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Exploring students' perceptions of mock job interviews as career preparation: a qualitative inquiry

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Abstract

This study explores undergraduate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of mock job interviews in preparing them for future careers. With the transition from academia to the professional world posing challenges, simulated interviews offer a practical strategy for bridging this gap. Conducted at a private university in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, this study employed a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews and reflective responses from 17 students. Guided by social constructivism and the competence-based learning framework (CBLF), thematic revealed that mock interviews enhanced students' confidence, communication skills, and understanding of professional expectations. Participants valued the constructive feedback they received, noting its role in fostering both personal and professional growth. However, some students expressed concerns about the lack of realism in the simulations and called for more structured support to apply these experiences to actual job interviews. The findings offer insights for educators by highlighting the importance of incorporating mock interviews into higher education curricula. Doing so can better equip students with the competencies and confidence needed for future employment. The study concludes with practical recommendations for improving the design and delivery of mock interview programs to ensure that they prepare students for real-world career challenges more effectively.

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment in Malaysia continues to be a pressing concern, posing significant challenges for the country's future workforce. Despite Malaysia's steady economic growth, many young Malaysians still struggle to secure employment opportunities. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), the youth unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 to 24 stood at 10.4% as of November 2024, with approximately 300,600 youths unemployed (DOSM, 2024). This figure is particularly alarming when compared to the national unemployment rate, which was recorded at 3.2% during the same period (Malay Mail, 2025).

Recent data indicate that approximately 17.6% of Malaysian graduates under the age of 25 remain unemployed six months after graduation, with the majority holding degrees (The Star,

2025). On the other hand, Wang (2024) pointed out that the most common reason cited was job applicants' poor performance during interview sessions. The applicants do not fulfil the desired criteria that employers seek in future employees, such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving. For this reason, social psychologists and career counsellors have put forth guidelines and recommendations for job seekers to succeed in interviews (Boland, 2024). Boland (2024) unanimously agreed that interviewers evaluated both the verbal and non-verbal responses of the interviewees. Therefore, it is vital for job applicants to determine the steps involved in the job application criteria.

These criteria are crucial in today's dynamic and competitive job market, as the transition from academia to the professional world poses a significant challenge for students (Mato-Diaz & Escudero-Castillo, 2023; Tomlinson, 2023). As they prepare to embark on their careers, acquiring the necessary skills and confidence to navigate job interviews is paramount. Mock job interviews and simulated exercises are designed to enhance interpersonal communication skills and imitate real-world interview scenarios and have gained traction as educational tools aimed at bridging the gap between academic preparation and professional readiness (Powell et al., 2022).

Thus, this qualitative inquiry sought to delve into the perceptions of students regarding the effectiveness of mock job interviews in preparing them for future career endeavors. By exploring students' experiences, attitudes, and reflections on participating in mock interviews, this study aimed to provide valuable insights into the role of these simulations in shaping their preparedness for the workforce. The rationale behind investigating student perceptions lies in the recognition that understanding their perspectives is essential for optimizing the design and implementation of mock interview programs within educational settings. By eliciting direct feedback from students engaged in these simulations, educators and institutions can gain a deeper understanding of the strengths, limitations, and areas for improvement of such initiatives.

2. Statement of the problem

Students in the selected institution (hereinafter referred to as University A), despite possessing strong foundational communication skills, often face challenges in articulating their thoughts and experiences effectively during real-life interviews for internships or entry-level positions. These difficulties can stem from several factors, such as lack of confidence and soft skills (Vo et al., 2021), limited exposure to professional interview scenarios, and social anxiety. Furthermore, the ability to adapt communication styles and use appropriate and clear lexical items to suit diverse interview settings, ranging from formal and structured formats to casual and conversational ones, can be a significant hurdle. These barriers are compounded by the high expectations of employers regarding clear and concise communication, which is increasingly prioritized in the competitive job market.

For example, studies have highlighted that students may struggle to convey their achievements or explain how their academic experiences translate into workplace competencies (Araiza-Alba et. al., 2021; Azman et. al., 2016; Bressler & Pence, 2019). The pressure of the interviews can lead to miscommunication or overly simplistic answers that fail to reflect the depth of their capabilities. Addressing these issues involves targeted training, such as mock interviews and real-time feedback, which has been proven to enhance students' ability to navigate the interview process with greater confidence and skill.

3. Mock interview

According to Neelen and Kirschner (2020), mock interviews simulate real-world interview scenarios, offering candidates an opportunity to build confidence and hone their skills in actual interviews. In alignment with the competency-based learning framework outlined by Bleazby (2017), these simulations encourage critical thinking and self-reflection (Collins et. al, 2019). By exposing participants to the types of questions commonly encountered in real interviews, mock interviews helped them to practice effective responses (Collins et al., 2019). They often incorporate behavioral interview techniques to highlight essential job-related skills, traits, and competencies, which are strong predictors of future job performance (Doll, 2018). As organizations frequently use structured interviews to evaluate and identify top candidates (Makachoska, 2023), mock interviews play a vital role in familiarizing individuals with these formats (Doll, 2018). As technology-mediated interviews become increasingly common, mock interviews serve as valuable tools for developing interview skills in the modern workplace context.

3.1 Confidence building

Mock interviews are valuable for developing the behavioral, communication, and language skills essential for job-seeking success (Hartwell et al., 2019). They enhanced their understanding of the interview process, the chosen industry, and personal strengths and weaknesses Bergelson et. al., 2022). Practice interviews provide hands-on experience, help candidates prepare answers, refine verbal communication, and build confidence while benefiting from professional feedback (Renbarger et al., 2022). Recent studies have reinforced the importance of thorough interview preparation and simulated practice to enhance candidate performance. According to Hiration (2023), well-prepared candidates often achieve better outcomes, as preparation boosts confidence and aligns their skills with job requirements. Additionally, Asana (2023) highlights that simulated practices, such as role-playing interviews, improve active listening skills and reduce distracting habits by allowing individuals to engage fully and attentively in conversations.

3.2 Fostering professionalism

These exercises also enable the practical application of skills relevant to career interests (Seifi et al., 2020). This enhances job interview self-efficacy, which reflects confidence in handling interview challenges (Schneider et. al., 2019). By boosting perceived self-efficacy, mock interviews help candidates effectively present their strengths and build confidence (Van Hoye et al., 2019). Additionally, they hold significant pedagogical value, fostering professionalism and correlating with academic performance (Crandell-Williams et al., 2017). Structured interview preparations strengthen resumes and interview techniques (Lorin, 2020). Mock interviews were particularly effective in enhancing students' confidence. A study by Wilkie & Rosendale (2024) found that students often reported increased preparedness and reduced anxiety post-practice. Furthermore, combining mock interviews with reflective activities, such as reviewing recorded performances, amplifies learning outcomes by helping students identify and correct their errors (Seifi et al, 2020).

The use of technology-mediated formats such as automated video interviews (AVI) has emerged as an alternative to traditional face-to-face mock interviews. AVIs allow for asynchronous practice, providing students with the flexibility to engage conveniently. These platforms typically integrate advanced analytics to assess performance, including body language and speech patterns (Jaser et al., 2023). While AVIs improve access and reduce costs, they may not fully replicate the socio-emotional nuances of face-to-face interactions, as some students prefer to build rapport and receive immediate feedback (Hudak et al., 2019).

Previous research has highlighted various benefits associated with mock job interviews, including opportunities for students to practice and refine their interview skills, gain valuable feedback, and bolster their confidence in facing real-world job interviews (Lukacik et al., 2022; Johnson & Kesterson-Townes, 2020). However, the literature also acknowledges the need for further exploration of students' perceptions to inform the ongoing development and enhancement of mock interview programmes. Drawing on qualitative research methodology, this study aims to fill this gap by providing an understanding of how students perceive the utility, relevance, and impact of mock job interviews on their career preparedness. Through interviews and thematic analysis, this study sought to uncover the underlying factors that shape students' perceptions, identify areas of effectiveness, and offer insights into potential avenues for refinement and improvement. Eventually, by shedding light on students' perspectives, this study attempts to contribute to the ongoing discourse on career preparation in higher education and inform the development of evidence-based practices aimed at equipping students for success in their future professional endeavors.

3.3 Induce insights on hiring process

Mock interviews in university settings are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for career preparation, equipping students with skills to navigate real-world employment processes. This review explores recent findings on the implementation and perception of mock interviews among university students. Recent studies have underscored the multifaceted benefits of these simulated interviews, highlighting their role in enhancing students' self-efficacy, providing experiential learning opportunities, and bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application. One significant advantage of mock interviews is their capacity to bolster student confidence in navigating real-world employment processes. For instance, a study conducted at the International Islamic University Malaysia revealed that students often underestimated their interview competencies. The findings indicated that participants performed better in actual mock interviews than they had anticipated, suggesting that such simulations can effectively enhance self-perceived competence and reduce interview-related anxiety (Mohamad Utama, 2022).

Moreover, mock interviews serve as a conduit for experiential learning, allowing students to apply theoretical concepts to practical settings. Research involving sports management students demonstrated that engaging in mock interviews, especially when students assumed roles as both interviewers and interviewees, provided comprehensive insight into the hiring process. This dual exposure not only improved their interviewing skills, but also deepened their understanding of employer expectations, thereby fostering a more holistic grasp of the employment landscape (Wilkie and Rosendale, 2024). The implementation of mock interviews also addressed the critical need for practical experience among graduates. Universities are increasingly recognizing that academic qualifications alone may not suffice in a competitive job market. For example, the University of Albany has instituted mandatory work experience components for certain majors, acknowledging that hands-on practice, such as that gained through mock interviews, is essential for effective career readiness (Times Union, 2025).

In summary, the integration of mock job interviews within university curricula is a strategic approach for enhancing student employability. By providing a realistic platform for practice, feedback, and experiential learning, these simulations allow students to transition seamlessly from academic environments to professional settings.

4. Theoretical perspective

The Competency-Based Learning Framework (CBLF) provides a relevant theoretical basis for understanding mock job interviews as a tool for career preparation (Evans et. al., 2021). CBLF emphasizes the mastery of essential skills, behaviors, and knowledge critical to real-world success, aligning closely with the purpose of mock interviews. According to Everett (2019), competency-based learning is particularly effective in interdisciplinary fields because its student-centered design encourages greater learner autonomy and independence. It is worth pointing out that the competency-based education fosters student engagement and deep learning when aligned with practical performance tasks, enabling learners to demonstrate workplace-relevant competencies such as communication, critical thinking, and adaptability (Pan et al., 2023). At its core, the CBLF prioritizes the development and mastery of crucial competencies, such as skills, behaviors, and knowledge, which are essential for success in real-world scenarios, unlike traditional education models that often emphasize theoretical knowledge and rote learning. Hence, CBLF focuses on practical performance-based outcomes.

Recent studies have highlighted the positive impact of competency-based education on students' engagement and motivation. For instance, research conducted at the Tanzania Public Service College-Mbeya Campus has demonstrated that implementing competency-based education significantly enhances students' active participation in the learning process, fostering greater autonomy and independence (Mbwillo, 2024). Furthermore, authentic-based competency assessments, which integrate real-world tasks and collaborative learning, have been shown to promote deeper understanding and practical application of skills among students (Azmanirah, 2020). By embedding CBLF-aligned mock interviews into university curricula, educational institutions can create a bridge between academic learning and professional demands. This alignment helps address the skills gap often cited by employers, ensuring that graduates are job ready. The focus on competencies ensures that students develop transferable skills applicable across multiple disciplines and careers, thus enhancing their employability in an increasingly dynamic job market. Therefore, this study applies CBLF to explore students' perceptions of these benefits.

Social constructivism, as detailed by Vygotsky (1978), offers a compelling theoretical lens to explore students' perceptions of mock job interviews as a form of career preparation. According to Vygotsky, learning is inherently a social process that is facilitated through interactions with more knowledgeable others and is mediated by cultural tools and language. In the context of mock job interviews, dynamic interactions between students and interviewers, whether they are instructors, career professionals, or peers, serve as a critical space for scaffolded learning. Through feedback, students refine their communication skills, enhance self-awareness, and build confidence, aligning with social constructivist emphasis on learning (Neelen & Kirschner, 2020).

Furthermore, the reflective component of mock interviews encourages students to internalize the feedback provided, a process Vygotsky described as moving from the social to individual planes of development. This internalization not only aids in skill development but also promotes critical self-assessment and adaptability, which are qualities essential for career readiness (Saxena et al, 2021). By situating mock job interviews within the framework of social constructivism, researchers can better understand how these experiential activities shape students' perceptions and prepare them for professional challenges through socially mediated learning.

This study investigated students' perceptions of mock-job interviews as career preparation. Three research questions (RQs) were developed to guide this investigation.
RQ1: What do students understand about mock job interview sessions?
RQ2: What were the challenges faced by students during the mock interview?
RQ3: How will mock interview sessions prepare students for real job interviews?

5. Research design

A qualitative method based on a case study approach was employed in this study to obtain data from the participants to investigate students' perceptions of mock job interviews as career preparation. By applying a qualitative approach, it provides the opportunity to depict the capability of the participants' perceptions of mock job interviews as career preparation. It facilitates the understanding of students' perspectives and offers insights into their experiences in mock interviews. It can be pointed out that the qualitative approach is appropriate compared to other approaches because it could provide necessary insights into understanding participants' experiences and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell 2015). The research procedure comprised two main parts: a mock interview and qualitative data collection via semi-structured interviews.

5.1 The mock interview

At University A, a mock interview was incorporated as part of the curriculum for the course English for Career Preparation. The course is designed to equip students with the essential English language skills required in professional workplaces. The course emphasizes practical and context-specific communication competencies including resume writing, job interview techniques, and workplace communication strategies. Students engage in a variety of interactive and task-based activities, such as mock interviews, presentations, and collaborative projects, to enhance their fluency, accuracy, and confidence in using English in career-related scenarios. Additionally, the course focuses on developing critical soft skills, such as adaptability, teamwork, and problem solving, which are essential for succeeding in diverse and dynamic work environments. By the end of the course, students will be well-prepared to navigate the demands of the job market and communicate effectively in professional settings.

The purpose of the mock interview was to evaluate participants' communication abilities, readiness, and ability to provide appropriate responses with regard to questions about the job. The mock interview was intended to provide participants with a genuine interview experience so that they could refine their responses and receive constructive feedback from the lecturer conducting the mock interview. It was conducted as a hands-on activity to address the gap between academic understanding and practical application. All students undertaking the course were required to complete the mock interview, ensuring that they had obtained practical interview experience.

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the program coordinator. The researchers also met with the students to seek their consent to participate in the study. Letters of consent describing the research in detail were issued to the 17 students taking the course. The course instructor and students were briefed about the study and the data were collected at the start of the course.

The mock interview sessions were conducted in Week 12 and Week 13 of the semester, in the classroom, in a controlled environment, simulating a formal interview setting. Participants were required to dress professionally and adhere to standard interview protocols. The interviews were arranged with four participants in a group attempting the same job using a job advertisement provided by the lecturer. Each group interview session lasted approximately 20–30 minutes per participant, ensuring sufficient time for both structured questions and spontaneous discussion. The interviews were conducted by the lecturer responsible for teaching the course, who had 17 years of experience in Human Resources, specifically in interviewing candidates for organizational roles. This extensive background in recruitment and candidate evaluations ensured professional and insightful interview experience for participants. The mock interview process is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mock interview process

1.	Introduction and greeting:	Participants introduced themselves and were welcomed by the panel.
2.	General questions:	Common interview questions related to personal background, strengths, and career aspirations were asked.
3.	Technical and situational questions:	Job-specific or field-related questions were posed to assess participants' knowledge and problem-solving abilities.
4.	Behavioral questions:	Participants responded to scenario-based questions, focusing on past experiences and how they handled challenges.
5.	Feedback and discussion:	At the end of the interview, lecturer provided feedback, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

Each participant received both verbal and written feedback, including detailed observations of their performance. The feedback focused on articulation, confidence, response structure, and overall impressions. Additionally, recommendations for improvement were provided to help the participants refine their interview skills for future opportunities.

5.2 Data collection and analysis

The research instrument used for the study was an open-ended questionnaire survey that consisted of 10 questions that were designed based on the research questions. These questions are listed in the Appendix. The questionnaire collected data on the effectiveness of mock job interviews in enhancing students' preparedness for future career endeavors. The questions also included two questions prior to learning the course English for Career Preparation, such as the types of interviews the students were aware of and their expectations before participating in the mock interviews.

The research survey was administered at the end of the semester (Week 14) via an online platform. The participants were assured that this exercise was not connected to any course assignment grade or bonus points, and their involvement was voluntary. Besides, the participants were encouraged to provide honest responses without fear of any negative consequences, ensuring that their opinions were genuinely represented. The voluntary nature of participation further strengthens the validity of the responses (Green et al., 2020). To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, the participants were provided with a summary of their responses to corroborate the accuracy of their statements, verifying that the interpretations remained true to their intended meaning (Briscoe & Hall, 2021). After the survey forms were transcribed, each participant emailed a summary of their individual responses, along with key interpretations. Participants were asked to review the document, confirm the accuracy of their statements, or suggest any clarifications. This process ensured that the data remained true of the participants' intended meanings and enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings.

Researchers implemented several measures to ensure the authenticity of the responses collected through online forms. First, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the importance of providing honest, reflective responses based on their personal experiences and opinions. To mitigate the risk of respondents using Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated answers, the questions were designed to be open-ended, reflective, and specific to the participants' individual experiences, making it challenging to provide generic or externally sourced responses without direct experience. Consistency checks were performed by analyzing the coherence of responses across related questions to identify any discrepancies or indications of inauthentic answers.

To overcome the inherent weaknesses of online data collection, particularly the inability to observe body language and intonation, this study incorporated follow-up interviews with a subset of participants. These interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants, allowing the researchers to observe nonverbal cues, clarify responses, and probe deeper into participants' perspectives. This triangulation of data collection methods strengthened the validity

of the findings by ensuring that the insights gathered were rich, authentic, and reflective of participants' true experiences. Where follow-up interviews were not feasible, respondents were asked to elaborate on their answers to provide greater depth and clarity, further reducing the likelihood of AI-generated or insincere responses.

The semi-structured interviews were analyzed through the transcription and classification of categories and patterns. Data obtained from semi-structured interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The researchers examined each transcript carefully while highlighting any discrete ideas that emerged from the data and labelled them by providing a name for the codes. The codes ensured that each code or notion was mentioned in the transcripts of the other participants. If a code was assigned but did not appear anywhere else during the study, it was discarded.

6. Results

The participants of the study were 17 second-year undergraduate students (with an average age of 20 years) studying at a private university who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. To ensure participants' confidentiality, they were given codes such as "P1" or "P2," meaning P1 is Participant 1 and P2 is Participant 2, respectively. The participants were selected from an intact class conducted for one semester (14 weeks). They were selected based on the following two criteria: (i) second-year undergraduate students from a university who did not have prior knowledge or experience of mock interviews and (ii) the students were registered for the English for Career Preparation course. The findings, which are categorized according to the themes that emerged from the data, are presented in the following subsections based on the three research questions.

6.1 RQ 1: What do the students understand about mock job interview sessions?
A thematic analysis of the qualitative study on the understanding of mock job interviews among students revealed four key themes: interview atmosphere, employability skills, reciprocal evaluation, and milestones.

6.1.1 Interview atmosphere
Participants expressed varying degrees of satisfaction regarding their understanding of mock interviews.

"I was expecting the interview to be very strict and the interviewer to be not friendly." (P1)

"Before the mock interview, I expected to engage in a simulated interview scenario where I would have the opportunity to showcase my abilities, receive constructive feedback, and gain valuable insights into areas where I could improve my performance." (P2)

"Before participating in the interview, I expected to gain new experience of the interview and valuable insights into the process to improve my communication skills as well." (P3)

"Before participating in the mock interview, I expect that the question to be asked during the personal interview would be some basic questions that are general." (P4)

The excerpts revealed that students perceived mock job interviews as valuable tools for professional growth, although their expectations varied widely. Some, like P1, anticipated a highly formal and strict environment, reflecting an understanding of mock interviews as realistic simulations of high-stake scenarios. Others, such as P2 and P3, focus on personal development,

expect opportunities to gain insight, improve communication skills, and receive constructive feedback to refine their performance. Meanwhile, P4 highlighted an expectation for basic, general questions, suggesting a perception of mock interviews as foundational exercises rather than comprehensive simulations. These differing expectations underscore the multifaceted role of mock job interviews, catering to various aspects of career preparation from skill enhancement and self-assessment to familiarity with professional interactions.

6.1.2 Employability skills
Students in this study understood employability skills as essential competencies that enhance their readiness for the job market, enabling them to perform effectively in professional roles.

"Job interviews are the process of screening the suitable candidates for certain positions in a company". (P10)

"To know the actual and full procedures of the interview and learn about the questions that might be asked by the interviewers". (P11)

"My understanding is it's one of the quickest and instant ways to know if someone suits the job. From a job interview, the employer could get information of whether this potential employee fits the job or not, while the employee could also quickly know if the company suits their expectations and abilities." (P5)

"My understanding is that interviews are the first step to seeking potential employees for potential growth for the company in the future. Since there are many candidates from different academic backgrounds with different skill sets, it is important to select the most suitable employee for respective job positions." (P6)

"During a job interview, which is an essential stage in the hiring process, employers and candidates communicate about the candidate's background, abilities, and fit for the position. They provide a forum for reciprocal evaluation, allowing both parties to determine whether the candidate's skills and the job requirements are a good fit." (P8)

These excerpts collectively highlight that students perceive job interviews as a crucial process in recruitment, serving multiple purposes for both employers and candidates. They understood interviews as a means for employers to evaluate candidates' suitability for specific roles by assessing their qualifications, skills, and alignment with job requirements (P10, P5, P6, and P8). Additionally, students recognize interviews as a structured procedure to familiarize themselves with potential questions and gain insight into the hiring process (P11). Importantly, they see interviews as a reciprocal evaluation platform where candidates can also assess the company's fit with their expectations and abilities, emphasizing mutual benefits (P5, P8). This understanding reflects a nuanced view of job interviews as essential tools for identifying the best match between employers and candidates, supporting both organizational growth and personal career alignment.

6.1.3 Reciprocal evaluation
Reciprocal evaluation refers to a two-way process of assessment during a job interview, where both the employer and candidate evaluate each other to determine if they are a good fit. In this study, the students noted that mutual assessment allows both parties to make informed decisions about the hiring process, ensuring a compatible match for long-term success.

"Job interview is to talk about yourself and the company and try to decide if you're a good match for them." (P9)

"Job interviews are a way for interviewers from the organization that you are applying to get an idea of your persona and how your skills are applicable for the applied job position." (P17)

"Job interviews are meant to seek a level of confidence in a person when promoting themselves/proving that they can work under conflicts/making sure that they are an asset to the company and not a liability." (P16)

"A face-to-face check to make sure a person is up to standard when it comes to factors like eye contact, confidence, whether they're able to gel with different kinds of people." (P14)

"During a job interview, which is an essential stage in the hiring process, employers and candidates communicate about the candidate's background, abilities, and fit for the position. They provide a forum for reciprocal evaluation, allowing both parties to determine whether the candidate's skills and the job requirements are a good fit." (14)

"A questioning session done by the interviewer to gauge if a person is suitable for the job position". (P11)

It is worth noting that the excerpts reveal that students understand job interviews as a multidimensional process aimed at assessing compatibility between the candidate and organization. They view interviews as a platform for candidates to present themselves and their skills, showcasing their confidence, adaptability, and ability to contribute positively to the organization (P9, P16). Interviews are seen as tools for employers to evaluate candidates' qualifications, personas, and potential through direct interactions such as observing confidence, eye contact, and interpersonal skills (P14, P17). Additionally, students recognize the reciprocal nature of interviews, where both parties assess alignment with each other's expectations and needs (P14). The process is also understood as a formal questioning session to gauge a candidate's suitability for the role, emphasizing the structured nature of the assessment (P11). These findings highlight students' nuanced perceptions of job interviews as not just evaluative, but also communicative and relational, focusing on mutual decision-making and alignment.

6.1.4 Milestone
Mock interviews function as a critical milestone for students and serve as a preparatory step in the job market. The following excerpts from two students revealed mock interviews as a symbolic "entry ticket" in the job market:

"It is the entry ticket to a company." (P11).

"… an essential stage in the hiring process." (P9)

Therefore, these simulated interview sessions allow students to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional expectations, equipping them with essential skills such as effective communication, professional demeanor, and confidence in presenting their qualifications. Engaging in mock interviews reduces anxiety and enhances students' ability to respond effectively to real-world interview challenges.

6.2 RQ2: What were the challenges faced by the students during the mock interview?
The analysis of student data highlights three key challenges faced during mock job-interview sessions. These findings provide valuable insights into the areas where students encounter difficulties, which can guide future enhancements in the process.

6.2.1 Job relevance and skills alignment

A significant challenge faced by students was identifying the relevance of the mock interview to their desired job roles and effectively aligning their skills. Some students expressed uncertainty regarding whether the interview scenarios accurately reflected real-world job expectations in their fields of interest.

"It could be challenging to ascertain the actual objective of the interviewer in certain cases due to ambiguous and open-ended questions. I sometimes couldn't tell if my answer to these questions was meeting the interviewer's intentions because they required careful interpretation." (P14)

"The challenges that I faced are concerning what type of answers the interviewer expects to hear from us. I'm afraid that the answer given is not what they wanted to know. Therefore, it becomes a hard time processing the key points for the questions." (P8)

"The challenges were trying to come up with answers on the fly, not able to have perfect responses." (P9)

Therefore, this misalignment created confusion and hindered their ability to demonstrate their competencies confidently. For instance, students pursuing technical roles found it difficult to showcase specific technical skills during generalized interview scenarios. Similarly, nontechnical students struggled to adapt the questions to match their soft skills and professional aspirations.

"Understanding the mock interview questions required careful consideration of the context, clarity, and specific requirements of each question. Challenges could arise from ambiguity, unfamiliar terminology, or complex scenarios presented in the questions. Additionally, interpreting the interviewer's intent and effectively addressing the underlying concerns while articulating a coherent response posed additional challenges". (P3)

This gap underscores the need for more tailored mock interview frameworks that cater to diverse career paths.

6.6.2 Challenges in articulating answers

Another common challenge was students' difficulty articulating clear and concise responses to the interview questions. Many students reported struggling to structure their answers effectively, particularly when responding to situational or behavioral questions. Some described feeling overwhelmed by the need to balance professionalism with authenticity in their responses.

This issue was compounded by a lack of familiarity with frameworks such as the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result), which is widely used to structure answers. Consequently, students often provided incomplete or overly verbose answers that did not adequately showcase their qualifications or experiences.

6.2.3 Ambiguity in open-ended questions

The ambiguity of open-ended questions poses a notable challenge to many students. Questions such as 'Tell me about yourself' or 'Where do you see yourself in five years?' often left students feeling unsure about how much detail to provide or which aspects of their background to emphasize.

"In the part of the personal interview question there was no challenge as the words and questions asked are easy to understand even though it is some unexpected question to be asked. However, for the open-ended question, there are some challenges as some of the words used in the case will consist of some words that are unfamiliar to me." (P6)

"The questions asked by the interviewers might be vague and biased." (P11)

"It could be challenging to ascertain the actual objective of the interviewer in certain cases due to ambiguous and open-ended questions. I sometimes couldn't tell if my answer to these questions was meeting the interviewer's intentions because they required careful interpretation." (P14)

Based on the students' excerpts, it can be pointed out that the lack of clear guidance on these types of questions made it difficult to gauge what the interviewer was looking for, leading to a sense of insecurity and underperformance. The absence of structured examples or prompts further contributed to their unease, making this a critical area for improvement in mock interview designs.

6.3 RQ3: How will the mock interview sessions prepare students for real job interviews?
Mock interview sessions play a critical role in preparing students for real-world job interviews by equipping them with essential skills and strategies to enhance their readiness and performance. One key area of preparation is practicing and familiarizing oneself with interview protocols such as researching potential employers, understanding job descriptions, and rehearsing responses to commonly asked questions. The following are excerpts from the students:

"The question that was asked in the interview to me and also my group member is unexpected as it enables me to know such a question would also be questioned by the interviewer to the interviewee. It helps me to extend my critical thinking skills as after such a question I would know how to answer such a question and I would also think by myself would some relevant question would also be asked etc." (P6)

"The questions asked really enhanced my critical thinking skills, as we were given workplace scenarios to explain how we would handle various situations. This will help us be better prepared to face similar issues in the future." (P10)

"To brainstorm and develop the sentences within a short period can be challenging and beneficial to improve immediate response in English." (P13)

"Definitely made me think things through properly before answering." (P15)

Therefore, conducting mock job interviews not only builds knowledge, but also instills a sense of preparedness, helping students reduce uncertainties and anticipate interview dynamics. Additionally, mock interviews foster confidence and self-management, enabling students to manage nerves and remain under pressure. Most participants emphasized the importance of staying calm, suggesting the following:

"I was told that I'm confident in my answers which gave me a huge confidence boost, knowing that I will only continue improving from now on." (P9)

"The feedback given by the lecturer was helpful to know which part I can improve about my performance during the mock interview. Such as the way I answer and the words that I use during the interview, and I may use those comments to improve." (P10)

"It benefited me in gaining insights of the qualities, attitudes and methods of problem-solving that recruiters generally look forward to from interviewees." (P14)

This focus on composure translated directly into improved communication and professionalism during the interviews. Moreover, the mock interview sessions emphasize the value of critical thinking and clear communication, which are pivotal in real interviews where understanding and responding effectively to questions determines success. As one respondent highlighted,

"The mock interview has significantly enhanced my critical thinking skills by challenging me to think analytically and strategically in real-time scenarios. During the interview, I was prompted to evaluate and interpret complex questions, discern underlying intentions, and formulate thoughtful responses that effectively addressed the interviewer's concerns. This process required me to draw upon my knowledge, experiences, and problem-solving abilities to navigate various challenges and uncertainties presented throughout the interview. Additionally, receiving feedback on my responses provided valuable insights into areas where I could further refine my critical thinking skills, such as identifying logical inconsistencies, anticipating follow-up questions, and synthesizing information to present well-rounded arguments. Overall, the mock interview served as a practical platform for honing my ability to think critically, adaptively, and decisively in professional contexts, thereby better preparing me for future career opportunities." (P3)

Critical thinking skills help students handle complex or unexpected questions with poise, reflecting on their adaptability and critical thinking. Furthermore, mock interviews provide opportunities for feedback and continuous improvement, allowing students to reflect on their performance and identify areas of growth. For example, one participant mentioned that feedback helped them realize that their responses were "a bit too brief," prompting efforts to refine and expand their answers.

"Yes, the feedback given to me after the mock interview was incredibly helpful. It provided valuable insights into my performance, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. Understanding where I excelled allowed me to build upon those strengths, while constructive criticism helped me identify specific areas to focus on and develop further. The feedback was specific and actionable, offering concrete suggestions for improvement that I could incorporate into my preparation for future interviews." (P3)

By simulating the interview environment and providing structured feedback, mock interviews encourage students to address weaknesses and enhance their overall competence, aligning with findings from the career readiness literature that stress experiential learning is vital for professional development. Consequently, these sessions acted as comprehensive training grounds, bridging the gap between theoretical preparation and practical application in job interviews.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study offer insights into students' perceptions of mock job interviews and highlight their effectiveness in career preparation. Thematic analysis identified several dimensions of understanding, challenges, and benefits that these simulated sessions provided to participants.

In line with the Competency-Based Learning Framework (CBLF), the students viewed mock interviews as valuable exercises for professional development, offering opportunities to refine communication, build confidence, and gain familiarity with real-world interview dynamics. These sessions were perceived as both structured and flexible, addressing varied career preparation needs, from understanding the interview atmosphere to gaining clarity about employability skills. Notably, the students appreciated the reciprocal evaluation aspect, emphasizing the dual benefits for both candidates and employers. These findings align with the existing literature that underscores the role of mock interviews in fostering career readiness and adaptability (Hoare & McIlveen, 2021; Green et al., 2020).

The study revealed a significant challenge in that the participants were unable to understand the interviewer's expectations. This obstacle points to gaps in the current design of mock interviews, suggesting a need for customization to address diverse career aspirations and skills. Previous research echoes these challenges, emphasizing that tailored interventions are crucial for bridging

the gap between academic preparation and professional expectations (Tran et al., 2022). In addition, mock interviews were found to enhance critical thinking, communication, and self-management skills among the participants. Feedback mechanisms are particularly impactful, enabling students to identify weaknesses and iteratively refine their performance. This finding aligns with CBLF and social constructivism theory, which stresses the importance of experiential learning in developing workplace competencies (Briscoe & Hall, 2021). These findings further corroborate the value of feedback in shaping career-related skills, as identified in contemporary studies (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2019).

In line with social constructivism theory, which emphasizes learning as a collaborative and context-driven process, institutions should implement tailored mock interview frameworks that cater to diverse career fields, incorporating technical, behavioral, and situational questions relevant to specific professional pathways. Workshops focusing on answer structuring techniques, such as the Situation, Task, Action, and Result (STAR) framework, enable students to construct meaningful responses by engaging in reflective practice and drawing from their personal experiences. Moreover, guidance in addressing ambiguous or open-ended questions fosters critical thinking and adaptability, reduces anxiety, and enhances preparedness. To further support learning, structured feedback mechanisms should be integrated into mock interview sessions to promote dialogue and iterative improvements. These strategies reflect the principles of social constructivism by creating a dynamic learning environment in which students actively construct knowledge through authentic, interactive, and reflective experience. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on experiential learning in career preparation, emphasizing the importance of mock interviews as a pedagogical tool. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of such interventions on employment outcomes and career trajectories.

8. Conclusion

This study underscores the multifaceted role of mock job interviews in enhancing career preparedness of the students. By simulating real-world interview scenarios, these sessions enabled participants to develop critical skills, gain confidence, and receive actionable feedback, ultimately bridging the gap between academic learning and professional requirements. However, challenges, such as alignment with job roles and difficulty in articulating responses, highlight areas for improvement. Addressing these challenges through tailored frameworks, training, and comprehensive feedback mechanisms can enhance the effectiveness of mock interviews significantly.

Future research should focus on studies that assess the sustained impact of mock interviews on career outcomes, particularly in enhancing work-related skills, such as teamwork, time management, and communication. Examining how mock interviews contribute to the development of these competencies would provide stronger evidence for their value in career preparation. Additionally, exploring the integration of technology, such as AI-driven interview simulations, may offer innovative solutions to the challenges commonly faced by students, including anxiety management, adapting to diverse interview formats, and receiving personalized feedback. Overall, mock interviews represent a vital component of career preparation, equipping students with the practical skills and confidence to effectively navigate the complex landscape of professional opportunities.

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Author contributions: JIT was responsible for conceptualizing the study, developing the research framework, and guiding the overall research design. HK conducted and supervised the data collection process, including open-ended surveys and participant communication, and contributed to the thematic analysis. YPS was involved in transcription, data analysis, and initial drafting of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the revision of the manuscript, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of this work.

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Appendix

Student Interview Questions

Prior to learning this course:

1. What are the different types of interviews that you were aware of? Explain
2. What were your expectations before participating in the mock interviews?

After attending the mock job interview:

1. What is your understanding about job interviews?
2. What were the challenges that you faced in understanding the mock interview questions?
3. What were the language problems you faced when answering the interview questions?
4. How would you overcome the challenges that you faced during the mock interview?
5. How do you think the mock interview session has helped you in preparing yourself for your future job application?
6. What specific skills or areas were you hoping to improve through the mock interview?
7. How has the mock interview enhanced/enabled/benefitted your critical thinking skills?
8. Was the feedback given to you after the mock interview helpful? Why?