Examining the Presence of Social Intelligence in Job Interviews through Multimodal Social Semiotic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Graduates with high level of social intelligence are in high demand. Those who can demonstrate having good attitude and social flexibility, able to build good relationships with others, and able to use appropriate language during their interviews have higher chances of being employed. However, reports show that graduates of higher learning institutions lack social intelligence. Failure to address this issue can affect future graduates' employability. This paper examined the extent to which students in higher learning institutions had developed social intelligence. The participants were the final year students of one technical university in Malaysia. These participants underwent a job interview session as one of their course assessments. In this paper, the responses by three participants were selected to be analysed. The mock job interview sessions, which were conducted online, were recorded and transcribed.

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The data were analysed using multimodal social semantic discourse analysis to determine the candidates' intention and then, using the five dimensions of social intelligence which included social awareness, presence, authenticity, clarity, and empathy to examine the presence (absence) of social intelligence. It was found that social awareness and empathy to build relationships and develop trust with the interviewer were taken for granted by the participants. In addition, the participants' focused more on the qualification and skills that they had rather than how they could use their skills for the benefit of a company or organisation. The findings provided invaluable input on ways in designing courses that promote the development of social intelligence among students of higher learning institutions.

Keywords: Social intelligence; social awareness; social semiotic; job interview; critical discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, having social intelligence in the workplace is vital to increase productivity. Social intelligence helps leaders to easily manage employees to perform task, while employees feel motivated which in turn will increase productivity (Koraus et al., 2017). As such, employers no longer seek graduates with high academic achievement as this quality is no longer sufficient. This is because they perceive graduates who are high achievers as being good in their academic but are incompetent in the workplace (Ab Rahman, Mohamed, Nasir, & Saidin, 2020). Instead, employers prefer graduates with high level of social intelligence (Lau, 2016). It is believed that graduates who have high level of social intelligence are able to build positive relationship with other people, able to perform well in difficult decision-making situations, and can give full commitment in the workplace (Tamunosiki-Amadi, Sele, & Ernest, 2020).

Employers are beginning to change the way they interview candidates so that they can look for characteristics of social intelligence (Nyfeler, December 7, 2020). This includes looking for candidates who are able to get connected and create positive interaction (Albrecht, 2006). This makes it more challenging and competitive for graduates to secure a job. During interviews, interviewers rate candidates' facial expressions to determine the presence of social intelligence (Petrides, Mason, & Sevdalis, 2011). In a study conducted by Lau (2016), employers reported that they wasted 600 hours of their time per year interviewing candidates who seemed good in their resumes but lacked social intelligence. This highlights the importance of showcasing social intelligence during a job interview (Doyle, 2019).

Nonetheless, there are evidence that show fresh graduates in Malaysia are not able to display social intelligence during their job interviews such as working together in a team and were not able to be mindful to others, particularly to the interviewers (Ab Rahman et al., 2020). This inability reflects potential incompetence in the workplace which may cause candidates to lose the opportunity to be considered for the job.

Social intelligence is difficult to develop once graduates are in employment (Lau, 2016). Within this context, higher learning institutions should play a vital role in developing social intelligence in their students. In preparing future graduates for employment, many higher learning institutions provide courses that help students to enhance their communication skills and teach them about job application. This includes helping them with their resumes and preparing them for job interviews. Questions arise in relation to the extent to which these courses have provided the space for the development and enhancement of social intelligence and to what extent students in higher learning institutions can illustrate social intelligence, particularly in their resumes and job interviews. In finding the answers to these questions, this study examined the presence of social intelligence in students' job interviews.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EXAMINING SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE IN INTERACTIONS

The concept of social intelligence originated from Thorndike (1920) who defined it as the ability to understand and manage others and engage in social interactions wisely. It is believed that social intelligence can help employees to succeed in their career. According to Meijs et al. (2010), employees who have high level of social intelligence have a high degree of social information processing, social skills and social awareness. In her study, Lau (2016) reported that employees with high level of social intelligence have higher chances of earning more than their colleagues and progress in their career because they have high level of confidence, can negotiate social situations and develop social relationships to increase productivity. Thus, examining candidates based on their social intelligence during a job interview is of high priority to recruiters.

The presence of social intelligence can be identified through interactions, either verbally or nonverbally. In terms of verbal interactions, there are a number of studies such as the one conducted by Onufriieva et al. (2020) which examines the correlation between verbal expressions and social intelligence. However, the discussion on the words or phrases, particularly in the context of job interviews that illustrate the presence of social intelligence were not available in this study.

Albrecht (2006) proposed that human behaviour may be located somewhere along the spectrum between toxic (behaviour that makes people feel devalued, angry, frustrated, guilty or inadequate) to nourishing (behaviour that makes people feel valued, respected, encouraged or competent) effects. This suggests that human behaviour may shift from toxic to nourishing behaviour. People who demonstrate continuous toxic behaviour have low level of social intelligence and are not able to connect or influence other people effectively. Whereas people who demonstrate nourishing behaviour have high level of intelligence and are able to deal with others effectively.

Online job interview technique is becoming a trend, particularly during this pandemic. On the part of the candidates, it may be challenging for them to display nonverbal cues in online job interviews. In job interviews, nonverbal cues play important roles in determining, whether or not, a candidate will be considered for a job. In examining social intelligence, interviewers may examine candidates' smile, gesture and talk time (Gifford, Ng, & Wilkinson, 1985). Rupasinghe et al. (2016) conducted a study on performing an online job interview. It was found that interviewers were able to evaluate candidates' expressions but there were some inconsistencies in relation to nonverbal cues. This raises questions about the extent to which candidates can illustrate social intelligence through online job interview and to what extent recruiters can identify the presence of social intelligence based on online job interviews.

This studyemployed the multimodal social semiotic discourse analysis. Social semiotics is a study of material resources and how these resources are used for communication and expressions (van Leeuwen & Kress, 2009). It focuses on how communicators use semiotic resources such as visuals and signs to represent meaning within a social context (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The use of social semiotic analysis provides understanding about "how representations are produced by and contribute to cultural settings, that is, to get at their social function and meaning potential in the communicative landscape" (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016, p. 146). Social semiotics was further developed to multimodal social semiotics as there was a need to examine multimodal communication (Kress, 2010).

Several studies have used critical discourse analysis to examine a phenomenon from linguistics perspectives (Al-Mwzaiji, 2021; Mustafa & Pilus, 2020). Al-Ghamdi and Albawardi (2020) employed social semiotic approach to examine text and images on social media. van

Leeuwen and Kress (2009) have developed a multimodal framework which define semiotic resources and three layers of analysis which include discourse, design and production. Semiotic resources include physiological and technical resources. Physiological resources refer to voice to produce sounds and speeches and muscles to produce non-verbal resources such as facial expressions, gestures and postures. Technical resources range from using devices or technology to extend communication, to the way we groom ourselves. In the context of this study, the physiological resources included voice projection, non-verbal resources, and virtual background on Google Meet. The technical resources included the participants' attire, grooming and the speech (language) produced during the interaction. Upon the completion of the multimodal social semiotic analysis, the results were mapped against the conceptual framework of the social intelligence.

Further elaboration of social intelligence included the ability to get along with others, interact with his or her social environment and understand social situations (Vernon, 1933; Wechsler, 1939). In simple terms, social intelligence refers to individual's knowledge about the social world (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2000).

Mykhalchuk (2018) argued that social intelligence can be identified through ways in which an individual is able to manage and take control of his or her emotions, show empathy and analyse the behaviour of others. In other words, an individual with high level of social intelligence is able to anticipate the consequences of his or her actions (linguistically or non-linguistically) on others and control his or her emotions. In the case of this study, social intelligence was identified through ways in which the students reacted and responded to the interview questions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative approach to data collection and analysis using phenomenological method. The use of qualitative approach helped to provide deeper understanding about the interactions of the participants who were final year students, particularly in terms of the presence of social intelligence. A total of 3 participants were recruited for this study. The study served as part of a larger research and three participants were sufficient to provide preliminary findings.

DATA SOURCES

The final year students at this university were required to enrol in an English course that included mock job interview as part of its assessments. The interview questions were based on the common questions that can be found from coaching websites as well as coaching videos on YouTube. There are several types of interview questions that are commonly used in job interviews which include traditional, situational, case, behavioural, competency-based and problem solving (Doyle, 2020). For the selected English course, the types of interview questions included in the syllabus were traditional, situational, and behavioural questions. Three sets of questions comprising traditional, situational and behavioural questions in each set were developed. Each set had different questions for each type. In the case of this study, the researchers focused on the traditional question which was "Why are you interested to work at this company?". Traditional questions are commonly used at the beginning of an interview to obtain an overview of the candidates (LiveCareer Staff Writer, n.d.). Candidates' responses to this question provide first impressions of them to the interviewers.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all classes were conducted online. Thus, the assessment on job interview had to be conducted online as well. The job interview session was conducted using Google Meet as the platform. The interviewer was the lecturer who taught the

course to the students. Prior to the interview session, the students were given the instruction to imagine that they were being interviewed by a recruiter, not their lecturer. However, the outcome of this instruction was not as expected. This is discussed further in the finding section. In the context of this study, the term "interviewer" was used to represent the lecturer who did the job interview assessment. Prior to the assessment session, students had the opportunity to discuss common questions in job interviews and how to address these questions with their lecturer and their peers. They even had the opportunity to watch videos containing examples of how to respond to job interviews. As such they may have prepared a script for them to refer to during the mock job interview sessions. This should not be an issue as the main purpose of this study was to examine their responses (scripted or non-scripted) in terms of the presence of social intelligence, verbally and non-verbally. In addition, their answers were generally based on their own experience and understanding. All the interview sessions were video recorded. Later, the recordings were organised according to the set of questions that the students responded to.

For this study, only the responses related to the question "Why are you interested to work at this company?" were considered. The researchers picked three video recordings that addressed the selected question at random from the list of job interview sessions. The data collected included a) the speech or the language used by the respondents, b) the non-verbal resources which included the posture, facial expressions, attire, gestures, eye contact and voice projection, and c) the virtual setting which included the virtual background and the position of the respondents on the screen as viewed by the interviewer. Upon the completion of the mock job interview sessions, the researchers transcribed the responses and made notes on the respondents' non-verbal patterns.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study employed the social semiotic approach to multimodal critical discourse analysis to examine the verbal and non-verbal patterns on video recorded interviews. Multimodal social semiotic analysis is relevant for this purpose as it examines, not only the language use, but also the non-verbal cues (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The non-verbal resources are divided into physiological (e.g: facial expression, gestures, voice, posture) and technical (e.g: images, musical instruments, clothing, grooming) (van Leeuwen & Kress, 2009).

In analysing the interview data, this study adopted van Leeuwen and Kress' (2009) three layers of analysis. These layers include:

a) discourses which refer to the socially constructed knowledge for constructing and interpreting the content of texts and communicative events. Within this context, the language used is dependent on the context or setting.
b) design which refers to the format for embedding the discourses in specific social context and creates the purpose of the communicative events.
c) production which refers to the way the materials are used to execute the design.

In the context of this study, these three layers were not discussed separately, but rather as a whole as it was difficult to isolate one from another in reality (van Leeuwen & Kress, 2009). The results of the social semiotic analysis were further examined to determine the presence (or absence) of any of the dimensions of social intelligence. Albrecht (2006) proposes five dimensions of social intelligence. These dimensions include:

a) situational awareness which refers to the ability to read situations and to interpret the behaviours of people in those situations,
b) presence which refers to verbal and non-verbal patterns (appearance, posture, voice quality and subtle movements),
c) authenticity which refers to the signals that we give through our behaviour that led other people to judge us as honest, open, ethical, trustworthy and well-intentioned,
d) clarity refers to the ability to explain ourselves, provides ideas, deliver data clearly and accurately and articulate our views and proposed courses of action that enables us to get others to cooperate with us, and
e) empathy refers to the state of connectedness with another person which created the basis for positive interaction and cooperation.

These five dimensions can lead to building social relationship and trust between a candidate and an interviewer.

FINDINGS

The three respondents were given pseudonyms: Justin, Zam and Barry. Their level of proficiency in English ranged from intermediate (Zam) to upper intermediate (Justin and Barry). All the respondents answered the questions spontaneously to the interview questions without any pre-prepared script. This study presented the transcriptions that addressed the question "Why are you interested to work at this company?"

The analysis of the social semiotic discourse is discussed according to van Leeuwen and Kress' (2009) three layers of analysis which include discourse, design and production. In this study, the discourse is promoting oneself to be hired. To address this discourse, the design involves the use of informative, followed by persuasive language. In the context of job interviews, the discourse also includes the concept of professionalism. In terms of production, the language use in their speeches should contain lexical choices and sentences that reflect informative followed by persuasive language. In other words, the respondents should be able to provide information about their skills and values and persuade the recruiters that they are able to use these skills for the benefit of the selected company. The use of persuasive techniques which include flattery, expressing opinion, hyperbole, statistics and figures, and personal pronouns could help achieve persuasion.

In achieving the discourse of promoting oneself to be hired, the ways the respondents present themselves online also play important roles. This includes their nonverbal resources which include their attire and grooming. The nonverbal resources include facial expressions, gestures, postures, eye contact, voice, body movement and their images. In the context of this study, images refer to the virtual setting which include the way they position themselves in front of the camera and their background.

The job interview was conducted online using Google Meet and the respondents understood that the assessment would be virtual, requiring them to set up a virtual setting. In the case of an online job interview, candidates need to create a professional setting. This includes how they position themselves in front of the camera, lighting, their choice of attire, colours, and the type of background. In the actual job interview session, these were supported by other modes which included the respondents' nonverbal resources and speech. As indicated in the methodology section, the students were expected to treat their lecturer as the recruiter. However, this expectation was not fully achieved and this could be seen from their choice of their background. The fact that they were aware that the job interview was only one of the assessments for the course, and that the interviewer was their lecturer, may have influenced the way they set up their virtual location, particularly in terms of their background.

JUSTIN'S PRODUCTION

In responding to the question, it could be seen that Justin's production shows evidence of persuasion. The excerpt below shows Justin's production to the selected question.

> *Uh…The reason why I am passionate about this job is that I have always dream to work in a designing of civil and structural things in terms of building wise. I do enjoy doing some plans and organisation in that, in that type of career, career that I have selected. And also, the reason why that I chose AJ is that, because I heard that AJ is a very fast paced environ, fast paced environment where I could learn more and gain more knowledge in my expertise that I am very interested and passionate about. That's all for me, thank you.* [Excerpt 1: Justin]

In his production, Justin explained about his passion related to the field he had chosen. The sentences were structured as giving information about his passion in designing structures and his knowledge about the company. He used the persuasive strategies such expressing opinion about his passion such as *I am passionate about* and *I have always dream to work as*, and personal pronoun *I*. When talking about himself, he may have demonstrated evidence of persuasion. However, when expressing his opinion about the company that he had chosen (*I chose AJ is that, because I heard that AJ is a very fast paced environment)*, the element of persuasion was lost. Justin had not directly presented the strengths of the company that had attracted him to apply for a job at this company. His opinion about the company was unclear and he had not really addressed the question. He focused on what he could gain by working at this company with his statement *I could learn more and gain more knowledge in my expertise* instead of how his knowledge and skills could benefit the company. In addition, the use of *I heard* signalled that his knowledge about the company was a hearsay and not based on facts. This further highlighted that he lacked the element of persuasion in his response, thus had not achieved the discourse of promoting oneself to be hired.

Justin's intention of being persuasive was not supported by appropriate intonation in his voice and his facial expression displayed lack of emotion to persuade the interviewer to hire him. Throughout the interview session, his eyes kept moving from looking at the ceiling to the monitor almost every second, indicating the possibility of trying to remember a memorised script. His intonation sounded like a person reading a script and lacked expression. These descriptions do not seem to represent confidence or persuasion.

In a professional context such as attending an interview, it is a common understanding (normative discourse) that male candidates should wear at least a pair of shirts and pants, as well as a tie. In the recording, Justin's representation of professional attire was slightly varied from the normative discourse. He wore a pair of collared T-shirts which he might consider as professional and persuasive.

In terms of his virtual setting, Justin has demonstrated efforts to address professionalism. Figure 1 shows Justin's virtual setting.

FIGURE 1. Justin's virtual setting

Based on Figure 1, Justin used a virtual background which he perceived as appropriate for a professional context. However, the lighting, the choice of colour of the background, topped with the colour of his shirts created a dim environment that may not support the professional representation.

ZAM'S PRODUCTION

In addressing the question posed by an interviewer, candidates need to provide clear information. In Zam's case, he struggled in expressing his opinion. Below is his production based on the selected question.

> *Ok, I'm passionate for, for filling this uhm, uh, (pause) slot in your company because I want to gain as many experience[s] as possible during my uh time working with you. Then uh (pause) as my plan is I want to be a safety officer in which, for the company uh for the department that I am applying for which is the quality and safety department. So, along that time uh, which is around 3 years in the occupational safety and health department of experience needed, so along that time I will gain as many experience[s] as possible in this company and grow as an individual (pause) to become a better version of myself (pause) and perhaps this company also.* [Excerpt 2: Zam]

The sentence structure in Zam's production was mainly informative and lacked persuasion. He stated that his intention of working at the company was *to gain as many experience[s] as possible.* This production, which is common among the final year students suggests the social understanding that the first job is always about gaining knowledge and experience to help them establish their foundation before leaping to a better opportunity. This indicates that they plan to move to other companies once they have achieved their goal. This idea is further illustrated in Barry's production which is discussed later in this section.

Zam kept mentioning the word *safety* such as in *I want to be a safety officer, which is the quality and safety department,* and *3 years in the occupational safety and health department*. Within the context of the sentence structure, it could be concluded that he was enthusiastic about the job as a safety officer. However, his voice (intonation) and his facial expression were not consistent with his enthusiasm.

There were a lot of "hm" and pauses in Zam's production such as *I'm passionate for, for filling this uhm, uh, (pause) slot in your company.* The production of *uhm or uh* which serves as a filler in oral production is common even among native speakers. Fillers give the opportunity for listeners to process the information delivered and a speaker may seem less trustworthy if fillers are eliminated (Conrad et al., 2013). Within the social context of second language setting, the rigorous use of *uh* or *uhm* may suggest that Zam has limited proficiency of English. This rigorous use may also reflect uncertainty of Zam's intention. This was supported by his soft monotonous voice, indicating that he was not confident with what he was saying.

The use of *slot* (an informal word but used in a formal context) as opposed to *vacancy* or *(job) opening* may seem unprofessional. This create a casual environment which may or may not be acceptable depending on the social environment of the company involved. Further investigation is required to examine how recruiters perceive the use of casual words such as *slot* in a formal setting such as in a job interview.

Zam was well-groomed. He wore white long-sleeved shirt with a tie. However, his hair did not seem neat. He seemed to be leaning to his left and his left shoulder dropped. Apart from that, he did not look at the web camera. Similar to Justin, his face lacked expression. In addition, his intonation was flat, and his voice was soft, making it difficult to anyone listening to concentrate on his response.

FIGURE 2. Zam's virtual setting

Based on Figure 2, it could be seen that Zam used a virtual background. The use of virtual background for online meetings or video conferencing is common when the location of the individual does not have the professional setting desired (Capello & Shaughnessy, 2020). In this case, Zam selected a background that depicted the space. The virtual background was selected from the options provided by Google Meet. The following are the list of the virtual background available.
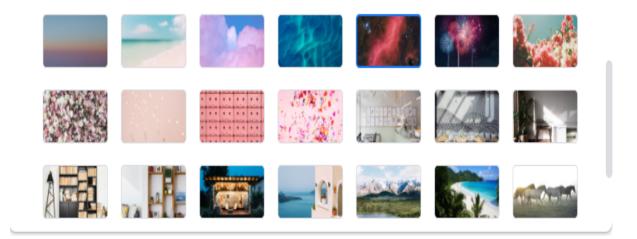

FIGURE 3. The virtual background available on Google Meet

Based on Figure 3, the options contained images appropriate for a casual setting as well as for a professional setting. However, there were not many options that represent science and technology. Given the fact that Zam's academic background was in engineering, the image of the space would be the closest that had representations of scientific and technical fields. In real life job interview, Zam would be unknown to the interviewer. His choice of the space as his virtual background may reflect that he was not serious.

BARRY'S PRODUCTION

Barry demonstrated a more interesting production which separated him from the first two participants. Below is his production.

> *Ok, so I have always been passionate about aaa…pursuing a career in a mechanical and manufacturing section especially in engineering part, engineering field of the study. So, it has been a long life passion for me and it was pretty much a no brainer for me to select your company PTS. So, from what that I read from the advertisement, you company take on odd jobs and…a lot of aaa…a lot of it has to be related to the mechanical engineering and the electrical engineering part of the*

field. So, I would like to apply my trade my expertise in designing in programming and in final element analysis and I want to at least, aaa within your company I want to at least gain working experience so that I can actually apply for the professional engineering license trade…uh…license. So, once I get that professional engineering license then I would be aa people the higher (indecipherable) will actually aaa approve me as a proper and professional engineer. So, I would like to work under your company as a steppingstone to my aa to fulfil my potential as a mechanical engineer. [Excerpt 3: Barry]

In Barry's production, he used the informative structure and, to a certain extent, persuasive. The persuasive structure is *So, it has been a long life passion for me and it was pretty much a no brainer for me to select your company.* This is a form of flattery and opinion. This structure was supported by his intonation, facial expression and hand gestures which could help build a connection with his interviewer. However, his production *gain working experience* and *work under your company as a steppingstone to my aa to fulfil my potential as a mechanical engineer* support the practice discussed in Zam's production where the first job is not where graduates would like to stay with for the rest of their career.

The word *proper* in *approve me as a proper and professional engineer* signalled that Barry would not be able to perform duties as an engineer at the company as he had not obtained his license. In Malaysia (along with other participating countries), to become an international professional engineer, one needs to obtain the Washington Accord accreditation.

The use of the first person pronoun "I" is categorised as persuasive. However, in this case "I" had not shown how "I" can contribute to the company apart from obtaining the professional license for his own benefit. Barry's speech was supported by other semiotic resources such as his facial expression, varied intonation, clear voice, clear articulation and smiles. The semiotic resources that supported Barry's speech are features that could catch the attention of the listeners and are effective for persuasion (Anderson, 1991; Leigh & Summers, 2002).

In some ways, Barry's attire fulfilled the normative discourse. His shirts were short-sleeved and the colour was red. The choice of colour may have been influenced by the belief that red brings good luck. In terms of his posture, his shoulders were symmetrically positioned, and he used hand gestures during his interaction. His facial expression was good and there were varieties in his intonation. His voice was clear, and he articulated his information clearly. From time to time, he could be seen smiling.

FIGURE 4. Barry's virtual setting

Based on Figure 4, it could be seen that Barry did not use any virtual background. He may have a space at home that he considered as appropriate for a professional setting. Barry had a light-coloured background with a red sofa. This could be acceptable if Barry had not worn a pair of red shirts. In this case, the sofa is foregrounding the scene. In some cultures, the red represents good luck. In Barry's case, his cultural representations influenced his choice of colour for his attire without realising that the colour overlapped with the sofa.

In terms of the virtual setting, all the respondents were positioned in the centre of the screen. The bottom edge of the screen was just below their shoulders, making it difficult to see their whole attire. The normative discourse in job interview representation requires full body view of a candidate because attire is part of the evaluation. Within the context of online interview, this is not appropriate. While positioning the camera further away from the candidate may help interviewers to access a candidate's overall appearance, this may also affect their assessment on other nonverbal resources such as facial expressions.

THE PRESENCE (OR ABSENCE) OF SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

The analysis of the social intelligence is discussed according to Albrecht's (2006) five dimensions of social intelligence. The key concept of the analysis is to determine ways in which the respondents have built connections with the interviewer to anticipate the interviewer's expectations. This enables the candidates to provide appropriate responses according to the interviewers' expectations. In addition, they can illustrate how they can work well with others in the workplace and create a harmonious workplace environment.

Based on the analysis on the production, it could be concluded that Justin had not built a connection with his interviewer. He lacked situational awareness where he could not interpret how his interviewer would perceive about him with the way he responded to the question. He was not able to connect with his interviewer to engage the interviewer to know more about him. His facial expression was flat and there was not even a smile (nor a sour face). This could signal to the interviewer that he was not enthusiastic about the interview as well as the position he was applying for. His response lacked clarity where he was not able to express clearly why he was interested in working at the company.

Zam may not be aware that his posture, facial expression and intonation could send negative messages to the interviewer. The non-verbal cues may not be of his priority. He was more concerned about getting his explanation through. In other words, he lacked the effort to get connected with the interviewer. To him what he said was more important than how he said it. He was not aware of what the interviewer may have perceived with such performance. This indicates that situational awareness is not present in his response.

The intention of gaining *as many experience[s] as possible* signalled to the interviewer that there is a chance that he will move to another better job when Zam has the opportunity. This could lead the interviewer to question his trustworthiness and judge his loyalty to the company. Zam illustrated that getting a job was about what he could gain instead of what he could offer and contribute to the company.

On top of that, the choice of the background also indicated that Zam lacked situational awareness. Similar to the non-verbal cues, he did not realise the importance of choosing an appropriate background. This could also affect the interviewer's trustworthiness towards him. Zam's answer was also lack of clarity. He was not able to persuade the interviewer with knowledge about the company. In other words, he had not addressed the question sufficiently.

Barry may have built the connection with the interviewer with *So, it has been a long life passion for me and it was pretty much a no brainer for me to select your company.* However, his idea of the company being the *steppingstone* for him to *gain working experience so that I can actually apply for the professional engineering license* may have led to a disconnection. This raises concerns about loyalty and trustworthy. In this context, Barry lacked the situational awareness and authenticity. He did not perceive the consequences of his production as he was focused on his abilities and his goal.

CONCLUSION

In this competitive world, human resource managers and recruiters are very careful in hiring new recruits to avoid wasting time in conducting interviews for the same post or recruiting new employees who are not able to perform as claimed during the interview. Most importantly, employers would prefer hiring employees who could work well with other colleagues to increase productivity. As such, interview sessions would be challenging especially to fresh graduates.

Equipping future graduates with the ability to communicate is insufficient if they are not able to develop trust and create positive interaction with the person they are communicating with. Higher learning institutions need to help them develop social intelligence so that they are not only well-equipped with the technical and relevant soft skills, but also the skills to work and communicate effectively in the workplace.

This study highlighted that the respondents lacked social intelligence in their communication. There are several key concerns with regard to preparing future graduates for their job interviews. First, the respondents were focused on the benefit that they would get out of the recruitment instead of how they could benefit the company. Justin used the sentence *I could learn more and gain more knowledge in my expertise* and Zam used the structure *I want to gain as many experience[s] as possible.* Barry clearly mentioned that treated his first job as *a steppingstone* to *gain working experience* so that he could *apply for the professional engineering license* to achieve his goal as a professional mechanical engineering. This could disconnect recruiters or hiring manager from considering him for the post, regardless of whether or not he had fulfilled the requirements and could express his ideas well.

Second, the respondents focused on providing information about the skills that they have instead of persuading the interviewer how their skills could benefit the company. Barry, for example, mentioned that he wanted to use *my expertise in designing in programming and in final element analysis*, indicating that he had the skills that the company required. However, he did not provide any example on how he would use his expertise for the benefit of the company.

Third, the respondents were not concerned about connecting with their interviewer during the interview session. In their discourse, they focused on providing information about themselves with the expectation that the interviewer would agree on what they had described. Effective communication is a two-way process where the speaker needs to get the trust of the listener.

This study has employed social semiotic approach to multimodal critical discourse analysis where meaning is constructed through language and non-verbal resources which included physiological and technical resources. The analysis has helped to highlight the lexical choices that were later mapped against the dimensions of social intelligence to determine its presence (or absence). The results showed that the respondents lacked social intelligence in their interaction, particularly in terms of the non-verbal resources. Facial expression such as a smile is not just about creating a pleasant and friendly situation. There is evidence that facial expression also promotes trustworthiness (Morioko, Osumi, Okamoto, & Matsuo, 2015), which is an important feature in social intelligence (Bayer, 2016). Although these results raise concerns regarding students' way of interacting with others, the issue on non-verbal resources warrants further investigation. Interacting through an online platform may have limited the respondents from performing well.

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