

## BRIDGING CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND EMPLOYMENT DEMANDS: HOSPITALITY STUDENTS' PERCEIVED READINESS FOR ENGLISH JOB INTERVIEWS

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### Abstract

This qualitative inquiry explores hospitality students' self-assessed preparedness for participating in English-mediated employment interviews within the international hospitality sector, emphasizing the mismatch between pedagogical practices in the classroom and the communicative realities of professional interviews. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews involving 20 students enrolled at STIPARY Tourism Academy Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The interview data were subjected to thematic analysis guided by three pre-established analytical frameworks derived from the study objectives. The analysis identifies three overarching dimensions of readiness gaps. The first concerns affective constraints, where all participants exhibited interview-related anxiety, particularly when required to respond spontaneously. This affective burden was further compounded by limited command of hospitality-specific lexis and observable psychophysiological inhibition when facing high-pressure questioning. The second dimension relates to insufficient interview preparation, reflected in students' unfamiliarity with the STAR interview framework, overdependence on rote memorization, and difficulty in producing logically organized and persuasive responses. The third dimension involves contextual inadequacies, notably a lack of awareness regarding intercultural interview conventions, appropriate register selection, and effective strategies for addressing challenging or sensitive questions. Despite its focus on a single Indonesian tourism institution, the study offers important pedagogical implications. The findings point to the urgency of integrating anxiety regulation strategies, explicit training in structured interview discourse, sustained practice in spontaneous spoken interaction, instruction in cross-cultural pragmatics, and closer collaboration with industry stakeholders through authentic HR-oriented feedback. This study extends the ESP and vocational ELT literature by revealing instances of complete communicative shutdown during interviews and by highlighting the discrepancy between students' perceived self-marketing confidence and their actual oral proficiency.

**Keywords:** *Anxiety Management, Cross-Cultural Communication, English for Hospitality, ESP, Job Interview Readiness, Vocational Education.*

### INTRODUCTION

The international hospitality industry has progressively positioned English competence as a central criterion in employment selection, particularly within global hotel networks and transnational tourism enterprises. Functioning as the dominant lingua franca in service-oriented communication, English proficiency in this sector extends beyond elementary interactional ability. Hospitality graduates are increasingly required to demonstrate professional-level spoken competence, especially in evaluative contexts such as recruitment interviews. Previous studies have repeatedly highlighted the instrumental role of English across hospitality settings, where recruitment procedures, staff development programs, and operational communication are frequently conducted in English (Graddol, 2006; Blue & Harun, 2003). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Indonesia, where tourism represents a strategic contributor to national economic development. As the industry continues to expand, hospitality graduates encounter intensified competition for positions that necessitate effective English-mediated interview performance, often assessed by international recruiters or human resource personnel operating under global professional standards (Hermawan et al., 2018). Notwithstanding prolonged exposure to formal English instruction, a substantial number of Indonesian hospitality students report inadequate readiness to meet authentic communicative demands, particularly

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in high-stakes evaluative interactions such as job interviews (Kusumoto, 2008; Maher & Yoo, 2019). This persistent issue has been consistently documented in empirical investigations addressing English proficiency challenges in hospitality education. Employment interviews constitute a distinctive communicative genre that cannot be reduced to general language competence alone. Within this institutionalized interaction, candidates are expected to integrate linguistic accuracy, pragmatic appropriateness, strategic self-presentation, and intercultural awareness within a constrained timeframe and under considerable psychological pressure. Roberts and Campbell (2005) argue that interviews are governed by implicit interactional conventions related to turn-taking, politeness strategies, and norms of self-promotion. For learners of English as a foreign language, these demands are further compounded by the necessity to simultaneously manage cognitive load, emotional regulation, and impression management in an evaluative setting (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). In contrast to classroom discourse, interview interactions are inherently unpredictable and unscripted, requiring spontaneous language production, coherent narrative construction, and adaptive language use aligned with interviewer expectations. Consequently, learners who possess adequate grammatical knowledge may nonetheless experience significant difficulty when required to articulate professional experiences, competencies, and personal attributes in English during formal interview encounters.

Within the Indonesian educational context, these difficulties are closely linked to long-standing instructional orientations in English language teaching. English instruction for hospitality programs has traditionally foregrounded form-focused pedagogy, particularly grammar mastery and receptive language skills such as reading and listening, while providing relatively limited space for the development of spontaneous, interactive oral communication (Lengkanawati, 2005; Lie, 2007). While such pedagogical practices may support test-oriented achievement, they are often insufficient in equipping learners with the communicative competence required for authentic professional interaction. Consequently, a clear gap can be observed between classroom-based language learning and the communicative demands encountered during employment recruitment processes, especially within high-stakes and time-pressured interview situations (Zhu, 2012). Furthermore, interview performance is further mediated by sociocultural influences. Indonesian communicative norms generally prioritize modesty, interpersonal harmony, and indirect expression, which may contrast with prevailing Western interview conventions that value assertiveness, direct self-representation, and explicit articulation of personal achievements (Hofstede, 2001). This cultural mismatch may cause learners to regard self-promotion as socially inappropriate, thereby limiting their capacity to project confidence and persuasiveness when participating in English-mediated interviews.

Although scholarly inquiry into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within hospitality settings has grown, existing studies have predominantly focused on curriculum design, workplace discourse characteristics, or employer-driven competency expectations (Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Lin, 2019). In comparison, relatively little empirical attention has been devoted to students' interview preparedness from an emic standpoint that foregrounds learners' own perceptions, emotional responses, and self-identified skill gaps. This oversight is particularly significant within ESP needs analysis, which emphasizes the alignment of instructional practices with learners' actual communicative challenges rather than with institutional or instructor-based assumptions (Basturkmen, 2010). Without a comprehensive understanding of how learners perceive their own readiness, curricular interventions risk addressing only surface-level linguistic shortcomings while neglecting deeper affective, strategic, and contextual factors that hinder effective interview performance. In response to this gap, the present study explores hospitality students' perceived readiness to participate in English-language job interviews within the Indonesian setting. Specifically, the study examines affective constraints related to interview anxiety, limitations in strategic preparation and communicative organization, and deficiencies in cross-cultural interview awareness. Adopting a qualitative approach that captures learners' lived experiences and subjective evaluations, this research provides nuanced insights into the interplay between linguistic competence, psychological factors, and cultural expectations in interview contexts. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more context-responsive ESP curricula in hospitality education, thereby enhancing alignment with the communicative demands of the global hospitality workforce.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### English for Specific Purposes in Hospitality Education

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is commonly understood as a learner-centered approach to language instruction that systematically aligns pedagogical content with the communicative demands of particular occupational and professional contexts. Foundational ESP theory, as articulated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), emphasizes that effective language instruction must be grounded in careful analysis of learners' target situations and communicative needs. Within hospitality education, this orientation necessitates that English instruction extend beyond formulaic service exchanges to include a wider range of professional communication practices required across diverse workplace scenarios (Blue & Harun, 2003).

However, despite conceptual progress in ESP curriculum development, empirical studies continue to indicate persistent gaps between instructional objectives and the communicative realities of the hospitality industry. Needs analysis research, including Prachanant (2012), suggests that many hospitality English programs remain predominantly oriented toward routine operational communication, such as front-desk interactions, guest service procedures, and standardized service dialogues. While these competencies are essential for entry-level positions, they provide limited exposure to higher-level communicative events, including job interviews, performance evaluations, and professional networking, which are critical for long-term career progression. This incongruence between classroom practices and authentic workplace communication has been documented across multiple cultural and educational contexts. Lin (2019), for example, found that hospitality-focused English courses frequently fail to generate learning outcomes aligned with industry expectations, particularly with respect to strategic communication and evaluative discourse. In environments where English functions as a gatekeeping language for recruitment and professional mobility, such curricular misalignment becomes increasingly consequential. As a result, graduates often enter the labor market with insufficient preparation for high-stakes communicative encounters, despite prolonged exposure to formal English instruction that remains narrowly focused on routine service-oriented discourse.

### **Job Interview Communication Competence**

Successful job interview performance depends on a multidimensional set of communicative competencies that transcend grammatical accuracy alone. Drawing on extensive interview research, Macan (2009) identified several core components of effective interview communication, including pragmatic appropriateness, strategic self-presentation, coherent narrative organization, emotional self-regulation, and sensitivity to culturally embedded interactional norms. For learners using English as a foreign or second language, fulfilling these demands is particularly complex, as they must simultaneously manage linguistic production, cultural adaptation, impression management, and affective control within a time-pressured and evaluative communicative setting. In response to these challenges, structured frameworks for interview responses have been developed to support candidates' communicative organization. One of the most widely recognized is the STAR framework (Situation, Task, Action, Result), which offers a systematic model for responding to behavioral interview questions. Originating from Janz's (1982) patterned behavior description interview approach, the STAR method enables interviewees to present prior experiences in a logically sequenced and evidence-based manner. This structure facilitates the demonstration of professional competencies such as problem-solving, responsibility, and reflective growth. Due to its clarity and standardization, STAR has been widely institutionalized in recruitment processes, particularly within multinational corporations and international hospitality organizations. Despite its prominence in professional recruitment contexts, the STAR method remains largely absent from ESL and EFL instructional practices. Guo and Al-Mubarak (2021) reported that vocational English programs rarely integrate structured interview-response strategies, even when workplace communication is an explicit instructional goal. This omission is significant, given evidence that structured frameworks can reduce cognitive load during high-pressure interactions. By supporting idea organization and easing language processing demands, such strategies may contribute to lower anxiety levels and enhanced oral fluency in interview situations.

### **Language Anxiety in High-Stakes Contexts**

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is commonly defined as a situation-specific affective response characterized by heightened tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with second or foreign language use. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceptualized FLA as distinct from general anxiety and identified three interrelated dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These affective factors are particularly salient in evaluative contexts where language performance is subject to scrutiny and carries significant consequences, rendering job interviews especially anxiety-inducing for non-native speakers. Building on this framework, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) distinguished between trait anxiety, which reflects a stable individual disposition, and state anxiety, which arises in response to specific situational demands. Their findings indicated that interview settings can elicit intense state anxiety even among individuals who do not typically experience high anxiety levels. Language anxiety was found to disrupt cognitive processing by limiting working memory capacity, reducing attentional resources, and restricting access to linguistic knowledge that would otherwise be available in low-stress conditions. This cognitive disruption helps account for the discrepancy often observed between learners' classroom performance and their diminished communicative effectiveness during interviews. Research has also documented the physiological manifestations of language anxiety in high-stakes communicative contexts. Young (1991) reported symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, and mental blocking, all of which interfere with effective language production. In more severe cases, Liu and Jackson (2008) observed episodes of acute verbal disruption and

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complete communicative breakdown among EFL learners experiencing intense anxiety. Some participants reported being unable to speak at all, despite possessing adequate linguistic competence under non-threatening conditions. These findings underscore the extent to which language anxiety functions as a substantial barrier to effective interview communication, with direct implications for employability and professional advancement.

### Cross-Cultural Pragmatics in Interviews

Research in intercultural pragmatics has consistently demonstrated that interview communication is culturally embedded and shaped by context-specific norms and expectations. Variations in communicative preferences related to directness, self-promotion, and interactional behavior reflect broader cultural value systems. Through discourse-analytic investigations of professional interaction, Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997) showed that judgments of competence and professionalism are linguistically constructed in culturally patterned ways. Such differences become particularly pronounced in job interviews, where implicit norms regulate turn-taking, response elaboration, degrees of explicitness, and acceptable modes of self-presentation. In many Western contexts, particularly in North America and Northern Europe, interview discourse tends to privilege direct communication, explicit self-assertion, and narratives emphasizing individual achievement. Spencer-Oatey (2008) noted that interviewers in these settings often expect candidates to articulate their accomplishments assertively, frequently employing first-person singular constructions to claim agency and responsibility. These expectations are grounded in cultural orientations that value individual autonomy, clarity, and demonstrable personal success. In contrast, Indonesian communicative practices—shaped by collectivist cultural orientations—place greater emphasis on modesty, social harmony, and indirect expression. Studies by Sumarsono and Candraningrum (2020) indicate that Indonesian EFL learners often experience discomfort with overt self-promotion in intercultural professional interactions. Speakers may downplay personal achievements, attribute success to collective efforts, and employ face-saving strategies in self-representation. Widodo (2016) further argued that such culturally rooted communicative practices can create pragmatic challenges in international interview contexts. Behaviors perceived as polite and appropriate within Indonesian culture may be interpreted by Western interviewers as a lack of confidence, weak communicative competence, or insufficient professional readiness, illustrating the potential for misinterpretation arising from divergent cultural norms of professional self-presentation.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study was conducted within a qualitative research framework employing a phenomenological perspective to investigate hospitality students' experiential perceptions of readiness for English-based employment interviews. The phenomenological stance was adopted to facilitate an in-depth understanding of how learners conceptualize and internalize their interview-related experiences, particularly in relation to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. This approach prioritizes meaning-making processes derived from participants' lived experiences rather than relying on pre-established theoretical assumptions. To capture these experiences, data were elicited mainly through semi-structured interviews. This data collection method enabled the researcher to maintain a coherent line of inquiry while allowing flexibility to probe emerging issues based on individual responses. Such an approach made it possible to examine recurring patterns across participants without neglecting personal variation in perspectives and experiences. The methodological orientation is consistent with qualitative inquiry principles outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), who emphasize phenomenology as an effective design for exploring complex, situationally embedded human phenomena and identifying shared interpretive patterns among individuals encountering comparable experiences.

### Participants

The participants comprised twenty students enrolled in the Diploma-level hospitality program at STIPARY Yogyakarta Tourism Academy. The group consisted of eleven female and nine male students selected through purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to the research focus. All participants were actively registered students who had completed a minimum of two semesters of English for Hospitality courses, ensuring adequate exposure to field-specific English instruction. Participation was entirely voluntary and non-remunerated to maintain ethical integrity and enhance the credibility of the qualitative data. The participants' ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-two years, corresponding to the typical age profile of diploma hospitality students. Fifteen participants reported prior internship or workplace training experience in hotel or restaurant settings, which contributed to their familiarity with professional English use in operational contexts. However, eighteen participants indicated that they had no prior experience participating in English-medium job interviews. As a result, their perceptions of interview preparedness

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were largely anticipatory rather than experiential, highlighting a gap between instructional input and employment transition demands. Only one participant had completed a standardized English proficiency assessment (TOEIC) with an approximate score of 500, suggesting limited engagement with formal language benchmarking. Collectively, this participant profile reflects learners with relevant academic preparation and partial workplace exposure but limited interview experience, making them suitable for exploring perceived rather than performance-based interview readiness.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted using a semi-structured interview instrument comprising twenty-five guiding questions. The interview protocol was developed through a systematic integration of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings relevant to ESP and interview communication. Its design was informed by ESP needs analysis principles proposed by Basturkmen (2010), research on interview competence synthesized by Macan (2009), and a pilot study involving three students whose data were excluded from the main analysis. The interview questions were categorized into five thematic areas representing key dimensions of interview readiness: perceived English proficiency, interview experience and preparation practices, anxiety and confidence-related factors, perceived communicative ability, and evaluation of curriculum relevance alongside perceived learning needs. To ensure participants could articulate their views freely without linguistic constraints, all interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. Each interview lasted between twenty and thirty-five minutes, depending on the depth of participants' responses. With informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy and interactional detail. This procedure enhanced participant comfort and contributed to the depth, reliability, and authenticity of the qualitative dataset.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis commenced with data familiarization, during which the researcher engaged in repeated reading of the transcripts to develop an overarching understanding of the dataset and identify initial analytical insights. This phase was followed by open coding, allowing for the systematic identification of diverse meanings, perceptions, and challenges related to English interview preparedness. Subsequently, the generated codes were clustered into preliminary themes aligned with the study's research questions, with careful consideration given to conceptual relationships and levels of abstraction. These themes were then subjected to iterative review against both the coded extracts and the complete dataset to ensure thematic coherence and analytical distinction. In the refinement stage, themes were clearly defined by delineating their scope, focus, and relevance to the research objectives. The final stage involved constructing the analytical narrative, supported by representative excerpts to substantiate each theme. While the analysis was informed by deductive orientations derived from the research aims, inductive sub-themes were allowed to emerge from the data, enabling a balanced interplay between theoretical guidance and empirical discovery.

### **Trustworthiness**

Methodological rigor was ensured through the application of strategies addressing the four trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, whereby five participants reviewed and validated preliminary interpretations, and through peer debriefing sessions that facilitated critical reflection on analytical decisions and minimized researcher bias. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and institutional setting, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to comparable hospitality education environments. Dependability was achieved by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail documenting data collection procedures, coding processes, and analytical revisions. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive journaling, in which the researcher systematically documented assumptions, positionality, and potential biases, particularly in relation to their role as a faculty member at STIPARY. Together, these measures reflect a sustained commitment to qualitative rigor while acknowledging the interpretive nature of phenomenological research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were integrated throughout all stages of the research process. Formal ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority prior to data collection to ensure compliance with ethical standards governing research involving human participants. Informed consent was secured from all participants after providing a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, as well as participants'

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right to withdraw at any point without repercussions. Given the researcher's institutional affiliation, particular attention was devoted to addressing potential power asymmetries. Participants were explicitly informed that their involvement in the study and the content of their responses would not influence academic assessment or institutional relationships. These ethical safeguards were implemented to protect participant autonomy, confidentiality, and well-being, thereby ensuring ethical integrity throughout the study.

## RESULTS

### Anxiety Gaps: Constraints on Spontaneous Oral Performance

Anxiety was identified as the most salient and pervasive factor negatively affecting students' performance in English-mediated job interviews. All participants (100%,  $n = 20$ ) reported experiencing cognitive interference when required to speak English under evaluative pressure, particularly in interview-simulated situations. The intensity of this anxiety varied across individuals, ranging from transient lexical retrieval difficulties to total psychophysiological breakdowns that inhibited verbal output altogether. Some participants described temporary disruptions in word recall triggered by nervousness but indicated an ability to regain control after brief hesitation. This experience was articulated by Widya: "Saya sering blank saat ingin mengomongnya. Biasanya itu karena gugup." Others reported partial memory lapses in previously memorized responses when confronted with performance pressure, as Desta noted: "Saya sudah hafal beberapa kata. Tetapi saat saya maju ke depan, saya cukup kaget karena ada hal yang saya lupakan." More severe manifestations were observed in over one-third of the participants, who experienced complete communicative paralysis accompanied by cognitive disorientation. This phenomenon was vividly expressed by Prabawa: "Mulut enggak bisa buka, Pak... pikiran pun juga enggak tahu ke mana."

The anxiety response was further exacerbated by demands for spontaneous language production. All participants indicated a preference for predictable or rehearsed interview questions, which they perceived as cognitively less threatening. Only one participant—who had previously participated in an authentic English-language interview—expressed greater comfort with unpredictable follow-up questions, suggesting that experiential exposure may attenuate anxiety effects. Additionally, nearly half of the participants (45%,  $n = 9$ ) reported difficulties related to processing speed, wherein comprehension of interview questions occurred, but formulation of appropriate responses was delayed. This temporal lag often resulted in hesitation, disrupted fluency, and diminished self-confidence. Lexical demands specific to the hospitality industry further intensified anxiety levels. A substantial proportion of participants (65%) expressed uncertainty when encountering analytical or technical terminology such as upselling and occupancy rate, as illustrated by Widya's statement: "Istilah hospitality seperti upselling, occupancy rate itu saya sering lupa artinya."

**Table 1.** Anxiety Gaps in English-Language Job Interviews

Sub-theme	(n)	Representative Interview Excerpt
Cognitive blank episodes	100% (20)	"Mulut enggak bisa buka, Pak... pikiran pun juga enggak tahu ke mana." (Prabawa)
Preference for predictable questions	100% (20)	"Pertanyaan sudah diprediksi itu lebih mudah dipahami." (Widya)
Processing speed anxiety	45% (9)	"Saya cepat memahami tapi bingung menyusun kalimat." (Prabawa)
Industry terminology discomfort	65% (13)	"Istilah seperti upselling... sering lupa artinya." (Widya)

### Preparation Gaps: Deficits in Strategic Self-Presentation

The second overarching theme highlights systematic shortcomings in students' interview preparation, particularly in relation to strategic self-presentation. A large proportion of participants (82%,  $n \approx 16$ ) demonstrated limited awareness of the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) framework, which is widely recognized as a core structure for responding to behavioral interview questions. As acknowledged by Ramadhani, "Sebelumnya saya belum terlalu familiar dengan metode tersebut." The absence of such strategic knowledge led many students to approach interview preparation in an unstructured manner. In lieu of strategic frameworks, 70% of participants ( $n = 14$ ) reported relying predominantly on rote memorization, rehearsing fixed responses without sufficient conceptual flexibility. This memorization-oriented approach proved fragile when interview questions diverged from anticipated patterns, frequently resulting in cognitive disorganization or complete response failure. Wayan's account illustrates this vulnerability: "Saya menghafalkan jawaban... ketika interview saya nge-blank." Although several participants

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were aware of the limitations of memorization-based preparation, they reported having no alternative strategies to replace it. Across the dataset, all participants (100%,  $n = 20$ ) expressed difficulty in constructing responses that were coherent, logically sequenced, and appropriately detailed. Interview answers were often characterized by imbalance, being excessively elaborated, overly brief, or internally inconsistent. Jessica summarized this challenge by stating, "Kadang terlalu panjang karena tidak fokus, kadang juga terlalu singkat." These findings indicate a lack of discourse-level competence necessary for effective narrative construction in interview contexts. Despite these pronounced linguistic and strategic deficiencies, a paradoxical pattern emerged. All participants reported strong confidence in their ability to market themselves professionally. This confidence, however, was not matched by their capacity to verbalize personal strengths effectively in English. As Prabawa asserted, "Kalau menjual mungkin 100%, Pak... kita harus confident." This divergence suggests a clear dissociation between perceived self-efficacy and the communicative competence required to enact strategic self-presentation in English-mediated interviews

**Table 2.** Preparation Gaps in Strategic Interview Communication

Sub-theme	% (n)	Representative Interview Excerpt
STAR method unfamiliarity	82% (16)	"Belum terlalu familiar dengan metode tersebut." (Ramadhani)
Memorization dependency	70% (14)	"Saya menghafalkan jawaban... saya nge-blank." (Wayan)
Storytelling structure deficits	100% (20)	"Kadang terlalu panjang... kadang terlalu singkat." (Jessica)
Self-promotion confidence paradox	100% (20)	"Kalau menjual mungkin 100%." (Prabawa)

## Contextual Gaps: Cross-Cultural and Pragmatic Awareness

The third theme underscores students' limited comprehension of interview contexts, particularly with regard to cross-cultural pragmatics in English-mediated employment settings. A majority of participants (85%,  $n = 17$ ) exhibited little awareness of pragmatic and cultural distinctions between Indonesian interview conventions and those commonly associated with Western professional contexts. This lack of understanding was explicitly acknowledged by Ramadhani, who stated, "Belum paham perbedaan budayanya." Only one participant demonstrated nuanced intercultural awareness by articulating how Indonesian interview norms tend to prioritize politeness and humility, whereas Western interviews often reward assertiveness, explicit self-promotion, and direct responses. A similar pattern emerged in relation to interview formality. Although 75% of participants recognized that international or English-language interviews generally require a higher level of formality, most were unable to translate this awareness into concrete linguistic or interactional strategies. One participant, Vista, stood out by identifying specific pragmatic behaviors, such as maintaining a consistently professional tone and deliberately avoiding colloquial expressions or slang. This contrast highlights a gap between declarative knowledge of interview norms and procedural ability to enact them in real-time communication.

Difficulties were also evident in participants' responses to sensitive or potentially face-threatening interview questions. All participants (100%,  $n = 20$ ) reported uncertainty when asked about personal weaknesses or limitations. Many favored complete honesty without strategic framing, thereby risking negative self-presentation, while others recognized the potential danger of such openness but lacked pragmatic alternatives. Only one participant demonstrated awareness of professional boundary-setting by questioning the relevance of such inquiries within an interview context. Furthermore, 30% of participants interpreted their interview difficulties as personal shortcomings rather than as consequences of limited instructional support. As Sinta reflected, "Kesalahan ada pada diri saya." This tendency indicates the early development of learned helplessness and a limited recognition of systemic gaps in interview-oriented English instruction, reinforcing the need for explicit pedagogical intervention in cross-cultural and pragmatic competence.

**Table 3.** Contextual and Cross-Cultural Interview Gaps

Sub-theme	% (n)	Representative Interview Excerpt
Limited cross-cultural awareness	85% (17)	"Belum paham perbedaan budayanya." (Ramadhani)
Formality awareness without strategy	75% (15)	"Interview internasional biasanya lebih formal." (Jessica)
Tricky question handling difficulty	100% (20)	"Saya akan jujur saja... banyak kelemahan." (Wayan)
Self-blame internalization	30% (6)	"Kesalahan ada pada diri saya." (Sinta)

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**DISCUSSION**

**The Interdependence of Anxiety, Preparation, and Contextual Awareness: Implications for ESP Curriculum Design**

The present findings demonstrate that anxiety, inadequate preparation, and limited contextual awareness should be conceptualized not as isolated constraints but as mutually reinforcing dimensions within a complex adaptive system. These factors interact dynamically through recursive feedback loops. For example, students' dependence on memorization-based preparation—reflecting limited strategic competence—heightens anxiety when rehearsed responses fail to align with unpredictable interviewer prompts. This heightened affective state subsequently increases cognitive load, impairing students' capacity to interpret culturally implicit or pragmatically ambiguous questions. In turn, insufficient cultural and pragmatic knowledge further undermines preparation, as learners struggle to infer unspoken communicative expectations embedded in interview discourse. This interconnected pattern aligns closely with MacIntyre's (2017) dynamic model of willingness to communicate, which conceptualizes language performance as emerging from moment-to-moment interactions among cognitive, affective, and situational variables rather than from stable personality traits. Likewise, Zheng and Cheng's (2018) ecological perspective on foreign language anxiety highlights the reciprocal causality between internal learner variables—such as preparedness and self-regulation—and external contextual pressures, including evaluative interview settings. Extending these frameworks, the present study identifies specific mechanisms of mutual reinforcement: insufficient preparation heightens susceptibility to anxiety; anxiety constrains contextual interpretation; and misinterpretation of context further weakens preparation. Together, these processes generate a self-perpetuating cycle of communicative underperformance.

Addressing such a systemic problem necessitates an integrated, triadic intervention model that simultaneously targets affective regulation, strategic communicative competence, and pragmatic-cultural awareness, rather than addressing each component in isolation. This position is supported by Gkonou et al.'s (2020) complexity-theoretical view of emotions in language learning, which argues that interventions focusing narrowly on single variables are unlikely to produce sustainable change when broader systemic interactions are ignored. The finding that 82% of senior hospitality students were unfamiliar with the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) framework—despite its widespread use in international recruitment—signals a significant misalignment between curriculum content and industry expectations. This gap is particularly consequential given the STAR method's dual pedagogical value. First, STAR functions as a cognitive scaffold that reduces processing demands during high-stakes oral interaction. According to Sweller's (2011) Cognitive Load Theory, tasks requiring simultaneous management of content, structure, and language often exceed working memory capacity, resulting in performance breakdown. By externalizing narrative organization, the STAR framework enables learners to allocate cognitive resources toward linguistic formulation rather than discourse planning.

Second, the emphasis on concrete experiential narratives rather than abstract self-evaluation aligns with Indonesian learners' documented discomfort with overt self-promotion (Widodo, 2016). Cross-cultural communication research by Yang and Bond (2017) suggests that evidence-based storytelling is broadly acceptable within collectivist cultures when framed as factual reporting rather than self-aggrandizement. Thus, STAR not only supports cognitive processing but also mediates cultural tensions surrounding professional self-presentation. The prevalent reliance on rote memorization observed among participants underscores the need for pedagogical practices that promote adaptive, spontaneous language use. Instructional activities incorporating unpredictable follow-up questions, time-pressured responses, and dialogic role-play can foster communicative flexibility rather than formulaic recall. Additionally, explicit instruction in cross-cultural pragmatics should be embedded into ESP curricula, utilizing authentic interview recordings, comparative discourse analysis, and guided role-play followed by reflective cultural debriefing. At an institutional level, systemic reform is required. English-Medium Instruction should extend beyond isolated language courses; speaking-focused classes should be conducted in smaller groups; dedicated interview simulation spaces equipped with recording and playback technology should be established; and counseling services specializing in language anxiety should be adequately funded. From a policy perspective, standardized adoption of industry-aligned assessment rubrics and explicit inclusion of interview communication competencies within national hospitality education standards are essential to ensure curriculum relevance and graduate employability.

**Complete Communicative Collapse and the Need for Clinical-Level Intervention**

The identification of Type C responses—characterized by motor inhibition, cognitive disorientation, and total communicative shutdown—extends beyond traditional conceptualizations of Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). While classic FLA frameworks emphasize communication apprehension, evaluative fear, and test anxiety,

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the severity of Type C reactions suggests a qualitatively different mechanism. These responses appear more consistent with physiological threat reactions resembling trauma-related dissociative states. This interpretation aligns with Porges' Polyvagal Theory (2011), which proposes a hierarchy of autonomic responses: social engagement, sympathetic mobilization, and dorsal vagal shutdown. Type C responses exhibit hallmarks of dorsal vagal activation, including immobility, cognitive disengagement, and loss of voluntary control—responses typically associated with perceived existential threat rather than routine performance anxiety. LeDoux's (2015) revised dual-pathway model of threat processing further elucidates this phenomenon, proposing that extreme stress can activate subcortical survival circuits that bypass cortical language-processing regions. As a result, linguistic knowledge becomes temporarily inaccessible regardless of proficiency level. Neurocognitive evidence supports this interpretation. Roelofs and Piai (2017) demonstrated that acute stress disrupts phonological encoding and lexical retrieval through prefrontal cortex impairment, while Kim's (2020) neuroimaging studies showed that foreign language anxiety suppresses activity in Broca's area during speech production. The total communicative paralysis observed in Type C cases may therefore represent an extreme manifestation of stress-induced neurocognitive disruption. Given the severity of these reactions, conventional classroom-based anxiety reduction strategies are insufficient. Liu and Jackson's (2022) longitudinal findings indicate that learners exhibiting physiological panic symptoms derive limited benefit from pedagogical interventions alone but show significant improvement when provided professional psychological support. Consequently, ESP programs should implement formal anxiety screening during student intake using validated instruments such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Institutions must also establish clear referral pathways to counseling or clinical services for high-risk students and provide instructor training to distinguish pedagogically manageable nervousness from anxiety requiring specialist intervention.

### Cultural Identity, Self-Promotion, and the Role of Peer Learning

The observation that students with limited English proficiency nonetheless expressed strong confidence in self-promotion challenges deficit-oriented explanations attributing interview difficulties to culturally ingrained modesty norms. Instead, the findings suggest that students possess well-developed self-awareness and advocacy skills at a conceptual level; the primary constraint lies in their ability to encode these competencies linguistically in English. This distinction is consistent with Cummins' (2017) differentiation between cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). Learners who demonstrate confident self-presentation in Indonesian contexts likely possess advanced CALP in their first language, including metacognitive insight and narrative competence. However, limited second-language proficiency restricts the transfer of these abilities into English, a challenge corroborated by Cenoz's (2018) work on cross-linguistic transfer. These findings also point to cultural fluidity rather than rigid constraint. Students' variable comfort with self-promotion across contexts reflects situational sensitivity rather than a fixed cultural prohibition. This aligns with Spencer-Oatey and Franklin's (2021) situated cultural identity framework, which conceptualizes cultural norms as dynamically enacted rather than static. Pedagogically, framing self-promotion as a professional obligation grounded in evidence-based reporting—rather than personal boasting—may enable students to engage in strategic code-switching without compromising cultural values.

Desta's reflection on learning from peers' interview experiences highlights significant untapped potential for structured peer-learning initiatives. This aligns with Bandura's (2019) updated social cognitive theory emphasizing vicarious learning as a powerful mechanism for building self-efficacy, particularly in anxiety-inducing domains. Topping and Ehly's (2018) meta-analysis further demonstrates that structured peer-assisted learning can rival faculty-led instruction while offering additional benefits such as reduced power distance and more effective transmission of tacit procedural knowledge. To operationalize this potential, institutions should formalize peer mentoring through clear selection criteria, mentor training, reflective articulation practices, and scheduled interaction points. Similarly, students' independent use of YouTube and TikTok interview resources indicates strong learner agency and engagement in informal learning. However, as Hafner and Miller (2021) note, ESP learners require guidance in evaluating the credibility and transferability of online content. Formal curricula can add value by equipping students with critical frameworks for assessing digital resources, facilitating comparative analysis of tutorial approaches, and explicitly linking informal learning to theoretical principles.

### CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesian hospitality students continue to face substantial challenges in English-mediated job interviews, primarily due to a structural mismatch between existing ESP curriculum provision and the communicative, strategic, and affective demands of international recruitment contexts. Drawing on the findings, the

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study demonstrates that interview difficulties emerge from the dynamic interaction of anxiety, insufficient strategic preparation, and limited contextual-pragmatic understanding, which together function as an integrated system rather than isolated weaknesses. The analysis extends prevailing English Language Teaching and Foreign Language Anxiety frameworks by distinguishing surface-level lexical constraints from more severe psychophysiological breakdowns, highlighting critical gaps such as students' limited familiarity with globally dominant interview frameworks (e.g., STAR), a paradox between strong self-conceptual awareness and restricted linguistic realization, and inadequate transfer of workplace English exposure to interview performance. Consequently, the study proposes a triadic pedagogical orientation that integrates affective regulation, strategic discourse training, and intercultural-pragmatic competence as a foundation for ESP curriculum realignment in vocational education. Overall, the findings emphasize that students' underperformance in interviews reflects systemic curricular misalignment rather than learner incapacity, underscoring the need for evidence-based ESP reforms to better support Indonesia's hospitality workforce in accessing global employment opportunities.

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