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Exploring EFL Doctoral Students' Perceptions of Employment Interviews for a Faculty Position

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Abstract: *In a growing competitive employment market, the employability of EFL doctoral graduates at Algerian universities is becoming of great concern to many parties due to the large pools of applicants and the short hiring windows, over the last years under the umbrella of LMD system. Among the selection methods used by faculties in the hiring process is the job interview. Due to the fact that most candidates, may have similar CVs in terms of qualifications and experience, their performance during employment interviews could make the difference in getting a faculty position or not. The aim of this paper is to investigate the faculty hiring interview from the lenses of applicants (interviewees) in order to determine EFL doctoral students' readiness and consciousness of the employment interview that they are likely to take after graduation to get an assistant lecturer position. To reach this aim, a survey is conducted with twenty EFL doctoral students from different Algerian universities using an online questionnaire. Results highlight two major findings: doctoral students'unconsciousness about selection procedures in the hiring process; and needs to enhance applicants' communicative skills in employment interviews.*
Keywords: *Employment interview, EFL students, perceptions, faculty position.*
Résumé : *Parmi les méthodes de sélection utilisées par les facultés dans le processus d'embauche figure l'entretien d'embauche. Étant donné que la plupart des diplômés en doctorat peuvent avoir des CV similaires en termes de qualifications et d'expérience, leurs performances lors des entrevues d'emploi peuvent faire la différence en vue d'obtenir un poste d'enseignant universitaire ou non. Dans le présent article, l'entrevue d'emploi est examinée du point de vue des postulants (personnes interviewées). L'étude cherche à susciter les perceptions des diplômés en doctorat de l'anglais comme langue étrangère « EFL » de l'entretien d'embauche qu'ils sont susceptibles de passer après l'obtention de leurs diplômes afin d'être embauchés comme enseignants à temps plein au sein de l'université. Pour atteindre cet objectif, une enquête est menée auprès d'une vingtaine de diplômés en doctorat de l'anglais comme langue étrangère « EFL » de différentes universités algériennes au moyen d'un questionnaire en ligne. Les résultats mettent en lumière deux constatations importantes : l'inconscience au sujet des procédures de sélection dans le processus d'embauche et la nécessité d'améliorer les compétences en communication des candidats lors des entrevues*

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d'emploi.
Mots clés : *L'entretien d 'embauche, perceptions, doctorat de l'anglais, poste de professeur.*

1. Introduction

Broadly speaking, the employment /job interview can be regarded as a popular selection technique used by many institutions to assess candidates and their suitability for specific jobs. It has also been a popular topic for research for around 100 years (Macan, 2009). Its widespread has prompted some to state that "it is rare, even unthinkable" to hire someone without being interviewed in some sort (Huffcutt & Culbertson, 2010, p. 185). But when it comes to an academic setting, in other words, 'a faculty position' a rather different type of interview could be anticipated than when applying in a different work setting like a school, a private clinic, hospital among other cases (Ezell, 2002).

The employment interview has been investigated from different angles by researchers. In spite of the fact that a considerable amount of research has been conducted in human resources field in different organizational and workplace settings to present adequate interview structure for more validity and reliability, little research about faculty hiring interviews was conducted in an EFL setting. Therefore, this study attempts to fill in that gap of research in academic institutions by investigating the employment interview from the lenses of job applicants for a faculty position who are Algerian EFL doctoral students, as preservice applicants. In the past decade, applicant perceptions of selection procedures have become an important theme in personnel selection research.

Among the reasons for this growing interest is that applicant perceptions are related to various individual and organizational outcomes such as job acceptance intentions, recommendation intentions, and perceptions of organizational attractiveness (Lievens et.al, 2003). Because of the large pools of applicants and short hiring windows for Algerian Ph.D. graduates, getting a faculty position is becoming a very competitive matter.

Besides having a good CV (eg; class rank, publication history, research area, experience), job applicants are expected to perform well during employment interviews which are an important part in faculty hiring process especially that most new graduates may have similar profiles in terms of experience and qualifications (Lipovsky, 2006). Recently, with social media spread, it is observed that many doctoral students and graduates who are seeking a faculty position join groups concerned with recruitment across Algerian universities. Members in such groups continuously post and share information about Algerian universities recruitment adverts and the number of positions offered in addition to the required conditions and speciality relatedness. Throughout reading the comments and informal discussion of the group members, it is observed that novice graduates who have similar CVs in terms of qualifications and experience, share many concerns about the way employment interviews are conducted and evaluated as their performance and successful communication during the employment interview which is a major part in the hiring process could make the difference in getting the position or not. The present study aims at exploring the perceptions of EFL doctoral students of employment interviews for a faculty position so that possible implications could be suggested in order to fill in the gap between students' readiness and expectations of employment interviews communication. For that aim, a questionnaire is conveniently

conducted with 20 EFL English doctoral students to answer the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of EFL doctoral students of the employment interview for a faculty position?
- To what extent are EFL doctoral students of English prepared for employment interviews to get a faculty position?

2. Review of the Literature

2.1The employment interview

Initially, it is crucial to review some basic definitions that have been prompted by various researchers about the job interview, which can set as a frame for the academic context of the faculty hiring interview for an assistant lecturer position. One of the broad definitions is that of Huffcutt and Youngcourt that regarded the employment interview as "interaction" carried out "face-to-face" to evaluate applicants in terms of "qualifications", in other words, their suitability, for a specific "position" (2007, p 182). In this regard, the focus of the interviewers is not usually about how applicants may "inform" their qualifications that are already stated in their CVs, but rather on how they "perform" during their interaction (Scheuer, 2001).

An other definition by Levashina (2014), in her meta analysis research of the job interview where it is considered as "a personally interactive process " of one or more people asking questions orally to another person and evaluating the answers (usually between a panel of interviewers and the job applicant) for the purpose of determining the qualifications of that person in order to make employment decisions (Levashina et al, 2014, p.243). So, iteraction is central in the job interview. Employers in the institutions and organisations who are in charge of making hiring decisions, believed that the job interview as a selection technique gained much preference among supervisors and Human resources (HR) managers as (Lievens et al, in Levashina et al 2014). This importance is due the interactive nature that allow both interviewees and interviewers to exchange their communication beyond the limits of information stated in the application form and CV. Moreover, many studies that have been conducted with candidates, showed that the job interview is viewed as a fair device with regard to other selection procedures, and is also expected by many applicants, (Lievens et.al, 2003).

2.2 Impression management (IM) in Employment Interviews

Because interaction is central in the employment interview, as stated earlier, appraising applicants' performance had been also a major topic of research that goes hand in hand with introducing adequate interview structure (Campion et al, 2007). In their attempt to develop valid evaluation tools like using anchored rating scales (ARS) to assist interviewers in their feedback, researchers have continuously been seeking theories to ground their research and account for applicants' behaviours during employment interviews especially that it is regarded as " a prime situation" (Lievens & Peeters, 2008) for applicants to manage or create impressions.

According to Lievens and Peeters, (2008), a number of factors can affect applicants' attempt to manage impressions in the interview such as (a) its interpersonal nature, (b)

ambiguity, (c) short duration, and (d) high stakes. Impression management (IM) that is defined as 'the conscious or unconscious attempt to control the images that are projected in… social interactions' (Schlenker, 1980, p. 6) has recently received greater attention in the literature in terms of applicants' non-verbal behaviours (like smiles, eye-contact, dressing); or verbal behaviours (like self-promotion tactics) that can result in positive or negative feedback (eg: Van Iddekinge, McFarland, & Raymark, 2007). Though IM tactics are controversial, some tactics may help applicants in managing positive images, especially when they provide more details (voluability), personalize their responses and are more specific (avoiding vagueness) in their answers, they manage a better impression of themselves to the interviewers of their competence (Scheuer 2001, Lipovsky 2006). So, creating a good impression by applicants could play a crucial role in having positive feedback from interviewers (Teoh .et al, 2012). Consequently, as Fox and Spector (2000) put it, winning an interview could not stand only on candidate's employable skills and work experience but is also related to applicant' communicative skills, engaging expression of work devotion and a good display of stance (Schuh, 1973).

3. Method

The study at hand employs a self-compiled questionnaire that was created online using Google sheets. The aim of the study is to elicit EFL English doctoral students' perceptions of employment interviews, as pre-service applicants, and the way in which they are conducted and evaluated during faculty hiring at university. According to Osuala (2004) survey research design is most appropriate for studies which center on individuals and their opinions, beliefs, motivation and behavior. Sampling in this study was a purposive one following the typical strategy where participants share the same experience as EFL doctoral students (Dornyei 2007, p 128). Mixed method approach is used in the analysis of the questionnaire (quantitatively with closed questions and qualitatively with the open ended questions). The questionnaire was sent to EFL doctoral students at different Algerian universities. Contacts of the respondents were conveniently gathered with the help of some doctoral students and teachers who are among organizing members of conferences (from Oran, Batna, Canstantine, Setif). About 50 questionnaires were sent to EFL doctoral students but only 20 were returned.

3.1 Participants

Participants in this study are 20 English doctoral students from different Algerian universities at various stages in their PHD studies. They are 6 males and 14 females aged between 25 and 36 years old. 60% of them were under 30 years old. Their field of Ph. D are various as follow: *Applied Language Studies, Applied Linguistics, Didactics and Culture, TEFL, Intercultural Communication, Sociolinguistics, Literature, ESP, Language Studies and Applied linguistics and new technologies*. For their current positions, the majority of respondents 65% are part time teachers at university. While 10% are jobless, 15% are teachers in middle and secondary school, and the rest are working at private schools. The difference in applicants' specialities, therefore academic training, could yield a broad view of the current issue.

3.2 Description of the questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into three main Sections. The first section consists of demographic information of the respondents including their age, sex, current position besides being doctoral students and their Ph. D field. The second section is devoted for applicants' perceptions and expectations of employment interviews for a faculty position to see their awareness about the way the hiring process run in the Algerian universities; the types of frequently asked questions they would expect during employment interviews; what interviewers focus on and the role of employment interviews in the hiring process.

Other questions in this section focus on how applicants might prepare themselves for employment interviews and whether they took any training course in employment communication. Four questions in section two were designed using 5 points Likert scale of agreement and one question uses the scale of frequency. Items in question 5 related to the frequently asked questions during employment interviews were gathered from the literature, and some guides for faculty hiring practices (Christopher D. Lee 2016) in addition to authentic interviews held at Algerian universities. The third section entails one open -ended question about applicants' future plans and aspirations with the aim of showing what applicants' future aspirations are and how positive image of themselves is constructed.

4. Data Analysis

The first section of the questionnaire was concerned with the demographic information about the respondents. It is presented in the description of participants' section.

The second section is meant for examining applicants' perceptions and expectations of employment interviews. As for the answers to the first question (Q1) in section two, 95% of respondents said that they had never taken any course about employment communication skills or Business English during their educational career. From the outset and according to these results, a gap in applicants' performance during employment interviews may be expected. Moreover, in the second question (Q2) which is about how the hiring process to recruit teachers is conducted at Algerian universities 85% of applicants answered that they knew how it was conducted, and 82, 4% of them said that the hiring process was conducted through a structured interview and evaluation of the CV while 23,5% thought it was through a written contest and the rest believed that it was through the evaluation of the CV only. However, in question three (Q3) the majority of respondents 85% said that they did not know how employment interviews were scored in teachers' hiring process at Algerian universities. Answers to questions (Q1, Q2, Q3) showed that though the majority of respondents knew how the hiring is conducted; yet they ignore how the employment interview is scored.

With regards to respondents answers about the way they perceived the role of employment interview in the teachers' hiring process in question four (Q4), it was found that they held different attitudes. The majority 55% agreed that employment interviews were of great importance in the hiring process .45% of them said that employment interviews were true filters for selecting candidates. While 35% agreed that they were partly important in the hiring process. 30% strongly agreed that employment interviews were just a formality. However, 40% strongly disagreed with the idea that employment

interviews had no role at all and the other 30% added that there were other things to be considered in the teachers' hiring process like experience, qualifications, motivation, real classroom performance of the teacher, students' view, quality of Ph.D. thesis, experiences abroad, teachers' knowledge of the subject matter or the modules to be taught, added to their mastery of language appearing in their accuracy and fluency, and training in teaching pedagogy.

Results obtained from the analysis of (Q4) highlight the importance of employment interviews in the hiring process for applicants who believe that obtaining a job interviw is fundamental to job search success. Also results show that applicants expect interviews as part of a selection process.

As for the expected questions during the employment interview in question five (Q5), answers of respondents were ranked using the frequency scale from the frequently asked, sometimes asked, rarely asked to never asked questions. From Figure.1, it is apparent that introducing oneself to interviewers was the most frequently asked question according to applicants answers 90%. This is probably because such type of question is the first step in interviews where it is also crucial that interviewees at job interviews create a good impression since it can result in a positive outcome (Teoh Mei Lin, 2012). Moreover, the question about research field or topic was highly expected by 85% of applicants. The reason behind applying for a faculty position in a specific university was expected by 55% of applicants. In addition, the way to motivate students was expected by 60% of applicants according to their answers.

Among the questions that were ranked as frequently asked during employment interviews by applicants were related to subjects that they can teach at university with a rate of 60 %; the characteristics of a good teacher ranked also as high as 65%; and the way to solve problems of discipline with students in the classroom received 55% by applicants as well.

This illustrates that applicants' expectations are generally related to teaching and research fields. Probably, these expectations are due to the nature of academic employment interviews which are different from other job interviews (Ezell,2002). Another reason for these results may go back to the type of training that they received during their Ph.D. studies which are basically related to teaching and conducting research.

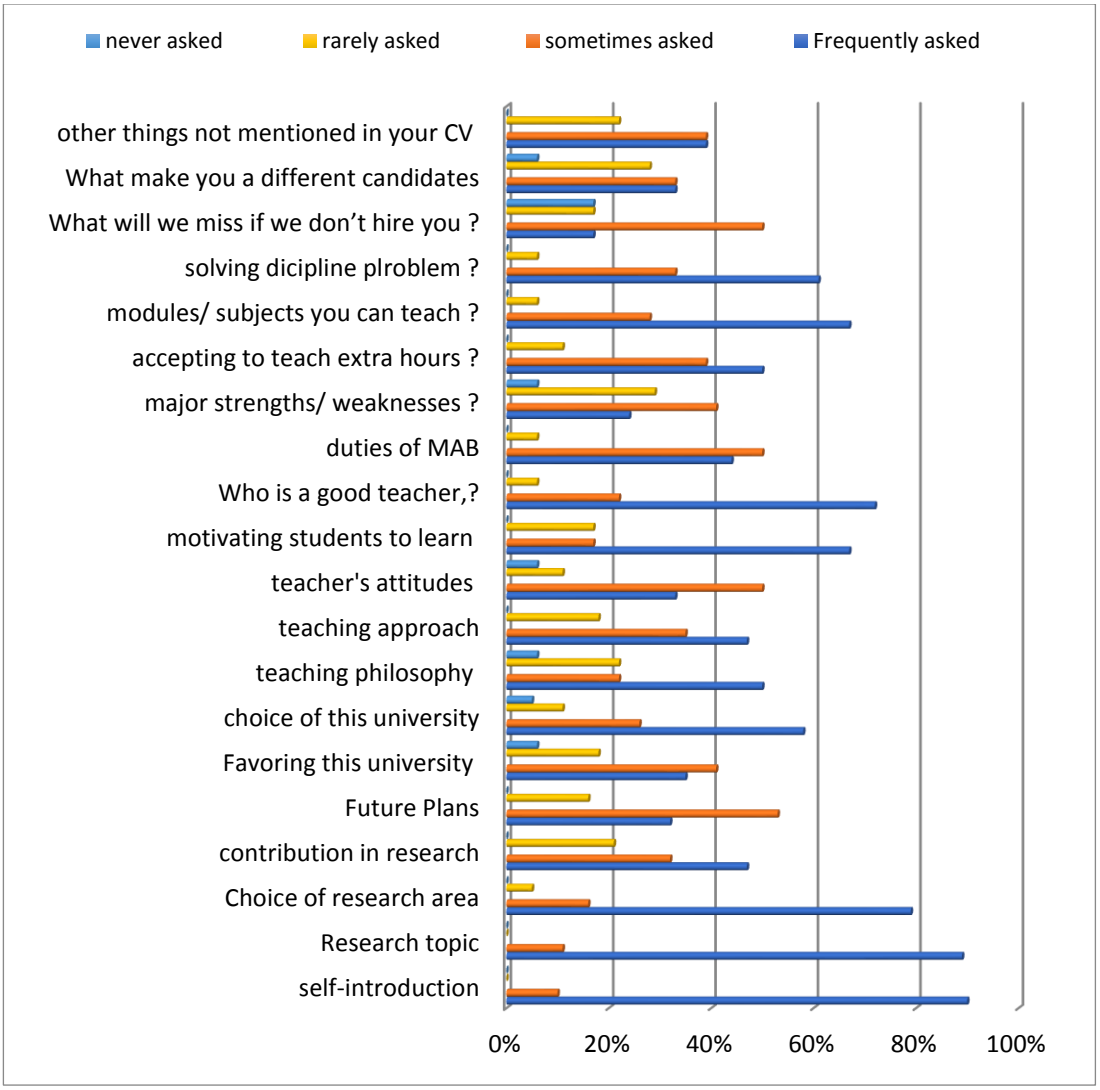


Figure N° 1: Expected Questions During Employment Interviews

With regards to applicants' concerns about employment interviews in question six (Q6), the majority of them 65% strongly agreed that the absence of a clear scale of evaluation stood as a major one. In addition, competition with skillful candidates and the lack of training in employment communication skills represented a rate of 50% for each one. Another concern was nepotism or bias to some candidates that was represented with a rate of 60%. Furthermore, some applicants added that there were other concerns like the lack of experience, age," interference" which could mean nepotism and interviewers focus on applicants' faults. Apart from subjective concerns, the unconsciousness of the evaluation process and the lack of communication skills in employment interview could be regarded as the core concerns of applicants. Other results are shown in the following figure2.

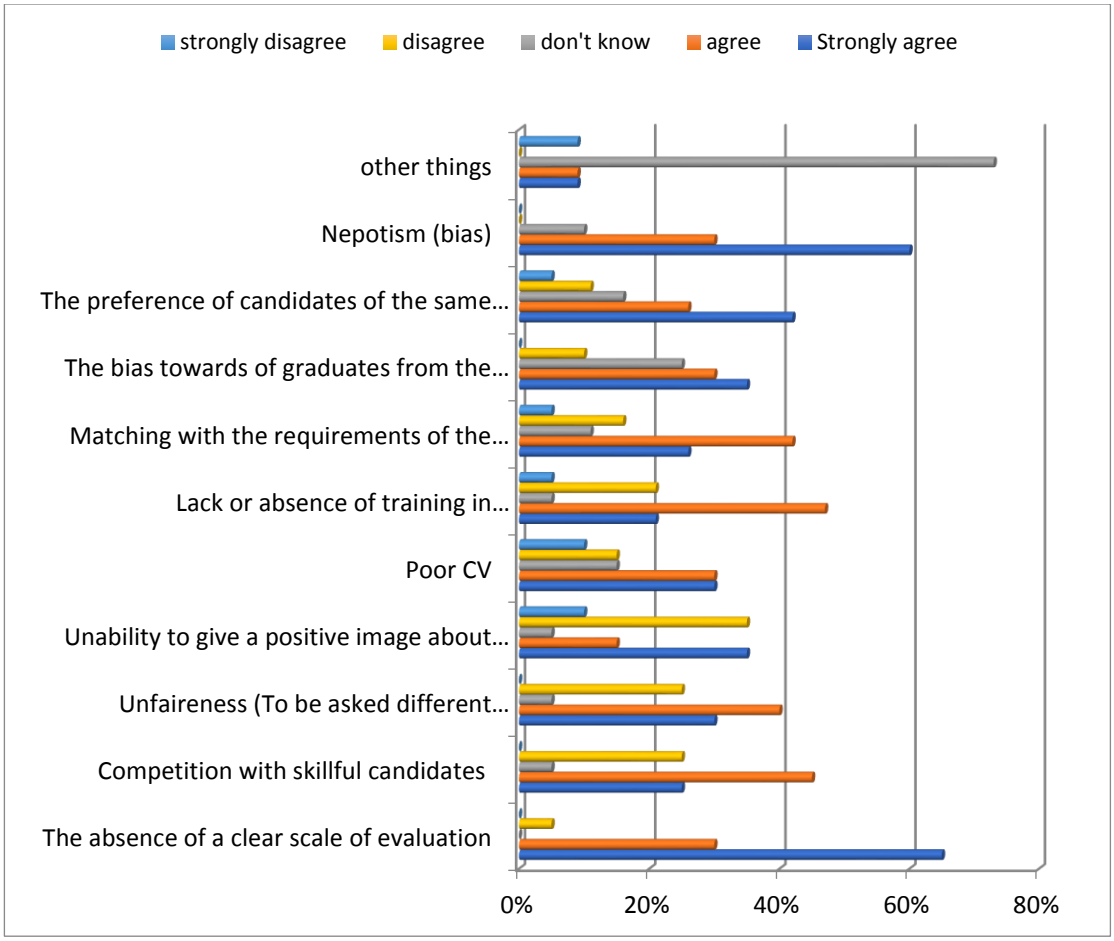


Figure 2: Applicants' Major Concerns at Employment Interviews

Further analysis of applicants' answers about the way to prepare for employment interviews in question (Q7) revealed that the majority 75% strongly agreed that consulting hired teachers about their experiences with employment interviews was the best way to prepare themselves. 55% of them said that they would prefer searching about the most frequently asked questions on the web and training themselves to answer them. Moreover, 50% of the applicants opted for joining groups on facebook concerned with teachers' hiring and discussing the topic with members. About 40% agreed with the idea of waching tutorials about employment interviews on the net to get prepared for employment interviews. Also, 40% opted for reading guides or booklets about employment interviews and only 30% agreed with the option of attending a private course about employment communication skills.

What can be inferred from the above answers of (Q7) is that applicants had a propensity to consulting recruited teachers as this might be the easiest and direct way to know how employment interviews run, therefore get prepared for them as each Algerian university might represent a different context.

The last question (Q8) in the second section is related to applicants' expectations about what interviewers focus on during employment interviews. Most applicants 65% strongly agreed that interviewers focused on one's ability to communicate and summarize; self-confidence and knowledge in the subject matter (field of speciality). 60% of their answers thought they the focus was on fluency and accuracy in speaking. In addition, 50% agreed that characteristics and attitudes of applicants might receive more attention from interviewers, whereas 50% said relevant teaching experience. The same rate that is 50% went for publication in the field of speciality. Applicants' non-verbal appearance, education, training and other skills were believed less important according to the answers of respondents.

These results showed that applicants expected questions that focused on communicative skills, teaching methods and research competence. This is due to the nature of employment interviews where it has been believed by Fox & Spector (2000) and Schuh (1973) that interviewee's communicative skills, engaging expression of work desire and good display of stance and evaluation are not less important than information regarding candidate's employable skills and work experience.

The last section of the questionnaire is pertained to applicants' future plans and aspirations after joining university (Q9). Most of applicants' answers 75% lied in two columns: teaching and doing research. Only 5% of them had a global and different goal that was contributing for a better university. Moreover, it was noticed that 50% of applicants' goals were general and unspecified; only 35% of them were specific and clear. As far as teaching is concerned, 40% of applicants stated that they would search and apply new teaching methods for better learning. 10% of them added that they would focus more on developing e-learning and online teaching, and 10% showed interest in improving student-teacher relationship and student level. Only 5% of them said they would develop and design new and interesting teaching materials. For those who opted for doing research 40%, their answers were divided between two goals: publishing articles and organizing conferences. Lastly, 5% said that they would encourage collaborative work and other 5% said that they would join research laboratories for doing more research.

Further analysis of the open ended question (Q9) showed that applicants aspiration was similar, to a great degree, and related to teaching and research. It was inferred that they lack communication skills and tactics to manage this type of questions to create a positive impressions and different image about themselves.

5. Results and Discussion

This section discusses important findings with regard to the research questions that sought to investigate the perceptions of EFL English doctoral students about employment interviews for a faculty position, and the extent to which applicants were prepared for employment interviews. Major findings are summarized below :

- ***Unconsciousness about selection procedures in the employment interview***

It was found that applicants held different attitudes about employment interview's role in faculty hiring. Though the majority of applicants (82,4%) in (Q2) expect interviews as part of the selection process (e.g., Lievens, De Corte, & Brysse, 2003) little was known about the slection and evaluation procedures of employment interviews in the Algerian

universities according to the answers of applicants. (in Q 3, the majority 85% of applicants did not know how employment interviews were scored in teachers' hiring process).

- ***Needs to enhance applicants' communicative skills***

Applicants shared many concerns about employment interviews mainly the lack of training in employment communication skills and this is due to the fact that (95%) of them had never taken any course about employment communication skills or Business English during their educational career (as shown in Q1). In addition, many applicants appeared unaware of employment communication skills namely tactics for managing and creating a positive image in interviews (this was noticed mainly in the open-ended question about applicants' aspirations and future plans after joining university). Their plans and aspirations after being hired were general and unspecified and lied in two columns: teaching and doing research (75%). Thus, raising applicants awareness about employment communication skills and impression management tactics are not less important than preparing them in their academic tasks and their field of speciality and this can go in the line of reasoning of Fox and Spector, (2000) where communicative skills, engaging expression of work desire and good display of stance and evaluation are not less important than information presented in the CV regarding applicant's employable competencies and work experience.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate EFL doctoral students' perceptions and expectations of employment interviews for a faculty position in order to suggest possible implications for further research. The study utilized a questionnaire with a mixed method approach for the analysis. The present study has some limitations that should be noted, as well as some implications for future research. As for the limitations, results cannot be generalized as the case study is not representative to the whole population. In addition, only one tool was possible to be used in this research that is the questionnaire.

The findings of this study highlight a number of areas for future research. First, a large scale study with more participants would provide more data, and therefore a more reliable view. Second, this study explores the employment interviews from the angle of applicants who are EFL doctoral students. Further research may investigate the employment interview from the lenses of interviewers. Another area for research worth considering is to investigate real employment interviews conducted at Algerian universities to generate more reliable and realistic data in terms of types of questions asked and selection procedures in addition to the impression management tactics used by applicants to create a positive image of themselves.

Follow up interviews with all the parties including interviewers and interviewees might be used to investigate the issue further in order to be able to design ESP courses to train doctoral students in employment communication and pave their way to get a faculty position. In a word, the present study could stand as an exploratory phase for further description of real faculty hiring interviews.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Dear participant,
You are kindly requested to answer this questionnaire which is part of research in ESP. The aim of this survey is to reveal EFL doctoral students' perception of employment interviews that they are likely to take after getting graduation in order to be hired as full-time teachers at university. Your answers will remain anonymous and will be used for the sake of research purposes only. Your help and cooperation would be deeply appreciated.

Part One: General Information about the Applicant

- **Sex :**
- **Age :**
- **Current position:** Besides being a Ph. D student, you are:

part time teacher	working at private school	Working in middle school	Working in secondary school

Others, please specify……

- Field of speciality of PHD…….

Part Two: Applicants Perceptions and Expectations of Interviews for a Faculty Position

1. Have you **ever** received any course about employment communication skills or Business English during your educational career?
   Yes No
   If yes, what was the name of the course……...

2. Do you know how is the hiring process conducted to recruit teachers at university?
   Yes No
   If yes is it through?

written contest	**Structured interview**	**Evaluation of CV**	**Evaluating of the CV and interview**

3. Do you have any idea about how job interviews are scored in the teachers' hiring process at Algerian universities?
Yes No
If yes, say the mark given to the candidate:

4. How do you perceive the role of employment interviews in the teachers' hiring process at university?

	Strongly agree	**agree**	**Not sure**	**diagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Employment interviews are just a formality					
Employment interviews are true filters for selecting candidates					
Employment interviews are partly important in the hiring process					
Employment interviews are of great importance in the hiring process					
Employment interviews just reflect the candidate's CV					
Employment interviews have no role at all					
There other things to be considered					

Please specify other things to be considered if any

……

5. How do you rank the following questions that are expected to be asked during employment interviews?

	Frequently asked	**Sometimes asked**	**Rarely asked**	**Never asked**
Tell us about yourself				
What is your research/thesis topic ?				
Why did you choose to work on this area of research ?				
What is new in your research / what contributions have you made in scientific research ?				

What are your future plans for research ?				
Would you choose this university in case you pass the interview in another university ?				
Why did you apply for this university ?				
What is your teaching philosophy ?				
What approach will you apply in your teaching ?				
Are you a strict or an permissive teacher ?				
How will you motivate students to learn ?				
Who is a good teacher, according to you?				
What are the your duties when you are recruited as an associate lecturer B ?				
What are your major strengths/ weaknesses ?				
Will you accept to teach extra hours ?				
Which modules/ subjects you can teach ?				
How would solve dicipline plroblem in your class ?				
What will we miss if we don't hire you ?				
What make you a different candidates				
Can you add other things not mentioned in your CV ?				

6. What are your concerns when taking an employment interview

	Strongly agree	**agree**	**Not sure**	**disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
The absence of a clear scale of evaluation					

Competition with skillful candidates					
Unfaireness (To be asked different questions with regards to the other candidates)					
Unability to give a positive image about oneself					
Poor CV					
Lack or absence of training in communication skills to manage this type of interviews					
Matching with the required specialities for the offered positions					
The bias towards candidates who studied at that university where emloyment interviews are held					
The preference of candidates who live in the same city where is the university located					
Nepotism (favouring some candidates over others because of some personal ties or relationship)					
Other things ?					

Please specify other things if any ……

7. How would you prepare yourself for an employment interview?

	Strongly agree	**agree**	**Not sure**	**diagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Consulting recruited teachers about their experiences with employment interviews					
Watch tutorials about employment interviews on the net					
Attend a course about employment communication skills in a private school if possible					
Join group discussions on facebook concerned with hiring teachers for a faculty position					

Search about the most frequenty asked questions on the internet and train myself to answer them					
Read guides, booklet or handbooks about employment interviews					
Do nothing because I believe they are just a formality					
I will just improvise on the day of the interview and depend on my own skills					

8. What do you think interviewers focus on during employment interviews at university?

	Strongly Agree	**agree**	**Don't know**	**disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Appearance (dressing, body language, other things)					
Characteristics and Attitude (the way an applicant greets, smiles, eye contact, hesitation in speaking….)					
Perception of oneself (creating a positive image about oneself)					
Fluency and accuracy in speaking					
Ability to communicate and summarize					
Self-confidence					
Knowledge in the subject mater (field of speciality)					
Relevent teaching experience					
Education, training, other skills					
Publication in the field of speciality					
Other things					

Please specify other things if any ……

Part Three: Applicants and Impression Management

9. How would you answer this question in an employment interview?

What are your aspirations /plans for the future after joining university?

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