JOB INTERVIEW ANXIETY IN ENGINEERING STUDENTS: CAUSES AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki prevalensi dan penyebab kecemasan praktek wawancara kerja mahasiswa teknik di Politeknik Negeri Semarang. Survei ini melibatkan 290 mahasiswa dan menggunakan kuesioner terstruktur yang mencakup informasi demografis, pengukuran tingkat kecemasan, kecemasan terkait wawancara kerja, efektivitas sesi latihan, penyebab dan strategi mengatasi kecemasan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tingkat kecemasan umum ada di tingkat sedang, namun kecemasan meningkat saat praktek wawancara kerja. Sesi latihan secara signifikan mengurangi tingkat kecemasan dan meningkatkan percaya diri mahasiswa. Penyebab utama kecemasan termasuk kurangnya pengalaman mengikuti wawancara kerja, tekanan untuk dapat memenuhi ekspektasi, dan ketakutan terhadap pertanyaan yang tidak mampu dijawab. Studi ini menyoroti perlunya program dukungan yang komprehensif dari institusi pendidikan untuk mempersiapkan mahasiswa dalam menghadapi wawancara kerja sehingga dapat mengurangi kecemasan dan meningkatkan kesiapan mahasiswa ketika memasuki dunia kerja.

Kata kunci *:kecemasan, wawancara kerja, mahasiswa teknik*

Abstract

This study investigates the prevalence and causes of job interview anxiety among engineering students at the State Polytechnic of Semarang (Polines). The survey, which included 290 students, utilized a structured questionnaire that addressed demographic information, general anxiety levels, specific job interview anxieties, the effectiveness of practice sessions, causes of anxiety, and coping strategies. The results reveal moderate levels of general anxiety among the students, with heightened anxiety specifically related to job interview preparation and the waiting period before interviews. Practice sessions and mock interviews significantly reduced anxiety levels and improved student confidence. Key causes of anxiety included lack of job interview experience, pressure to meet expectation, and fear of unanswerable questions. The study also highlights the need for comprehensive support programs from educational institutions to better prepare students for job interviews. It can help alleviate job interview anxiety and enhance students' transition into the workforce.

Kata kunci *:kecemasan, wawancara kerja, mahasiswa teknik*

1. Background

The global engineering sector has increasingly emphasized the necessity for engineering graduates to possess strong English language skills. A recent study has shown that integrating language and communication skills into engineering education can significantly contribute to students' success in their careers and community engagement (Spoelstra & Collins, 2023). This integration not only boosts their employability but also prepares them for diverse professional environments. It is more than simply fulfilling the graduation requirement but to enhance their local and global professional skills (Kaewpet & Sukamolson, 2011). Developing these skills ensures that graduates are well-equipped to tackle complex challenges in a multicultural and interconnected world.

The practice job interview during English class is one example of how effective communication in English can significantly enhance employability (Ne'Matullah et al., 2023). Engineering students, however, often face unique challenges in job interviews due to the technical nature of their field and the specific terminology used. Despite their technical proficiency, many students struggle to articulate their skills and experiences in English, which can hinder their career opportunities in multinational companies and collaborative projects.

At the State Polytechnic of Semarang (Polines), students from the Telecoms, Energy Conversion and Energy Generation Engineering Study Programs are no exception to this trend. With approximately 300 engineering students taking English class each semester, there is a clear need to enhance their English communication skills, particularly for job interviews. however, a significant barrier that these students face is job interview anxiety. This anxiety can stem from various sources, including a lack of confidence in language proficiency, unfamiliarity with the interview process, and pressure to perform well. Understanding and mitigating this anxiety is crucial for helping students succeed in job interviews.

The primary purpose of this research is to identify the causes of job interview anxiety among engineering students at Polines and to develop effective mitigation strategies. The objectives of the study are, (1) to identify the main causes of job interview anxiety among electrical and mechanical engineering students, (2) to assess the impact of job interview anxiety on students' performance, (3) to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies to mitigate this anxiety, (4) to provide recommendations for integrating these strategies into English Language Teaching (ELT) programs at Polines.

Anxiety, a common psychological response to stress, has been extensively studied in various context, including educational and professional settings. Anxiety can be characterized by feelings of worry, nervousness, and fear that can interfere with daily activities and performance. Recent studies highlight that anxiety is prevalent among students and professionals, affecting their mental health and performance (American Psychological Association, 2020). High levels of anxiety can lead to avoidance behaviors, decreased performance, and impaired cognitive functioning, making it a critical issue to address for improving overall well-being and success.

Anxiety among university/college students is a prevalent issue influenced by various factors. Factors like family, school, and societal pressures, as well as childhood abuse, have been identified as significant contributors to anxiety risk among college students (Wen & Sun, 2023). Addressing these factors through targeted interventions can help mitigate the anxiety levels experienced by students.

In the context of English language learning, anxiety can significantly impact students' ability to acquire and use the language effectively. English Language Anxiety (ELA) is a specific type of anxiety that manifests when learners are required to use English, especially in high-stakes situations, like exams or job interviews. ELA can lead to reduced participation in class, avoidance of speaking opportunities, and overall lower performance in language-related tasks (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Understanding the causes and symptoms of ELA is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies that foster a supportive learning environment.

Factors contributing to ELA include fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and anxiety related to communication tasks, especially in speaking activities (Saleh et al., 2023; Weerakoon et al., 2023; Kuswantoro & Novita, 2024.

Engineering students, who often focus heavily on technical subjects, may experience heightened English language anxiety due to lack of self-confidence, fear of criticism, limited opportunities for speaking, language challenges, and anxiety about being evaluated by listeners (Kakepoto et al., 2022; Riaz & Riaz, 2022; Nangimah, 2022). Regional dialect influences can also become the cause for engineering students speaking anxiety and this emphasizes the importance of considering students'

psychological conditions and providing individualized solutions to reduce anxiety levels in English communication (Syaefani et al., 2023).

This lack of confidence in English proficiency can be particularly pronounced during job interviews, where precise and clear communication is essential. According to a study by Liu and Jackson (2008), students who perceive their English skills as adequate are more likely to experience higher level of anxiety, which can negatively affect their performance in oral examinations and job interviews

Existing literature highlights the importance of addressing job interview anxiety to improve performance outcomes for engineering students. Job interview anxiety can significantly hinder a candidate's ability to present themselves effectively, regardless of their himself skills and qualifications. This anxiety often manifests as physiological symptoms (e.g., increased heart rate, sweating) and psychological symptoms (e.g., nervousness, negative self-talk). According to McCarthy and Goffin (2004), job interview anxiety is a significant predictor of interview performance, indicating that higher anxiety levels can lead to poorer performance outcomes.

1.1.The Causes of Job Interview Anxiety

One of the primary causes of job interview anxiety is language proficiency. Limited proficiency in English can increase anxiety levels, as students may fear making grammatical errors or not understanding the interviewer's questions (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). This fear can be particularly pronounced among engineering students, who might already be less confident in their language skills due to their focus on technical subjects. Additionally, unfamiliarity with the interview process and common interview questions can worsen anxiety. McCarthy and Goffin (2004) found that lack of preparation and uncertainty about what to expect during the interview contribute significantly to interview-related stress.

Performance pressure is another significant factor. The high stakes of securing a job can lead to increased stress and anxiety. Engineering students may feel an intense pressure to perform well in interviews to secure positions in a competitive job market. This pressure can cause them to experience heightened levels of anxiety, which in turn can impair their performance.

1.2.Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Engineering Classes

To address job interview anxiety, several strategies have been proposed and tested in educational settings such as Polines. As it closely related to ELA, to overcome the anxiety people can use different strategies such as deep breathing, giving space for thinking, code-switching, preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer support (Kakepoto et al., 2022; Wilang, 2022). Understanding and addressing ELA are crucial for creating supportive learning environments that enhances students' confidence and skills in speaking the target language, ultimately improving their communication abilities in job interview scenarios (Muhtadi Agha Situmorang et al., 2023; Mansarate Quinto & Macayan, 2019.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is another effective approach. TBLT has ben shown to impact positively on learners' anxiety levels in various language tasks, such as oral presentations (Azizifard, 2024) and writing activities (Shi, 2023). TBLT emphasizes practical language use through tasks that stimulate real-life scenarios. TBLT focuses on learner-centered approaches, emphasizing real-task completion to enhance English language skills (Li, 2023). TBLT promotes active participation and motivation in speaking

activities, ultimately to reduce anxiety levels among learners (Li, 2023).

For engineering classes in Polines, these tasks include mock interviews, group projects, and presentations. Ellis (2003) suggests that TBLT is effective because it allows students to use language in meaningful context, which can improve both their fluency and accuracy.

In practice, TBLT for a job interview in engineering classes at Polines involves several stages. Initially, the students engage in tasks that help them become familiar with common interview questions and appropriate responses. This includes role-playing exercises where students practice not only answering interview questions, but also handshaking, small talk, asking questions to interviewer and thanking the interviewer at the end of the practice session. They also learn on appropriate body gestures and attire to wear during a job interview. Instructor provides feedback on both language use and content accuracy, helping students refine their responses.

1.3.Mitigation Strategies

Role-playing and simulations are also valuable techniques. Role-playing exercises, where students practice job interviews in a controlled environment, can help them gain confidence and improve their communication skills. Ladousse (1987) highlights that role-playing encourages students to think and speak spontaneously, which is crucial for job interviews. These exercises provide a safe space for students to practice and receive feedback, reducing their anxiety over time.

Incorporating soft skills training into ELT programs can further aid in mitigating job interview anxiety. Soft skills, such as interpersonal communication, teamwork, and cultural awareness, are critical for success in professional settings. Goleman (1998) emphasizes that emotional intelligence, which includes these soft skills, is essential for navigating the interpersonal aspect of job interviews. Training in these areas can help students feel more prepared and confident.

Additionally, technological tools can play a significant role in reducing job interview anxiety. Language learning apps, online platforms, and virtual interview practice software can provide additional support for students. Warschauer and Healey (1998) highlight the potential of technology to enhance language learning by offering interactive and personalized learning experiences. For engineering students, these tools can provide opportunities to practice and receive feedback outside the classroom, further building their confidence and reducing anxiety.

This research will provide valuable insights into the causes of anxiety among electrical and mechanical engineering students at Polines and will identify effective strategies for mitigating this anxiety. The findings will benefit educators by offering evidence-based recommendations for curriculum design and instructional practices tailored to the needs of these students. Engineering students will benefit from improved preparation for job interviews, reducing their anxiety and enhancing their employability and career prospects. Additionally, the research will contribute to the broader field of ELT by addressing a specific and practical application, thereby filling a gap in the existing literature.

By identifying the main causes of job interview anxiety and understanding the effectiveness of various mitigation strategies, this study aims to enhance the overall quality of ELT programs at Polines and similar institutions. The integration of practical language tasks, role-playing, soft skills training, and technological tools can create a comprehensive approach to job interview preparation, ultimately supporting engineering students in achieving their career goals.

2. Method

This study employs a quantitative approach using a comprehensive survey to understand the causes of job interview anxiety among engineering students at Polines and to evaluate effective mitigation strategies. The survey is administered to 290 students from the Electrical and Mechanical Engineering majors. The questionnaire consists of several sections designed to gather detailed information on various aspects related to job interview anxiety specifics, reflective questions on job interview anxiety, the effectiveness of practice sessions, causes of anxiety, coping strategies, and preparation, as well as open-ended questions for qualitative feedback.

The data collected from these surveys will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics will summarize the demographic information and general anxiety levels of the respondents. Inferential statistics, such as regression analysis, are used to identify innate anxiety factors that contribute significantly to students' anxiety levels when facing job interviews. The interpretation of the regression results was carried out by considering the statistically significant coefficient values in the ANOVA table. Factors with a p-value of < 0.05 show that these variables play an important role in determining the level of anxiety of students during job interviews. This approach ensures a thorough understanding of the issue and provides a robust basis for developing targeted strategies to mitigate job interview anxiety among engineering students at Polines.

3. Results

This section presents the findings from the survey conducted among 290 Electrical and Mechanical engineering students at Polines, focusing on their job interview anxiety levels, causes, and mitigation strategies.

The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized as follows. The sample consisted of 160 male (55%) and 130 female (45%) students, aged between 19-23 years. The majority of respondents were first-year students. The average GPA among the students was 3.45, with the majority falling between 3.0 and 3.5. regarding prior work experience, 40% had completed an internship, while 60% had not. Additionally, 50% had never attended a job interview, 30% had attended one, and 20% had attended two or more.

These demographic details are significant for several reasons. First, the gender distribution suggests that any gender-specific anxieties or challenges could be more pronounces among the male respondents due to their majority. Understanding how job interview anxiety reveals differently across genders can help tailor specific interventions. For example, previous studies have shown that women may experience higher levels of anxiety due to societal expectations and gender biases in technical fields (Richman et al., 2011). Therefore, addressing these specific anxieties could improve overall outcomes.

The year of study distribution highlights that the majority of the respondents are in their first year, a critical period where students typically need more foundational guidance to develop their skills to prepare for future job interviews. The final year students, on the other hand, might experience greater anxiety levels as they have to balance the final year academic responsibilities with job search pressures. Tailoring support based on academic standing ensures that the students receive the most relevant and effective assistance to mitigate job interview anxiety.

3.1. General Anxiety Level (GAD-7 Scale)

The GAD-7 scale was employed to measure the general anxiety levels among the students. The mean scores for each item on the GAD-7 scale indicate moderate anxiety levels, with higher scores reflecting greater anxiety (Table 1).

Table 1. GAD-7 Scale

GAD-7 Item	Mean Score
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on the edge	1.2
Not being able to stop or control worrying	1.1
Worrying too much about different things	1.4
Trouble relaxing	1.3
Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	1.1
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	1.2
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	1.1

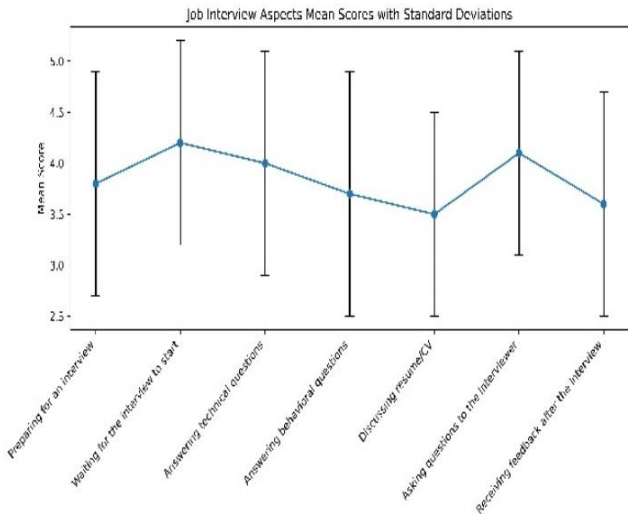
GAD-7 Item	Mean Score (SD)
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on the edge	1.2 (0.8)
Not being able to stop or control worrying	1.1 (0.9)
Worrying too much about different things	1.4 (1.0)
Trouble relaxing	1.3 (1.1)
Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	1.1 (1.0)
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	1.2 (0.9)
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	1.1 (0.8)

The overall mean score on the GAD-7 scale was 8.3, indicating moderate anxiety. These findings suggest that a significant proportion of the students experience moderate to severe anxiety, which could potentially impact their performance in high-stress situations such as job interviews.

3.2. Job Interview Anxiety Specifics

When asked specifically about job interview anxiety, 65% of the respondents reported experiencing high levels of anxiety, 25% reported moderate anxiety, and 10% reported low anxiety. The high frequency of job interview anxiety emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to help students manage their anxiety and perform effectively during interviews.

Students were also asked to rate their anxiety levels for various aspects of job interviews on a scale from 1 (not anxious at all) to 5 (extremely anxious). The mean scores for these items are presented in Graph 1.



Graph 1. Job Interviews Aspects Mean Scores

The highest anxiety levels were reported for waiting for the interview to start (mean = 4.2) and asking questions to the interviewer (mean = 4.1).

3.3. Factors Affecting Anxiety Levels

In this section, regression is used to analyze inherited anxiety factors that affect the level of anxiety of students during interviews. The level of student anxiety during the interview was calculated by averaging the scores of all the questions in Section 3 for each respondent. ANOVA table for regression with dependent variables level of anxiety of students during interviews with 8 anxiety factors can be seen in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Analysis of Variance

SOURCE	DF	ADJ SS	ADJ MS	F-VALUE	P-VALUE
Regression	21	49,025	2,33451	4,19	0,000
1. Feeling nervous or anxious	3	4,868	1,62259	2,91	**0,035**
2. Always worried	3	1,288	0,42922	0,77	0,512
3. Worrying a lot of things	3	0,778	0,25937	0,47	0,707
4. Trouble relaxing	3	1,513	0,50440	0,90	0,439
5. Becoming very restless that it is hard to sit still	3	0,075	0,02492	0,04	0,987
6. Easily annoyed	3	1,005	0,33497	0,60	0,615
7. Fear that something bad could happen	3	7,288	2,42942	4,36	**0,005**
Error	276	153,849	0,55742		
Lack-of-Fit	213	112,698	0,52910	0,81	0,863
Pure Error	63	41,150	0,65318		
Total	297	202,873			

From Table 2, p-value for the factors "easily feeling nervous" and "fear that something bad might happen" is less than 0.05. This means

that both inherent anxiety factors significantly influence the level of anxiety among students during interviews.

3.4. Major Causes of Job Interview Anxiety

In this study, six main causes were queried among students, namely confidence in communication skills, presentation skills, feelings of pressure, fear of not being able to answer questions, job interview experience, and concern about making a bad impression. The identification of the main causes of anxiety was done by averaging the scores for each statement, which can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Average Anxiety Cause Score

Causes of Anxiety	Mean Score
Lack of confidence in communication skills	2.91
Uncertainty in presenting technical skills	2.96
Pressure to meet high expectations	2.93
Fear of not being able to answer questions	3.17
Limited experience with job interviews	3.41
Worry about making poor impression	3.35

The research results presented in Table 3 show that job interview experience is the primary cause of student anxiety, with the highest average score (3.41), followed by concern about making a bad impression (3.35) and fear of not being able to answer questions (3.17). This indicates that the lack of experience and fear of being judged negatively by the interviewer are the most significant factors in increasing student anxiety. Although anxiety related to presentation skills (2.96), feelings of pressure (2.93), and confidence in communication skills (2.91) are also quite high, they are relatively lower compared to the top three factors.

3.5. Effectiveness of Practice Sessions

In this study, six different types of training were identified to assess how helpful the students found the various training sessions they attended in preparing for job interviews. The mean score for each type of training can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Average Practice Session Score

Types of Practice	Mean Score
Practice with friends	3.30
Practice with family	1.68
Attend job interview preparation class	2.76
Participate in a mock interview	2.25
Researching potential employers and roles	3.40
Using relaxation techniques before proceeding with practice	3.38

The research results show that students felt most helped by researching the type of job and the company (mean score 3.40) and using relaxation techniques before practice sessions (mean score 3.38). This indicates that information-based preparation and stress management are the most effective strategies in helping students reduce anxiety during job interviews. Practicing with friends was also rated quite helpful (mean score 3.30), suggesting that peer support can have a positive impact. Conversely, practicing with family received the lowest score (mean score 1.68), which might reflect that family practice does not provide a realistic interview simulation or sufficient pressure to effectively prepare students. Attending job interview preparation classes (mean score 2.76) and participating in mock interviews (mean score 2.25) received intermediate scores, indicating that while helpful, there may need to be improvements in the design and implementation of these sessions to make them more effective.

The practice sessions were rated highly for their effectiveness. The mean score for the helpfulness of mock interviews was 4.5, and the sessions were found to significantly reduce anxiety levels and improve confidence (Table 5).

Table 5. Average Effectiveness Score of Exercise session

Practice Session Effectiveness	Mean Score

Helpfulness of mock interviews	4.5
Reduction in anxiety	4.3
Improvement in interview confidence	4.4

3.6. Mitigation Strategies

The effectiveness of various strategies to mitigate job interview anxiety was also evaluated. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) was reported to be highly effective by 75% of the respondents. Students found that engaging in practical tasks such as mock interviews, group projects, and presentations helped them improve their fluency and confidence in using English.

Role-playing and simulations were also rated positively, with 68% of the respondents stating that these exercises helped reduce their anxiety. The opportunity to practice in a controlled environment and receive feedback was particularly beneficial. Soft skills training, which included interpersonal communication and teamwork exercises, was believed effective by 60% of the students.

3.7. Open-Ended Responses

Open-ended questions provided qualitative insights into students' experiences. Common themes included the beneficial aspects of practice sessions, such as building confidence, improving communication skills, and receiving constructive feedback. Students suggested more practical sessions, varied interview scenarios, and additional focus on technical questions for future improvements. Students also expect to have more intensive practical session with the experts such as Human Resource Department staffs or interview specialist. Thus, educational institution such as Polines can organize workshops on Job Interview that invites professionals. Overall, the feedback was positive, highlighting the sessions' helpfulness and the support provided.

4. Conclusion

The survey results indicate that engineering students at the State Polytechnic of Semarang experience moderate levels of anxiety related to job interview practice. This anxiety is particularly pronounced in the initial stages of the interview process, such as preparing for the interview and waiting for it to start. The data reveal that both male and female students experience similar levels of anxiety, highlighting the pervasive nature of this issue across different demographic groups. The mean scores on the GAD-7 scale underscore the need for targeted interventions to address general anxiety among students.

A significant finding from this study is the effectiveness of the practice sessions in mitigating job interview anxiety. Students reported a noticeable reduction in anxiety levels after participating in mock interviews and other preparatory activities. The practice sessions were especially beneficial in helping students feel more confident and better prepared for various aspects of the interview process, including small talk, answering questions, and closing the interview session. This suggests that experiential learning through practice can be powerful too in reducing anxiety and enhancing performance in real job interviews.

The study also identified several key causes of job interview anxiety among engineering students. Job interview experience and concern about making a bad impression were the most frequently cited reasons for anxiety.

The lack of job interview experience means that students are often unprepared for the dynamics and pressures of real-world interviews. This unpreparedness can worsen anxiety, leading to poorer performance. Educational institutions can mitigate this by providing students with more opportunities to engage in mock interviews and other preparatory activities that simulate the job interview environment. This hands-on practice can help students become more familiar with the process, reducing their anxiety levels.

Fear of making a bad impression is closely tied to concerns about language proficiency and the ability to articulate thoughts clearly and confidently. Many engineering students focus primarily on their technical studies, which may leave them less confident in their language skills. Addressing this issue requires integrating targeted language support and communication training into the curriculum. Workshops and courses that emphasize public speaking, presentation skills, and interpersonal communication can significantly boost students' confidence and reduce their anxiety.

Moreover, the findings suggest that comprehensive support programs should include stress management techniques. Learning to manage stress effectively can help students maintain composure during interviews, allowing them to perform to the best of their abilities. Techniques such as mindfulness, relaxation exercises, and cognitive-behavioural strategies can be incorporated into these programs to help students cope with anxiety.

By targeting these root causes - lack of experience, fear of making a bad impression, and inadequate stress management skills - educational institutions can better prepare students to handle the demands of job interviews more effectively. Implementing these comprehensive support programs can lead to improved student outcomes, as they enter the job market with greater confidence and preparedness.

Coping strategies employed by the students varied, with many engaging in activities such as practicing with friends, attending workshops, and participating in mock interviews. These strategies were generally effective in reducing anxiety, as indicated by the positive feedback from students. However, there is still room for improvement in the support provided to students. Suggestions from the survey responses include increasing the number and variety of practice sessions, incorporating more technical questions, and offering personalized feedback to help students improve their performance.

In conclusion, the study highlights the significant impact of job interview anxiety on engineering students and underscores the need for targeted interventions to address this issue. Practice sessions and preparatory activities have proven to be effective in reducing anxiety and improving confidence. Educational institutions should consider implementing comprehensive support programs that focus on both technical and soft skills to better prepare students for the challenges of job interviews. By doing so, they can help students transition more smoothly into the workforce and achieve their career goals.

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