

Undergraduates' Perceptions of Job Interview Assessment for Career Readiness of a University English Language Course

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Abstract

This study focuses on the career readiness among the final year undergraduates through job interview assessment in an English language course. Issues related to the lack of preparation, language incompetency and poor self-confidence are some factors of unemployment among Malaysian graduates. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the aspects that the participants could improve as reflected by themselves and other components that could be integrated into the course for future reference. This study was conducted by distributing an open-ended survey to 80 participants comprising local and foreign. The analysis highlighted three aspects including the significance of job interview assessment for career readiness, self-reflection from the participants on their job interview assessment and other components that can be included in the course in the future. The findings show that the participants find the job interview to be very helpful for their career readiness. Furthermore, they would like to improve themselves in terms of their fluency, self-confidence, answering skills, and body language. The implication of this study is for the higher institutions to be more aware about the importance of having mock job interviews as part of the undergraduates' preparation for their future career.

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, unemployment is no longer a new issue as high numbers of unemployment among graduates are recorded every year. Life after graduation seems to be challenging to many Malaysian graduates as it was claimed that their qualifications and skills do not match the employers' expectations when applying for a job. Research carried out by Nalini et al, (2021) stated that fresh graduates still face difficulties in articulating effectively during job interviews, resulting in negative impressions of themselves and are unlikely to be selected for employment. Unprepared, poor language proficiency together with the lack of knowledge and soft skills in the specific field are also some of the possible reasons for their unemployment. There were also employers who were disappointed with the attitude and discipline that the graduates bring when coming for job interviews. In this modern and challenging world, being unemployed might be the last option for a graduate as the cost of living keeps increasing and their skills and knowledge may deteriorate over the years if they are not being applied and polished. When applying for a job, it is a standard procedure for job seekers to go through one or more job interviews before proceeding to the next step until they exactly get the job. Since the main aim of the graduate is to be selected for the job he or she has applied for, the graduate must make the essential preparations before attending the interview. Graduate has not only to be knowledgeable about the job being applied for, but also excel in giving impression and interacting (Kenayathulla, Ahmad, & Idris, 2019).

It is apparent that job interviews are essential as a platform for employers to test and evaluate job seekers before considering them for a job. This is when graduates need to look their best and showcase their strengths and skills that they have developed throughout their studies. Job interviews also can display their level of career readiness from the answers given and the confidence displayed by the graduates. On the other hand, career readiness is the process of preparing yourself to enter the workforce whether you are in college or university who is preparing to graduate. In relation to career readiness, it is important to find out the significance of incorporating job interview assessment in the university curriculum to prepare them for the real job environment after graduation. It is crucial for institutions to make career readiness and development of college students an institutional priority, a fact recognized by many institutions (Megan, 2022). A report by Bank Negara Malaysia (Murugasu, Hakim & Yau, 2019) also highlighted the need for universities to produce graduates who were well-trained in their specific fields and possessed significant attributes that would drive their career performance. Hence, this paper explores the students' perceptions on the significance of interview assessment in a university English course for their career readiness and aspects of the job interview skills that could be improved as reflected by the students during their experience in the job interview assessment.

2. Literature Review

It is undeniable that university students, especially the final year students should be exposed to interviews. Interviews are now becoming the best platform to choose the best potential candidates when they apply for jobs in the future.

In most courses at tertiary levels, an interview assessment is a normal procedure of evaluation conducted by an interviewer or a panel of interviewers to gauge a candidate's suitability for a job position. Osadebe (2020) pointed out that interview skills are relevant to construct valid and reliable questions, ability to present questions face to face and obtain formation for students' assessment. In this case, teachers or lecturers act as the interviewers meanwhile the students act as the potential candidates. This interview typically involves assessing various aspects of the candidate's qualifications, skills, experience, and attributes to determine if they meet the requirements and expectations of the role and the organisation. The common goal for this assessment to be conducted in university is to guide their students and each course may differ in terms of their approaches and marking criteria.

Students may have different perspectives on whether interview assessments in their university are helping them or not. In general, all universities mostly have an ultimate goal to help their students to get ready to set themselves with all related elements of professionalism, industry knowledge and career goals. Thus, constructive feedback is needed to guide students to understand their strength, and area for improvement while mock interviews ensure each student is well equipped for the job application process and procedures

According to Alphard and Gardner (2020), interviews benefit lecturers and students in the sense of it provides face to face feedback and take less time than the written critiques of the students' performance. Based on their findings through students' evaluation, despite the time and effort needed in both parties, an interview is an investment worth making. This is because the interactions between the assessors and the interviewees will allow both parties get some values and something to learn from.

Previous research had also indicated that students who participated in mock interviews are more confident, less anxious and better prepared for the actual interview (Buckley et al, 2018). Hasriani (2019) added that interview techniques would also be able to increase students' confidence in speaking and they are trained using English language not only in daily life but also when applying jobs. Prior to a research done to examine the usefulness of mock interview assessments on students' learning among sports and recreation management students, it had been found out that mock interviews offer students the opportunity to practice interviewing skills in an environment similar to actual interviews (Anaza et al, 2023). A total of 163 students completed a research to measure the impact of mock interview assessments towards students' readiness to workplace. Majority agreed that their interview skills had improved, questions were appropriate and the feedback received was helpful in addition to their level of confidence was higher.

In addition, another research done to a random number of third and fourth year of medical students in the United States. Through a remote interview via zoom video conferencing software, it revealed a different evaluation by the participants. Interesting feedback was tabulated such as the participants' concerns on recruitment, training programme, and virtual clerkship experiences. The participants got to know the real environment of the workplace surroundings while evaluation gathered had given guidance to the employers or programmes developers to develop a more comprehensive needs assessments to more focus group participants (McDonalds, Marcrom, Strickler & Everett, 2021).

Looking at the advantages that interview assessments can offer, this study aims to explore the different perspectives of different students in different fields as well as to explore more on how interviews would help the students. Overall, it provides holistic preparation for final year students, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application in the professional world.

3. Methodology

This research is a case study that focuses on exploring the undergraduates' perspectives on interview assessment in a university English course for career readiness. The participants were from the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology (FSKTM). A group of 80 undergraduates were selected to participate in this study. This study employs a qualitative method for data collection and analysis to identify the undergraduates' perspectives on the significance of interview assessment in an English course (English for Occupational Purposes) for their career readiness. A short survey consisting of three open-ended questions were distributed to the fourth-year FSKTM students. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The participants were comprised of 78 local students and two international students. The participants were asked to share their perspectives on the significance of job interview assessment in a language course for their future career. Besides that, they were also asked about the aspects that they would like to improve based on the job interview assessment in the course. Another question asked in the survey is the other occupational contents that they wish they could learn in the language course to prepare them for their future career. The data were analyzed using qualitative method. The central issue addressed in this investigation is the potential impact of job interview assessment on their career readiness and the aspects including language aspect that could be improved and reflected in the participants. Career readiness and self-confidence in answering the questions during the job interview necessitate a subtle understanding of the factors contributing to their fluency and accuracy when speaking during the assessment.

4. Discussions

A comprehensive exploration brought to light a consistent concern among the final-year undergraduates regarding their career readiness and the language proficiency displayed when answering the questions during job interview assessment in the English language course. This study prompted an in-depth examination of the significance of the job interview assessment for their future career and the possible aspects that could be improved to answer the job-related questions better and more confidently using English as the target language.

The first component was related to the students' perspectives on the significance of job interview assessment to prepare them for their future career. It was found that most of the students think that the assessment provides several benefits for their career readiness including providing the job interview environment where the participants could practice their interview speaking skills, improving language proficiency particularly in applying the professional and industry specific vocabularies and as a good platform for them to showcase their strengths professionally. It is obvious that English language proficiency could put graduate at an advantage during job interviews, in which the probability for them to be able to respond critically and creatively to solution-based questions is higher (Wendy et al., 2021).

The second component was about the improvements that could be made based on the students' experience and performance during the job interview assessment. The responses were fully reflected by the students, and it was discovered that they would like to improve in terms of their answering skills, structure of their responses, handling spontaneous questions, body language, self-confidence, fluency and accuracy. This is in line with a previous study which found out that English language proficiency was highlighted as a primary employability factor with employers preferring candidates who demonstrated better language accuracy (Zainuddin, Pillai, Dumanig & Phillip, 2019). It is apparent that all these aspects are highly important in ensuring the success of a job interview apart from showcasing their academic qualifications and achievements.

The third component was related to the skill contents in the specific English language course that the participants wish they could learn to prepare them for their future career. Networking strategies, industry insights, cultural competence, career planning and development are some of the responses given by the students. In addition, some of the students also stated about wanting to learn conflict and project management. Alongside the language components and existing occupational contents integrated in the course, more aspects are anticipated by the participants as they believe the components stated are highly beneficial for their career progression and professional self-development in future.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the students' perspectives on the significance of having job interview assessment in the English language course to students' career readiness, the aspects that could be improved as reflected by them and the occupational skills that the students wish they could learn in university especially in the language course. From the findings, language assessment such as mock job interview is highly significant for the students

considering that not all of them have the interview experience. Apart from that, there are more occupational skill sets that the students wish to learn that shows the students' self-awareness about the importance of preparation before going into the real working environment. It is important to consider why existing educational routes may not adequately prepare the workers of tomorrow. Therefore, it is much needed for future curriculum review or new course in higher institutions to consider integrating these occupational skills as part of the students' preparation for their future career.

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Conflict of Interest

We declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the paper.

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