Get ready, get set, /spiːx/! Introducing a virtual reality interview simulator

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ABSTRAK / ABSTRACT

/spiːx/ is a virtual reality application that was inspired by the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcription of the word "speak" which aims to encourage more Malaysians to practice English communication. This virtual reality tool enables graduating students to refine their interview techniques before finishing their higher education, thereby boosting their employability and reducing their English-speaking anxiety. The study implemented experimental research design involving 94 students enrolled in a Professional English course. Results indicated that participants who underwent three virtual reality sessions with /spiːx/ experienced a reduction in interview anxiety almost double compared to their peers who did not. A paired samples t-test was performed, and result indicated a significance difference between the pre-test and post-test with the p-value <0.05. These findings demonstrate the application's effectiveness in alleviating interview stress among university students. Overall, the study underscores the considerable potential of virtual reality in enhancing education and communication skills.

Keywords: /SPIːX/; Virtual Reality, Job Interview, Interview Anxiety, Employability

INTRODUCTION

Although the issue of unemployment is not a foreign topic in Malaysia, but recent studies indicate that unemployment is exacerbating especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors Ismail and Zakaria (2021) in their job-hunting book, present data showing the fierce competition in the job market. They highlight that since 2014, an average of 20% of new graduates has faced unemployment each year through 2019. A study by a public university in Melaka indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation, with more new graduates being significantly impacted by the severe recession (Rahman et al., 2020). Interviews with recent graduates revealed a willingness to accept jobs for which they are overqualified, underscoring the intense struggle and desperation among Malaysian graduates to secure employment post-pandemic. With the fierce competition in job hunting, the issue of unemployment is often linked to the lack of proficiency in English at workplace (Ismail and Zakaria, 2021; Rahman et al., 2020). Therefore, a solution is needed to address the issues of English proficiency and Malaysian graduates' employability.

This study proposes the utilisation of virtual reality to overcome students' interview anxiety and improve their interview performance. This is because interview anxiety is highly correlated to interview performance which will lead to the success of employment (Schneider et al., 2019). Virtual reality is selected as the treatment not only because it is a newly emerging and increasingly popular technology, but also because of its extensive application and use in virtual classrooms and simulations (Wong et al., 2020). To achieve this, the following research questions are formulated for this study:

Research Questions:
1. Is there any significant difference on students' interview anxiety with and without the presence of virtual reality?
2. Which anxiety component (i.e. communication, appearance, social, performance, or behavioural) is the highest among students who enrolled in a professional communication course at a technical university in Malaysia?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants
94 students who are enrolled in a professional English course at a technical university are recruited for this study. Participants are bachelor's degree students from