

Understanding Self-Awareness and Its Impact on Job Interview Performance: A Qualitative Study on Candidate Reflection, Stress Management, and Employability Outcomes

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ABSTRACT: Job interviews are critical in determining candidates' employment success, with self-awareness playing a significant role in interview performance. This study explores the influence of self-awareness on successful and unsuccessful job interview candidates through a qualitative case study approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten participants—five successful and five unsuccessful job candidates—to analyze their preparation strategies, self-reflection, and communication techniques. Thematic analysis revealed that successful candidates exhibited a higher level of self-awareness, enabling them to confidently articulate their skills, address weaknesses constructively, and adapt to interview dynamics. Conversely, unsuccessful candidates displayed lower self-awareness, leading to difficulties in self-expression, ineffective communication, and a lack of structured responses. The findings underscore the necessity of incorporating self-awareness training in job preparation programs to improve employability outcomes. This study contributes to the growing discourse on emotional intelligence and career readiness by emphasizing self-awareness as a pivotal factor in professional success. Future research should examine the effectiveness of self-awareness interventions across various career sectors to determine their broader applicability.

Keywords: Self-Awareness; Job Interviews; Employability; Communication Strategies; Emotional Intelligence; Career Readiness; Interview Performance.



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INTRODUCTION

Self-awareness plays a crucial role in job interview performance and overall career success. Defined as an individual's ability to introspect and recognize their emotions, thoughts, and motivations, self-awareness allows candidates to align their personal competencies with job requirements (Barbosa et al., 2014; Montemayor et al., 2020). This alignment is particularly significant in job interviews, where candidates must effectively communicate their strengths, weaknesses, and

professional experiences to potential employers. Studies have consistently shown that candidates with high self-awareness perform better in interviews due to their ability to manage stress, structure responses effectively, and demonstrate confidence in their competencies (Hourani et al., 2020; Khalid et al., 2018).

The modern job market is highly competitive, requiring candidates to distinguish themselves through more than just technical skills and qualifications. Research has indicated that recruiters evaluate candidates based on both their technical expertise and their ability to reflect on past experiences, learn from them, and apply those insights to new challenges (Hassan et al., 2015). Candidates who exhibit strong self-awareness tend to align their skills and experiences with the company's expectations, leading to more favorable hiring decisions. Furthermore, emotional intelligence, which encompasses self-awareness, is strongly correlated with effective communication, adaptability, and leadership potential, all of which are desirable traits in professional environments (Chang et al., 2023; Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Leman et al., 2021).

Despite the recognized importance of self-awareness in interview success, many candidates struggle to articulate their experiences in ways that highlight their qualifications. Common reasons for interview failure include poor preparation, difficulty in structuring responses, lack of confidence, and an inability to relate experiences to job requirements (Krishnan et al., 2020). Candidates with low self-awareness often struggle to recognize and articulate their strengths and weaknesses, resulting in either overconfidence in areas where they lack proficiency or excessive self-doubt in areas where they excel. Such misalignment can negatively impact their interview performance, leading to unsuccessful job applications (Lassus et al., 2015; Rosqvist et al., 2022).

One widely accepted solution to improving interview performance is structured self-reflection and training. Studies have shown that candidates who engage in self-assessment and feedback exercises before interviews significantly enhance their ability to present themselves effectively (Blaique & Pinnington, 2021). Methods such as behavioral interview training, mock interviews, and the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) technique have been proven effective in helping candidates structure their responses and demonstrate self-awareness in interviews (Chodkowska-Miszczyk et al., 2019). Additionally, self-awareness training programs that focus on emotional regulation, communication skills, and career goal alignment have been linked to improved interview success rates (Grant et al., 2024; Reed et al., 2018; Zimmer et al., 2017).

Previous research on self-awareness in professional development has primarily focused on its role in leadership, workplace communication, and career adaptability. Goleman's emotional intelligence model posits that self-awareness serves as the foundation for emotional regulation and interpersonal effectiveness, making it a key predictor of workplace success (Hourani et al., 2020). Similarly, self-regulation theory suggests that individuals with high self-awareness are better equipped to set realistic career goals, navigate professional challenges, and adjust their approaches to align with evolving workplace demands (Rupp et al., 2021). Despite these insights, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the direct impact of self-awareness on job interview performance, particularly in differentiating successful and unsuccessful candidates.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining how self-awareness influences job interview outcomes and identifying key strategies employed by successful candidates. By analyzing qualitative data from job seekers who have both succeeded and failed in job interviews, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role self-awareness plays in interview performance. The findings will contribute to existing knowledge by offering practical recommendations for job seekers, recruiters, and career development professionals on how to enhance interview readiness through self-awareness practices. Ultimately, this research will advance the discourse on self-awareness in career development and provide empirical evidence to support the implementation of structured self-awareness training programs for job candidates.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the role of self-awareness in determining job interview success and failure. Given the subjective and introspective nature of self-awareness, qualitative methods provide a suitable framework for capturing the depth of candidates' experiences and reflections. The study follows a case study approach, focusing on a targeted sample of job seekers who have either successfully passed or failed job interviews. The research is designed to analyze participants' self-perceptions, interview strategies, and the impact of self-awareness on their performance during interviews.

The study was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, where participants were recruited based on purposive sampling. Participants included ten job candidates aged between 22 and 35 years old, divided into two groups: five candidates who successfully passed their job interviews and five candidates who failed. This sampling approach ensured that the study captured diverse perspectives and provided a comparative analysis of the role of self-awareness in interview performance. To be eligible, participants needed to have attended at least one job interview within the past six months and be willing to share their experiences in detail.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore participants' experiences in an open-ended manner while maintaining consistency across interviews through predefined themes. The interview protocol was developed based on existing literature on self-awareness, job interview performance, and emotional intelligence. Key themes explored included candidates' preparation strategies, reflections on their strengths and weaknesses, emotional regulation during interviews, and their perceptions of the interview outcome. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either in person or via online video conferencing, depending on participants' availability.

The study utilized a phenomenological research approach to capture participants' lived experiences and perceptions of self-awareness in the interview process. Phenomenology is particularly relevant to this study as it seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their self-awareness and how it influences their performance in real-world interview settings (Reeves et al., 2022). This approach

allows for a deep exploration of how candidates perceive their strengths, weaknesses, and emotional states during interviews. The narrative inquiry method was also incorporated to examine how participants articulate their experiences, highlighting the ways in which self-awareness manifests in their professional self-presentation (Hasanah et al., 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a widely accepted method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The coding process began with the transcription of interviews, followed by iterative reading to identify recurring themes related to self-awareness and interview performance. Themes were categorized into key areas, such as self-reflection strategies, emotional regulation, confidence levels, and communication effectiveness. Through this process, the study sought to uncover patterns distinguishing successful and unsuccessful candidates in their articulation of self-awareness.

To enhance the reliability and validity of findings, triangulation was employed. Data triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing interview responses with observational notes and self-assessment reports from participants. Researcher triangulation was also applied, wherein multiple researchers independently analyzed and validated thematic patterns to ensure consistency and minimize bias. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants, allowing them to verify the accuracy of interpretations and providing them with an opportunity to clarify or expand on their responses (Moore et al., 2020).

Ethical considerations were carefully adhered to throughout the study. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and their ability to withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participant data and securely storing interview transcripts. The study also adhered to research ethics guidelines, ensuring that participants were treated with respect and that their insights were represented authentically.

The methodology employed in this research aligns with previous studies examining self-awareness in professional and academic contexts. Prior research has demonstrated the effectiveness of qualitative approaches in understanding the interplay between self-awareness and professional success (Blaique & Pinnington, 2021). This study builds upon these foundations by applying a focused case study design to job interviews, thereby contributing new insights into how candidates' self-awareness influences their performance in high-stakes assessment settings.

Overall, the methodological framework used in this study ensures a comprehensive examination of self-awareness in job interviews. By leveraging phenomenological and narrative inquiry approaches, combined with thematic analysis and triangulation techniques, this research provides a robust analysis of the ways in which self-awareness impacts candidates' confidence, communication, and overall interview outcomes. The findings will contribute to existing literature on career development, recruitment processes, and self-awareness training, offering practical recommendations for job seekers and recruiters alike.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight key differences between successful and unsuccessful job interview candidates, particularly in their levels of self-awareness, communication strategies, and ability to handle challenges. Through thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, several recurring patterns emerged, demonstrating how self-awareness influences interview performance. Successful candidates exhibited higher levels of preparation, confidence, and adaptability, while unsuccessful candidates struggled with articulating their strengths and addressing weaknesses effectively. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the role of self-awareness and preparation in job interview success (Durosinmi-Etti et al., 2021). The following sections detail the key themes identified in this study, supported by verbatim interview excerpts.

3.1 Self-Awareness and Interview Performance

Self-awareness played a crucial role in distinguishing successful candidates from those who failed. Candidates who demonstrated high self-awareness were able to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, effectively aligning their responses with job requirements. As one successful candidate described:

"I knew that one of my strengths was project management, but I also recognized that I sometimes get too caught up in details. During the interview, I made sure to highlight how I balance both strengths and areas for improvement." (RK)

In contrast, candidates with lower self-awareness struggled to articulate their competencies or acknowledge areas for growth. One unsuccessful candidate admitted:

"When they asked about my weaknesses, I wasn't sure what to say. I just said I work too hard, but I think the interviewer wanted something more specific." (AN)

These findings are consistent with previous literature on self-awareness and performance, which suggests that individuals with a clearer understanding of their capabilities are better equipped to navigate job interviews (Horton-Deutsch et al., 2020; Mastenbroek et al., 2015).

3.2 Communication Strategies and Articulation of Experience

Effective communication strategies, such as structured responses and confident articulation, were evident among successful candidates. Many employed the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to frame their answers, allowing them to convey their experiences concisely and persuasively.

"I used the STAR method to structure my answers. When they asked about a challenge I faced, I described the situation, explained my role, the actions I took, and the final outcome. I think this helped me sound more organized and clear." (DA)

Conversely, candidates who failed the interview often provided vague or overly detailed responses that lacked structure. One candidate recounted:

"I got nervous and ended up talking too much. I didn't realize I was rambling until the interviewer cut me off." (KS)

This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of clarity and structured responses in effective interview communication (Archer & Yates, 2017).

3.3 Preparation and Confidence Levels

Preparation was a key determinant of success, as candidates who conducted thorough research on the company and anticipated potential questions demonstrated higher confidence during the interview. One successful candidate shared:

"Before the interview, I studied the company's mission and values. I even prepared some questions to ask the interviewer, which I think made a good impression." (FN)

In contrast, unsuccessful candidates admitted to feeling underprepared, which contributed to their lack of confidence and ineffective responses.

"I didn't expect them to ask technical questions, so I was caught off guard and couldn't answer properly." (DR)

This finding corroborates previous studies suggesting that preparation reduces anxiety and enhances candidates' ability to present themselves effectively (Capiola et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2023).

3.4 Challenges and Barriers in Interviews

Several psychological and environmental factors were identified as barriers to interview success. Candidates who reported high levels of anxiety struggled with composure, often affecting their ability to communicate effectively. One unsuccessful candidate reflected:

"I was so nervous that I kept second-guessing my answers. It made me sound unsure, even when I knew what I wanted to say." (LR)

Successful candidates, on the other hand, acknowledged their nervousness but employed coping strategies to maintain confidence.

"I was nervous at first, but I took a deep breath and reminded myself that I had prepared well. That helped me stay focused." (MS)

These findings align with research on self-efficacy and interview anxiety, suggesting that individuals who believe in their abilities are more likely to perform well under pressure (Wang et al., 2020).

3.5 Feedback and Learning from Past Experiences

A critical distinction between successful and unsuccessful candidates was their approach to feedback and learning from past interviews. Candidates who secured job offers demonstrated a proactive approach to self-improvement.

"After a previous interview where I struggled with behavioral questions, I practiced more. I also asked for feedback, which helped me improve for this one." (JL)

Conversely, some unsuccessful candidates lacked a clear plan for improvement.

"I knew I didn't do well, but I wasn't sure what I could have done differently." (MH)

These findings are consistent with theories on reflective learning, which emphasize that individuals who analyze their past experiences critically are more likely to develop effective strategies for future success (Kolb, 1984).

Overall, the results indicate that self-awareness, structured communication, preparation, and resilience in handling challenges are critical factors influencing job interview success. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of how candidates can enhance their interview performance by developing greater self-awareness and refining their communication strategies.

The findings of this study reveal the critical role of self-awareness in determining the success or failure of job candidates during interviews. Self-awareness influences how candidates prepare for interviews, articulate their strengths and weaknesses, and adapt their communication strategies to align with employer expectations. Candidates with a higher degree of self-awareness tend to exhibit greater confidence, emotional regulation, and adaptability, which positively impacts their interview performance. In contrast, candidates with lower self-awareness often struggle with expressing their competencies effectively and managing interview-related stress. These findings align with previous literature, which emphasizes the importance of preparation, emotional intelligence, and structured communication in interview success (Durosini-Etti et al., 2021; Grant et al., 2024).

4.1 The Role of Self-Awareness in Interview Preparation

The study confirms that prior preparation plays a crucial role in enhancing self-awareness and interview performance. Informants who successfully passed their interviews demonstrated comprehensive preparation strategies, including researching the company, anticipating common interview questions, and refining their responses using structured methods like the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) approach. These findings are consistent with studies by (Akbar et al., 2015; Leeuwen et al., 2020), which highlight that candidates who invest time in understanding job descriptions and company expectations perform better during interviews.

Conversely, informants who failed to pass their interviews often lacked structured preparation. Many admitted to engaging in minimal company research or practicing only superficially. One informant noted, "I only read the company's website briefly and didn't anticipate the technical questions they asked" (AN). Such responses support the findings of (Bartlett et al., 2015), which suggest that a lack of adequate preparation results in weaker articulation of skills and lower confidence levels.

4.2 Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation

Emotional intelligence, particularly self-awareness, plays a significant role in how candidates manage stress and anxiety during interviews. Candidates who successfully passed their interviews demonstrated emotional regulation techniques, such as controlled breathing, positive visualization, and mindful communication. As one informant stated, "I felt nervous at first, but I reminded myself to breathe deeply and focus on the conversation rather than my anxiety" (DA). These

findings align with the work of Chang et al. (2023), which suggests that emotionally intelligent candidates maintain composure during high-stress situations, allowing them to perform better.

On the other hand, candidates who failed interviews reported difficulty managing their anxiety, leading to hesitancy in responses or a lack of confidence. One informant reflected, "I overthought every answer, and it made me sound uncertain" (KS). This supports prior research by (Scott et al., 2019), which indicates that unregulated stress negatively impacts cognitive function and verbal fluency during interviews. The study also reaffirms findings by Hassan et al. (2015), which suggest that self-reflection and mindfulness techniques can help candidates overcome these challenges.

4.3 The Impact of Self-Awareness on Communication Strategies

Candidates who exhibited higher levels of self-awareness demonstrated clearer and more structured communication strategies. Successful candidates often employed the STAR method to provide concise and relevant responses. One informant mentioned, "When asked about a past challenge, I structured my response so that it was clear what the situation was and what I did to resolve it" (FN). This is consistent with research by (Chhetri et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2020), which highlight that structured responses help candidates articulate their skills more effectively.

In contrast, candidates with lower self-awareness struggled with coherence and specificity. Informants who failed their interviews often provided vague or unstructured answers. One informant admitted, "I rambled too much and never really answered the question directly" (DR). This aligns with findings from Capiola et al. (2020), which suggest that candidates who lack structured communication tend to leave a weaker impression on interviewers.

Additionally, successful candidates displayed a higher level of adaptability in their communication, adjusting their tone and language based on interviewer cues. Research by Hasanah et al. (2019) and Wang et al. (2020) supports this, emphasizing that candidates who adapt their communication style tend to be more successful in professional interactions. One informant shared, "I noticed the interviewer appreciated direct responses, so I made sure to be concise and to the point" (JL). This strategic adaptability reflects a heightened level of self-awareness and situational awareness, which are crucial for effective communication in interviews.

4.4 Challenges Faced by Candidates with Low Self-Awareness

Candidates who failed their interviews frequently cited a lack of confidence, difficulty articulating their experiences, and an inability to handle unexpected questions as key challenges. One informant noted, "I couldn't think of a good example when they asked me about a time I solved a problem, so I just gave a generic answer" (MH). Such findings correspond with research by Reeves et al. (2022), which highlights that candidates with lower self-awareness struggle with providing specific, reflective answers that showcase their competencies effectively.

Additionally, technological barriers and external stressors contributed to poor performance among some candidates. One informant who attended a virtual interview stated, "The connection was unstable, and I felt rushed, which made it harder for me to think clearly" (JL). This aligns with findings by Blaique & Pinnington (2021), which suggest that environmental and technical factors can exacerbate interview anxiety, particularly among candidates who are already struggling with self-awareness and confidence.

One of the main limitations of this study is the reliance on self-reported experiences, which may introduce subjective biases. Candidates may have recalled their interview experiences differently due to hindsight bias or social desirability effects. Additionally, the study is limited by its focus on a specific demographic group—young professionals seeking employment in Jakarta. The findings may not be entirely generalizable to other job markets or age groups. Future research should explore self-awareness in job interviews across different cultural contexts and industries to provide a broader understanding of this phenomenon.

This study highlights the importance of self-awareness in job interview success and suggests that training programs focusing on self-reflection, emotional regulation, and structured communication should be incorporated into career development initiatives. Future research should explore how different educational and training programs impact self-awareness levels in job seekers and whether targeted interventions can enhance interview performance. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insight into how self-awareness evolves throughout a candidate's career and its long-term impact on professional success. Understanding these dynamics could inform policy recommendations for workforce development programs aimed at improving employment outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the crucial role of self-awareness in determining the success or failure of job interview candidates. The findings reveal that candidates who demonstrate high self-awareness exhibit better preparation, articulate their strengths and weaknesses effectively, and adapt their communication strategies to align with interview expectations. In contrast, candidates with low self-awareness struggle with confidence, fail to reflect on past experiences, and demonstrate ineffective communication skills, leading to lower success rates.

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by reinforcing the significance of self-awareness as a key determinant of interview performance. It provides empirical evidence supporting the link between self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and employability. The implications of these findings suggest the need for targeted self-awareness training programs to enhance job seekers' interview preparedness. Future research could explore the impact of structured self-awareness interventions on different professional fields and industries to understand their broader applicability.

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