

The Role of English Exit Tests in Employment Decisions: An Employer Perspective Study

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ABSTRACT

English proficiency is widely recognised as a critical asset for enhancing graduate employability in a globalised job market. To ensure graduates meet these linguistic expectations, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) utilises the English Exit Test (EET) as a mandatory graduation prerequisite. However, uncertainty remains regarding the extent to which corporate recruiters value and utilise these test results in actual hiring processes. This study investigates potential employers' perspectives on the importance of the EET for graduate employability. A pilot survey was undertaken with a purposive sample of 36 industry participants involved in a range of sectors, including business, finance and education, using a quantitative survey design. The data were obtained online through a 5-point Likert-type scale questionnaire consisting of 20 questions under four main factor components, namely importance, certificate perception, hiring decision, and policy. The strategic value of the EET was strongly supported by the employer consensus, as shown by descriptive analysis. Employers strongly believe that the EET is a valid instrument for assessing task performance and shortlisting candidates for interviews or international assignments. In addition, there was a broad consensus among stakeholders on the need to keep the EET as a compulsory university policy. In contrast, employers do not extensively use the EET scores for their own organizational decisions, such as promotion or salary increase. The implications are that although the normal trend for universities should be to continue adopting the standardisation of language requirements, they have to continuously reorient teaching and learning towards authentic communicative competence in the workplace.

Keywords: English Exit Test (EET), Graduate Employability, Graduate Attributes, Communication

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

English proficiency is a critical asset for employability in today's globalised job market. Employers from multinational corporations to local businesses expanding their reach have increasingly recognised that strong English communication skills enhance productivity, collaboration, and professional growth. An investigation by the Cambridge English research team (2016) has revealed that English plays an essential role in the world of business. Improved English skills contribute to better career opportunities and many companies value candidates who have good English skills, particularly in multinational industries. Putra et al. (2023) conducted another study that found that employees who have a high level of English language proficiency have more development opportunities in the world of work. The impact on employment is also evident in the recent study by Suhaili et al. (2025), which revealed that graduates with enhanced English communication skills exhibited higher employability and were more likely to hold leadership positions. Therefore, English fluency allows employees to engage confidently, adapt to diverse work environments, and access broader career opportunities. This viewpoint highlights that proficiency in English is more than just a skill – it is an essential key to thriving in the modern workplace.

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) implements English Exit Tests (EETs) to ensure graduates meet minimum English standards. Minimum English standards for graduates vary by institution and country, but they provide students with the necessary language proficiency to succeed in academic and professional settings. There are significant implications for students by having English proficiency standards, as these standards help to enhance employability and provide opportunities for global opportunities. The Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) has developed a document on Programme Standards: Language, which outlines minimum English proficiency requirements for graduates (MQA, 2020). Therefore, all universities must adhere to this programme standard to ensure their graduates can achieve the target standard outlined by the faculty.

EETs are usually conducted by UiTM for final-year students before graduation. These tests are crucial for the undergraduates to ensure they meet a minimum standard of English proficiency before entering the workforce. The tests are often modelled after standardised English tests like the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), and the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT). However, the existence of EETs is unknown to most employers. Therefore, this study investigates employers' perspectives on the importance of the English Exit Test for employability. This could help improve the quality of preparing the test in line with the current workplace expectations.

Statement of Problem

Higher education institutions design standardised assessments like the English Exit Test (EET) to prepare graduates for the professional sphere, ensuring their language proficiency aligns directly with labour market demands. In a synergistic recruitment ecosystem, these credentials serve as transparent, reliable benchmarks for employers to verify a candidate's readiness for the workplace. Strong English proficiency acts as a critical mechanism for reducing youth unemployment risks (Gan et al., 2024), where university curricula and industry expectations operate in tandem to foster job-ready graduates who possess both formal grammar structures and high communicative confidence (British Council Malaysia, as cited in New Straits Times, 2022).

A stark mismatch persists between the academic competencies tested by universities and the practical communication skills required in the workplace. While university assessments heavily emphasise academic writing, structured reading comprehension, and formal listening tasks, they fail to account for spontaneous interpersonal communication, workplace negotiation, and practical report writing. Ganapathy and Kaur (2019) emphasise that possessing an English certificate does not convince employers that a graduate can communicate effectively in professional settings, as industries consistently prioritise soft skills and job-specific communication over standardised test scores. Thus, formal qualifications do not inherently translate to job readiness (Khazanah Research Institute, 2023). Instead of relying on test scores, employers heavily favour actual performance during recruitment; for instance, Ne'matullah et al. (2023) found that over 80% of hiring managers prioritise candidates who speak English well during interviews, frequently bypassing test scores in favour of behavioural or task-based assessments.

The consequence of this misalignment is widespread uncertainty regarding the transparency, relevance, and weight of EET results within actual hiring frameworks. Because exit exams are viewed as merely symbolic indicators of academic discipline rather than true signifiers of employability, graduates face severe barriers to job placement. Despite possessing foundational passive and active language skills, a persistent lack of communicative confidence and clarity continues to hinder graduate employment rates (British Council Malaysia, as cited in New Straits Times, 2022). This disconnect ultimately forces organisations to undervalue or entirely discard university-mandated test scores during recruitment, rendering these institutional assessments underutilised and economically inefficient.

Despite these pressing concerns, a significant research gap remains; there is an absence of empirical data exploring how the corporate sector evaluates and utilises the EET in recruitment decisions. While literature establishes that a general mismatch exists, little is known about how hiring managers actively perceive this credential when making hiring decisions and navigating corporate policy. Consequently, this study is vital to bridge this empirical gap. By explicitly evaluating the perceptions of potential employers toward the EET, this

research provides the necessary data to realign higher education curricula with contemporary industry expectations, ensuring university exit exams serve as true indicators of professional employability.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is conducted to investigate employers' perspectives on the English Exit Test (EET). Specifically, this study was conducted to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What is the perception of potential employees toward the importance of EET?

RQ2: What is the perception of potential employees toward EET certificates?

RQ3: What is the perception of potential employers regarding EET and its impact on hiring decisions?

RQ4: What is the perception of potential employers toward EET policies?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Employability

In most research on the theory of employability, two common theories are cited by scholars: the USEM Model of employability by Knight and York (2004) and the CareerEDGE Model by Pool and Sewell (2007). One of the models, the USEM model, suggests that employability consists not only of a set of technical skills but also of a complex interaction among four interrelated components: understanding, skilled practices, efficacious beliefs, and metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2004). Looking into the social interaction and English proficiency connection, this theory highlights skilled practices that act as the enactment of subject understanding. In the contemporary professional context, English proficiency serves as the main medium through which these “skilled practices” are demonstrated (Tomlinson, 2017). Consequently, inadequate communicative competence significantly hampers one’s ability to engage in the social interactions required for collaborative work, negotiation and leadership, which diminishes the visibility and effectiveness of their technical skills in a globalised market (Succi & Canovi, 2020.)

Pool and Sewell (2007) developed a model, CareerEDGE that offers a comprehensive framework for understanding employability that emphasises “skills” and “emotional intelligence” over purely academic attainment. It posits that employability is a developmental process that consists of five interrelated elements: experience, degree, subject knowledge, skills (focus on communication and interpersonal), emotional intelligence, and reflection. In the context of social interaction and English proficiency, this model is highly pertinent. This is because it categorises communication and interpersonal skills as the main drivers of professional success. The authors argue that these skills are prerequisites for transitioning students to functioning professionals. This is supported by Succi and Canovi (2020), who stated that communication skills and the ability to influence others are key predictors of career progression. In addition, Tomlinson (2017) pointed out that contemporary employers highlight interpersonal competencies and adaptability, identifying employability as the ability to navigate dynamic labour markets through social and communication skills.

The integration of these models displays how internal attributes accelerate external professional performance. CareerEDGE outlines the vital components of the employability journey, and the USEM model deepens this understanding by focusing on how graduates internalise their discipline, apply skills reflectively, and develop the self-efficacy required to navigate professional environments. Specifically, the “efficacy beliefs” and “metacognition” components of USEM offer the internal toolkit for the “reflection” and “emotional intelligence” components of CareerEDGE, allowing graduates to monitor and vary their social and communicative acts effectively. Together, these frameworks offer a holistic perspective: CareerEDGE acts as the external roadmap for career readiness, while USEM provides the internal cognitive and reflective toolkit required to maintain long-term career success in a dynamic global workforce.

Importance of English Proficiency for Graduands

The ability to communicate in English is a key determinant of a university graduate's successful entry into a global workplace and is thus an important gatekeeper. The ability to use the English language is generally accepted as a manifestation of the graduate's professional and socio-economic capital and has a profound influence on a graduate's ability to access employment opportunities, to perform during job or career interviews, and to progress their careers. Nesaratnam et al. (2020), and Singaravela and Paramasivam (2016) pointed out that English and communication skills were very important for a graduate to get a job in any position and in any field. Ismail (2011) conducted a study of 3,025 graduates in Malaysia who had taken a proficiency test in English communication, and the results from this research indicated that having a high level of proficiency in English communication is a contributing factor to the higher employability of graduates. In the Malaysian labour market, the main problem is not really a language barrier, but a lack of language proficiency; in this case, English. Almost all Malaysian graduates can speak and comprehend basic English as it has been taught since primary school, but there is a huge number of job seekers who have difficulty communicating in the corporate world (Nesaratnam et al., 2020).

There is recent empirical literature available through RSIS International, which reveals that limited English proficiency (LEP) is a structural barrier to entry for graduands (Maksan & Mohd Sukri, 2025). The data shows that, even if academic performance is high, inadequate language skills can cause significant problems in the interview process and narrow access to international labour markets in a multinational context. It was reported that there is a huge mismatch between having a high level of technical competence and the inability to use rhetoric by the graduates (Amin & Bakar, 2022). Citing long-standing workforce dynamics, they argue that deficiencies in English competency directly bottleneck a graduate's ability to secure immediate, gainful employment. Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman emphasised that strong English proficiency is critical not just for day-to-day communication, but also for employability, career progression and Malaysia's competitiveness in international markets ('Employers want English-ready graduates', 2025). He added that whilst many of the Malaysian university graduates can converse with others in English in the social domain, they struggle to do so in the professional domain.

Ahamed (2026) looks at the role of language in the changing global market. The study ends by highlighting that despite the quick pace of technological and workplace change, knowledge of English is not easily replaceable, for non-native speakers, as a means of connecting with peers in the workplace, moving across the globe, or securing higher wages. The results from surveys of workplace tracking reveal a clear evaluation division when evaluating linguistic tasks. Surprisingly, the top performers in the industry differ in their evaluation of these tasks. Written communication is a key non-negotiable competency for documentation, corporate reporting, and internal alignment, as evidenced in over 82% of national employers' written requirements for large-scale corporate data gathered by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2018). A clear distinction exists between the requirements for compliance and those for career advancement. Written skills establish the baseline for compliance, whereas oral presentation skills drive promotion potential. Public speakers were noted as a key asset when it comes to moving up the corporate ladder, as up to 84% of all corporate communication takes place in real-time oral form, such as in persuading clients, briefing sessions, or live problem-solving.

Past Studies

The impact of students' linguistic ability, academic attainment, and future employment options has been studied in the field of English education. Mohamad et al. (2020) evaluated the construct validity of the English Exit Test (EET) relative to students' final grades at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Their analysis utilised a comprehensive dataset comprising all students across various academic programmes who completed the assessment cycle between 2016 and 2017. The results of their analysis indicated that he or she tended to have a stronger (higher) CGPA with a higher score on the EET. They believe the EET is a useful tool to differentiate between students who are fluent in English and those with average proficiency. This is especially important as employers understand they may be unable to hire good candidates despite their high grades if they lack good speaking skills.

Hiew et al. (2021) conducted another investigation on science graduates from another public university in Malaysia to find out beyond their academic grades for employment. They compared a batch of 3,918 students who graduated from seven years (2015-2017) to discover whether there is any relationship between the employment status and the grade of English of the students in university or their MUET scores. The results were unexpected as they showed that being good at English is no guarantee of employment. Rather, working and non-working graduates found that their overall level of English was very similar and that most graduates were in the middle to upper middle band. In addition to language tests, the study suggests that the university and corporate world must work together to design language programmes that include full-package preparation for careers.

Likewise, Jawing and Kamlun (2022) researched the impact of language skills on the graduates of a Social Science degree. Then, using data gathered from the university on a sample of 7,025 people from the three years of 2015, 2016, and 2017, the relationship between language scores and employment status was examined. The data showed that the unemployment rate was variable during the three years and reached its highest level in 2016. Although English was found to be strongly related to employment outcomes, it focused largely on a huge disconnect between what employers were expecting from graduates' English skills and what graduates found themselves lacking. The study suggests that the university language assessment should be changed considering the current industry on the communication skills of graduates. The authors suggest an academic-industry network to remedy this situation and boost employers' confidence in exit test scores.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Figure 2.1 Employers' perspective on the English Exit Test

Figure 2.1 presents the conceptual framework underpinning this study. The framework is grounded in the Theory of Employability, specifically the USEM Model (Knight & Yorke, 2004) and the CareerEDGE Model (Pool & Sewell, 2007). These theories posit that employability extends beyond academic knowledge to include

communication competence, practical skills, self-efficacy, and workplace readiness. Within this context, English language proficiency is recognised as a fundamental competency that enhances graduates' employability and career prospects.

Based on these theoretical foundations, the English Exit Test (EET) is positioned as the central construct of the study, serving as an assessment of graduates' English language proficiency before entering the workforce. The framework proposes that employers' perspectives on the EET can be understood through four interrelated dimensions. The first dimension examines the importance of English proficiency, focusing on employers' views regarding the significance of English communication skills in evaluating job applicants and determining workplace readiness. The second dimension investigates employers' perceptions of EET certificates, particularly whether the certificates are viewed as credible indicators of graduates' English language competence and professional communication abilities. The third dimension explores the influence of the EET on hiring decisions, including its perceived role in recruitment, interview selection, promotion opportunities, salary considerations, and international assignments. The fourth dimension examines policy perception, which refers to employers' views on implementing the EET as a university graduation requirement and its effectiveness in preparing graduates to meet workplace communication demands.

Together, these four dimensions contribute to an overall understanding of employers' perspectives on the role of the EET in enhancing graduate employability. The framework also serves as the basis for the development of the research instrument and guides the analysis of employers' perceptions regarding the relevance of the EET in employment contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This pilot study was conducted to test the instrument prepared to investigate future employers regarding EET. A purposive sample of 36 participants responded to the survey. Data were collected online via a Google Form. The instrument used is a 5-point Likert-scale survey. The scales (table 1) used are strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.

Table 1 – Likert Scale

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

Data collection was facilitated via a 5-point Likert-scale survey divided into five distinct sections. Section A captures the respondents' demographic profiles across four items. The remaining sections evaluate specific thematic constructs: Section B comprises four items regarding the importance of the EET to potential employers, Section C utilises five items to gauge perceptions of the EET, and Sections D and E consist of five items each, addressing hiring decisions and policy considerations, respectively.

Table 2: Distribution of Items in the Survey: Perception of EET

Section	Category	No. Of Items	Cronbach Alpha
B	Importance To Potential Employers	5	.811
C	Perception On English Exit Test Certificates	5	.821
D	Eet And Hiring Decisions	5	.827
E	Policy	5	.880
	Total Items	20	.926

Table 2 also shows the reliability of the survey. To ensure the internal consistency of the research instrument, a reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha. As shown in Table 2, the alpha coefficients for the individual dimensions are 0.811 for Section B (Importance to Potential Employers), 0.821 for Section C

(Perception of English Exit Test Certificates), 0.827 for Section D (EET and Hiring Decisions), and 0.880 for Section E (Policy). The overall Cronbach's alpha for all 20 items is 0.926, indicating excellent instrument reliability and strong internal consistency across the survey items.

Quantitative data tracking and descriptive statistical analyses were subsequently executed using SPSS to address the primary research questions. In evaluating the dataset, the mean (*M*) is utilised to represent the central tendency or average of the scores. Concurrently, the standard deviation (*SD*) is employed to measure the variability and spread of individual observations around the mean. A lower standard deviation indicates that the respondents' answers are closely clustered around the mean, reflecting a stronger consensus, whereas a higher standard deviation signals greater dispersion and variance in employer opinions.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

According to Ziegefuss et al. (2021), researchers report demographic data in percentages to establish sample representativeness and allow for generalisability to a larger population. The report also provides an overview of participants' characteristics. Percentages offer a clear and understandable picture of the sample makeup.

Table 3 – Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	39%
		Female	61%
2	Industry Sector	Education	18%
		Business & Finance	30%
		Healthcare	3%
		Engineering & Public	11%
		Hospitality & Tourism	18%
		Government & Public Services	10%
3	Job Position	Employer/Recruiter	17%
		Hiring Manager	13%
		HR Personnel	10%
		Supervisor/Team Leader	60%
4	Years of Hiring Experience	Less than 1 year	16%
		1-3 years	11%
		4-6 years	18%
		7-10 years	5%
		More than 10 years	50%

The demographic characteristics of the 36 respondents are detailed in Table 3. The sample was predominantly female (61%), with males accounting for the remaining 39%. In terms of industry distribution, the business and finance sector accounted for the largest segment (30%), followed by education and hospitality/tourism at 18% each. Engineering and public services accounted for 10%, while the health sector had the lowest representation at 3%. Regarding job hierarchy, a substantial majority held roles as supervisors or team leaders (60%), with smaller proportions identifying as employers/recruiters (17%), hiring managers (13%), and HR personnel (10%). Notably, the sample possessed a significant talent acquisition background; half of the respondents (50%) reported over 10 years of hiring experience. The remaining cohort was distributed across 4 to 6 years (18%), less than one year (16%), 1 to 3 years (11%), and 7 to 10 years (5%) of experience.

Perception on The Importance of English Proficiency

This section presents data to answer research question 1: What is the perception of potential employees toward the importance of EET?

Table 4 – Mean for importance to potential employers

ITEM	Mean	SD
HDQ1 Passing an English exit test is a significant factor when evaluating job applicants, as it provides employers with a standardised measure of their language proficiency.	4.42	0.77
HDQ2b) The English Exit Test plays a crucial role in determining an applicant's ability to perform job-related tasks, especially in roles that require effective communication, comprehension, and writing skills.	4.44	0.61
HDQ3c) The English exit test serves as a valuable tool for differentiating candidates with similar qualifications by offering an objective assessment of their language competency.	4.25	0.73
HDQ4d) The English Exit Test certification is essential for positions that require English communication, as it assures employers that candidates possess the necessary language skills to interact professionally and effectively.	4.47	0.65
HDQ5e) The English Exit Test is an important measure for assessing an applicant's general readiness for the workplace.	3.86	1.05

Table 4 outlines the descriptive statistics regarding potential employers' perspectives on the overall importance of the English Exit Test (EET). The data reveal a strong consensus among industry respondents that the EET is a vital tool for evaluating language capabilities, with item HDQ4 achieving the highest mean score ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.65$), indicating that employers view the certification as essential for communication-dependent roles. This is closely followed by item HDQ2b ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.61$), demonstrating that employers strongly believe the test reflects an applicant's capacity to execute language-intensive tasks in the workplace. Additionally, respondents agreed that the EET serves as a highly effective standardized metric for general application screening (HDQ1: $M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.77$) and functions well as an objective tiebreaker to differentiate between otherwise similarly qualified candidates (HDQ3c: $M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.73$). Conversely, item HDQ5e recorded the lowest level of agreement ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.05$), highlighting that while employers trust the EET as a specific measure of linguistic and communicative competency, they are slightly more cautious about using it as a broad indicator of a graduate's overall workplace readiness.

Perception Toward EET Certificates

This section presents data to answer research question 2: What is the perception of potential employees toward EET certificates?

Table 5- Mean for Perception on English Exit Test certificates

ITEM	Mean	SD
TCQ1 English Exit Test certificates accurately reflect an applicant's actual English proficiency.	3.78	1.05
TCQ2 English exit test certificates indicate that an applicant has strong workplace communication skills.	3.56	1.03
TCQ3 English exit test certificates are a useful indicator of an applicant's diligence and work ethic.	3.14	1.13
TCQ4 employers should give higher preference to applicants with English exit test certificates.	3.69	0.98
TCQ5 English Exit Test certificates provide a competitive advantage in hiring decisions.	4.0	0.93

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics on respondents' perceptions of the overall validity and utility of the English Exit Test (EET) certificate. Overall, the findings indicate a general positive consensus regarding the strategic relevance of the certification within recruitment processes. The respondents also agreed that EET certification gives a competitive edge to the candidates for employment in hiring decisions, as per the highest mean score in this item ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.93$). Employers were also confident in the high levels of diagnostic accuracy that the assessment possesses, and that the certificate is reflective of candidates' real levels of English (Item TCQ1: $M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.05$), and that certified candidates would be given preferential treatment when

being chosen for a position (Item TCQ4: $M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.98$). Additionally, respondents moderately agreed that EET certification is an indicator of a person's level of workplace communication competence (Item TCQ2: $M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.03$). However, the lowest mean score was for the item TCQ3 ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.13$), which had a more neutral interpretation of the certificate as a representation of other traits accepted by the individual as part of personal identity.

Perception of Hiring Decision

This section presents data to answer research question 3: What is the perception of potential employers regarding EET and its impact on hiring decisions?

Table 6: Mean for EET and hiring decisions

ITEM	Mean	SD
EDQ1 English Exit Test certificates influence hiring decisions in my company.	3.31	0.94
EDQ2 English Exit Test certificates improve an applicant's chances of being selected for an interview.	3.75	0.94
EDQ3 English Exit Test certificates impact promotion opportunities within my company.	3.25	1.02
EDQ4 English Exit Test certificates impact salary decisions in my company.	2.75	1.18
EDQ5 English Exit Test certificates impact opportunities for international assignments or roles.	4.31	1.00

As seen in Table 6, the findings indicate differences in attitudes towards the value of EET certification, depending on administrative outcomes. The highest level of agreement was found for item EDQ5 ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.00$). The responses were also relatively high on the importance of the recruitment screening process, suggesting that EET-certified candidates are more likely to be shortlisted for interview (Item EDQ2: $M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.94$). More moderate perceptions were for the effect of the test on internal organizational decisions. Item EDQ1 had an average score of $M = 3.31$ ($SD = 0.94$) and Item EDQ3 had an average score of $M = 3.25$ ($SD = 1.02$), indicating reasonable agreement in both areas. Last, the EET had the lowest mean score, suggesting that employers' general perception of the direct influence of the EET is not high on this aspect of their hiring or career progression decisions.

Perception of EET Policy

This section presents data to answer research question 4: What is the perception of potential employers toward EET policies?

Table 7 – Mean for POLICY

ITEM	Mean	SD
PQ1 I support the policy that university graduates should be required to pass an English Exit Test before graduation.	4.28	0.78
PQ2 The English Exit Test policy improves the overall employability of graduates.	4.19	0.92
PQ3 The English Exit Test policy ensures that graduates meet workplace English proficiency standards.	4.28	0.75
PQ4 The English Exit Test policy should be applied equally to all fields of study.	3.81	1.12
PQ5 The English Exit Test policy effectively prepares graduates for workplace communication demands.	4.31	0.86

Table 7 presents descriptive statistics capturing respondents' perceptions of the institutional mandates and broader implications of the English Exit Test (EET) policy. Data showed that the consensus on the integration of EET in Higher education institutional structures to improve the readiness of the workforce was more positive. The mean scores of the employers were highest for Item PQ5 (4.31, $SD = 0.86$), that is, the employers believed that EET policy effectively prepares graduates to meet the communication demands of the workplace. This is supported by other strong agreement responses on items PQ1 and PQ3 ($M = 4.28$ for both), showing strong

support from stakeholders to make it a graduation requirement for students and indicating that the test is an effective measure of meeting professional language standards for graduates ($SD = 0.78$ and 0.75 , respectively). Likewise, respondents greatly appreciated the policy's overall macroeconomic usefulness, with an overall agreement that the policy has a positive impact on improving the overall employability of entering graduates ($M=4.19$, $SD=0.92$, Item PQ2). On the other hand, the lowest level of agreement was on item PQ4 ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.12$).

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The findings indicate that employers regard the English Exit Test (EET) as a valuable and standardised measure for assessing applicants' English language proficiency, particularly for communication-intensive roles. They viewed the EET as an effective indicator of candidates' ability to perform professional communication tasks and considered it a useful criterion for distinguishing between applicants with comparable academic qualifications. Despite these positive perceptions, employers were less convinced that the EET alone provides a comprehensive indication of graduates' overall workplace readiness. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of English proficiency in enhancing graduate employability. The Cambridge English Research Team (2016), Putra et al. (2023), and Suhaili et al. (2025) similarly reported that strong English communication skills are essential for effective workplace performance, organisational productivity, and career advancement in an increasingly globalised labour market. The comparatively lower level of agreement regarding the EET as a measure of overall workplace readiness also reflects concerns identified in earlier research. Ganapathy and Kaur (2019) and Hashim and Mahalingam (2019) argued that although standardised language assessments provide valuable evidence of linguistic competence, they do not fully capture the broader communicative, interpersonal, and adaptive skills required in professional settings. Consequently, a gap may remain between formal language test performance and graduates' ability to apply these competencies effectively in authentic workplace contexts.

The findings demonstrate that employers generally hold favourable perceptions of the strategic value and credibility of English Exit Test (EET) certificates. Respondents agreed that possessing an EET certificate provides applicants with a competitive advantage in the recruitment process and serves as a credible indicator of English-language proficiency. Employers also expressed moderate confidence in the certificate as evidence of workplace communication competence and supported giving preferential consideration to candidates who possess EET certification. However, respondents were less convinced that the certificate reflects broader personal attributes, such as diligence and work ethic, suggesting that these qualities are perceived to extend beyond what a standardised language assessment can measure. The findings are also consistent with those of Mohamad et al. (2020), whose study at UiTM demonstrated the predictive validity of the EET in distinguishing graduates with high levels of English proficiency from those with average language competence. Their findings further suggest that EET results can function as a useful screening mechanism for employers by providing an objective measure of applicants' language proficiency during the initial stages of the recruitment process.

The findings indicate that the perceived influence of the English Exit Test (EET) varies across different employment-related decisions. Employers viewed EET certification as particularly valuable in enhancing graduates' opportunities for international assignments and global career roles, suggesting that English language proficiency is regarded as a key requirement in internationally orientated work environments. Respondents also recognised the EET as an effective screening tool that increases applicants' likelihood of being shortlisted for interviews. In contrast, the certification was perceived to have only a moderate influence on general hiring decisions and internal promotion opportunities, while its role in determining salary progression was considered relatively limited. The limited influence of the EET on salary progression and promotion decisions also aligns with the findings of Hiew et al. (2021) and Jawing and Kamlun (2022). Their longitudinal studies demonstrated that language certification alone does not guarantee sustained career advancement or improved employment outcomes. Rather, long-term professional success depends on a broader combination of workplace communication competence, adaptability, interpersonal abilities, and other employability-related skills that extend beyond formal language qualifications.

The findings reveal strong employer support for the institutional implementation of the English Exit Test (EET) as a graduation requirement. Respondents agreed that requiring university graduates to pass the EET before graduation effectively prepares them to meet workplace communication demands and ensures that graduates attain the English language proficiency standards expected in professional settings. Employers also perceived the policy as an important mechanism for enhancing graduate employability and strengthening workforce readiness. However, support was comparatively lower for applying the EET policy uniformly across all academic disciplines, indicating that employers recognise differences in language proficiency requirements across professional fields. These findings are consistent with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA, 2020) Programme Standards for Language, which advocate the establishment of minimum English proficiency standards to ensure graduates possess the communication competencies required for higher education and employment. The results also support the views of the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF, 2025), which emphasises that university-level English proficiency requirements play an important role in addressing workplace communication challenges and enhancing graduates' competitiveness in an increasingly global labour market. Collectively, these findings suggest that employers regard the EET not only as an assessment of language proficiency but also as a strategic institutional initiative that contributes to producing graduates who are better prepared to meet evolving workforce expectations.

Overall, the study reveals a highly favourable and robust consensus among employers regarding the strategic value of the English Exit Test (EET) in the graduate labour market. Employers strongly view the EET as a critical, standardised instrument for evaluating job-related task performance and professional communication skills, recognising that an EET certificate provides graduates with a distinct competitive advantage, particularly when shortlisting candidates for interviews and evaluating their readiness for international assignments. This institutional trust translates into widespread, enthusiastic stakeholder support for the university's policy, making the EET a mandatory graduation prerequisite to improve overall graduate employability and ensure compliance with workplace language demands. However, the findings also highlight minor employer reservations; while the EET is highly trusted as a valid indicator of real-world corporate communication competence, it is not directly relied upon for internal organisational decisions such as salary progression or promotions, nor is it viewed as a definitive proxy for broader personal attributes like diligence or general workplace readiness.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study offer vital insights for higher education institutions, particularly regarding the necessary alignment of university curricula with actual corporate expectations. Given that employers highly value the English Exit Test (EET) for interview shortlisting and international roles but remain cautious about its ability to predict general workplace readiness, universities must evolve their language programmes beyond traditional, text-based academic assessments. Language training should pivot toward immersive, task-based communication that mirrors modern corporate environments. This includes incorporating structured oral presentations, business negotiations, real-time client persuasion, and workplace reporting directly into the syllabus. By reshaping university assessments to focus heavily on communicative adaptability, contextual fluency, and spontaneous spoken interaction, educators can bridge the persistent gap between theoretical test certification and active on-the-job execution. This transformation ensures that graduates possess the elite soft skills and practical linguistic capital needed to transition seamlessly from academic success to immediate professional utility.

While this pilot study provides a strong foundational understanding based on a purposive sample of 36 industry respondents, several pathways emerge for future investigation. First, future researchers should expand the sample size and employ a mixed-methods approach, combining large-scale quantitative surveys with qualitative in-depth interviews to achieve a more representative and comprehensive overview of the national labour market. Second, given that employers expressed varying levels of agreement regarding whether the EET policy should be applied equally to all academic fields, future studies should conduct a comparative analysis across specific sectors, such as contrasting the distinct linguistic expectations of tech-driven engineering or TVET industries with client-facing business and finance sectors. Finally, establishing longitudinal tracking studies is highly recommended to monitor graduates after they are hired. Investigating how initial EET performance correlates with actual long-

term workplace performance, promotions, and global mobility will provide the definitive empirical data needed to continuously refine, realign, and legitimise university exit examinations in the eyes of industry stakeholders.

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