PROSPECTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE EMPLOYEES' ORAL COMMUNICATION PERFORMANCE DURING INTERVIEWS: FINDINGS FROM A WORKPLACE

[1*]MOHD ZULFADLI MAT HUSIN
[2]NOR YAZI KHAMIS

[1*] Academic Management Department, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia.
[2]Centre for Modern Languages, Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al Sultan Abdullah, Malaysia.
Corresponding author: zulfadli.mh@umk.edu.my

Abstract *Most job seekers know the importance of oral communication skills, yet issues concerning unskilled English language performance for employability persist. The plausible cause of the problems is the scarce feedback from workplace assessors. This study aims to identify the relationship between oral communication skills performance and age, gender, and academic achievement traits based on the employers' input. An assessment of 150 shortlisted prospective employees for a public institution administrative position was conducted during job interview oral presentations. A panel of senior administrative staff, served as the assessors, were instructed to rate participants based on a set of rubrics.*
. The scores afford the study with quantitative data for descriptive, inferential and correlation analyses. The candidates generally possessed moderate English language proficiency, reflecting the typical setting of today's employment. Gender showed an insignificant relationship with performance, whilst age and academic achievement indicated a weak correlation with the skills. The findings imply the need to delve deeper into prospective employees' traits that employers can wield as applicants' oral communication skills indicators. In this case, candidates' age (plausibly as an indicator for experience) or academic achievement (educational outcome) do not affirm the applicants' oral communication skills during workplace interviews. A more thorough assessment of applicants' skills or probation period is needed for employers' assurance. Additionally, constructive alignment between what is being taught in oral communication courses and what is required for the workplace may need revisiting from educators, employers, and collaborators alike.

Keywords: Communicative competence, graduate employability, English oral presentation.

INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency in oral communication is essential in the academic and professional arena. Public and private universities offer many language courses to enhance English oral communication skills (Abu Bakar et al., 2019). Over the years, within the academic context, considerable research has been done on English language oral
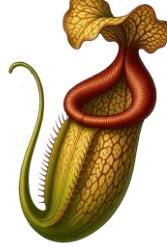
communication in the second language classroom (Abdelmajdid & Radzuan, 2022). Malaysian higher learning institutions, both private and public universities, require not only their academic staff but also the administrative staff to have a good mastery of English language proficiency (Mat Husin & Khamis, 2022). The administrative staff mainly deal with clerical work, management and financial duties involving their internal and external stakeholders, co-workers and students. Nowadays, as part of the Ministry of Higher Education's target to attract more foreign staff and students enrolled in Malaysian universities, the need for administrative staff to have a good command of English is higher than before. Most of the foreign staff and students would use the English language as their primary medium of communication (Jusoh et al., 2018).

An administrative officer is mainly responsible for management in terms of guidelines, statutes, regulations, and laws regulated within a particular university. Several job descriptions of the administrative officer are managing meetings, administrating academic staff and student affairs, preparing reports and documentation related to research and publications, human resources within centres or faculties, and overseeing records management. Looking at these several responsibilities, administrative officers in their daily job need to communicate not only with their superiors, but also with co-workers as well as students. In addition to that, since more foreign staff are recruited and students are enrolled in universities, administrative officers need to have a good level of English language proficiency so that they can communicate effectively.

Studies showed that one determining factor affecting graduates' employability is their ability to communicate fluently using English (Hiew et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2022; Singh & Harun, 2020). Candidates who can speak confidently in English are more likely to be hired regardless of their academic performance (Nesaratnam et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Malaysian graduates still face difficulties performing English oral presentations during job interviews, contributing to their unsuccessful employment. One possible explanation for this issue would be the disparity between what is taught in tertiary institutions and English communication demands and requirements in the workforce sector (Tejan & Sabil, 2019). Reviews by Lin et al. (2021) and Sarfraz et al. (2018) identified a void or misalignment between the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses learnt in the universities and English requirements in the workplace.

Therefore, investigating issues concerning English proficiency among Malaysian graduates can provide valuable insight to educators in redesigning or realigning existing tertiary-level English courses. It can also benefit employers in their job employment or upskilling strategies. This study aims to investigate Malaysian graduates as prospective employees for administrative positions, particularly in their English oral presentations during interview sessions. The investigation was conducted to examine the following research questions:

1. What are the candidates' scores for the oral presentation during the interview sessions?
2. What is the relationship between the candidates' traits – including gender, age, and academic achievement (CGPA) – and their English oral presentation scores during the interview sessions?
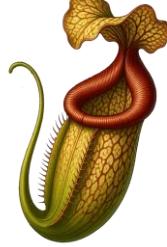
LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative Competence Framework

In relation to gaining employability and acquiring work readiness of graduates, the theory of communicative competence (Hymes, 1964) suitably looks at communication practised within a group of speakers who share common knowledge on discourse practices in a community. Communicative competence essentially views the act of communication as a relative and dynamic, interpersonal construct among individuals with focus on functionality and adequacy of communication, sufficiency of knowledge, judgment, and skills in linguistic competence, operational competence, social competence, and strategic competence (Bhattacharyya, 2018). As human interaction occurs in a diverse speech community, the appropriateness of every grammatically correct utterance is taken into account (Hymes, 1972).

In order for graduates to apply their knowledge and skills in the appropriate context and be deemed communicatively competent, a combination of competencies - such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence – is necessary, based on earlier theoretical concept of communicative competence introduced by Hymes (1964). This theory was supported by the communicative competence model operationalized by Canale and Swain (1980). Experts had critically claimed that Canale and Swain's (1980) model to be one of the most exceptional models that aimed to interpret communicative competence based on Hymes (1964) definition (Bin-Hady, 2016). Figure 1 showed the relationship between elements under communicative competence as well as communicative performance.
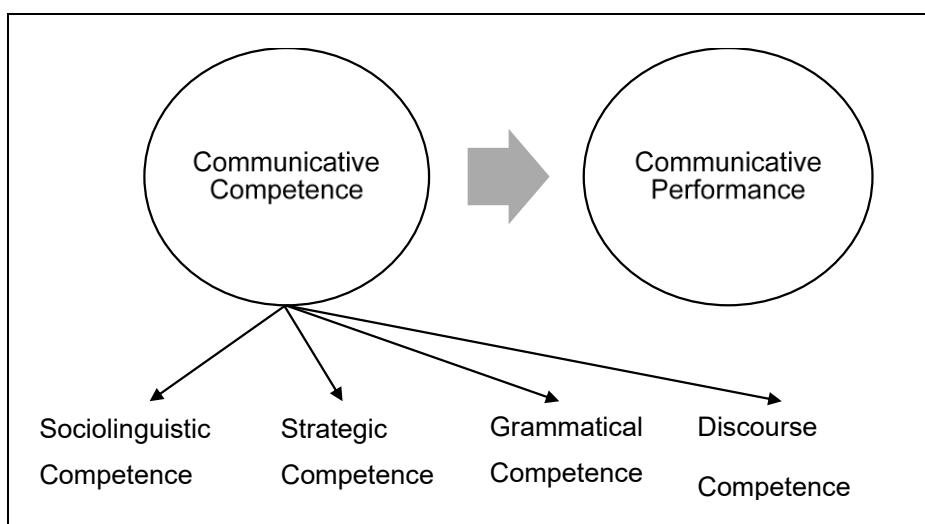

Figure 1
Canale and Swain's (1980) theoretical model (cited in Bin-Hady, 2016)

Employability

Employability is defined as "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (Yorke, 2006, p.8). From this definition, employability comprises several sets of values or attributes. There are two primary employability-related skills: hard and soft (Hiew

et al., 2021). Hard or technical skills are reliable information and capabilities related to a specific discipline (Turner, 2004). Alternatively, soft skills, also known as generic skills, are being optimized extensively in professional and social contexts (Hiew et al., 2021). Language ability, communicative skill, personal potential, critical literacy and critical thinking skills were recognized as soft skills (Koo, 2010). It was perceived that the development of soft skills among graduates, such as communication in higher learning institutions, was not at par with the requirements and demands of those in the workforce sector (Yorke, 2006; Teoh et al., 2023; Suhaili et al., 2025).

Related Studies on Employability
Communication ability, especially in using English, is a crucial attribute or trait for employability (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Omar et al., 2012; Rasul et al., 2013). Employers expect graduates to be able to communicate effectively with internal and external stakeholders of respected organizations (Omar et al., 2012; Wan Irham Ishak et al. 2025). Besides, graduates must be competent in writing and listening as these skills enable them to convey any information within the organization effectively and efficiently (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Rasul et al., 2013). The ability to master a good command of English language is deemed significant for employment as employers have high regard towards those graduates who can demonstrate better language accuracy (Zainuddin et al., 2019). Employers rated English communication skills in spoken and written as the most desired skills among Malaysian graduates (Hamid et al., 2014).

Findings from several studies have shown a strong relationship linking graduate employability with soft skills, especially with language communication skills. A study comparing private and public graduates regarded that graduates' discipline was very significant in employability, followed by accountability and a positive attitude (Azmi et al., 2009). An interesting inference from the study is that graduates from public universities considered communication, organization, problem-solving, decision-making, creative and innovative thinking, and leadership skills essential. Conversely, those from private universities necessitate English language fluency, a third language ability, and analytical skills (Azmi et al., 2009). Moreover, public and private universities focus differently on their curriculum content related to graduate employability (Hiew et al., 2021).

The relationship between language competency and employability is not exclusive to English. The ability to perform in a second language, such as Chinese, also significantly increases graduates' chances of being employed in technical industries (Omar et al., 2012). Teamwork that involves communication is another noteworthy employability characteristic employers seek as they require new employees to work and interact with others (Omar et al., 2012). Graduates who can mingle with team members in exchanging information and knowledge regardless of demographic, social and cultural differences are also prevalent employability attributes (Rasul et al., 2013). In addition, employees are expected to be creative in solving any problem at the workplace (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014) and can express constructive ideas and solutions (Rasul et al., 2013). In terms of personal characteristics, employees who possess positive traits related to work ethics, such as accountability, honesty, commitment and discipline, have higher chances of being hired (Omar et al., 2012; Osman & Rahman, 2019; Rasul et al., 2013).

Despite the expectations of employers from various industries, issues with graduates' skills and knowledge persist and hinder their chances for proper employment. Heang et al. (2019) identified that some fresh Malaysian graduates likewise declared that they were ill-

equipped with technology and technical skills upon working. The study investigated the challenges of 18 accounting graduates working in accounting-related departments after three years of graduation. Those graduates perceived that they lacked hard skills in auditing, taxation and analysis of financial data, which stemmed from their tertiary education, thus hindering them from performing their best in the workplace (Heang et al., 2019). This finding proved the existence of a gap in supply and demand between higher education and industry.

In a study on 425 final-year undergraduate students' self-perceived employability level, the students ranked academic performance lower than teamwork, work and career flexibility, and meticulousness (Ping et al., 2018). Though the students perceived they had the necessary soft skills for employment, they experienced a lack of confidence in hard skills related to academic performance. Correspondingly, a study among 171 engineering students in a Malaysian public university identified that despite the necessary steps taken for employment, i.e., polishing their soft skills, more than half of the students (57.9%) indicated that they were insecure about their academic performance and almost half (49.1%) reported a personal lack of technical skills (Yusof & Jamaluddin, 2015).

Communicative Competence for Employability
Over the years, several studies have been conducted to analyse the importance of competence. Several experts found that language was very significant toward communicative competence in social and professional interactions (Hymes, 1972; Morreale et al., 2007; Wiemann, 1977). In embracing the Industrial Revolution 4.0, employees are expected to be competent in language at the workplace (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Notably, communicative competence is becoming more pertinent for graduates in most parts of the world (Fan et al., 2017); some Malaysian graduates still perform poorly in oral interactions using English (Ting et al., 2017). Zainuddin et al. (2019) concurred that fresh Malaysian graduates who are not competent in English could not be employed. Alias et al. (2013) concluded that Malaysian graduates lacked communicative competence, failing to secure a proper job matching their academic background.

In relation to the current study, the connection between English proficiency among Malaysian graduates during job interviews and the communicative competence framework lies in the recognition that professional language use extends beyond grammatical correctness to encompass contextual, strategic, and interpersonal communication skills. The framework which comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies (Canale & Swain, 1980) had been known to provides a comprehensive basis for assessing how effectively graduates manage their English oral presentations by tailoring their own language to suit interview contexts and audiences. Success in job interviews demands more than linguistic accuracy; it requires the ability to convey ideas persuasively, respond appropriately, and navigate interpersonal dynamics, all of which are central to communicative competence.

Recent studies asserted this association such as Ali et al. (2025) found that English proficiency remains a key determinant of employability, with employers prioritizing communication skills that reflect confidence, clarity, and adaptability over mere grammatical precision. Similarly, Krishnan et al. (2024) who conducted appraisal theory from systemic functional linguistics to analyse interview transcripts of Malaysian graduates, suggested that effective candidates employed evaluative language to express stance and build rapport, underscoring the importance of strategic communication in high-stakes settings. These findings emphasized the communicative competence framework as both an evaluative tool

and a pedagogical guide for enhancing graduates' readiness for Malaysia's multilingual and competitive labor market.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research employed an exploratory research design to investigate English oral performance among graduates during job interviews for administrative positions in a Malaysian university. The aim was to understand how specific communicative components influence interview outcomes and to identify patterns related to English proficiency and employability; thus, it is necessary to collect a broad range of data with participants from diverse backgrounds (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). A purposeful sampling technique was adopted to ensure diversity in participant backgrounds. The sample consisted of 150 graduates who participated in job interview sessions. Consent to use the data was obtained from the Registrar and the Head of the Human Resource Department of a Malaysian public university. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and gave their consent for the use of their data, including academic records and oral presentation scores, which were observed and analyzed for research purposes. This transparency ensured ethical compliance and voluntary participation, aligning with established standards for research inquiry.

Document analysis was employed as the primary qualitative research instrument, allowing for a systematic examination of existing institutional records, including participants' CGPA and oral presentation scores aiming to identify recurring patterns and relationships. This method facilitated an in-depth evaluation of communicative competence within the framework of institutional expectations, thereby revealing potential differences between given language standards and actual learner performance (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003). The choice of document analysis was justified by its modest nature and accessibility to authentic, naturally occurring data sources, which is particularly advantageous in contexts where direct observation or interview recording is limited. As noted by Bowen (2009) and Jansen (2010), this approach supports empirical investigation into English oral communication challenges while offering insights that inform curriculum design, interview readiness, and institutional language policy reform. Furthermore, document analysis proved valuable for capturing institutional expectations and performance benchmarks, aligning with Chand's (2025) claim of its relevance in both educational and workplace research settings.

Two types of data were collected. The first was the nominal data on three traits of the participants: Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) for academic achievement, gender, and age which were extracted and gathered from the participants' application form. The second type consisted of oral presentation scores which were recorded from the participants during job interviews. Each participant was given five minutes to present in English on specific themes ranging from education, environment, social, economy, technology, entertainment, health, and world. Their performance was evaluated across four key components as shown in Table 1: Introduction, language style, delivery, and content. Each criterion was scored on a four-point scale; 1 (below proficient), 2 (approaching proficient), 3 (proficient), and 4 (highly proficient). These elements collectively contribute to the effectiveness of a candidate's oral communication and were used as indicators of performance in the interview sessions.
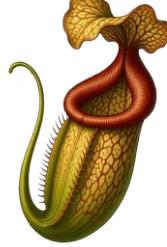
Table 1
English Oral Presentation Rubrics

Introduction	Language Style	Delivery	Content
Salutations, previews, creativity, concise and interesting	Clear and correct pronunciation, grammar usage, tone, and fluency	Body language, eye contact, confidence level, interaction with the audience	Systematic, continuity, concise references

Note: The data were collected in November 2022 and are adapted with permission from the university registrar.

The evaluation was conducted by a panel of ten senior administrative officers from various university departments. The oral presentation score was based on the following components:

1. Introduction: assesses professionalism and rapport building that includes salutation, concise self-introduction, preview of content and clarity of intent.
2. Language style: evaluates formal language use by participants, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, tone and fluency. It also reflects alignment with administrative communication standards.
3. Delivery: measures on the participants' vocal clarity, eye contact, posture, pacing and audience interaction. These collectively indicate confidence and engagement.
4. Content: examines relevance, organization and depth of information which include examples of leadership, administrative knowledge and problem-solving.

The integration of a strong introduction, appropriate language style, confident delivery, and relevant content forms the basis of the overall presentation score. These components reflect both linguistic competence and strategic communication skills, which are essential for success in administrative roles.

The interview was one of the recruitment processes for the position of public administrative officer in the N-scheme. Under the N-scheme within the scope of university, there were several position titles such as the Administrative Officer, Publishing Officer, Dormitory Administrator and Social Research Officer. The interview sessions were conducted on 28 June 2022 and 12 October 2022 via Microsoft Teams platform. The participants' demographic particulars are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Participants' Profiles

Profile	Category	f	Percentage
Gender	Male	44	29.3
	Female	106	70.7
Employment Status	Government	46	30.7
	Private	69	46.0
	Unemployed	35	23.3
Age	20 - 25 years	53	35.3
	26 - 30 years	53	35.3
	31 - 35 years	38	25.3
	36 - 40 years	4	2.7
	41 – 50 years	2	1.3
Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)	First Class (3.67 and above)	17	11.3
	Second Class Upper (3.00 to 3.66)	118	78.7
	Second Class Lower (2.00 to 2.99)	15	10.0

Note: Data collected in December 2022

Majority of the participants in the interview sessions are female (70.7%). From a total of 150 participants, 30.7% were currently working in the public sector where 46.0 % of the private sector, and 23.3% were unemployed. In terms of age, 35.3% of them were in the range of 20 to 25 years old, and another 35.3% were between 26 and 30 years old. For academic performance, the majority of the participants (78.7%) achieved second-class upper (CGPA of 3.00 to 3.66), and 11.3% obtained first-class (CGPA of 3.67 and above).

The data were first recorded in Microsoft Excel and subsequently uploaded into Google Drive for safekeeping. There are four groups for the age variables and three for the CGPA following the institution's academic grading guidelines and rules. The data were then analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 26. This study used descriptive, inferential and correlation analysis. The independent samples t-test was employed to compare the participants' gender and total English proficiency scores. The Spearman's Rho Correlation test was utilised to analyse the relationship between the English proficiency scores and participants' age, gender, and CGPA. The values of Spearman's Rho Correlation of +1 or -1 indicate a strong positive or negative correlation between the variables. The p-value of Spearman's Rho Correlation with less than 0.05 indicates the presence of a relationship between the variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
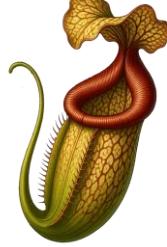
RQ1: What are the candidates' scores for the oral presentation during the interview sessions?

As the percentage of the participants' total scores on oral presentation ranged from 25 to 100, the study necessitated the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) 10-scale grading (i.e., grade 'G' as 'Fail' to grade 'A+' as the 'Highest Distinction'). However, for this study, the scales are reduced to five, as depicted in Table 3 (Malik et al., 2022). Table 3 presents the participants' overall oral presentation performance based on the scale.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics on English Oral Presentation Scores

Grade Scale	f	Percentage
A+ or A (80 to 100)	18	12.0
A - or B+ (65 to 79)	46	30.7
B or C+ (55 to 64)	55	36.7
C (50 to 54)	14	9.3
D (0 to 49)	17	11.3

The participants had a mediocre level of oral communication skills based on the scores during the presentation; with 36.7% of the participants obtained a B or C+, and 30.7% scored an A- or B+. 12.0% achieved the Highest Distinctions, and only 11.3% scored a D and 9.3% with a C.

Table 4 shows the participants' oral presentation according to the four criteria (Introduction, Language Style, Presentation and Content). They scored the highest in Content with a mean score of 3.17, followed by Language Style (3.11) and Introduction (3.10). The participants scored the lowest in the Presentation criterion with a mean score of 2.99.

Table 4
Oral Presentation Scores for Each Criterion

Sub Section	M	SD
Introduction	3.10	0.73
Language Style	3.11	0.79
Presentation	2.99	0.86
Content	3.17	0.81

Based on the results, the participants scored moderately in their oral presentation during the interviews. These results support the findings of Nesaratnam et al. (2020) and Malik et al. (2022), who similarly reported that Malaysian graduates often struggle to demonstrate good communication skills in English during job interviews. One explanation to this issue is that most Malaysian graduates face anxiety and lack confidence in oral presentations using English during interview sessions. Rusli et al. (2018) claimed that Malaysian graduates' weak performance in English verbal communication was due to psychological factors, as they felt nervous and shy in using the language. The moderate level of performance in English oral presentation among Malaysian graduates may lead to adverse outcomes in job interviews, which corroborates the findings of Alias et al. (2013).

RQ2: What is the relationship between the candidates' traits – including gender, age, and academic achievement (CGPA) – and their English oral presentation scores during the interview sessions?

Oral Presentation Scores and Gender

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the difference between the female and male participants' scores during the oral presentation. The results in Tables 5 and 6 show no statistically significant difference in terms of the total score achieved between male (M = 59.89, SD = 8.86) and female (M = 62.69, SD = 14.92) participants during their English oral presentation, t (130.01) = -1.42, p = 0.157.

Table 5
English Oral Presentation Mean Scores According to Participants' Gender

Gender	M	n	SD
Male	59.89	44	8.86
Female	62.69	106	14.92

Table 6
Independent Samples t-Test Results Based on Participants' Gender

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total Score	9.006	.003	-1.16	148	.247
			-1.42	130.01	.157

The results show female participants scored higher in the oral presentation during the interviews. These findings validate a commonly held belief and the conclusions of several studies that females are better than males in second language use (Rianto, 2021; Wightman, 2020). Conversely, lower scores from the male participants indicated their apprehensiveness in delivering presentations. Several studies, however, revealed that females are more apprehensive in communication using English, which could compromise their performance (Frantz et al., 2005; Husin, 2022; Jusoh et al., 2018; Mat Husin & Khamis, 2022; Rasakumaran & Indra Devi, 2017).

Oral Presentation Scores and Age

The study comprised of participants from diverse age groups. In comparing the participants' age and their scores in the oral presentation during the interviews, the participants were categorized into four groups. As illustrated in Table 7, those aged between 36 to 40 scored better than other age groups (M = 66.25, SD = 30.92). Participants aged 31 to 35 years scored a mean of 63.16 (SD = 16.10), followed by those aged 26 to 30 years (M = 62.74, SD = 10.82) and those aged 41 to 50 years (M=62.50, SD=3.54). The lowest mean score was recorded among those aged 20 to 25 years (M = 59.72, SD = 12.42).

Table 7
Oral Presentation Scores According to Age Groups

Age	M	n	SD
20 - 25 years	59.72	53	12.42
26 - 30 years	62.74	53	10.82
31 - 35 years	63.16	38	16.10
36 - 40 years	66.25	4	30.92
41 – 50 years	62.50	2	3.54

The Spearman's Rho Correlation test was conducted to analyse the relationship between the participants' oral presentation scores and their age, and the results are presented in Table 8. The Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient is 0.056, with the *p*-value of 0.495. The coefficient value of 0.056 indicates a positive but very weak correlation between the two variables. Since the p-value (0.495) is greater than 0.05, there is no statistically significant

relationship between age and English proficiency score. This weak correlation may be due to the small number of participants aged 36 to 40 years, who achieved a mean score of 66.25. Therefore, it can be concluded that graduates' age is not a reliable indicator of performance in oral presentations.

Table 8
Spearman's Rho Correlation Test Results between Participants' Scores and Age

			Age	Total Score
Spearman's rho	Age	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.056
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.495
		N	150	150
	Total Score	Correlation Coefficient	.056	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.495	.
		N	150	150

Moreover, the results connote that age trait, which is often related to experience, does not play a substantial role in determining the oral presentation performance among Malaysian graduates in workplace interviews. Nevertheless, the overall scores showed that some senior applicants performed better than those younger ones. One possible reason is that more senior applicants have experienced more real workplace interviews, which have provided them with additional practice and, consequently, greater confidence during the sessions. Several studies on English communication apprehension suggest that senior individuals tend to have lower apprehension levels due to their experience, enabling them to communicate better (Husin, 2022; Jusoh et al., 2018; Nantanawanich, 2017).

Oral Presentation Scores and Academic Achievement (CGPA)

Table 9 exhibits the participants' oral presentation scores during the job interviews according to their academic achievement, based on CGPA. Participants who achieved second-class upper (M = 62.23, SD = 13.85) scored higher than the other CGPA groups. Those who achieved first-class CGPA scored a mean of 61.18 (SD = 9.44), and the lowest mean score was recorded by those in the second-class lower group with a mean of 59.33 (SD = 14.62).

Table 9
Oral Presentation Scores According to CGPA Groups

CGPA	M	n	SD
First-class	61.18	17	9.44
Second-class Upper	62.23	118	13.85
Second-class Lower	59.33	15	14.62

A Spearman's Rho Correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between the participants' oral presentation scores and their CGPA. The results in Table 10 revealed a weak negative correlation between the two variables. In other words, the correlation is not statistically significant, r_s (150) = - 0.24, p = 0.77. This indicates that the participants' academic achievement does not correlate with their performance during the job interviews.
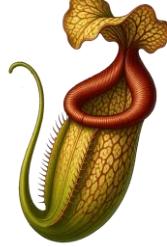
Table 10
Spearman's Rho Correlation Test Results between Participants' Scores and CGPA

			Total Score	CGPA
Spearman's rho	Total Score	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.024
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.767
		n	150	150
	CGPA	Correlation Coefficient	-.024	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.767	.
		n	150	150

The results suggest that graduates' overall academic achievement is not a significant predictor of an applicant's oral communication skills. The academic achievement trait does not provide a justifiable basis for determining an individual candidate's oral communication skills. The academic achievement (CGPA) variable appears to be a weak indicator of oral presentation performance. Similarly, Nasirudeen and Xiao (2020) found minimal significant differences between academic achievement and English language proficiency, which contrasts with the findings of Rahmat et al. (2015) and Stephen et al. (2004), who identified a direct relationship between language proficiency and academic success. Two possible reasons for the weak relationship between the two variables are: CGPA reflects an average of overall grades, and participants' apprehension during the oral presentations.

The weak relationship between CGPA and oral communication proficiency can be attributed to the nature of CGPA itself. As a cumulative measure, CGPA encompasses performance across various subjects, many of which are unrelated to language or communication skills. This broad aggregation dilutes its ability to reflect specific competencies such as oral English proficiency. As highlighted by Deeba et al. (2021), while written communication showed a statistically significant correlation with CGPA, oral communication did not correlate. This finding aligns with the structure of academic assessments in Malaysian and Pakistani universities, which heavily emphasize written exams and assignments. Consequently, students may prioritize written skills over oral communication, leading to a disparity between academic achievement and speaking proficiency. Secondly, communication apprehension could be the connection between academic achievement and English proficiency. Malaysian high-achieving graduates may show lower apprehension levels when communicating in English during job interviews. In supporting this, Rauf et al. (2021) found a significant negative relationship between academic performance and oral communication apprehension: students with higher CGPAs tend to exhibit lower levels of apprehension. However, this relationship is not always straightforward. High-achieving students may feel confident due to their academic success, reducing apprehension during interviews. Conversely, the pressure to meet high expectations may increase anxiety, especially in evaluative settings like job interviews. This duality suggests that CGPA alone is insufficient to predict oral communication performance.

The findings further support the Communicative Competence Model, particularly the dimensions of sociolinguistic and strategic competence. While demographic factors such as gender, academic achievement, age, and years of study were examined, they yielded only weak relationships with overall communicative performance among Malaysian graduates. This suggests that these variables alone do not sufficiently explain variations in oral

communication proficiency. Instead, the ability to employ appropriate communication strategies such as managing anxiety, adapting language to context, and using non-verbal cues may play a more decisive role in enhancing communicative performance. In the Malaysian context, where English is often a second language and apprehension is common in formal speaking situations, strategic competence becomes especially critical. Graduates who can navigate these challenges effectively are more likely to perform well in interviews and workplace interactions, regardless of their CGPA or demographic background.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insight into the issues connecting oral communication and employability for graduates in Malaysia. Generally, the graduates possess a moderate level of oral communication skills, evidenced during the job interview oral presentation sessions. The graduates need to take personal or extra initiatives to better equip themselves with skills and strategies to perform during job interviews. This proactive effort could increase their chances of securing the right jobs. It also indicates insufficient knowledge and skills in job interviews, or the fading of the skills learnt during studies over time due to lack of practice.

Further, the graduates' gender, age, and academic achievement revealed a weak connection with the ability to deliver an oral presentation during job interviews. Employers could not solely depend on these traits during interviews to predict or put expectations without getting the candidates to undergo probation. A 360 assessment or other traits, such as investigating candidates' background information, socio-economic status etc., could help them hire prospective employers.

Moreover, the issues with English communication skills dig deeper into the alignment between what graduates learned at the educational institutional level and employers' requirements. This study recommends a constant revisit between the two arenas as an initiative to reduce the country's unemployability rate. It will essentially benefit educational institutions when their graduates are highly sought after by industries and thus provide a good employability record. For instance, syllabi and courses should be designed to encourage more opportunities for authentic workplace setting interaction for the graduates to practise communication effectively and fluently. The practice could minimise communication apprehension, boost confidence and increase vocabulary size. This finding further reiterated that English language proficiency is one of the main factors that contribute to ensuring Malaysian employability (Hiew et al., 2021). Notably, results from this study invite academicians to create more comprehensive English language programmes such as English-based social engagement so that students can casually use the language without worrying about being assessed, further boosting their confidence levels.

However, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the data were collected from a single institution in Malaysia, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to graduates from other institutions or regions. To enhance the generalizability and broader applicability of the findings, future research should involve multiple institutions across diverse geographic and demographic contexts. Secondly, the study employed a purely quantitative methodology, which may not fully capture the complex, intricate experiences and perceptions of graduates regarding their English proficiency and employability. Employing a mixed-methods approach in future studies could provide a deeper, more holistic understanding of the abovementioned issues. Despite these limitations,

the study highlights important considerations for educational institutions and employers in bridging the gap between graduate skills and industry requirements.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Each member made a unique contribution to the project, bringing their expertise and perspective to the research. Mohd Zulfadli Mat Husin took the lead in drafting and reviewing all sections, ensuring clarity and coherence throughout the work as well as compiling the methodology and data analysis which provided a solid foundation for our findings. Nor Yazi Binti Khamis enriched our understanding by adding depth to the data on the English communication field toward community and refining the literature review part.

FUNDING

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

Abdelmajdid, B., & Radzuan, N. R. (2022). A correlational study of ESL undergraduate students' perceptions of oral presentation assessments. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 12(4), 311–323.

Abu Bakar, N. I., Noordin, N., & Razali, A. B. (2019). Improving oral communicative competence in English using project-based learning activities. *English Language Teaching, 12*(4), 73. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n4p73

Ali, Z., Bhar, S. K., Mahmood, S., Mokhtar, R., & Mohd Ali, A. Z. (2025). Reforming English for employability: Insights from employers and graduates in a Malaysian context. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, *7*(9), 801–816. https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i9.10249

Alias, M., Sidhu, G. K., & Fook, C. Y. (2013). Unemployed graduates' perceptions on their general communication skills at job interviews. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 90 (InCULT 2012), 324–333. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.07.098

Azmi, I., Hashim, R., & Yusoff, Y. (2009). The employability skills of Malaysian university students. *International Journal of Modern Trends in Social Sciences, 1*(3), 1–14.

Bhattacharyya, E. (2018). Stakeholders perspective on communicative competence in Industry 4.0: Walk the talk of informative technologists. *SHS Web of Conferences, 53,* 03001. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20185303001

Bin-Hady, W. R. A. (2016). Communicative competence in teaching English at secondary schools: A critical investigation in Yaff'ae District of Yemen (Issue August). Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University.

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics, 1,* 1–47.

Chand, S. P. (2025). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. *Advances in Educational Research and Evaluation, 6*(1). https://doi.org/10.25082/AERE.2025.01.001

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2018). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson.

Deeba, F., Abiodullah, M., & Khurshid, K. (2021). An interplay of oral and written communication and performance of undergraduates. *International Journal of Innovation in Teaching and Learning, 7*(2), 52–69.

Fan, L., Fei, J., Schriever, U., & Fan, S. (2017). The communicative competence of Chinese seafarers and their employability in the international maritime labour market. *Marine Policy, 83,* 137–145.

Frantz, J., Marlow, A., & Wathen, J. (2005). Communication apprehension and its relationship to gender and college year. *Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, 5*(7), 1–13.

Hamid, M. S. A., Islam, R., & Manaf, N. H. A. (2014). Employability skills development approaches: An application of the analytic network process. *Asian Academy of Management Journal, 19*(1), 93–111.

Hanapi, Z., & Nordin, M. S. (2014). Unemployment among Malaysia graduates: Graduates' attributes, lecturers' competency and quality of education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 112 (Iceepsy 2013),* 1056–1063. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1269

Heang, L. T., Ching, L. C., Mee, L. Y., & Huei, C. T. (2019). University education and employment challenges: An evaluation of fresh accounting graduates in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 9*(9), 1061–1076. https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v9-i9/6396

Hiew, W., Tibok, R. P., Ngui, W., Gabda, D., & Suyansah, Q. (2021). Science graduate employability and english language proficiency: Findings from a Malaysian public university. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 20*(7), 23–43. https://doi.org/10.26803/IJLTER.20.7.2

Husin, M. Z. (2022). English at workplace: A quantitative report on communication apprehension among Malaysian employees. *International Journal of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics, 6*(4), 57–70.

Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J.B Pride & A. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistic: Selected Readings, 15*(3), 1–2). Penguin.

Hymes, D. (1964). Introduction: Toward ethnographies of communication. *American Anthropologist*, *66*(6), 1–34. http://www.jstor.org/stable/668159

Jansen, B. J. (2010). Understanding document analysis. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Jusoh, Z., Engku Atek, E. S., Syed Omar, S. N. M., & Abdullah, A. T. (2018). Investigation into non-academic staff communication apprehension in using English language. *International Journal of Asian Social Science, 8*(9), 677–685. https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.1.2018.89.677.685
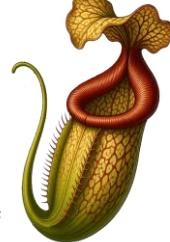
Kassim, H., & Ali, F. (2010). English communicative events and skills needed at the workplace: Feedback from the industry. *English for Specific Purposes*, *29*(3), 168–182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.10.002

Koo, Y. L. (2010). Sustaining diversity in higher education: Engaging the critical literacy of multilingual students in a Malaysian postgraduate classroom. *International Conference on Learner Diversity*, *7*(C), 389–397. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.10.053

Krishnan, I. A., Maniam, M., & Mokhtar, M. B. M. (2024). An appraisal analysis of the performance of Malaysian fresh graduates in a job interview. *Sage Open*, *14*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231214893

Lin, O., Arumugam, N., Lwin, A. S., Susanti, M., & Mohamad, F. (2021). Efficacy of the speaking and writing ESP modules for working adults: Government officials. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 11*(3), 1484-1501.

Malik, S., Malek, M., Saidin, S. F., & Afip, L. A. (2022). English proficiency among business students and its impact on academic performance. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling (IJEPC), 7*(47), 318–327.

Mat Husin, M. Z., & Khamis, N. Y. (2022). Preferences or requirements: Investigating administrative staff English usage at public tertiary institutions. *AJELP: Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy, 10*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.37134/ajelp.vol10.1.1.2022

Morreale, S. P., Spitzberg, B. H., & Barge, J. K. (2007). *Human communication: Motivation, knowledge and skills.* (2nd ed.). Thomson Wadsworth.

Nantanawanich, P. (2017). *Anxiety of EFL employees when using English oral communication at workplaces in Hong Kong and in Bangkok, Thailand.* Thammasat University.

Nasirudeen, A. M. A., & Xiao, S. (2020). English language skills and academic performance: A comparison between Asian international and domestic nursing students in Singapore. *International Journal of Nursing*, *7*(1), 30–38.

Nesaratnam, S., Wan Salleh, W. H., Foo, Y. Von, & Wan Hisham, W. M. W. S. (2020). Enhancing English proficiency and communication skills among Malaysian graduates through training and coaching. *International Journal of Learning and Development, 10*(4), 1. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v10i4.17875

Omar, N. H., Manaf, A. A., Mohd, R. H., Kassim, A. C., & Aziz, K. A. (2012). Graduates' employability skills based on current job demand through electronic advertisement. *Asian Social Science, 8*(9), 103–110. https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n9p103

Osman, W. H., & Rahman, S. H. A. (2019). Readiness of agriculture undergraduates towards English workplace communication: An evaluation. *International Journal of Language Education and Applied Linguistics (IJLEAL)*, *9*(2), 67–79.

Ping, W. S., Roslan, S., Yan-Li, S., Sulaiman, T., & Ab Jalil, H. (2018). The employability of undergraduate students in a Malaysian higher educational institution. *Educational Leader (Pemimpin Pendidikan)*, *6*, 165–182.

Prior, L. (2003). *Using documents in social research*. Sage Publications.

Rahmat, N., Min, L. S., Sungif, N. A. M., & Yusup, F. N. M. (2015). English language proficiency tests and academic achievement: A study on the Malaysian University English Test as a predictor of technical programme undergraduates' academic achievement. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 6*(1), 2–7. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.6n.1p.114

Rasakumaran, A., & Indra Devi, S. (2017). Oral communication apprehension among freshmen: A case in the Faculty of Medicine. *Journal of Human Capital Development (JHCD), 10*(1), 19–32.
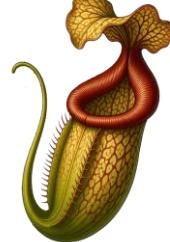
Rasul, M. S., Rauf, R. A. A., Mansor, A. N., Yasin, R. M., & Mahamod, Z. (2013). Graduate employability for manufacturing industry. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 102*(Ifee 2012), 242–250. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.739

Rauf, F. H. A., Khalid, F. M., Shokri, N. A. M., & Abdullah, S. P. N. S. (2021). Demographic factors and oral communication apprehension among students in Malaysian higher learning institutions. *Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal, 13*(4s), 358–367.

Rianto, A. (2021). Examining gender differences in reading strategies, reading skills, and English proficiency of EFL University students. *Cogent Education*, *8*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1993531

Rusli, R., Md Yunus, M., & Hashim, H. (2018). Low speaking proficiency among the Malaysian undergraduates: Why and how? *Persidangan Antarabangsa Sains Sosial Dan Kemanusiaan*, April, 678–689.

Sarfraz, I., Rajendran, D., Hewege, C. & Mohan, M. D. (2018). An exploration of global employability skills: A systematic research review. *Int. J. Work Organisation and Emotion, 9*(1), 63–88.

Singh, A. K. J., & Harun, R. N. S. R. (2020). Industrial trainees learning experiences of English related tasks at the workplace. *Studies in English Language and Education, 7*(1), 22-42.

Stephen, D. F., Welman, J. C., & Jordaan, W. (2004). English language proficiency as an indicator of academic performance at at tertiary institution. *Journal of Human Resource Management, 2*(3), 42–53.

Suhaili, M. S., Razak, R., & Deni, K. (2025). TVET graduates: The importance of workplace English communication skills for effective work performance. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 15*(2), 118–127.

Tejan, O. A., & Sabil, A. (2019). Understanding employers' perception of employability skills and career development in Morocco. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 7*(2), 134. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.7n.2p.134

Teoh, W. M. Y., Yuan, Y. Y., Chong, S. C., & Tee, W. N. (2023). Perspectives of employers on graduate employability skills: A case of Malaysia. *Asian Development Policy Review*, *11*(4), 229–243.

Ting, S. H., Marzuki, E., Chuah, K. M., Misieng, J., & Jerome, C. (2017). Employers' views on the importance of english proficiency and communication skill for employability in Malaysia. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 7*(2), 315–327. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i2.8132

Turner, R. (2004). Towards a structural model connecting hard skills, soft skills and job condition and the IS professional: The student perspective. *Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology, 4*, 0977–0991.

Wan Irham Ishak, Shafinah Md Salleh, Muhammad Shyazzwan Ibrahim Brian, Abd Latif Abdul Rahman, & Arif Tirtana. (2025). Representing English in the graduate economy: A media analysis of language proficiency and higher education in Malaysia. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS), 9*(3), 7005-7018.

Wiemann, J. M. (1977). Explication and test of a model of communicative competence. *Human Communication Research, 3*(3), 195–213.

Wightman, M. (2020). Gender differences in second language learning: Why they exist and what we can do about it. *In Chancellor's Honors Program Projects, 5*. https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/2371

Yorke, M. (2006). Employability in higher education: What it is, what it is not. *Learning & Employability, 1*(April), 24.
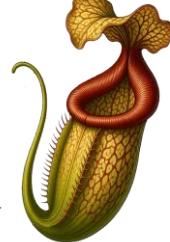
Yusof, N., & Jamaluddin, Z. (2015). Graduate employability and preparedness: A case study of University of Malaysia Perlis (UNIMAP), Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Society and Space 11, 11*(11), 129–143.

Zainuddin, S. Z., Pillai, S., Dumanig, F. P., & Phillip, A. (2019). English language and graduate employability. *Education + Training, 61*(1), 79–93. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-06-2017-0089

BIOGRAPHY

Mohd Zulfadli Mat Husin is a dedicated academic and experienced administrator in higher education, specializing in English language instruction, communication studies, and organizational development. With over a decade of professional engagement, he has contributed significantly to enhancing educational environments by combining innovative teaching techniques with administrative expertise. His academic journey includes a Master of Science in Technology Integrated Language Studies from Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al Sultan Abdullah (2022), a Bachelor of Arts in English Linguistics from Universiti Putra Malaysia (2012), and a Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language from Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (2009). Professionally, he has served as Senior Assistant Registrar at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan since 2013, handling diverse roles across corporate communication, organizational development, and academic affairs. His scholarly output includes research on communication apprehension, vocabulary learning strategies, and technology-enhanced language pedagogy, published in respected journals indexed by Scopus and MyCite. He has also actively participated in international conferences focusing on language teaching and educational innovation, solidifying his role as a scholar dedicated to advancing English language education and organizational communication within Malaysian higher education institutions.

Nor Yazi Binti Khamis brings about twenty-two years of education and research experience on board upon completing her doctoral studies in English language. Her specific interest is in English for Specific Academic Purposes in the aspect of practitioners' competency and lifelong learning. Her interest also includes pedagogical and content development, instructional design, and continuous professional development programmes for language instructors. To date, her enthusiasm is in technology-enhanced collaborative applications and tools, which she utilises in her heutagogical approach to 4.0 education learning. She is an associate editor for the International Journal of Language Education and Applied Linguistics, Universiti Malaysia Pahang, and an academic advisor for the Diploma in English language programme at Universiti Islam Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah, Pahang. As for research and innovation, she is particularly keen on design and development research (DDR) and design thinking, in addition to her experiences in utilising Delphi methods and several statistical softwares and reference management applications. She has been coordinating and developing curricula for undergraduate, postgraduate, and even preparatory and pre-sessional for local and international levels, as well as for Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) modules and micro-credential courses. Additionally, she has been a trainer for IELTS, MUET, workplace communication and research methodology. She became a member of the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP), which is based in the UK, the Malaysian Association of Applied Linguistics (MAAL), and the Mobile Learning Association of Malaysia (MALM).