



Enhancing Mandarin Speaking Skills through Job Interview Simulations for Students in the MBKM MSIB Selection Program

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Keywords

*Mandarin speaking skills,
job interview simulation,
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language learning,
professional communication*

Abstract

This study aims to explore and measure the effectiveness of instructional materials based on job interview simulations in improving students' Mandarin speaking skills, particularly as a systematic and contextual preparation for the selection process of the Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB) under the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) scheme. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data were collected through classroom observation and students' verbal responses during simulations, while quantitative data were obtained from pretests and posttests. Initial findings showed that students struggled to comprehend interview questions and provide coherent, appropriate answers. After the simulation sessions, significant improvements were observed in fluency, word choice, intonation, and contextual understanding and response. These results emphasize the urgency of integrating simulation-based learning into Mandarin speaking instruction to prepare students for professional communication in the workplace. This article recommends applying a similar model in other foreign language programs and suggests the development of interactive and adaptive digital instructional resources.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of globalization and international economic integration increasingly underscores the necessity for cross-cultural competence and robust foreign language skills as critical assets for university graduates navigating the global job market. Mandarin, in particular, holds a strategic position as one of the most significant international languages, given China's prominent role in global trade, manufacturing, technology, and finance(Wan et al., 2021).

In response to these global demands, Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has implemented the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy. A key component of this policy is the Certified Internship and Independent Study Program (MSIB), which provides students with opportunities to enhance both language proficiency and soft skills through direct work experiences in real-world settings(An Nisaa' Budi Sulistyaningrum et al., 2022).

However, preliminary interviews with students who previously participated in the MBKM MSIB selection process revealed that limited Mandarin speaking abilities, especially in professional job interview contexts, remain significant obstacles to their success. Challenges such as fluency, appropriate vocabulary selection, mastery of formal sentence structures, and a deep understanding of Chinese workplace norms and cultural etiquette were identified as major hurdles(Querol-Bataller, 2023).

These interviews highlighted several key issues impeding students during Mandarin-language interviews. Common difficulties included the use of inappropriate diction for formal contexts, flat and ineffective intonation, and verbal responses that were often too brief and poorly structured, reducing coherence and completeness(Han, 2010). Furthermore, students' limited understanding of Chinese professional workplace etiquette significantly impacted their interactions and the interviewers' perceptions of their communicative competence. These findings underscore the need for systematic and contextual instructional interventions that integrate both linguistic and cultural aspects to improve students' preparedness for formal job interviews(McConachy, 2022).

This study aims to explore and assess the effectiveness of simulation-based job interview instructional materials in improving students' Mandarin speaking proficiency, particularly as a systematic and contextual preparation for the MBKM MSIB selection process.

The job interview stage plays a pivotal role in determining students' success during the MBKM MSIB selection process. Research indicates that effective foreign language speaking skills are not solely dependent on grammatical and lexical competence but also require strong pragmatic abilities and cultural awareness to ensure appropriateness and effectiveness in communication(“Erratum: Ishihara, Noriko and Andrew D. Cohen. 2021. Teaching and Learning Pragmatics: Where Language and Culture Meet (2nd Edn.). New York & London: Routledge, Xii+354 Pp. ISBN 978-1-003-16818-8

(Intercultural Pragmatics. (2023) 20:4 (455–462) (DOI: 10.1515/Ip-2023-4005),” 2024). Therefore, strengthening speaking skills through authentic and contextual learning approaches—such as job interview simulations—is highly relevant and should be systematically developed and integrated into Mandarin language curricula.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining descriptive qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative approach aimed to provide a comprehensive description of the implementation process of job interview simulations in Mandarin language learning. This approach focused on describing the interactions during the simulation sessions, including how students responded to interview questions, their level of engagement during practice, and their spontaneous reactions in Q&A situations. Observations were conducted directly by the researcher to record students' verbal behavior, clarity of oral expression, and patterns of diction usage throughout the learning process.

Meanwhile, the quantitative approach was used to measure the extent of improvement in students' speaking skills after participating in the simulations. Data were collected through pretests and posttests in the form of oral interviews, assessing four main aspects: fluency, word choice accuracy, intonation, and communicative competence. The results of the two tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of simulation-based materials in enhancing students' speaking proficiency.

Data were collected using three primary techniques. First, direct observation during the simulation sessions was conducted to record students' verbal behavior in answering interview questions. Second, video recordings were used as supporting materials to review students' performance in more detail. Third, oral assessments in the form of pretests and posttests were administered before and after the simulation sessions to measure quantitative changes in students' speaking abilities.

The data were analyzed using two approaches. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify students' response patterns, diction suitability, and their ability to answer questions based on context. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics by comparing pretest and posttest scores across four indicators of speaking skills: fluency, diction accuracy, intonation, and communicative competence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study evaluated not only general speaking skills but also students' abilities to understand and appropriately respond to interview questions. These abilities were assessed from two dimensions: (1) comprehension of the meaning and structure of questions, and (2) clarity, relevance, and completeness of the answers provided.

Before the simulation implementation, most students showed limited responses, such as one-sentence answers, informal diction, and difficulty grasping the core of abstract or evaluative questions. After participating in the simulation activities, significant changes were observed in the length, structure, and content of answers, as well as increased confidence in responding.

The figure below illustrates the comparison of pretest and posttest results for four aspects of speaking skills among students.

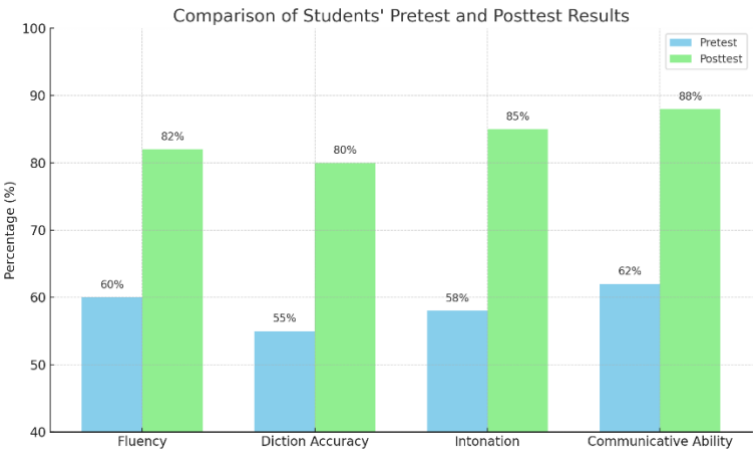


Figure 1. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results for Fluency, Accuracy of Diction, Intonation, and Communicative Competence

The bar chart above visually presents a comparison of students’ speaking performance between the pretest and posttest phases across four key aspects: fluency, diction accuracy, intonation, and communicative ability. As illustrated, each aspect showed substantial improvement after students participated in simulation-based learning activities. This visual representation helps to emphasize the extent of progress made, particularly in communicative ability, which reached the highest posttest score at 88%. To further elaborate on these findings, the table below provides a more detailed breakdown of the scores, including descriptive interpretations of both pretest and posttest results. This combination of quantitative data and qualitative analysis offers a comprehensive view of the students’ development in speaking skills.

Table 1. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results in Students’ Speaking Skills

Aspect	Pretest Average Score (%)	Description	Posttest Average Score (%)	Description
Fluency	60%	Moderate to low ability in smooth speech flow	82%	Significant improvement in smoothness and flow of speech

Diction Accuracy	55%	Difficulty in selecting appropriate vocabulary	80%	Enhanced ability to select appropriate and precise vocabulary
Intonation	58%	Limited use of pitch and stress to convey meaning	85%	Better use of vocal pitch and stress to convey meaning effectively
Communicative Ability	62%	Slightly better but still needing improvement in effective communication	88%	Stronger overall communication skills, including coherence and persuasion

The comparative data presented in the table clearly illustrates a significant improvement in students' speaking skills following the implementation of simulation-based learning. Each of the four assessed aspects—fluency, diction accuracy, intonation, and communicative ability—showed considerable growth from the pretest to the posttest phase.

In terms of fluency, students initially demonstrated a moderate to low ability (60%) in producing smooth and continuous speech. After the intervention, this improved markedly to 82%, indicating that students became more confident and fluid in their verbal expression. Diction accuracy, which was the weakest area during the pretest at 55%, increased to 80%, reflecting enhanced vocabulary control and a better understanding of appropriate word choices in professional communication contexts.

Intonation also saw a substantial rise from 58% to 85%, suggesting that students learned to use pitch and stress more effectively to support meaning, which is crucial for clarity and engagement in oral communication. The most notable gain occurred in communicative ability, which rose from 62% to 88%. This demonstrates that students became significantly more capable of conveying ideas clearly, persuasively, and coherently—skills vital in both academic and workplace settings.

These improvements not only affected the quality of the spoken content but also significantly strengthened students' confidence when speaking in front of an audience, a key psychological factor that often hinders effective communication among foreign language learners. The increased exposure to structured simulation scenarios allowed students to gradually overcome anxiety and hesitation, leading to a more fluent and assertive speaking style. This boost in confidence was accompanied by an observable increase in the use of professional expressions, idiomatic phrases, and formal vocabulary consistent with the communication norms and workplace culture of Mandarin-speaking professional environments.

Moreover, students demonstrated a heightened awareness of discourse organization, enabling them to deliver structured, relevant, and impactful responses during simulated professional interactions such as job interviews, business meetings, and academic presentations. Their responses were not only more linguistically accurate but also more contextually appropriate, reflecting an improved ability to adapt language use to suit specific communicative purposes and audiences. For instance, students became

more adept at using polite expressions, signaling transitions between ideas, and aligning their tone and register with formal settings—elements that are crucial for effective professional communication.

Overall, the results of this study affirm that simulation-based learning provided students with meaningful and sustained opportunities to practice and refine their speaking abilities in authentic, goal-oriented contexts. This pedagogical model facilitated the development of not only core linguistic skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation but also pragmatic and sociolinguistic competencies, including turn-taking, politeness strategies, and non-verbal communication cues. These elements are essential for achieving communicative competence in real-world professional environments, where effective interaction depends as much on cultural and contextual understanding as on language accuracy.

By immersing students in realistic scenarios that mirror the challenges they are likely to face in future careers—especially those involving international collaboration—the simulations enabled the bridging of the gap between classroom learning and professional application. Students reported greater self-efficacy in handling formal conversations and a clearer understanding of the expectations in professional Mandarin-speaking contexts. Consequently, this instructional approach plays a crucial role in preparing learners for the complexities of global communication and positions them more competitively in both national and international job markets.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the development and implementation of simulation-based instructional materials for job interviews effectively strengthen Mandarin speaking skills among students, particularly in preparation for the MBKM MSIB selection process. The simulation approach was proven to be beneficial in enhancing key linguistic components such as fluency, accurate diction, appropriate intonation, and the ability to comprehend and respond to interview questions systematically and contextually. These improvements reflect not only technical gains in language proficiency but also the development of higher-order communication skills that are crucial in formal and professional settings.

More importantly, the simulation-based learning method contributes significantly to students' overall communicative competence by integrating pragmatic and intercultural elements into instructional design. As a result, students are not only linguistically prepared but also culturally aware and attuned to workplace expectations commonly found in Chinese-speaking professional environments. This dual focus empowers learners to present themselves more confidently, convey messages more effectively, and navigate interviews with greater awareness of both language and context.

Additionally, the structured and authentic nature of the simulations provides students with repeated opportunities to practice and internalize formal communication routines, ultimately fostering habits

of self-reflection and continuous improvement. This pedagogical model bridges the gap between academic language learning and real-world application, making it especially relevant for programs aiming to enhance graduate employability.

Based on the positive outcomes observed in this study, it is strongly recommended that job interview simulations be more widely integrated into Mandarin language curricula, not only as supplementary material but as a core component of advanced speaking instruction. Such integration is expected to foster more meaningful learning experiences and support students' readiness for professional opportunities both domestically and abroad.

Furthermore, future research and development efforts should explore the creation of interactive digital versions of these simulations to increase accessibility and learning flexibility. Digital simulations can offer scalable and adaptive learning experiences, allowing students to engage in repeated practice in diverse scenarios, receive automated feedback, and develop confidence at their own pace.

In conclusion, this instructional model represents a strategic and forward-looking approach to foreign language education. By aligning with real-world communication demands, it holds great promise in enhancing students' global competitiveness and supporting national initiatives such as MBKM in producing workforce-ready graduates equipped with both language proficiency and intercultural communication.

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