STUDENT'S PERCEIVED COMPETENCE IN MOCK JOB INTERVIEWS

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Abstract

With the increasing importance of English proficiency in Malaysia's competitive job market—particularly in interview settings—this research investigates students' self-perceptions of their readiness and abilities after participating in simulated job interviews. A total of 36 students took part in the study by completing a self-evaluation questionnaire. The findings reveal that while students generally perceived themselves as prepared, especially in areas such as appearance, non-verbal cues, and basic interview etiquette, there was a noticeable gap in their perceived performance, particularly in spoken grammar, clarity, and fluency. The results underscore the need for targeted instruction in linguistic accuracy, structured speaking, and real-time communication strategies. This study offers practical implications for educators aiming to enhance students' employability through language training and interview skill development.

Keywords:

Mock Job Interviews, Perceived Competence, English Language Learning

1. Introduction

Securing employment in today's highly competitive job market remains a significant challenge. This is particularly true for fresh graduates who are transitioning from academic environments to the professional world. Although Malaysia recorded a relatively low overall unemployment rate of 3.3% in December 2023 (Ministry of Economy, 2023), a closer examination reveals a concerning trend among young graduates. According to a more recent report, the unemployment rate for graduates under the age of 25 has been rising steadily since 2021, reaching 17.6% (equivalent to 72,100 individuals) in 2023, exceeding pre-pandemic levels (Pfordten, 2025).

A major factor contributing to this issue is the lack of effective communication skills and limited English language proficiency among graduates. In a globalized workforce, particularly in multinational corporations and customer-facing roles, strong communication skills, especially in English are highly prioritized. Notably, English proficiency is not only crucial for job performance but is also a key determinant in the interview process itself (Krishnan et al., 2024). Consequently, candidates who struggle with both communication and English fluency often face compounded difficulties in securing employment.

In response to these challenges, certain programs in higher educational institutions have incorporated job searching skills into their curricula. Skills such as preparing conventional and video resumes, understanding job advertisements and attending job interviews have been a form of student assessment and career preparation initiatives.

Mock job interviews are simulated interviews that aim to replicate real-world hiring scenarios. It offers students a platform to practice professional interactions and receive constructive feedback. A critical factor influencing interview performance is self-perceived competence i.e. the individual's belief in their ability to effectively execute specific tasks (Nobre & Valentini, 2019). Rooted in Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, this concept suggests that individuals with stronger self-belief are more likely to perform successfully. Therefore, examining students' self-perceived competence during mock interviews can provide valuable insights into their actual readiness for job interviews and highlight potential areas for improvement.

Despite such initiatives, many Malaysian students continue to demonstrate inadequate fluency and confidence in English during interviews, resulting in poor performance during the initial stages of job selection (The Sun, 2023). This linguistic barrier not only undermines their confidence but also restricts their ability to present themselves effectively to potential employers (Krishnan et al., 2024). It is thus essential to explore how students perceive their readiness and performance in interview contexts.

This study aims to examine the self-perceived competence of diploma-level mechanical engineering students after performing a mock job interview. Specifically, it seeks to identify the students' self-perception on their readiness and performance, specifically in relation to communication skills, language proficiency and overall interview performance. Hence the following research questions are sought:

(i)What are the students' perceived competence of their readiness and performance in mock job interviews?

(ii)What are the areas of readiness and performance that need improvement?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Self-perceived competence and self-efficacy

Self-perceived competence refers to an individual's self-assessment of their ability to successfully perform tasks and meet specific demands. As a fundamental aspect of the self-concept, it serves as a crucial psychological indicator of how individuals understand and evaluate their own capabilities. A strong sense of competence is associated with increased self-efficacy, autonomy, and self-esteem, while negative self-perceptions may lead to avoidance of challenges and reduced motivation (Nobre & Valentini, 2019).

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1997), is the belief in one's ability to execute the actions necessary to manage prospective situations. It plays a significant role in shaping cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes. Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to embrace challenges, exert persistent effort, and demonstrate resilience in the face of setbacks. In the context of this study, engaging in simulated interview scenarios can enhance individuals' perceptions of their performance. Mock interviews offer students the opportunity to receive constructive feedback, reflect on their performance, learn from mistakes, and ultimately

build confidence in presenting their strengths. This process fosters a stronger sense of competence, which in turn reinforces self-efficacy and vice versa.

2.2 Benefits of Mock Job Interview

Mock interviews are widely recognized as effective simulations that prepare students for real-world job interviews. Several studies highlight their positive impact on students' confidence and career readiness."

In the area of students' preparedness and confidence, Kasbon et al. (2024) conducted a study with a group of the Global Classroom students, found that mock job interview experience significantly increased the students' confidence level and their preparedness. Practical experience, positive encouragement from their instructors, and a deeper understanding of what it takes to succeed in interviews were some of the key features that the students gained.

The advantages of mock job interview in preparing students for their future career are also echoed by Samad and Kadir (2024). The study surveyed 80 participants' survey responses on their experience undergoing a mock interview assessment. The findings confirmed that mock interview boost their career readiness by providing a platform for interview practices and to showcase their strengths professionally. Also, it improves language proficiency related to industry specific vocabularies.

Wilkie and Rosendale (2024) investigated students' satisfaction and perceptions regarding virtual mock interviews conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Results suggest that students largely perceived the experience as positive, particularly in terms of its utility in enhancing their preparedness and performance in actual interview settings. The most significant predictor of positive outcomes was the students' level of preparedness prior to participating in the simulation, although variations were observed across multiple variables.

The studies reviewed underscore the pivotal role that mock interview plays in the preparation phase before learning attending the actual job interview. In addition, it was proven that candidates who go through a rigorous preparation consistently perform at a higher level (Ring & Brackett, 2017). In other words, , mock interviews serve as an effective platform for students to demonstrate and enhance their readiness ahead of actual job interviews post-graduation.

Finally, another study that is closely related to the current study is carried out by Utama (2022) who examined the discrepancy between students' self-perceived competence and their

actual performance in mock interviews. Understanding the discrepancies is crucial as it help students see which they are lacking in and need to work on. In addition. It informs instructors on the targeted areas that need focus hence improvement is possible. The findings show that undergraduates often underestimate their capabilities, performing better in mock interviews than they anticipate. This underestimation may drive students to work harder, ultimately improving their performance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

The study is a pilot study which investigated 36 diploma students who were studying mechanical engineering programs at the diploma level were involved in the study. They were in the semester 5 and will be going for an internship in their semester 6 before graduating. Some companies recruiting the interns would require interview, hence mock interview would be a sound exposure for the students. The students were currently taking their English subject, and one of the topics covered is Job-Hunting Mechanics. This topic requires students to prepare their resume, job application email and doing mock job interview. The students attended 42 hours meetings within 14 weeks.

The study employed a set of survey questionnaires for the students to evaluate themselves on their readiness and performance after completing a mock job interview assessment. The questionnaire survey was developed based on Utama (2022). The survey contains 20 items that are categorized into 'Readiness' and 'Performance ', with certain vague items were refined. The items are measured in 5-point Likert scale of agreement which are 5= Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=uncertain, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree. The internal consistency for the item was measured using Cronbach's Alpha and yielded a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.707$, for 'Readiness' indicating acceptable reliability (Taber, 2018). This suggests that the items within this construct cohesively measure students' perceived preparedness for the mock interview. In addition, the internal consistency for the performance items was notably high ($\alpha = 0.857$), indicating that the items reliably measured students' perceived performance in the mock interviews

3.2 Procedures

The unit job hunting mechanics was taught at the beginning of the semester, and by week 7, the mock interview was carried out. A week before the actual assessment was conducted, the students practiced the interview with the lecturer. Feedback on strengths and weaknesses was

given by their respective lecturers, so that improvement could be made. The actual assessment was carried out the following week where they were evaluated based on a rubric developed by the English unit. The students were asked to complete the survey questionnaire shortly after they completed their mock interview.

This study employed a cross-sectional research design, which is a type of observational study that analyses data from a population at a single point in time. Unlike longitudinal designs, cross-sectional studies do not track participants over an extended period. They are typically cost-effective, straightforward to implement, and valuable for providing preliminary insights that can inform the planning of more advanced future research (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

The analysis of the data has been carried out statistically using SPSS version 2.0. For specifying the degree of agreement for each survey item, the mean values and standard deviation are calculated and shown in Table 4.2 and 4.3. The interpretation of means is shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 *Distribution of the Means Scores on 5-Point Likert Scale*

Mean Value	Estimation Degree
1.00 - 1.80	Very Low
1.81 - 2.60	Low
2.61 - 3.40	Average
3.41 - 4.20	High
4.21 - 5.00	Very High

4. Findings and Discussion

The section presents the data analyzed from the questionnaire. Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 show the students' mean and standard deviation scores for Readiness (R) and Performance (P) components.

Table 4.1: *Students' perception on readiness in mock interview participation*

No.	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
R1	I am aware of the appropriate speech style in mock interview.	3.41	.657
R2	I am excited to do mock interview.	4.15	.702
R3	I know how to engage with the interviewer.	3.47	.825
R4	I smile to create a positive mood in the room.	4.41	.657
R5	I know what questions to expect in the interview.	4.29	.579
R6	I will use friendly tone during the interview session.	4.09	.753
R7	I will avoid using my first language words whenever I have	3.79	1.038

No.	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
	difficulties explaining in English.		
R8	I will try to maintain eye contact with the interviewer	3.88	.913
R9	I dress appropriately for the job interview.	4.53	.662
R10	I practice my speaking before the actual interview to improve it.	4.09	.712

The readiness component (R1–R10) of the questionnaire measured the students' preparedness in terms of non-verbal elements, communication, and professional presentation. The findings reveal that students generally exhibit strong readiness for interview scenarios.

The highest rated item in this section was "I dress appropriately for the job interview" (R9, M = 4.53), indicating a high level of awareness regarding professional standards of appearance. This is consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of first impressions i.e. by exhibiting a neat and professional appearance in interview settings (Tews et al., 2018). Similarly, the item "I smile to create a positive mood in the room" (R4, M = 4.41) reflects students' use of positive non-verbal communication strategies to enhance interactional comfort. In fact, smiling and eye contact were identified as two essential facial expressions that employers sought for in job interviews (Cortez et al., 2017). In addition, strong agreement was observed for the item "I know what questions to expect in the interview" (R5, M = 4.29), suggesting the students' competence on the potential subjects asked in the interview. They viewed themselves as having the required knowledge and information related to the job.

Item R2 and R10 deserve a highlight as they still fall within the high range, indicating consistently positive responses. The students demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for the mock interview process, as reflected in strong agreement with the statement, "I am excited to do the mock interview" (R2, M = 4.15). This suggests a high level of intrinsic motivation and a perception of the task as meaningful and beneficial. Finally, item R10 (M=4.09) revealed the students' notable agreement with the importance of preparation, they might engage in effective practices. Preparedness is indeed a determinant for a successful interview (Ring & Brackett, 2017; Wilkie & Rosendale, 2024).

Despite these strengths, lower mean scores were recorded for items assessing communication and interactional engagement. The item R1 "I am aware of the appropriate speech style in mock interview" had a mean score of 3.41, which may indicate that the students' are unsure about the level of formality or structure required in professional dialogue.

Similarly, "I know how to engage with the interviewer" (R3, M = 3.47) reveals an area where further guidance on two-way communication and rapport-building techniques could be beneficial. Notably, the item R7 "I avoid using my first language whenever I have difficulties explaining in English" (R7, M = 3.79) presented the highest variability in responses with the standard deviation is 1.038, reflecting divergent language proficiency levels or coping strategies among students when facing linguistic challenges.

Table 4.2: *The students' perception on performance component in mock interview participation*

No.	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
P1	The meaning of each of my sentence is clear.	3.09	.793
P2	I explain my main points with supporting details and examples.	3.44	.746
P3	When I answer the questions, I speak at a right pace.	3.44	.927
P4	I am comfortable and confident in doing my mock interview.	3.68	.912
P5	I can logically organize my ideas in mock interview.	3.44	.786
P6	I avoid using fillers.	3.53	.748
P7	I pay attention to grammar when I speak with the interviewer.	3.15	.857
P8	I am not stressed with the questions asked.	4.12	.640
P9	I give acceptable answers during the mock interview.	3.74	.790
P10	I believe I am going to be hired.	3.56	.927

The performance component (P1–P10) evaluated students' perception on their ability to demonstrate effective communication, fluency, and overall interview delivery. The results indicate moderate to strong self-perceptions in these areas with some aspects requiring targeted improvement.

The students' reported the highest level of agreement with the statement "I am not stressed with the questions asked" (P8, M = 4.12), indicating a generally confident and composed attitude during the interview process. This is further supported by responses to "I give acceptable answers during the mock interview" (P9, M = 3.74) and "I am comfortable and confident in doing my mock interview" (P4, M = 3.68), both of which reflect a sense of self-assurance in their performance. The students appeared to develop a positive perception of their performance. They remained calm, composed, and self-assured throughout the mock interview. Providing acceptable responses may have further reinforced their sense of confidence and ease. This suggests a developing sense of positive self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) regarding their ability to carry out the mock interview task, potentially leading to an improved perception of their own competence.

However, clarity and grammatical accuracy emerged as the most prominent areas of concern. The students show weak agreement on item P1 "The meaning of each of my sentence is clear" as it yielded the lowest mean score across both Readiness and Performance components (M = 3.09). This could indicate their perception on the difficulties in articulating ideas and giving clear explanation. Additionally, item P7 (M = 3.15) is on grammar also received a low score, highlighting the need for greater attention to language form and accuracy. It may be inferred that while the students expressed some uncertainty regarding the clarity of their sentences, they perceived their overall responses to be acceptable. They demonstrated an awareness of their linguistic limitations, particularly in spoken grammar. The issue of communicative competence among Malaysian graduates has been extensively documented in the literature and continues to be identified as a significant barrier to successful job interview outcomes (Krishna et al., 2024).

The following items recorded moderate mean scores yet remained within the upper range of the scale. "I explain my main points with supporting details and examples" (P2, M = 3.44) and "I can logically organize my ideas in the mock interview" (P5, M = 3.44) suggest that students viewed themselves as having a basic understanding of structuring responses and using cohesive ideas, but their proficiency remains at a moderate level. This implies a need for additional training focused on idea organization and elaboration. Lastly, Item P10 (M = 3.56) reflects a cautiously optimistic self-perception among the students that they would be hired. This suggests that while students are optimistic, they maintain a realistic perspective regarding their employment prospects.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings suggest that the students demonstrated substantial preparedness in terms of appearance, non-verbal communication, and basic interview etiquette. However, their performance—particularly in linguistic clarity, grammatical accuracy, and structured expression—requires further development. While confidence and emotional control appear to be established strengths, the ability to articulate ideas clearly and accurately in English remains a significant challenge.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of integrating targeted language support and structured speaking practice into mock interview training programs. Such integration would

enhance students' linguistic readiness and improve their ability to perform successfully in real-world job interview scenarios. It is recommended that courses incorporating mock job interviews explicitly address grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures commonly used in professional contexts. Additionally, mock interview practices should include personalized language feedback from instructors, enabling the identification and correction of common linguistic errors. Finally, employing authentic interview questions to teach context-specific language use would effectively encourage greater clarity, fluency, and confidence in students' spoken responses.

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