MOCK INTERVIEW: SELF-PERCEIVED COMPETENCE AND ACTUAL PERFORMANCE AMONG ESL UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate self-perceived competence and actual performance during mock interview among ESL undergraduates in Malaysia. This study investigates the differences between students' self-perceived competence and actual performance in mock interviews. The study was conducted in Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The survey was distributed to 40 ESL undergraduates who were attending Language for Occupational Purposes (LE 4500) course. A descriptive quantitative method is used to examine the two variables involved in this study. The result revealed that students perform better than they think they are. The results of this study show that they underestimate their capability to do well in mock interview. This study helps to give instructors a better understanding about the student perspective. It could be implied students' lack of confidence drives them to work harder in order to do well in the mock interviews.

Keywords: career; interviewee; interviewer

Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan mengenal pasti kompetensi persepsi diri dan prestasi sebenar semasa latihan temuduga dalam kalangan mahasiswa ESL di Malaysia. Kajian ini mengenal pasti perbezaan di antara kompetensi persepsi diri dan prestasi sebenar pelajar semasa latihan temuduga. Kajian ini dijalankan di Kuliah Ilmu Wahyu dan Sains Kemanusiaan di Universiti

Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM). Kajian tinjauan telah diedarkan kepada 40 mahasiswa ESL yang mengambil subjek Language for Occupational Purposes (LE 4500). Penilaian kuantitatif deskriptif digunakan untuk mengkaji dua pemboleh ubah yang terlibat dalam kajian ini. Berdasarkan hasil kajian, didapati prestasi pelajar lebih baik daripada yang mereka fikirkan. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan mereka memandang rendah keupayaan mereka untuk berjaya dalam latihan temuduga. Kajian ini dapat membantu memberi pemahaman yang lebih baik kepada pengajar tentang perspektif pelajar. Ia boleh dirumuskan bahawa kekurangan keyakinan pelajar mendorong mereka untuk berusaha lebih keras untuk berjaya dalam latihan temuduga.

Kata kunci: calon temuduga; kerjaya; penemuduga

1.0 INTRODUCTION

High youth unemployment in Malaysia is a scary but true fact (Aun, 2020). "One in four graduates remains unemployed six months after graduation, with the majority being degree holders" (Jin, 2016). The reason most frequently cited is that job applicants do not do well in interviews (Huffcutt, Iddekinge & Roth, 2011). They do not fulfill the desired criteria that employers seek in potential employees. For that reason, social psychologists and career counselors lay out guidelines and recommendations for candidates to succeed in interviews. They unanimously agree that interviewers evaluate both verbal and non-verbal responses of interviewees. Therefore, it is vital for job applicants to know all these criteria and apply suggested outlines.

Mock interview is a career-awareness activity in which students play roles of interviewer and interviewee just like the real interview situation. This activity helps them not just to familiarize with the kinds of questions generally asked during interviews but also develop comfort and confidence to communicate with the professionals. Additionally, this practice also allows candidates to overcome nervousness (Corfield, 2009).

Realizing the importance and benefits from this activity, it has been adopted to be a part of university students' assessments. International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) students are required to do mock interviews in Language for Occupational Purpose course that they take towards the end of their study years. Mock interviews may be frightening for some students but they carry valuable information about students' overall preparation of being professionals. This helps them to relieve anxiety and feel confident during the actual interview

session as a job interview can be a very worrisome and daunting event. It is particularly true when a candidate does not know how well he or she does in the interview. The findings of the survey done by Harchar (2012) and Reddan (2008) revealed that interviewees found mock interviews beneficial.

According to Szyszka (2017), self-perception is the evaluation of an individual towards himself or herself. People who value their worth tend to focus and perform better than those who do not (Lai & Teng, 2011; Nobre & Valentini, 2019; Monteiro, Ferreira & Almeida, 2018; Rodgers et al., 2014). It is therefore important to discover students' self-rated level of competence in doing mock interviews. The results are useful to fill gaps and provide recommendations to teachers and students to improve interviewing skills.

This study aims to explore this self-perceived competence in mock interviews. Most studies on mock interviews have been focused on the impacts of the mock interviews (Hansen et al., 2009; Lord et al., 2019; Reddan, 2008). They aspire to find out the benefits that the students gained from the mock interviews. While many researchers studied mock interviews among undergraduates (Harchar, 2012; Lolla, 2012; Kosari et al., 2021), there is little evidence that they take into consideration the perceived performance and the actual performance of the students. The researcher wants to look at how students feel about themselves, how they prepare themselves and how well is the interview experience. Comparison between the students' perceived performance and that of actual scores is made and analyzed according to the interview components. Thus, the current study is essential in evaluating students' needs to pass job interviews successfully.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

There are certain techniques or strategies to do well in interviews, however, not many students are acquainted with those techniques. They tend to be very nervous whenever they answer questions (Corfield, 2009; McMunn, 2012; Bhowmik, 2018). Nervousness is normal but if it gets the best of us there is a high chance that we cannot showcase the best of our ability. In addition, there is possibility that they think better or worse than their actual performance (Beshara, 2008). Determining the perceived competence and actual competence would be useful to cater students' needs in mock interviews.

In response to these problems, the present study intends to make a survey of students' perceived performance in the mock interviews. Harchar (2012) did a survey to improve teaching methods and students' perceived self-efficacy in interview situations. In the context of job interview, usually, the candidate will be asked to give an introduction of himself or herself and offer reasons for the position applied then followed by ways of handling possible problems later in the profession. Candidates have to remain calm and polite throughout the session. But then again, what student thinks of his or her performance may differ from what the lecturer thinks. The present researcher distributed questionnaires to LE 4500 students and see whether their perceptions are similar or different to the actual scores given by the lecturer. Therefore, the objectives of the paper are to find out LE 4500 students' self-perceived and actual performance of mock interviews and discover the differences between LE 4500 students' self-perceived and actual performance of mock interviews using statistical analysis. This paper attempts to study the following research questions: What are LE 4501 students' self-perceived and actual performance of mock interviews? and What are the differences between LE 4500 students' self-perceived and actual performance of mock interviews?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mock Interview Studies

A research by Reddan (2008) examined the benefits of job-search seminars and mock interviews in a work experience course. The researcher used two instruments in the study, Measure of Guidance Impact (MGI) and questionnaire. The MGI forms contained 25 items to measure clients' agreement on four areas; decision making, opportunity awareness, transition skills and self-awareness while the questionnaires were designed to find out students' perceptions, suggestions and experiences. The result showed that the post-test MGI score was significantly higher than the pre-test score and this was true for all the three bands (Band 1, 2 and 3). Students had positive experience during the information sessions and found printed booklets useful. The interviews were beneficial in both ways; as interviewers and interviewees. They knew what employers seek in the employees and realized their weaknesses as applicants therefore worked harder to prepare for real-world scenarios. It is important to note that most of the students did not benefit from previous seminars mainly due to non-participation. They were mostly uninformed about those available seminars.

A more recent study is done by Iftekhar et al. (2015). They analyzed recorded videos of 138 interview sessions with 69 (26 males, 43 female) internship-seeking students from

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The participants whom were all native speakers of English were interviewed twice by two professional counselors with more than five years of experience. They received feedbacks after each session. Each interviewee was asked five questions to assess his or her behavioral and social skills. Performance of the interviewees were evaluated by nine Amazon Mechanical Turk workers based on 16 seven point likert-scale questions. Later, they presented a computational framework that can automatically quantify verbal and non-verbal behaviors in job interviews. The proposed framework is able to analyze three major components of interview which are facial expressions (smile intensity, head gestures and facial tracking points), language (word counts, topic modelling) and prosodic information (pitch, intonation and pauses). In addition, it can predict the ratings for interview traits like excitement, friendliness and engagement. The framework suggested that job candidates should speak fluently, use less fillers and smile more.

2.2 Self-Perception Studies

Rathee (2009) conducted a study to analyze self-perception among 185 female college students of Chandigarh (95 sportspersons and 90 non-sportspersons). The participants were required to complete the Osgood et al. (1967) Semantic Differential Scale. The scale had two parts; first part contained items related to 'myself as I am' while the second part contained items related to 'myself as I would like to be'. They had to rate themselves on the scale of eight on the following ten pairs of adjectives; good-bad, optimistic-pessimistic, confident-non-confident, strong-weak, attractive-unattractive, sociable-unsociable, independent-dependent, aggressive-non-aggressive, successful-failure and cooperative-uncooperative. Self-perception is measured by the difference of scores between the two parts. The difference and self-perception are inversely proportionate. The researcher presented the statistical derivatives of sportspersons and non-sportspersons on components of self-perception in the table form. The result showed that sportspersons demonstrated a better self-perception compared to non-sportsperson on all ten components. And, significant differences are found on the three components which are good-bad, optimistic-pessimistic and attractive-unattractive. The researcher concluded that participation in sports help in developing better self-perception.

Unlike Rathee (2009), Papamitsiou and Economides (2014) studied self-perception of 96 European High School students' performance before and after a computer test. The case study was conducted to fulfill three objectives: 1) To evaluate perception of students before

and after taking a computer-based test, 2) To investigate students' temporal behavior, that is, expressing un(certainty) during the test and 3) To explore relationships between (1) and (2). They used a simplified version of the LAERS assessment environment. There were two components of the module; computer-based testing unit and tracker. The testing unit contained multiple choice quiz while the tracker recorded the question that student works on, the answer the student saves, the correctness of the saved answer, how many times the student views each question, how many times the student changes the answer he/she saves for each question, the time student spends on viewing each question and the time student spends on answering each question. The data collected for objective 1 is measured using statistical measures while for objective 2 and 3, they used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Initially, they discovered significant difference between students' perceptions of performance and actual performance in both pre and post-tests. However, the statistical tests showed otherwise. In addition, goal expectancy (students' fulfilment with their preparation) has an indirect effect on students' un(certainty) (students' cautiousness during assessment). The researchers do not mention the number and kind of questions asked in the test.

Nor Fathiah and Sidhu (2013) conducted a study to describe students' self-perceived and actual performance in making oral presentations. Organization, content, delivery and language are the four oral presentation skills that are of interest of the study. Participants of the study were 40 UITM Business Faculty undergraduates taking English as a Second Language (ESL) course. The researchers collected data from questionnaires, oral presentation tests and semi-structured interviews. Significant difference between students' self-perceived and actual performance is found in all the skills except language. The researchers suggested that educators take this into consideration when designing the course outline.

2.3 Actual Performance Studies

Al-Mzary et al. (2015) studied the performance of Yarmouk University employees. The study aimed to examine the attitudes of the administrative leaders and employees towards the components of training, the relationship between in-service training at Yarmouk University and the performance of administrative employees and the differences between the attitudes of administrative leaders and employees towards the training process. Two questionnaires are completed by 40 administrative leaders and 40 administrative employees. Means and standard deviations of responses are calculated to compare the attitudes of the two groups.

The research found that both groups had positive attitudes towards the training program and that the training program had positive impact on the performance of employees. Hence, it is recommended that more training programs with advanced methods that cater the needs of employees are introduced.

A more recent study is done by Mahmood and Raju (2018). They attempted to find reasons for gap between perceived performance and actual performance of employees in Human Resource Management at Jordan Universities; Yarmouk University and Mutah University. The researchers also aimed to identify the solution to improve Human Resource Practices in an organization. The result of the study showed a positive correlation between external (leadership, organizational culture, working environment, motivation (rewards, job enrichment, acknowledgement), training) and internal (stress, self-motivation/ interests, communication (colleagues and customers, managers) business environment. Ease of communication between staffs and their managers, fair salary and reward and good level of control were three most important qualities of organization according to the survey. Nonetheless, the actual number of respondents is not known.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Sample

This study involves 40 students from Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (IRKHS). All of them registered for the Language for Occupational Purposes (LE 4500) course section 1 for semester 1 2019/2020 session. Using different subjects might add another variable to the analysis of the results. The students attend 14, two-hour weekly meetings. This selection process of materials is called purposive sampling as the sampling is not random.

For mock interview assignment, the students are asked to form a group of five or six. They are seven groups altogether namely Archevee Couture, E Carino. Co, General Spices, Knot in Love, Kado, Dustbusters and Pop. Every group is interviewed by the other group but ultimately every group plays both of the roles; interviewer and interviewee. They are given five weeks to prepare themselves. They are required to submit mock interview videos on week 8. The duration of the videos is between 8 to 10 minutes. The assignment carries 20% of their overall assessment. The study investigates two interview components; readiness and performance because these are the criteria that the lecturer evaluates during mock interviews.

3.2 Research Design

The questionnaires are adapted from Iftekhar et al. (2015) interview traits. Out of all interview traits, two of them are of interest of this research. The research design is descriptive statistics. The respondents' answers are counted and then converted into percentages, means, standard deviations, standard error of the means, mean differences, t-values and standard error of differences. The same thing applies for the actual marks of mock interview assignment.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive quantitative method of research is used to answer both research questions. The researcher evaluates students' scores in questionnaires and compares that to the scores given by the lecturer. Student may opt for Strongly Disagree-1, Disagree-2, Uncertain-3, Agree-4, Strongly Agree-5 in the first part of the questionnaires while, Rarely-1, Occassionally-2, Sometimes-3, Very Often-4, and Always-5 for the second part of the questionnaires. The researcher then calculates the scores for both parts of the questionnaires. The researcher compares the scores with the ones obtained from the lecturer.

3.3 Data Collection

The researcher prepares five-point likert scale questions that include two components; readiness and performance. Each section has 10 items. The scale has the following options: Strongly Disagree-1, Disagree-2, Uncertain-3, Agree-4, Strongly Agree-5, Rarely-1, Occassionally-2, Sometimes-3, Very Often-4, and Always-5. (See Appendix 1). The findings from the questionnaire are useful to identify students' self-perceived competence in mock interviews. The results are then compared to marks given by the lecturer who evaluated the students' mock interview videos.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The present study aims to determine LE 4500 students' self-perceived competence and actual performance in mock interviews and examine the differences between the two. The researcher states the purpose and instruction in the questionnaires. The questionnaires are administered to 40 LE 4500 students during the class hours. Data are then tabulated, analyzed and interpreted. The researcher calculates the means, mean differences, t-scores using goodcalculators.com, standard deviations and standard error of the means and standard error of differences to make comparison between what students think and actual scores by the lecturer.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Information

There is a total of 40 respondents. Majority are females (92.5%) and there are only three males in the class. The age range of the participants is 22-26 years old. They are all from Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge (KIRKHS). The respondents are mostly (82.5%) Human Sciences students and the rest are English Language students. Only two students are in their third year of study while the rest are in their final year. They are all level 4 second language learners of English. Bahasa Melayu is their first language.

Table 1 shows the students' evaluation of their mock interviews on two interview components; readiness and performance. Values for mean, standard deviation (SD) and standard error of the mean (SEM) are presented in the table. Overall, students did better in the actual performance compared to their self-perceived competence of mock interviews. Most of the students thought that their readiness was better than the performance. Their mean, standard deviation and standard error of the mean for readiness and performance were 7.995 (SD=0.657, SEM=0.104) and 6.960 (SD=1.034, SEM=0.163), respectively. However, the opposite was true for actual performance. The scores given by the lecturer showed a better result. The mean performance was 9.00 (SD=0.679, SEM=0.107) which was slightly higher than the readiness with a mean value of 8.45, (SD=0.986, SEM=0.156).

Table 1: *Students' Overall Self-Perceived Competence and Actual Performance*

	Self-Perceived			Actual Performance		
	Mean	SD	SEM	Mean	SD	SEM
Readiness	7.995	0.657	0.104	8.45	0.986	0.156
Performance	6.960	1.034	0.163	9.00	0.679	0.107

Majority agreed that they dress appropriately for the job interview, pay attention to the questions asked and smile to create a positive mood in the room which demonstrate their readiness. In term of performance, the students think that they give acceptable answers during the mock interviews, explain the main points with supporting details and examples and the meaning of each of their sentence is clear.

The marks showed that the students did well in mock interviews in both readiness and performance. Prior to the mock interviews, students attended a lecture on answering

techniques in interviews to better prepare themselves before the actual day. And, the lecturer said that it was probably one of the reasons that their mock interviews turned out well. The students deserved the marks because they were serious job candidates and speak confidently in the mock interviews.

Table 2 shows the results for a paired sample t-test for students' self-perceived competence and actual performance. Based on the results, it is evident that there was a significant difference with a p-value less than 0.05 for readiness and performance. Their mean difference, t-score, standard error value, degrees of freedom were -0.455 (t=2.2649, df=39, SE=0.201) and -2.040 (t=11.9719, df=39, SE=0.170) respectively.

Table 2: *Paired Sample T-Test Results for the Students' Self-Perceived Competence and Actual Performance of Mock Interviews*

Paired Sample T-Test	Self-Perceived Competence	Actual Performance	Mean Difference	t-score	df	SE	p-value
Readiness	7.995	8.45	-0.455	2.2649	39	0.201	.014576
Performance	6.96	9.00	-2.040	11.9719	39	0.170	< .00001

The difference for performance (< .00001) is bigger than that of readiness (.014576). They underestimated their ability to convince interviewers that they are the right persons for the job.

4.2 A Summary of the Interview Components in Mock Interviews

Readiness Attribute

Giving good first impressions by smiling and wearing appropriate dress help students to get good marks for readiness. Apart from them, practice is also a key. When they practice the interview skills and prepare for questions that the interviewers may ask, they will be viewed as dedicated and responsible job candidates.

Students mostly agree with most of the statements in the readiness part; 'strongly agree' (26%) and 'agree' (55%). There were only 15 ticks for disagree. They disagree with some of the statements such as 'I am excited to do mock interview' ($\mu = 10$), 'I avoid using my

first language words whenever I have difficulties explaining in English' ($\mu = 8$), 'I maintain eye contact with the interviewer' ($\mu = 10$) and 'I practice my speaking before the actual interview to improve it' ($\mu = 10$).

Generally, students got lower marks for readiness. This is probably due to the lack of preparation and enthusiasm of mock interviews. However, there were four students who did excellent job by scoring the perfect 10 for readiness.

Performance

Ability to remain calm and communicate clearly will give prospective employers a full overview of what candidates are capable of doing or becoming. Candidates also must be decisive and avoid using fillers when responding as these indicate that they have good judgment.

Unlike readiness part, students mostly opted for 'very often' ($\mu = 17.5$) and 'sometimes' ($\mu = 14.7$) in performance part. This shows that they are not confident enough to choose the most frequent option or 'always'. In fact, there were more ticks for 'occasionally' ($\mu = 4$) than 'always' ($\mu = 3.5$). There were three ticks for 'rarely' with one tick for each of the following statements; 'I am comfortable and confident in doing my mock interview', 'I can logically organize my ideas in mock interview' and 'I pay attention to grammar when I speak with the interviewer'.

In general, students got higher marks for performance. This is probably due to the action and execution of the mock interviews. There were eight students who scored 10 for performance. Two students performed exceptionally well by getting full marks, 20%, for mock interview assignment.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study has involved 40 English for Occupational Purposes (LE 4500) students. The questionnaires were designed and distributed to them in order to obtain their self-perceived competence. This research aimed at examining students' self-perceived competence and actual performance during mock interviews.

The findings show that LE 4500 students performed better in the actual mock interviews compared to their self-perceived evaluation. They perceived that their readiness is better than the performance but their mock interview results showed the performance marks are higher than that of readiness.

There is a significant difference between self-perceived and actual performance in both interview components; readiness and performance. The findings fulfill the gap by determining students' self-rated level of competence. Students should pay greater attention to readiness in order to get better marks in the actual mock interviews.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A few propositions for future studies have emerged based on the findings and limitations of this study:

i. It is recommended that this study be replicated by using a larger sample of Language for Occupational Purposes students perhaps from different kulliyyahs in order to compare and verify this study's findings.

ii. It is recommended that this study includes interviews in the method of analysis.

iii. It is also suggested that other interview components are included in the study of students' self-perceived competence and actual performance in mock interviews.

iv. It is also proposed that this topic be approached from sociolinguistics point of view in order to find out how genders do mock interviews.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Mock Interview: Self-perceived Competence and Actual Performance among IIUM LE 4501 Students

This survey is conducted for the purpose of English for Specific Purposes (ENGL 8200) assignment. The purpose of this study is to find out students' self-perceived competence and their actual performance in mock interview. This means that an honest answer is automatically a correct answer.

Please rest assured that all the information and feedbacks will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes. Thank you in advance for your advance.

Demographic Background

    1. Gender: Male   ☐   Female   ☐
    2. Age: _____
    3. Kulliyyah: _____
    4. Programme: _____
    5. Year of study: _____
    6. First language: _____

Instruction: Put a tick (/) in the box to indicate your opinion on each statement in relation to mock interview assignment.

Readiness

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
1.	I use appropriate speech style in mock interview.					
2.	I am excited to do mock interview.					
3.	I know how to engage with the interviewer.					
4.	I smile to create a positive mood in the room.					
5.	I pay attention to the questions asked.					
6.	I use friendly tone during the interview session.					

7.	I avoid using my first language words whenever I have difficulties explaining in English.					
8.	I maintain eye contact with the interviewer					
9.	I dress appropriately for the job interview.					
10.	I practice my speaking before the actual interview to improve it.					

Performance

No.	Statement	Always 5	Very often 4	Sometimes 3	Occasionally 2	Rarely 1
11.	The meaning of each of my sentence is clear.					
12	I explain my main points with supporting details and examples.					
13.	When I answered the questions, I speak at a right pace.					
14.	I am comfortable and confident in doing my mock interview.					
15.	I can logically organize my ideas in mock interview.					
16.	I avoid using fillers.					
17.	I pay attention to grammar when I speak with the interviewer.					
18.	I am not stressed with the questions asked.					

19.	I give acceptable answers during the mock interview.					
20	I believe I am going to be hired.					

Adapted from Iftekhar Naim, Md. Iftekhar Tanveer, Daniel Gildea and Ehsan Hogue's (2015) interview traits.

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