Ace Interview Skills with I-S-T-A-R Flashcards: An Innovative Tool to Enhance Graduate Employability

*[1]Norashikin Mokhtar, [2]Irma Ahmad, [3]Nurul Kamalia Yusuf, [4]Mohd Faiz Ismail, [5]Nur Nadiah Fatihah Johari, [6]Nuruladilah Mohamed

[1 2 3]Academy of Language Studies, University Technology MARA, Cawangan Seremban, Malaysia,

[4]Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy, University Technology MARA, Cawangan Seremban, Malaysia,

[5]Centre of Foundation Studies, University Technology MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil, Malaysia,

[6]Academy of Language Studies, University Technology MARA, Cawangan Terengganu, Kampus Dungun, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Graduate unemployment in Malaysia continues to be a significant challenge, often attributed to limited communication, adaptability, and problem-solving skills, particularly during behavioural interviews. To address this issue, the I-S-T-A-R Flashcard System was developed as an enhancement of the traditional STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method. Incorporating gamification and cultural contextualization, the system offers an engaging and structured approach to interview preparation. Designed through a design-thinking process with contributions from industry professionals, career counsellors, and graduates, the flashcards provide targeted practice in key domains such as teamwork, leadership, conflict management, and ethical decision-making. Key features include adaptive learning, real-time feedback, and dual accessibility through physical and digital formats. A survey was conducted and the findings indicate improvements in graduates' clarity, organization, confidence, and adaptability when responding to high-pressure interview scenarios. Affordable and scalable, the system aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Future developments, including AI-powered analytics and multilingual support, aim to expand its applicability and global relevance.'

INTRODUCTION

Graduate employability, often conceptualized as the development of skills, knowledge, and attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. However, it has become a critical concern in Malaysia, with persistent unemployment and job mismatch highlighting the gap between academic preparation and workplace readiness (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). Employers consistently cite poor communication, weak adaptability, and underdeveloped problem-solving skills as barriers to graduate success in behavioural interviews (Idris, Alisa, Idaya, Maryam, & Nursaadatun, 2025).

Problem Statement

The STAR (Situation–Task–Action–Result) method provides a clear structure for answering behavioural questions, but its guidance is inherently abstract and typically requires repeated, contextualized practice to convert into fluent, job-relevant responses.

While mock interviews and digital/virtual interview training show promising gains in confidence and preparedness, recent reviews note under-representation of scalable, culturally contextualized, affordable tools in the literature — many current offerings are generic, costly, or insufficiently localized for Malaysian contexts. An accessible, engaging, and sustainable intervention that operationalizes behavioural frameworks into practice-centred, culturally relevant activities is therefore warranted to help graduates internalise interview strategies and improve workplace readiness.

Objectives

1. To enhance graduate employability by equipping students with practical, structured behavioural interview skills.
2. To simplify the STAR method through gamification, adaptive learning, and contextualized workplace scenarios.
3. To ensure equitable access to sustainable interview preparation tools in both physical and digital formats.
4. To foster confidence, adaptability, and resilience among graduates under real interview pressures.

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION & METHODOLOGY

The **I-S-T-A-R Flashcard System** is an innovative educational tool developed to enhance graduate employability by improving performance in behavioural job interviews. Grounded in a design-thinking approach, the system was co-created with input from industry professionals, career counsellors, and graduates to address persistent skills gaps among Malaysian job seekers.

The flashcards transform the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) into structured, contextual practice. They cover essential workplace scenarios such as teamwork, leadership, conflict resolution, and ethical decision-making. Gamification features, including timed challenges, randomized question difficulty, and performance tracking, replicate high-pressure interview conditions. Adaptive learning technology further personalizes practice, while real-time feedback enhances learning outcomes.

Figure 1: I-STAR Flashcard
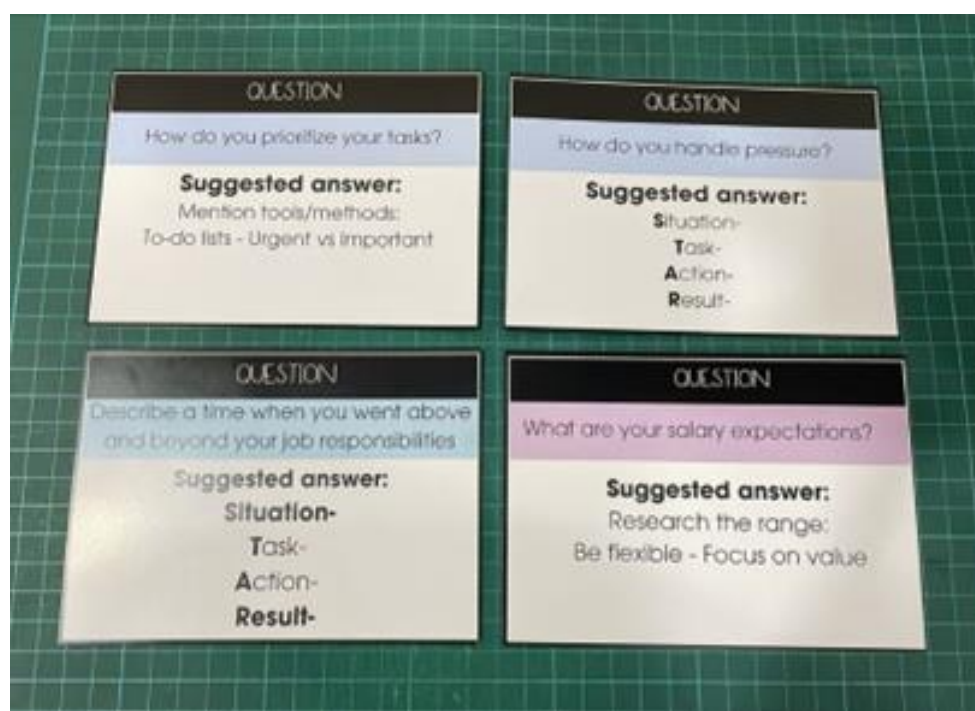
Offered in both physical (figure 1) and digital formats (figure 2), the system is scalable and cost-effective. By aligning with local cultural contexts, it provides a sustainable solution for bridging the disconnect between academic preparation and professional workplace readiness.

Figure 2 Digital form of I-STAR
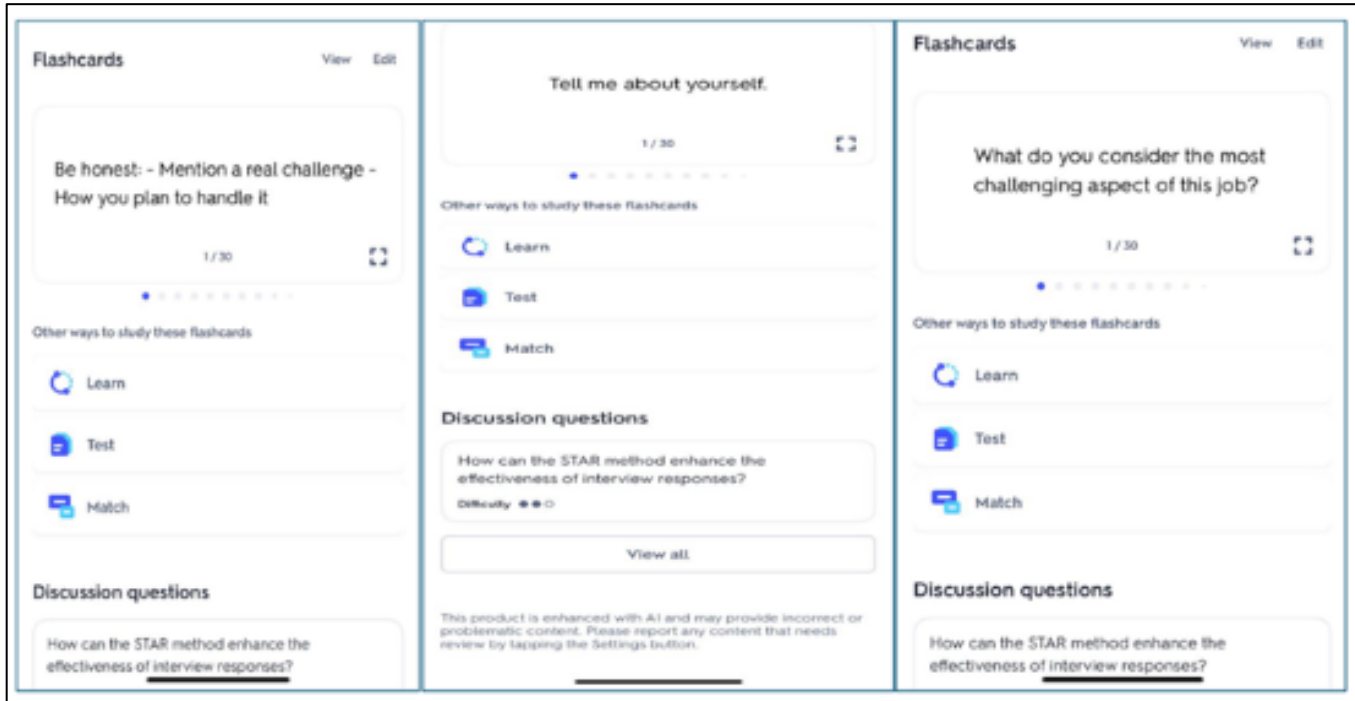
Potential Findings and Commercialisation

A survey was conducted to 42 students and findings indicate improvements in graduates' clarity, organization, confidence, and adaptability when responding to high-pressure interview scenarios.

Pre-Survey

Based on the pre-survey findings, most participants faced challenges in structuring responses and highlighting

achievements during interviews. In figure 3, 59.6% of the students agree that they often leave out important details when describing their experiences.

Figure 3 Leaving out important details
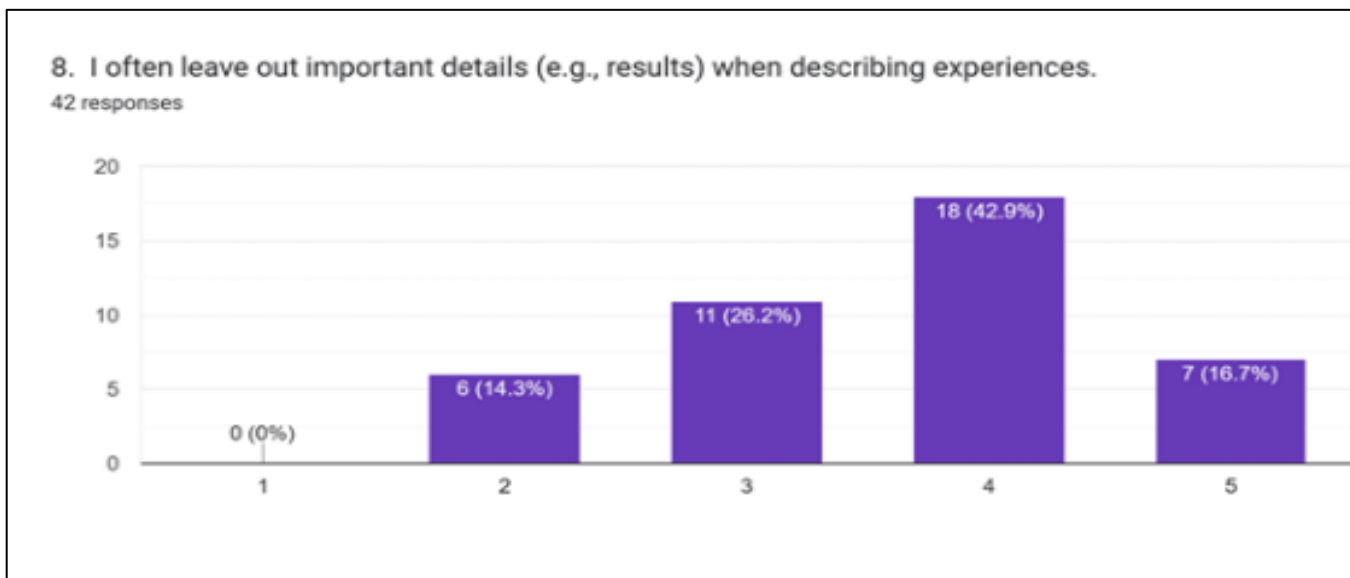
While in figure 4, 40.5% and 23.3% of the students chose agree and strongly agree respectively, showing they still struggled to explain past experiences in a structured way.
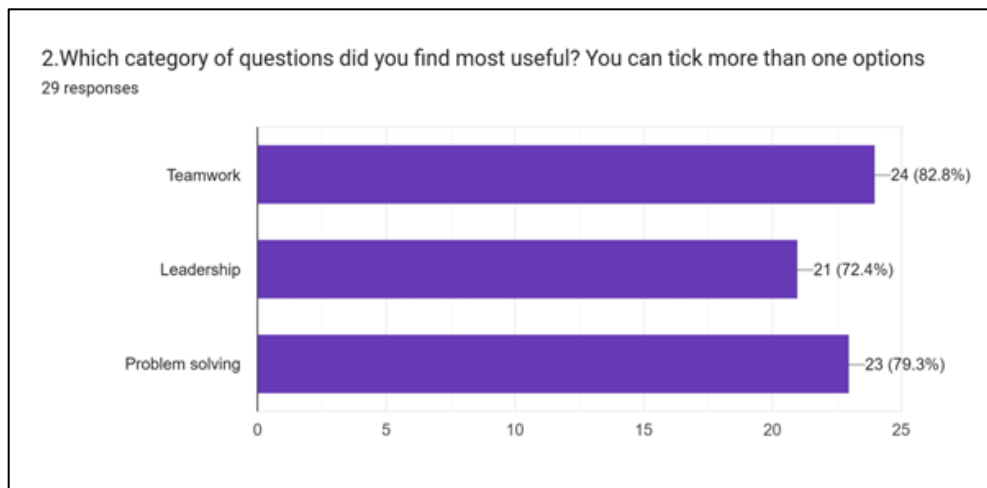
Figure 4 Struggling to explain in a structured way

6. I struggle to explain my past experiences in a structured way.
42 responses
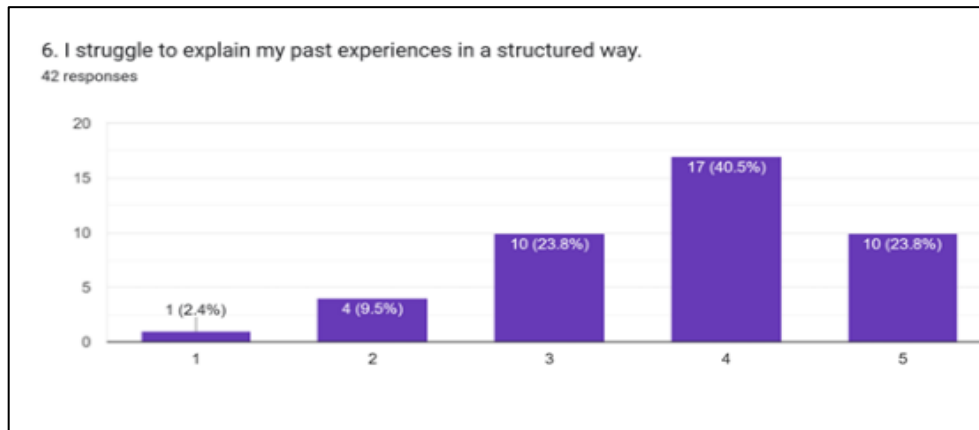
Post Survey

Following the intervention with the I-S-T-A-R Flashcard System, improvements were evident. Figure 5 shows that participants found teamwork (82.8%), problem-solving (79.3%), and leadership (72.4%) questions most useful.

Figure 5 The most useful category

2.Which category of questions did you find most useful? You can tick more than one options
29 responses

In Figure 6, 66.7% of the students said that they enjoy playing the I-STAR flashcards.

Figure 6 Enjoying using the flashcard

5.   I enjoyed using the flashcards to prepare for interviews.
30 responses
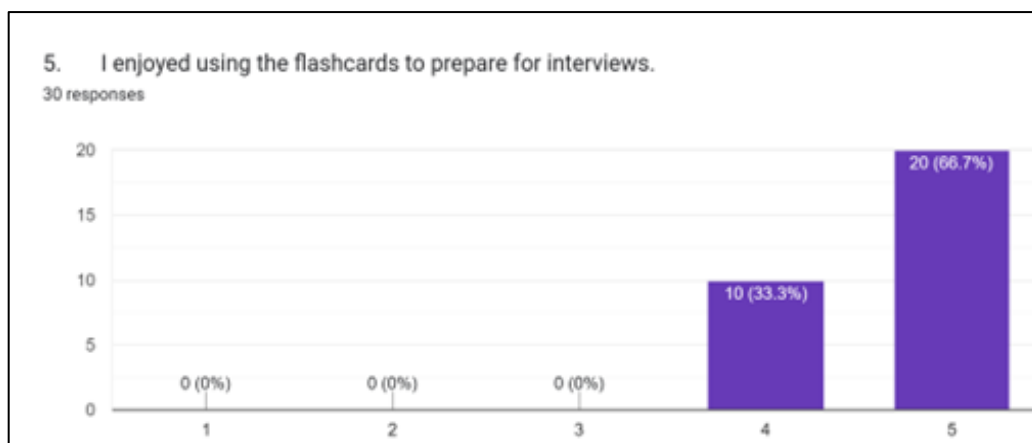
In Figure 7, it shows 68.8% rated 4 (agree) for preferring to continue using them.

Figure 7 Preference to continue using the flashcard
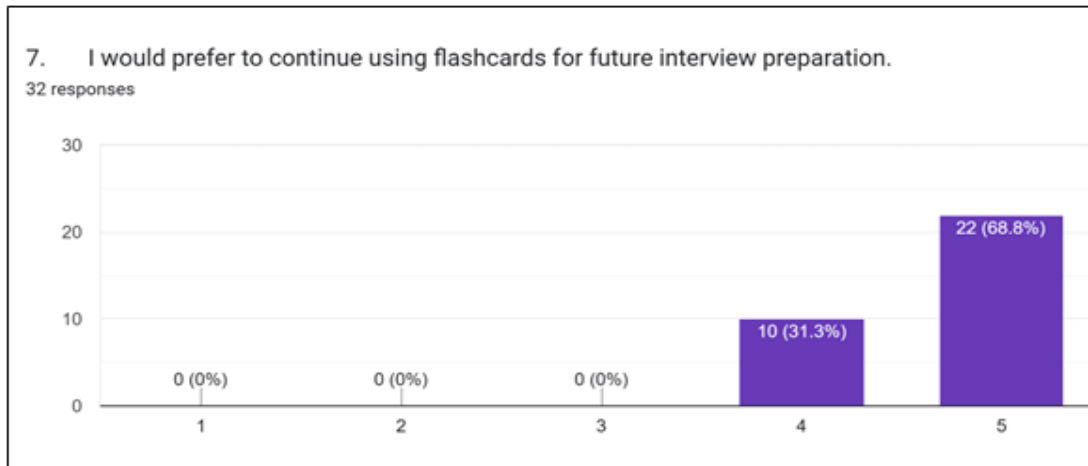
These results suggest that the flashcards were engaging, relevant, and effective in enhancing interview preparation skills.

NOVELTY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project introduces the first gamified STAR-method tool specifically designed for Malaysian graduates, addressing the unique cultural and contextual needs of the local job market. Unlike generic interview preparation tools, this solution integrates localized practice scenarios that reflect the behavioural norms and expectations of Malaysian employers. The tool is accessible in both physical and digital formats, catering to diverse user preferences and varying levels of technological access. A key innovation lies in its incorporation of peer competition and adaptive learning strategies, which are designed to sustain user engagement and personalize the learning experience. Furthermore, the tool features future-ready AI-driven analytics, enabling a more comprehensive and data-informed evaluation of users' interview readiness. This holistic approach not only enhances the effectiveness of interview preparation but also ensures that graduates are better equipped to meet the dynamic demands of today's employment.

To maximize the impact of this tool, it is recommended that universities and higher education institutions integrate the I-S-T-A-R platform into their existing employability and career development programs. Embedding this gamified learning approach can significantly enhance student engagement while building essential behavioural and communication competencies for job interviews. Future development efforts should focus on expanding the tool's accessibility by introducing multilingual capabilities to cater to Malaysia's diverse linguistic landscape. Additionally, developing a mobile application version would increase usability and convenience, particularly for on-the-go learners. There is also strong potential for cross-border scalability; adapting the tool for other Southeast Asian markets could support regional graduate mobility and employability. Continuous feedback from users and career professionals should guide iterative improvements to ensure the platform remains relevant, engaging, and aligned with evolving employer expectations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

1. Abdul Rahim, S., & Kok Wei, L. (2025). Student's Perceived Competence in Mock Job Interviews. Proceedings of Teaching and Educational Research Association (TERA), (p. 121). Kuala Lumpur. doi:https://doi.org/10.20319/ictel.2025.121

2. Career Advising & Professional Development: Using the STAR method for your next behavioral interview. (2025, August 25). Retrieved from Massachusetts Institute of Technology : https://capd.mit.edu/resources/the-star-method-for-behavioral-interviews/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

3. Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2022, November 2022). Retrieved from Graduates Statistics 2022: https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/graduates-statistics-2022?utm_source=chatgpt.com

4. Idris, O., Alisa, I., Idaya, M. H., Maryam , M. J., & Nursaadatun, A. N. (2025). Graduate soft skills and employability in Malaysia: The view. Social and Management Research Journal, 22(1), 1-16. doi:10.24191/smrj.v22i1