

Speaking English in job interviews increases employability opportunities: Malaysian employer's perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The ability to speak English proficiently has become increasingly important in the job market, especially in a diverse country like Malaysia. This brief aims to explore the significance of speaking English during job interviews in Malaysia, focusing on its impact on employability and career opportunities. The objective of this study is to examine how speaking English during job interviews affects employability in Malaysia. It attempts to identify company expectations and ascertain how well-rounded English language abilities affect employment possibilities. A mixed-methods strategy will be used to achieve this goal. A literature study will be done first to acquire information from previously conducted research on the topic. Furthermore, a series of online surveys will be conducted with Malaysian companies to get their perspectives on the significance of English language skills in the context of job interviews. The data collected will be analysed to identify common themes and patterns. The findings of this research are expected to highlight the importance of English-speaking skills in Malaysian job interviews. Employers are expected to place significant value on candidates who can communicate fluently in English, as it is seen as a crucial skill for effective collaboration, customer service, and international business interactions. The study may also reveal specific industries or job roles where English proficiency is particularly desirable. In conclusion, the ability to speak English proficiently during job interviews positively impacts employability in Malaysia. Employers often prioritise candidates who can communicate effectively in English, enhancing their chances of success in diverse work environments and global business interactions. By recognising the importance of English-speaking skills and investing in language proficiency, job seekers can enhance their employability and open doors to a wider range of career opportunities in Malaysia.

Keywords: English-speaking, Employability, Interview, Employee, Employer

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INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly globalised employment environment, speaking English effectively has emerged as a desirable talent that can greatly improve job seekers' employability. Employers acknowledge candidates who can clearly express themselves in English during job interviews, recognising the necessity of successful communication and cross-cultural teamwork. This study focuses on the employer's perspective on the importance of speaking English in job interviews and how it affects one's chances of getting hired.

Speaking English is crucial for many individuals and businesses, especially in today's globalised world, where communicating with people from different backgrounds and cultures is increasingly common. The ability to speak and communicate effectively in English is a crucial skill highly valued by employers and essential for success in many professions (Ting. et al., 2017). English language skills are often a prerequisite for positions that require communication with customers, clients or colleagues from different countries or regions. Furthermore, in today's global economy, many multinational companies require their employees to have a good command of English to communicate effectively with colleagues and clients worldwide. This statement is additionally supported by Chodhary (2022).

According to a study published in the *International Journal of Learning and Development*, job interviews are frequently employed as a selection method in businesses (Nesaratnam et al., 2020). Yet, some disagreement has been on how well job interviews predict job performance. Job interviews have been demonstrated to be reasonably efficient in predicting job performance. Still, they are not a perfect strategy, according to a study published in the *Journal of Language and Communication* (Krishnan et al., 2017). Despite any possible drawbacks, job interviews are essential in the hiring process. In addition to a candidate's credentials and experience, Harvard Business Review notes that interviews can reveal a lot about a candidate's personality, communication style, and cultural fit (Tarki & Massey, 2022). Ultimately, the job interview is a crucial stage in the hiring process because it offers both the employer and the candidate insightful information.

LITERATURE

English is the primary language utilised within the corporate realm, where communication occurs predominantly in English. Most global business interactions are conducted in English, including emails, corporate documents, faxes, phone calls, videos, and widely accessed business resources in print and electronic formats. Proficiency in English, encompassing both spoken and written fluency, is indispensable in various aspects of corporate life. It not only aids in securing employment within corporate organisations but also enables effective engagement with clients and the establishment of enduring business relationships worldwide. Furthermore, English is a common communication medium in government offices, organisations, technical firms, and even research facilities.

This literature review explores the role of English language proficiency in career development. It examines the significance of English as a global language and its impact on professional growth and advancement. The review synthesises existing research to provide an overview of how English proficiency influences various aspects of career development, including job opportunities, employability, communication skills, and career progression. The findings highlight the

importance of English language skills in today's global job market and provide insights for individuals seeking to enhance their career prospects through English language development.

English proficiency is often a prerequisite for employment in multinational corporations, international organisations, and industries with a global reach. Many companies require candidates to demonstrate strong English language skills, as it facilitates effective communication with clients, customers, and colleagues from different countries. Moreover, English is commonly used in finance, technology, science, and academia, where staying up-to-date with the latest developments and research requires proficiency in the language. Research suggests that individuals with strong English language skills have a competitive advantage in the job market, as English is often considered the lingua franca of business and international communication (Graddol, 2010). This is similarly agreed by Karunaratne (2014), who stated that English language skills are gaining greater significance in the workplace, leading to specialised courses tailored to professionals in various fields, including business, medicine, aviation, agriculture, and more. This growing emphasis on English stems from the recognition that proficiency in the language is crucial for job mobility, social interaction, and travel.

Furthermore, in today's job market, employers seek educated and well-trained professionals who can effectively fulfil the dynamic responsibilities required to achieve organisational objectives. The demand is for candidates who have undergone professional grooming and possess the necessary skills. Conversely, job seekers lacking professional aptitude encounter difficulties securing employment and progressing in their careers (John et al., 2021). They also further emphasised this point by stating that in the past, it was believed that having language skills was essential for individuals aspiring to join multinational companies. However, more recently, even local companies have started welcoming individuals who are proficient in English communication. This shift is due to the realisation that technical problems cannot be effectively resolved unless practitioners possess the necessary language skills. Language proficiency is crucial for acquiring the latest research and knowledge, enabling intelligent problem-solving. A comprehensive understanding of issues requires critical thinking, and this can only be achieved through extensive knowledge, which can be further enhanced through the use of the English language.

Fluency in English has become a prerequisite in various fields, occupations, and professions like medicine and computing. As a result, over a billion individuals now possess at least a basic level of English-speaking ability (Podamari, 2020). However, Clement and Murugavel (2018) emphasised that being skilled in English goes beyond constructing grammatically accurate sentences; it also encompasses various related abilities and interpersonal skills utilised when communicating in English. Knowing how to communicate in English also holds a prominent position in facilitating effective communication and serves as a vital connector, bridging barriers between individuals (Podamari, 2020). A skilled communicator possesses a solid foundation in utilising verbal, non-verbal, technological, mediated, participatory, and mass communication skills across diverse situations. With the expansion of the global market, the demand for English language proficiency is expected to rise annually. Individuals lacking sufficient English language skills may encounter difficulties in their professional advancement.

According to Tappoon (2022), utilising communication strategies when speaking a foreign language is vital for language learners as these strategies serve as effective tools that enable them to maintain smoother conversations. It was also further emphasised that communication strategies can help them remain and survive in English conversation successfully. Furthermore, English is also used in verbal communications during scientific and professional conferences, workshops, and meetings, extending beyond foreign countries (Tasić et al., 2020). As a result, there is a high

demand for English language proficiency as individuals are increasingly aware of its importance in diverse aspects of their lives, not just in foreign countries but also locally.

Employers use English proficiency as a sign of adaptability and cultural fit in a variety of job contexts. Candidates who can speak effectively in English are frequently viewed as more able to integrate into ethnic teams and grasp different points of view (Waheed et al., 2021). In many multicultural companies, English is a common language for communication. Candidates who are fluent in English can overcome communication barriers and allow efficient collaboration among team members from various linguistic origins. This ability to interact with co-workers promotes teamwork and a cohesive work atmosphere. Multicultural teams frequently bring a variety of problem-solving and innovative techniques. Candidates who can communicate effectively in English have an advantage when contributing ideas, discussing solutions, and participating in creative thinking sessions. The capacity to explain and discuss ideas and opinions effectively improves the team's overall problem-solving capabilities (Badawi et al., 2018). According to research, employers believe that English-speaking candidates have access to a wider variety of business opportunities and potential growth opportunities. Effective communication in English opens up opportunities for foreign markets, clients, and collaborations, giving organisations a competitive edge (Maureen, 2018). The English language opens doors to global networking and professional development opportunities. Candidates who communicate effectively in English can attend international conferences, seminars, and industry events to network with key professionals, thought leaders, and possible mentors. This exposure can result in essential collaborations, knowledge-sharing, and personal development, all of which help the organisation.

Relevant studies have also been carried out in Malaysia. In a study highlighting the use of the English language in a Malaysian polytechnic, Yasin et al. (2010) stated employers raised concerns about respondents' lack of conversational English and writing skills. Ting et al. (2017) also claimed that Malaysian university students recognise the effects of inadequate language proficiency on effective communication. Even though students disagree that English proficiency would benefit them in the job market, Lan et al. (2011) found that a variety of tasks in the workplace, including making and receiving phone calls, negotiating with clients, participating in meetings and discussions, writing letters, memos, emails, writing reports, and conducting research are all conducted using the English language. Similarly, Cheong et al. (2016) also stated that when it comes to the employers' perception of employing new prospective employees, high importance is placed on English language proficiency and communication skills. This shows that potential employees who are highly skilled in language and communication skills would fare better during job interviews.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research approach was used in this study to investigate the employer's viewpoint on the effect of using English in job interviews on employability opportunities. The quantitative method made it possible to systematically gather and analyse numerical data to spot patterns, trends, and relationships. The research was conducted for six months, from January to June 2023. Employers from the two main sectors, the public and private sectors, made up the target population for the recruitment and hiring process—the sample selection intended to include a wide range of employers from various industries and organisational sizes. Oil and gas companies, technology firms, tertiary education institutions, government service sectors, construction industries, banking,

and commercial firms are among them. The majority of these organisations are based on Malaysia's West Coast. These businesses were chosen due to the importance of English in promoting effective communication, expanding market reach, establishing international ties, and supporting organisational growth. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure representation across industries and regions. The samples of hiring managers, recruiters, and HR managers who assessed potential employees were included.

The survey was administered electronically using online survey platforms or email, and 53 samples were collected. Participants were provided with clear instructions on how to complete the survey and were given a defined response submission deadline. Furthermore, this study utilises a cross-sectional research approach to investigate the employer's perspective on the connection between using English in job interviews and employability opportunities. Employers will be provided with a Google form for quantitative data collection. The approach enables the gathering of standardised replies that can be statistically examined. A structured questionnaire will be designed with questions pertaining to the employer's perspective on the significance of English language skills in job interviews and the perceived impact on employability opportunities. The questionnaire will include Likert scale items, multiple-choice questions, and demographic factors in order to collect relevant data. The quantitative data collected from Google Forms will be analysed using descriptive statistics. Measures like as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations will be used to summarise the responses. Inferential statistical techniques such as correlation analysis and regression analysis may be used to investigate the links between English language proficiency and perceived employability opportunities. To ensure the validity of the Google form, a pilot study will be conducted with a small sample of employers to assess the items' clarity, relevance, and reliability. Based on the pilot study results, necessary modifications will be made to enhance the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The study notes potential limitations such as sample bias, self-reporting biases, and the research design's cross-sectional nature. These constraints will be mentioned in the final report to provide a thorough understanding of the scope and potential ramifications of the study. This methodology attempts to provide empirical information regarding the employer's position on how speaking English in job interviews boosts employability possibilities by utilising a quantitative research design, administering structured questionnaires, and implementing statistical analytic tools. The findings will contribute to a quantitative knowledge of the perceived influence of English language competency on employability from the perspective of employers, and they can affect HR practices, language training efforts, and job seekers' plans to improve their employability.

RESULTS

The reliability of the test scores was examined by running the reliability statistics analysis for this study. The reliability analysis procedure indicated how well the items in a set were positively correlated. Table 1 shows Cronbach's Alpha at the value of 0.862.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.862	10

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 show the importance of the English language within the company. The item, 'Is it a must for all employees to speak and write in English?' indicated a mean=3.92 (SD=0.987). In addition, the item, 'Are employees expected to have a certain level of proficiency in English?' showed a mean=4.04 (SD=0.791). The descriptive statistics mean score for 'If an employee is proficient in English, does he/she hold important posts?' revealed a mean=3.92 (SD=0.882). As for the item, 'Does it become a problem if an employee does not know English?' showed a mean=3.37 (SD=1.257). The descriptive statistics for 'Does your company/department use English for its documentation?' showed a mean=4.10 (SD=0.995).

Table 2

The Importance of the English Language within the Company

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Is it a must for all employees to speak and write in English?	3.92	.987
2. Are employees expected to have a certain level of proficiency in English?	4.04	.791
3. If an employee is proficient in English, does he/she hold important posts?	3.92	.882
4. Does it become a problem if an employee does not know English?	3.79	1.091
5. Does your company/department use English for its documentation? (e.g., letters, proposals, minutes, etc.)	4.10	.995

Table 3 shows the criteria for employee selection. The descriptive statistics for 'Do applicants who speak fluent English have better chances in job interviews?' indicated a mean=4.04 (SD=0.839). The descriptive statistics for 'When a candidate speaks English, it shows confidence and character' revealed a mean=4.06 (SD=0.998). As for 'In Malaysia, it is a requirement to speak English during an interview?', the descriptive statistics indicated a mean=3.58 (SD=0.915). The descriptive statistics for 'Is English more important than experience?' revealed a mean=2.79 (SD=1.035). The descriptive statistics mean score for 'If an applicant speaks English during a job interview, he gains more confidence from his interviewer' revealed a mean=3.81 (SD=0.930).

Table 3

Criteria for Employee Selection

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Do applicants who speak fluent English have better chances in job interviews?	4.04	.839
2. When a candidate speaks English, it shows confidence and character.	4.06	.998
3. In Malaysia, is it a requirement to speak English during an interview?	3.58	.915
4. Is English more important than experience?	2.79	1.035
5. If an applicant speaks English during a job interview, he gains more confidence from his interviewer.	3.81	.930

Figure 1 shows employee selection preferences by the employer during an interview. It is evident that 45 (84.9%) employers prefer to hire candidates who are competent in English. Good English language skills enable precise and effective communication in the workplace. Employees with strong English language abilities are better equipped to articulate their thoughts, understand instructions, and engage in meaningful discussions. If the workplace primarily operates in English or has a significant number of English-speaking employees, then being able to communicate effectively in English becomes more critical. Employers may prioritise candidates who can seamlessly integrate into the existing team and contribute to a cohesive work environment. During the interview, demonstrating fluency and clarity in English can positively influence the employer's assessment of an employee's suitability for the work. Hence, this is the main preference for the majority in this study.

Figure 1

Employee Selection Preferences

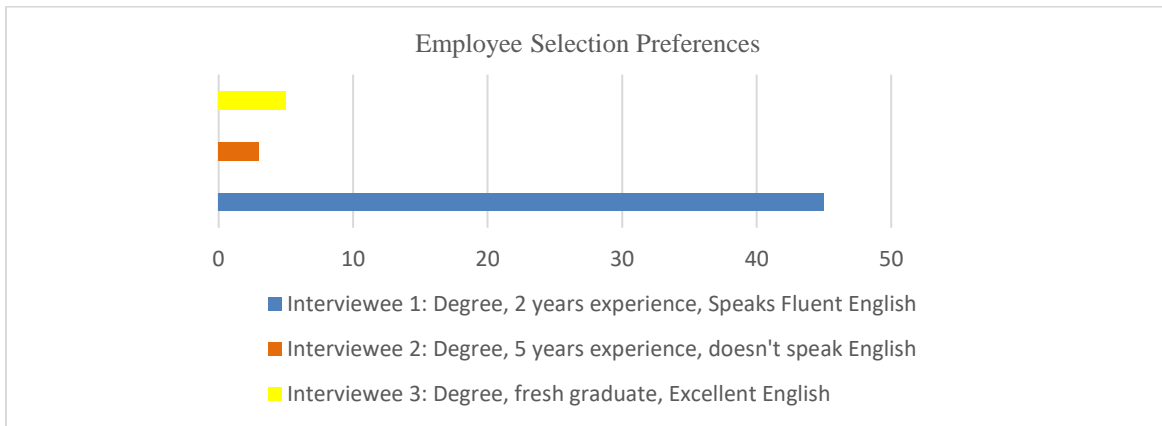
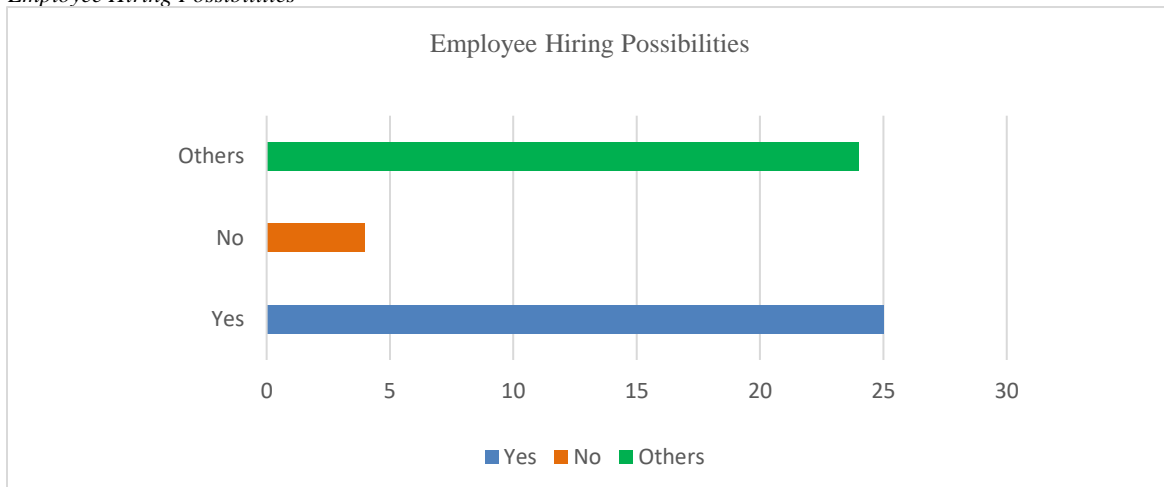


Figure 2 illustrates the possibility that an applicant will be employed if they speak English during the interview. According to the results, 45 (47.2%) respondents believed that speaking well in English at an interview is advantageous and can increase a candidate's likelihood of being hired. Speaking English fluently and with assurance can give off an air of knowledge and professionalism. It demonstrates the employee's good communication abilities, which are essential for teamwork, client interactions, presentations, and other job tasks. Meanwhile, 24 (45%) mentioned that an employee is particularly successful if the position requires exceptional English language abilities. The possibility of an employee being employed simply based on their English-speaking abilities during an interview can vary depending on several circumstances. While the English language is unquestionably advantageous, it can be considered that employers assess various qualities and attributes when making recruiting decisions. The value of English abilities in the employment process varies according to the type of job. Some roles may necessitate great English ability due to regular communication with international customers, but others may not.

Figure 2

Employee Hiring Possibilities



DISCUSSION

English as a business language is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon in Malaysia that profoundly connects to the nation's history, economy, and cultural diversity. Due to its colonial history, English has become an indispensable tool for effective communication in Malaysia's diverse commercial sector. The importance of English in Malaysian business can be linked to its status as a global lingua franca. English serves as a bridge for cross-cultural communication in an increasingly interconnected globe, allowing for seamless exchanges between varied ethnic and linguistic groups both within and across national borders. This has proven critical for international firms, trade talks, and foreign investments, contributing to economic growth and worldwide competitiveness. Fluency in spoken English during job interviews can considerably improve employment prospects for various reasons. According to the global job market, English has become the universal language of commerce and communication. Many businesses engage in international trade or do business with nations that speak the English language. Candidates portray themselves as valuable assets that can contribute successfully to a work market that is becoming more interconnected and globalised by highlighting their English ability during a job interview. Employers have different opinions about whether using English in job interviews improves employment prospects. While some companies may prioritise English language skills, especially if the position involves international clients or stakeholders or requires regular contact in English, other employers may prioritise alternate talents or multilingualism. Ultimately, it depends on the organisation's demands and particular position.

English is often recognised as the global business language. Many multinational corporations operate in or have international operations in English-speaking countries. Being fluent in English can help you communicate effectively with colleagues, clients, and partners from various linguistic origins. Speaking English opens up a wider range of job opportunities, both locally and internationally. Many employers seek candidates with strong English skills, particularly for positions requiring frequent communication, interaction with international clients or colleagues, or involvement in cross-border projects. A high level of English fluency can give candidates a competitive edge over others who may not possess the same language proficiency.

In the workplace, excellent communication is crucial. Candidates who can clearly and confidently communicate in English during job interviews are more likely to be able to convey their ideas, experiences, and qualifications. Effective communication increases the interviewer's understanding of the candidate's skills and potential match within the organisation. Employers can tap into a bigger talent pool if they are fluent in English. Employers can select from a broader spectrum of candidates by recruiting English-proficient employees, perhaps attracting individuals with global viewpoints, cultural awareness, and the ability to work well in cross-cultural teams.

English proficiency can improve collaboration in a variety of teams. When team members speak the same language, language obstacles, misunderstandings, and miscommunications are reduced, resulting in enhanced production and efficiency. Businesses that want to go worldwide or reach new markets could consider English proficiency crucial. Strong English language abilities are necessary to successfully negotiate contracts, form alliances, and trade on foreign markets.

Exceptional English language skills help to establish a professional image during an interview. Employers may perceive candidates who speak English fluently as highly professional, competent, and attentive to detail. This favourable impression can greatly impact how the interviewer views the applicant, improving their chances of getting the job. However, it is crucial to recognise that all employers may not share this viewpoint. To cater to various customer bases, some organisations may prioritise additional skills such as technical competence, industry-specific knowledge,

leadership characteristics, or the ability to speak numerous languages. Ultimately, employability opportunities depend on a combination of factors, including the job's specific requirements, the industry, the organisation's values, and the candidates' overall skill set and qualifications.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, having high English language abilities greatly improves one's chances of finding employment, especially in the current globalised and interconnected work market. Many organisations place a high value on English proficiency because it facilitates effective collaboration and communication as well as access to more employment opportunities. Studies indicate that multilingual candidates, particularly those who are fluent in English, are more likely to be considered for competitive positions and have higher earning potential, supporting the notion that English proficiency can positively impact employability (Zainuddin et al., 2019). English proficiency is also frequently viewed as a sign of adaptability, openness to learning, and cultural awareness—highly valued qualities in multicultural and multinational work situations.

Many employers recognise the advantages of speaking English in job interviews when considering employability opportunities (Ting et al., 2017). English proficiency is often valued for its role in global communication, accessing a larger talent pool, facilitating collaboration within diverse teams, and supporting international business expansion. The consensus among many employers is that speaking English in job interviews significantly enhances employability opportunities (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). However, it's important to note that speaking English alone may not determine whether you get hired. Other factors will also be considered, such as your qualifications, skills, experience, and overall fit for the role and the organisation. Employers generally assess candidates based on a combination of factors, and language proficiency is just one aspect of that evaluation.

The standard language requirement for a job interview varies depending on the particulars of the position and the organisation. In most situations, fluency in English is highly regarded, especially if it is the primary language of communication for the company or industry. If English is the expected or required language for the position, speaking English during the interview is unquestionably advantageous (Arkoudis et al., 2014).

Interviewees should exhibit their language skills if they apply for a position where English proficiency is essential. This is the ability to communicate effectively and explicitly, express ideas clearly, comprehend questions, provide appropriate responses, and use language in a professional manner.

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