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# THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION ON SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION



20TH AUGUST 2025

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION, DRIVING INNOVATION AND  
ADVANCING LIFELONG LEARNING FOR EMPOWERED WORLD

## **SPEAKSPRINT: ENHANCING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH SPEED INTERVIEW PRACTICE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This innovation introduces SpeakSprint, a dynamic, low-stakes speaking activity inspired by the speed dating format to boost students' confidence and communicative competence in English. Designed for undergraduates in the LSP301 General English course at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), this approach prepares learners for simulated job interviews, a key course assessment through rapid, structured peer interactions. Grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), SpeakSprint transforms classrooms into interactive spaces where students engage in rotating five-minute interviews using authentic prompts such as personal introductions and behavioural questions. Conducted over three weeks, each session incorporates scaffolded support, including vocabulary banks, peer feedback checklists, and self-assessment via Google Forms to foster learner autonomy and reflective practice. To address anxiety in high-stakes speaking situations, the activity draws on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, creating a supportive environment that prioritises fluency and experimentation over grammatical perfection. Engaging with multiple peers and unpredictable scenarios, students develop adaptability and confidence through repeated practice. Preliminary results show promising outcomes: 85% of participants reported increased readiness for real-life interviews. In alignment with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SpeakSprint equips learners with transferable employability skills such as communication, collaboration, and self-efficacy. The innovation demonstrates how gamified interaction and student-centred design can bridge classroom learning with career preparedness in a meaningful and motivating way.*

**Keywords:** speed interview, innovative pedagogy, low-anxiety, CPT, learner autonomy

## INTRODUCTION

In the current landscape of higher education, communicative competence in English has become a vital skill for employability, particularly in multilingual societies like Malaysia. For many undergraduates, the ability to speak confidently and effectively in professional settings such as job interviews remains a significant hurdle. Despite exposure to English language instruction, many learners continue to struggle with speaking performance due to anxiety, limited authentic practice, and a lack of feedback-rich environments (Tan et al., 2019; Yusof & Saadon, 2021). This gap is especially evident in language-for-specific-purpose (LSP) courses, where assessment formats often include simulated job interviews but rarely provide scaffolded opportunities to prepare in low-stakes settings.

To address this issue, this study introduces SpeakSprint, an innovative pedagogical activity that adapts the structure and pace of “speed dating” into a series of rapid, structured peer interviews. The aim is to provide students with repeated, scaffolded opportunities to rehearse job interview responses, improve fluency, and build confidence through peer interaction. This method aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, emphasising real-life communication, learner autonomy, and meaningful interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). It also incorporates insights from Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language more effectively in low-anxiety, motivating environments (Krashen, 1982).

The SpeakSprint model was implemented in the LSP301 General English course at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), a course designed to equip undergraduates with workplace-related English language skills. Within this context, the innovation serves two main purposes: (1) to simulate authentic job interview experiences through repeated, structured peer interaction, and (2) to reduce speaking anxiety through gamified, non-evaluative practice sessions. While job interviews are commonly simulated in language classrooms, SpeakSprint introduces a new approach by leveraging the fast-paced, rotating structure of speed dating to ensure maximum participation, immediate application, and iterative practice (Thornbury, 2005).

The initiative also aligns with global educational objectives. By integrating communicative, digital, and collaborative learning strategies, SpeakSprint aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), both of which emphasise the importance of equipping learners with relevant skills for employability and lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2017). It enhances students’ employability by fostering transferable skills such as adaptability, critical thinking, and oral communication—competencies essential for the 21st-century workplaces (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

This paper explores the use of an innovative approach through the SpeakSprint activity, focusing on its pedagogical design, classroom implementation, and methodological framework. Preliminary feedback and engagement trends will be explored in subsequent sections. The findings are expected to contribute to ongoing discussions in language pedagogy and innovation in higher education, particularly regarding how authentic, low-stakes speaking activities can better prepare learners for real-world communication tasks.

## METHODS

This study was implemented in the LSP301 General English 2 course at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), a compulsory and exit-level English course for all undergraduates. The participants consisted of thirty students, both local and international, from various academic disciplines. Their English proficiency levels ranged from B1 to C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), representing a mixed-proficiency cohort with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

The SpeakSprint activity was conducted over three consecutive one-hour sessions and was modelled on the speed dating format. In each session, students engaged in rapid, five-minute peer interviews, rotating to a new partner with each round. The prompts increased in complexity over the three weeks: the first focused on self-introductions, the second on behavioural questions, and the final session on situational and field-specific scenarios. The primary aim was to provide authentic, repeated speaking opportunities in a low-stakes, engaging format that simulated real-life job interview conditions.

To scaffold learning and support reflection, students used Padlet after each session to record peer and self-evaluation scores based on fluency, clarity, and confidence. This visual, interactive platform allowed students to monitor their performance progression and engage with feedback in real-time. To measure affective and performance-related outcomes, Google Forms were administered before and after the intervention. These surveys collected quantitative data on three key variables: students' self-reported levels of speaking anxiety, confidence, and communicative proficiency. The pre-survey established a baseline, while the post-survey captured changes following the three-week activity.

The instructional approach was informed by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which advocates for authentic interaction and learner-centred tasks, and by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasises the importance of reducing anxiety in language learning contexts. The gamified structure and repeated practice were intentionally designed to lower affective barriers and increase learners' willingness to speak.

Data from the post-activity Google Form survey were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in student-reported gains. Peer and self-assessment scores collected through Padlet served as supplementary tools for reflection and classroom-based formative assessment, though they were not included in the statistical analysis. The analysis focused on the quantitative outcomes of the post-survey, which are presented in detail in the following section to evaluate the effectiveness of the SpeakSprint intervention.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The post-activity survey results provide strong support for the effectiveness of the SpeakSprint intervention in improving students' communicative preparedness and confidence in English-speaking tasks related to job and internship interviews. Quantitative data reveal that 75% of students reported feeling more prepared for such high-stakes interactions, indicating that the repeated, peer-led practice

simulated interview settings effectively. This finding aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasises real-world tasks, meaningful interaction, and learner engagement in authentic communication contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Moreover, 69% of students reported increased speaking confidence, while 65.1% indicated lower levels of anxiety during the activity. These affective outcomes are consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which posits that emotional states like anxiety can hinder language acquisition. By providing structured but low-stakes, gamified speaking sessions, SpeakSprint created a psychologically safe space where students could experiment, take risks, and improve through repetition, key conditions for lowering the affective filter and promoting fluency (Thornbury, 2005).

In addition to affective gains, cognitive improvements were also reported. 62.1% of students agreed that the reflection and feedback tools, particularly Padlet and peer scoring checklists, helped enhance their speaking performance. This is in line with studies emphasising the importance of formative assessment and peer feedback in developing oral skills (Yusof & Saadon, 2021). By externalising their awareness of strengths and areas for improvement, learners developed metacognitive strategies that contributed to self-regulation and autonomy.

Furthermore, 65.5% of participants noted improved ability to structure responses using examples, drawing directly from peer feedback and repeated practice. This supports Tan et al. (2019), who identified a lack of strategic language use and poor response organisation as common challenges among Malaysian ESL learners. The structure of SpeakSprint, which included iterative rounds with varied prompts, allowed students to refine their answers, test different strategies, and receive immediate feedback, thereby promoting both linguistic competence and interview readiness.

These findings also reinforce the argument that repeated speaking practice in a supportive environment promotes both fluency and communicative competence, particularly when combined with learner reflection and scaffolded feedback (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Thornbury, 2005). The layered approach of SpeakSprint, interaction, repetition, and reflection, appears to have holistically addressed both the cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that SpeakSprint successfully operationalised a CLT-based model in a way that supported both student performance and psychological readiness for real-world communication. The positive reception among students and the measurable affective gains support its potential for broader application across other English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts. The innovation not only aligns with national and global calls for more employability-focused language instruction (UNESCO, 2017; Trilling & Fadel, 2009) but also addresses persistent gaps in low-anxiety speaking practice in Malaysian ESL classrooms.

## CONCLUSION

This study introduced SpeakSprint, a low-stakes, high-engagement speaking innovation designed to enhance undergraduates' oral communication skills for job and internship interviews. Grounded in



Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and supported by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, the activity addressed both the cognitive and affective challenges faced by ESL learners in high-stakes speaking scenarios. Conducted over three weeks, the intervention used a speed dating-inspired structure, scaffolded peer interaction, and reflective tools to foster learner autonomy, build confidence, and reduce speaking anxiety.

Findings from the post-activity survey revealed strong positive outcomes, with 75% of participants reporting increased readiness for interviews and over 65% noting gains in confidence, structured responses, and reduced anxiety. The integration of digital tools such as Padlet and Google Forms for peer feedback and self-assessment further enriched the learning experience, enabling students to engage in metacognitive reflection and track their progress over time.

The success of SpeakSprint highlights several pedagogical implications. First, incorporating repeated speaking opportunities in a non-evaluative, gamified format can significantly enhance fluency and reduce affective barriers to performance. Second, simple digital tools can be leveraged to support real-time feedback and reflection, increasing learner engagement and ownership of progress. Finally, the activity's flexible, low-cost design allows it to be easily adapted to various English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, including interview training, presentation preparation, and other professional communication modules.

In alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SpeakSprint equips learners with transferable skills such as adaptability, communication, and collaboration—key competencies for the 21st-century workforce. As educational institutions continue to seek effective, scalable solutions for employability-focused language instruction, innovations like SpeakSprint offer practical, research-informed pathways for enhancing learner readiness and confidence in real-world communication tasks.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers would like to express sincere appreciation to the undergraduate students of LSP301 General English 2 at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for their enthusiastic participation in the SpeakSprint activity. Their engagement, feedback, and reflections were invaluable to the development and evaluation of this innovation.

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