

The Importance of English Language Proficiency on Employability in Malaysia among Non-English Major Students

¹Nur Iqliah Maksan, ^{*2}Hanna Insyirah Mohd Sukri

^{1, 2}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Shah Alam,

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

English language proficiency has become significant in the universal job market, especially for university graduates who aspire to secure employment in a competitive environment. This quantitative study investigates the impact of English proficiency on the employability of Malaysians among 228 non-English major students from two public universities. The study explored students' perceptions of how English skills enhance their career opportunities through an online survey. The findings revealed that the majority of the students agree that English is important both to secure jobs and to improve performance. Nonetheless, although there were no significant gender differences, the research uncovered significant ethnic differences, with Chinese and other respondents valuing English more than their Malay respondents. The findings shed light on the critical issue in employability, showing how improving English proficiency can sharpen the job prospects of Malaysian graduates and address a critical issue in employability for non-English major students.

Keywords: English language proficiency, employability, perceptions, communication skills

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Over the last few decades, graduates have had to compete more in the job market in order to promote their skills and qualifications as they need to develop a variety of capabilities. However, nowadays, most jobs demand language and communication skills as their top priority compared to only dependable on qualifications and academic skills. Universities all over the world annually produce graduates from a variety of academic programmes with different major languages with the same goal of finding employment in their areas of expertise. English language proficiency was considered to be, among other factors, a critical component of graduate employment in Malaysia. English is frequently used as a second language and a means of communication worldwide. As it has been witnessed in Asian countries, English language is the common second or third language that needs to be learned in every school. The use of the English language as a medium of communication becomes increasingly important over the years.

According to Hiew et al. (2021), qualifications for employment have evolved beyond just expertise, though subject-specific knowledge and skills remain important. This highlights that expertise alone is not enough as strong communication skills are also essential for success. It shows that being an expert in specific skills still needs to be supported by good communication skills. However, most global companies require documentation and any business needs to be stated in English. Workers or employees that have low tolerance in English language could affect the company's image. Plus, Lan (2022) mentioned that having low proficiency levels of English language might also be a barrier in communication, especially among multinational society in the country. Thus, this study sheds light on the importance of English proficiency for employability in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, according to Nesaratnam et al. (2020), a huge percentage of graduates are unable to find a job due to inadequate English communication skills. Therefore, this research provides an overview on the importance of English proficiency for employability in Malaysia.

Statement of Problem

There are certain university courses where English is not included in the curriculum, and instead focus is given to alternative languages or solely on native tongues. This dismissal of English reflects not only a divergence from current learning trends but also emphasizes the prioritization of other linguistic or regional educational approaches within these programs. As stated by Radwan (2023), unfortunately, speaking and writing English fluently and accurately can be a difficult undertaking for many ESL graduates. This can be a significant barrier for graduates seeking employment in today's global market.

A large percentage of graduates are unemployed due to inadequate English communication skills, and employability has become a serious concern (Nesaratnam et al., 2020). Because of this, graduates looking for work need to be proficient in English communication, regardless of their position or industry. The significance of English language competency for prospective graduates lies in its widespread role as a global lingua franca. Companies, particularly multinational corporations (MNCs) often require employees to be proficient in English to communicate with international clients, stakeholders, and partners.

Most companies still require English language proficiency despite their excellent academic records because that is the most important qualification they seek for. Acknowledging the significance of English language competency for prospective graduates, Hiew et al. (2021) also stated that English language is the main language. Every company that advertises their vacancy will absolutely include their preferable language, in which it is either English or Bahasa Melayu.

The challenges outlined above, specifically the exclusion of English from some academic curricula, the high rate of unemployment among graduates due to poor English skills, and the consistent demand for English proficiency from employers, collectively highlight a critical issue. Despite the clear need for English proficiency in the job market, a gap exists between the skills graduates possess and the skills employers require, which is a serious worry. Given the importance of English proficiency, particularly for recent graduates looking for work, the current study is carried out to find out whether aspiring graduates viewed English proficiency as a necessary qualification that would increase their marketability and desirability.

Research Aims and Questions

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of non-English major students towards the importance of English proficiency skills in enhancing employability. To achieve this aim, the following research questions will be addressed:

What are the non-English major students' perceptions of the importance of proficiency skills in English in enhancing employability?

Is there a difference between genders in the non-English major students' perceptions towards the importance of English proficiency skills in enhancing employability?

Are different ethnic groups able to influence the non-English major students' perceptions towards the importance of English proficiency in enhancing employability?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of English in the Global Job Market

Nowadays, global marketability prioritises English proficiency because it can be the promising point to start an

individual career as well as enhancing the company's image. The usage of English in international trade is essential to ensure the effectiveness of collaboration within people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Most feel that the workforce can only get employment and be able to compete in the global job market by their English proficiency level. Conversely, regions with lower English proficiency may struggle to secure positions that require strong English skills, thus limiting their ability to compete effectively in industries where language proficiency is a critical factor in hiring (Nesaratnam et al., 2020).

The level of English is increasing as a factor with a greater role in career applications of the people globally and especially in sectors that deal with imported clients. Daqiq et al. (2024) stated that employees with better English proficiency are able to get the job they desire and are also promoted. Fluency in English can help a graduate to obtain better employment and progress in their job (Kamaruddin et al., 2021). Furthermore, English is gradually becoming a job asset in major working fields such as technology, finance, healthcare, and hospitality sectors.

English language proficiency plays a big role in interacting in multinational organisations. It influences employment overseas and helps an individual to be aware of new developments in the international markets of relevant employment. The more usage of English in employment, the higher the quality of people, the more people who are fully capable of English can participate in global projects, communicate with people, speak other languages and follow the guidelines recognized universally (Leadbeatter et al., 2023). That is why it is important to stress the fact that having a proficient level of English is imperative in order to start a great career in the contemporary interconnected and competitive global world.

Graduates' English Proficiency for Employability

Having English language fluency in the written and spoken word present ideas and information exchange, proving competence in managing multicultural teams. The employers now consider this as a core competency rather than competencies where one can prove one's aptitude, willingness, and readiness to handle clients and stakeholders of different language and culture while contributing to the teams worldwide (Kamaruddin et al., 2021). According to Amin and Abu Bakar (2022), proficiency of English in Malaysia remains an issue of concern, due to the exposition by the employers who agreed that poor skills of language among fresh graduates was the one of the major factors to unemployment. Suhaili and Mohamad (2021) argued that although Malaysian students are expected to possess good English which is said to improve employability rate, the students still exhibit different levels of English proficiency. Plus, Daqiq et al. (2024) also stated that graduates' facing difficulties to gain their dream jobs instantly had nothing to do with their perceptions of job and educational background mismatch and the main issues are related to their deficiencies in English competency expertise and ability.

Malik et al. (2022) have studied the influence of academic disciplines on graduates' English language skills mostly due to their fields of studies that are globally interconnected with business, engineering, and information technology disciplines. They sometimes demand that professionals communicate with co-workers, consumers, and business associates globally. An IT specialist may be required to solve some issues, write comments or documentation for the users whose native language is different from English and disseminate various technical information in English (Altay et al., 2022). If graduates do not actively pursue opportunities to enhance their language skills outside of their core curriculum or receive extra language instruction, they may have lower proficiency levels.

Employers' Expectations on Graduates' English Proficiency Skills

Having such language skills is crucial not only for momentary job requirements but also for potential career promotion and management roles in today's globalised society. However, there are disparities in competency levels concerning graduates and students despite these trends and understanding of English efficiency. Van Dung et al. (2023) stated that these differences can be attributed to factors such as; socioeconomic status, major and the type of education. The deviations clearly suggest that language development and educational change must be offered in order to ensure that all graduates regardless of their background possess the requisite level of

English language competency necessary to compete within the increasingly stringent international environment. In order to evaluate the type of skills that graduates (Mussarat, 2022) stated that they need to improve their employment opportunities and contribution towards various workplaces, it is necessary to also consider the English language competency which exists within the employees.

Employers surmise graduates to a high standard for English proficiency because they understand that it is an essential ability for efficient communication and work at companies, (Idkhan et al., 2021). Given that English is the nation's second language, majority of businesses view it as a fundamental language that all employees should be fluent in (Husin & Radzuan, 2021). This competency is also important for firms that work on an international level since English is officially identified as the key language of interaction particularly in the global organisations (Van Dung et al., 2023). The employers' perception reveals that mastery of the English language is seen to be improving flexibility in different places of work (Al Asefer & Zainal Abidin, 2021). For instance, Idkhan et al. (2021) shared their opinion by stating that they can comprehend technical materials frequently and speak well in English, engineering students at Malaysian institutions with higher levels of English proficiency frequently get internships and job placements with international companies.

Employers also consider the candidate's capacity for international teamwork. Graduates with proficiency in English are better equipped to collaborate and work together across cultural boundaries through cross-cultural communication (Lai, 2022). This ability is particularly applicable to multinational corporations because they depend on effective foreign teams for the advancement of their business (Nithideechaiwarachok et al., 2022). Also, Joerene (2024) postulated that there are significant associations between English language proficiency and one's self confidence that are important in managerial and supervisory roles. Yeoh (2021) noted that these are skills that the Malaysian students, who engage in cultural exchange programmes or internship in other countries for their training, may likely develop adding that the graduates with such skills are easily employed when they finish their studies. For example, technical graduates from colleges in Malaysia can hardly cope with the current trends in the market and technology, since most of it is print in English which affords them a competitive edge (Krishnan et al., 2024).

In summary, it can be collectively concluded that, based on past studies, English proficiency is an essential skill for graduates in securing a place in today's global market that is interconnected. The studies put emphasis on the employers' high expectation for graduates' language competency in navigating the challenges in the workplace and showcasing teamwork. Nonetheless, today's graduates still portray disparity in proficiency levels due to various factors such as socioeconomic status and academic discipline. This literature review emphasizes the need to master language skills for these graduates to enhance their marketability.

Theoretical Framework

This current study is governed by the Human Capital Theory (HCT) which emphasizes that a person's investment in a specialized skill, such as English language proficiency, is an important form of human capital that boosts one's marketability in employment (Kaur Bhar et al., 2025). This further explains the argument of how high of a value English proficiency is in securing a career. On another note, in investigating the different perceptions and self-evaluations across different ethics, this research follows the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) which implies that human beliefs, including perceived importance and self-efficacy, are strongly influenced by personal interactions, surrounding behaviour, and their environments (Vattøy et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

To guide this study, a conceptual framework is developed to draw the relationships surrounding the study's variables. As discussed in the previous section, English proficiency holds the key for graduates to secure a future in their careers. The concept, therefore, illustrates whether gender and ethnic hold any differences in participants' perception of the importance of English proficiency in enhancing their marketability.

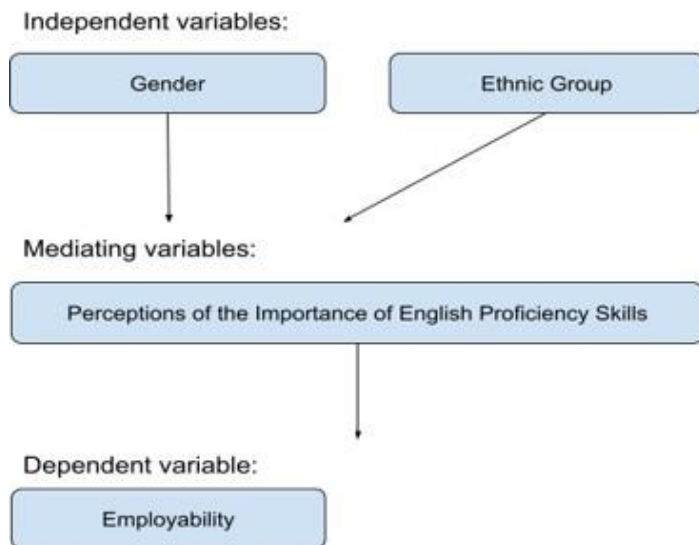


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The figure above illustrates the conceptual framework that governs the study. Gender and ethnic are the external factors that are expected to influence participants’ perception of the importance of English proficiency that relates to their employability opportunity. The framework connects the discussion of the study that determines whether the participants view English proficiency as a necessary requirement in promoting their marketability.

Research Design and Research Approach

To explore the significance of English language proficiency on employability in Malaysia among students from two public universities in Malaysia, this study will employ a quantitative research design. According to Coghlan & Brydon-Miller (2014), the quantitative approach is the most prevalent research framework in the context of social sciences. It encompasses a variety of methods and approaches used to analyze numerical patterns that are often utilized in psychological, social, and economic issues. For the purpose of this research, a causal comparative research design will be used, as stated by Costello (2023). This research style describes causal relationships between independent variables with dependent variables, and analyses the differences between groups to derive potential causes.

This research data collection will be carried out through survey or questionnaire methods. This form of data collection is often used in quantitative research. The demographic profile of the sample is important to gain a better understanding of the research into deeper comprehension. Researchers can use and examine human behaviour in this kind of study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Sample and Sampling

The study will involve a sample of 258 undergraduate non-English major students from two public universities in Malaysia. To ensure diversity and reliability in the data collection, the sample includes participants from different programs. The selection of these universities provides a diverse pool of students with varying levels of English proficiency and various kinds of ethnic groups. This sample size is consistent with similar studies in the field that aim to investigate perceptions within a specific student population (Elnaem et al, 2022; Lim & Tan, 2021). The sampling technique applied in the research will be following the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sampling. As stated by Noor Haslin (2017), the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sampling was used to determine the sample size needed for the data collection. It also helps reduce time and is easier for researchers as it already gives the sample of population and the sample of the feedback needed. This method is a suitable approach for the present study as it ensures a statistically representative sample, which is a key requirement for the quantitative research design.

Research Instrument

Research instrument is a piece of equipment that will be used to assist in gathering, calculating, and analysing the data for the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The instrument for this study will be a closed-ended questionnaire, administered via Google Form, consisting of 15 questions divided into two sections: demographic information and self-perceptions. The questionnaire was adapted from a previous study by Jawing and Kamlun (2022) to focus specifically on non-English major students. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of agreement or disagreement with the self-reporting statements.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The data collection procedure is a crucial part of any research. According to Simplilearn (2023), it is the process of gathering and analysing information from various sources to predict trends and probability. The questionnaire was distributed via personal communication platforms such as Telegram, email, and WhatsApp, giving respondents the flexibility to complete it at their convenience. Data from the respondents was collected just once upon completion, as there is no pre-test or post-test involved in this study. The data was compiled and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The data was then converted from frequency counts into percentages, while the mean and standard deviation values were extracted to display the data. This tool is widely used in social science research for its robust capabilities. A T-test was used to compare the means between two genders, and a one-way ANOVA was used for comparing the means of more than two ethnic groups. These methods are consistent with recent studies by Nordin and Hamzah (2021) and Rosli and Rahman (2023) which made use of SPSS to analyse the data collected. The significance level for the Cronbach Alpha value was set at 0.7.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability in a study can be determined as the degree of which the result of a measurement can be depended on for its accuracy (Gravetter et al., 2025). To ensure this, the Split-Half method and Cronbach's Alpha were used to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability, yielding a value of 0.893, which denotes strong internal consistency. Validity was ensured through an expert review by an academic expert, who verified that the questions were clear, pertinent, and aligned with the study's goals. This process guarantees the questionnaire's precision in gathering trustworthy data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants Perceptions Towards English Proficiency and Employability

Table 1 Perceptions of English Proficiency Skills in Enhancing Employability

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	
I believe that English proficiency is important for securing a job.	228	1	5	4.27	1.167	
I believe that being proficient in English can improve my job performance.	228	1	5	4.24	1.160	
I often use English in my academic studies.	228	1	5	1.83	1.061	
I often use English in my daily life outside of academic studies.	227	1	5	2.63	1.173	
I think that my current level of English proficiency is sufficient for the job market.	228	1	5	3.11	.898	

I think that speaking is the most important aspect of English proficiency for employability.	227	1	5	4.24	.872
I think that writing is the most important aspect of English proficiency for employability.	227	1	5	4.14	.886
I think that reading is the most important aspect of English proficiency for employability.	227	1	5	4.15	.957
I think that listening is the most important aspect of English proficiency for employability.	227	1	5	4.20	.883
Valid N (listwise)	223				

Based on the descriptive statistics provided in Table 1, the analysis reveals a strong agreement that English proficiency is a substantial factor in securing a job with the mean recorded (mean= 4.27, SD = 1.167) and in improving job performance (mean = 4.24, SD = 1.160). Apart from that, the participants' perceptions on the importance of the four main aspects in English was also recorded with the highest being the speaking skill (mean = 4.24), followed by listening (mean = 4.20), reading (Mean = 4.15), and writing (mean = 4.14). These values are recorded also with relatively low variability.

However, the outcome shows a moderate agreement regarding respondents' confidence in their current level of English proficiency for the job market (mean = 3.11, SD = 0.898). Additionally, while respondents occasionally use English in their daily lives (mean = 2.63), their use of English in academic studies is notably low (mean = 1.83). It can be predicted as the participants are non- English major students. These findings highlight the potential gap in English usage across different contexts, which may have implications for both academic and professional preparation. However, research conducted by Bisht (2023) has a contradictory result which revealed that not every country uses English as their medium of communication in the job market.

Table 2 Perceptions on the Importance of English Proficiency Skills in Securing Jobs

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceptions	223	1.89	4.56	3.6477	.68654
Valid N (listwise)	223				

Table 2 shows that most of the participants' perceptions on the importance of English proficiency in securing employment is quite impressive (mean = 3.65), which can be interpreted that most of the students understand they need to master English proficiency in securing a job in the future.

Table 3 Participants' Self Evaluation of Their English Level Proficiency

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I think that my educational institution provides adequate support to improve my English proficiency.	228	1	5	3.49	.878
I am confident with my English proficiency skills.	227	1	5	3.18	.854
I do participate in many extracurricular activities to enhance my English proficiency.	227	1	5	2.28	1.262

I think that English proficiency is important in my field of study.	228	1	5	3.60	1.203
I believe that improving my English proficiency would enhance my career opportunities.	228	1	5	3.98	.973
I believe that my surroundings (e.g. family, friends, and classmates) , play a significant role in enhancing my English proficiency.	228	1	5	3.81	.951
Valid N (listwise)	226				

Table 3 indicates that students generally recognize the importance of English in their education and career. This indicates an acute awareness of how essential English proficiency is to success in the job market. In summary, most respondents agree that having English proficiency courses would enhance their fluency and comprehension in English plus increasing their career opportunities (mean = 3.98, SD = 0.973). It shows that students understand the value of English language skills and how they may affect their job prospects, but it also identifies areas that need work, such as boosting self-esteem, participating in extracurricular activities, and receiving institutional assistance. This echoes the study by Daqiq et al. (2024) which found that 92% of participants acknowledged that English language proficiency is essential for their future careers and English language skills are mandatory in finding a suitable job.

Based on the results, the data shows that most of the respondents understand English proficiency is important in employability. This shows that even though the students are from non-English major courses, they still acknowledge that having a proficiency in English could level up their marketability in employability. Based on the analysis, it shows that 64.91% of the respondents strongly agree that English proficiency is important for securing a job. A study from Idkhan et al. (2021) also shared their opinion by stating that they can comprehend technical materials frequently and speak well in English, engineering students at Malaysian institutions with higher levels of English proficiency frequently get internships and job placements with international companies. Contradictory with the higher percentage, 9.65% and 10.09% respondents react that they disagree with the statement. Those bilinguals that can speak Mandarin and English fluently will undoubtedly be in high demand by companies in the future and will have a big edge when they start their careers. According to Jusoh (2021), supposedly, the Malay language offers comprehensive employment opportunities in industry employment.

Gender Influence in the Perceptions of English Proficiency for Employability

Male and female non-English major students' opinions on the value of English proficiency for employment do not differ much, according to the SPSS data analysis. The mean scores for men and women are comparable across a range of perception-measuring statements, and the standard deviations have values that overlap, suggesting that answers are consistent between both genders. For instance, there is a high agreement among both males with a mean of 4.25, standard deviation of 1.27 and females with a mean of 4.29, standard deviation of 1.09 regarding the significance of English ability in obtaining employment. Similarly, males (mean = 4.19, SD = 1.29) and females (mean = 4.27, SD = 1.06) have similar opinions on whether or not mastering English enhances job performance. Males and females report equal mean scores (mean = 3.06 and mean = 3.15, respectively) for current English proficiency levels that are sufficient for the employment market. Men tend to score speaking and reading slightly higher than women, while women score speaking and listening slightly lower when evaluating the significance of particular English abilities for employability, such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing. For example, speaking is rated higher by men (mean = 4.36, SD = 0.77) than by women (mean = 4.16, SD = 0.93). The variations are still negligible, though, and are not likely to be statistically significant. Almost equal ratings for males (mean = 3.51, SD = 0.87) and females (mean = 3.48, SD = 0.88) indicate agreement on institutional support for enhancing English proficiency. Although there are some little differences between the sexes in terms of extracurricular activity involvement and English proficiency, the general trend points to similarities.

In summary, the findings show that male and female non-English major students do not significantly differ in their views on the value of English proficiency for employability and its many facets.

Following the result for RQ2, it is revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between genders in their perceptions of the importance of English proficiency skills for employability, according to the results of the t-test, which show that none of the analysed items had a significant p-value ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the research question, "Is there a difference between genders in the non-English major students' perceptions towards the importance of English proficiency skills in enhancing employability?" can be answered as there is no significant difference between genders in the importance of English proficiency for employability. According to Idkhan et al. (2021), stating that having an English proficiency skill is for everyone and just those who major in English only. This statement strengthens the fact that neither female nor male will be less proficient in English. For example, Ting et al. (2017) discovered that employers in Malaysia view communication skills and English proficiency as distinct but equally important attributes for graduates joining the private sector.

Perceptions of Non-English Major Students on English Proficiency's Role in Employability Across Ethnic Groups

To investigate how different ethnic groups (i.e., Malay, Indian, Chinese, and Others) view English proficiency and its significance for employment, a one-way ANOVA study was performed. The Bonferroni test was used for post-hoc comparisons to find significant group differences. Chinese and other ethnic groups gave a considerably higher rating to the statement of "I believe that English proficiency is important for securing a job," than did Malay respondents ($p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.001$, respectively). Similar to this, both Chinese and other ethnic groups demonstrated considerably higher agreement with the statement of "I believe that being proficient in English can improve my job performance," than did Malay respondents ($p = 0.014$ and $p = 0.004$, respectively). Ethnic groups did not, however, significantly differ in their assessments of whether English language proficiency such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, is most crucial for employment. In comparison to Malay respondents, Chinese and other ethnic groups consistently view English ability as more important and use it more frequently in a variety of circumstances. This implies that attitudes and the usage of English proficiency to improve employability may be influenced by cultural and environmental factors. According to Al Asefer and Zainal Abidin (2021), the environment does play an important role in influencing the usage of language in daily lives. For instance, there are Asians that cannot speak their mother tongue as they have migrated to different countries. However, there are also people who manage to speak well using their mother tongue even though they are in different countries.

According to the findings of the one-way ANOVA, ethnic groupings have a substantial impact on how important English proficiency is in improving employability for students who do not major in the language. Significant disparities were found between Malay and Chinese students, as well as between Malay and other ethnic groups, regarding the statement, "I believe that English proficiency is important for securing a job" ($p < 0.001$). Similar findings were made with the statement, "I believe that being proficient in English can improve my job performance," where Malay students perceived it to have less of an influence than the other groups ($p = 0.014$ for Malay vs. Chinese; $p = 0.004$ for Malay vs. Other). Significant differences were seen in all comparisons when asked about the use of English in academic studies, but especially between Malay and other groups ($p < 0.001$ for Malay vs. Indian and Malay vs. Other; $p = 0.034$ for Malay vs. Chinese). The use of English in everyday situations outside of school showed similar trends, with notable distinctions between Malay and Chinese pupils ($p = 0.025$) and Malay and other ethnic groups ($p = 0.011$).

To support this, research by Husin (2021) stated that since the majority of Malaysian people are Malays, they agreed with the community that using Malay in every conversation is much more understandable and more universal compared to Mandarin and Tamil. Additionally, Chinese students evaluated their English competence higher than Malay students did for the statement, "I think that my current level of English proficiency is sufficient for the job market" ($p = 0.004$). The results show that ethnic groupings have a substantial impact on how non-English major students perceive their level of English ability. As supported by Foncesca (2023), different ethnicities have different usage of language in their daily lives.

Relating to Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) explained in the previous section, the findings of this study further solidify socio-cultural environment as a determinant in shaping how different ethnics validate the need of English proficiency concerning their marketability (Zaliha Idris et al., 2025).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data that has been collected throughout this study, there are few recommendations that can be done to achieve more detailed answers. For instance, the number of participants in the questionnaire can be widely exposed to many different non-English major students instead of just focusing on certain courses only. Therefore, in the future research, an improvement should be made in the questionnaire aspects as the questionnaire did not really cover all the impacts and the causes to the perception made by the respondents in the questionnaire. For example, future studies could incorporate interviews or focus groups to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind the students' perceptions, as qualitative data can provide deeper insights (Lim & Tan, 2022). Additionally, to investigate the long-term impact of English proficiency on career success, a longitudinal study following students from graduation to their first few years in the workforce is recommended (Teng & Wong, 2019).

Implications

The study impacts both educational and research policy. As ethnicity has significant impact in the perceptions of English proficiency requirement in marketability while gender was not, the study sheds light on this perception that it is not universal, but is rather shaped by socio-cultural factors. The same was revealed by research published by Foncesca (2023). This revelation may further extend research in the area of cultural and environmental contexts that may influence how students perceive the need to master English language in securing a job. Moreover, educational institutions should take the findings into consideration in designing the curriculums of programs in universities, progressing away from the approach of one-size-fits-all. For instance, to improve students' English proficiency, specific interventions can be implemented to address the lower perceived importance among certain ethnic groups (Nordin & Hamzah, 2021). Essentially, a more holistic approach that considers diverse backgrounds of students is needed to prepare them for the competitive global job market.

CONCLUSION

The study finds that non-English major students in Malaysia are generally aware of the importance of English proficiency for employability, which addresses the first research question. It is worthy to note that the perceptions do not differ among different genders, which infer that English skills are important for all students and not just those who are majoring in the language (Idkhan et al., 2021). However, significant differences exist when different ethnic groups are examined. Chinese and other ethnic groups put a higher value on English in promoting marketability compared to the Malay participants, which shows that regardless of the awareness, socio-cultural factors such as ethnicity might also impact these perceptions (Foncesca, 2023).

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