

# The Impact of English Proficiency in Enhancing Employment Opportunities Among University Students

Noor Syamimi Binti Zawawi, Siti Balqis Binti Abdul Aziz, Amirun Hariz Bin Azmi, Amirul Shafiq Bin Abdul Razak, Nurul Syahirah Binti Mohamad Nasir, Mohammad Radzi bin Manap\*

Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA

\*Corresponding Author

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## ABSTRACT

English language proficiency plays a fundamental role in shaping the employability of university graduates, particularly in multilingual contexts like Malaysia where English dominates professional and corporate communication. This paper examines how English language competency influences graduates' performance in three critical areas of employability that include: job interviews, resume writing, and workplace communication. Drawing on a review of recent literature, the paper highlights that English language fluency enables candidates to articulate ideas confidently during interviews, thereby improving their chances of employment. In contrast, limited proficiency often results in vague responses, miscommunication, and negative perceptions of competence. Furthermore, resume writing demands clarity, precision, and professionalism—skills closely tied to English language mastery. Graduates with strong language abilities can present their achievements persuasively, while poorly written resumes risk being overlooked by employers. In workplace settings, effective English language communication is crucial for tasks such as report writing, meetings, and client engagement, where poor or inadequate proficiency can hinder career progression. Generally, findings underscore the importance of embedding practical English training in higher education to bridge existing skill gaps. Effort to Strengthen English language proficiency is not merely an academic requirement but a strategic asset that enhances graduates' employability in an increasingly demanding and globalized labour market.

## INTRODUCTION

English proficiency plays a significant and basic role English plays in conditioning graduating participants for the workforce while it is often viewed as yet another component of the academic requirements. In Malaysia, where English is a dominant language of discourse across numerous disciplines and excellent verbal and written communication skills are expected, graduates struggle to meet labour market demands due to limited English proficiency, particularly in interviews, resumes, and general communication practices in the workplace, despite being taught English as part of their university component (Zainuddin et al, 2019; Warman et al., 2024).

Past research has identified a strong positive correlation between English language proficiency and employability. Proficient students appear to be more confident and to have access to more jobs (Malokani et al., 2023; Kamil & Muhammad 2021). Furthermore, embedding soft skills such as English communication in academic programs is becoming an expectation of exposure in preparing students for the characteristics of work, such as resilience at work (Noah & Abdul Aziz, 2020). Highlighted in this context are the limitations

in English training opportunities that can be structured into a more career-specific set of English competencies offered by universities at the time of reporting to the labour force.

### **Aim & Research Questions**

This study examines the impact of English language proficiency on university graduates' employability, highlighting how strong English skills contribute to success in job interviews, resume writing, and workplace communication.

Research Questions:

RQ1: How does English language proficiency influence university graduates' performance during job interviews?

RQ2: How significantly do English language skills affect the quality and effectiveness of resumes prepared by university graduates?

RQ3: How does English language proficiency influence university graduates' ability to communicate effectively in professional workplace settings?

### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopts qualitative approach where reference is made on relevant and reliable previous studies in addressing the research questions.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 English Proficiency and Job Interview Performance**

In many countries, especially Malaysia, it is known as a country that uses English widely in the corporate and professional sectors, and strong English communication skills allow candidates to express their ideas clearly, confidently, and persuasively (Deepa et al., 2023). Graduates who possess a good command of English are more likely to leave a positive impression on interviewers, which increases their chances of securing employment. According to Rido (2019), employers usually reject applicants who have a low ability to communicate well in English.

As Wiles et al. (2024) explain, one can confidently assert that job interviews can be challenging, even to the point that the most qualified applicants may also not be able to convey their potential if they lack good language skills. Hidayat (2024) finds that the best indicator of interview success among fresh graduates was fluency in English. Moreover, Rido (2019) states that during job interviews, candidates are mostly asked to handle situational questions, describe their achievements, and perhaps even demonstrate spoken scenarios to show their leadership or problem-solving abilities. Graduates who struggle to comprehend English well may find it hard to explain their answer clearly, which can result in replies that are brief, vague, or lacking, which could be interpreted as incompetence or lack of preparation.

Employers would then assume that such applicants would likewise find it difficult to communicate well in actual work settings. (Deepa et al., 2024). As Daqiq et al. (2024) highlight, graduates who can communicate in English well will make themselves stand out in interviews and increase their chances of getting a job offer, making English language skills another important factor influencing interview performance among university

graduates. Therefore, improving English-speaking skills is crucial for students who want to be successful in the employment process, especially in multinational or English-dominant working environments.

## 2.2 English Proficiency and Resume Writing

It's important to have a strong and clear resume these days. The first thing employers review when selecting candidates to interview is often this matter because proficiency in English is crucial for job seekers to showcase their qualifications professionally, given that it is the predominant language used on numerous Malaysian work-related resumes and applications.

If your resume is poorly written or grammatically incorrect, it can give the impression. If a resume is unclear or unreadable, potential candidates may be overlooked. Employers frequently make abrupt hiring decisions and tend to favor concise resumes due to the abundance of available jobs. A good command of the English language, however, can assist job seekers in highlighting their strengths. Adequate proficiency in English strengthens and demonstrates the narrative of one's career achievements on a resume (Wulandari et al., 2022). The employers look for candidates who can accurately use industry-specific terms and avoid using ambiguous or repetitious language (Nesaratnam et al., 2020).

A resume with a strong structure can provide employers with more visibility for essential information such as education, experience, and skills (Wulandari et al, 2022; Nesaratnam & Associates, 2020). Fluency in English is beneficial for the development of human capital, as it demonstrates diligence, professionalism, and attention to detail.

## 2.3 English Proficiency in Workplace Communication

English proficiency plays a vital role in boosting the employability and effectiveness of university graduates in today's global workforce. While technical expertise is important, employers increasingly expect graduates to communicate effectively in English particularly in tasks like writing emails, participating in meetings, preparing documents, and engaging with clients. According to Al-Riyami (2020), many Omani employers had complained about graduates' lack of competence to communicate ideas clearly in English during workplace interactions, a skill that limited their participation in group projects, customer support, and written communications.

Research has shown that English fluency significantly contributes to job readiness across various countries. Students also recognize that professional English use involves more than grammar and vocabulary, it requires understanding context, tone, and appropriateness. This includes interpreting feedback, responding professionally, and expressing ideas clearly in discussions. As noted by Çal, Mearns, and Admiraal (2023), poor English skills can make an otherwise capable graduate appear unprofessional. Karim et al. (2022) found that STEM and business graduates from English-medium institutions performed better in key communication tasks, such as writing reports and negotiating, and were more likely to take on leadership roles.

In Malaysia, Hiew et al. (2023) highlighted that English-proficient science graduates were more likely to be employed and entrusted with critical responsibilities, especially in international settings, while those with weak English faced difficulties advancing. Early language struggles, as identified by Nithideechaiwarachok et al. (2022), often begin in the first year of university and can negatively impact future workplace communication if not addressed. Together, this research backs up the idea that being good at English has become a key job skill. Students who can talk well in English have better chances at good jobs, while those who struggle with it might face big hurdles.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review, there are several crucial points that can be highlighted as important findings that also serve as answers to the research questions raised in this paper. This section is tabulated based on the research question of the paper.

RQ1: How does English language proficiency influence university graduates' performance during job interviews?

English language proficiency plays a crucial role in helping graduates perform well during job interviews. Strong English skills allow candidates to express their ideas clearly and confidently, which leaves a positive impression on interviewers (Deepa et al., 2023). Studies show that poor English communication often leads to rejection, as employers may see unclear or brief responses as a sign of incompetence or lack of preparation (Rido, 2019; Hidayat, 2024). Job interviews frequently involve situational questions and role-play tasks, which require candidates to explain their achievements and demonstrate problem-solving abilities.

Graduates with weak English skills may struggle with these tasks, causing them to appear less capable even if they have the required qualifications. Employers often assume that if a candidate cannot communicate well during an interview, they are likely to face similar challenges in the workplace (Deepa et al., 2024). Therefore, future employees or students need to understand that improving English-speaking skills is not just about passing the interview stage but also about proving readiness for professional roles in multinational or English-dominant work environments. This also highlights the need for universities to focus on or prioritise effort on equipping students with strong spoken English abilities before graduation.

RQ2: How significantly do English language skills affect the quality and effectiveness of resumes prepared by university graduates?

A well-written resume is often the first step to securing a job, and English proficiency is essential for making a strong first impression. Resumes with grammar errors, unclear structure, or awkward phrasing can cause employers to overlook otherwise qualified candidates (Wulandari et al., 2022). Since most job applications in Malaysia are prepared in English, graduates must use accurate language and relevant industry terms to demonstrate professionalism (Nesaratnam et al., 2020).

Clear and concise resumes help employers quickly identify a candidate's qualifications, skills, and achievements, especially when there are many applications to review. Good English also reflects attention to detail and diligence, traits that employers value highly. On the other hand, poorly written resumes may suggest a lack of care or communication skills, which can negatively impact hiring decisions. This shows that English proficiency not only helps graduates highlight their strengths but also positions them as competent and employable individuals in the eyes of potential employers. In a competitive job market, a strong English resume can be a deciding factor between being shortlisted or rejected.

RQ3: How does English language proficiency influence university graduates' ability to communicate effectively in professional workplace settings?

English proficiency is vital for effective workplace communication, especially in today's global job market. Graduates are expected to perform various tasks in English, such as writing professional emails, participating in meetings, preparing reports, and engaging with clients. Research shows that weak English skills can limit participation in group projects and customer interactions, which can affect overall job performance (Al-Riyami, 2020). Poor communication may also lead to misunderstandings or cause graduates to appear

unprofessional, even if they possess strong technical abilities (Çal et al., 2023). In contrast, graduates with strong English fluency are more likely to take on leadership roles and handle critical responsibilities, particularly in multinational companies (Karim et al., 2022; Hiew et al., 2023).

Those with limited proficiency often face barriers to career advancement and may struggle to compete in international work environments. Addressing these language gaps early—ideally during university—can help graduates enter the workforce with the communication skills necessary to succeed. This demonstrates that English proficiency is not just an academic requirement but a long-term professional asset that influences employability and career growth.

## CONCLUSION

English proficiency significantly determines the employability of university graduates because it affects their performance in job interviews, resumes, and communications in the workplace. Candidates with a high level of communication in English can easily articulate their ideas (Ali et al., 2022), and effective writing demonstrates the overall quality of professional written work, which includes resumes (Akther, 2022). Nonetheless, there is a skills gap for many students as they are unable to utilize sound rhetorical strategies in their job application letters (Abdullah, 2021). The current workplace largely relies on English in commerce, documentation, and communications with clients (Prasetya, 2023). Research indicates a strong connection between English skills and overall job performance, which calls for higher education to provide more practical training for language contexts (Abbas et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2022). In this ever-changing world, English proficiency is more than an academic milestone, it is a strategic advantage in a global job market (Prasetya, 2023).

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