

A qualitative approach to examining early career employability skills from the perspective of Taiwanese
business programme graduates

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Doctor of Education by Jean-Sebastien Goyette

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Abstract

A qualitative approach to examining early career employability skills from the perspective of Taiwanese business programme graduates

Jean-Sebastien Goyette

This thesis researches the perspectives of recent graduates from the International Trade Institute (ITI), a Taiwanese government-sponsored higher education institution offering a business and foreign language programme, on the importance of employability skills as part of their efforts to obtain employment, transition into their new roles, as well as advance professionally in the early stages of their careers. Based on a series of fifteen qualitative interviews following the Jackson & Chapman Graduate Employability Framework, findings from this thesis provide insights into two underdeveloped perspectives on employability skills: Taiwanese stakeholders and recent graduates. A constructivist-interpretive approach was adopted in order to better understand the viewpoints of each interviewee and answer the research questions. Findings show the importance of the development of employability skills through English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, particularly those of a social nature. EFL classes are perceived as being able to go beyond their original focus on language skills, with higher level classes such as English for Meetings and English for Negotiations contributing the most to developing employability skills. The potential exists for institutions offering foreign language classes or standard classes in a foreign language to increase their awareness of secondary learning coming from these classes, as well as take an active role in updating their curriculum in order to better prepare their graduates for today's marketplace.

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.

Signature: Jean-Sebastien Goyette

Date: September 24, 2017

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research objectives

The objectives of this thesis are to identify the employability skills necessary, as perceived by recent graduates of the International Business Administration Programme (IBAP), offered at the International Trade Institute (ITI), in Hsinchu City, Taiwan, in order for them to obtain employment, transition into professional roles, and advance in the early stages of their careers. It is hoped that providing findings based on the perspective from this group will add information to this particular context, such as the Mandarin Chinese language and culture, to the existing body of knowledge related to more extensively studied, and English-speaking, countries such as the UK, the USA, and Australia, as well as contribute to better understanding the viewpoints of students and recent graduates and adding them to the existing data on higher education institutions (HEIs), employers, faculty members, as well as curriculum developers. An additional goal of this thesis is to offer recommendations that can be applied immediately at ITI, and potentially in similar institutions in Taiwan and other members of Greater China (e.g. Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao), as well as any HEI sharing similar challenges and opportunities related to business and language training.

1.2 Taiwanese education system

1.2.1 Structure of Taiwanese education system

The Taiwanese education system offers programmes ranging from kindergarten to doctoral studies, shown below in Table 1.1.

	Option 1 Senior high school	Option 2 Vocational school			Option 3 Junior college		
Kindergarten (0-6 years old)	Voluntary enrolment						
Primary school (6-12 years old)	Compulsory enrolment (6 years)						
Junior high school (12-15 years old)	Compulsory enrolment (3 years)						
High school (15-18 years old)	Option 1 Senior high school (3 years)	Option 2 Vocational school (3 years)			Option 3 Junior college (5 years)		
Undergraduate level *	University or college (4 years)	University or college (4 years)	Junior college (2 years) Work exp. (3+ years)	Institute of technology (2 years)	Institute of technology (4 years)	Institute of technology (2 years)	Work experience (3+ years)
Master's level	Master's degree graduate programme (1-4 years)						
Doctoral level	Doctoral degree graduate programme (2-7 years)						

*Although it is more likely that students will follow paths in a linear way (e.g. Option 1 to university or college), it is not a requirement and not uncommon for different routes to be taken.

Table 1.1 Summary of Taiwanese education system (MOEA, 2011)

Following voluntary enrolment in kindergarten, Taiwanese education institutions offer twelve years of compulsory education starting with six years in primary school and three years in junior high school. Following this point, three options are available to students for the high school and undergraduate studies period. After this, all options lead to the possibility of applying to enter master's, and then doctoral, studies programmes, all of which last between one to four years for the former, and two to seven years for the latter.

Due to the context of this research, it's important to add that EFL courses are included in primary school, junior high school, high school, vocational school, and junior college curricula. In the tertiary level, EFL classes are available but are usually not compulsory unless specifically included in the programme or institutional curricula.

Option 1: Senior high school

Students who enter senior high school complete a three-year programme, at the end of which they can apply for a four-year university or college programme. Following the completion of an undergraduate degree, students can apply to enter a master's degree programme, and then a doctorate programme.

Option 2: Vocational school

In this option, students complete a three-year vocational programme, at the end of which they can enter university or college to complete a four-year programme. As with option 1, students also be able to apply to enter master's and doctoral programmes following graduation from university.

Another option available to vocational school graduates is to enter a four-year programme in an institute of technology. Following graduation, they will be able to apply to enter a master's programme and then a doctoral programme.

Finally, vocational school graduates can enter a two-year junior college programme. Those who then complete a two-year programme in an institute of technology will be eligible to apply to enter a master's programme, and then a doctoral programme. Another option to enter master's, and then doctoral, programmes is to accumulate at least three years of professional experience.

Option 3: Junior college

Junior high school graduates can complete a five-year junior college programme. Following this, they can complete a two-year programme at an institute of technology, which will permit them to apply for a

master's programme, and subsequently a doctoral programme. Another option to apply for these programmes is to accumulate at least three years of professional working experience, which will give them the opportunity to apply to enter a master's programme, and then a doctoral programme.

1.2.2 Programme choice and employment opportunities

Senior high school programmes are more often associated with the university path, and senior vocational school programmes are more often associated with the professional training programme path. However, these are not mutually exclusive, meaning that students from either programme can continue in both directions (National Statistics, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2017). In 2011, approximately 35% of vocational high school students majored in industry and about 34% majored in commerce, showing a strong connection between these types of institutions and business-related majors.

The number of students entering tertiary programmes has been increasing steadily over the past decades, which can be seen in the steady increase in the university enrolment rate from 1976 (approximately 10%) to 2011 (approximately 68%) (MOE, 2011). As stated above, following graduation from university or a professional training programme, Taiwanese students have the option to enter higher education programmes, such as a master's degree or post-graduate training programme, of which ITI is an example of the latter. Although ITI isn't part of the Taiwanese Ministry of Education (MOE), it possesses similar entry requirements as other post-graduate degrees (National Statistics, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2017).

In addition, the overall economic context related to interviewees could be qualified as a positive one. At the time of the interviews, the Taiwan youth unemployment rate was slightly below 4% (National Statistics, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2017). In addition, none of the interviewees from this research project stated having had difficulty finding employment after graduating from ITI. However, some did share disappointment with not being able to work abroad right away. Indeed, I conducted an analysis of the first position obtained by ITI graduates between 2008 and 2013, and found that more than 90% had been with companies in Taiwan, and that what qualified as foreign assignments often referred to Mainland China.

An increasingly globalised marketplace and with it the need for companies to compete in an international setting may have played a role in the rise in the number of business programmes at multiple levels in Taiwan, many of which include a strong emphasis on foreign languages, such as English

as a Foreign Language (EFL), as an additional element, or even as a primary language of instruction. Examples of Taiwanese programmes offered with a strong or total EFL component (Ministry of Education, R.O.C., 2014) include doctoral degrees (e.g. Department of Business Administration PhD, from the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, in Taipei City), master's degrees (e.g. IMBA from National Tsing Hua University, in Hsinchu City), undergraduate degrees (e.g. Bachelor of Business Administration from Providence University, in Taichung City), as well as professional and vocational programmes, such as ITI's IBAP.

The changes in Higher Education provision in Taiwan therefore are seen as needed in order to reflect market demand. Table 1.2 below provides an overview of the Taiwanese industries with up to 50% of employees finding employment in *Manufacturing & Wholesale and Retail Trade* as the leaders.

Industry	Number of employed people (in thousands)	Percentage
Manufacturing	3,019	27%
Wholesale and Retail Trade	1,835	16%
Construction	893	8%
Accommodation and Food Service Activities	806	7.2%
Education	647	5.8%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Animal Husbandry	554	5%
Human Health and Social Work Activities	436	3.9%
Transportation and Storage	436	3.9%
Financial and Insurance Activities	420	3.8%
Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security	376	3.4%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Activities	361	3.2%
Support Service Activities	279	2.5%
Information and Communication	245	2.2%
Real Estate Activities	100	0.9%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	97	0.9%

Table 1.2: Number of employees in Taiwanese industries (National Statistics, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2017)

These proportions are a good representation of the cohort studied in this thesis, as can be seen in Table 1.3, which shows companies having recruited the highest number of ITI graduates between 2008 and 2013, all are Taiwanese except one.

Company	Industry	Location of headquarters	Number of ITI graduates recruited
THC	Plastic products manufacturing	Taiwan	25
ASUS	Computer hardware manufacturing	Taiwan	21
MSI	Computer hardware manufacturing	Taiwan	21
Quanta Computers	Computer hardware manufacturing	Taiwan	19
Keding	Wood panels manufacturing	Taiwan	13
AVTECH	Communication electronics manufacturing	Taiwan	9
Foxconn	Electronic components manufacturing	Taiwan	8
Asahi Glass Co.	Glass components manufacturing	Japan	6
Ase Global	Semiconductor manufacturing	Taiwan	6
CyberTAN	Home networking equipment manufacturing	Taiwan	6

Table 1.3: Companies having recruited most ITI graduates between 2008 and 2013

For this thesis, I conducted an analysis of 605 surveys filled out by ITI alumni having graduated between 2008 and 2013 and found some data that are worth considering in order to better understand the experience of ITI graduates. First of all, these graduates found employment in 336 companies, of which 173 were multinationals. However, only 39 employers were non-Taiwanese companies. In addition, over 95% of graduates' first positions were in Taiwan.

In line with international trends, and to ensure students are prepared for the challenges of competing internationally, EFL provision has grown significantly across much of the world. Taiwan is no exception, with graduates predominantly entering international companies (see Table 1.3), although these are generally international companies with their headquarters in Taiwan, and with fewer graduates going abroad for work.

1.3 Employability in the Mandarin Chinese language context

The inclusion of employability as a measure of success in higher education programmes such as business studies is increasingly recognized in countries such as the UK (Wilton, 2011) and Australia (Kinash *et al.*, 2016), but less in Taiwan (Wang & Tsai, 2014), which has contributed in part to concerned institutions relying on data, conclusions, and policies taken from Western, and often English-speaking, contexts. In addition, much of the focus of these research projects has been on traditional influencers such as HEIs' faculty and administrative members, outside employers and their administrators, as well as government agencies, while seemingly putting little emphasis on the individuals most affected by academic policies, such as students and recent graduates.

The potential exists to better understand these less explored perspectives. First of all, a key motivator for individuals to enter higher education is to improve their employability (Storen & Aamodt, 2010) and career progression. However, a graduating student may discover a contrast between the more academic content offered in business curricula and the more practical workplace requirements, resulting in additional challenges in seeking and obtaining employment, transitioning into a position, and advancing professionally. Finally, as competition for students and funding is increasing all over the world (Vaaland, 2016), HEIs need to not only show the quality of their programmes and curricula, but also demonstrate their effectiveness and potential benefits, both immediate and long-term, these can offer students, employers, and society in general. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a better understanding of employability skills necessary for those entering the business world, determine if these are provided, or not, within HEI business programmes in Taiwan, as well as explore how to better integrate them into existing curricula, update their content, as well as create new programmes better adapted to contemporary demands.

One area that stands out, as discussed above, is the increasing importance of EFL as an academic discipline or as part of other programmes. In this context, the role of EFL in preparing students for employment could be a useful one to investigate. EFL classes and English-language programmes offered in non-English speaking countries are growing in popularity as means to gain access to employment with global companies, as well as with those seeking to improve general English skills, pass a standardized test (e.g. TOEIC, TOEFL), or complete a higher education degree, and include offerings ranging from basic conversations skills to more specialized ones such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Yeh, 2014). While these programmes may successfully reach the goals of improving language skills for school or the workplace, this thesis shows that an amount of

secondary learning, intentional or not, can also result from EFL classes, such as improved analytical skills gained from learning to identify the main message in a piece of writing, as well as relationship-building abilities developed through engaging in role-playing activities and group assignments. However, these skills are not necessarily acknowledged or properly developed, and therefore are often not set as learning goals for programmes.

1.4 Curriculum updates in higher education institutions

Some HEIs are responding to the need to better prepare graduates for workplace requirements by including employability skills development as well as career management skills (Jackson *et al.*, 2013). However, in many cases, such as in Taiwan (Yu *et al.*, 2008), employer satisfaction towards certain skills, such as foreign language ability and teamwork, has been overshadowed by a greater concern about the range of key skills that they see as not fully developed in recent graduates. Although the scope of this thesis is limited mainly to the experiences of recent graduates, it is crucial to bear in mind the importance skills acquisition and workplace preparedness may have on countries, like Taiwan, that rely heavily on international trade, with goals ranging from developing a more competent workforce, reducing unemployment, improving overseas trade, as well as developing local or national economies. However, uneven effectiveness of implemented policies may result in recent graduates not necessarily possessing the skills and knowledge best suited for current economic conditions, and therefore with companies not having access to the types of skilled employers need (Zhu *et al.*, 2011).

1.5 Research context

Research for this thesis was conducted within the context of the International Trade Institute (ITI), a government-sponsored higher education institution in Hsinchu City, Taiwan (Republic of China), offering a post-graduate business programme, the International Business Administration Programme (IBAP), on (at the time of the research) three campuses in Taiwan, in its role as the training branch of the Taiwan External Development Council (TAITRA), a semi-private non-profit organization associated with the Taiwanese Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA).

TAITRA's goals (TAITRA, 2015) are:

- *to assist Taiwan businesses and manufacturers in developing the international market*
- *to provide business alliance consultation and connect international firms with Taiwan partners*
- *to collaborate closely with the Taiwan government to promote international trade*

ITI helps TAITRA reach its goals by offering business and language training in order provide Taiwanese companies with highly qualified sales and marketing professionals who will help them develop their business internationally. Therefore, the need for ITI graduates to possess not only business and language skills, but also employability skills that can be implemented in the workplace made ITI an ideal institution in which to conduct this type of study, as well as to offer recommendations based on its findings.

1.6 International Business Administration Programme (IBAP)

At the time of this research project, ITI's International Business Administration Programme (IBAP) was offered on both its Kuang-Fu and Dong-Shan campuses in Hsinchu City to over three hundred students, and was taught by a faculty of approximately thirty full-time English and Japanese instructors, as well as eighty language or business instructors contracted for one or several terms. Since it did not offer the IBAP, ITI's Taipei City campus was not included in this research.

ITI's goals are (International Trade Institute, 2015):

- *to train university graduates in international trade and languages*
- *to create alliances with industries*
- *to provide career placement opportunities to students*
- *to provide corporate ongoing training*
- *to create, maintain and expand its alumni network*

To reach these goals, a variety of sub-programmes are offered, as shown below in Table 1.4:

Class	Number of students	Campus(es)	Length	Academic Focus
Class A	120	Kuang-Fu Dong-Shan	2 years (3-month internship in the USA or Ireland)	EFL courses (Approximately 50% of study hours) Trade courses in Mandarin Chinese (Approximately 50% of study hours)
Class B	48	Kuang-Fu	2 years (2-month internship in Japan)	Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) courses (Approximately 50% of study hours) Trade courses in Mandarin Chinese (Approximately 50% of study hours) Four English classes in the 2nd year (average of four hours per week)
Class C	48	Kuang-Fu	1 year	EFL courses (Approximately 25% of study hours) Trade courses in Mandarin Chinese (Approximately 75% of study hours) *option to learn 3rd language overseas offered to a limited number of students: Korean (South Korea), Arabic (Jordan), Portuguese (Portugal), Spanish (Spain), French (France), German (Germany), Russian (Russia) Option to pursue studies for second year to obtain a Global Master's of Business Administration (GMBA) degree at Jiao-Tong University, in Hsinchu City, offered to a limited number of students
Class D	60	Dong-Shan	1 year	EFL courses (Approximately 60% of study hours) Trade courses in Mandarin Chinese (Approximately 40% of study hours)
Class E	36	Kuang-Fu	1 year	EFL courses (Approximately 60% of study hours) Trade courses in Mandarin Chinese (Approximately 40% of study hours) *trade courses are oriented towards the Service Industry

Table 1.4: IBAP class structure between 2008 and 2013

1.7 ITI students

ITI students are all Taiwanese citizens who have already completed a university degree, from a variety of academic specializations such as literature, engineering, or business, and possess a level of professional experience ranging from none to over a decade in some cases. Admission is based on assessment of English and Mandarin Chinese language skills, past academic performance, admission interviews carried out in English and Mandarin, and also on perceived ambition and attitude towards the IBAP and anticipated careers. This last point reflects TAITRA's goal of energizing the Taiwanese market by providing skilled and determined employees to companies in need of trained graduates.

1.8 Researcher context

I was born and educated entirely in French in Quebec, Canada, where I gained a bachelor's degree in psychology with a specialization in child development at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Upon graduation, I obtained a scholarship from the Taiwanese government to study Mandarin Chinese for one year at the National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei City, Taiwan. During this time, I also worked as an EFL instructor in a private school.

In 2002, I returned to Canada to pursue my studies at McGill University, in Montreal. There, I first completed a master's degree in East-Asian Studies, and then an MBA with a specialization in international business. As part of this programme, I completed four months of study at the China-Europe International Business School (CEIBS) in Shanghai, China. CEIBS was very similar to ITI in terms of goals and curriculum (e.g. finance, accounting, marketing, negotiations). Following graduation in 2007, I worked in sales position for a European language software developer, where I was responsible for developing the Canadian market with school districts

In 2010, I chose to move to Taiwan permanently. Shortly after my arrival, I entered employment at the International Trade Institute (ITI) as a full-time EFL instructor. I believe that my knowledge of Western and Taiwanese cultures, education systems, and business practices provided an ideal background for this role. In this institution, I've taught a variety of traditional EFL classes (e.g. Writing, Listening & Speaking) and specialized EFL classes (e.g. English for Presentations, English for Negotiations), organized and delivered workshops (e.g. Customer Service) and events (e.g. Cross-Campus Business Presentation Contest), as well as created original content for various classes (e.g. Sales Guide for Exhibition English, Scenarios for English for Negotiations). In 2012, shortly after entering the EdD programme at the University of Liverpool, I took on an administrative role as English Language Programme Coordinator at

ITI. Although I continue to teach several classes every term, my time is now more focused on administration, assessing and updating the EFL curriculum, organizing teaching recruitment, training, and ongoing assessment, providing assistance to students, as well as organizing special projects, such as specialized classes for government departments or local corporations.

Since my arrival at ITI, regular interactions with students, faculty members, administration staff, as well as recruiters for Taiwanese companies led to several personal observations. First of all, graduating students have often shared that they did not feel confident that the skills and knowledge they had acquired at ITI would be sufficient for them to succeed in the job market, which has been reinforced by several recent graduates informally sharing they had struggled to adapt to their post-graduation reality. In addition, many faculty members have shared they felt the ITI curriculum was insufficient in providing the necessary workplace skills for a career in business, and administration members have reported on the increasing amount of negative employer feedback on the lack of adequate preparation of ITI's graduates. Through tasks such as interviewing potential students, recruiting staff, attending industry talks and career fairs, preparing students for the job search process, examining recruitment documents sent by employers, updating curricula, and studying graduate career reports, I came to believe that ITI students could be better prepared to obtain their targeted positions, successfully transition into their new roles, and advance professionally.

It is my opinion that better understanding this topic can help HEIs such as ITI improve their academic programmes in order for their students to reach these goals, better advance in their careers, and as a result make a positive impact on the satisfaction of students, graduates, employers, as well as the HEIs themselves. In addition, I hope to help faculty and administration members better understand employability skills, as well as increase awareness of the importance of teaching them in addition to traditional business and language skills. Finally, I plan to provide useful research findings on employability skills to Taiwan's business school community in order to better understand this perspective and provide recommendations better suited to its specific needs.

1.9 Choice of employability skills as a research topic

In order to address these perceived sources of dissatisfaction with the ITI programme, I chose to examine the gaps between the skills and knowledge it offered and those sought by employers hiring ITI graduates. My goals in doing so were to determine how these gaps could be isolated and corrected in the ITI curriculum in order to improve it, as well as bring benefits to students and graduates, education

providers and employers, and society in general. As a result, I aimed to improve the experience of students, faculty members, and administration staff at ITI, as well improve its reputation by providing students with the qualifications and training that better match the requirements of employers.

In order to contribute knowledge on the acquisition of employability skills in a Taiwanese business programme, I chose to focus on recent ITI graduates to determine if they had received training beneficial to post-graduation targeted positions, such as sales representative or product manager. Therefore, it was essential to interview them after they had experienced at least one year of professional experience and before they had moved up the corporate ladder to positions that may have better corresponded to the training initially received at ITI.

1.10 Research questions

This research project aimed to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: In the view of recent ITI graduates, what employability skills are required in order for a recent graduate to successfully:

- Obtain employment?
- Transition into a new position?
- Facilitate career progression?

Research Question 2: In the view of recent ITI graduates, which employability skills were successfully taught in the ITI business programme?

Research question 3: In the view of recent ITI graduates, how can business programmes incorporate these employability skills into a curriculum?

This thesis will explore these three questions through the following sections. First of all, Chapter 2, Literature Review, will examine the progression of research on factors contributing to the increase in the importance of general skills, such as globalisation and internationalisation, the increasing ubiquity of technology, and the competition between HEIs, as well as present an overview and critique of contemporary research on employability skills. Then, Chapter 3, Practitioner Research Questions and Theoretical Framework, will introduce how research questions for this thesis were chosen, as well as how different employability skills frameworks were explored in order to select one as a model for this research. Following this, Chapter 4, Research Methodology and Methods, will present the different

steps taken to conduct the data collection and analysis, as well as the reasoning behind the methodology, such as collecting data through qualitative interviews. In addition, Chapter 5, Research Findings and Interpretation, will present themes that appeared throughout interviews, such as the importance of EFL classes in teaching employability skills and the role of Social Employability Skills in filling in the gap between graduation and taking on more advanced professional roles. Furthermore, Chapter 6, Impact of the Research on Practice and the Associated Knowledge Base, will offer recommendations to ITI, as well as similar institutions, for major stakeholders (students, graduates, HEIs, employers) to improve their awareness and understanding of employability skills, as well as how each of these parties can be actively involved in integrating employability skills development within an existing programme. Finally, Chapter 7, Conclusions, will summarize the findings from this thesis as well as address its research limitations and the potential for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter gives a general overview of the context in which the International Trade Institute (ITI) and its academic programme, the International Business Administration Programme (IBAP), find itself, such as the increasing importance of developing an international workforce in a globalised market, the need to develop more practical and observable skills, such as the use of technology and languages, as well as more easily transferrable ones such as communication skills. In addition, it provides a general impression of the new expectations for business programmes, how their success is measured, the increasing competition between business programme providers, as well as the discrepancies between stakeholder expectations. Following this, I will provide an overview of research on employability skills, its multiple definitions, the different perspectives and priorities of stakeholders, as well as the challenges associated with measuring employability skills. Finally, I will elaborate on the growing importance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a component of business programmes, as well as discuss gaps in research in employability skills in the Taiwanese context.

2.2. Changing international market

In an increasing number of fields, today's students, academics, professionals, managers or business owners may find it rare to go about daily life without regularly encountering terms like globalisation and internationalisation, such as how Knight (2008, p.21) defines globalisation as

"...flow of people, culture, ideas, values, knowledge, technology and economy across borders resulting in a more interconnected and interdependent world",

and internationalisation as the

"...process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the goals, functions, and delivery of higher education... (that is) ...tailored to meet the individual needs and interests of each higher education entity." (Knight, 2012, p.2),

In other words, internationalisation can be a practical response to globalisation (Maringe & Foskett, 2010), visible in ways such as business programmes updating their curricula (de Wit, 2013). However, this symbiotic relationship between globalisation and internationalisation may withstand scrutiny in the realities of multiple marketplaces and a large diversity in the needs of participants. Stromquist & Monkman (2014) state that the traditional image of globalisation as a unifying force doesn't stand up to the current reality in which multiple internal and external forces play different roles, and in which

certain regions, namely the USA, Europe, and East Asia, exert more influence. ITI's multilingual curriculum, with a combination of trade classes taught in Mandarin Chinese and foreign language classes offering English, Japanese, and several foreign languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, and German, represents an example of an institution, and by extension the Taiwanese government, taking an active role in embracing these new markets through training meant to help business create and develop trading channels in these territories. However, as will be elaborated on in Chapter 6 of this thesis, the reality of ITI graduates, in most cases, doesn't reflect this image of globalisation requiring trade specialists to use multilingual and multi-cultural skills. In reality, recent graduates trained to use English, Japanese, and other foreign languages in business contexts, often end up communicating almost exclusively in Mandarin. Therefore, institutions such as ITI might have to re-examine how their curricula can prepare graduates for these multiple realities, rather than providing an education based on a general concept of globalisation.

Therefore, today's graduates may find themselves in an increasingly competitive international economy in which a diploma may no longer be a guarantee of employment, but rather a requirement to be permitted to compete (Chiu & Chuang, 2016). As a result of trends such as globalisation (McHann, 2012), the rise of the information economy (Robles, 2012), and the increasing number of university graduates (Bernhard, 2009), employers may now seek graduates already equipped with skills that previously would have been taught by employers as part of ongoing training.

For example, in researching the needs of Scottish employers (n=71) through questionnaires, McMurray *et al.* (2016) found the most sought after attributes from employers were personal attitude, employability skills, work experience, and degree, and that the most important transferable skills were trustworthiness, reliability, motivation, communication and willingness to learn. These findings give an example of employer needs and demands. However, they also represent a limitation present in research on employability. Indeed, in trying to incorporate all sectors but not doing so (e.g. 65% of respondents came from three large sectors: Professional Services, Public Sector, Retail/Hospitality), McMurray *et al.* (2016) fell short of either effectively representing the market as a whole or offering details on specific industries. In addition, the research focused on the industries themselves, hinting at an assumption that graduates would need to possess the same skills, hard or soft, for all positions within a sector. Therefore, opportunities exist to better understand employer perspectives with regard to specific occupations, entry requirements, as well as tasks assigned to employees, rather than on an industry itself.

In addition, advances in information and communication technologies, better transportation methods (Kedia & Englis, 2011), and stabilizing international relations (Hudzik, 2011) have increased the importance of international business markets, resulting in a higher number of participants in international business, such as employers and their staff, as well as business programmes and their students, coming to the realization that today's workforce may not be able to reach the standards set by the new international marketplace (Beleen & De Wit, 2012), especially with newly graduated business professionals for whom expectations may often be set higher.

However, the roles and influences of globalisation and internationalisation in higher education have been increasingly scrutinized and even criticized in recent years. Altbach (2015) pointed to the almost exclusive Western view of internationalization in the literature, with countries like the USA, the UK, and Australia being the most active participants in both the research and practice of having foreign students study in their higher education programmes, setting up programmes and campuses abroad, as well as investing in developing a better sense of internationalisation in their own students at home. This stronger influence of Western governments and HEIs in internationalisation can also be seen in English being increasingly adopted as an academic *lingua franca*, in some cases in branch campuses set up in developing countries, but also in local institutions within these developing countries aiming to implement internationalisation measures. Indeed, the inequality as to the availability and adoption of new technologies, stating that multinational corporations and Western HEIs, such as in the USA and the UK, have an advantage in this regard, especially in the cases of those conducting business or providing education services in English. As a result, regions and countries currently active in foreign exchange programmes, such as Asia providing 55% of Western HEI foreign students, with China representing over 10% of these, are underrepresented in the internationalisation dialogue, research, and policy-making. Indeed, HEIs in developing countries may be dependent on richer and better developed HEIs and nations. Therefore, globalisation and internationalisation might not represent the ideal of the world building a global platform of education, but rather the need to conform to the standards of the most powerful and influential education providers, regardless of the relevance to the local context or the effectiveness for students to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for their experiences. However, Altbach also notes the small, yet growing, participation of some developing countries in the internationalisation dialogue, such as India's interest in the 'brain drain' phenomenon related to Indian students remaining in the USA after graduating from an American HEI, and thus contribute to the US economy instead of the Indian one.

Brandenburg & De Wit (2015) report on the transition over the past decades from an ideal of engaging in international education from an ideal of having students exchanging ideas to one of developing the business side of higher education. An interesting point made is that while the general perception of globalisation may be negative at times, internationalisation has a more positive representation, even though it may still not deliver the ideals it represents. Therefore, it's important to continue examining what globalisation and internationalisation mean, both in academic and practical terms, in order to better measure their impact on education.

Taiwan's response to the pressure to internationalise is an example of the potential negative consequences of rushing to implement outside approaches rather than develop one better suited for the characteristics of local students, institutions, and employers (Chien *et al.*, 2013). In the case of Taiwanese HEIs, a push to improve access to education led to a surplus of HEIs, lower entry requirements, higher unemployment among graduates, and a lower perception of the value of HEIs in Taiwan for stakeholders such as employers. Therefore, a push towards developing the quantity of programmes without having considered the relevance of the curricula, has led to an imploding higher education industry struggling to recruit local and international students, and compete on the global scene. However, the need to shift curriculum development towards relevance and quality may present an opportunity to offer programmes better suited to the needs of contemporary Taiwanese students and employer.

2.3 New expectations for business programmes

One of the ways the increasingly global marketplace may be felt is in a need to train graduates more effectively in a manner that reflects these changes. In many cases, traditional business education has remained relatively the same for decades, which may not be enough anymore to follow market demands (Xie & Steiner, 2013). For example, in the 1980s in the USA, increased criticism of focus on quantitative skills and a managerial focus in business schools led to creation of more courses to teach more relevant skills (Paglis, 2012). Decades later, we can see new types of dissatisfaction from multiple stakeholders, many of which aren't properly addressed due to misunderstandings, lack of resources, or simply because decision-makers may be unaware of the need to continue updating curricula, or how to do so. In addition, McHann (2012) reported that students have many expectations from business schools, such as granting a degree that will aid in career progression, transferring useful knowledge that can be applied in the workplace, as well as giving students the tools to keep growing personally. However, many may be dissatisfied with the content provided in their business programmes, especially

because of the lack of opportunity to apply the related knowledge in more realistic situations, as was identified in the case of the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in Mainland China (Wenzhong & Cheng, 2013).

The challenge for business programmes to redefine themselves in this manner is accompanied by increased opportunities to grow, such as recruiting international students (Choudaha & Kono, 2012) and forming transnational partnerships (Jie, 2010). Furthermore, Xie & Steiner (2013) found that business programmes are increasing in popularity around the world, but that most of their structures seem to have stayed relatively the same for decades, resulting in some being out of touch with current market demands. For example, in a mixed-methods study surrounding internationalisation efforts of Taiwanese HEIs (n=24), Chin *et al.* (2012) showed these institutions taking action to adapt to internationalisation demands. However, the voluntary nature of participation in this study may show a more optimistic view of internationalisation efforts, as HEIs that have not engaged in updating their programmes may not have been properly represented, for reasons such as an unwillingness to be criticized. Indeed, according to Otten (2009), many HEIs do not seem to address twenty-first century student expectations, which include adaptation to local cultures, as well as developing new sets of skills that can be transferred to the workplace (Gray, 2010), as well as offer opportunities for advancement (Gorman, 2011).

2.4 Measuring success in business programmes

In order to justify the cost of business programmes, initiatives taken to improve the quality of skills obtained by graduates must often be measured and compared. In the past, measurement of programme success was simpler due to fewer elements to consider (de Wit, 2010), but new variables such as those related to globalisation have made this process more difficult. While quality assurance systems have become increasingly popular in the last decade (Kinser, 2011), not enough emphasis may have been placed on measuring learning outcomes. This is in part due to a multitude of differences regarding where and how institutions are engaging in addressing trends such as internationalisation (Green, 2012), in addition to many of them not necessarily agreeing on or even understanding what terms like these mean (Sayers, 2013). For example, English-language academic programmes in non-English countries are increasingly popular (Wenzhong & Cheng, 2013), but the focus may be put on creating fluency, which is more difficult to define and measure, rather than developing more easily defined communication skills (Mellors-Bournes *et al.*, 2015). This may reflect a willingness for different stakeholders to obtain or provide the perceived necessities of the twenty-first century marketplace without ensuring a higher level of success. Finally, the impact and effectiveness of these changes not only have to be measured (de

Wit, 2010), but also perceived within the context of each institution (Coryell *et al.*, 2012). In addition, the need to address the gaps between skills in demand by employers and those taught to students by HEIs has a variety of effects on graduates, companies and society as a whole. Indeed, according to the World Economic Forum (2014), skills mismatch is an important issue that affects individuals, companies and society, and as a result that has become a high policy concern, especially in the context of current economic challenges. Therefore, it's important for all groups involved to not only identify the skills and knowledge to prioritize in higher education and corporate training, but also confirm if these have been successfully taught on an ongoing basis.

The inclusion of employability skills has gained importance with stakeholders such as governments, higher education institutions, employers and students (Rosenberg *et al.* 2012). In addition, an example of an increasingly vocal stakeholder group is the small and medium enterprise (SME) finding itself having to compete internationally in order to survive, in part by having to hire staff ready to take on these new responsibilities. However, Smith (2010) found that firms may also have to reduce the size of their staff, resulting in the remaining employers having to possess more skills than before. These kinds of changes taking place within the global marketplace, as well as within companies adjusting to new international demands, have reinforced the importance for companies to hire employees with the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to successfully take on today's positions (Wu, 2011).

2.5 Increasing competition between business programme providers

In this context of increasing international recognition, developing markets such as China or India is increasingly important for universities, but also reveals existing barriers (Kedia & Englis, 2010), such as different languages and sets of expectations. The latter may be compounded by the existence of savvier students with easier access to information online. This desire to provide higher quality programmes may lead to the growing need to move away from simply emulating established Anglo-American curricula (Ng, 2012), and develop more authentic content adapted to local circumstances. Increasing competition and transparency of student demands are not all being translated into the necessary curricular updates for the global marketplace (Sawir, 2011), thus depriving employers of the globally-minded graduates they seek (Sayers, 2013). In addition, students are also increasingly aware of this gap (Wenzhong & Cheng, 2013), adding to the overall dissatisfaction with all parties involved in job placement (Robles, 2012). The belief of employers and students regarding the lack of skills of recent graduates in the workplace can also be examined in the light of different perceptions regarding the roles of each party as well as the

definition of useful skills and knowledge (Stowe *et al.*, 2012), so the potential exists to increase the number of opportunities for cooperation between business programmes and companies.

Increasing competition and transparency of student demands may not all be translated into necessary curriculum updates for the global marketplace and may also be depriving employers of the globally-minded employees they seek. For example, in Taiwan, through the analysis of questionnaire data from students (n=250) and employers (n=250) based on a five-point Likert scale, Ho (2015) observed this growing mismatch between today's jobs and decades-old curricula meant to prepare students for these positions. This research is interesting because it includes two major stakeholder groups (employers and students), a diversity of transferable skills (e.g. discipline, teamwork) as well as more technical skills (e.g. job-specific knowledge, specific operation skills). In addition, it aimed to represent the Taiwanese reality regarding university discipline diversity (e.g. agriculture, education, engineering, business), as well as reflect gender distribution in both groups. However, as previously stated in this thesis, the focus on the student perspective in comparison to employers' may be more effective in getting attention by demonstrating large gaps, such as the social sciences students expecting a salary almost three times what employers think they should receive. Therefore, these findings based on opinions of individuals with little or no working experience may not best reflect the skills that should be integrated within existing curricula to better match the expectations of the current workforce.

Similarly, in Mainland China, Moorman (2011) approached students (n=178) from two HEIs in Shaanxi Province in order to examine student expectations related to employment. A mixed-methods approach combining questionnaires (n=178) and interviews (n=5) permitted data collection on student perceptions of classes as well as post-graduation prospects, and showed that students' expectations, although still higher than what the marketplace was willing to offer, were increasingly realistic due to the current economic situation and related employment opportunities, stating as an example that students understood the need to accumulate experience first. However, as acknowledged by Moorman (2011), the small sample size, especially for the number of interviews, may limit the validity of these findings. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to either increase the number of interviews or reduce the scope of the research in subsequent studies.

2.6 Discrepancies between employer demands and HEI offerings

As a result of increasing employer demands and higher student awareness of challenges following graduation, stakeholders point out gaps in skills between what is expected in companies and what is

offered in business programmes. These may have a negative effect on students, such as slowed career progression and increased turnover (Gallagher, 2015), as well as lower wages and returns on investment, unrealized expectations (World Economic Forum, 2014), on companies through lowered productivity (Jackson, 2013b), on HEIs through poor perception of their programme (Milhauser & Rahschulte, 2010), and also on society through unemployment and a reduced economic performance (World Economic Forum, 2014). As a consequence, students, graduates, and employees have to take charge and invest in their own personal development (Tsai *et al.*, 2014).

In addition, Bruner & Innarelli (2011) found that businesses are increasingly outspoken about gaps between what prospective employees have learned in school and the abilities graduates should have, such as soft skills (e.g. interpersonal communication), as opposed to the more traditional hard skills (e.g. accounting), as reported by Mitchell *et al.* (2010). Through surveys conducted with students and practitioners (n=350), Stowe *et al.* (2012) gave a specific example of these gaps, referring to the acquisition of presentation skills within two American HEIs, with recommendations that better communication between academics and employers should lead to the inclusion of more practical learning. However, these are based on convenience sampling, meaning that a wide range of disciplines were included, leading to general findings that apply to the workforce, and for which the identified skills may be applied to lowest common denominator situations, but not necessarily to specific ones. A potential follow-up study could concentrate on specific disciplines (e.g. accounting, engineering), industries (e.g. IT, health), types of presentations to be given (e.g. sales, meetings), as well as the target audience (e.g. superiors, co-workers, customers).

These kinds of findings have set an increasingly strong emphasis on the contrast between the traditional role of HEIs, in which a common foundation of skills and knowledge was provided, and those of employers, who were expected to fill in the gaps specific to the industries and roles graduates took on (Prestwich & Ho-Kim, 2007). Nevertheless, it is important to point out that HEIs do not necessarily disagree with the importance of skills perceived as essential by employers. In researching this point, Abraham & Karns (2009) surveyed higher education business programmes (n=42) in the USA and Canada in order to compare priorities on twenty-three competencies with findings obtained from previous research (Karns & Mena, 1998, as referenced in Abraham & Karns, 2009), determining that although HEIs agreed with the priorities of businesses for new graduates, different sets of skills were included in the curricula in order to help students build more successful careers, rather than perform better in their initial jobs. An issue with this approach is that the comparison is made between two sets of data that are

over a decade apart, and based on a set of competencies from the previous century, which can be seen with the absence of concepts for which mastery could be considered essential, such as IT and social networking. More modern data based on more contemporary skills obtained within a shorter space of time would provide a much needed update to these findings.

2.7 Research on employability skills

As shown above, business programmes are faced with the challenge of providing the skills and knowledge matching employer expectations (Welborn & Singer, 2013). With this in mind, much of the research focus on providing skills in curricula from the previous two decades has been placed on comparing sets of skills, often grouped into two main categories. Gradually, the first category known as hard, traditional, or technical skills (e.g. accounting, marketing) has been integrating the skills from the second category, known as soft, non-technical, or employability skills (e.g. presentation, intercultural communication), in part as the result of an increase in demand from employers for students to acquire both types of skills (Shuayto, 2013). In addition, research from the past decade on the interaction and mutual contribution between these two categories of skills shows the potential in jointly integrating them into curricula. For example, efforts have been focused towards better understanding the importance of experiential learning (e.g. internships) to help graduates find employment (Updyke, 2013), as well as measure, during and after, the effectiveness of skills taught in programmes (Templeton *et al.*, 2012). Finally, an emerging perspective on this subject relates to students', recent graduates', or more experienced graduates' perspectives on the effectiveness of business programmes and the relevance of skills taught within them. These range from the belief of students that the development of skills will play an important role in their careers (Jackson, 2013a) and understanding that what is taught in business programmes may differ from what will be required of them after graduation (Stowe *et al.*, 2012), to alumni sharing experiences supporting this belief (Storen & Alamodt, 2010). Therefore, a potential exists for deeper analysis of the experiences and insights of alumni.

2.7.1 Definition of employability

One of the challenges in researching the development, teaching, and effectiveness of employability skills is the lack of consensus on the concept as well as terms associated with employability. Research in this field became more visible in the early twentieth century, with an initial focus on the ability to be employed. For example, Beveridge (1910) focused on causes of unemployment in the UK and how to find employment, rather than on individual development or differences between industries,

accompanied by an assumption that employers were in the right and employees were to adapt to their needs.

More recently, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, the study of employability has increased in popularity and visibility, with several different definitions evolving over time. Knight & Yorke's definition (2003), is one of the first definitions that went beyond the previous century's emphasis on finding employment that were still used at that time, such as Harvey *et al.*'s (2002) focus on obtaining and keeping employment, by also including the contribution to themselves as well as society. Instead, Knight & Yorke's (2003, p.2) definition seems to have merged the short-term need to find employment with long-term development:

"A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy".

Following this definition, other conceptions of employability tended to put a stronger emphasis on personal development, such as Fugate's (2004) stress on going beyond professional development, adapting to new situations, as well as improving individual-work interface. Similarly, McQuaid & Lindsay (2005) identified the goals of employability as increasing flexibility and security in the labour market, providing skills appropriate for current and future work environments, improving the quality of jobs and working conditions, as well as improving conditions for job creation. However, these definitions mostly emphasized the acquisition of professional skills for a chosen occupation, and once more examined employability more from the employer perspective than the employee's. For example, Dacre Pool & Sewell's definition (2007, p.278) added weight to the idea of personal development as more than simply succeeding financially or climbing the corporate ladder, but also feeling satisfied professionally,

"...having the skill set, knowledge, understanding, and personal attributes needed to increase the likelihood of choosing a satisfying and successful occupation".

Over the course of the past decade, an increasing diversity of definitions of employability has accompanied researchers' more specialized approaches, from the need for individuals to obtain skills and knowledge attractive to potential employers, such as Pan & Lee's (2011, p.91)

"...skills and attributes that make an individual desirable to potential employers"

to an emphasis on social equality, and Wilton's (2011, p.85),

"...means by which to obtain and maintain high-quality employment and to eradicate social reproduction of inequality".

However, certain common elements seem to appear in a number of definitions, such as the wider scope of skills acquired, as in Blades *et al.*'s (2012, p.4),

"...personal, social and transferable skills seen as relevant to all jobs, as opposed to job-specific technical skills or qualifications",

the personal development aspect of a career, such as Wang & Tsai's (2014, p.126),

"...set of knowledge, skills, and attributes that allow one to choose a career, to be employed, to transfer freely in the job market, to grow, to fulfill job duties, to show commitment to work, to feel satisfied, and to realize personal potential",

as well as the acquisition of general skills that can be applied to multiple scenarios, such as Snowden's (2013, taken from Wiley, 2013, p.74)

"...a complex blend of skill, attitude, experience, motivation and interest, underpinned by the ability to learn and to apply that learning to the challenges that work presents".

While these themes may fit well together in understanding the definition of employability as a whole, the increasing number of specific segments, such as the Taiwanese recent business school graduates studied in this thesis, may require researchers to perceive employability skills from a more specialized perspective.

Similar to the evolution of definitions of employability, research on employment, and more recently on employability, has also experienced changes over the past century. Early examples of research on unemployment in the UK can be found as early as 1917, with Beveridge's *Unemployment: A problem of industry*. A notable shift towards the current state of research on employability became more visible with the Robbins Report (1963), which played an influential role in emphasizing the importance of skills and employment in higher education. Research on employability has continued to increase in number and size over the last few decades (Esposito & Meagher, 2007), such as Australia's Karmel Report (1985), Finn Report (1991), Mayer Report (1992) and the Employability Skills for the Future Report (2002).

Early research on employability concentrated on general skills that were desirable and how to integrate these into curricula, rather than on specific areas of study (Yorke, 2006). However, in recent decades, research projects seem to have shifted to better understanding the acquisition of transferable or generic skills, as well as on distinguishing them from academic or technical skills (Paglis, 2012). This shift of focus can in part be explained by an increasing awareness by graduates that transferable skills, such as

handling information, may be more important than the subjects themselves. As explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis, the increasing complexity in definition, scope, and specialization of employability through the past decades has been accompanied by frameworks better adapted to reflect the characteristics such as geographical regions, industries, and age groups. However, as presented earlier with Sultana (2011), an increasing number of employability frameworks, as well as the number and specificity of skills and variables, does not necessarily guarantee that models will successfully be transferred from one context to another, no matter how similar they may appear on paper. Rather, the study of employability skills within an institution, as well as the choice of frameworks, can also depend on the different cultures (e.g. national, linguistic, and professional) of all parties involved. This is discussed further in section 2.10 below.

2.7.2 Multiple perspectives on employability skills

The lack of agreement on the definition of employability may be a reflection of the diversity of perspectives related to it in terms of target populations (e.g. students, older adults, migrants), industries (e.g. IT, business, engineering), countries (e.g. UK, USA, India), and most importantly in the context of this study, groups involved in student professional training, such as HEI faculty and administration members, company managers and HR representatives, as well as students and alumni. These differences in priorities can apply to different countries that, despite a shared collection of desired skills (Osmani *et al.*, 2015), still present their own differences (Young & Chapman, 2010). In this thesis, the groups most closely associated with the research project: HEIs & faculty, employers, and students & graduates, will hereafter be referred as the three main stakeholders.

2.7.3 Student perspectives on employability

When considering the suitability of a programme's curriculum to post-graduation requirements, including the student perspective is important in the sense that all parties should be included, especially if an HEI is to present its programme in an attractive way to potential students and employers. However, there may be some limitations regarding the knowledge of the interviewees. For example, in trying to better understand student satisfaction in Taiwan, Chou (2010) examined the level of satisfaction of Taiwanese technical and vocational college programme students (n=76,319) through online surveys, and found that students from vocational institutions possessed the highest level of satisfaction regarding their programme, in comparison to more academic, and presumably less pragmatic, institutions. However, the focus was limited to junior students (third year of a four-year programme), and only a limited number of in-person interviews were conducted (n=5). With these limitations in mind, the

breakdown of teaching and learning methods offers HEIs of all types the chance to further investigate student satisfaction with their programme and further research the implementation of new approaches.

In addition, Huang's (2015) study on Taiwanese college students' (n=200: male=76 & female=144) perception of their own employability also stands out in part because of the use of Rothwell *et al.* (2008, referenced in Yang, 2014) distinction between the perception of internal employability, based on skills acquired throughout the programme, and external employability, based on the workplace situation, HEI recognition, and demand for students' area of expertise. Huang's (2015) findings showed a correlation between a perception of internal employability and hardiness and career self-efficacy, but not with external employability, leading to potential to further study perceived employability from these two viewpoints.

The development of employability skills from the perspective of students also extends beyond programme curricula. For example, Lau *et al.* (2014) assessed the perception of personal employability skills of Taiwanese business school graduates from the 2008 academic year (n=27,768) through online survey data collection and propensity score matching (PSM) analysis to determine their association with extra-curricular activities taken throughout their programme (e.g. sports, music, student government), establishing that more active students possessed a more positive view of employability skills such as leadership, creativity, communication, and self-promotion, and that different types of activities led to varying levels of skills development, such as music clubs contributing more to creativity skills and sports clubs aiding in improving leadership skills. A major strength of this research is that it focused on the perception of more experienced recent graduates who possessed around half a decade of post-graduation experience, which was ensured by eliminating those who followed different paths such as graduate school or military service. However, a weakness in this approach was the lack of clarity on the timeframe in which the five employability skills measured (e.g. communication, time management) were applied, meaning that it was unclear if responses were meant to study the situation of students at the time of the survey, or in an earlier stage of their careers, such as when seeking their first full-time post-graduation position. Therefore, similar to Chou's (2010) research that examined the perspective of students a year before having entered the job market, Lau *et al.* (2014) present a perspective that, while representative of the cohort, may not necessarily be translated into a business curriculum meant to balance short-term growth and long-term career development.

The study of employability can also extend to better understanding why and how students enter an academic programme. Through a survey of Taiwanese students (n=1,820) from six universities in Taiwan,

Wu (2011) examined how high unemployment and economic restrictions in Taiwan influence students' expectations regarding the choice of classes, job needs, as well as salary, and found that more challenging economic and employment circumstances push students towards classes offering skills and knowledge more likely to increase their employability. While emphasizing the student perspective, this research stressed the importance of improving communication between employers, HEIs and students in order to improve curricula. In a similar project, through questionnaires based on the developmental-contextual model of career development, Wu *et al.* (2014) studied the self-perception of employability with Taiwanese science education major students (n=614) in twelve universities across the island, finding that career guidance played an influential role in students developing their vocational self-concept. In addition to efforts put into offering a representative picture, such as including proportions of HEIs and students based on the population in different regions of Taiwan, as well as a ratio of 45% male and 55% female, Wu *et al.* (2014) offer a good example of using data collection tools developed based on previous research conducted in Taiwan in order to study a specific segment of Taiwanese higher education students, and for which findings can more easily lead to steps and policies to improve career development and employability with a specific cohort, rather than offer wider findings that don't necessarily apply to all, or even multiple, HEI departments.

As another example of a more specific target research group, Huang *et al.* (2014) approached the study of the perception of employability skills related to people with disabilities from the perspective of Taiwanese MBA students (n=116) in anticipation of their roles as business representatives for the next generation. Results showed that this cohort possessed a positive attitude towards hiring people with disabilities, but also recognized these types of situations hadn't been included in their education. To complete this research, Huang *et al.* (2014) used two established tools related to the study of employment of people with disabilities, the Scale of Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (SADP) and the Attitudes Toward the Employability of Persons with Severe Handicaps Scale. However, it's worth mentioning that in addition to having been developed for a Western context, both tools originated over two decades ago, resulting in the potential omission of key elements of today's employability, such as IT skills, language knowledge, as well as cultural intelligence. Therefore, this is a reminder of the potential benefits of targeting a smaller group to be studied, while still having to adapt the tools to current circumstances.

2.7.4 Employer perspectives

In Taiwan, research into the needs of potential employers has provided several different viewpoints into how HEIs should better prepare students for them not only to obtain employment, but also succeed in their careers. For example, Wang & Tsai (2014) sought to identify the employability skills most valued by both managers in the Taiwanese hospitality industry (n=105) and senior students (n=193) aiming to work in this field. Qualitative methods such as interviews with industry experts (n=5) and focus groups with mid-level managers (n=6), were used along with a Delphi study with experienced managers (n=46) to ensure validity and credibility of the survey instruments, which added robustness to the study. However, the specific nature of the skills associated with this industry, and the more limited number of potential occupations, led this team to present employability skills as overlapping with competency skills. While this approach may not necessarily be best applied to ITI's students because of the greater number of potential industries and job specialisations, even if contained within sales-related positions, the comparison of two important groups showed interesting potential discrepancies. In reality, quantitative research in the form of questionnaires was used to collect data from senior students. The reasoning behind merging these two groups could be better explained and, especially in light of the discrepancies present in Wang & Tsai's (2014) paper (more specifically in Table 3, p.132), indicating that a comparison of these two groups may have provided more fruitful results.

In addition, there is increasing pressure to make graduate business programmes more practical in order to serve the needs of the community (Syvertsen, 2008). For example, in a study based in Thailand, Barnes (2008) stated that the majority of employers in Bangkok placed MBA graduates in functional administrative positions, rather than the managerial posts many were expecting, in part because these lacked the required interpersonal skills. In addition, Stowe *et al.* (2012) concluded that some transferable skills (e.g. presentations) may be taught in business programmes, but not in ways relevant to employers' needs.

Furthermore, in Taiwan, Yu *et al.* (2008) conducted research on employability skills most desired by Taiwanese employers, which surveyed Taiwanese business executives (n=108) and constructed a Management Education Opportunity Grid. According to Yu *et al.* (2008), there is a growing concern in the business community to better assess business programmes and their graduates, stating that only 21% of the latter satisfied employer expectations for top skills such as foreign languages and international business. These results indicated the lack of employer satisfaction with skills and knowledge perceived as important, such as IT, languages, as well as international business and management abilities, and a

strong desire from the corporate world for HEIs to teach these skills to students. What makes this research valuable to better understanding the Taiwanese business executive mindset towards employability skills is the identification of priorities (with communication skills as high, and cultural knowledge (e.g. history, geography) as low) based on both importance and current employer satisfaction. In addition, the strong sampling of a specific group of executives possessing a combination of education and experience created a clear reference point. However, a discrepancy seems to exist between the responsibilities identified by respondents and those recent graduates would take on, meaning data seem to reference roles taken on later in business careers or for individuals possessing work experience before entering graduate business programmes.

This kind of research is supported by Liu's (2010) findings that employers in Mainland China also showed similar dissatisfaction in the skills possessed by recent business school graduates. Through questionnaires and follow-up interviews with employers (n=424) based on the China National Employability Framework, Liu (2010) first ranked the perception of employability skills of new Chinese graduates, with skills such as Communication, Learning Ability, Interpersonal Ability, and Team Work at the top, and Problem-Solving and Decision Making, and Personal Management at the bottom. Then, Liu (2010) ranked employer satisfaction with these skills, with skills such as Learning Ability and Positive Attitude at the top, and Problem-Solving Decision Making at the bottom. Finally, both ranking were compared to show some possessing similar rankings, such as Learning Ability (second place in importance and first place in satisfaction) and Integrity (fifth place in importance and third place in satisfaction), as well as larger gaps, such as Communication (first place in importance and sixth place in satisfaction), and Interpersonal Ability (third place in importance and thirteenth place in satisfaction). While it's noteworthy that a Chinese framework was used for this research, one of the major weaknesses of these findings is that it was actually based on a melting pot framework from seventeen countries, many of which are English-speaking Western countries (e.g. UK, Australia, Canada, USA), resulting in a data collection tool that might not best fit the Chinese context. While I am aware of the fact that I used an Australian framework to study a Taiwanese institution for this thesis, Jackson & Chapman's (2012a) Graduate Employability Framework was chosen for clear common points such as the subject of study and professional experience of students, making the differences more easily identifiable and adjustable for follow-up research. In addition, Liu's (2010) description needs to be described in more detail, as information on the questionnaire, framework it was based on, its data collection and analysis methods, as well as the vague notion of "in-depth interviews", which weren't described in detail, make the results difficult to fully comprehend.

2.7.5 Discrepancies between perspectives on employability skills

A challenge in determining the skills to be taught within higher education business programme is the lack of agreement between the major stakeholders. Through online and paper surveys in Australian HEIs (n=108), Kinash *et al.* (2016) researched the perspectives of four stakeholders (students (n=442), graduates (n=102), HEIs (n=108), and employers (n=53)) on twelve strategies to develop employability during a university programme, which were previously identified through a literature review. As a result, Kinash *et al.* (2016), identified discrepancies between strategies found in the literature review and those from their surveys, as well as differences between stakeholders. An interesting angle to this research project is its focus on the activities, services, and curriculum components perceived to be beneficial to developing employability skills, rather than examine the skills themselves, as in the case in this thesis. However, the double-edged nature of this approach can be seen in the variations on the questions used with different stakeholder groups, such as the student focus on strategies currently being used versus the strategies used by graduates following graduation. A smaller and more easily manageable analysis of a single group's perspective, or even comparison of fewer elements, such as the discrepancies between the views of current students and graduates (e.g. five years after graduation, as was the case with Lau *et al.*'s (2014) research described above) may have simplified findings, and also given more strength to the assertion that four very different stakeholder groups disagreed on curriculum structure. In addition, much like I discovered in the first round of interviews for this thesis using the Knight & Yorke (2003) framework, the use of more HEI-focused terminology, such as those from the list of twelve strategies (e.g. Career Advice, Portfolios, Extracurricular), may better reflect an understanding by curriculum designers of the skills and knowledge deriving from these activities, rather than that of the other stakeholder groups' understanding of these terms, as well as the associated (but not described) employability skills.

In addition, Ho (2015) researched the perceived mismatch between Taiwanese students' (n=234) expectations of a good job and Taiwanese employers' (n=95) expectations in terms of skills graduates should possess. The five-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to both students and employers focused on perceptions of an ideal job (i.e. characteristics), the skills required in the workplace, as well as career competence. Results showed that students in general perceived characteristics such as pay, benefits, and empowerment as being more important, while employers prioritized opportunities for promotion, job security, interesting work, location, and level of comfort as priorities. As for the perceived importance of skills, it's worth pointing out that certain skills were seen as more important with students (e.g. International Perspectives) and employers (e.g. Discipline and Good Manner). This

research is notable for its comparison of students' competence with these skills, with students perceiving themselves as much more highly qualified in all types of competence (e.g. Group and Team Worker, Ambitious) but one: Information and Technology.

However, an aspect of the research description that could be better described is how each characteristic or competence was presented to both students and employers, as the wording may influence the response, especially when comparing two groups at different ends of the experience continuum. It's worth mentioning though that the lack of consistency may be related to the translation of research tools from Mandarin Chinese to English. In addition, subsequent research based on these findings could be more specialized in order to focus on specific industries and professions, rather than a combination of several categories such as agriculture, business, and engineering.

It is important to specify that differences may also be closely related to personal agendas. For example, differences in opinions between business schools and employers is that while the former may agree with the latter on the needs required in the workplace following graduation, they may choose not to integrate them because of a focus on career development, rather than on acquiring the skills necessary for immediate employment (Abraham & Karns, 2010). In contrast to Liu's (2010) previously mentioned use of a foreign framework, Su & Zhang (2015) developed a qualitative competency model for the measurement of employability skills based on research conducted with Chinese employers (n=100) and undergraduate students (n=187). To do so, Su & Zhang (2015) first interviewed career experts, career tutors, and HR/recruitment managers (n=12) with over five years of experience in their fields to identify five first-class indicators (e.g. personal attribute, professional ability) and twenty second-class indicators (e.g. psychological competency, professional knowledge) which were then used to interview employers (n=300) recruiting from the same HEI, the School of Economics and Management of Beihang University, thus providing information for a specific group of students recruited across a diversity of types of enterprises (e.g. state-owned, overseas funded) and industries (e.g. manufacturing, banking, construction). An added element to this framework, while still in its initial stages of development, is the inclusion of the Chinese context in its interpretation and recommendations, the most important of which being the influence of the One-Child Policy on the Chinese family dynamic and subsequent search for employment. While this example may not play a part in Taiwan, where this policy doesn't exist, it still stands as a strong example of a framework built for a specific location and culture.

Despite challenges for stakeholders to clarify their needs and understand those of others, communication between these two employers and HEIs seems to be gradually improving. For

example, there is an increasing demand for HEIs to provide more general skills training in order to permit companies to focus on job-specific skills (Prestwich & Ho-Kim, 2007). Finally, Holtzman & Craft (2011) found similarities in the skills determined to be important by both business alumni and employers (e.g. time-management, writing, IT), but the skills determined to be important by alumni aren't always included in the curriculum.

2.7.6 Measuring employability skills

Despite different groups sharing similar opinions on specific skills and behaviours, the lack of general agreement between stakeholders' results in the unlikely possibility of creating a general employability framework, as well as general categories of skills and behaviours (Little, 2011). In addition, the lack of agreement on the definition of employability, as well as the diversity of viewpoints, contribute to the challenges in determining the framework best suited to select, implement, and most importantly, evaluate the effectiveness of the most relevant employability skills for a specific programme. This point is elaborated upon further in the Theoretical Framework section of this paper. Employability skills play an increasingly important part in HEI curricula, but not enough attention is spent on measuring their acquisition and the success of their transfer (Jackson, 2013a). Therefore, the creation of a uniform system for all parties could help bridge the gaps between different parties and improve measurement efforts (Riebe & Jackson, 2014).

2.8 EFL in business curricula

Learning foreign languages is becoming an important part of doing business internationally, which can include students in English-speaking countries, such as the UK (Dlaska, 2012), offering an increasing number of foreign language classes. In addition, it's important to acknowledge the impact the increasingly popular adoption of English as a language of instruction (Wilkins & Urbanovic, 2014) or a business *lingua franca* (Ehrenreih, 2012). The challenges for students to take on additional language classes while overseas, such as in the USA (Fryer, 2012), or in non-English speaking countries, such as in Taiwan (Zhang & Mi, 2012) and Vietnam (Duong & Chua, 2016), which may hinder their academic performance. For example, Haugh (2016) found that the inadequate level of English proficiency of foreign students in English-speaking countries, such as Australia, is a cause for concerns as it may lower institutional standards in order to cater to these non-native students, and consequently create antagonism towards them.

The increasing pressure for HEIs to cater to the demands of internationalisation, such as students graduating with a knowledge of foreign languages, has played an important role in institutions in East Asia, such as ITI, being created.

One of these pressures relates to the use of English as the language of instruction. In a study at the Business English for International Trade in Guandong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS), a Mainland Chinese institution similar to ITI in several ways, such as its focus on foreign languages and business education, as well as the use of English as a language of instruction, Wenzhong & Cheng (2013) investigated the balance between EFL and business courses in the curriculum according to the theory of Needs Analysis, based on the idea that students and faculty members have different needs that influence each research situation, ending with a recommendation to increase the proportion of business classes. Based on data collected through questionnaires given to GDUFS students (n=100) from different levels of the programme, Wenzhong & Cheng (2013), found students generally weren't satisfied with their classes, learning atmosphere, or instructors. While the research seems to have extensively covered the elements within GDUFS, and the recommendations, such as improving cooperation between the student body and faculty, properly reflect the findings, its foundation on students' perception of a quality programme in comparison to post-graduation expectations, rather than actual experience, limits the applicability of findings. However, the recommendation to establish an information feedback platform, an idea similar to the one which will be introduced in this thesis, shows potential to pursue this research with the same students after graduation in order to not only compare perceptions of workforce skills and knowledge requirements before and after graduation, but also continue improving the GDUFS curriculum.

In Taiwan, Yang (2014) found similar findings in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programme at the National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism (NKUHT), where a contrast was identified between the superior acquisition of EFL skills for students (n=29), in comparison with similar non-CLIL programmes in Taiwan, and students' negative perceptions of their skills and knowledge development throughout the programme, especially for weaker students. However, based on personal experience at ITI, I believe gender may play a role in self-perception of learning, more commonly known at ITI as the fear of losing face, which is partly addressed here when referencing male students wanting to fall back on Mandarin Chinese more strongly. Indeed, the ratio of female students (n=23) and male students (n=6), while it may reflect the reality of NKUHT and closely resembles ITI's gender distribution, isolates the findings to that specific institution, and paints a portrait that may not be applicable in other

Taiwanese institutions. Confirmation of these findings with a more balanced gender distribution could make them applicable in other institutions. Alternatively, focusing on one specific gender could also offer data regarding different approaches to implementing CLIL programmes.

As a continuation of Yang's (2014) previously mentioned study at NKUHT, Yang & Gosling (2014) compared two CLIL programmes, within NKUHT that had been assessed by the Ministry of Education's (MOE), one deemed effective in improving students' proficiency in English and increasing the number of international students (Tourism Management) and the other not (Culinary Arts), in order to better understand the factors that make a CLIL programme successful as well as better understand the MOE's perception of these skills. Based on an analysis of the MOE report, students (n=85) filled out a questionnaire, and were later interviewed to elaborate on preliminary findings from the quantitative analysis. Findings pointed to several factors playing important roles in the effectiveness of CLIL efforts, such as curriculum design, the quality of teachers, support from administration as well as the existence of an atmosphere in which the use of English is encouraged. Although a very good opportunity to compare two CLIL programmes experiencing different levels of success, this is still done based on exterior criteria from the MOE, rather than identifying factors specific to the institution. However, much like this thesis using a framework developed and tested in Australia as part of research into a Taiwanese institution, the opportunity exists to move away from a top-down approach in future research and rather develop original criteria best suited to NKUHT. In addition, the comparison of a group of students traditionally associated with two branches of the service industry, i.e. the Tourist Management graduates working in a more unpredictable environment where they are expected to interact with individuals from different countries, and the Culinary Arts graduates working in a more self-contained environment where interactions are more limited to a regular group of people, may have created a bias in the research in terms of student preferences for a future career. A replication of this research with two groups belonging to similar majors may provide a stronger comparison of the curricula, faculty and administration members, as well as CLIL cultures within each programme.

On a parallel path to research on CLIL, Yeh (2014) researched the increase in English as Medium for Instruction (EMI) courses in Taiwanese higher education. Conducting surveys on learning experiences and attitudes towards EMI courses, Yeh (2014) surveyed students (n=476) from EMI courses (n=25) in Taiwanese universities (n=6), revealing that instructors played a more important role than improving English, but that improving these language skills did help to promote employability and better Taiwan's global competitiveness. However, while participant feedback on the challenges faced as students in EMI

courses paints an informative picture on how HEIs can better build and update their EMI courses and programmes, much of the data collected on student satisfaction on EMI courses and more important, instructors, is weakened by the data collection method. In addition to the previously mentioned voluntary nature of participation in this survey, the lack of anonymity and the involvement of instructors in administering and collecting questionnaires containing questions such as 'The instructor is an expert in the field' and 'I am satisfied with the instructor's English ability', make the acceptance of these results very difficult. Therefore, an anonymous data collection method might reveal student concerns or other types of dissatisfaction with their programme.

In the case of ITI, the goals set out for the curriculum were to develop trade and language skills to aid Taiwanese companies expand their business internationally. As a result, acquiring these skills, and even being influenced by different cultures, has had a mostly positive connotation at ITI. While the research above focused on the practical applications of English as a Foreign Language in the classroom, it didn't elaborate on the effects outside the classroom, such as language and cultural identity. Phan (2013) examined the influence of Western countries on East Asia, such as English as a language of instruction policies in Japan, as well as the potential negative impact on national identity. Phan stressed the impact policies can have on local languages and cultures, and this despite good intentions. Further research into the influence of foreign programmes, as well as the use of English as a language of instruction, in Taiwan need to be conducted in order to better understand the role, and potential danger to national culture and identity, institutions such as ITI present.

2.9 Gaps in research on employability skills

In examining the literature on the demand and provision of employability skills related to the context of ITI, two main gaps were identified: the perspective of recent graduates and the over-reliance on non-Western perspectives (i.e. tools and frameworks developed for regions such as Taiwan) in studying employability skills in Taiwan.

2.9.1 Graduate perspectives

As seen above, the perspectives of stakeholders such as students, employers, and even HEIs have been more extensively explored than the views of recent graduates. Research such as Lau *et al.*'s (2014) analysis of graduate perspectives five years after completion of a programme shows the benefits of exploring this perspective. However, the point of view of graduates needs to be better addressed in

terms of the quantity of research projects, the specificity of the researched groups, as well as the points in the timeline such as directly after graduation or half a decade later.

One of the issues with researching student perceptions of their employability skills is that it may place more importance on finding employment, rather than performing within their roles and advancing throughout their careers. For example, by surveying graduates in thirteen European countries five to six years after graduation, Storen & Alamodt (2010) determined that graduates believed that programme characteristics played a part in their first five years of their careers, but not necessarily on finding employment, which showed the contrast between student and experienced graduate beliefs. Therefore, further research needs to emphasize this point of view in order to add validity to other groups' perspectives, add new criteria, and update findings from previous research.

2.9.2 Non-Western perspectives

The locations of many of the earlier research projects shown throughout this literature review reflect the challenges of obtaining data based on research on employability skills in Taiwan, Greater China, or even other countries in East Asia (e.g. Japan, South Korea), especially for those not based on Western authors, frameworks, or institutions, whether they are adapted to local circumstances or not. The past two decades have delivered findings that are increasingly detailed, insightful, and specialized, but most of these have originated from English-speaking countries like the UK, the USA, as well as Australia. As a result, research projects into cohorts such as Taiwanese business graduates have access to vast amounts of findings from Western contexts, but are also heavily influenced by these, which is the case for this thesis since it based its initial research protocol on an Australian framework.

Fortunately, the past five years have been fruitful with regard to research on employability in Taiwan, of which several examples are covered in this literature review, but many opportunities to build a foundation based on a Chinese environment, rather than an English one, exist and should be taken advantage of. According to Lim (2014), several trends in Asia are affecting its business schools, such as its increasing number of institutions offering business-related programmes and their uneven quality across different regions, the increasing importance of China, new accreditation standards, as well as the difficulty for HEIs to keep their academic staff. For example, training approaches for what Lim (2014) refers to as "first-world" Asia (i.e. Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore) won't necessarily be successful in developing regions such as Vietnam, Cambodia, or Indonesia. Therefore, a great diversity of approaches need to be developed for different countries, regions, industries, and types of HEIs.

Despite these differences, many of these Asian institutions adopt, and only sometimes adapt, established Western curricula that don't necessarily provide the best models for their students to follow (Ng, 2012). The same can be said for frameworks to study employability in East Asian countries like Taiwan since, while there may be agreement that employability skills play an important role in today's business curricula, and employers in different countries often identify similar employability skills as being relevant, these are often prioritized differently, meaning that no framework can be applied in all situations (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, a gap that needs to be addressed is the inclusion of non-English speaking regions, such as Taiwan, into the research on employability. While original research in Greater China (Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao) may seem behind findings from Western countries like the UK, recent efforts have shown a growing interest in employability in those parts of the world. Velde (2009) determined that the perception of important transferable skills in China is undergoing change, in part because of the inclusion of modern management principles. As an example, between 2007 and 2013, Taiwanese employers have experienced a challenge twice as big as European countries to, which has heavily affected young people (World Economic Forum, 2014). Therefore, the initial push to localize research may well be underway, but efforts still need to be made to ensure its continued development and success.

2.10 Application of Western frameworks in Taiwanese context

Chapter 3 describes the process I followed to explore different employability frameworks. The main reason for doing this was that English-speaking countries such as the UK, Australia, and the USA, have a longer history of conducting research on employability, as well as a larger quantity of well-developed frameworks. However, conducting research on a Taiwanese institution by exploring, being inspired by, and even adopting data and frameworks from Western settings presented several challenges, including differences in language and culture.

Sultana (2011) analysed findings from studies on fifty-five Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries conducted in the preceding decade in order to develop a good general understanding of how policies were lent and borrowed between countries. I believe Sultana's findings apply to employability frameworks and are therefore worth including here. One point made regarding contextual influence is the impact globalisation and internationalisation have made on accelerating the need and opportunity to lend or borrow policies. In order to better investigate why and how policies are imported or exported, especially if policies already exist in the recipient country,

Sultana examined push forces, relating to motivations to export existing policies, as well as pull forces, referring to reasons for importing foreign policies. Push forces include increasing a country's political and economic presence overseas, transfer ideologies, as well as obtaining an increase in legitimacy through having other countries adopt their policies. As for Pull Forces, these include internal dissatisfaction with existing policies, as well as negative results from an external evaluation, such as from the OECD. Sultana points out that no matter the motivation for doing so, transferring a policy from one context to another is complex and can result in failure, not only because of the institutional context of both parties, but also because of the individual involved. In each case, policies have to be re-interpreted to fit the receiving country's needs.

While focusing on career guidance policies and not necessarily on employability skills frameworks, Sultana's analysis of the challenges presented by policy transfer can apply to better understanding those that appeared in this thesis when trying to apply an Australian framework to a Taiwanese context. However, its focus on OECD members, with a particular focus on Middle Eastern and North African countries, as well as its large scale perspective, in contrast to ITI's context of one independent institution, make it more difficult for its conclusions to be applied to all situations. Nevertheless, it provides a very good idea of the tensions existing between different parties, and even countries, in the policy transfer process, which can help researchers and institutions such as ITI better select policies to be looked into, or set standards for the creation of new ones.

An example of the challenges related to transferring a framework from one national context to another can be found in Hooley *et al.*'s 2013 research on the differences with implementation of a specific framework, the Blueprint framework for career management skills. Hooley *et al.* examined this framework in Western countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia, and found that the framework was useful and innovative means to connect career theory, practice and policy. In addition, it permitted students to go beyond making career choices by also including career management factors throughout their lives. This shows a good example of how a framework can be successfully adapted from one environment to one sharing similarities, such as the language or education system. In addition, the inclusion of greater differences, such as the case with Lithuania, can lead to greater challenges in implementing or even adapting the framework, such as framework philosophies and education systems at different levels.

Interestingly, countries relatively close to each other, both in terms of geography and culture, such as the USA and Canada, may face challenges, which are compounded if additional factors such as language

differences are included, such as is the case of Lithuania (Hooley *et al.*, 2013). This suggests that wider gaps in terms of culture, language, and education systems, may lead to greater challenges in successfully implementing frameworks. In the case of ITI, adopting a foreign framework for the interviewing process presented many challenges, even though all documents presented to interviewees having been translated into Mandarin Chinese. For example, the concept of influencing others, present in the Jackson & Chapman framework, was not readily acknowledged by interviewees, but was indirectly discussed throughout several interviewees. This seems to indicate that although interviewees had much to say on this, the framework was not conducive to them doing so from the beginning. Further research with a framework developed specifically for the Taiwanese context is a necessary step in order to better understand the reality interviewees found themselves in.

2.11 Conclusion

Employability skills are experiencing an increase in general awareness and a growing recognition of their importance in today's business world. However, with these come the knowledge of gaps between the skills provided by higher education institutions and those desired by employers (Helyer, 2011), and that academic programmes don't necessarily offer the employability skills considered important by employers, which can be particularly impactful for recent graduates with little or no prior working experience. Jackson & Chapman (2012b) found that while graduates showed competence in employability skills such as confidence, working effectively with others, initiative, and social responsibility, they still lacked mastery of leadership, conflict resolution, meta-cognitive skills, as well as critical thinking. These gaps in non-technical skills in business graduates impact upon organizational performance and global competitiveness (Jackson, 2013a).

The issue isn't necessarily that the quality of the content and delivery of their curricula have deteriorated, but rather that the demands of today's global marketplace may have surpassed the business classes created decades before today's economic reality, such as the ubiquity of personal computers and the internet, as well as the global nature of today's marketplace. Previous to the current generation of business careers, the notion of basic skills may have referred to terms such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and mathematics. However, rapid advances and access to technology and communication methods may have resulted in skills that, although previously may have been perceived as specialized, are now identified as mandatory and no longer considered exceptional. Examples of these include foreign languages, information and communications technology (ICT) skills,

communication and organizational skills, as well as a higher level of cultural awareness (CEDEFOP, 2009). As a result, today's new graduates aren't necessarily equipped with the employability skills necessary to give them the edge necessary to get the best job related to their level of training, expertise, knowledge and experience, or to successfully transition into their new work environment, or advance in their career at a rate reflecting their willingness to learn and their commitment to their work.

2.10.1 Addressing gaps through research questions

The research questions on which this thesis is based were derived from the desire to address some the gaps described previously in this chapter. First of all, conducting research with recent ITI graduates presented the opportunity to add to the existing knowledge on employability from the perspective of Taiwanese recently graduated employees, rather than employers, experienced workers, managers, HEIs, or faculty members. In addition, the focus on interviewees born, raised, and educated in Taiwan, provided a non-Western perspective, and the opportunity to compare employability skills. Finally, it's hoped that results from this research will contribute to the diversification of research on employability skills as well as the increasing specialization of business and language curricula.

3. Practitioner Research Questions & Theoretical Framework

This research project originated from questions that appeared following concerns shared by recent graduates of the International Trade Institute (ITI) regarding their difficulties in finding employment, the challenges associated with transitioning from school to the workplace, for both those with or without prior work experience, as well as the frequent desire and/or necessity to change positions shortly after beginning their first post-graduation position, which was in some cases as early as a few months following completion of their certificate. Since the programme was comprised of two distinct parts, the language component (offered in English or Japanese) and the business component (offered in Mandarin Chinese), I began looking into each of these as an initial step to better understanding these challenges.

As a member of the ITI faculty, I had first-hand knowledge of its curriculum and could understand where these concerns could be coming from. In addition, my roles as instructor and administrator had led me to analyse the content of EFL classes in order to determine their relevance, as well as propose, develop, and implement substitute subjects if needed. Therefore, I quickly realized that although the curriculum seemed well-balanced, or rather hadn't received any major complaints from students, faculty, or administration since my arrival, its development had occurred organically, without reform being officially implemented for its over two-and-a-half decades of existence. In other words, ITI's programme seemed to focus on the skills and knowledge traditionally associated with the business world, but hadn't necessarily been audited to determine if it fit the contemporary needs of life after graduation. This seemed to be the case even for more practical EFL classes like English for Meetings, English for Negotiations, and English for Presentations, which strongly emphasized the acquisition of the traditional four skills associated with language learning (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), admittedly with an emphasis on business-related content, but seemed content to provide skills and knowledge without fully understanding if and how these could be used by graduates in the professional world. The issue wasn't necessarily that the EFL department, as well as its curriculum and instructors, was not reaching its goals of delivering quality education. Rather, what kept coming up was whether the goals set by the institution were the best for itself, its students, and the companies and Taiwanese society it sought to serve.

Since the EFL language component only constituted about half of the overall ITI curriculum, it was also important to look into the trade classes, such as Marketing, Accounting, Finance, which are all given in Mandarin Chinese. While I was familiar with the overall structure of the programme, a lack of direct involvement in its management and evaluation efforts made it a greater challenge to understand its

goals, as well as the contribution of every class and activity in reaching these. Nevertheless, it was very important to include this major part of the overall ITI learning experience, especially if it turned out to be the main reason why students chose to study in its programme. Therefore, a perspective that could include all aspects of the ITI programme was necessary.

As a solution, the topic of employability skills was chosen as the perspective from which to examine this situation for several reasons. First of all, it permitted to look into immediate concerns with the ITI curriculum in a manageable way in terms of time and access. Second, discussions on this topic with faculty members had shown similar concerns regarding the level of preparedness of graduates, in addition to concerns that employers' poor opinion of new graduates would directly impact on the perception of its classes, faculty and teaching methods. These concerns had also been raised by the administrative staff, with regards to the need to remain competitive in an increasingly large market. Therefore, this decision to focus exclusively on recent graduate perspectives and experiences presented an opportunity to contribute original research related to this population. Third, with employability studies appearing at an increasing rate over the past two decades, a variety of strong data sources, frameworks, and research methods could be accessed in order to better analyse ITI's recent graduates. In addition, with many of these research projects having been completed in Western (and often English-speaking) countries such as the UK, Australia, Canada, and the USA, pursuing this line of questioning in Taiwan would once more present the opportunity to push this topic further. Finally, examining the views of recent ITI graduates on employability would bring the benefit of being able to examine both business classes and EFL courses at the same time, thus covering the complete curriculum and comparing all subjects.

In order to reach the goals of offering students more valuable skills during their programme, providing qualified graduates to employers, as well as improving the ITI programme in general, the following research questions were asked:

Research Question 1: In the view of recent ITI graduates, what employability skills are required in order for a recent graduate to successfully:

- Obtain employment?
- Transition into a new position?
- Facilitate career progression?

Research Question 2: In the view of recent ITI graduates, which employability skills were successfully taught in the ITI business programme?

Research question 3: In the view of recent ITI graduates, how can business programmes incorporate these employability skills into a curriculum?

3.1 Employability frameworks

A number of employability frameworks were investigated in order to look into employability skills at ITI. Several employability frameworks have played an important role in the development of the study of employability and have consequently had a strong influence on this research project. These are shown in chronological order to show the influence of earlier frameworks on subsequent ones.

3.2 Use of theory in researching employability skills

Ashwin (2011) points out that theory in higher education research is underutilised, not used consistently throughout the research process, or that several different theories are used without explanations or relationships being given. Nevertheless, several theoretical frameworks have influenced contemporary research on employability skills. Young & Chapman (2010) summarized the evolution of employability research frameworks from Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada, and the UK over the past three decades, and found that although the different frameworks had many points in common, regional differences had to be acknowledged.

In the past three decades, employability models have been increasing in size and complexity, in which non-linear interaction between parties plays an increasingly important role, and seem to have become more specialized in order to better serve specific countries, industries, companies, or groups of people. In addition, a number of additional employability skills frameworks have contributed to moving from a quantitative to a qualitative perspective, showing the importance of employability skills for students, institutions, companies, and society in general, as well as creating the case studies that serve as references for projects such as this thesis.

This progression can be seen by observing the five employability frameworks that played a role in developing the research approach for this thesis. These models are:

- SCANS Framework (1990)
- USEM Framework (2002)
- Psycho-Social Model (2004)

- CareerEDGE Model of Graduate Employability (2007)
- Jackson & Chapman's Graduate Employability Framework (2012)

3.3 SCANS Framework (1990)

The SCANS Framework (1990), or *Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills*, was a large scale US government-led research project aiming to identify non-technical skills that could benefit the workforce (Young & Chapman, 2010). It was one of the earliest models used to examine employability skills, which was based on three sets of foundation skills and give competencies, as shown in table 3.1.

Foundation skills				
Basic skills (e.g. reading, arithmetic, speaking)		Thinking skills (e.g. creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving)		Qualities (e.g. taking responsibility, self-esteem, sociability)
Competencies				
Resources: -identifying -organising -planning and allocating resources	Interpersonal: -working with others	Information: -acquiring and using information	Systems: -understanding complex relationships	Technology: -working with a variety of technology

Table 3.1: SCANS Skills & Competencies

Despite its early contributions, it's important to recognize that the factors explored in the SCANS Framework are relatively simple in comparison to later frameworks. For example, the *interpersonal* competency refers to working with others, rather than exploring the different types of interactions within the workplace, such as with colleagues, superiors or subordinates, as well as suppliers or customers. This focus on the individual reflects the simplicity of this model, as well as the lack of information on interaction or influence from other parties. In addition, the SCANS Framework is rather general, which is part of its design since it aimed at identifying skills that could be applied in different jobs and industries (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2012).

3.4 USEM Framework of Graduate Employability (2002)

Knight & Yorke's USEM Framework of Graduate Employability (2003) was one of the first frameworks that focused on non-technical skills acquired in the context of education, rather than general skills related to the workplace, as was the case with the SCANS Framework, and has been highly influential in many subsequent models (Pegg *et al.*, 2012).

This framework was created as the result of the 2002 *Skills Plus Project*, and similar to the SCANS Framework, aimed at increasing employability. However, while the SCANS Framework related to the general workforce, the *Skills Plus Project* aimed to analyse curricula in order to increase employability (Pool & Sewell, 2007). The related and highly influential *Learning and Employability* series also played an important part in popularising the concept of employability, as well as demonstrating the more practical applications of the USEM model in analysing employability in higher education curricula. In addition, one of the most appealing aspects of the USEM model was its adaptability to different contexts. As a result, this model was a major influence in early interviews in this research project.

The USEM model contains thirty-nine employability aspects (see Appendix 1), categorized in 3 groups:

- Personal qualities (e.g. self-awareness, independence, emotional intelligence)
- Core skills (e.g. numeracy, language skills, written communication)
- Process skills (e.g. computer literacy, commercial awareness, prioritising)

In comparison to previous frameworks such as SCANS, the USEM model offers a larger number of variables to explore. For example, while SCANS describes its *interpersonal* competency as "Working with Others", the USEM model breaks it down into more specific behaviours, such as *influencing*, *negotiating*, *team work*, and *political sensitivity*. Another important aspect of the USEM Framework which influenced the decision to adopt it early on in this research process is its easier applicability in the higher education context. More specifically, the USEM Framework was developed to study the acquisition of employability skills in post-secondary education, and the implementation of such skills in the curriculum, collecting data from recent business graduates.

An additional benefit of the USEM Model that influenced its early adoption in the research process is its acknowledgement of interactivity between different parties (e.g. students, higher education institutions, employers), as well as between different sets of skills.

Diagram 3.1 below shows the interaction opportunities between the four concepts from which the term USEM is derived (Higher Education Academy, 2012):

Understanding (of disciplinary subject matter and how organisations work);

Skilful practices (academic, employment, and life in general);

Efficacy beliefs (reflects the learner’s notion of self, their self-belief, and the possibility for self-improvement and development);

Metacognition (complements efficacy, embraces self-awareness, how to learn and reflection. It encompasses knowledge of strategies for learning, thinking and problem-solving, and supports and promotes continued learning/lifelong learning).

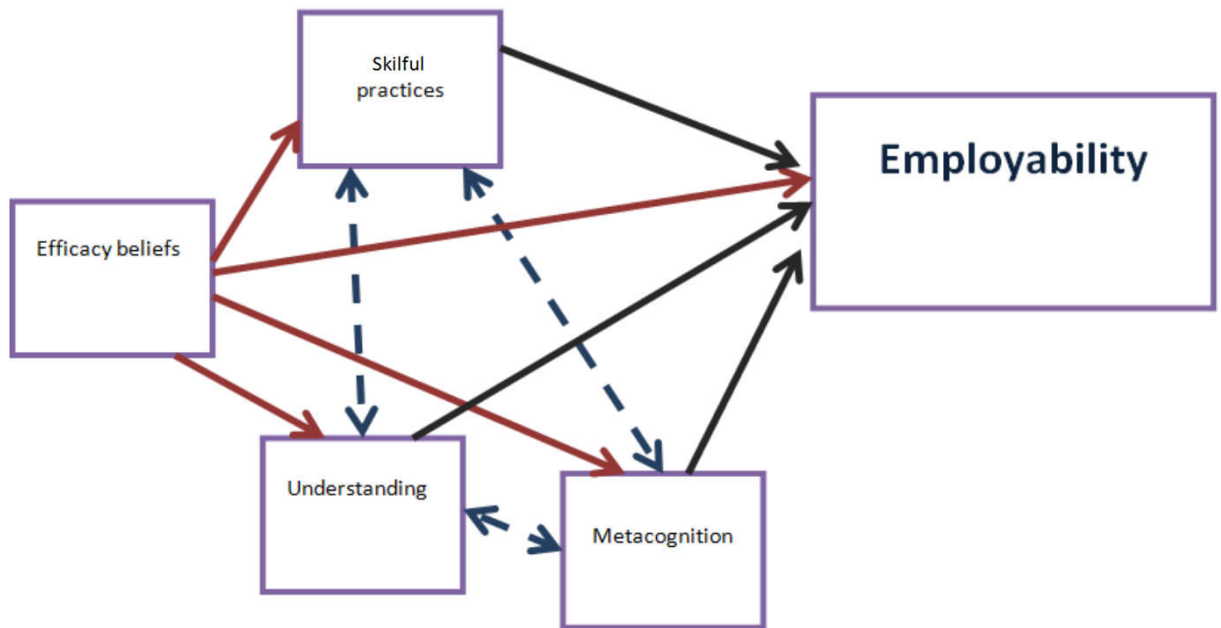


Diagram 3.1: USEM Graduate Employability Skills Framework (Knight & Yorke, 2003)

In addition to employability elements that not only present more specific situations, and that are more relevant to the higher education context, the USEM Model stands out for its emphasis on integrating employability into the curriculum, incorporating other parties in the analysis, such as employers and HEIs, as well as emphasizing metacognition and its practical applications (Owens & Tibby, 2013).

In the context of this research project, exploring this framework added a cyclical element to individual experiences at university, during their job search, their transition into the workplace, as well as in their first years in the workforce. This was particularly important to include since alumni responses from early

interviews that had shown similar challenges and opportunities had presented themselves frequently throughout the transition from student to job seeker, and then from being a new employee in a first position after graduation to regularly moving up the corporate ladder within a company or changing positions and/or employers.

Therefore, it was important to keep this repetition of similar experiences in mind, as each event could have an influence on other elements, and could therefore affect the subsequent job, promotion, or other career changes. The inclusion of metacognition into the discussion of alumni experiences at university and the workplace also added an element of recognition of the individuality and intelligence of each individual interviewed, as well as pointed out the continuous nature of learning.

3.5 Psycho-Social Model (2004)

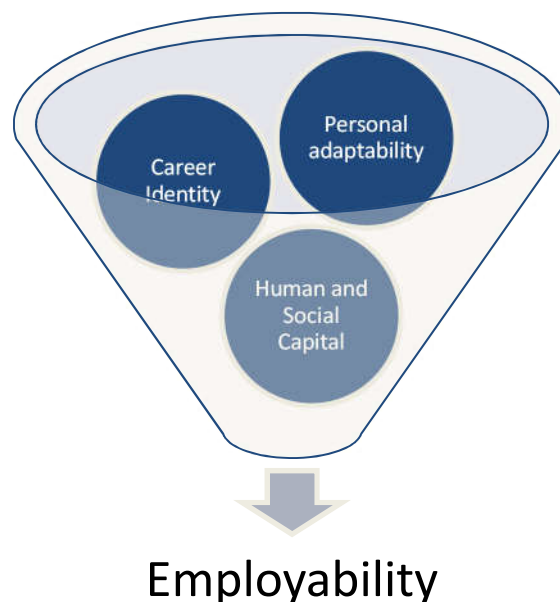


Diagram 3.2: Psycho-Social Model (Fugate *et al.*, 2004)

Fugate *et al.*'s (2004) Psycho-Social Model (Diagram 3.2) focuses on the skills and knowledge students need to acquire in order to fill positions offered by employers. This is an example of a framework that emphasizes how students, recent graduates, or even experienced workers should adapt to the demands of employers, rather than have a more active role in choosing the direction of their professional development.

In doing so, Fugate *et al.* (2004) view employability as a psycho-social construct made of three co-existing dimensions:

- Career identity (e.g. personality traits, beliefs, career identity)
- Personal adaptability (adapt skills and knowledge to new situations)
- Social & human capital (e.g. training, skills development, work experience, social networks)

This framework played a role in shaping the direction of this research project because, despite its strong emphasis on considering the needs for skills and knowledge required by employers from their perspective, it still is constructed around how individuals can build themselves based on requirements and adapt in order to obtain, maintain, or increase their employability. This focus on how individuals can contribute to developing their employability was in line with this research project's goals of examining the perspective of individuals, rather than companies or education providers.

However, Fugate *et al.*'s (2004) framework's stronger emphasis on external requirements can be seen in the focus placed in developing specific sets of characteristics in order to obtain employment. In this sense, it seems to view employability skills as factors that can be measured, and that individuals can possess or not. This may hint at an assumption that employers share preferences regarding desired skills, and that education providers need to provide these in order to ensure employability success. While many institutions would like this to be so, there may be too much variety in the possible combinations of companies, positions, interviewers, and interviewee backgrounds to possibly offer a general set of employability skills. Even in the case of a more specialised institution like ITI, which aims to train its graduates for positions in international sales, an approach meant to please all stakeholders may end up disappointing most. In addition, this framework places a lot of emphasis on the individual's power to take control of his/her training, and adapt it to the needs of employers. While this may be relevant with experienced workers, it was not seen as the most appropriate lens for ITI's role as a general business and language skills provider to students with little or no work experience. Therefore, in the context of this research project's goal to examine recent graduates' perception of employability skills, and how these are delivered (or not) by a business programme, this framework was put aside.

3.6 CareerEDGE Model of Graduate Employability (2007)

The CareerEDGE Model of Graduate Employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) was developed in part with the goal of compensating for the lack of approachability of the USEM Framework for non-experts.

This model sees employability as

*“...having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful”
(Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p.272).*

As it put more emphasis on personal experience, involvement and satisfaction, this framework showed promise as a better suited framework with which to inform data collection from recent business programme graduates.

CareerEDGE stands for:

Career development learning

Experience (work and life)

Degree subject knowledge, skills & understanding

Generic skills

Emotional intelligence

Diagram 3.3 below shows the interaction of these elements:

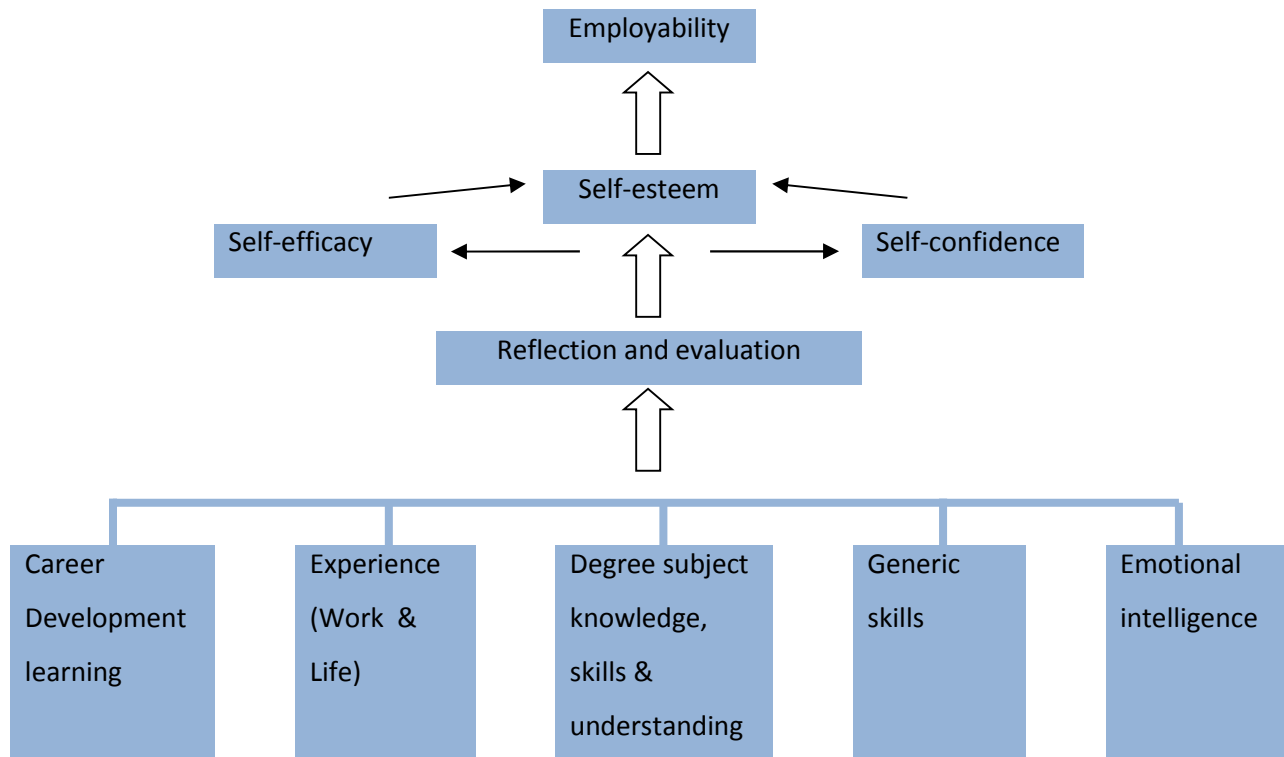


Diagram 3.3: CareerEDGE Model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007)

The CareerEDGE Model considers the individual as the starting point for the analysis of items, many of which were present in the USEM Framework, such as subject skills, knowledge, and understanding, as well as overall skills. In addition, it put a stronger emphasis on previous experiences (e.g. work and life), as well as ongoing learning and career development. In addition, the issue of emotional intelligence was added as a contributing factor to developing employability (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013).

While the USEM Model views metacognition as one of the four elements interacting to determine employability, CareerEDGE places it as an intermediary step between analysing an individual's characteristics and investigating self-satisfaction. The role student satisfaction plays in the CareerEDGE Framework is a notable addition, and plays a major role in the development of employability. This framework also shows flexibility, making it easier to integrate with different groups of interviewees, such as the business programme graduates from ITI. However, its stronger emphasis on a more linear transfer of skills, knowledge and other characteristics into a self-development process, and ultimately employability, didn't match the reality of recent business programme graduates studied in this thesis.

As concepts such as emotional intelligence and satisfaction may be perceived differently in Taiwan, adding these elements to this research project would have added an additional layer of complexity, and would have gone beyond the original objectives of finding gaps between the non-technical skills taught

in business programmes and those required by employers. In addition, different expectations related to life after graduation may also play an important role in measuring this. For example, a point made by some interviewees was that they disliked their jobs, but accepted this since they hadn't expected anything else at this stage in their career. This also extended to their career planning in development, which many either had not thought of beyond getting their first job or had been set out by their parents. Therefore, the more linear nature, emphasis on individual satisfaction, and lack of focus on interaction between different parties of this framework resulted in it being disregarded as a framework to adopt or emulate for this thesis.

3.7 Jackson & Chapman's Graduate Employability Model (2012)

Jackson & Chapman's Graduate Employability Framework (Jackson & Chapman, 2012a) is based on competencies which consist of operational behaviours focusing on the process, more than the outcome, for effective performance (Jackson & Chapman, 2012a). Jackson's (2010) earlier research showed that concerns for the existence of competencies and skills gaps in university graduates were shared in higher education institutions in the USA, the UK, and Australia. Mainly, increased competition with countries such as India and China led to a need to both recruit and retain domestic skilled graduates in order to have a better international position through adding value and innovation.

Based in part on Jackson's (2010) compilation of industry-related competencies, and the conclusion that non-technical competencies could be generic across culturally similar countries (Jackson & Chapman, 2012a), the Jackson & Chapman Graduate Employability Framework was chosen as the basis for the data compilation and analysis for this thesis. Although this framework presented a very strong foundation for this study, it was important to identify the differences between Jackson & Chapman's (2012a) previous applications of this model, and the characteristics of this research project.

First of all, while their research involved higher education business academics, this research project concentrated solely on recent graduates from a business programme. In addition, in my thesis project, interviewees were all from Taiwan, while Jackson & Chapman focused on Australia and the UK. Second, Jackson & Chapman included many disciplines and programmes, such as Marketing, Management & People, Finance & Quantitative, and Economics, but this research project only included ITI graduates. Therefore, data collection was undertaken exclusively with recent graduates of this post-graduate programme, rather than from the undergraduate business students included in Jackson & Chapman's research.

Despite these differences, Jackson & Chapman's model was the framework chosen to conduct formal data collection for this research, in part because it is a more recent employability skills framework that incorporates several elements from previous frameworks, such as the focus on personal development from the CareerEDGE Model, the non-linear interaction from the USEM Framework, as well as efficiently organized sets of employability skills. In addition, it clearly identifies personal characteristics, programme structures, and employer circumstances as playing important roles in the transfer of knowledge from the classroom to the workplace. Also, this framework was developed to help researchers work with undergraduate business students, such as the Jackson & Chapman's (2012a) early research on this type of student in Australia, resulting in its elements being compatible with this study's participants in aspects such as the level of work experience, as well as the emphasis on individual circumstances. Finally, an additional reason that motivated the adoption of this framework as a reference in data collection and analysis was its flexibility towards different cultures.

While many of the frameworks previously discussed above had been designed with a specific culture, industry or age group in mind, often due to their association to a specific government or organization, Jackson & Chapman's framework was created to be applied in developed economies of the world, such as North America, the UK, and other parts of Europe (Riebe & Jackson, 2014). Therefore, its flexible nature, in combination with its many specific examples of behaviour, helped make it more accessible in previously understudied countries, such as Taiwan. The compatibility of this model with this research project was determined by examining how the three original research questions fit into it, which is done below using a graphic representation of this framework (Jackson & Chapman, 2012a).

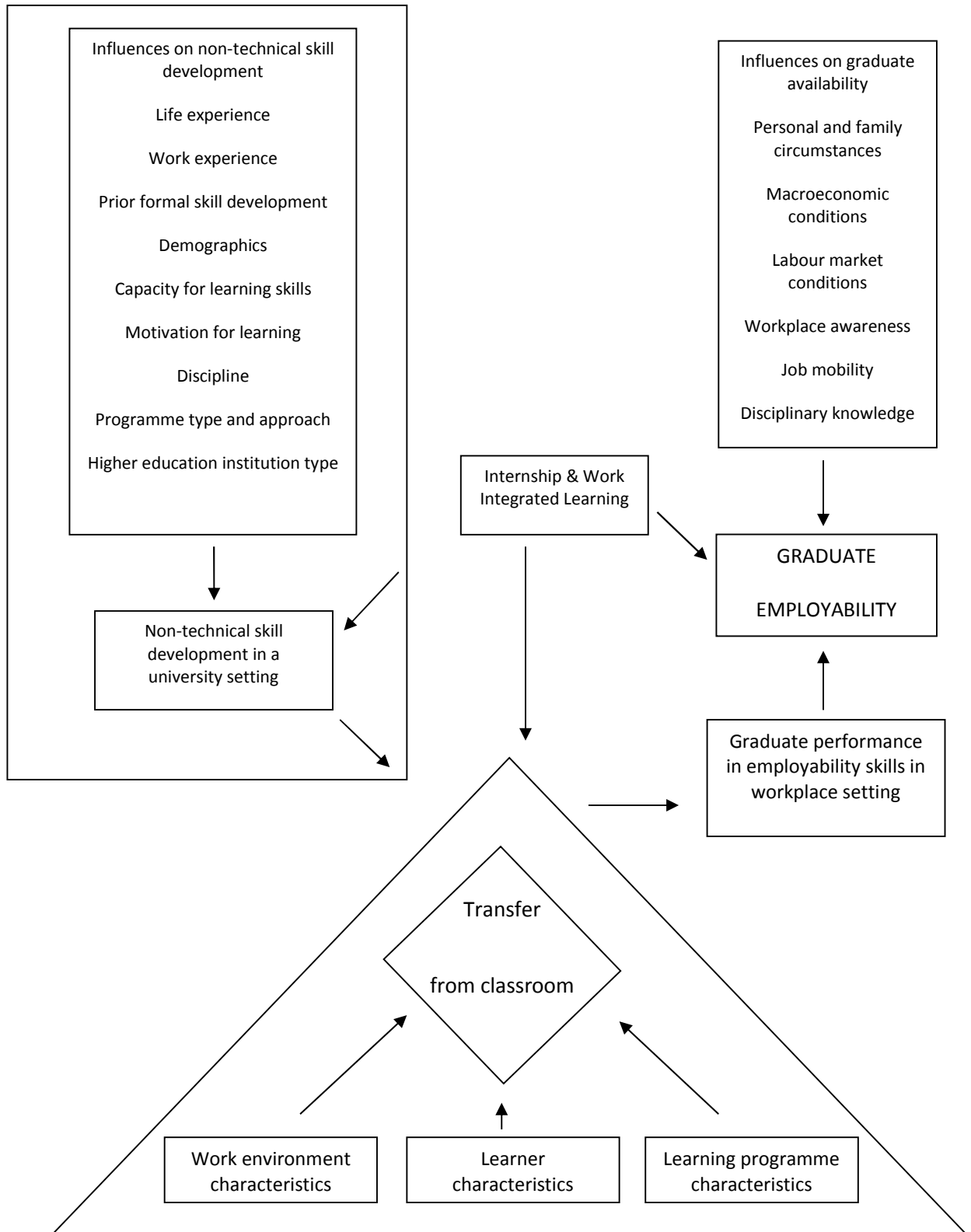


Diagram 3.4: Jackson & Chapman Graduate Employability Framework (Jackson & Chapman, 2012a)

Jackson & Chapman's Graduate Employability Framework added several levels of complexity that were absent in the employability models previously explored. In fact, this framework examined the interaction of students, academic programmes, and the workplace in the transfer of knowledge and skills from the classroom to the professional environment, as well as the influence of the application of employability skills in a company.

In addition, it examines the *Influences of non-technical skill development*. This category of influences contains the following:

- Life experience
- Work experience
- Prior formal skill development
- Demographics
- Capacity for learning skills
- Motivation for Learning
- Discipline
- Programme type and approach
- Higher education institution type

All of these elements contribute to *Non-technical skill development in a university setting*, which will be discussed below with Research Question 3.

Furthermore, this framework examines the *Influences on graduate employability*, and how these impact employability. This category includes:

- Personal and family circumstances
- Macroeconomic conditions
- Labour market conditions
- Workplace awareness

- Job mobility
- Disciplinary knowledge

Research interests aimed to examine the employability skills required from the workplace, and those offered (or not) by a business training programme. Therefore, it was very important to restrain the scope of this research, and keep this in mind when analysing the data.

While the size and complexity of this framework went beyond what was needed for analysing the gaps identified by recent graduates, the components of the framework that were analysed were self-contained, and therefore it was possible to focus exclusively on them. This was in part because the categories and associated behaviours were organized in a way that fit very well with the level of education, work experience, and career progression of the research participants. Therefore, the decision was made to keep the Jackson & Chapman model as a framework for the third, and final, phase of data collection.

This framework's categories served as the foundation for the interview schedule in order to remain close to the source materials, and benefit from comparisons when analysing the data. In addition, as discussing the acquisition and transfer of employability skills was a major goal of the interview, including this framework's established categories and competencies served as both ice-breaker and catalyst in discussing recent graduates' academic and professional experiences.

By doing so, this project also benefited from previous research into the most frequently analysed competencies (Jackson, 2010), the subsequent refinements which were made in similar contexts of business programmes (Jackson & Chapman, 2012b), as well as similar interviewees in terms of age, work experience, and academic majors. The use of the framework's content benefited the collection of data on the acquisition and transfer of employability skills. All three research questions emphasized gathering information related to the framework's *Learner characteristics* data because the goal was to obtain information from the perspective of recent graduates. Therefore, participants were encouraged to share as many personal characteristics and experiences related to each category and competency.

3.8 Application of Jackson & Chapman Framework to Research Questions

Each research question sought to obtain information from different elements from the framework that are more closely related to the experience of students and recent graduates.

Research Question 1: In the view of recent ITI graduates, what employability skills are required, in order for a recent graduate to successfully:

- Obtain employment?
- Transition into a new position?
- Facilitate career progression?

This first research question emphasized the collection of data on employability skills related to the *Work environment characteristics* component of Jackson & Chapman's framework. Although both this component and *Learning programme characteristics* are presented in the framework as both contributing in a similar manner to the transfer process, it was essential in the context of this study to get interviewees to first identify competencies associated with their experiences at work before associating them with ITI classes. This difficulty in associating professional experiences with academic training may be related to the challenge of transferring frameworks across cultures previously mentioned in section 2.10 of this thesis.

As previously mentioned, the transfer of skills and knowledge into the workplace plays an important role in this framework, called *Transfer from classroom to workplace* in the framework, making it compatible with the second element of this first research question: *Transition into this new position*. In addition, the third element of this research question, *Facilitate Career Progression*, identified as *Graduate performance in employability skills in workplace setting*, also played an important role in Jackson & Chapman's framework as a step between *Transfer from classroom to workplace* and *Graduate Employability*. However, the job search process mentioned in this research question, *Obtain employment*, is mostly omitted in Jackson & Chapman's framework.

Although this framework indicated that this could be included as *Transfer from classroom to workplace*, my experience with several graduating cohorts at ITI had shown that the job search process not only played an important role in students' experience, but also had a very strong impact on their life after graduation. Therefore, it was important not to omit this element in adopting this framework as a reference.

Research Question 2: In the view of recent ITI graduates, which employability skills were successfully taught in the ITI business programme?

Following the identification of the most important employability skills needed in the workplace, participants were asked to specify which ones were successfully taught in the ITI curriculum (or not), and successfully transferred into the work environment (or not). As with the first research question, the use of Jackson & Chapman's framework categories and competencies aided participants in identifying which employability skills were associated with classes, as well as elaborate using personal experiences. In addition to emphasizing the *Learner characteristics* component of the framework, this research question also sought to focus more on the *Learning programme characteristics*. In this case, the interview schedule sought to focus on alumni's perception of the ITI programme, while memories were still relatively recent.

Research question 3: In the view of recent ITI graduates, how can business programmes incorporate these employability skills into a curriculum?

Over the past two decades, higher education providers have created lists of employability skills, but don't necessarily monitor how they are integrated or if they lead to a successful transfer to the workplace (Jackson, 2013a). Therefore, one of the goals of this research project was to identify ways to effectively provide employability skills in a business programme, through direct teaching or indirect integration. Therefore, this final research question sought to integrate the three major elements related to *Transfer from classroom to workplace: Learner characteristics, Learning programme characteristics, and Work environment characteristics*.

This third research question also sought to look into another element related to *Transfer from classroom to workplace*, i.e. the *Non-technical skill development in a university setting*. As previously mentioned, this research project sought to focus primarily on alumni's experiences at ITI, as well as within a few years of graduating. Therefore, the elements of the *Influences on non-technical skill development* limited themselves to that period of time.

The skills and categories associated with this framework served as the foundation for the interview schedule used with interviewees. The main reason for doing this is that it was beneficial to keep the data collection and analysis as close as possible to the original source material in order to facilitate comparison with similar research using this framework and be able to offer constructive criticism based on this research context.

As previously mentioned, Jackson & Chapman's framework added elements to previous employability frameworks, resulting in a much larger scope. However, in the case of this research project, the increase

in the number of variables such as previous experiences, socio-economic conditions as well as career progression did not result in a mandatory increase in complexity, since the scope of the research questions did not include all the variables.

In the early phase of this research, I sought a framework that would take into account the non-linear nature of learning, interaction, and career mobility had been sought. However, after completing two rounds of trial interviews (see Chapter 4), it became apparent that although some of the interviewees had gone through similar repeated experiences, such as having more than one job since graduation, they did not interpret it this way. Actually, some seemed to take for granted that the first few jobs following graduation weren't going to be successful, and were only to accumulate experience to move towards their chosen occupation. So, while transition into the workplace had originally been interpreted as seeking employment and adapting to a new environment, interviewees may see it as a longer process that was still taking place. Therefore, approaching life after graduation with a linear approach in mind could make it easier for interviewees to share their experiences. The Jackson & Chapman Graduate Employability Framework served as a strong foundation for the data collection and analysis of this project. Although its scope was greater than what was needed, its structure and interaction between components nonetheless gave inspiration to what could be done, and permitted a level of interaction from interviewees that hadn't been reached before.

4. Research Methodology & Methods

The main goals of this research project were to determine which employability skills were perceived as important by recent graduates of the International Business Administration Programme (IBAP) at the International Trade Institute (ITI), identify if and how these employability skills are taught, and provide recommendations to better implement these skills in the programme.

4.1 Constructivist-Interpretive view

Ritchie *et al.* (2013) view epistemology as how individuals know and learn about the world around them and focus on issues such as learning about reality and what knowledge is based on. They associate a constructivist-interpretive research approach with examining and interpreting participants' interpretation of that understanding and knowledge. More importantly, while this perspective aims to obtain findings based on the collection and analysis of participant data, other factors influence this process. For example, surrounding environments and circumstances, as well as individual researcher characteristics, social circumstances, beliefs, and values make this process subjective all have to be acknowledged by researchers as unavoidable influencers.

With this in mind, I chose to follow such a constructivist-interpretive view of knowledge building for this thesis. My goal was to better understand how recent ITI graduates had experienced the process of entering business school, completing the programme, and most importantly, their perception of events following graduation, such as finding employment and adapting to a new work environment. More specifically, I wanted to study how each graduate built knowledge surrounding these experiences. Therefore, I felt it was important to follow a qualitative approach in order to look into this under-researched segment of research on employability. The goal was to develop a deeper understanding of the motivations behind their choices leading to business school, as well as their interpretation of the events and related skills following graduation.

In examining the limitations of my research situation, such as the limited existing data collection tools adapted to my target interviewees, I realized the necessity to move away from a theoretical framework to a more pragmatic approach with a goal of developing insights into this group of graduates, rather than building a theory (Smith *et al.*, 2011). While following a quantitative approach offered interesting opportunities to better understand the graduate population as a whole, such as by asking ITI graduates to fill out an online questionnaire, I felt it necessary to more deeply analyse the responses of a smaller group of individuals, and more importantly, engage with them to elaborate on their answers.

Since I had anticipated the use of a foreign language would be a key component in the interview, I felt it important to acknowledge this and to engage in one-on-one interviews with each participant in order to not only ensure questions were clearly stated and clarifications were provided if necessary, but also to go beyond the initial response in order to comprehend each person's rationale behind their answers. Also, the under-researched nature of my target audience would have made it difficult to build a questionnaire specifically adapted to recent business school graduates from Taiwan. Therefore, a qualitative approach made it easier for me to adapt to new circumstances during the interviewing process.

Finally, the language challenges mentioned above represented the first, but not last, cultural difference that influenced data collection and analysis. The misconception I had to avoid was the belief that, because I had worked at ITI for several years and had learned to communicate effectively with students, there would be a similar level of interaction during interviews. The reality was that my level of comfort was related to interacting with students and graduates within the ITI culture, but not necessarily outside a well-managed and predictable environment. This emphasized the importance of acknowledging the influencers, for myself, interviewees, as well as any other party involved in the research and analysis portions of this thesis. As mentioned above, following this approach acknowledged my presence, and outsider status, within the ITI and post-graduation cultures, kept me aware of my biases, as well as gave me the opportunity to use my knowledge of ITI, its partners, employees, as well as Taiwanese culture.

As presented in Chapter 1, my academic and professional background is similar in many ways to that of ITI students, such as having studied a foreign language for an extended period of time, living abroad, as well as having completed a business degree with a concentration in international trade. Early on in the exploration of potential research topics for this thesis, I became aware of these similarities, and also remembered how it felt to graduate from business school with little practical experience while still being expected to adapt to a new working environment with little or no support. In addition, I was also aware of my roles of educator and administrator at ITI, of my experiences with this programme and its students, as well as, most importantly, my personal opinions on the ITI programme, its curriculum, and also how well it prepared students for life after graduation. Finally, I was well aware that, in most cases, I had interacted with interviewees in one capacity or another during their time at ITI, and that I had preconceptions regarding how they perceived the ITI programme and their positions obtained after graduation.

However, challenges with following this approach appeared early on in the research process. These challenges included the observation that the interviewees' perception of talking about academic programme and employers as criticizing them, there was a low level of awareness of the academic programme at ITI, even if they had completed it as recently as a year prior, interviewees had a relatively low level of awareness of the employing organisation, and even department, structures, and even in some cases their own roles within these groups, as well as, most importantly, the difficulties related to language.

In preparing and carrying on interviews for this research, I made the mistake of assuming current ITI students and ITI graduates were mostly the same. While the former group was using a higher level of English on a daily basis, did a lot of work before each class, and were eager for the most part to engage in conversations in class in order to get the most out of the programme, the latter group had not studied English on a full-time basis for at least a year, admitted to not using English daily, and had not put in the same amount of preparation work before their interview. In addition, the interviews for this research project didn't follow the linear and mostly predictable path an ITI class would, which added an extra layer of difficulty for participants being asked to engage in real-time introspection while being interviewed in a foreign language. This presented challenges not only in the data collection during the interviews, but also in the validity of the interpretation, since I could not be sure if what had been shared represented the interviewees' recollections and opinions, or an approximation resulting from their limited knowledge of English. Follow-up research exclusively containing interviews in Mandarin Chinese would provide a valuable comparison and help better understand the challenges of these kinds of recent business graduates.

The decision to move from a qualitative interviewing approach to one containing an employability framework to guide participants came through a long process. As shown in 4.2 below, the initial exploratory round with five subjects, not included in the final findings, resulted in a feeling of interviewees having a lot to share, but not necessarily knowing how. While all the related information had been sent beforehand (e.g. list of classes taken at ITI), it was still difficult to engage in conversations about specific skills and experiences. Therefore, in order to be more pragmatic in gaining insights, the decision was made to present a framework into the research, and to provide it well in advance, in order for interviewees to be more at ease with not only better understanding what was meant by specific skills and requirements, but also have time to think about how these corresponded to specific classes, activities, and workplace situations.

In doing so, my biggest fear with this was that the qualitative interview would become a quantitative questionnaire, and that interviewees would feel confined by the categories of the framework. In some ways, this may have happened, especially in the first half of the interview. However, interviewees seemed to initially be more at ease with talking about skills and categories in the framework, and, more importantly, in the second half, open up more easily, engage in discussion on topics stemming from the materials provided, but also on unrelated issues, have the vocabulary to more easily share their thoughts on ITI's programme and the reality of being an inexperienced employee in a Taiwanese company, and also more easily match concepts together, rather than simply ticking boxes.

The decision to move from the Knight & York Graduate Employability Framework (2003) to the Jackson & Chapman Graduate Employability Framework (2012) was in part because of its more accessible (to non-academics) and detailed framework. It was my hope that introducing interviewees to more easily understood concepts and skills would relieve the pressure of having to understand the framework, and rather be used as tools for interviewees to prepare for the interview. As a result, I believe the final fifteen interviews were facilitated by interviewees being able to more easily transition into the conversation by referring to vocabulary and concepts I provided at least a week before the interview, and more naturally moving away from this framework in order to share experiences and opinions. I also believe the most interesting findings came in the second half of interviews when participants felt more at ease.

Although I stand by the decision to introduce the framework to interviewees in order to facilitate the interviewing process, I am fully aware of the influence it has had on enclosing their thoughts inside a box, and that the finding possibilities have been limited by this decision. A repetition of this interviewing process would require the use of a fluent Mandarin Chinese speaker, which I am not, that would permit interviewees to fully express themselves in their native language in order to discuss these higher concept ideas.

However, it's crucial to properly analyze how this experience of conducting research in a foreign language can also help minimize any unintentional and undocumented impact in the future. In an analysis of forty cross-language qualitative studies, Squires (2009) found that only six had successfully met all the study's criteria for cross-language research. Based on these findings, I would say this thesis succeeded in certain parts, such as testing the interviewing process beforehand, but mostly failed to reach the appropriate standards for the inclusion of the language differences in the research description and analysis, as well as working within an appropriate cross-language framework. Different

circumstances, such as the inclusion of a translator, or the participation of interviewees without a close relationship to ITI, may have resulted in more issues, such as having to ensure the credibility of the translator conducting the interviews. Therefore, even if I were to follow the previously mentioned update of conducting interviews in Mandarin Chinese, a stronger research methodology would have to be implemented in order to ensure the quality of the process, as well as minimize the loss of meaning in translation.

4.2 Data Collection process

The data collection process evolved through three phases and an overview is presented in Table 4.1 below:

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Goal	Narrow down research scope: manageability & relevance	Examine research topic: Employability skills gaps Test out Knight & Yorke (2003) framework	Test out Jackson & Chapman (2012a) framework Collect data for analysis
Number of interviews	Five (not used in final analysis)	Five (not used in final analysis)	Fifteen (used in final analysis)
Focus	Gaps between business programme & skills/knowledge needed in workplace	Employability skills needed Employability skills taught How to integrate important skills into programme	Employability skills needed Employability skills taught How to integrate important skills into programme
Insights	Little focus on technical skills (e.g. accounting) Strong focus on non-technical skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, foreign languages)	Stronger interviewee input and interaction Use of employability skills framework as interview tool mostly positive (but also strong influence on linear delivery of information)	Jackson & Chapman (2012a) framework better suited to graduates' experiences Interviews more diversified, unpredictable, and focused on personal experiences
Challenges	English as an interview language Lack of interviewee awareness of academic & professional skills/ knowledge	English as an interview language still an issue Knight & York (2003) framework difficult to interpret & seemingly outdated (e.g. IT)	English as an interview language still an issue, but framework more approachable
Decision	Focus on employability skills Conduct 2nd series of exploratory interviews to test out employability framework: Knight & Yorke (2003)	Keep topic: Employability Skills Move on to framework better suited to recent graduates: Jackson & Chapman (2012a)	Keep interviews as official source of data for analysis

Table 4.1: Summary of research process

4.2.1 Phase 1: Refining the research topic

The process to refine the research topic from gaps between the skills and knowledge offered in the ITI business programme and those required in the early career stages began with a literature review, with particular attention paid to contemporary demands on business programme curricula, such as globalisation and internationalisation, IT, e-commerce, and languages. This preliminary investigation of potential research topics revealed that the high number of relevant topics, as well as the substantial amount of existing research on each of these, required an intervention to take action and move to the next stage of the research. This was strongly motivated by a desire to conduct research that would also be practical and beneficial to ITI, as well as similar institutions, and that could be implemented in existing curricula within a timeframe reasonable for the institution.

In the pilot exploratory round (Turner, 2010), several challenges appeared in the interviewing process. First of all, although all interviewees had recently graduated from an intensive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programme, several had not used this language regularly since leaving ITI, which was between one and five years prior to the interview date, and some of those who had shared it had rarely gone beyond small talk. Therefore, it was difficult for them to discuss more complex issues in English. This communication challenges were increased by the seemingly low level of knowledge of the goals and structure of their former academic programme, even after having been given a complete list of all courses taken during their time at ITI. This lack of understanding of its composition and goals seemed to reflect an observed absence of engagement of current students in their academic progression through a programme in which all core classes were predetermined for each sub-programme (e.g. Class A, Class D) and few electives were available beyond choosing which physical education classes (e.g. golf, tennis) or presentations from guest lecturers to attend.

Despite these challenges, this first round of five pilot interviews was very useful to better understand recent graduates' perspectives on gaps between their school experience and work requirements. The biggest surprise was the general lack of interviewee interest in skills and knowledge that would be traditionally associated with a business programme and business-related jobs, such as sales or marketing. Rather, interviewees often referred to non-technical skills, such as learning to communicate with co-workers, and also pointed to EFL classes as having been helpful in teaching these. In other words, they seemed to transfer the skills, knowledge, and experiences from EFL subjects to the business-related requirements of their positions. This was in some ways unexpected, especially since follow-up questions revealed that few of them had used English on a regular basis at work, or that it was a core part of their

position(s). Indeed, rather than the language itself, they referred to the classes offered in the EFL curriculum as being useful, such as English for Meetings, English for Negotiations, English for Presentations, Job Search, and Business Report Writing. Interestingly, these subjects were all taught in the Mandarin Chinese component of the ITI programme as part of the business course curriculum but hadn't been referred to as the same level. However, a major difference was that these were supplementary business classes, usually taught in an intensive seminar format. The EFL curriculum, on the other hand, offered four hours per week, for a total of up to forty-eight hours, depending on the length of the term, for each subject, as shown in Table 4.2 below.

	Business curriculum hours (Mandarin Chinese)	EFL curriculum hours
Meetings	3	40 to 48
Negotiations	12	40 to 48
Presentations	6	40 to 48
Job search	7	40 to 48
Report writing	3	40 to 48

Table 4.2: Comparison of Business (Mandarin Chinese) and EFL hours in IBAP

As a result of this first round of pilot interviews, I chose to focus on the gaps between employability skills required in the workplace and those taught as part of the ITI programme. Following the decision to narrow the scope of the research project from general gaps between demands of the marketplace and the skills and knowledge offered in ITI's curriculum to concentrating on employability skills, a framework was sought in order to bring an existing structure to this research project that could be compared and built upon. Knight & Yorke's (2003) Graduate Employability Skills Framework served this purpose during the first series of five trial interviews, and was then replaced by Jackson & Chapman's (2012a) Graduate Employability Skills Framework for the final fifteen interviews. As discussed in the Practitioner Research Questions and Theoretical Framework section of this paper, the main reason for this change was the higher approachability of Jackson & Chapman's employability skills and behaviours from the perspective of graduates.

In addition, the trial interviews from the first phase hinted that ITI graduates not only struggled with using English for an extensive period of time, something that many hadn't done since graduation, but also in revisiting their time at ITI, and comparing these experiences with their past and current professional contexts. In addition, it seemed that few were aware of the structure of ITI's programme or the goals of their employer(s). Therefore, a list of employability skills examples was provided to students in order to provide a general idea of what employability skills were, offer a range of possible skills to identify in their academic and professional experiences, as well as equip them with the vocabulary to discuss these during the interview.

With this new perspective in mind, the narrowing of the research scope was undertaken with special attention paid to non-technical skills, which was then specified to employability skills. An updated literature review showed that the study of employability skills seemed to be gaining momentum, as well as presented opportunities to make a contribution. More specifically, the overall focus on decision-makers, both academic (faculty & administrators) and professionals (e.g. managers, HR staff), as well as an emphasis on English-speaking countries such as the UK, the USA, Australia and Canada, presented an opportunity to add to the body of knowledge by concentrating on the perspective of recent graduates from Taiwan, a less extensively studied group. Therefore, I saw the potential to add to the existing body of knowledge on this topic, as well as to apply the findings to ITI.

4.2.2 Phase 2: Knight & Yorke Graduate Employability Framework (2003)

In order to confirm the feasibility of conducting research on employability at ITI, as well as overcome the limitations observed during the first round of interviews resulting from graduates' limited knowledge of English, their former academic programme, as well as the goals of their employers, a second round of interviews was conducted based on Knight & Yorke's Graduate Employability Framework (2003). As previously discussed, this model was chosen for its close association with academic programmes, as well as its well-developed list of categories of employability skills. Therefore, the interviewing approach went from the previous general approach consisting of asking recent graduates to identify gaps between the skills and knowledge they had perceived as important in the workplace and those actually taught in their business programme, to one in which interviewees and interviewer could access categories and skills as a means to initiate discussions on those perceived as most relevant, and expand towards interviewees' opinions and experiences.

A series of five pilot interviews was conducted in order to confirm the existence of gaps between the employability skills required in the workplace and those taught at ITI, as well as determine how giving interviewees access to a framework would affect testimonials about their academic and professional experiences. Results were noticed immediately, as interviewees identified more easily with skills related to their personal contexts, rather than their schools' or companies', and also used the concepts and vocabulary contained in the framework to discuss past events and share their opinions.

Some of the anticipated benefits of using existing categories were that it would reduce the scope of the research to a manageable size, ensure all interviewees started with a similar foundation of knowledge relating to employability skills by having access to a common set of concepts and terms related to this field, thus hopefully permitting the identification of those perceived as the most important. However, it was also possible that providing a list of categories and employability skills might not only constrain the scope of interviewees' recollections, but also engage them on a linear path that would limit the number of original ideas and opinions. With this in mind, the updated data collection approach was tested with five participants with two possible outcomes in mind. If interviewees responded mechanically without adding their personal insights, then the use of a list of categories and employability skills would be abandoned. On the other hand, if using this tool helped participants open up and elaborate on their experiences more, then the list would be kept.

As a result of updating the interview schedule to focus on employability skills and providing interviewees with a list of the employability categories and skills listed in Knight & Yorke's Graduate Employability Framework (2003), a number of differences were noticed in participant responses. First of all, it seemed that participants engaged in the interview much more readily, showed a lower level of hesitation, possessed a much better command of the English language for both general terms and specific vocabulary related to employability skills, referred to more personal experiences related to these types of skills for both the workplace and their time in the ITI programme, and also gave examples of how they believed the skills and knowledge learned at ITI had benefited them in the workplace.

In addition, although interviews followed a standard path of going through the provided categories and employability skills, interviewees often chose the topics to discuss, jumped between different categories, and more easily formed connections between skills from different categories without being asked. Once provided with relevant concepts and vocabulary, interviewees more easily shared opinions and experiences related to employability skills, and I saw that certain trends had the potential to be identified, such as the importance of certain classes in developing specific employability skills (e.g.

Marketing for trade classes, English for Presentations for English classes), as well as some gaps in the ITI business curriculum (e.g. internal corporate communication). Therefore, I chose to keep this framework-supported data collection approach for this research project. However, despite this step in the right direction, it seemed that Knight & Yorke's (2003) framework's content was better suited for higher education institution managers and academics who were familiar with employability as a research discipline, rather than non-specialists engaging in an interview in a foreign language. In addition, the framework was over a decade old, and therefore did not directly refer to concepts that had become commonplace in the life of business graduates at the time of these interviews, such as globalisation, computer and internet skills, as well as social networking. Therefore, the decision was made to continue the process with a framework better suited for skills currently in demand as well as created with non-experts in mind.

4.2.3 Phase 3: Jackson & Chapman (2012) framework

Jackson & Chapman's Graduate Employability Skills Framework (2012a) was adopted as the foundation for the third and final round of fifteen interviews. As before, five interviews were first conducted in order to determine the effectiveness of this framework. Following an improvement in interviewee responses and a more frequent use of its concepts and vocabulary, the decision to adopt this as the final framework was taken and ten additional interviews were conducted, for a total of fifteen. This number was determined after analysis of the time available to complete the necessary steps (contact potential interviewees, set up & conduct interviews, transcribe & analyse data). As the method previously used in the second round of pilot interviews had proven successful overall, only the list of employability categories and skills was updated. Another reason why this framework was chosen was because of Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) subsequent use, and modification, of this framework in an Australian higher education institution, which showed its flexibility in adapting to different higher education contexts, but also presented a path to follow to identify employability skills, implement changes within ITI, and later measure the success of these policies.

However, differences with ITI's circumstances had to be acknowledged. For example, Jackson *et al.* had focused on undergraduate business students, while I interviewed recent graduates from a post-graduate business programme, resulting in differences such as age, academic training, and working experience. In addition, while both related institutions experienced a lack of an employability training measurement system at one point, Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) context was one where a system has been developed and the research is meant to measure its effectiveness, while the institution related to my research hadn't

even begun the process. An advantage from this last point was that I was able to learn from how the process had been implemented previously, and how they were a few steps ahead in measuring the effectiveness of these efforts.

Since the goals of this paper were to identify the employability skills required by recent Taiwanese business school graduates using an existing framework, rather than develop a new one, the amount of time spent on this step was drastically reduced (Silverman, 2010). In addition, as the framework had been developed for business students in Australia, concerns existed over the inclusion of non-essential characteristics, as well as the omission of those that would apply for a group of Taiwanese students. As a result, the decision was made to emulate the framework as closely as possible in order to test it out in a new environment, and subsequently make modifications to better serve the studied population, rather than pre-emptively modify it in anticipation of possible differences. An exception to this was the distinction between *Communicating Effectively* within interviewees' company by using their native language of Mandarin Chinese, and *Communicating Effectively* outside interviewees' company by using a foreign language such as English and Japanese. This was done in order to better distinguish between employability skills required for work within a Taiwanese company, and those for interaction with parties such as overseas customers, or suppliers, which is one of ITI's main goals. However, it is important to note that this may still have been done through the translation of the framework description and each of its points into Mandarin Chinese. While efforts were made to maintain the original meaning, subtle changes may have been made by the translators (myself and the head of the student placement programme) (Forsyth *et al.*, 2006).

As a result of this modification, the collection and analysis of data related to skills such as *Verbal Communication*, *Public Speaking*, and *Meeting Participation*, were explored from two different perspectives, and interviewees were asked to distinguish between and elaborate on each of them if necessary. However, several major differences between Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) research environment and goals and those of this project became more obvious, mainly through the fact that no prior research on employability skills had been completed at ITI, and that these were not part of the programme description, goals, or assessment criteria. Therefore, while the comparison of the curriculum against the employability skills framework played a part in setting up Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) goal of assessing these skills and updating the programme, it served as this research project's main focus, leaving subsequent steps (i.e. auditing student skills, re-aligning curriculum, evaluating transfer of skills) to future follow-up research.

Nevertheless, despite the differences in depth between both research projects, Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) research on an existing employability skills acquisition programme was very useful in initiating research on employability skills from the perspective of ITI's recent graduates by adopting an earlier step or position. First of all, while Jackson *et al.* (2013) sought to describe key messages for internal and external stakeholders, my research aimed to examine the perspective of a specific group of internal stakeholders (i.e. recent graduates). Second, Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) assessment of whether already identified employability skills are taught served as a model for the identification of employability skills, based on Jackson & Chapman's (2012a) framework, needed in life after graduation, as well as if/how they are taught in ITI's current programme. Third, while Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) research emphasized updating core skills associated with a programme's individual units, my research sought to identify which core skills were perceived to be associated with business or language classes, as well as extra-curricular activities. Finally, Jackson *et al.* (2013) sought to revise learning outcomes, content, and descriptions associated with each unit, in order to promote the related skills. In contrast, as ITI did not have an employability skills development framework, this research project did not have the opportunity to assess and evaluate employability skills.

Once more following Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) method described for the analysis of employability skills, the criteria for the selection of a framework were identified, or rather confirmed. The search for a framework had been conducted previously, with earlier frameworks from researchers such as Yorke & Knight (2003), Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007), and finally Jackson & Chapman (2012a). This process is described in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis. As Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) research project aimed to analyse an existing employability skills programme within an institution, thus being on step ahead of this research in terms of recommendations and implementation, it was not possible to compare the data from this research project with an existing employability skills development system at ITI. One possibility of a follow-up research project would be to conduct similar comparative research in the near future in order to determine the effectiveness of the employability skills programme that could be implemented as a result of this research.

In order to make the task of discussing employability in a business programme and in the workplace possible for ITI alumni, the interview schedule was updated by moving on to a more recent framework developed by Jackson & Chapman (2012a). In addition to the previously lack of accessibility to an audience not involved in training or hiring, it also presented a much stronger focus on students' and recent graduates' experiences, rather than the employers' or higher education institution' perspectives.

As with the previous round of interviews, participants were provided with all relevant documents in order for them to better understand the goals and the procedure of the research process, more adequately prepare for the interview, as well as understand ethical issues such as confidentiality and their rights as interviewees. In addition, interviewees received a bilingual list of Jackson & Chapman's Graduate Employability Skills, and their description, in order for them to have a better understanding of employability skills, think about them beforehand in the context of their academic programme and their early career, and discuss them during the interview.

For the final round of interviews, fifteen individuals were chosen from respondents from the second and third rounds, with priority given interviewing an evenly spread out number of alumni from each class (e.g. Class A, Class D), and then by choosing them based on their availability, access to technology (e.g. one was in Vietnam and didn't have access to a dependable internet signal), to finally make a final choice at random if too many candidates from the same class were available. Once more, all interviews took place on Skype, and were recorded (with the interviewees' permission) using Evaer software. Finally, each interview lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes.

As a result, changes were observed in the interview process. Right away in the first five interviews of this final round, an improvement in the level of response of interviewees was noticed in both how well they responded to the elements of the interview schedule, as well as how they more easily went beyond the items in the interview schedule. For example, although the idea of influencing others was only mentioned once in the schedule, and got one of the lowest levels of response when asked directly to discuss it, the theme came back frequently throughout interviews, which hadn't been the case in the first two rounds of trial interviews. Therefore, data collection moved forward with this version of the interview. After the fifth interview, further interviews were put on hold in order to transcribe them and do a preliminary analysis of their content in order to see if any changes could be made to the interview schedule or the data collection method. Each interview was transcribed using the YouTube captioning software, which also provided a password-protected online back-up copy of each interview, which could only be accessed by the interviewer. Following this, no changes were made to the interview schedule, but a goal was set to pay more attention to the most popular themes to come up during the interviews, and especially those that were not part of the original interview schedule (e.g. co-worker influence).

Then, the final ten interviews were completed, transcribed, and readied for content analysis, as described in the coding section in this chapter. One of the biggest challenges that resulted from using this guide was determining the order of questions, as well as if all of Jackson & Chapman's categories of

employability skills should be included. The decision to keep all the categories in the same order was taken because it would facilitate comparison with similar research done with the same framework, as well as because interviewees would all receive the interview schedule at least a week in advance, giving them the chance to think about their answers beforehand.

Throughout all rounds, a semi-structured interview schedule (Barbour, 2008) was developed for this research project in order to present the same questions to all interviewees, supply prompts to encourage participants to move forward, while still giving them the opportunity to elaborate on their answers as they saw fit. The approach used a combination of presenting multiple categories of employability skills and asking open questions, the former in a series of employability skills, classes and activities being given to students, and the latter on follow-up questions as to the reasons behind the choices. In addition, the structure of the interview schedule was divided in three parts (see Appendix 2). The first consisted of general information questions, such as their motivation to enter a business programme and details of their job placement. In addition to acquiring valuable data, this also served as a warm-up to the more difficult questions. The second and largest part consisted of questions related to employability skills needed in professional circumstances, as well as if and how these were provided by their business programme. Finally, the third part of the interview schedule consisted of asking interviewees about gaps they might have identified in the curriculum of their business programme, and how they could be filled. The question that asked interviewees to be the most critical of their institution was asked last for two reasons. First of all, going through the process of examining both their workplace experience and the structure of their business programme would hopefully help them clarify their thoughts on the matter. Second, interviewees were clearly informed that this was the final question, and that it would be their final chance to share any insights they had.

4.3 Interviewing

A constructivist-interpretative approach was adopted in order to qualitatively research the experiences of each interviewee, identify similarities, elaborate on differences, construct a better understanding of ITI's curriculum, the Taiwanese job market, as well as the business and EFL school present-day circumstances. The choice to only include ITI graduates was in part motivated by a prior understanding of the programme, its students, as well as existing challenges. In addition, the full support of administration and involvement of key staff members gave access to official documents (e.g. programme structure & syllabi) and contact information (e.g. alumni e-mails), as well as confirmation of the authenticity of documents presented to interviewees (e.g. programme structure) and translation of

documents from English to Mandarin Chinese (e.g. employability framework) and Mandarin Chinese to English (e.g. list of business classes).

In addition, it was hoped that findings from this research could be applied in the researched work environment in order to improve the quality of the programme, the content offered to students, better reach the institutional goals of offering students a strong start in a new career in business, as well as provide Taiwanese companies with skilled professionals that could help them develop internationally.

Individuals interviewed at all stages of this research shared the following traits:

- Taiwanese citizens
- University and ITI graduates
- Mandarin Chinese as first language
- Graduation TOEIC scores between 800 and 990
- Graduated from ITI 1-5 years prior to the interview
- Worked in a business-related position for at least one year following graduation

The choice to limit the scope to graduates having left ITI within one to five years prior to the interview and having at least one year of experience in a business-related field was to focus on the perspective of individuals who were still relatively close in time to their experiences in business school and would hopefully view them more objectively, rather than with nostalgia, as well as be experiencing the challenges related to the early stages of a career. However, it's important to point out that doing so added the additional characteristic for most interviewees of having been in contact with the interviewer, either through activities such as classes, extra-curricular activities, entrance and/or exit examinations, feedback sessions, or even special events such as cross-campus artistic competitions. In addition, the choice to not include gender as a criterion was made because the priority was put on ensuring diversity of interviewees in terms of class (e.g. Class A, Class B) as well as graduation year. While it would have been preferable to ensure an equal number of male and female interviewees, the reality in which 70-80% of graduates during the studied period were female made this more difficult.

Contact information for potential interviewees was obtained from the ITI Senior Project Manager responsible for building relationships with potential employers, organizing recruitment activities such as job fairs, as well as conducting post-graduation employment surveys. ITI graduates were contacted by e-mail, and interviews were scheduled with a number of those who showed interest. In order to include as

much diversity in terms of academic and professional experiences, as well as in language proficiency, a stratified sampling approach (Turner, 2010) was adopted in inviting former students from each of the ITI sub-programmes (Classes A, B, C, D and E presented in Chapter 1 of this thesis), and to aim at a well-balanced number of interviewees from each of the classes if the number of positive replies permitted. In addition, following the first phase of interviews, it was determined that EFL classes played an important part in the post-graduate experiences, including the testimonial from the Class B (Japanese language) graduates who had only taken four EFL classes during his time at ITI, so the decision was made to only include groups from EFL sub-programmes, mostly in order to identify the most influential classes and related skills from a larger curriculum. It is nonetheless important to acknowledge the bias this may have introduced towards EFL classes.

In preparation for participating in an interview, potential interviewees were informed of the following (at least a week in advance):

- Title of research
- Details on researcher (name, organization, contact information)
- Details on research institute (name, contact information)
- Copy of the interview schedule (see Appendix 2)
- Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix 3)
- List of employability skills and behaviours: Knight & Yorke (2003) for Round 2 (see Appendix 1), and Jackson & Chapman (2012) for Round 3 (see Appendix 4)
- List of business classes, EFL classes, and extra-curricular activities taken at ITI

All documents used in the interviewing process were presented to ITI graduates in both English and Mandarin Chinese. Translation was conducted with the help of the ITI Senior Project Manager previously mentioned. In addition to the role held at the time, this person was also directly involved in the ongoing development of the ITI EFL and business curricula for over a decade, possessed a professional background in EFL studies, and was fluent in Mandarin Chinese. Therefore, the interviewing process only began once her approval was given on the quality of the translation of all documents.

Interviews lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes and all took place via Skype in order to increase access to participants across Taiwan and overseas, eliminate travel needs for both parties, easily record interviews, as well as increase the flexibility of scheduling interviews. In addition, all participants were asked to forward a signed consent form (see Appendix 3) before the interview in order to acknowledge

their understanding of the process, as well as their rights to depart at any time. In total, for all three stages of this thesis, four hundred fifty-five invitations were sent to alumni from having graduated between 2008 and 2013, of which forty-three showed an interest in participating, and twenty-five were interviewed. As previously described, five interviews were conducted in the initial stage of the research in order to refine the research topic, leading to the selection of employability as the study lens. In addition, five interviews were conducted using the Knight & York employability skills as a guide for interviewees to elaborate on their experiences. Finally, the fifteen interviews on which this research paper is based on were conducted using the Jackson & Chapman skills & behaviours as a guide for interviewees to discuss their school and employment experiences in more detail.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

In preparation for data collection and analysis, several ethical issues were included as part of the research process. The first ethical issues considered for this research, which were all communicated to potential participants, were the voluntary nature of participation (and lack of compensation), the right to withdraw at any time, the transparency regarding the goals of the research as well as the potential benefits, as well as an assurance of confidentiality. As for the institutions involved, it was essential to proceed with this research project only after it had been approved by the University of Liverpool EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 5), as well as the Authorization Letter from the International Trade Institute (see Appendix 6).

The need for interviewees to prepare themselves is directly related to the decision to conduct interviews in English, a language none of the interviewees spoke fluently, and as it turns out, many had not spoken at length since graduation. This approach created several obstacles, such as the need to better prepare interviewees beforehand, which may have led to aligning their train of thoughts with the framework presented, limited the ease with which interviewees could express themselves, as well as may also have discouraged them from going deeper in their self-analysis. In addition, this challenge may have added an extra selection criterion, meaning that only those who felt confident enough with their English skills may have agreed to participate.

However, despite these challenges, I believe this choice was better than conducting interviews in Mandarin Chinese for several reasons. First of all, every interviewee's level of English was superior to my knowledge of Mandarin Chinese, especially in oral communication. Therefore, in addition to my inability to properly understand answers in order to ask for clarification or follow-up questions, the

transcription and analysis would have been immensely more challenging and time-consuming, and some subtle cues may have been undetected.

If the experience were to be repeated, doing interviews in Mandarin Chinese with an interviewer fluent in this language would permit interviewees to better share their thoughts, minimize the amount of preparation, deliver more natural answers, as well as increase the level of interest in participating. More importantly, more advanced clarification and follow-up questions could be asked, potentially leading to deeper thoughts and more meaningful insights. However, changing languages wouldn't necessarily make interviewees more aware of their past academic programmes, current work requirements, as well as non-technical skills in general.

4.5 Data analysis

Once all the interviews were completed, all interviews were transcribed and explored in order to better understand their content, and identify themes (Turner, 2010) related to job search, transition into the workplace, and the early stages of a graduate's career, as well as test out the assumptions that had led to this research.

Upon completion of the transcription, the coding process followed a series steps similar to those proposed by Gray (2014). First of all, I read through each of the fifteen transcripts in order to do a preliminary round of coding in order to detect potential themes, as well as familiarize myself with the overall content. Throughout this process, it was important to familiarize myself with the trends appearing in interviews, while not letting early potential themes guide the reading of later transcripts. Rather, I made conscious efforts to examine all parts of each transcripts with equal attention, while still taking note of repeated vocabulary, experiences, and potential themes. Once this first round was finished, I read through all my notes taken during interviews and during the previous reading of transcripts, and then noteworthy aspects of the interviews, such as unusual and/or frequently mentioned items.

Then, with a better understanding of the general thoughts and experiences of interviewees in mind, I set out to read through all transcripts once more in a more focused manner by setting out to identify keywords related to potential themes hinted at in the previous read-through. This stage included highlighting specific keywords, as writing personal comments, questions, as well as beginnings of theories. Once more, it was important to maintain the focus on the content at hand in order to let trends appear by themselves, rather than let my original preconceptions limit the scope of my

examination. At the end of this second reading, overlapping codes were combined and unclear code names were amended. An open coding process (Merriam, 2009) was adopted to identify key concepts such as skills perceived by alumni as beneficial to their success after graduation (e.g. influencing others), classes identified by interviewees as having played an important role in developing workplace communication skills (e.g. English for Meetings), as well as perceived challenges experienced in the early stages of a career (e.g. learning the office culture), or gaps in their academic training (e.g. internal communication). Following Corbin & Strauss' (2007) approach to qualitative data analysis, I then moved to grouping these open codes following an axial coding approach in order to identify themes, and finally formed propositions through selective coding.

The identification of categories was based on several criteria, such as a specific word or idea being repeated by several interviewees and/or discussed in length by one or several individuals. In addition, special attention was paid to direct referrals by interviewees to experiences in school or at work, as well as specific classes, skills, and training. In addition, categories were created to capture unexpected or surprising themes in interviews, especially during the second exploration of the transcripts. The next step consisted of identifying the most important codes and combining them to create categories through axial coding Corbin & Strauss (2007). First of all, the most important codes, once more determined by frequency & elaboration, direct referrals, as well as their surprising nature, were identified and served as the foundation for themes. Following this, the codes that stood out less were either attached to existing categories, resulting in some cases to the eventual theme adopting a different name reflecting the nature of the different codes or were simply being discarded in order to focus the analysis on a more manageable number of themes. With these code categories in mind, I began reflecting on my original preconceptions that had led me to select employability as a lens for the study of this particular cohort, the findings that had emerged from the past decade with regard to more extensively groups such as English-speaking countries and company managers, and more important how the data I had just evaluated differentiated itself from these.

As previously discussed, the Jackson & Chapman framework (2012a) had been chosen for its ease of use with this study's interviewees, as well as its basis in business education programme research. However, while the names of employability skills from this framework were kept intact in order to maintain consistency and facilitate comparison, the organization of themes and the summarized content for each employability skill was based on interviewees' perceptions of these skills, rather than Jackson & Chapman's original descriptions. This point comes across in Chapter 5 of this thesis, when skills usually

associated with personal processes (e.g. *Conceptualization*) are associated with social activities, and vice-versa. Following the analysis of employability skills identified as important in the period following graduation, ITI programme courses associated with the themes and skills identified as most important were analysed in order to once more identify how they helped students acquire employability skills, and determine how these could be replicated in other courses or activities. Finally, the employability skills and classes identified as most important were identified and discussed in Chapter 5.

4.6 Reflexivity in the research process

On a more personal level, it was important for me to adopt a reflexive approach in order to become better aware of the subjective interaction between myself and interviewees (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). For instance, throughout the process of organizing interviews, it was important to keep the selection of potential interviewees as random as possible, without giving priority to classes I thought would express opinions similar to my preconceptions on programme-workforce gaps. This need to distance myself from the selection process was also important when interviewing individuals I had encountered as an instructor and/or administrator.

On a related note, it was essential for me to be aware of my opinions of ITI, as well as its curriculum, faculty, administration, and role within TAITRA. This was particularly important during the interview process since it was essential to let the flow of information come naturally, rather than push the conversation in a direction parallel to my flow of thoughts on the ITI programme, as well as on business education in general. This became more important following the first series of five interviews since preliminary findings were becoming more apparent, many of which I agreed with, such as the need to improve the teaching of social skills within a business curriculum, and wanted to be supported by subsequent interviews. Therefore, it was important to follow the same procedure and follow-up questions in order to remain as objective as possible.

Finally, the most important elements to keep in mind were my personal experiences (Cousin, 2010) as a business school student in Canada, especially since I had experienced similar challenges following graduation, such as the feeling the programme has been more academic than practical, had focused on teaching skills and knowledge that would better serve a higher level manager many years later, and generally hadn't prepared me for the type of employment I could obtain with little professional experience. The challenge was that, prior to beginning the research process, I had empathised with students and the situations they found themselves, which was a reason that had motivated my initial

choice to study gaps between business curricula offerings and workplace needs. Indeed, it's difficult to think that I didn't transfer any of my thoughts on contemporary business education to the choice of framework, creation of an interview schedule, as well as follow-up questions asked during interviews.

Nevertheless, I believe that my awareness of this bias helped keep a necessary distance, and permit the surfacing of original thoughts and insights from recent graduates. For example, my initial focus on core business classes was quickly replaced with the importance of EFL classes as a source of non-technical skills training, an aspect of business education I hadn't expected to find in all five participants in the initial trial interviews, and later with follow-up interviews. Better understanding my roles as a former business school student, educator, administrator, as well as doctoral student, helped me maintain clarity in obtaining and analysing data, as well as be better aware of biases in doing so.

5. Research Findings and Interpretation

This thesis aimed to examine recent International Trade Institute (ITI) graduates' views on the employability skills beneficial to obtain employment, transition into the workplace, as well as advance professionally. The dual nature of the ITI programme undertaken by interviewees, consisting of a combination of business classes taught in Mandarin and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, was reflected not only in how interviewees discussed their experiences at ITI, but also in the skills perceived as important, as well as those acquired throughout their studies in this institution.

This chapter presents the findings of this research in two parts: first, the acquisition of employability skills in EFL classes, and second, the importance of Social Employability Skills in the early stages of ITI graduates' careers. The section on EFL classes will cover student satisfaction with the ITI programme, perceived gaps in employability skills, the transfer of skills from EFL classes to Mandarin Chinese working environments, differences in employability skills acquired in business, general EFL classes, and specialized EFL classes, as well as common traits found in classes perceived as providing Social Employability Skills. The section on Social Employability Skills will present an overview of employability skills related to building and maintaining relationships in the workplace identified as most important by interviewees, which are categorized in three main themes.

5.1 EFL classes as a source of employability skills

My early research interest was closely related to the desire to identify gaps between programme offerings and workplace demands. Originally, my thoughts on the subject, influenced by my experiences as a business student in Canada, and later as an instructor and administrator at ITI, were centered around the idea that the demands of the business world could be satisfied by the appropriate selection and delivery of the right business classes. Like many students, administrators, business instructors, and even EFL faculty members, I saw EFL classes at ITI as an essential part of the programme, since developing language skills was one of the reasons why ITI was founded, but nonetheless one that offered mostly language skills that played a secondary role to business components.

However, conducting this research project showed me the current impact of EFL classes in developing employability skills, particularly those of a social nature, called Social Employability Skills in this thesis, that both play a role internally, such as with co-workers, superiors, and other departments, and externally, such as with customers, suppliers, and competitors. The first clue came with the first series of five exploratory interviews, in which EFL classes had been identified as helpful in the workplace, despite

interviewees not necessarily being able to elaborate in detail on the reasons why. Following the adoption of employability skills as a lens to narrow down the scope of the research, focus the data collection process, as well as serve as a guide for analysis, similar findings were detected throughout the later interviews. Later analysis of interviews showed that although business classes (offered in Mandarin Chinese) satisfied most student expectations regarding skills and knowledge development for the business world, and that several classes were associated with employability skills, interviewees more often associated acquiring employability skills important for early career success with EFL classes.

5.1.1 Employability skills in business classes

Although EFL classes were most closely associated with the acquisition of useful employability skills for the immediate post-graduation period, it's worth mentioning that the secondary, unplanned, and undocumented acquisition of employability skills is not limited to EFL classes. However, due to the unanticipated perceived importance of EFL classes in providing these skills, as well as the more traditional and predictable nature of the employability skills associated with business classes, I chose to put most of the research focus on the EFL elements. Nonetheless, it's important to acknowledge some of the employability skills associated with traditional business classes, and also to better understand how similar these are to those developed in EFL classes.

Interviewees often associated employability skills such as Information Management, with classes such as Marketing, as related by Interviewee 4.

I remember we have several Marketing Courses, and we also have to do a lot of reports, and a lot of evaluations, and we had to collect information from other people, and also among our team members, we have to make sure everybody is at the same position for that information, so I think the International Marketing Management courses, those categories helped us to train that category. (Interviewee 4)

What makes EFL-related employability skills different is, in part, the social application of employability skills, whether they are more easily associated with group activities. However, it's worth mentioning that Social Employability Skills were also more closely associated with two business classes: Marketing and Business Plan. Both these classes have several points in common with EFL classes, such as group activities, frequent small-scale activities, regular feedback from instructors, as well as several presentations to small and large audiences. It would be interesting in future research to further explore these classes, such as in comparing them with other business courses more closely associated with more Personal Employability Skills or with EFL classes said to help acquire Social Employability Skills

5.2 General interviewee satisfaction with ITI curriculum

In order to better understand interviewee perceptions employability skills, as well as whether they perceived these to have been properly taught in the ITI curriculum, it's important to take a look at graduate satisfaction towards the programme in general, for both the business and EFL components. The goal is to show the overall mood of interviewees in sharing feedback on their programme, and how the identification of gaps came following a specific exploration of recent academic and professional experiences, rather than as an expression of discontent towards these.

Overall, recent ITI graduates interviewed seemed to be satisfied with the content of their business and language classes. While some criticism regarding certain classes, instructors, teaching materials, and extra-curricular activities was made during several interviews, as could be expected with any programme, negative feedback seemed to lack the frequency and intensity necessary to even hint at areas of the curriculum that were defective.

Similar findings were made relating to EFL classes. Despite feedback based on personal experiences in the ITI programme and following graduation, no major trends of criticism towards EFL classes at ITI were identified. Students were generally satisfied with the content of the EFL curriculum, mostly relating to traditional EFL content, such as vocabulary, grammar, role-playing, and also the business angle used in these. Therefore, the general interviewee experience seems to refer to acquiring skills helpful in obtaining employment, but not being beneficial until several months, or even years, later. As a result, interviewees found themselves challenged in the transition phase in which they didn't necessarily feel that they possessed the skills necessary to complete their assigned tasks nor build the necessary internal and external social networks. This issue of balancing more practical workplace skills, that could be beneficial to recent graduates in the short term, with more theoretical business skills, that could better help graduates move into higher level positions in their companies, such as a managerial role, mostly relates to business classes, which is not the focus on this chapter. However, as it has come up in several interviewees, this specific aspect of skills acquisition warrants further research in the future.

5.3 Gap in short-term employability skills provision

The research questions of this thesis aimed to identify employability skills perceived as important for the initial stages of an ITI graduate's professional life (job search, transition, adaptation), if/how these were provided in the ITI programme, as well as what changes could be made to better integrate learning these in an academic programmes. However, challenges in conducting data collection, elaborated on in

Chapter 4 of this thesis, such as conducting interviews in a foreign language, interviewees not having an in-depth knowledge of the structure of the ITI programme or the organization of their employer(s), or the difficulty of re-examining personal experiences with a more critical eye, as well as the unexpected importance of EFL classes in acquiring Social Employability Skills, resulted in an adjustment to my research goals and expected findings.

Nonetheless, the contrast between interviewees having a generally positive level of satisfaction as a student, while still being aware of its imperfections, hinted at the existence of a gap related to skills and knowledge acquired at ITI and the period in which they will be applied. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, certain interviewees pointed to parts of the ITI curriculum only coming into play at later stages of their careers. However, little mention was made of interviewees believing ITI's curriculum should have focused more on teaching skills that could have been applied immediately following graduation.

This low level of acknowledgement from interviewees of a missing component in their education may be the result of a combination of the elements described above, but also a cultural component related to the initial hesitation of students to engage in what they had assumed would be criticism of their employer and/*and alma mater*. The decision to focus on the period of time between interviewees' entry into the ITI programme and up to five years following graduation was made consciously at the beginning of this research project in order to limit the scope and demands of data collection and analysis. As a result, many variables, such as differences in upbringing, socio-economic status, as well as cultural influences were not included. However, this combination of dissatisfaction and acceptance is an example of how and why follow-up research could definitely include these factors in order to better understand how interviewees view their academic and professional environments, and how interviews should be conducted.

As previously stated, the initial low level of specific criticism of the business and EFL aspects of the ITI programme make it more difficult to examine gaps between it and the demands of the workplace. Fortunately, the decision to focus on employability skills provided a more specific perspective to look into one aspect of interviewees' experiences during the ITI programme and following graduation, and the final decision to provide additional information from an existing framework as a starting point helped to create a transition point. As a result, data collected from interviews showed that although students are happy with the traditional business content taught in the trade classes, they were not fully satisfied with the employability skills acquired in this programme.

However, these more individual skills were not identified as playing the most important part in the immediate post-graduation experiences. Rather, the most important employability skills regarding the first few months or years following graduation were associated with building and maintaining relationships with groups and individuals, both inside and outside their organization, which were previously introduced as Social Employability Skills. For the most part, trade classes were not identified as having helped with developing these Social Employability Skills, but instead, a surprising trend was the close association of Social Employability Skills with EFL classes.

5.1.4 Transfer of skills from EFL classes to Mandarin Chinese workplace

The unplanned, undocumented, and uncontrolled acquisition of employability skills in EFL settings is very important to understand better because interviewees referred to the transfer into their professional situations, even if it was outside an English-speaking environment. For the most part, interviewees shared that most of their initial working experiences took place in a Mandarin Chinese-speaking environment, and that most external communication, such as with customers or suppliers, took place within the Mandarin Chinese diaspora. However, interviewees often acknowledged the positive influence of taking classes in a foreign language, such as Interviewee 11.

Almost all English classes. Because, like, for example, like Reading. You need to set up your weekly goal, like a book or how many pages. Then you need to find a way to finish a book. Even you have a lot of other homework. And, like for Presentations, is very stressful, just like I mentioned before. Then time management is very important. I think it is because we are not very good at foreigner language, so we need to use more to finish your homework. But if it is in Chinese, I think it's much easier. (Interviewee 11)

More importantly, the application of employability skills was mostly associated with internal communication, such as with co-workers, superiors, or other departments within the same company. According to many interviewees, the most important applications of employability skills acquired in EFL classes related to small, daily, informal, and internal communication. So, although the purpose of EFL classes was to provide a more traditional 4-skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) learning experience, additional employability skills were not only acquired throughout these classes, but also transferred to different professional situations unrelated to both the language taught (i.e. English), or even the specific subject (e.g. English for Presentations, Writing, English for Meetings).

An additional point to cover is that interviewees often associated skills acquired in EFL classes with short-term situations, such as the transition into a company and relationship-building, and business class with long-term opportunities, such as being assigned tasks related to analysis, market development, or

product marketing. In business courses, students are taught concepts and work on related assignments that build up their understanding of international business, but that may not be applied immediately, if ever. As for EFL classes, as students don't master the language at the same level, business-related classes such as English for Negotiations, Advanced Business Skills, and English for Meetings, place a much stronger emphasis on a higher number of smaller tasks, such as initial contact with co-workers, presentations to superiors and customers, as well as data collection. While the main goal of these classes is to improve students' fluency in English, acquired communication skills can still be transferred to other languages spoken in the Taiwanese workplace, such as Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese.

For example, Interviewee 11 again spoke of the importance of mastering English as a means of communicating with foreigners.

*"Or, if you want to find a job that will use English, foreigner language a lot, then maybe you need to have good verbal communication skills. I think. Because for my job, I need to communicate with foreigners. So that when I was interviewing this job, then I need to speak in English."
(Interviewee 11)*

As time seems to play an important part in which employability skills provide the most assistance, such as those associated with EFL classes being useful immediately after graduation, and the ones related to business classes being seen as most useful after a few years of having worked, follow-up research would have to take this into account, such as having distinctive interviewee segments based on the number of years of post-graduation experience.

5.1.5 Employability skills in General EFL Classes

Much like the employability skills associated with business classes, those associated with General EFL Classes (e.g. Writing, Listening & Speaking, Business English) are more closely associated with the goals of the classes, and therefore stand out less, or not at all. Generally speaking, the fact that interviewees perceived General EFL Classes as offering more opportunities to develop *Verbal Communication* skills than trade courses was observed throughout the interviews. While this is not surprising in the context that one of the main goals of the EFL component is to improve these skills, the transfer of communication skills from English in the classroom to Mandarin Chinese in the workplace, may be worth looking into. A starting point is that EFL classes are often more general, and can therefore be applied to situations that are not language-dependent, and may aid in developing skills such as *Public Speaking*, as pointed out by Interviewee 6.

"I think we have, probably the English, the term is not good, but we, I just remember that one of the English courses, we have, like a, we have a, we separate into different teams, and different, every team have different topic, probably not different topic but, they should analysis the market to see if this market is good to enter, or if this product is good for this market, or we have this kind of product, we can look for some area, or some market we can enter." (Interviewee 6)

In addition to skills that could be more readily associated with language classes, interviewees often referred to categories of behaviours less focused on communication, such as *Accountability* by Interviewee 9.

"For accountability, every class at ITI helps, I mean, every class at ITI helps you to know that accountability is important because it's very easy to tell whether you are well prepared or not well prepared." (Interviewee 9)

As for the development of *Task Collaboration* behaviours, the above idea of multitasking experiences transferring skills towards the workplace was shared by Interviewee 15 as well.

"Actually. In ITI... help us to develop those skills, actually. Because we do have a lot of projects we need to have different teams to work on this. So, it makes you really need to study how to work with others." (Interviewee 15)

These references can serve as examples of how experiences within a programme can better prepare students for life after graduation, and how specific skills and behaviours can be transferred. However, this phenomenon isn't unique to EFL programmes, and could be associated with a high number of specializations. However, the following section focuses on more specialized EFL classes and the skills transfers that may not be naturally associated with these subjects, at least not at first.

5.1.6 Employability skills in Specialized EFL Classes

More Specialized EFL Classes, such as English for Telephoning or Exhibition English, in the eyes of interviewees, stand out from not only business classes, but also from General EFL Classes, by the social emphasis attached to the employability skills acquired. While employability skills more closely related to the goals of the classes are picked up, as is the case of the business classes and general EFL classes, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

The following sections provides examples of four Specialized EFL Classes most closely associated with the acquisition of Social Employability Skills: English for Presentations, Business Correspondence, as well as English for Meetings & English for Negotiations. As these last two classes were often associated by interviewees, since they are similar in content and follow each other in the curriculum, as well as presented very similar feedback, in part because interviewees weren't always sure which experiences

had taken place in which of these two, English for Meetings and English for Negotiations will be discussed as one class. However, this shouldn't take away from the differences in content, goals, and teaching approaches associated with each class.

English for Presentations

English for Presentations was more easily associated skills such as *Verbal Communication*, for example adapting content to an audience, as referenced by Interviewee 13.

“Because in presentations, not everybody has the same background, so you need to find a very efficient way to express the meaning you want to tell them. So, it will make you think of your content very carefully. You need to find to find a way to express the meaning.” (Interviewee 13)

Interviewee 15 referred to *Presentation Skills* when discussing this class, however emphasis was more strongly put on how this class could help develop a better sense of structure, which could be applied to other aspects of a professional life such as meetings.

“Because the structure of speaking. Even though I cannot use it all over here. Because right now before I talk to the... if I have a report during the meeting, I will also just talk about the important points, and just read through the points. I will not try to memorize my presentation at all. The meeting is 2 hours, so it's impossible to memorize everything.” (Interviewee 15)

This use of skills learned in a presentation class for use in other contexts was also shared by Interviewee 10 when discussing the importance of *Influencing Others*, for both internal audiences (e.g. superiors) and external groups (e.g. customers).

“I feel the Presentation is the most useful class. When I was looking for a job, because during the interview, I was asked to give a brief presentation, and when I was working, I feel that every day I was doing presentation when I presenting the products for my clients. Or I also have to make reports to, make report to present the market situation, or what we have done to my supervisor, or to our director. So, I feel Presentations was the most important.” (Interviewee 10)

As this type of class may be more strongly associated with the final result, giving presentations, clear indicators of additional skills acquired can help better understand all the skills a student can learn as well as those a graduate can bring into the workplace.

Business Correspondence

A similar phenomenon could be observed when examining interviewee perceptions of Business Correspondence, a class which is usually associated with *Written Communication* skills, both in terms of formal writing, as well as with international communication.

However, as with English for Presentations, additional employability skills were identified, such as developing *Conceptualization* skills through the analysis of others' documents, as discussed by Interviewee 15.

"I remember we had a Writing and Business Correspondence. Because first you need to know how to write good reports, and how to write proposals. And then you know the structure. So then when you are looking at other people's reports and proposals, you can understand very easily what's wrong with the proposal." (Interviewee 15)

As with English for Presentations, the need to better understand the target audience and deliver information in the most efficient way possible is a learning opportunity that isn't necessarily acknowledged in a class closely related to templates and predictability. Therefore, there exists potential to once more add to the learning process by not only making students aware of the need to go beyond the language aspect of business communication, but also teach them to better understand the subtle differences between different target audiences, and develop a more questioning mindset.

English for Presentations and Business Correspondence are examples of classes that share a close association with external communication that is visible to intended target audiences, such as co-workers, superiors, or customers, which corresponds with their intended goals. However, in several cases, interviewees referred to how the preceding phases, such as market research or audience analysis, were associated with additional important employability skills, but that these classes did not necessarily include these skills and their associated behaviours in the curriculum.

English for Meetings & English for Negotiations

Although designed to be two distinct classes, albeit with English for Negotiations serving as a follow-up to English for Meetings, interviewees often discussed these two classes as one, and weren't certain about which experiences, topics, or employability skills were associated with which subject. Therefore, these two classes are jointly presented in this thesis. However, further research would have to be sure to clearly distinguish these during the data collection process and analysis.

In the eyes of interviewees, English for Meetings and English for Negotiations represent two examples of classes most explicitly acknowledging the possible challenges related to professional communication. As with previously discussed EFL classes, English for Meetings and English for Negotiations were indicated by several interviewees as playing an important role in developing *Verbal Communication* skills. In addition, emphasis was often put on the processes taking place before the actual language-related

deliverables promised in the curriculum, such as learning to better organize, summarizing data, as well as planning subsequent steps, as stated by Interviewee 8.

"For Meetings. I have learned what I should prepare before the meetings. What I should do during the meeting. And what I should do after the end of the meeting. Like I have to make a conclusion. Make the following steps. During the meeting, I have to organize, I have to make it organized." (Interviewee 8)

An additional series of transfers from English for Meetings and English for Negotiations what were identified related to better handling situations involving several stakeholders, as indicated by Interviewee 10's experience with Mandarin Chinese-speaking customers.

"Yes, even in Chinese. For example, like Negotiations, of course, I have to negotiate with the price, not only with the client, but also with the supplier. Because we are the distributor. So, my role is very complicated. I have to make all of the people happy." (Interviewee 10)

Interviewee 11's thoughts on learning *Decision-Making* skills through role-playing leadership roles,

"I think Meetings class and Negotiations class is related to Decision-Making. Because they... usually in the class, teachers give you a situation to role-play. Maybe you are the chairperson, then you need to decide when is the meeting, and how we're going to start the meeting, and how long are we going to take." (Interviewee 11)

as well as Interviewee 9's reference to improving *Analysing and Diagnosing* skills thanks to calculating advantages and disadvantages within these kinds of scenarios.

"I think Meetings, and Negotiations would help. For these 2 courses, every time, before we had a formal meeting, we will need to understand all the facts and circumstances, so that we can list what problems we have, and what advantages and disadvantages, so that we can use the items to make decisions. Yes, so I think Meetings and negotiations." (Interviewee 9)

One advantage of EFL classes at ITI, in comparison to trade courses, is the higher ratio of hours per topic covered. For example, *Conflict Resolution* skills were taught through teaching students the language necessary for them to express their positions and positions, persuade them to think about these, as well as do the same with other parties' positions and opinions, as shared by Interviewee 6.

"I think that's a very useful course to help you to resolve the conflict. Because, during the negotiation, everyone have their position, and everyone have their opinions. And, during that course, you should have a brainstorm to persuade others to believe your opinion is the best. So, also, you also should consider about other, you also should put yourself in others' shoes, so I think during that course, you not only will think about yourself, you also will help others to think about their position." (Interviewee 6)

As observed with other specialized classes identified by former graduates as having helped develop employability skills, such as Exhibition English and English for Telephoning, the characteristics of advanced EFL classes can help explain the strong association with Social Employability Skills, such as *Public Speaking* and *Verbal Communication*, which are similar to the goals and specific behaviours of these classes. However, English for Meetings and English for Negotiations classes stand out the most in going beyond these by having been associated with additional employability skills that would more easily be associated with traditional business classes and are developed as much if not more, outside class, such as *Decision-Making*, *Lateral thinking/Creativity*, as well as *Conceptualization* employability skills.

While this observation may be true, a number of traits associated with developing employability skills can be identified within these classes, such as giving students clear language and non-language objectives during and between classes, offering workplace role-playing opportunities in which disagreement is not only possible but also encouraged, and that go beyond simply following a script or template, as well as challenging students to make sense of the offered content by themselves and making decisions based on incomplete information. Keeping characteristics like these in mind when designing, teaching, or even promoting classes or programmes can serve as the first step in better integrating employability skills within EFL programmes.

5.2 Importance of Social Employability Skills

Early on in the interview analysis process, a strong focus on the importance of developing social skills was identified, especially when interviewees discussed school subjects (e.g. English for Meetings, English for Presentations) and employability skills and behaviours (e.g. *Social Intelligence* skills, *Verbal Communication* skills) leaning towards social communication.

The exploration of these interviews demonstrated some surprising findings related to recent graduates' perception of employability skills required in the workplace. A number of employability skills introduced to interviewees were closely associated with individual activities, which is particularly true for skills focusing on inner development. For example, when discussing workplace assignments, Interviewee 15 referred to *Numeracy* skills as being related to specific tasks such as analysing sales reports or creating quotes for customers.

*"I think it's not useful when you find a job, but it may be useful if you want to evaluate, because most companies need to know how to analyse well, and it will help them make decisions."
(Interviewee 15)*

In addition, *Technology* skills were identified by Interviewee 11 as contributing to learning company procedures.

"OK. I think technology is important when transitioning into a different workplace. Because, like, in my job, I think if you need to finish a project, then you need to... if there's technical questions, problems, then you need to ask technical people. And, if there is, like, shipment or custom questions, then you need to ask sales assistants. So you find different ways to solve different problems to let your project go smoothly." (Interviewee 11)

These references to specific skills and behaviours serve as examples of the importance recent ITI graduates may place on developing social skills to better gain access to their new workplace, transition into their new social environments, and succeed within their cohort, rather than on the intended purposes of the projects and tasks. In other words, the success of individual activities was often judged by the impact they had on others in their social spheres. Table 5.1 below gives a general comparison, based on data collected for this thesis, of Personal Employability Skills and Social Employability Skills.

	Personal Employability Skills	Social Employability Skills
Scope	Mostly closely related to individual tasks	Related to inter-personal communication & influence
Tasks	Individual tasks	Group tasks
Level of formality	More formal and official Less frequent Example: sales presentation, minuted meeting, official proposal	Less formal and official More frequent Example: informal conversation, inner-office e-mail, daily report
Direction of communication	External communication Example: prospect, customer, supplier, partner	Internal communication: Example: superior, co-worker, subordinate
Application curve	Longer curve May take months or years to be fully applied	Shorter curve May be necessary immediately, or even before being hired
ITI classes associated with	Strong association with business classes Association with more traditional EFL 4-skills classes	Strong association with specialized EFL classes Association with some business classes with a stronger social component (see Chapter 6)

Table 5.1: Comparison of Personal Employability Skills and Social Employability Skills

As shown in the above examples on Personal Employability Skills, circumstances of the workplace may influence how skills acquired in business school can be applied, and goals of the immediate social environment may play a strong influence on the original purpose of a task. Similarly, employability skills developed as the result of specific assignments within business programme classes may turn out to play a much lesser role in the early stages of a career. As interviewees shared their experiences and began associating their education with the position(s) that followed, it seemed that these recent graduates didn't identify with many of the aforementioned skills because these were associated with the management or international sales positions they had been trained to occupy, but hadn't yet reached in the early stages of their career progression. However, what appeared through analysing these interview transcripts was a different level of understanding of what these skills were, and how they could be

applied on smaller and/or more immediate scales, while still playing an important role in helping ITI graduates build their careers.

Therefore, communication-related employability skills such as *Public Speaking* and *Influencing Others* that were initially considered by many to be unimportant, in part because several interviewees had associated them with large scale presentations and negotiations, turned out to play a more important role once they were adapted to interviewees' daily experiences. One of the reasons why the term Social Employability Skills was chosen because of the communication and relationship-building goals associated with more individual-oriented employability skills, such as *Organizational Awareness*, *Problem-Solving*, *Decision-Making*, *Analysing & Diagnosing*, *Creativity*, as well as *Information Management*. In other words, some interviewees viewed these skills as playing an important role in reaching immediate goals related to interacting with people in their immediate vicinity on a daily basis, networking professionally, and building relationships within and outside their companies.

The Social Employability Skills identified in this thesis have been organized into three stages, as shown in Diagram 5.1 below. This diagram represents the general order in which skills identified by interviewees were used in the early stages of their careers, but not necessarily a hierarchy.

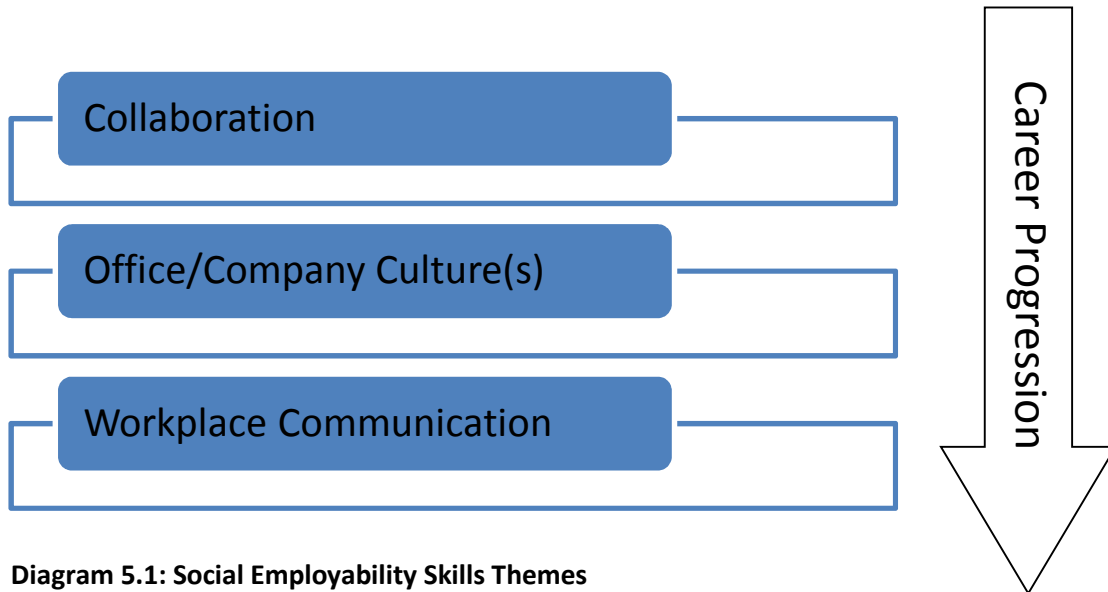


Diagram 5.1: Social Employability Skills Themes

5.2.1 Workplace Communication

An important theme present throughout interviews was the discrepancy between the workplace communication skills taught in the ITI business programme, and those required for daily interactions, as shown in Table 5.2.

Theme 1: Workplace Communication

- Internal communication
- Public Speaking
- Meeting Participation
- Written Communication

Internal Communication

Verbal Communication skills were identified as some of the most important to have in the workplace in order to reach daily goals such as obtaining customer feedback and solving problems, as well as specific high priority objectives such as obtaining a position after graduation, as described by Interviewee 11.

"Just like, when you interview, and the interviewer will ask you a lot of questions. And, you need to explain what you think, or what you, what idea you need to explain to them. So I think, to say something clear, to what you think is very important." (Interviewee 11)

However, throughout this research project, my preconception of the skills necessary for students to acquire for the workforce was often challenged, such as with the differences between the intended applications of skills and knowledge and the actual ones. In some cases, participants such as Interviewee 5 referred to the anticipated use of ITI's training in communication skills, such as engaging with customers.

"Because we are the supplier, and most of the time, customers, they are expecting we will offer them a... so we recommend things to customers. And when they will come to us, when they have problems, and they will need to consult us. So I think the ability to give and receive feedback is very important." (Interviewee 5)

Interviewee 14 added the importance of mastering subtle variations, such as tone and wording in adapting communication to a specific audience.

"I have to try to use my own words, and to translate, and they can understand me. And with a regular, and non-offensive tone." (Interviewee 14)

Regarding external communication, Interviewee 12 referred to the challenges of using English as a business *lingua franca* that is not mastered by all.

"...we need to have international phone calls, so we... especially the... most of them, I deal with them, their mother tongue is not English. For example, I got a customer from Tunisia today. And, I just realize he talk to me, every single thing, just translate from the Google translator." (Interviewee 12)

In addition to communicating with outside parties, the importance of communication within interviewees' companies seemed to occupy an equal, if not more important, role. Interviewee 4 referred to the need to use the skills learned for communicating with international clients in dealing with different departments within his/her own company.

"Within my company, every day I have to communicate with overseas buyers, and my colleagues in different departments. So, in different departments, verbal communication is very useful and essential for me to reach other people" (Interviewee 4)

This need to adapt communication to different audiences is an opportunity to highlight variations between the two facets of ITI's programme: EFL classes and business classes. In EFL classes, tone is a core element in both classes teaching verbal communication (e.g. English for Meetings, English for Negotiations) as well as written communication (e.g. Writing, Business Correspondence, Business Report Writing), aiming to help students learn to reduce miscommunication and avoid cultural or linguistic misunderstandings. However, lessons taught have an outward focus meant to establish contact and build relationships with external groups, such as customers, suppliers, and partners, at moments of high importance such as a meetings, negotiations, or sales presentations. Challenges may come from the lack of departmental recognition of the importance of routine internal communication, of being responsible for these skills, or possibly as a result of knowing how these skills can be taught within their programmes. For example, tone for daily internal communication, such as with co-workers, superiors, and other departments may not be acknowledged as much because internal communication matters, assumed to be in Mandarin Chinese, aren't directly addressed.

Public Speaking

Another set of skills that had been assumed to play an important role in life after graduation was related to *Public Speaking*. In part, this perspective on this type of oral communication was supported by interviewee testimonials. For example, Interviewee 6 referred to the need to use these kinds of skills with customers.

"Because, I think, because a lot of time, we have a lot of, sometimes customers will visit us, and we also will visit customers, and during that time, we should do some presentation..."
(Interviewee 6)

Interviewee 1 even referred to cultural differences regarding public speaking, stating Taiwanese students didn't get the same opportunities to develop these communication skills, and the importance of improving these for business, especially since these are in a foreign language.

"Because that's... even in Mandarin, it's very difficult to do the public speaking, and if you want to do the public speaking in foreign language, I think that's more difficult and you have to do more... put more work on it." (Interviewee 1)

However, a distinction was made by Interviewee 5 regarding the differences between internal and external public speaking.

"Because, when I'm outside of the company, what I should say is usually not the same as what I can say when I'm inside the company." (Interviewee 5)

An explanation could be related to the distinction between the popular image of public speaking in the eyes of graduates, such as presenting to a large crowd such as an industry seminar, and those necessary for employees in their daily work, such as smaller, more informal, and much more frequent presentations to colleagues within the company, or similar smaller scale interactions with customers while outside their company. Therefore, an interesting adaptation of the categories would be distinguishing *Public Speaking*, such as giving a speech to a large audience, with presenting to colleagues, superiors, or customers on a much smaller scale, at a distance (e.g. teleconference), or even casually over coffee. The perceived lower importance of *Public Speaking* skills due to the lack of such opportunities, at least as perceived by interviewees, points to the predominance of internal, or short distance, communication as essential skills for recent graduates.

Meeting Participation

Another aspect of communication skills elaborated on by interviewees was the importance of mastering meetings. As with *Public Speaking* skills, I was surprised at how these kinds of communication skills were

presented at two levels: external, and often more official, communication, and internal, and often more frequent, communication.

Interviewee 12 pointed to the importance of developing the appropriate language skills, especially for interactions in English.

"...it's about, you need to deal about the partnership. You need to deal about the payment. About any issues. So you need to learn some useful expressions in English. Useful power language to negotiate, to gain the orders from the meetings. Even to get closer with your partners, you also need some useful meeting language" (Interviewee 12)

As for communication within the company, two different types of interactions were discussed by interviewees. The first type, as referred to by Interviewee 14, related to the more traditional image of a meeting held in order to influence others and make important decisions, as taught in the ITI curriculum.

"... because sometimes we have to hold meetings with the vice-president, and CEO. So I think we have to speak in a right way, and in a strong way, to persuade them to agree with us." (Interviewee 14).

Several interviewees viewed internal meetings as more casual and frequent, as discussed by Interviewee 3.

"Of course, we have a lot of meetings, to discuss the schedule, to discuss do we have shortage to make our products." (Interviewee 3)

However, ITI graduates still shared some insights relating to the importance of possessing effective communication skills during these meetings. For example, Interviewee 1 stated the importance of knowing how to express ideas and opinions.

"...because you... during the meeting, you need to explain yourself clearly to others, so how could you show your opinion to others and, also do the communication and negotiation during the meeting is also important." (Interviewee 1)

Therefore, we can see that although the level of formality associated with meetings in the classroom doesn't match the reality of new employees, skills and knowledge learned can still be transferred to more informal situations. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement regarding the relevance of the content taught.

Written Communication

Similar to employability skills relating to spoken communication discussed above, interviewee perceptions on *Written Communication* skills seemed to include both a focus on external, and more formal, communication, as well as internal, and more informal, communication.

Regarding external communication, Interviewee 10 shared the importance of mastering written communication skills in order to better serve customers.

"For example, each day, my job is basically on communication, and trying to make an agreement from different parts of people. So, either way, I have to communicate with people verbally, or by written e-mail. For example, if I want to sell a product, I have to communicate with the client and also, communicate with my suppliers, and my boss. So, I'll say that everything related to communication will be very useful for me." (Interviewee 10)

As for internal written communication, Interviewee 4 referred to the importance of providing appropriate feedback to team members.

"... also sometimes for some cases, we have to have further discussions with my team members, so giving and receiving some feedback is very important." (Interviewee 4)

Once more, we can observe that skills taught to students in order to better handle official external communication are perceived as equally important, if not more important, in routine internal communication.

5.2.2 Company/Office Culture(s)

Theme 2: Company/Office Culture(s)

- Organisational Awareness
- Autonomy
- Social Intelligence
- Conceptualisation of Workplace Culture

Throughout the interviews, the theme of company/office cultures, as shown in Table 5.3, appeared in a variety of ways. It's important to specify that the choice of words for this theme is meant to reflect the complexity of the environments new graduates find themselves in, especially since the overall company

portrait they had put together during the hiring process may not stand up to the reality of competing cultures and ideologies within the same company, departments, or even teams.

Organizational Awareness

Organizational Awareness skills were identified as playing an important part in better understanding an organization in order to adapt behaviour to it. For example, Interviewee 7 associated this experience with the job search process and making sure to select a compatible company.

"...in job search process, I would say, the organizational awareness is important in this stage, because you are interviewing some company, and you should do some homework or preparation to understand what kind of company you want to join. " (Interviewee 7)

In addition, Interviewee 11 referred to importance of these skills in the next stage of transitioning from an academic environment to a professional one, mostly to better understand and adapt to the company culture.

"I think organizational awareness is important and useful when I transit to a new job. Because this is a new, like, environment, and new co-workers, new colleagues. New boss. And it's different when you're being a student. So, you need to know, like, you need to find out the culture of your company. Then, to adapt to this culture. And, the rules of policies. Yeah." (Interviewee 11)

Better understanding a company's culture in order to follow it more closely was also identified as contributing to improving the chances that new recruits would be able to express their ideas, and more importantly would be listened to by their superiors. As an example, Interviewee 9 referred to the need to adapt content to match a company's culture in order to increase the chances of success.

"I work in a not big company, just a middle company, we do not, actually we do not have much time express our own ideas. So, once you know that, you will have to adjust yourself to suit the company better. Because, at ITI, we always, we always speak out for ourselves, but it's not, it doesn't mean that it suits all the company culture, or style. So, I think this is important. Otherwise, your boss might want you to go because you wouldn't listen to him." (Interviewee 9)

As can be seen in the testimonial above, learning to better understand the different cultures that exist in a working environment, both within and outside a company, and even initially becoming aware of them, is essential for recent graduates to not only succeed in long-term career development, but also to be able to complete routine tasks that may not have seemed to require these kinds of knowledge at first.

In contrast to the reality of entering existing corporate cultures at different times throughout the year or in the company's development, all ITI students began their academic experience at the same time, and

as a result, experienced a similar entry into the programme and its different stages of discovery, integration, and influence of an academic culture, resulting in not having been required to determine their strengths and weaknesses.

Autonomy

Autonomy skills were perceived by several interviewees as a necessity for recent graduates, especially if placed in sales roles, as is the case with most individuals completing the ITI programme. For example, Interviewee 10's experiences reflected this possibility of ITI graduates having to work on their own early on in their careers.

"Because, when I have a business trips, I drove cars to visit clients in other cities. For example I drove cars to Taichung, or to Taoyuan. And, on that way, I was all alone. So, basically, I'm like an individual employee. I have to, I decided I organized what I'm going to do, and I did what I planned." (Interviewee 10)

However, this early autonomy wasn't perceived in the same way throughout the interviews. For example, Interviewee 8 viewed this independence as the company trusting recent graduates to organize themselves and get the job done.

"If you can behave yourself without supervisor, without supervision, which means your supervisor can trust you, because they know you will finish it on time, or in time. They don't worry about you." (Interviewee 8)

Interviewee 3 shared a similar experience, but with a stronger emphasis on supervisors caring about the results, rather than the method.

"Because if your boss is too busy, they will not monitor everything, every detail when you are working in your job. Then you have to be autonomous, because your boss only focuses on the results. They won't see the consequence. They don't care about your details. So, you have to be autonomous." (Interviewee 3)

These expectations of autonomy, and varying levels of support from colleagues and superiors, can add to the existing challenges of having to interact and develop relationships with members of existing internal cultures (e.g. teams, departments, company in general) and external cultures (e.g. customers, suppliers, partners) in order to reach goals.

Social Intelligence

Interviewees identified *Social Intelligence* skills as playing an important role in learning to learn existing corporate cultures, but for varying reasons. For example, Interviewee 5 shared the importance of understanding others' perspectives in order to better communicate.

"Because, sometimes, I think what you tell other people is now what they get. So this one is very important, we need to understand what other people are thinking, and then we can move to the next level, to really communicate. I think this one is also very important." (Interviewee 5)

Social Intelligence skills were also perceived as essential to better understanding what employers are seeking in order to adapt to these requirements and obtain their desired position. For example, Interviewee 7 referred to the need to anticipate interviewer questions in order to provide the satisfying answers.

"Because in my view of point, when I interview with the current Google employer, even the boss, I had to find out what his current emotion, or I don't know, just the present feeling, because you need to keep your interviewers happy, or you know what he wants to ask, or what he wants to know from you. So I think the social intelligence, you need to understand, and in the other one's shoes to answer their questions, so that's what I feel in the Job Searching process." (Interviewee 7)

Conceptualization of Workplace Culture

The need to better understand a company's culture also came across through the importance of *Conceptualization* skills through some interviewees' recollections, such as with the job search process. Interviewee 11 referred to the need to go beyond the information readily available during this task, in part because of a lack of time.

"Because, just like you only have, you don't have a lot of time to know this company. Or you didn't know anyone who worked in this company. Then you need to ask questions to the interviewer. Then from his answer, you may know what this job is like. Maybe you will like this job, or you will not. You will, maybe like they hire you, and you join this company. Then you will know, during the interview, you will know what is right and wrong. You will confirm what you think before." (Interviewee 11)

As for the workplace, some interviewee ideas on *Conceptualisation* skills focused once more on daily activities rather than larger scale future goals. For example, Interviewee 14 referred to the importance of understanding a company and its market in order to combine information from different sources.

"Because right now, because my work is related to this behaviour. Because our department we have market research. And, the standard establishment. So I think conceptualization is very

important. I have to do a lot of research, about our competitors, our traders, our opponents all over the world." (Interviewee 14)

What seems to bring about a higher level of difficulty for recent graduates is the lower level of experience with adapting to a new company and its staff. However, some interviewees seemed to believe that forming an understanding of a situation was only part of the process, since it may also necessary to communicate it to other members of staff, or external groups such as customers, as shown with Interviewee 1.

"That is also important, because you need to put your thoughts into reality and to let others know that what's in your mind so I think this is also important." (Interviewee 1)

While *Conceptualisation* skills were presented to interviewees as "Recognize patterns in detailed documents and scenarios to understand the 'bigger' picture", most insights shared related to basic internal and external communication. This may be a reflection of the position new graduates find themselves in, such as not having the experience necessary to begin recognizing patterns, or possibly of new graduates with little or no work experience are given more basic tasks that do not require these types of skills. However, this would not explain why so many interviewees identified this skill as being important for new graduates. An explanation might be that immediate needs are related to identifying patterns and understanding the "bigger" picture on a much smaller scale, such as their daily working environment.

5.2.3 Collaboration

Theme 3: Collaboration

- Problem-Solving & Decision-Making
- Analysing and Diagnosing
- Initiative & Accountability
- Reasoning
- Lateral Thinking/Creativity
- Cooperation
- Team Working
- Conflict Resolution
- Information Management
- Evaluation
- Influencing Others

The theme of collaboration between individuals, department, and even companies, such as between partners, or with suppliers and customers, appeared throughout the interviewing process, such as when discussing *Task Collaboration* employability skills, identified as being relevant in the early stages of their career.

Problem-Solving & Decision-Making

The general category of problem-solving is one that has been expressed throughout the interviews, in areas such as handling job-related tasks, cooperating with clients, or interacting with customers. A frequent point made regarding the importance of developing problem-solving skills referred to helping their companies and superiors not only handle difficulties, but more importantly make a final decision within the company, as referenced by Interviewee 13.

“Because I think they are connected. You need to find out the reason. And it's a process you need to collect the information, to help you know the situation, and then you need to make a decision. Decision is the final step. If you don't have a decision, nobody will know what will happen next.” (Interviewee 13)

This need to take action connects to references to *Decision-Making* skills necessary for graduates, such as in obtaining a position, as discussed by Interviewee 15.

"All these... behaviours are pretty important during the job search or transition into the workplace, as well as in working. Because those things are one of the most important things employers are looking for. I think decision making is the most important. The other two aren't as important, but still have some weight." (Interviewee 15)

However, contrary to much of the training they have received during business school, new employees may find themselves in positions where they aren't required, expected, or even permitted to make decisions, and rather complete more basic or routine tasks such as managing inventory, placing orders, and deciding on quantities, such as Interviewee 10's experience.

"Decision-making was very hard. The reason is that my, part of my job, we have to... I had to decide which... when to prepare the stock, when to place orders to our suppliers. When I ordered to our suppliers, I had to think about the stock level in Taiwan, and how much time we will take for suppliers to ship to Taiwan. And, I also have to calculate that, how many or how much quantity we will sell during the certain time. Yes, that was very hard for me to decide when to prepare the stock, or how much we have to prepare." (Interviewee 10)

The transition from learner to decision-maker may be gradual, and new employees often may have to take it upon themselves to take a more active role in the company. Therefore, *Decision-Making* skills are relevant for frequent interactions between recent graduates and those within their internal environments (e.g. choosing most important information to share with colleagues and superiors within a limited amount of time) and external environments (e.g. selecting marketing materials to include in sales presentation to prospective clients), especially within the reality where new hires may get less training, feedback, and supervision than they had hoped for, as presented by Interviewee 11.

"Not the beginners. Because when it's beginning, you are learning different things. You make decisions, but you need to ask your boss whether this is right or wrong, or is this doable or not doable? But after one year passed, then you need to make a decision by yourself, and to think what is, what's your next step, it's good or not. You need to decide yourself." (Interviewee 11)

Therefore, the idea of developing *Decision-Making* skills was seen as important by many interviewees, but few decision-making moments were clearly identified, at least not in the same way as they had been presented throughout their business programme. Reasons for this could range from the more fluid and multi-dimensional nature of the workplace in which half a dozen clearly defined school projects can be replaced by a much greater number of small, more fragmented, less defined, and constantly changing tasks associated with their jobs. In many cases, the clear goals communicated by instructors, once more in written form, are much clearer than those provided, or not, by employers, co-workers, partners, or

even customers, if these are provided at all. Business programmes such as ITI's may better prepare students for a role most may only hold in several years, if at all, but don't always offer the necessary training for recent graduates to learn and integrate into an existing system, understand its processes, and be able to quickly make decisions. The challenge presented here may be to find a way to maintain, or at least remain parallel with, the current goals of developing the business leaders of tomorrow, while still giving them the skills and knowledge necessary for them to be the successful contributors of today.

Analysing and Diagnosing

Analysing and Diagnosing skills can play a role for graduating students during the job search process, such as having to analyze a case study at the interview, as presented by Interviewee 7.

"OK. In my experience, in the job search process, the problem-solving, the priority should be the analysing and diagnosing, because in my interview experience, my interviewer asked me many case study questions so I need to analyse and diagnose the answer, and how to answer that." (Interviewee 7)

However, much like with *Decision-Making* skills, some interviewee opinions painted a picture of graduates using complex analytical tools for simple tasks, such as Interviewee 1's example of solving customer problems.

"I think the Analysing and Diagnosing is the most important during my work, because we need to know that what our customers want, and to analyse that... could we satisfy our customers, or to solve their problem. Yes, so I think this skill is the most important." (Interviewee 1)

Analysing and Diagnosing skills also gain importance in the eyes of many interviewees with regard to the importance of properly understanding information in order to use it in daily tasks, projects, as well as make final decisions, as shared by Interviewee 14.

"Because right now, we have to run many projects. I think, from the beginning, we have to reason how to start with this project. And then, we have analyse and diagnose, to analyse the facts and circumstances. And finally, we have to make the decision, because, now, in our company, I think no one will want to make the final decision, because they don't want to take the responsibility. So, the job, this job has to fall on us. We have to make the final decision." (Interviewee 14)

In addition, Interviewee 9 went one step further by sharing the need to determine the veracity of information, as well as intentionally misleading information.

"Because, when I was in the company, we have a lot of agents all over the world. And sometimes, our agents, they will try to, they will try to get more from our side, because they want to cost down. So sometimes, they won't tell the truth. And, we have to know how to respond to their

behaviour. So that we need to analyse how the situation, to analyse the real situation. And to do the correct judgement. And report to our boss. So that our boss can make decision properly.”
(Interviewee 9)

It may be difficult to imagine a business school training exercise in which potential customers, or even partners, are unwilling to share all the necessary information needed to attend their needs, in part because it would stand the logical mindset of academic training. However, these restrictions may be present in the workplace. An aspect of the Jackson & Chapman (2012a) framework that could benefit from additional development would be related to obtaining information necessary for *Problem-Solving*. This could refer to traditional research skills, as taught in business programmes, but also to people-related aspects of data analysis, such as building relationships and trust, judging the relevance and veracity of information, as well as learning how to make decisions based on incomplete information. In business programmes such as ITI's, information presented to students is identical, assumed to be true, as well as is permanent throughout the period of the project. Based on interviewee testimonials, the reality of the marketplace is that information needs to be actively sought, requested, and questioned. Students all work towards the same goal, and therefore may even help each other, since success isn't built around a zero-sum game reality. The addition of the uncertainty of being able to trust information given by customers reinforces the need to present students with a more fragmented representation of their future careers.

Initiative & Accountability

Skills related to developing *Initiative* were identified by certain interviewees as playing an important role in life after graduation, such as taking action the workplace, as discussed by Interviewee 1.

"I think initiative is the most useful, because, yeah... I need to take action, and before I take action, I need to explain what I need to do this to my employer, so to let them know why I did this, so initiative is very important and very useful in my job." (Interviewee 1)

Whatever the reason, new employees do not necessarily have to think of highly innovative concepts or implement strategies that will completely transform a company. Rather, new employees may also show initiative through efficiently completing daily tasks, managing multiple projects without supervision, as well as going beyond customer expectations, as described by Interviewee 9.

"This one is more related to me right now. Because sometimes, because we sold, because we sell machines, so the delivery is very important for our customer. OK. And, sometimes, if you really follow the, if you really follow our company's delivery, and normally the delivery will be delayed." (Interviewee 9)

Based on this information, an important first step to take for new employees seems to determine their position within an existing culture, understand what is expected of them, map out and rank their existing and potential relationships, and finally assess their real and potential influence over each of these. Doing this may give former students the opportunity to apply the skills they have learned through planning strategies to overthrow seemingly outdated systems in order to improve a whole company, to one where gradual changes can be made within living cultures.

However, *Initiative* may be discouraged due to unwillingness of new employees to take responsibility for their actions, as referenced by Interviewee 6.

"And, the reason is that you should be responsible for the success or failure of this project. So, accountability should be very important for my position." (Interviewee 6)

This highlights the close relationships between *Initiative* and *Accountability* in some interviewees' experiences. The goal of better understanding *Accountability* skills was also discussed by Interviewee 10 with regard to handling routine tasks, such as taking responsibility for a sale budget.

"Because as a salesperson, we have to be responsible for the budget, like every month, when we have a meeting, that salespeople will be, like, put on the, will have a spotlight on salespeople and ask us why we didn't meet the budget, or what we have done. So, we have to be very responsible for our target budget." (Interviewee 10)

As we've seen from the interview responses, taking responsibility for work-related behaviour and results is seen as an important aspect of a new employee's experience, but once more mostly when it influences a person's immediate professional sphere and career progression. In contrast, there was no discussion of team, department, or company accountability with regard to interaction with internal and external parties. Once more, this could be as a result of the limited scope of responsibilities given to new employees, or even the result of a lack of communication and cooperation with colleagues within or outside their department, as well as a lack of supervision and mentorship.

Reasoning

Reasoning skills were identified as an important aspect of work and career development for interviewees in a variety of ways, such as Interviewee 8's reference to finding solutions.

"Before I have rational and logical reasoning, I have to see the data, and numbers. Through those data and numbers, I can analyse and I can diagnose to give a proper solution. Also, my supervisors, when they want to make a decision, they also do this data and numbers. That's I have learned from my current work." (Interviewee 8)

In addition, these types of skills were again associated with daily interactions in and of the company, as expressed by Interviewee 3.

"Like my second job. I... how do I say... because, for one component, we will have one supplier, or two suppliers, or three suppliers. If we only have one supplier, then the price is very pure. You will have only price. Then if we have multiple suppliers, then the prices will be very complicated, especially when you have to buy the components from the suppliers. And they also have different lead times. And different prices. And also, there are many issues or potential issues that are going to happen at suppliers' sites. So at the end of the month, I will have many issues, price issues or supply issues" (Interviewee 3)

In ITI's business programme, the goal of assignments may be to find a solution and present it to instructors. In some cases, the instructor may disagree with the solution, but this may be because of lack of evidence, or due to a poor or unclear presentation of ideas. Although not eliminated completely, the instructor's personal beliefs don't necessarily play a major role since there are no lasting consequences to what has been proposed, in contrast with workplace longer-term relationships between parties (e.g. superiors, co-workers, customers, and suppliers).

Cooperation

Cooperation was perceived by some as a basic requirement of today's workplace, as indicated by Interviewee 6.

"Because I think my first... the job I'm going to interview after graduate ITI is project manager, so I think I should have... we should have a lot of opportunities to cooperate with other, other functional units, or other position, or people..." (Interviewee 6)

In contrast, most ITI school projects would give students flexibility in choosing a team, emphasizing similar interests, working styles, or even existing personal relationships. Therefore, students may not have the same number of opportunities to develop the skills necessary to handle unexpected, incompatible, or even counterproductive co-workers with differing priorities or agendas. Taking away choice from students in organizing teams and carrying on projects may result in short-term discontent in students and a decrease in teacher popularity, but could better equip students to transition and prosper in a professional environment. This need to contribute to larger projects as a team was associated with the additional challenges of different departments working together, as referenced by Interviewee 14,

"Because, now I work in a product planning department, so I have to coordinate, collaborate with other departments, such as R&D, and then Quality Control. And, Production Department. So I think, because every time we have to propose a project, and we have to decide which product is

going to plan, is going to announce. So I think, in the development of time, I have to communicate with different kinds of people from different departments.” (Interviewee 14)

as well as having to reach agreements in order for a project to move forward, as indicated by Interviewee 8.

“Take me as an example. I am a project manager. So, I have to collaborate with each department to make the project go smoothly. But, each department, they will have their issues, and their opinions. How to make them agree with you is very important. So, you have always a lot of meetings to discuss, and solve problems.” (Interviewee 8)

As previously mentioned, within a business programme such as ITI's, teams are able work with a higher level of independence, with identical goals and rules, as well as similar access to information and resources, which they can easily share, and, while competing with other teams in an academic sense, don't belong to a zero-sum game environment in which one team's gain implies another's loss, but to the contrary, teams can learn from each other, even through failure. On the other hand, in the workplace, team members can have their own goals, for the project and beyond, possess uneven levels of information and resources, and may not necessarily share them with others, and often follow a zero-sum game mentality in which the existence of winners and losers is unavoidable, even within the same team, and especially if this team is comprised of members of different departments. Therefore, the reality that cooperation may be against team members' own self-interest, and therefore may hinder cooperation, resulting in the need to deliver and supervise the execution of clear instructions, as we can see with Interviewee 15.

“And then, however, even though we have conflict, like we need to keep the... we need to make the... in the team, to make sure everyone needs to contribute. If you want help with the team. I think that's why the task collaboration is pretty important.” (Interviewee 15)

Team Working

Closely related to *Cooperation* in the eyes of interviewees, discussions related to *Team Working* skills emphasized the acknowledgement of workplace realities, such as not choosing who to work with, and the development of relationships based on providing mutual benefits. Some *Team Working* challenges identified throughout the interviews, clearly pointed to developing positive relationships with co-workers, from simply being able to work with others, as was the case of Interviewee 11.

“Because in my job, this is my first job, and we need to “team work” with a lot of people. Yeah, so I think this is the most important. If you don't have the good relationship with your co-workers, then you cannot finish your project.” (Interviewee 11)

As shown above, the need to differentiate internal and external communication in this thesis became apparent through the research process, in order to account for differences related to communicating with internal groups (e.g. co-workers, supervisors) and external groups (e.g. customers, suppliers). While the original purpose of including this interview schedule was to distinguish communication in their native language(s) (i.e. Mandarin Chinese and/or Taiwanese) from communication in foreign languages (e.g. English, Japanese), doing so revealed other differences between communicating internally and externally. Indeed, based on interview data, issues related to *Task Collaboration* seem to tend to refer more to working with other departments, while those related to *Team Working* seem to emphasize working within one's own department. However, factors such as individual differences (e.g. ambition to surpass others), personal conflicts within the cohort (e.g. dislike between team members), as well as competition within the programme (e.g. limited number of slots available for specific classes, competition for internship positions) may still play a major role in the life of students.

Another difference between certain interviewees' views on *Team Working*, and those previously described regarding *Task Collaboration*, was the inclusion of customers as being part of the team. In addition to interviewees sharing the need to influence others to help them in their own projects, a more positive view of teamwork was presented when it involved working with customers. The need for new employees to influence co-workers and supervisors is presented at several points throughout interviews, but not always directly acknowledged. For example, learning to communicate with overseas customers and other departments, especially for new employees who must learn to work with different departments, adapt their working and learning styles to it, as well as learn its inner-workings, such as its technical language, as described by Interviewee 2,

"Because of our team working. Because I work in foreign factories, so I need to communicate with the QC (Quality Control) department, and also, and Profession department. And I also need to face the overseas customers. So it's very important, because all of us, we have different backgrounds, so I need to try to communicate with the "Operations", no... Profession department." (Interviewee 2)

is often presented alongside the necessity to influence others, including customers, in order for projects to be completed, as shared by Interviewee 12.

"So all we... but our company used to be only manufacture surveillance, now it transfers to solutions provider. But most of the people, they are still thinking we only provide devices. So I need to convince them..." (Interviewee 12)

Conflict Resolution

According to some interviewees, differing opinions, priorities, as well as working approaches and personalities, may lead to conflict in the workplace, resulting in the need to acquire *Conflict Resolution* skills being mentioned throughout interviews for internal matters such as with different individuals or departments, as stated by Interviewee 9.

"...because sometimes we will need to communicate with the factory workers, for the after-sales service. And, because we are at different position, so we will have different ideas, and solutions to the problems. And, that will cause some conflicts." (Interviewee 9)

A surprising variation on this challenge was Interviewee 10's issue of having to choose between satisfying both customers and superiors.

"Because I think the sales job is... you can... I can never satisfy both sides of people. For example, if I sell these things at a certain price, my clients complain that I sell this too expensive. But my boss will complain that I sell it too inexpensive." (Interviewee 10)

However, despite the difficulties presented by the existence of conflict in the workplace, knowing how to handle it can also offer opportunities to demonstrate initiative and problem-solving skills and contribute to career advancement, as stated by Interviewee 11.

" You will have a lot of problems shows up, and you need to solve it. Then this related to your EQ, and the... how do you react, what reaction you will take when you are facing a problem. And I think, if you succeed to solve a problem, that will make your, like, maybe your boss will think you are a great people, and a good employee". (Interviewee 11)

While these challenges seem to exist in an environment where individuals share as much as possible, such as ITI's programme, these can be accentuated when present within an environment filled with diversity: professional, cultural, linguistic, and generational. Interviewee discussions relating to handling conflict seemed to focus more on new graduates learning to work within an existing culture, learning to adapt to individuals within and outside the company, and most importantly avoid conflict, rather than addressing and resolving issues, as was presented in the Jackson & Chapman (2012a) framework given as part of the interview process. Rather than *Conflict Resolution*, recent graduates seem to have a need for conflict avoidance, which may require different sets of skills that could be applied in the early stages of life after graduation, in part because of the lack of power and influence new employees have towards internal and external parties, as well as a more passive approach focusing on learning the company culture and becoming a part of the established group, rather than determining their position in the corporate hierarchy. This first came as a surprise to me, in part because of the emphasis ITI put in

teaching students to handle conflicts. However, this again seems to remind us of the gap between ITI's focus on solving a smaller number of larger problems, and the reality of recent graduates in having to juggle a higher number of ongoing smaller problems.

Information Management

Interviewee thoughts on *Information Management* skills range from more general applications of data analysis and use, as explained by Interviewee 14,

"Because every day, we receive a lot of information. So we must analyse the information. Where does it come from? Is it really important? And after that, I have to judge this information is really important or not" (Interviewee 14)

to uses in more specific circumstances, such as Interviewee 7's experience with handling information related to seeking employment,

"...because before you start your interview, or start your Job Search process, you need to hunting, to find, to search old information will help you to pass interview." (Interviewee 7).

However, it's important to note that several references were made to using *Information Management* skills to better build and handle internal relationships, such as with superiors and co-workers, and external relationships, such as with customers, as stated by Interviewee 1.

"I think the information management is the most important during my job, because there are a lot of information that every day I need to read the message from customer, from my employer, or from my colleagues. So I need to manage the information, and let the information become helpful for myself." (Interviewee 1)

The importance of obtaining information, analysing it, and judging its importance seems to play a major role in the experience of recent graduates. One reason may be due to it possibly seeming to come from several sources, may be misleading (intentionally or not), contradict itself as well as may vary in importance for different parties. In contrast, students from ITI's programme are often given clear and consistent information, or at least, in the case of research-based classes, clear standards from one source, usually the instructor, that don't vary throughout an academic study period. Another point made is the importance of knowing how to communicate with different groups of customers, keep track of them and the information they've shared, as well as their needs and required functions. Indeed, the purpose of dealing with customers can be perceived as giving and receiving information, build trust, and ultimately making a deal in which both sides benefit, as shared by Interviewee 11.

"Because you need to collect information from different places, and you let the information because your advantage, because you have a lot of information, so when you are talking to customers, then you can exchange information to them, and customers will think you are, like, you are, trust, you can be trust. Then maybe, because they trust you." (Interviewee 11)

Lastly, an important function well-developed *Information Management* skills can have is to help improve internal and external communication. Interviewees referred to having to judge the importance of information analysed, in order to judge the importance of each piece of information, such as the example given by Interviewee 4.

"... from my job, we have to do some weekly report to report some information and to present how content or which level we are at, so we also use some... a lot of Google Docs, some Cloud Computing information systems to manage our information with our colleagues..." (Interviewee 4)

Evaluation

An extension to the previously discussed importance of *Information Management* skills came as the expressed need to make decisions based on the information collected from different sources. For example, Interviewee 7 focused on career progression by emphasizing the need to understand the potential consequences of actions taken.

"I would say the priority in the transition into the workplace, or in the career progression. Because after you on board, or when you start your new job, you need to evaluation your job performance, or before you send out an e-mail, you need to evaluate what happen, or what that will cause from your e-mail." (Interviewee 7)

As for the workplace, Interviewee 10 commented on the lack of instructions given for smaller tasks and the related need for new hires to make decisions.

"...in real world, there are a lot of information, and there are a lot of information, but there is no instructions, no answers for us. So, we have to evaluate by ourselves, and to make up, and to figure out what we are going to do." (Interviewee 10)

Once more expressed by several interviewees, the purpose of evaluating the importance of assignments or data may be directly related to the need to communicate results or challenges to others, such as customers or superiors. Interviewee 9 referred to the need to present findings to superiors based on their importance and ability to understand.

"... we have to read a lot of letters, and we have to evaluate which one is important, and which one is less important. And, from those letters, I think I have to train my ability to recognize which is the most important in this document." (Interviewee 14)

Throughout interviews, this issue of a lack of preparation for internal communication was presented in several contexts, such as with personality conflicts with a superior, as was Interviewee 7's case.

"And for the 1st part, in my experience, could be the relationships between the employer and the employee. Because when I joined Google in the first few months, the most important question to me could be how to better a company with my boss, because we are 2 kinds of people, and you cannot understand what he thought, and he is underestimate me, so I think the challenge is the relationship between the boss and the employee." (Interviewee 7)

In discussing the evaluation of information, the subject of learning and adapting to existing company culture reappeared, such as Interviewee 13's experience with transitioning from an academic environment to a more competitive corporate one.

"I think it's hard to avoid in school, because they students, they don't express the real world, the real society, especially in the company culture. Some company cultures, they are very competitive, or may dangerous, because people will always be against others, because they need to get results. It's hard to imagine for school students, especially for freshmen who didn't have a full-time job." (Interviewee 13)

Influencing Others

One of the major surprises encountered throughout this research process was the lack of acknowledgement of the need for recent graduates to influence their peers, superiors, customers, and other people encountered at work, despite several other references throughout the interviews. One possible reason for this is that interviewees may have possibly used euphemisms such as "convince", as was the case of Interviewee 12,

"But during this time, we already got some, like, conflict. They will think "Oh, you don't need to go Kenya. They don't even can afford the shows. Or, they don't know nothing about the surveillance. What are you going there?" So, sometimes, I need to convince them." (Interviewee 12)

or "persuade", as was the case of Interviewee 5.

"Because, for an employers, they will like you to have an opinion, and to be persuasive to others." (Interviewee 5)

It's essential to once more refer to the use of English as a foreign language for all interviewees, as well as its infrequent use for many since graduation. According to Interviewee 14, ITI graduates have had to request help from co-workers with varying levels of interests, present their ideas, and convince them, new employees have to present to colleagues and superiors and persuade them. In these cases,

interviewees referred to the need to adapt their communication style, such as speaking in the "right way", or in a strong way.

"Because I think I'm new in this company, and our department is also new in this company. So I think, sometimes my speaking is representative of our department. But I think, maybe I'm low key in this company. Somebody won't take me... think my speaking is very important. So, I have to defend, I have to be assertive about my point of view. I have to give them a lot of evidence to persuade them that I'm right and what I have to do, for this work, in this way." (Interviewee 14)

The contrast between the existence of this theme throughout the interviews, and the low response rate when asked directly could point to limitations in the research methodology, such as certain concepts being lost in translation, despite the bilingual documentation provided, or the interviewer missing certain cues from respondents and failing to follow up on them. Mentions made in previous sections, such as *Task Collaboration* and *Team-Working* refer to the need to influence others as the means to reach goals such as completing projects. This need to influence others throughout this process is mostly neglected in the ITI curriculum, as previously mentioned, because most students share the same goals, deadlines, and circumstances for completing projects. Therefore, individuals aren't faced with conflicting priorities from several parties and don't have to work to influence them.

In summary, the original goal of identifying the most important and/or useful employability skills required by graduating ITI students slowly transformed itself into identifying major themes related to social interactions, and how employability skills can help facilitate these. As examples of employability skills were provided to participants as part of the interviewing process, it's not necessarily surprising that these were used to that effect. However, this doesn't deny the importance of the themes of Workplace Communication, Company/Office Culture(s), and Collaboration, and how employability skills were interpreted by interviewees and associated with these themes. In addition, the intended external focus of many of these skills was applied to internal situations, such as within the company, which shows a need to further address this reality and how traditional skills and knowledge, as well as employability skills are taught within ITI's business programme.

6. Impact of the Research on Practice and the Associated Knowledge Base

This chapter will elaborate on two recommendations arising from the findings which are related to improving how employability skills could be taught in a business programme such as ITI's:

- 1) Identifying and promoting employability skills already taught in EFL programmes
- 2) Increasing awareness of employability skills with stakeholders (e.g. students, HEIs, employers)

6.1 Acquiring employability skills through EFL programmes

6.1.1 Importance of EFL classes in developing employability skills

As previously mentioned, with an increasing number of non-native English speaking students studying in English-language programmes abroad in English-speaking countries or within an English language programme inside their countries, as well as the growing importance of English as an international academic and professional language, EFL programmes within higher education institutions have been increasing in number, size, as well as in diversity. Whether for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP), these programmes have the potential to offer additional employability skills that will benefit students in their education and professional lives. Therefore, it is important to break away from the perception of these programmes as a prerequisite to enter a subsequent principal programme, or as a necessary addition, and rather take advantage of these opportunities to promote, measure, and document additional learning.

This point was made with ITI as this research project began with the goal of identifying employability skills perceived as important by recent graduates of a business programme, match them to specific classes or activities, as well as identify gaps. However, an unexpected turn in the data collection and analysis came with the stronger association of Personal Employability Skills with business classes, and Social Employability Skills with EFL classes. While the former presented opportunities to discover some insights, the latter presented an opportunity to better understand how the acquisition of two sets of skills, English as a Foreign Language Skills and Social Employability Skills, were not only intertwined, but also how Social Employability Skills could be acquired through studying in an EFL programme. Therefore, the goal of identifying gaps in employability skills turned to identifying existing or missed opportunities

to successfully teach these, as well as promote them to interested stakeholders such as students and employers.

While foreign language skills have been present in several employability frameworks, such as those explored in the Theoretical Framework section of this thesis, these have mostly included employability skills related to engaging with others, such as *Verbal Communication*, *Written Communication*, and *Public Speaking*. As will be shown in this section, this is also the case with the cohort studied in this research project. However, what will also be shown is that in addition to these communication-oriented employability skills, EFL classes were also associated with acquiring a larger diversity of Social Employability Skills, such as *Social Intelligence*, *Decision-Making*, and *Handling Conflict*, which could be assumed to better fit with business-related classes.

The dual nature of ITI's academic programme, consisting of a mix of specific business classes and more general language classes gave the opportunity to examine how employability skills such as *Team Working* are acquired, but more importantly to what degree these can be taught intentionally. The fact that employability skills are often referred to as passive skills does not equate to being learned passively, but rather to being applicable in various situations throughout an individual's academic and professional development. Nevertheless, former students acknowledge that these skills, represented here by the example of *Team Working*, are developed through daily interactions related to classes, rather than as part of stated goals within the syllabi. In addition, a great number of the classes referenced as having helped develop these skills are not the courses that aimed at providing specific work-related training, but rather EFL classes that focused on improving communication skills. Efforts to integrate these types of skills exist in several HEIs, but aren't a part of ITI's main programme, which could be due in part to its relatively smaller size. Nevertheless, it's possible for ITI to learn from these and update its transferable skills component.

There exist many opportunities to solidify the association between EFL classes and Social Employability Skills, as well as identify other types of employability skills that are either currently being taught inadvertently and could be formally, and better, integrated into existing curricula, or that have the potential to be included within a programme in order to instil students of all levels with a wide range of employability skills alongside the planned vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills.

It is important to point out that findings, especially those based on Specialized EFL Classes, may be closely linked to the particular characteristics of this research project's participants, such as their

intermediate and above levels of proficiency in English, the strong business content of their EFL classes and subsequent use of this foreign language, their possession of a university education, as well as their common cultural and linguistic background. Therefore, these recommendations could more easily be applied to similar students, such as preparatory programmes for English-language universities or more advanced levels of EFL courses. This is particularly valid when considering the specific classes described below, such as English for Meetings and English for Negotiations. However, as previously discussed, employability skills acquired throughout EFL classes are not necessarily associated with the language itself, but rather to experiences during classes and those in the workplace. Therefore, all levels of teaching have the potential to support students to develop additional skills that will serve them once the class or programme is completed.

6.1.2 Common traits of Specialized EFL Classes

Specialized EFL classes were more often identified as having played an important role in providing the Social Employability Skills necessary to help fill the gap between the departure from the ITI academic programme and the moment where recent graduates have learned how to adapt to and successfully integrate the various cultures related to their new working environments. In order to better understand why Specialized EFL classes (e.g. English for Presentations, Business Correspondence, English for Meetings, English for Negotiations) were often associated with the acquisition of Social Employability Skills, it's useful to examine what these have in common within the ITI curriculum and how these could be replicated.

First of all, these are taught mostly in the second half of the ITI programme, so factors such as an improved level of English, a higher level of ease with classmates, or a better understanding of the institution's culture would have to be looked into to determine if or how they impact the acquisition of these skills. Second, all of these classes include a strong emphasis on the frequent application of EFL elements (e.g. vocabulary, listening skills). Third, classes associated with Social Employability skills include a higher frequency of team projects, both short- and long-term, in which more communication needs to take place in order to organize, practice, and deliver final role-playing skits, presentations, and reports. The inclusion of ITI's English Only Policy in this equation may also play an important role in bringing the interaction to a simpler level, and engaging participants in using the more basic, yet effective, communication methods learned in class. Fourth, these classes present students with more case studies than more traditional 4-skills EFL classes, which can engage students in better communicating to solve problems, no matter what the level of difficulty. Finally, the fifth common

element seems to be that frequent feedback on unfinished projects, assignments, productions, is offered by classmates and/or instructors, which may force students to better handle necessary workplace skills such as clarifying, influencing, as well as understanding the real meaning of information given.

6.1.3 Steps for identifying existing employability skills in EFL programmes

Existing EFL programmes can transition from a curriculum in which employability skills are possibly being taught, but not monitored or promoted, to one in which all groups (e.g. students & graduates, faculty & administration, employers) are not only aware of the employability skills acquired, but also recognize their importance and impact, how well they have been learned, and play an active role improving the process, which can be accomplished through several steps, as shown in the following example.

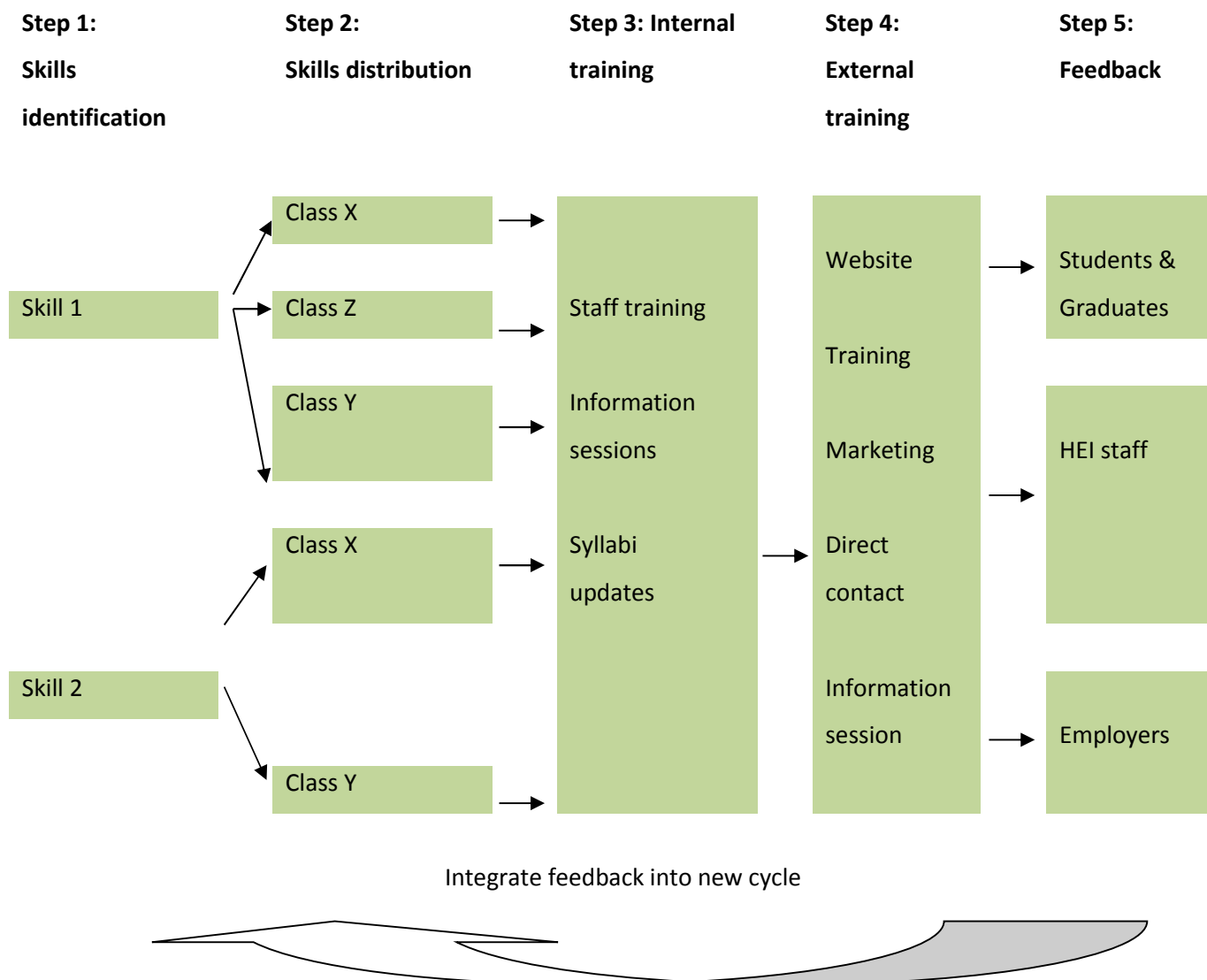


Diagram 6.1: Steps for identifying existing employability skills in EFL programme

The following section offers a description of how this short-term feedback loop can be implemented in an existing business curriculum such as ITI's.

6.1.4 Short-term identification of existing employability skills

Step 1: Skills & class identification

The first step to follow is the identification of the employability skills perceived as most important to be acquired as part of the programme. In the case of this research project, recent graduates were chosen for their transitional state between education and established skills, knowledge, and habits, and the data showed the employability skills to be consistent enough to be confidently used as the foundation for this process at ITI.

In addition, a less intensive data collection method, such as an online survey given to alumni from the same cohort having graduated up to five years ago but having at least one year of post-graduation experience, similar to Zhu & Zhang's (2013) research on student satisfaction or Su & Zhang's (2015) assessment of employer and faculty perception of employability skills, could serve as a confirmation, and most importantly a way to start identifying differences between different concentrations (e.g. two-year English & Business major and one-year English major).

However, it is crucial not to try to confirm every skill before moving forward, or to feel every party needs to be included before moving forward, especially because of the lack of general understanding of employability skills that was shown during the interviews. Rather, institutions can begin the process knowing that no major changes will be implemented in the curriculum at first, and that these skills will be integrated gradually and practiced by students throughout the programme.

Step 2: Skills distribution

As some interviewees have shared, a number of the employability skills identified as most important may already be taught within EFL classes, without students, or even the faculty in some cases, being aware of this secondary level of learning. Therefore, the second step is to associate the skills previously identified with existing classes. This can be completed along with data collected for Step 1, simply by asking respondents to choose which EFL classes best helped them develop these.

Once skills and classes are identified, key members of administration and faculty associated with the programme can participate in discussing the results, and determining priorities, as well as putting together a plan for transitioning from passive to active teaching and acquisition of employability skills through the EFL programme, as well as examining the distribution of objectives within different classes. This can be aided by the identification of gaps and redundancies related to employability skills present in the EFL programme. This period can also be used to begin staff training on employability skills, and most importantly, to involve administration and faculty members in this process.

Step 3: Internal training and promotion

Once employability skills have been distributed throughout the existing curriculum, materials related to classes, such as course descriptions on the website, syllabi, as well as handouts, need to be updated to clearly include the teaching of employability skills (and the associated assessment of these). In addition, formal internal training needs to be conducted with the faculty, administration staff, as well as current

students. However, most, if not all, of the original course content can remain the same, as the goal is to increase internal awareness and ensuring all parties within the institution share an understanding of these skills.

Step 4: External training and promotion

Once HEI staff and students better understand employability skills, and the curriculum has been updated to maximize the conscious acquisition of employability skills, attention can be turned outward to alumni, potential students, current employers of graduates as well as future ones. Once more, the goal isn't to create new external marketing and communication methods but rather take advantage of the existing advertising and networking methods, such as newsletters for alumni, information sessions in universities for potential students, as well as direct marketing for employers.

Step 5: Assessment & feedback

The fifth step consists of collecting feedback from involved students & alumni, faculty & administrative staff, as well as employers, regarding the relevance of employability skills listed in Step 1, the effectiveness of how these were acquired through the EFL programme, as well as identify additional skills acquired through the programme, or those lacking that need to be added. As a result, insights can be added into Step 1 as the process starts again.

6.1.5 Long-term development of employability skills

It is hoped that the experience of going through the process described above will increase awareness of employability skills with minimal changes to an existing curriculum in order to gradually implement long-term change in the content of EFL classes, as well as other aspects of the overall curriculum, such as business classes.

In summary, ITI faces several challenges in successfully integrating employability skills development within its programme, such as increasing awareness with students, faculty, administration, as well as employers, in order to create a common platform for discussion of standards and expectations. In addition, ITI's particular programme, with a strong emphasis on business and foreign languages, presents an opportunity for awareness and development of employability skills to be integrated within existing classes and serve as input to update these, as well as be taught in stand-alone activities such as workshops. However, the importance must be placed on ensuring ongoing communication between all parties in influencing the development of specific classes and ITI's programme, as demands from each

stakeholder are bound to change with time. Certain classes referred to as most influential in developing these kinds of skills, such as English for Presentations, Business Correspondence, English for Meetings, and English for Negotiations, offer the best starting points to doing so, but shouldn't serve as limit for future updates to ITI's EFL and trade classes.

6.2 Increasing awareness of employability skills

6.2.1 Student & graduate awareness of employability skills

Research into employability skills in this thesis aimed to better understand the perspective of recent graduates regarding which skills are most important, how they learn them (or not) within their business programme, and how these could help improve the quality of the education provided. However, it's essential to consider the two other major groups involved in this process, education providers and employers, as setting goals and implementing strategies can be needlessly laborious and even counterproductive unless all are aware of them and work together.

Findings from this research have shown that students, and even experienced graduates, are not necessarily conscious of the skills and knowledge taught by their business programme and those required by employers, as well as how compatible these are, which seems to be especially true of employability skills. As a result, students can be misinformed and underprepared regarding all the skills and knowledge they can get out of their business training, which of these are sought by potential employers, as well as how to effectively promote these. Finally, they may not know how they can use them to not only obtain their desired positions but also advance in their careers. This lack of knowledge can also be attributed to the choice of business programmes, as the most common reason given by interviewees was to obtain employment, rather than acquire specific technical and non-technical skills.

Potential, current, and former students need to be educated on all the skills acquired during a programme such as ITI's, especially for the less easily observable employability skills, such as *Leadership* or *Time Management*, how these can benefit them, as well as reinforce the idea of continuing to develop them. While this can be done through direct methods at key moments, such as during recruitment information sessions, new student orientation, or job search training, it is essential to embed the awareness of these skills throughout the programme, such as within individual classes and activities, in order to reinforce knowledge of these and give opportunities to put them into practice throughout the programme. This can be facilitated by engaging the students in their learning, from the selection of classes (if possible), to offering more options in terms of projects and learning materials,

each with different goals and related skills. As a result of having to choose a path to follow, and by extension experiencing an opportunity cost, students may become more aware of the skills they can obtain from each subject, project, or even individual session, apply them, and present them with more confidence.

6.2.2 Faculty & administration awareness of employability skills

The lower level of student awareness of employability skills can offer benefits, such as higher faculty and administrative control in designing a curriculum, creating its resources, as well as implementing it, like scheduling. It may also provide students with an overall better quality education, especially for a more practical-oriented programme leading to specific industries and professions, like international sales and marketing. The question raised is not how much control students should have in the path they follow in completing a degree, although it remains a valid one, but rather the lack of student awareness of potential and actual learning due to not having to make choices. However, these benefits may be based on the assumption that all those involved in designing and teaching the curriculum are aware of the employability skills that are currently or potentially taught within a programme, their impact on students' lives after graduation, as well as how to successfully integrate them in more subtle tactics (e.g. passive learning through role-playing) or more obvious activities (e.g. workshops). In addition, based on these findings, business programme providers, as well as its curriculum designers and faculty, need to be better aware of the additional skills required of graduates, those that already form part of the student experience, knowingly or not, and how these can more effectively taught, as well as integrating additional employability skills without sacrificing other aspects of the programme.

6.2.3 Employer awareness of employability skills

In addition to the need for academic programme developers to better understand employability skills, it is also important to examine the level of employer awareness of employability skills, in part because it would help them reach their goals of hiring based on the correct criteria for an industry, a market, or a specific position, rather than popular perceptions of what a business professional should be, but also because it would reinforce the efforts implemented during training. In other words, skills and knowledge taught as part of a curriculum designed specifically to help its students obtain employment must incorporate those that employers seek.

Following this approach may help reorient hiring practices within Taiwanese employers as they seem to continue to include these criteria in their hiring practices. For example, my exploration of 58 job advertisements sent to ITI to recruit its students revealed that the majority of the criteria sought by

Taiwanese employers in recruiting graduates still relate to more traditional business skills, as can be seen in Table 6.1 with the top ten most popular ones.

Skills	Frequency (out of 58 ads)
Customer development & maintenance	50
Customer service & IT support	32
Quotations, orders, billing & collection	15
Product promotion	14
Exhibitions & trade fairs	12
Strategy development	10
Specific industry knowledge	9
Market research	8
Specific IT skills	5
Analysing & writing reports	3

Table 6.1: Top skills requested in Taiwanese job descriptions

It is very important to point out that the two most requested skills were Customer Development & Maintenance, as well as Customer Service & IT Support, which reinforce the emphasis on social skills discussed in the previous section. In addition, analysing these advertisements showed that a number of Taiwanese employers already place importance on "Personality" (directly translated from Mandarin Chinese), with the following behaviours being the most popular ones.

Behaviours	Frequency (out of 58 ads)
Independence	11
Enthusiasm	6
Communication skills	5
Taking initiative	4
Responsible	4
Time management	3

Table 6.2: Top behaviours requested in Taiwanese job descriptions

These findings hint at an interest in non-technical skills as hiring criteria existing, and these could be developed to match what institutions like ITI offer. In addition, better understanding employer expectations and clarifying them could help programme developers improve their classes, help students better prepare, and match them with the appropriate jobs in order to improve satisfaction for both students and employers.

6.2.4 Improving communication between stakeholders

Students enter business programmes with the hopes that the institution will provide the training that will lead to the skills and knowledge for them to obtain employment and build a successful career. Similarly, employers may expect HEIs to provide the training necessary for graduates to succeed in a specific industry, company, or even position, and may be unhappy with the need to invest in additional training, especially since there is no guarantee new hires will remain in this position for a period of time long enough to justify the investment. Therefore, HEIs such as ITI may find themselves in a position in which they are expected to satisfy demands for situations following graduation, such as practical skills, while still providing the long-term mindset for them to take on management positions in the future. As a result, they may experience negative results with its reputation, competitiveness, as well as effectiveness in fulfilling their mission of training business professionals. Therefore, a shared communication framework between students, HEIs, and employers offers the potential to not only create better awareness of employability skills, but also bring about realistic expectations and goals,

improve the preparedness of graduates, better allocate resources related to hiring and training new employees, as well as create a virtuous feedback loop between all parties.

This presents several potential benefits. First of all, for employers, this could help improve retention, reduce the amount of initial training required, as well as increase sales and productivity, by better understanding both traditional business skills and knowledge (e.g. marketing, accounting, business plan writing), non-technical skills such as those identified by interviewees, as well as the specific behaviours associated with those requested in job advertisements (e.g. Independent, Customer Service Skills). Therefore, better identifying and advertising the employability skills required for specific positions could not only attract the right candidates, who are themselves better aware of their own employability skills, but also assessing them, learning from each wave of recruits, and improving the job profile, as well as the skills and behaviours associated with them. Indeed, training programmes could be implemented upon recruitment to help new employees learn the appropriate abilities to succeed in their position. Finally, employers could in return provide feedback to HEIs in order for the business programmes to provide training better suited for the demands of today's global and online markets.

In addition, for HEIs, providing relevant training for these increasingly complex marketplace demands would not only help better fulfil the purpose of their programmes, but also add a competitive edge in order to distinguish themselves from the increasing number of competitors offering their services to the same potential students. In addition, HEIs having built an understanding of these skills alongside employers could take a more active role in providing graduates for companies, rather than only responding to company demands.

Finally, students should also be included in the process in order for them to take an active role in their education, better understand the requirements of their future careers, and increase the chances of matching their backgrounds, skills, and personalities to the appropriate career paths, as well as work to identify gaps in their professional profile and set goals to improve these. In addition, students must learn to better promote themselves throughout key periods such as finding employment and transitioning into their new company, as employers may not be aware of the benefits of possessing employability skills, be aware of underdeveloped abilities, and include these in their professional growth plan.

HEIs like ITI often find themselves in a facilitator role in which they are expected to bridge the gaps between students and employers, and are therefore privileged with access to information from both

groups, as well as the ability to communicate new information and even exert some influence. Therefore, while acknowledging that each party must play a role in better understanding how employability skills can be integrated into the training, recruitment, and career development processes, HEIs are in a stronger position to take the initiative in building common understanding between stakeholders.

However, integrating employability skills into a business, language, or any other type of programme, no matter how well researched, well developed, or how relevant they may seem to one or several groups, is limited by the level of engagement of the least willing participant. For example, this thesis focused on the perspective of recent graduates, and brought attention to the need to develop employability skills to better develop internal and external relationships. So, updating ITI's programme based on these findings, and even getting full faculty involvement and support, would be limited if employers still exclusively sought specific business or technical skills, such as "Quotations, Orders, Billing & Collection", general external communication skills, such as "Customer Development & Maintenance", or vague descriptions of non-technical skills or behaviours (or "Personality", as referred to in Taiwanese job advertisements), such as "Independence" or "Enthusiasm", and most importantly, if they didn't share the same understanding of employability skills in general, or more specifically the importance of developing Social Employability Skills to increase success, productivity, and retention in the early stages of a graduate's career.

Employer needs and priorities present the potential to occupy a better position in employability skills research. However, gaps exist between what those hiring, from human resources managers to specific managers, and the needs of new employees. Therefore, a framework for the development of employability skills in a programme such as ITI's must be used not only as a means to give students the tools to improve their success in the programme and after graduation, but also to move towards all three main stakeholders (students/graduates, faculty/administration, employers) to better communicate and cooperate in building a "job-ready" curriculum.

An employability skills assessment framework must, in addition to being a training and assessment tool, serve as a promotional instrument to potential students in order to improve the institution's visibility and attractiveness, a means to educate companies on the evolving nature of business and language requirements for the modern workforce, and most importantly to create employer demand and anticipation for these skills, as well as student/graduate awareness of their mastery of these skills, and the means for them to properly communicate them.

In order to do this, common vocabulary that can be used by all parties is a first step in creating a platform for the exchange of information, from sharing expectations to providing feedback on the quality of graduates, as well as giving recommendation concerning the direction the programme should take. As was clearly observed in the data collection for this research project, equipping ITI graduates with the concepts and associated vocabulary to discuss employability skills not only greatly improved their initial engagement in the conversation, but also the quality and quantity of their opinions, the transfer from one skill to another or the combination of several, as well as the identification of gaps between their experiences at ITI, and those in the workplace.

In addition to employers being able to provide feedback on the existing framework structure, highlight redundancies and less useful components, as well as provide recommendations for its improvement, graduates could better present the skills acquired and implement them in practical situations during their training, the job search process, and transition into the workplace. This would give more relevance to the teaching approach emphasizing these skills taught by the faculty. However, a major challenge in following this approach of building a common foundation of knowledge may be the feeling of investing time and effort in a project that may not come to fruition. For example, students, especially those with prior working experience, may rely on their past experiences in which hard skills were prioritized, even if these weren't positive. In addition, faculty members may be unwilling to change their approach, especially if it has been seen to be successful for years. Finally, employers might simply not believe in the importance of non-technical skills, especially higher level managers who rose to prominence in an era when terms like cloud computing or online social networking were unknown. Therefore, it would be important to include standards and measurement methods that not only bring credibility to the integration of employability skills into the training and recruitment processes, but also permit students to set goals for themselves, help the faculty better understand the levels and needs of students, and finally guide employers in identifying hiring criteria and comparing candidates more objectively.

Methods for the measurement of employability skills are increasingly elaborate, and diversified, from Jackson *et al.*'s (2013) previously mentioned research to Su & Zhang's (2015) more recent assessment of employability skills in China, and can be adapted to fit the needs of one specific institution or programme. While this presents an advantage to institutions that are familiar with employability skills and are willing, and able to invest in assessing them and implementing changes to improve the overall programme, characteristics possessed by other programme providers, such as a smaller size, lack of resources, or simply a lack of understanding of the importance of employability skills beyond a handful

of promoters within its staff, make it less likely the institutions will take the leap into an seemingly unproven area of curriculum development. Therefore, an approach based on identifying, promoting, and developing existing Social Employability Skills, as well as gradually updating the programme to integrate them in a more natural way, can serve as a first step for institutions, big and small, wanting to acknowledge these. Doing so can offer the initial advantage of not having to heavily modify classes or the curriculum, and not sacrificing any of the existing goals and content.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Research summary

The choice of topic for this research project originated from perceived gaps between student training and employer expectations, as stated by recent graduates of the International Trade Institute (ITI), a Taiwanese business programme in Hsinchu City. This led to a more focused study on employability skills taught in this business programme, with the goals of benefiting related stakeholders (e.g. students, HEIs, employers), as well as contributing to research on this specific context.

A literature review showed that while research on employability skills was increasing in frequency and depth, no main definition or measurement method could be agreed upon due to the different viewpoints of stakeholders. However, trends such as the importance of communication skills and the perceived inability of HEIs to provide these skills seemed present in several groups. In addition, new challenges related to globalisation, technology, and the diversification of career paths were shown to play an important role in the need to update business curricula. As a result, this thesis identified gaps between the employability skills required in the workplace, and the training provided at ITI.

Therefore, research questions were used to identify the employability skills required for ITI graduates to successfully obtain employment, transition into the workforce, and succeed in the early stages of a career, the presence of goals to teach these skills within the business curriculum at ITI, as well as how they could be better integrated. Cognisant of the cultural and local context an approach to the research was designed to investigate these questions in which Jackson & Chapman's Graduate Employability Framework (2012a) was used as a tool for data collection, along with part of Jackson's subsequent research approach (2013), to undertake qualitative interviews with recent graduates from ITI's programme.

7.2 Acquiring employability skills through EFL classes

Findings showed a strong emphasis on the importance of EFL classes as a source for learning employability skills. However, while some more closely associated with the subject matter, such as *Public Speaking* for a class such as English for Presentations, are more easily recognized, a number less easily identified employability skills, in many cases related to internal communication, identified as Social Employability Skills in this thesis, are not acknowledged. As a result, the potential exists to better

identify potential additional learning in EFL classes, include it in curriculum learning objectives, and most importantly measure the acquisition of these skills in order to continue improving the programme.

Recommendations from this research are to ensure all major stakeholders, including students and graduates, HEI administration and faculty staff, as well as employers, become aware of employability skills taught in EFL classes and view them as legitimate tools for training and recruitment through the use of a common framework, and that a soft transition can be undertaken through the identification and use of employability skills already being taught in the EFL component of ITI's programme.

7.3 Increasing importance of social skills in the workplace

Business programmes place a high level of importance on skills and knowledge traditionally associated with conducting business, such as accounting, finance, as well as sales and marketing. With the rise of online business as well as the growing importance of international trade, curricula have updated their designations of specializations and classes, as well as aimed to increase skills and knowledge related to different cultures as well as foreign languages. The existence of ITI is an example of this as it was created specifically to address the demands of the increasingly globalised market.

The need for countries, as well as its industries, companies, and education providers, to look towards foreign markets has led to the need for curricula emphasizing relationship-building, communication, and interaction with outside parties such as customers, suppliers, and partners, and in most cases, in more official contexts, such as sales presentations or negotiations. However, the development of communication skills related to informal communication may have been neglected in business programmes in Taiwan for dealing with external parties mentioned above, but more importantly for internal communication with parties such as other departments, teammates, superiors, and subordinates.

Deming's (2015) research on the importance of social skills in the workplace shows that these lower coordination costs, as well as permit workers to more efficiently specialize and trade. Deming's (2015) main point is that IT and automation have contributed to the obsolescence of many routine jobs in the USA, which has placed more importance on tasks that are require high levels of skills and are difficult to automate, and that social skills play an important role in this higher-level occupations. According to Deming's (2015) research, IT has caused several profession to be increasingly automated, and that jobs that cannot be automated consist of an increasing diversity of tasks, and require social skills for employees to identify how different individuals' skills can complement each other and tasks can be

traded. The higher social skills, the more efficiently this exchange of tasks can take place, which reduces coordination costs. The research also states that employers believe teamwork, collaboration and oral communication skills are some of the most important but difficult to find qualities in workers.

The same could be true with ITI graduates. For example, ITI students are taught job search skills in both the Mandarin Chinese language part of the programme, through a short seminar and a consultation with HR specialists, as well as in the English programme, with a strong emphasis on creating their job search portfolio and developing the external communication skills (e.g. e-mail communication, interviewing) necessary to obtain a first position after graduation. However, these seem to be offered with the assumption that students will find the position that best suits their short-term and long-term goals, and don't necessarily prepare students for the reality of having to switch positions, companies or even industries, relatively early in their career. An updated curriculum including job-related internal and external networking, as well as developing ongoing self-assessment and goal-setting skills, could provide students with more up-to-date job search skills.

7.4 Research methodology in future research

The range of employability skills presented in Jackson & Chapman's (2012a) framework presented interviewees with concepts, vocabulary, and descriptions of employability skills in order to provide some guidance in helping them revisit their experiences related to their business education, job search process, and transition into professional environments. The initial series of five interviews conducted without a framework resulted in interviewees struggling to propose and elaborate on the needs of employers and how these connected (or not) to their business programme, leading to the decision to present the framework to all interviewees and make it an integral part of the data collection process. However, it's very important to acknowledge that this structure also may have placed interviewees inside a cognitive box, thus limiting the scope and diversity of their memory recollection, thinking, and discussion, resulting in them choosing from a wide choice of general categories and specific employability skills from the list presented in the interview schedule in order to match them to their context, rather than proposing their own original insights. Subsequent research could use the general findings from this research as a starting point to conduct data collection and analysis of a smaller scope, and concentrate on the most important skills and experiences described. Interviewees would be given more time and freedom to elaborate on the employer needs and employee skills revealed to be the most important, as well as more opportunities to propose their own ideas and share original insights, with the hope that these would lead the research in new directions.

However, it's important to keep in mind language and cultural differences. Although all the documentation provided throughout the interview process, from the initial e-mail to the final Skype call, was translated into Mandarin Chinese, the native language of all interviewees, and all participants possessed a considerable level of English training, interviewees were not always able to express themselves at their optimal level. Therefore, follow-up research conducted exclusively in Mandarin Chinese by an interviewer with a native-level knowledge of this language could permit interviewees to open up more, discuss their experiences with more confidence, have access to a wider range of vocabulary, as well as redirect the time and energy spent translating, mentally and orally, into other processes, such as creative thinking.

It's also important to acknowledge the lack of diversity with the interviewed cohort, both authentic, such as shared common language and early education, as well as created purposefully in order to make the research project manageable, such as not considering the characteristics having influenced interviewees to attend business schools (e.g. academic, professional or socio-economic background) or the type of position obtained following graduation (e.g. profession, company, or industry).

Throughout this thesis, one point I've made was the use of research done in Western countries such as the UK, Australia, and the USA, as well as its related tools and frameworks, to study groups such as students, graduates, employers, and HEIs with different circumstances, leading to research projects such as this one not only collecting and analysing data using a lens developed for different cultures, languages, and economic systems, but also failing to see what new criteria should be examined in order to better understand institutions such as ITI. An example of how this thesis could be better adapted to this institution lies with Su & Zhang's (2015) research using a framework developed specifically for a Mainland Chinese institution. While it's important to mention that, unlike ITI, Su & Zhang's (2015) research context also included international students, basing a follow-up investigation on the inclusion of employability skills into the ITI curriculum, and most importantly the effectiveness of these from multiple perspectives (e.g. graduates & employers).

7.5 Research on relationship building

Task Collaboration, as well as other behaviours included in the *Working Effectively With Others* section of Jackson & Chapman's (2012a) framework, offer opportunities for interviewees to describe their thoughts on the skills necessary for successful interactions in the workplace. However, they seem to function with an assumption that relationships already exist, or that these are easily built. In reality,

several behaviours associated with *Working Effectively With Others* are highly influenced by and must be adapted to the level of relationship between recent graduates and other parties (e.g. experienced employees, superiors, or customers). In addition, building relationships seems to be a prerequisite to being able to effectively using employability skills such as those described in Jackson & Chapman's (2012a) framework.

A challenge stated by several interviewees lies in the contrast between how relationships in the ITI business programme (e.g. with classmates, with faculty members) are and how the same is done in the workplace (e.g. with co-workers, with supervisors, with customers). The business programme provides students with a more collective experience in which most, if not all, students begin at the same time, are provided guidance regarding the rules of the institution, interaction with different parties, time management, and also can depend on each other for help and support. In contrast, recently-graduated employees may find themselves entering an existing environment in which they are expected to adapt to a corporate culture, its numerous rules, both official and unofficial, as well as contribute to the organization. Therefore, it could be beneficial to examine how business programmes could add elements from the workplace, such as different priorities and goals, varying levels of authority, intermittent contact between groups, fragmented information, as well as a related necessity to develop relationships based on reciprocity, rather than commonality.

7.6 Additional perspectives

Knowing that students believed they had acquired employability skills that helped them in the workplace, such as *Team Working*, led me to wonder to what degree this was intentional, and who were aware of this, such as:

- Which skills goals were intentionally included in the programme?
- Were the administration and faculty members aware of this?
- Were the students aware of this?

An examination of English language programme syllabi indicated that many abilities that could be classified as employability skills were part of certain syllabi's goals, such as *Cultural and Diversity Awareness* skills being taught in the Cultural Awareness class, *Written Communication* skills acquired through a Business Correspondence class, or *Verbal Communication* skills resulting from Listening & Speaking classes. However, few, if any, less easily defined employability skills, such as *Conceptualisation* or *Autonomy* were not included in any of the syllabi. Therefore, as the first and main source of

information for teachers in most courses may be the syllabus, it may be safe to say that acquiring additional skills not directly related to the subject was not intentional. An interesting follow-up to this research project would be to examine the perspective of faculty members and administrative staff in order to better understand their views, as well as contrast them with data obtained from recent graduates. As for students, the challenges encountered throughout the trial phase of the interview process relating to recent graduates' lack of knowledge of employability skills as well as the general goals of previously taken classes, hint that there was little awareness of any secondary learning throughout their time at ITI.

The improvement in data collection which followed the explicit inclusion of Jackson & Chapman's framework (2012a) shows that while students are able to identify needs associated with their first jobs and associate them to acquisition of skills within their programme, they weren't aware of this before, during, or after completing their degree. This lack of expectations makes it more difficult for future students to choose the right programme for them. This is made even more difficult by the increasing number of business programmes, local and foreign, as well as new delivery methods such as online degrees.

Higher education business programmes providers such as ITI often emphasize the course subjects and their content, rather than the work-related skills which will be provided. In part, this may be related to an aversion to being associated with vocational programmes, which tend to present the practical benefits, such as work-related skills. Rather, higher education business programmes may focus on general knowledge, theories, and developing a mindset which can be applied to a variety of contexts. This educational philosophy may be a remnant of a time period when the scope, diversity, and speed of business were irrevocably transformed by the ubiquity of mobile communication devices, the seemingly irreversible global market, as well as the necessity to learn and adapt at an increasing rate.

Opportunities exist for higher education providers to take advantage of this increasingly challenging marketplace to improve their programmes in order better serve the needs of their students, as well as other parties such as employers. While vestiges of the belief that an academic programme may know best how to prepare students to be tomorrow's skilled workers, creators, or leaders, these are quickly giving way to an increasing level of consumer awareness, both for students and employers, regarding the needs of a modern marketplace. However, access to unlimited information can also have its drawbacks as these parties may feel overwhelmed, and possess a new sense of frustration from moving from a "one-size-fits-all" appeasing mindset, to a paradox of choice leading to indecision. In this context,

higher education providers can serve as guides in educating potential students and employers in the needs of marketplace, and how their programme will fulfil these.

A challenge for programme designers will be to find the right balance between practical knowledge, which may help graduates at the beginning of their careers, but may hinder their long-term professional growth, and theoretical knowledge, which may provide a set of skills, mindset, and knowledge permitting a higher level of growth within an industry, but that may make the transition from an academic environment more difficult. It's also challenging for programme designers to differentiate between skills that can be fully acquired during the academic programme, can be taught at a more general during the academic programme with the intention of being furthered in the workplace, or simply cannot be acquired during the academic programme due to a lack of resources and/or opportunities

7.7 Integration into existing programmes

The findings presented in the Research Findings and Interpretation section of this research showed that a number of employability skills perceived as important for new graduates were of a more social nature, and played an important role in communication within their team, department, and company, rather than only with external parties such as suppliers or customers. In addition, a high number of these Social Employability Skills can already be acquired through traditional business classes, even if this is not a stated goal and no related group such as students, faculty, or even programme designers, are aware of this, as well as in EFL classes for both communication skills such as *Public Speaking* and more individual ones such as *Conceptualization*. This unintended but beneficial learning shows a great potential for employability skills to be formally integrated into existing programmes, and that new programmes can be developed with a stronger emphasis on the immediate requirements of graduates to obtain a position, successfully transition into this new world, and rise in the corporate ranks.

While an increasing number of higher education institutions and programmes may have started including employability skills training within their curricula, either through specific classes or workshops or through subtler sprinkling in existing syllabi, these have often been identified as career training or associated with classes specific to target professions, such as business courses. However, as employability skills training have not been associated with EFL curricula, especially at lower levels of proficiency, the learning associated to these types of skills, actual and potential, has not been fully acknowledged.

Education providers offering foreign language training such as EFL as a mandatory, supplemental, or optional part of a programme have the opportunity to not only improve the quality of students' learning and better prepare them for their careers, but also use these as promotional tools to stand out in an increasingly crowded international education market. The increasing number of foreign students studying in English-speaking countries and of English-language higher education programmes provided within non-English-speaking countries has been accompanied with preparatory programmes offered before or during studies. As a result, in addition to developing useful skills for their studies, students could not only be better aware of the useful additional skills they have learned, but also effectively present them to reach their post-graduation goals such as finding the best position possible. However, a major challenge related to implementing employability skills within foreign language training classes and programmes is the low awareness of their existence with students, employers, and even education institutions. This thesis is an example of this since the research process had to be modified early on by providing interviewees with examples of employability skills to discuss. This ignorance of employability skills acquired throughout the ITI programme has been highlighted in the end-of-programme Job Search class, in which students have struggled with finding relevant skills and experiences to build an effective resume, especially with students possessing no prior work experience. Therefore, it is essential to involve students from the beginning of their training, or even before as part of the recruitment process, in helping them better understand the employability skills they will acquire throughout their language training, but also how these are in demand and how they can better present them to potential employers, obtain their desired positions, efficiently transition into their new working environment, and contribute to their personal performance, as well as to the development of their team, department, company, or even society as a whole.

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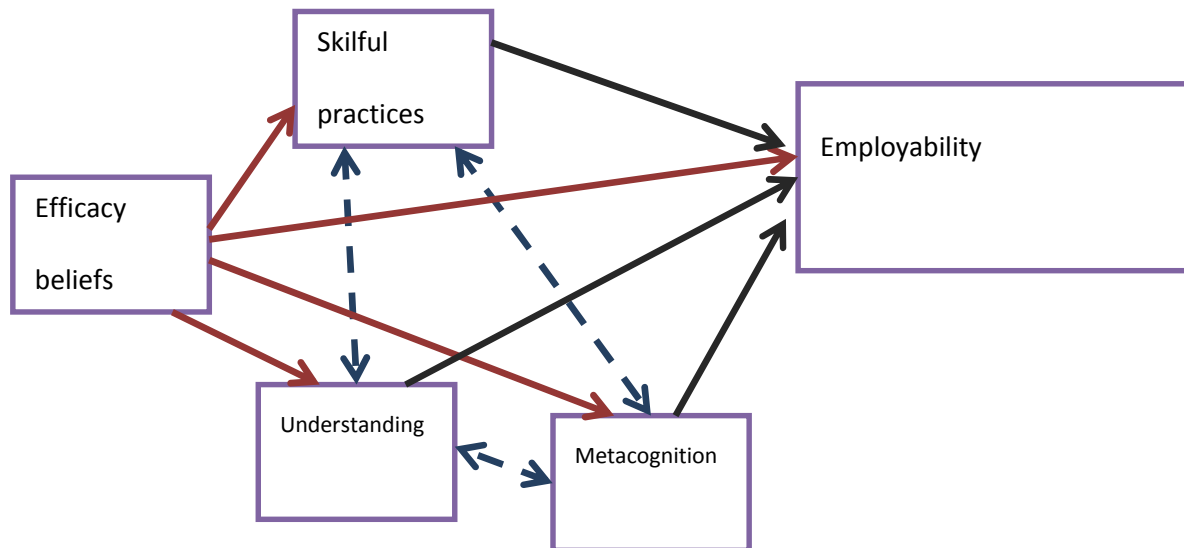
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9. Appendix

Appendix 1: USEM Graduate Employability Framework (Knight & Yorke, 2003)



USEM categories

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- 1 **Malleable self-theory:** belief that attributes [e.g. intelligence] are not fixed and can be developed.
- 2 **Self-awareness:** awareness of own strengths and weaknesses, aims and values.
- 3 **Self-confidence:** confidence in dealing with the challenges that employment and life throw up.
- 4 **Independence:** ability to work without supervision.
- 5 **Emotional intelligence:** sensitivity to others' emotions and the effects that they can have.
- 6 **Adaptability:** ability to respond positively to changing circumstances and new challenges.
- 7 **Stress tolerance:** ability to retain effectiveness under pressure.
- 8 **Initiative:** ability to take action unprompted.
- 9 **Willingness to learn:** commitment to ongoing learning to meet the needs of employment and life.
- 10 **Reflectiveness:** the disposition to reflect evaluatively on the performance of oneself and others.

CORE SKILLS

- 11 **Reading effectiveness:** the recognition and retention of key points.
- 12 **Numeracy:** ability to use numbers at an appropriate level of accuracy.

- 13 Information retrieval:** ability to access different sources.
- 14 Language skills:** possession of more than a single language.
- 15 Self-management:** ability to work in an efficient and structured manner.
- 16 Critical analysis:** ability to 'deconstruct' a problem or situation.
- 17 Creativity:** ability to be original or inventive and to apply lateral thinking.
- 18 Listening:** focused attention in which key points are recognised.
- 19 Written communication:** clear reports, letters etc. written specifically for the reader.
- 20 Oral presentations:** clear and confident presentation of information to a group
- 21 Explaining:** orally and in writing.
- 22 Global awareness:** in terms of both cultures and economics.

PROCESS SKILLS

- 23 Computer literacy:** ability to use a range of software.
- 24 Commercial awareness:** operating with an understanding of business issues and priorities.
- 25 Political sensitivity:** appreciates how organisations actually work and acts accordingly.
- 26 Ability to work cross-culturally: both within and beyond the UK.**
- 27 Ethical sensitivity:** appreciates ethical aspects of employment and acts accordingly.
- 28 Prioritising:** ability to rank tasks according to importance.
- 29 Planning:** setting of achievable goals and structuring action.
- 30 Applying subject understanding:** use of disciplinary understanding from the HE programme.
- 31 Acting morally:** has a moral code and acts accordingly.
- 32 Coping with complexity:** ability to handle ambiguous and complex situations.
- 33 Problem-solving:** selection and use of appropriate methods to find solutions.
- 34 Influencing:** convincing others of the validity of one's point of view
- 35 Arguing for and/or justifying a point of view or a course of action**
- 36 Resolving conflict:** both intra-personally and in relationships with others.
- 37 Decision making:** choice of the best option from a range of alternatives.
- 38 Negotiating:** discussion to achieve mutually satisfactory resolution of contentious issues.
- 39 Team work:** can work constructively with others on a common task.

Appendix 2: Interview schedule

Name of interviewee (English & Chinese):

受訪者（英文及中文）名字:

Date of interview:

面談日期:

Year graduated from ITI:

何年畢業於 ITI:

Part 1: General information questions

Why did you decide to enter a business training program?

你為什麼決定學商？

Tell me about the position you obtained after graduating

- Type of company
- Location of company
- Industry
- Size of company
- Type of position you obtained

告訴我畢業後獲得的職位

- 公司類型
- 公司地點
- 行業
- 公司規模
- 您獲得的職位

When did you get a job after ITI? (before or after graduation? how many interviews?)

在 ITI 結束後,你何時找到工作? (畢業前或畢業後?有多少面試?)

Definition of employability

Set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy

一系列的成就 - 技能, 理解和個人屬性 - 使畢業生更容易在自己選擇的職業獲得就業機會和成功, 對於自己, 勞動力, 社會, 經濟是有利的

Part 2: Discussion of employability skills & classes

Which of the following personal employability skills do you think were the most useful and/or in demand from employers during:

- Your job search process
- Your transition into the workplace
- Your career progression

Why?

以下哪些就業技能, 對雇主而言,你認為是最有用的和最需要的:

- 你的求職過程

- 您過渡到職場
 - 您的事業發展
- 為什麼呢？

Based on the employability skills that were required of you in your new position, which **English, trade, and extra-curricular** courses or subjects were useful to have in your training? Why?
基於新的職位對於您的就業技能的需求，那門英語課程或主題，貿易類課程或課外活動，對於你的訓練是最有用，為什麼呢？

Part 3: Identification & discussion of gaps between ITI & workplace

What kinds of challenges did you face in the workplace that you believe you weren't prepared for?

How do you think business schools could better prepare students to face these challenges?

在工作上你有什麼樣的挑戰是你沒有預料到而且也沒有準備的呢？

你是覺得商學院能如何更進一步培養學生面對這些挑戰呢？

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET and CONSENT FORM

受訪者基本資料和同意書

You are invited to take part in a research study of the skills and knowledge necessary for recent business program graduates to be successful in the workplace.

你被受邀參與一項研究關於近期畢業生在職場上必需的技能 and 知識,並能在職場上獲得成功的調查研究計劃。

The researcher is inviting alumni of the International Business Administration Program (IBAP), offered by the International Trade Institute (ITI), as part of the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA), to be in the study.

研究者邀請了國際工商管理課程 (IBAP), 由國際貿易研究所 (ITI), 為台灣對外貿易發展協會 (TAITRA) 的校友參與此研究。

This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

這個表格的形式過程叫做“告知同意”, 是為了讓你了解這項研究,再決定是否參加。

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Jean-Sebastien Goyette, who is a Doctorate of Education (EdD) student at the University of Liverpool.

這項研究是由一個名叫 JS Goyette 研究員, 目前在研讀利物浦大學教育博士學位 (EDD) 所進行的。

You may already know the researcher as the English language program coordinator, but this study is separate from that role.

你可能已經知道研究者本身是英語課程協調人, 但這項研究和他的職位無關。

Background Information:

背景資料:

The purpose of this study is to analyze the skills and knowledge offered by business programs, as well as those determined to be important by recent graduates in order to obtain employment and be successful.

本研究的目的是在分析這些商業課程所提供的技能和知識, 由近期畢業生來確認哪些重要的課程是能够使他們獲得工作並有出色的表現。

As a result, it's hoped to better understand the needs of the marketplace, be able to better prepare students for life after graduation, and offer better qualified workers to employers.

因此，此研究的目的是希望能夠更了解市場的需求，並能夠讓這些學生在準備週全後進入畢業後的生活，並提供更好的合格人才給雇主。

Procedures:

程序：

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

take part in one audio recorded interview that will last up to 60 minutes

如果您同意參加本研究，您將被要求：

- 參加一個音頻錄製採訪時表示，將持續長達 60 分鐘

Here are some sample questions:

Which classes provided you with the most useful skills for your first job after graduation?

Which subjects do you feel were the least useful for preparing you for your first job after graduation?

What challenges were you unprepared for in the workplace?

下面是一些樣題：

- 哪些科目為您提供畢業後的第一個工作中最有用的技能？
- 哪些科目，你覺得是您畢業後的第一個工作中最沒有用的技能？
- 那些在職場上的挑戰是你毫無準備？

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

該研究的自願性質：

This study is voluntary.

這項研究是自願的。

Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study.

每個人都會尊重你選擇是否參與的決定。

您與中華民國對外貿易發展協會,或任何其他其教師或管理成員的關係,並不會受到任何影響。

If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study.

即使您現在決定參加本研究，你仍然可以在這研究期間或之後改變主意。

You may stop at any time.

你可以在任何時候停止。

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

參加研究中的風險和優點：

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress or anxiety at expressing one's opinion.

參與這種類型的研究調查時，在發表個人意見時，可能會在日常生活中有些輕微不適，如疲勞，緊張或焦慮。

Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

但本研究不會對你的安全或健康有危險。

Even so, all participants taking part in a University of Liverpool ethically approved study have insurance cover.

即便如此，所有參加利物浦大學研究之參與者都有保險。

This study aims to provide new knowledge to help business programs better prepare graduates for the needs of the workplace, improve their job search process, and increase their success in their career.

本研究旨在提供新的知識進而幫助商業課程符合畢業生職場上的需要，改善他們的求職過程，並提高他們在事業上的成功。

Compensation:

補償：

There is no compensation for taking part in this study.

參加這項研究並不給予任何報酬

Privacy:

隱私：

Any information you provide will be kept confidential.

您提供的任何信息將被保密。

The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project.

研究人員不會將您的個人信息用於本研究項目之外的任何地方。

Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports.

此外，研究人員不會把您的姓名或其他任何可以識別您的資料呈現在研究報告中。

Data will be kept secure by keeping it inside a password protected computer (soft copy) and a locked office (hard copy).

數據將被妥善保存在有密碼保護的電腦中（軟拷貝），並在有上鎖辦公室(硬拷貝書面資料)內。

Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

應大學要求這些數據將被保存至少 5 年。

Contacts and Questions:

聯繫方式和問題：

You may ask any questions you have now.

你現在可以問任何問題。

Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone (03-571-2571 Ext. 305) or e-mail (js_goyette@iti.org.tw).

或者，如果您以後還有疑問，您可以透過電話（03-571-2571 分機 305）或電子郵件（js_goyette@iti.org.tw）與研究者連絡。

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott.

作為參與者如果你想私下談談您的權利，您可以撥打電話給萊拉尼恩迪科特博士。

She is the University of Liverpool representative who can discuss this with you.

她是代表利物浦大學可以跟你討論這個問題的人。

Her phone number is 001-612-312-1210 and her email address is liverpooethics@ohcampus.com.

她的電話號碼是 001-612-312-1210 和她的電子郵件地址是 liverpooethics@ohcampus.com。

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

研究人員會給你這個表格的副本保存。

Statement of Consent:

同意聲明:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement.

我已閱讀上述信息，我覺得我有足夠的理解此研究調查並決定參與。

By signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study as described above.

在下面簽字，我同意參加上述研究。

Printed Name of Participant

參與者的楷書簽名

Date of consent

同意的日期

Participant's Signature

參與者簽名

Researcher's Signature

研究人員的簽名

Appendix 4: Jackson & Chapman Graduate Employability Skills

Working effectively with others

有效率地與他人合作

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Task collaboration 任務協力合作	Complete group tasks through collaborative communication, problem solving, discussion and planning 透過協作交流, 解決問題, 討論和計劃, 來完成的小組任務
Team working 團隊合作	Operate within, and contribute to, a respectful, supportive and cooperative group climate 工作中 貢獻有利於互相尊重, 支持和合作的團體氣氛
Social Intelligence 社會智力	Acknowledge the complex emotions and viewpoints of others and respond sensitively and appropriately 了解他人的複合情緒和觀點, 而有靈敏和適當的反應
Cultural and diversity awareness 文化多樣性的認識	Work productively with people from diverse cultures, races, ages, gender, religions and lifestyles 高效率地與來自不同文化, 種族, 年齡, 性別, 宗教和生活方式的人工作
Influencing others 影響他人	Defend and assert their rights, interests and needs and convince others of the validity of one's point of view 捍衛和維護自己的權利, 利益和需求, 進而說服別人認同其觀點
Conflict resolution 解決衝突	Address and resolve contentious issues with key stakeholders 和主要關鍵人處理和解決與關鍵利益相關爭議問題

Communicating effectively within your company (Native language: Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, etc.)

有效溝通 (國語, 台, 等)

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Verbal communication 口頭溝通	Communicate orally in a clear and sensitive manner which is appropriately varied according to different audiences and seniority levels 口頭溝通 是用一種清晰, 敏感的方式 根據不同的對象和資歷水平做適當的改變
Giving and receiving feedback 給予和接受反饋	Give and receive feedback appropriately and constructively 適宜和有建設性的給予和接受反饋
Public speaking 公開演講	Speak publicly and adjust their style according to the nature of the audience 根據觀眾的性質調整自己的風格公開發言
Meeting participation 在會議上有建設性地參與	Participate constructively in meetings 在會議上有建設性地參與

參加會議	
Written Communication 書面溝通	Present knowledge, in a range of written formats, in a professional, structured and clear manner 一系列的書面格式，以專業，層次分明，清晰的方式 呈現專業知識

Communicating effectively outside your company (Foreign language: English, Japanese, etc.)

有效溝通（外語：英語，日語等）

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Verbal communication 口頭溝通	Communicate orally in a clear and sensitive manner which is appropriately varied according to different audiences and seniority levels 口頭溝通 是用一種清晰，敏感的方式 根據不同的對象和資歷水平做適當的改變
Giving and receiving feedback 給予和接受反饋	Give and receive feedback appropriately and constructively 適宜和有建設性的給予和接受反饋
Public speaking 公開演講	Speak publicly and adjust their style according to the nature of the audience 根據 觀眾 的性質調整自己的風格 公開發言
Meeting participation 參加會議	Participate constructively in meetings 在會議上有 建設性地參與
Written Communication 書面溝通	Present knowledge, in a range of written formats, in a professional, structured and clear manner 一系列的書面格式，以專業，層次分明，清晰的方式 呈現專業知識

Self-Awareness

自我意識

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Meta-cognition 元認知	Reflect on and evaluate personal practices, strengths and weaknesses in the workplace 反思和評估個人的做法在 職場上優勢和劣勢
Lifelong learning 終身學習	Actively seek, monitor and manage knowledge and sustainable opportunities for learning in the context of employment and life 積極尋求，監控和管理知識，且是就業和生活可持續發展的學習機會
Career management 職業生涯管理	Develop meaningful and realistic career goals and pathways for achieving them in light of labour market conditions 發展有意義和切合實際的 職業目標和途徑，鑑於勞動力市場狀況來實現這些目標

Thinking critically

批判性思維

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Conceptualisation 概念化	Recognise patterns in detailed documents and scenarios to understand the 'bigger' picture 能確認出詳盡的文件和方案的模式
Evaluation 評估	Recognise, evaluate and retain key points in a range of documents and scenarios 在一系列文件和方案能夠確認，評估和保留其重點

Analysing data and using technology

分析數據，並運用技術

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Numeracy 算術	Analyse and use numbers and data accurately and manipulate into relevant Information 分析並準確的使用數字和數據，運用到相關信息
Technology 技術	Select and use appropriate technology to address diverse tasks and problems 選擇和使用適當的技術來解決不同的任務和問題
Information management 信息管理	Retrieve, interpret, evaluate and interactively use information in a range of different formats 在各種不同的格式下能,檢索，解釋，評價和交互使用信息

Problem-solving

解決問題

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Reasoning 推理	Use rational and logical reasoning to deduce appropriate and well-reasoned conclusions 運用理性和邏輯推理來推斷適當的，理由充分的結論
Analysing and diagnosing 分析和診斷	Analyse facts and circumstances and ask the right questions to diagnose problems 分析事實和情況，並提出正確的問題來診斷問題
Decision-making 決策	Make appropriate and timely decisions, in light of available information, in sensitive and complex situations 根據現有信息，在敏感和複雜的情況下,作出適當和及時的決定

Developing initiative and enterprise

發展創新進取

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Entrepreneurship/ intrapreneurship 創業/內部創業	Initiate change and add value by embracing new ideas and showing ingenuity and creativity in addressing challenges and problems 啟動變革和擁抱新的想法，並顯示在應對挑戰和問題的聰明才智和創造力增值
Lateral thinking/ creativity 橫向思維/創意	Develop a range of solutions using lateral and creative thinking 採用橫向和創造性思維來開發一系列的解決方案
Initiative 倡議	Take action unprompted to achieve agreed goals 採取自發性行動，來實現既定目標
Change management 變更管理	Manage change and demonstrate flexibility in their approach to all aspects of work 在工作上的各層面上，能管理變更並展示其靈活性

Self-management

自我管理

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Self-efficacy 自我效能感	Be self-confident in dealing with the challenges that employment and life present 自信的應對工作和生活呈現的各種挑戰
Stress tolerance 應力耐受性	Persevere and retain effectiveness under pressure or when things go wrong 在出問題時或壓力下，能不屈不撓，保持戰鬥力
Work/life balance 工作/生活的平衡	Demonstrate the importance of well-being and strive to maintain a productive balance of work and life 證明幸福的重要性，並努力保持工作和生活的平衡
Self-regulation 自我調節	Reflect on and regulate their emotions and demonstrate self-control 反思和調節自己的情緒，並展現自我控制

Social responsibility and accountability

社會責任和問責制

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Social responsibility 社會責任	Behave in a manner which is sustainable and socially responsible (e.g. consistent with company policy and/or broader community values) 行為方式是可持續發展和社會責任（如公司政策和/或更廣泛的社會價值觀相一致）
Accountability	Accept responsibility for own decisions, actions and work outcomes

問責	能承擔自己的決定，行為和工作上成果的責任
Personal ethics 個人道德	Remain consistently committed to and guided by core values and beliefs such as honesty and integrity 一如既往地堅持的受核心價值觀和信仰的引導，如誠實和正直
Organisational awareness 組織意識	Recognise organisational structure, operations, culture and systems and adapt their behaviour and attitudes accordingly 認出組織結構，業務，文化和制度，並相應地調整自己的行為和態度

Developing professionalism

專業化發展

Behaviour 行為	Description 說明
Efficiency 效率	Achieve prescribed goals and outcomes in a timely and resourceful manner 用足智多謀的方式,及時達到規定的目標和結果.
Multi-tasking 多任務處理	Perform more than one task at the same time 在同一時間執行多項任務
Autonomy 自治	Complete tasks in a self-directed manner in the absence of supervision 在沒有監督下以自我指導的方式完成任務
Time management 時間管理	Manage their time to achieve agreed goals 管理自己的時間來實現既定目標
Drive 動力	Go beyond the call of duty by pitching in, including undertaking menial tasks, as required by the business 在工作上,能超越職責要求,貢獻己力,包括接受瑣碎,微不足道的工作.
Goal and task management 目標和任務管理	Set, maintain and consistently act upon achievable goals, prioritised tasks, plans and realistic schedules 制定，維護和堅持的行動在可實現的目標，任務的先後次序，計劃和實際的時間表

Appendix 5: EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee



Dear Jean-Sebastian		
I am pleased to inform you that the Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.		
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)	
Review type:	Expedited	
PI:		
School:	Lifelong Learning	
Title:		
First Reviewer:	Prof. Morag Gray	
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Ewan Dow	
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Baaska Anderson; Kathleen Kelm, Dr. Lucilla Crosta; Dr. Peter Kahn	
Date of Approval:	22 nd January 2014	
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:		
Conditions		
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.
<p>This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.</p> <p>Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).</p>		
Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.		

Kind regards,

Morag Gray

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix 6: Authorization letter - International Trade Institute



Authorisation Letter

I, Jean-Sebastien Goyette, am enrolled in the Doctor of Education (EdD) Programme at the University of Liverpool in partnership with Laureate Education.

I entered the programme in order to develop doctoral-level depth of knowledge and research skills across areas in higher education such as higher education management, innovative approaches to educational leadership, decision making, as well as ethics, social responsibility, and social change. As an EdD student I am required, as part of this programme, to undertake research projects during the taught modules. These projects provide an opportunity for me to reflect on critical issues that I encounter in the context of my work, apply my scholarly learning to these issues, and, in the end, develop as an agent of positive change in our organisation.

In the context of my research in the EdD programme, I hereby request authorisation to access organisational data, facility use, and use of personnel time for research purposes relevant to my required assignments. This includes permission to access documents from the archives of the organisation which are not necessarily in the public domain and which I may normally have access to when performing the responsibilities of my job. This also includes authorisation to conduct an interview with an employee of the organisation about the organisation's policies, programmes, and practices. I also request permission to provide my personal reflections on the collected data. I have included with this letter a Participant Information Sheet which outlines in greater detail the nature of the current research project I am required to complete for the EdD programme.

I appreciate the opportunity to engage in research involving my organisation. Please contact me and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any question or concerns you may have.

My contact details are:

Jean-Sebastien Goyette
Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA)
66, Dong Shan Street, Hsinchu 300, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Tel: 03-571-2571 Ext. 305
Fax: 03-572-2816

E-mail: js_goyette@iti.org.tw

The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool are:

001-612-312-1210 (USA number)

Email address liverpooletics@ohcampus.com

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JS Goyette", written over a dotted line.

EdD student

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Last update: July 16, 2012



Title of Research Project: Analysis of skills gaps at the International Trade Institute

Researcher: Jean-Sebastien Goyette

Please
initial box

- 1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the Participant Information Sheet dated [2014-03-19] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- 2. I hereby grant permission to the researcher for all relevant data access, facility use, and use of personnel time for research purposes.
- 3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information provided and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
- 4. I understand that information on the organisation will be anonymised, will be maintained as proprietary information, and will be kept in confidentiality. Additionally, I understand that no results of the research will be made publically available without my specific approval.

_____	2013-04-19	<u>Melody Yang</u>
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature

_____	2013-04-19	_____
Participant Name	Date	Signature

_____	2013-04-19	
Researcher	Date	Signature