ESP Jordanian business graduate employees require instruction in interpersonal communication, primarily internet communications, computer-mediated correspondence/interactions, e-mail communication, and professional conversations in order to acquire linguistic and intercultural comfortable competence in the diverse workplace settings. With the increasing use of technology, issues of quality, innovation and competitiveness, oral communication skills take on a higher workplace focus.

This is confirmed by (Byrnes, 2005). What is more, the present study survey questionnaire respondents indicated that ESP Jordanian business graduate employees entering the workplace often begin their careers with inadequate oral communication skills. The present study displays a number of limitations with regard to workplace oral communication skills, among which is a general lack of differentiation between oral communication skills and interpersonal and written communication skills. Communication challenges as well as computer-mediated communication also surface in the workplace settings for ESP Jordanian business graduate employees while on their full time workplace placements. Existing studies conducted by (De Lenage, Jackling and Gut 2006, McDonald, 2007 and Myles, 2009) confirm this study result. The present study survey questionnaire respondents also identified a number of workplace oral communication skills they seek in ESP Jordanian business graduate employees: "explaining or making a topic intelligible to colleagues", "explaining concepts to clients" and "using/adjusting vocabulary/oral communication to diverse/ specific audiences/ workplace settings.

These sought workplace oral communication skills are in line with those of (Gray's, 2009) study. The study survey questionnaire respondents also claimed that oral communication is vital, but, interestingly, is an area for which business graduates lack university business/commerce preparation. This explanation receives support from (Van Horn, 1995). The study survey respondents revealed that ESP Jordanian business graduate employees are required to have attained a high level of proficiency in English because language competence comes to be a convenient tool to function in the diverse workplace settings. The university business/commerce curriculum that is based on cultural content and language competence helps ESP Jordanian business graduate employees engage in , interact with and synthesize information, work through tasks in teams to solve real problems and, once again, engage in interactive communicative practices. This justification is consistent with that of McAll's (2003) study.

### **Conclusion**

In the present study, the researchers have provided invaluable data on the workplace oral communication skills of ESP Jordanian business graduate employees in an area where there appears to be little detailed information available. There is room for further pieces of research. Examples of further issues that could be investigated include a more comprehensive study of university and workplace responsibilities for oral communication development, the effect of status on the informal communication between a workplace supervisor and a business employee, for example, including issues of linguistic politeness, as well as differences that such informal communication takes across different industry sectors. What is more, the present study researchers do believe that ESP Jordanian business graduate employees need additional help in business etiquette, i.e., in the formal rules of proper behavior. Considerably more research is needed in this particular business area. University with Business/Commerce Faculties should regularly assess the satisfaction level of workplace employers with their business graduates' workplace oral communication skills through, for example, having a dialogue with them to ensure that their students are competent communicators. With regard to oral communication training, the present study researchers recommend that university business/commerce programs focus on the development of interpersonal and group skills, the ability to present and defend a report orally and in writing as well as the skills required to write quality e-mails that are not only technically sound but also clear in their attention to form, grammar and style.

E-mail communication training provides business graduate employees with ample opportunity to use the target language, i.e., English, in authentic communication, which can result in improved cultural awareness, increased participation, fluency and language proficiency. Work in the diverse workplace settings is language-centered rather than language-marginal and it is heavily involved in establishing communication networks. That is why it tends to be a convenient communication tool that enables business graduate employees, in particular, to function well in the diverse areas of the labor market or workplace settings. The researchers of the present study suggest providing business students at universities with business/ commerce programs with weekly takeaway conversational strategies so that they can develop / build confidence in their language skills. This, of course, increases the likelihood of them speaking English more often.

In the present study researchers' view, the university business / commerce curriculum that is based on the integration of cultural contexts and language helps business graduate employees acquire a comfortable language competence as well as a high level of cultural literacy. These business graduate employees are expected to join diverse workplaces with personnel of different ages, genders and national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This makes a considerable demand upon responsible bodies at universities to enable their business graduates to look beyond their cultural lens.

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**Table 1: The Distribution of the Participating Companies by Size and Number**

Company Size	Number
Large (of more than 200 employees)	16
Medium – sized (with less than 200 but more than 50 employees)	5
Small (with less than 50 employees)	3
Total	24

**Table 2: The Distribution of the Participating Companies by Type and Number**

Company Type	Number
Chartered Accounting	8
Banking or Insurance Industry	4
Manufacturing Industry	5
Service, Retail and Government	7
Total	24

**Table 3: Percentage of Employer Respondents and Frequency of Business Graduate Employees' Use of Oral Communication in the Workplace**

Frequency of Use	Percentage of Employer Respondents
Seldom	
Occasionally	
Sometimes	16 %
Often	45 %
Constantly	39 %
Total	100 %

**Table 4: Percentages and Degrees of the Importance of Oral Communication for: Recruitment, Job Success and Promotion**

Workplace Aspect	Degree of Importance					Total
	Quite Important	Important	Very Important	Little Important	Not Important	
Recruitment	15 %	41 %	44 %	—	—	100 %
Job Success	5 %	61%	34 %	—	—	100 %
Promotion	5 %	60 %	35 %	—	—	100 %

**Table 5: Frequency of Oral Communication Occurrence Within and Outside Company Departments**

Occurrence of Oral Communication	Frequency of Oral Communication			
	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Constantly
Within Own Dept. of the Company	10 %	10 %	38 %	42 %
With Personnel in Other Departments	14 %	20 %	30 %	36 %
With Similar Status Staff Outside Companies	15 %	23 %	28 %	34%

**Table 6: Frequency of Use of Oral Communication Forms for Similar Status Staff in the Same Company Department**

Form of Oral communication	Frequency of Use				
	Seldom	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Constantly
- Informal work-related discussions	—	—	17 %	40 %	43 %
- Following Instructions	—	15 %	19 %	44 %	22 %
- Persuading Colleagues	16 %	17 %	30 %	19 %	18 %
- Networking	8 %	8 %	37 %	42 %	5 %
- Giving Feedback	23 %	20 %	32 %	15 %	10 %
- Instructing, explaining and demonstrating	9 %	15 %	30 %	41 %	5 %
- Informal, Social Conversation	13 %	14 %	19 %	34 %	20 %

**Table 7: Frequency of Forms of Oral Communication with Business Graduate Employees' Supervisors**

Form of Oral communication	Frequency of Use				
	Seldom	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Constantly
- Negotiating Conditions	18 %	22 %	23 %	22 %	15 %
- Promoting, employees' own Strengths and Weaknesses	13 %	29 %	18 %	19 %	21 %
- Presenting New Ideas / Alternative Strategies	12 %	28 %	19 %	21 %	20 %
- Informal Social Conversations	6 %	28 %	17 %	18 %	31 %
- Informal Work-related Discussions and Meetings	5 %	12 %	18 %	33 %	32 %
- Following Instructions and Responding Orally	5 %	9 %	20 %	34 %	32 %
- Building Relations with Colleagues	8 %	14 %	16 %	28 %	34 %

**Table 8: Frequency of Forms of Oral Communication Used in Meetings**

Form of Oral Communication	Frequency of Use				
	Seldom	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Constantly
- Formal Presentation	14 %	17 %	20 %	23 %	26 %
- Participation in Discussions/ Conversations During Meetings	5 %	8%	8 %	37 %	42 %
- Chairing / Leading Discussions	14 %	19 %	20 %	24 %	23 %
- Persuading in Discussions	15 %	18 %	20 %	29 %	18%

**Table 9: Frequency of Forms of Oral Communication Used in Team Work**

Form of Oral Communication	Frequency of Use				
	Seldom	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Constantly
- Building Relations with Fellow Team Members	6 %	4 %	20 %	29 %	41 %
- Informal Conversation with Team Members	—	14 %	20 %	38 %	28 %
- Negotiating with Team Members	18 %	17 %	20 %	24 %	21 %
- Leading / Persuading Team Members	20 %	18 %	20 %	25 %	17 %
- Conflict Resolution	18 %	25 %	21 %	21 %	17 %