

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF ECONOMICS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY FOR EMPLOYABILITY IN PAKISTAN: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

English language proficiency has emerged as a vital component of human capital that enhances employability, labour market competitiveness, and economic productivity in an increasingly globalised economy. In Pakistan, English serves as the primary language of higher education, professional communication, and international business, making it a critical factor influencing graduate employability and career advancement. Despite its recognised importance, evidence on the economic returns of English language proficiency remains fragmented across the fields of education, labour economics, linguistics, and public policy. This study systematically reviews the existing literature to synthesise evidence on the relationship between English language proficiency and employability in Pakistan. The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines. A comprehensive search identified 1,262 records, of which 15 studies met the predefined inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis. The findings reveal that English language proficiency significantly improves employment opportunities, earning potential, occupational mobility, and access to competitive labour markets. Furthermore, employers consistently regard English communication skills as a key competency for recruitment and career progression. However, persistent inequalities in access to quality English language education across public and private institutions, urban and rural regions, and socioeconomic groups continue to limit equitable employability outcomes. The review also identifies important gaps in the existing literature, particularly the limited availability of longitudinal and nationally representative empirical studies within the Pakistani context. The study concludes by recommending reforms in English language education and policy to strengthen graduate employability, reduce educational inequalities, and better align workforce skills with the evolving demands of the labour market, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development in Pakistan.

Keywords: English language proficiency, employability, human capital, labour market outcomes, graduate employability, economic returns, Pakistan, systematic literature review, PRISMA 2020.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's knowledge-based global economy, English language proficiency has become one of the most valuable forms of human capital, significantly influencing educational attainment, labour market participation, occupational mobility, and economic productivity. As globalization, technological advancement, and international trade continue to reshape labour markets, employers increasingly demand employees who possess effective communication skills in English alongside technical and professional competencies. English has evolved beyond its traditional role as a medium of communication to become an economic asset that facilitates access to high-paying employment, international business opportunities, higher education, and global knowledge networks (Grin, 2001; Crystal, 2003). Consequently, the economic value of English language proficiency has attracted growing scholarly attention across the fields of labour economics, education, sociolinguistics, and development studies.

The relationship between language proficiency and employability is commonly explained through Human Capital Theory, which argues that investments in education and skills enhance workers' productivity and consequently improve their earnings and employment opportunities (Becker, 1964). Within this framework, proficiency in English represents a productive skill that increases an individual's competitiveness in domestic and international labour markets. Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that individuals possessing higher levels of English language proficiency generally experience better employment prospects, higher wages, greater occupational mobility, and increased opportunities for career advancement compared with individuals who possess limited English communication skills (Chiswick & Miller, 2003; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003).

The economic significance of English language proficiency is particularly evident in developing countries where globalization has transformed labour market requirements. Multinational corporations, export-oriented industries, information technology firms, higher education

institutions, financial organizations, and international development agencies frequently adopt English as their principal language of communication. Consequently, proficiency in English has become an important determinant of employability, especially among university graduates seeking employment in competitive labour markets (British Council, 2013; World Bank, 2018). Employers increasingly regard English communication skills as an essential employability attribute that complements academic qualifications, professional expertise, and interpersonal competencies.

Pakistan presents a particularly important context for examining the economics of English language proficiency. English occupies a unique position within Pakistan's linguistic landscape as an official language alongside Urdu and serves as the primary language of higher education, judiciary, bureaucracy, diplomacy, science, technology, and corporate business (Rahman, 2002). Since independence, English has retained considerable institutional significance, functioning not only as a medium of administration but also as a gateway to socioeconomic mobility and professional advancement. Public and private sector employers often require applicants to demonstrate strong English communication skills, particularly in sectors such as banking, information technology, engineering, medicine, aviation, higher education, multinational corporations, and international organizations (Coleman, 2010).

Despite the widespread recognition of English as an important employability skill, substantial inequalities persist in access to quality English language education across Pakistan. Educational disparities between public and private institutions, urban and rural regions, and different socioeconomic groups contribute significantly to unequal labour market outcomes. Students graduating from English-medium institutions generally possess greater linguistic competence and enjoy comparatively stronger employment prospects than graduates from Urdu-medium or regional-language schools (Rahman, 2004). These disparities have important implications for social mobility, income inequality, and equitable access to economic opportunities.

The emergence of the digital economy has further increased the economic value of English language proficiency. Digital platforms, remote employment, freelancing, artificial intelligence, software development, e-commerce, and international outsourcing increasingly require effective English communication skills. Pakistan has experienced considerable growth in its freelance economy, information technology sector, and digital entrepreneurship, creating new employment opportunities that depend substantially on English proficiency. Consequently, language competence has become closely associated with participation in global digital labour markets and knowledge-based industries (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022).

From a policy perspective, English language proficiency contributes directly to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) (United Nations, 2015). Strengthening English language education has the potential to enhance workforce competitiveness, improve graduate employability, increase labour productivity, and support sustainable economic development. However, achieving these objectives requires educational reforms that address disparities in language instruction, teacher quality, curriculum development, and equitable access to learning resources.

Although considerable literature has examined English language teaching, language policy, educational reforms, and graduate employability in Pakistan, research investigating the economic dimensions of English language proficiency remains fragmented across multiple disciplines. Existing studies often focus either on educational outcomes or labour market performance without integrating evidence concerning the broader economic returns associated with English language skills. Furthermore, previous reviews have rarely synthesized empirical findings specifically within the Pakistani context using a systematic and transparent review methodology. Consequently, policymakers, educators, and labour market stakeholders lack a comprehensive evidence base

for understanding how English language proficiency contributes to employability and economic development.

To address this gap, the present study conducts a systematic literature review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework. The review synthesizes empirical and theoretical evidence concerning the relationship between English language proficiency and employability in Pakistan. Specifically, it examines the economic returns associated with English language skills, identifies the structural barriers affecting equitable access to employability opportunities, and evaluates policy implications for strengthening workforce competitiveness through language education. By integrating evidence from education, labour economics, and public policy literature, this review contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of English language proficiency in promoting inclusive economic growth and sustainable employment in Pakistan.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to synthesize and critically evaluate the existing body of knowledge concerning the economics of English language proficiency and employability in Pakistan. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic literature reviews adopt a transparent, rigorous, and replicable process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant research evidence (Snyder, 2019). The systematic review approach minimizes researcher bias through predefined search strategies, eligibility criteria, quality assessment procedures, and systematic data extraction methods, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings.

The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines developed by Page et al. (2021). PRISMA provides internationally recognized standards for reporting systematic reviews and ensures methodological transparency throughout the review process. The

framework consists of four sequential stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of relevant studies.

2.2 Review Protocol

The review protocol was developed prior to the literature search to ensure consistency throughout the review process. The protocol specified the research questions, search strategy, electronic databases, keywords, eligibility criteria, screening procedures, quality assessment methods, and thematic synthesis approach. Establishing a review protocol before commencing the search reduced subjective decision-making during article selection and strengthened the methodological rigor of the review.

2.3 Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple internationally recognized electronic databases to capture peer-reviewed studies examining English language proficiency, employability, labour market outcomes, and economic returns associated with English language skills. The selected databases included:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ERIC
- Education Source
- Google Scholar

These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of research in education, economics, labour studies, linguistics, public policy, and social sciences.

The search combined Boolean operators (AND, OR) with relevant keywords. Examples of search strings included:

- "English language proficiency" AND employability
- "English skills" AND labour market
- "Economics of English language"
- Pakistan AND English proficiency
- Graduate employability AND English communication
- Language skills AND wages
- Human capital AND English language
- English education AND employment

To ensure comprehensive coverage, reference lists of relevant studies were manually examined to identify additional publications that met the inclusion criteria.

2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the reviewed literature, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before the screening process.

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

- were published in peer-reviewed journals;
- focused on English language proficiency, employability, labour market outcomes, or economic returns to language skills;
- examined Pakistan or provided internationally relevant evidence applicable to developing countries;
- were published in English;
- contained empirical or theoretical evidence relevant to the research questions; and
- were published between 2000 and 2025.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

- focused solely on English language teaching methodologies without discussing employability or economic outcomes;
 - were conference abstracts, dissertations, book reviews, editorials, or newspaper articles;
 - lacked sufficient methodological detail;
 - duplicated previously identified studies;
- or
- were not available in full text.

2.5 Study Selection Process

The study selection followed the PRISMA 2020 framework. Initially, all records identified through electronic databases were exported into a reference management software package for duplicate removal. Titles and abstracts were subsequently screened to determine their relevance to the review objectives. Full-text articles that met the preliminary screening criteria were independently evaluated against the predefined eligibility criteria. Only studies directly addressing English language

proficiency, employability, labour market outcomes, or economic returns were included in the final synthesis.

The entire screening process was documented using a PRISMA flow diagram to enhance transparency and reproducibility as illustrated in Figure 1.

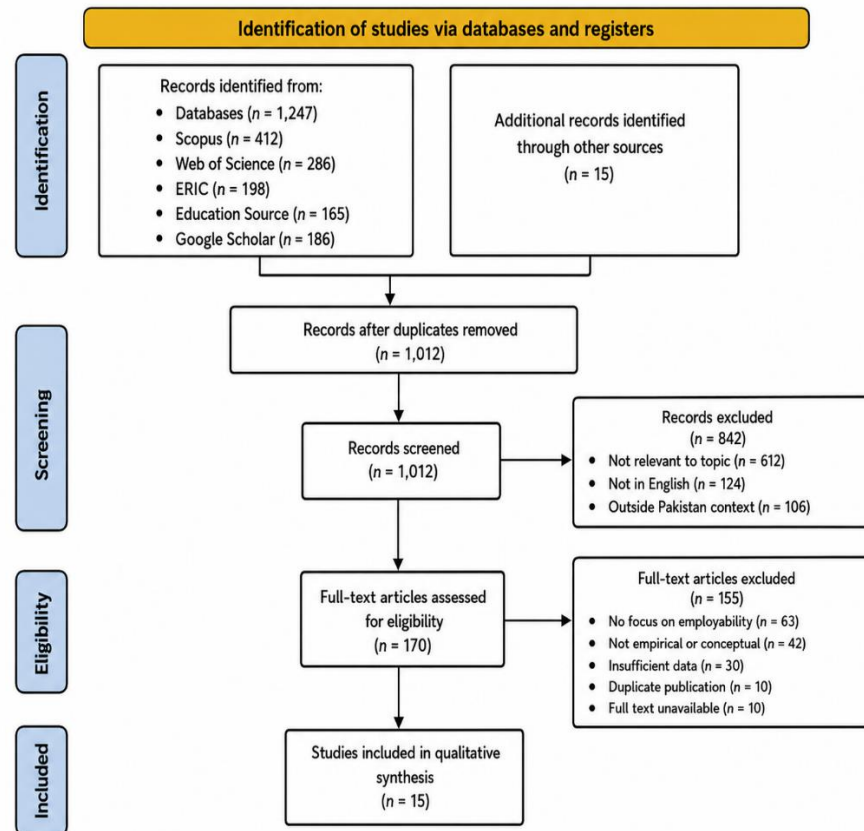


Figure 1
PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram Illustrating the Study Selection Process for the Systematic Literature Review

Note. The figure illustrates the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines. The study selection process involved database searching, duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, full-text eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies for thematic synthesis. Adapted from Page et al. (2021).

2.6 Data Extraction

A structured data extraction form was developed to ensure consistency across all included studies.

The following information was extracted from each publication:

- Author(s)
- Year of publication
- Country
- Research objectives
- Research design
- Sample characteristics
- Data collection methods
- Analytical techniques
- Major findings
- Policy implications

The extracted data facilitated systematic comparison across studies and supported the

identification of recurring themes and patterns within the literature.

Table 1
Characteristics of Studies Included in the Systematic Literature Review

Author(s)	Year	Country	Research Design	Sample/Participants	Focus of Study	Key Findings	Contribution to Present Review
Becker	1964	USA	Theoretical	Human Capital Theory	Economics of education	Education and skills increase productivity and earnings	Provides theoretical foundation linking English proficiency with employability
Crystal	2003	UK	Conceptual	Global language analysis	Global role of English	English functions as the dominant language of international communication	Explains global demand for English skills
Chiswick & Miller	2003	USA	Econometric	Labour market survey	Language and earnings	English proficiency improves employment and wages	Demonstrates labour market returns to language skills
Dustmann & Fabbri	2003	UK	Econometric	Immigrant labour market	English and employment	Better English increases employment probability and income	Supports Human Capital Theory
Rahman	2002	Pakistan	Qualitative	Policy analysis	Language policy	English is associated with power, education and employment	Explains Pakistan's linguistic hierarchy
Rahman	2004	Pakistan	Qualitative	Educational institutions	Educational inequality	Public-private disparities	Identifies structural barriers

						influence English proficiency	
British Council	2013	Pakistan	National Report	Universities and employers	Graduate employability	English identified as essential employability skill	Highlights employer expectations
Coleman	2010	International	Policy Review	Developing countries	English and development	English facilitates globalization and economic development	Supports economic importance of English
Azam et al.	2014	India	Econometric	National household survey	Wage premium	Fluent English speakers earn approximately 34% more	Strongest empirical evidence on economic returns
Aga Khan University	2015	Pakistan	Employability Survey	1,333 graduates; 150 employers	Graduate employability	English strongly predicts employment opportunities	Pakistan-specific evidence
Consultancy Asia	2019	Pakistan	Employer Survey	Employers	Skills gap	Poor English communication reduces employability	Explains employer expectations
Khan et al.	2020	Pakistan	Qualitative	Students and faculty	Perceptions of English	English viewed as a passport to success	Explains social perception of English
Ali et al.	2022	Pakistan	Survey	Telecommunication employees	English in workplace	Over 90% considered English mandatory for recruitment	Demonstrates workplace demand
ILO	2022	International	Labour Report	Global labour market	Digital economy	English facilitates participation in remote work	Links English with digital employability

Ali & Salam-Salmaoui	2024	Pakistan	Critical Policy Analysis	Employability programmes	English and inequality	Structural inequalities limit employability beyond language skills	Provides critical perspective
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Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the studies included in this systematic literature review. The selected studies represent diverse methodological approaches, including theoretical analyses, qualitative investigations, quantitative surveys, econometric analyses, and policy reports. Collectively, these studies provide comprehensive evidence regarding the relationship between English language proficiency, employability, labour market outcomes, and economic development in Pakistan and comparable international contexts.

2.7 Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of the selected studies was critically assessed before inclusion in the synthesis. The assessment considered research design, sampling procedures, methodological transparency, analytical rigor, validity of findings, and relevance to the review objectives. Studies demonstrating robust methodological quality and clear reporting standards were prioritized during thematic synthesis. This quality assessment enhanced the overall credibility and trustworthiness of the review findings.

2.8 Data Synthesis

Given the diversity of research designs and outcome measures identified in the selected literature, a thematic synthesis approach was employed rather than a statistical meta-analysis. Thematic synthesis enables researchers to integrate findings from qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies by identifying recurring concepts, relationships, and explanatory patterns across the literature (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The synthesis involved repeated reading of the included studies, open coding of key findings, development of descriptive themes, and construction of higher-order analytical themes

aligned with the research questions. The principal themes emerging from the literature included:

- Economic value of English language proficiency;
- English language proficiency and graduate employability;
- Wage premiums and labour market returns;
- Employer expectations and workplace communication;
- Educational inequalities and language barriers;
- Public-private educational disparities;
- Policy interventions for improving employability.

These themes formed the basis of the analytical discussion presented in the Results section.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

As this study was based exclusively on published literature, no human participants were directly involved, and ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, all sources were appropriately acknowledged following the American Psychological Association (APA, 7th edition) referencing guidelines. The review adhered to principles of academic integrity, transparency, and accurate representation of the findings reported in the original studies.

3. Results and Thematic Analysis

The systematic review identified a consistent relationship between English language proficiency and employability across the reviewed literature. Following the PRISMA 2020 screening process, the selected studies collectively demonstrate that English language proficiency functions as an important component of human capital, contributing significantly to labour market participation, occupational mobility, earnings,

and career advancement. Although the reviewed studies employed diverse methodological approaches—including quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, mixed-methods research, discourse analyses, and econometric investigations—they converge on the conclusion that English proficiency has become an increasingly valuable economic asset within Pakistan's evolving labour market. The thematic synthesis generated seven major analytical themes: (1) the economic value of English language

proficiency, (2) English language proficiency and graduate employability, (3) wage premiums and labour market returns, (4) employer expectations and workplace communication, (5) educational inequalities and access to English language education, (6) policy interventions for improving employability, and (7) research gaps and future directions. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional role of English language proficiency in shaping employability outcomes in Pakistan.

Table 2
Thematic Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature

Theme	Number of Studies	Representative Studies	Main Findings
Economics of English Proficiency	7	Becker (1964); Azam et al. (2014); Crystal (2003)	English is a form of human capital producing economic returns.
Graduate Employability	8	British Council (2013); Aga Khan University (2015); Ali et al. (2022)	English enhances recruitment and career progression.
Wage Premiums	5	Azam et al. (2014); Chiswick & Miller (2003)	English proficiency increases wages and occupational mobility.
Employer Expectations	6	Consultancy Asia (2019); Ali et al. (2022)	Employers consider English a core employability skill.
Educational Inequalities	6	Rahman (2002, 2004); British Council (2013)	Unequal access to English education reinforces socioeconomic disparities.
Policy Interventions	5	British Council; ILO; Ali & Salam-Salmaoui (2024)	Teacher development and curriculum reform are needed.
Research Gaps	10	Multiple studies	More longitudinal, econometric, and nationally representative research is required.

Note. Developed by Researchers

3.1 Economic Value of English Language Proficiency

The first and most prominent theme emerging from the reviewed studies concerns the economic value attached to English language proficiency. Across both international and Pakistani literature, English is consistently conceptualized as an investment in human capital that enhances individual productivity, increases access to employment opportunities, and improves long-term earning potential. This finding strongly supports Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which argues that investments in education and

skills increase workers' productivity and generate economic returns through higher wages and improved employment prospects.

International evidence provides substantial empirical support for the economic value of English proficiency. Azam et al. (2014), using nationally representative labour market data from India, demonstrated that fluent English speakers earned approximately 34% higher wages than workers without English proficiency after controlling for education and demographic characteristics. Intermediate English proficiency also generated statistically significant wage

premiums, indicating that even modest improvements in language skills can produce measurable economic benefits. Similar findings have been reported in studies conducted across Europe and North America, where language proficiency substantially improves immigrants' labour market integration and earnings (Chiswick & Miller, 2003; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003).

Within Pakistan, although large-scale econometric evidence remains limited, the reviewed studies consistently portray English as a valuable economic resource. The nationwide survey conducted by Aga Khan University reported that English functions as the dominant language within Pakistan's employment sector and serves as the principal medium through which graduates access professional occupations. The study further demonstrated that graduates possessing stronger English communication skills were significantly more competitive in recruitment processes than graduates educated through Urdu-medium institutions. These findings reinforce the proposition that English proficiency constitutes an important labour market signal, enabling employers to differentiate among candidates with otherwise comparable educational qualifications. Furthermore, English proficiency facilitates access to global labour markets beyond Pakistan. Rapid expansion of freelancing platforms, digital outsourcing, software development, international business process outsourcing (BPO), and remote employment has significantly increased demand for English-speaking professionals. Pakistani freelancers operating on international platforms such as Upwork, Fiverr, Freelancer, and Toptal rely heavily upon English communication skills to secure contracts, negotiate with international clients, and maintain professional relationships. Consequently, English proficiency increasingly functions not merely as a communication skill but as a gateway to participation in the global digital economy.

The reviewed evidence therefore indicates that English language proficiency contributes to economic productivity through multiple mechanisms. First, it enhances workers' communication abilities within increasingly knowledge-intensive occupations. Second, it

expands access to higher-paying employment sectors, including multinational corporations, financial institutions, higher education, engineering, information technology, aviation, and healthcare. Third, it improves workers' capacity to access international knowledge resources, professional networks, and career advancement opportunities. Collectively, these mechanisms establish English proficiency as a significant form of human capital capable of generating long-term economic returns.

3.2 English Language Proficiency and Graduate Employability

The second major theme concerns the relationship between English language proficiency and graduate employability. Employability extends beyond obtaining employment and encompasses the knowledge, competencies, personal attributes, communication abilities, and transferable skills that enable graduates to secure, maintain, and progress within employment throughout their careers. Across the reviewed studies, English communication skills emerged as one of the most consistently identified determinants of graduate employability.

Evidence from Pakistan demonstrates widespread agreement among graduates, employers, and academic institutions regarding the importance of English proficiency during recruitment. The nationwide Aga Khan University employability survey involving 1,333 graduates and 150 employers concluded that English had become the dominant language within Pakistan's professional labour market and represented one of the strongest predictors of graduate employability. Graduates from English-medium institutions consistently demonstrated higher employment rates, improved career progression, and greater access to white-collar occupations than graduates educated through Urdu-medium schools.

Similarly, Ali et al. (2022) found that over 90% of employees working within Pakistan's telecommunications sector considered English proficiency mandatory for recruitment and career advancement. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that candidates demonstrating stronger English communication skills were more likely to

succeed during written examinations, interviews, presentations, and workplace communication. These findings suggest that English proficiency functions both as a technical communication skill and as an indicator of professionalism, confidence, and workplace readiness.

Qualitative investigations further reinforce these findings. Khan et al. (2020) reported that both university faculty and students viewed English as a "passport to success" and an essential requirement for accessing higher-status occupations. English proficiency was widely perceived as facilitating professional networking, confidence during interviews, leadership opportunities, and organizational advancement. These perceptions align closely with employer expectations identified across multiple sectors of Pakistan's economy.

The growing internationalization of higher education has further strengthened the relationship between English proficiency and graduate employability. Universities increasingly incorporate English-language textbooks, research publications, digital learning platforms, and international collaborations into their curricula. Consequently, graduates possessing higher English proficiency develop stronger analytical skills, greater exposure to international research, and enhanced ability to participate within global professional environments. Such competencies increase graduates' competitiveness within both domestic and international labour markets.

However, the reviewed literature also highlights an important distinction between perceived employability and objectively measured labour market outcomes. Most Pakistani studies rely primarily upon employer perceptions, graduate opinions, or institutional surveys rather than longitudinal employment data. While these perceptions consistently indicate that English enhances employability, future research should examine the extent to which objectively measured English proficiency predicts actual employment outcomes, career progression, and long-term labour market success.

3.3 Wage Premiums and Labour Market Returns

The third theme emerging from the systematic review concerns the economic returns associated

with English language proficiency, particularly its influence on wages, occupational mobility, job security, and long-term career progression. Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) suggests that investments in education and skills increase worker productivity, enabling individuals to command higher earnings in competitive labour markets. English language proficiency represents one such productive skill that enhances an individual's capacity to communicate effectively, acquire technical knowledge, collaborate within diverse workplaces, and participate in increasingly globalized economic activities. Across the reviewed literature, English proficiency consistently demonstrates positive associations with labour market outcomes, although the strength of empirical evidence varies considerably between Pakistan and other countries.

International evidence provides robust quantitative support for the existence of an English language wage premium. The econometric analysis conducted by Azam et al. (2014) remains one of the most comprehensive investigations within South Asia. Using nationally representative household survey data from India, the authors estimated that fluent English speakers earned approximately 34% higher wages than workers without English proficiency after controlling for education, experience, occupation, and demographic characteristics. Workers possessing intermediate English proficiency also enjoyed wage advantages of approximately 13%, indicating that economic returns increase progressively with higher levels of language competence. Importantly, the study demonstrated that English proficiency complements formal education rather than substituting for it, suggesting that highly educated workers derive even greater economic benefits from strong English communication skills.

Similar findings have been reported in developed economies. Chiswick and Miller (2003) concluded that language proficiency substantially improves immigrants' labour market performance by increasing productivity, reducing communication barriers, and facilitating occupational mobility. Likewise, Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) demonstrated that English proficiency

significantly increases employment probabilities and earnings among immigrants in the United Kingdom. These international findings consistently indicate that language competence constitutes an economically valuable form of human capital across diverse labour market contexts.

In contrast, Pakistan lacks nationally representative econometric studies directly estimating the wage premium associated with English proficiency. This represents one of the most significant gaps identified during the systematic review. Nevertheless, indirect evidence strongly suggests that similar economic mechanisms operate within Pakistan's labour market. Employer surveys consistently indicate that English proficiency influences recruitment decisions, promotion opportunities, salary negotiations, and leadership appointments. The nationwide employability survey conducted by Aga Khan University found that English serves as the dominant language of professional employment and significantly influences graduates' access to higher-paying occupations. Similarly, Ali et al. (2022) reported that employees overwhelmingly perceived English communication skills as an important factor influencing career advancement, managerial responsibilities, and promotion opportunities.

The literature further suggests that English proficiency contributes to labour market returns through several interconnected pathways. First, English facilitates entry into high-income sectors where communication with international clients, multinational corporations, development agencies, and foreign investors constitutes an essential job requirement. Banking, information technology, engineering, aviation, medicine, higher education, consulting, telecommunications, and international trade increasingly require employees capable of communicating fluently in English. Consequently, workers possessing stronger English skills enjoy access to occupations that generally offer superior salaries, benefits, and opportunities for professional development.

Second, English proficiency enhances occupational mobility by allowing employees to

compete for promotions, supervisory positions, and international assignments. Effective workplace communication enables workers to participate confidently in meetings, prepare professional reports, negotiate contracts, deliver presentations, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. These competencies increase managerial confidence in employees' leadership potential and consequently improve promotion prospects. Several reviewed studies reported that employees themselves perceive English as facilitating upward career mobility, particularly within multinational corporations and export-oriented industries.

Third, English proficiency increases employability within the rapidly expanding digital economy. Pakistan has emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing freelance markets, with thousands of professionals providing software development, graphic design, digital marketing, content writing, virtual assistance, and business consulting services through international online platforms. Success within these digital labour markets depends heavily upon English communication because clients, contracts, project documentation, and customer interactions are predominantly conducted in English. Consequently, language proficiency directly influences freelancers' ability to attract international clients, negotiate higher service fees, maintain long-term contracts, and expand their professional networks.

Another important mechanism identified in the literature concerns access to knowledge resources. English remains the dominant language of scientific publications, technological documentation, professional certification programmes, online learning platforms, and international conferences. Employees possessing stronger English proficiency can therefore continuously update their technical knowledge, acquire internationally recognized certifications, and remain competitive within rapidly changing labour markets. Continuous professional development ultimately contributes to sustained earnings growth throughout individuals' careers. Despite these positive findings, the reviewed literature emphasizes that wage premiums associated with English proficiency are not

distributed equally across society. Individuals from urban areas, higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and English-medium educational institutions generally possess stronger English skills and consequently obtain greater economic returns. Conversely, graduates from government schools, rural communities, and economically disadvantaged households frequently experience limited access to quality English education, restricting their ability to compete for high-paying employment. Therefore, while English proficiency generates substantial labour market benefits, unequal access to language education simultaneously contributes to widening income inequality.

The systematic review therefore concludes that English language proficiency constitutes an economically valuable asset capable of increasing wages, improving occupational mobility, strengthening job security, and facilitating participation within both domestic and international labour markets. However, Pakistan urgently requires rigorous econometric studies capable of quantifying the precise magnitude of these economic returns using nationally representative labour force data.

3.4 Employer Expectations and Workplace Communication

The fourth analytical theme concerns employer expectations regarding English language proficiency and its role within workplace communication. Across the reviewed literature, employers consistently identified English communication skills as one of the most important competencies expected from university graduates entering the labour market. This finding reflects broader structural transformations within Pakistan's economy, where globalization, technological advancement, foreign investment, international trade, and digitalization have increased organizational dependence upon effective communication in English.

Employer surveys reviewed in this study reveal remarkable consistency regarding the importance of English language skills during recruitment. Consultancy Asia's employer survey reported that

communication deficiencies constituted one of the principal reasons why graduates failed to satisfy labour market requirements. Employers emphasized that many university graduates possessed adequate technical knowledge but lacked the communication competencies necessary to function effectively within professional environments. English proficiency was repeatedly identified as a desirable attribute for both recruitment and long-term organizational performance.

Similarly, Ali et al. (2022) found that more than ninety per cent of surveyed employees believed English competency significantly influenced recruitment outcomes. Respondents indicated that organizations routinely assess English skills during written examinations, interviews, presentations, and probationary evaluations. Candidates demonstrating stronger communication abilities were perceived as more confident, adaptable, and capable of handling organizational responsibilities. Consequently, English proficiency functions not only as a communication skill but also as an indicator of broader professional competence.

The increasing presence of multinational corporations within Pakistan has further strengthened employer demand for English-speaking professionals. International firms operating in banking, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, aviation, consulting, and information technology frequently adopt English as their official working language. Employees are expected to communicate with foreign clients, prepare technical documentation, participate in virtual meetings, interpret international regulations, and collaborate with multinational teams. Under these circumstances, English proficiency becomes essential for organizational efficiency rather than merely desirable.

Beyond recruitment, English also influences everyday workplace communication. Professional activities such as report writing, email correspondence, proposal preparation, presentations, project management, customer service, and negotiation increasingly require effective English communication. Employees

lacking adequate language skills frequently encounter difficulties participating in decision-making processes, assuming leadership responsibilities, or interacting confidently with senior management. Consequently, English proficiency contributes directly to organizational productivity by facilitating clearer communication, reducing misunderstandings, and improving teamwork across culturally diverse workplaces.

The reviewed literature also highlights the growing importance of English within Pakistan's service economy. Customer-facing industries—including banking, hospitality, tourism, aviation, healthcare, higher education, and information technology—often require employees capable of interacting with international clients and partners. Strong English communication therefore enhances service quality, customer satisfaction, organizational reputation, and business competitiveness. Employers increasingly view English proficiency as an essential employability competency that complements technical qualifications and professional expertise.

However, several studies caution against reducing employability exclusively to English language skills. Ali and Salam-Salmaoui (2024) argue that employer-driven narratives frequently portray English as an individual responsibility while overlooking broader structural inequalities affecting educational access. Training programmes emphasizing English as the primary solution to unemployment may unintentionally reinforce existing socioeconomic disparities if unequal educational opportunities remain unaddressed. Consequently, improving employability requires not only strengthening English language education but also enhancing teaching quality, curriculum relevance, digital literacy, and broader professional competencies.

3.5 Educational Inequalities and Access to English Language Education

The fifth analytical theme emerging from the systematic review concerns the unequal distribution of English language proficiency across Pakistan's educational system and its implications for employability. While the reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that English proficiency

enhances labour market outcomes, it also reveals that opportunities to acquire high-quality English language skills remain highly uneven. Educational inequalities associated with socioeconomic status, institutional quality, geographical location, and language policy significantly influence students' ability to develop English proficiency, thereby shaping their future employment prospects. Consequently, English functions not only as a productive economic skill but also as a mechanism through which existing social and economic inequalities are reproduced across generations.

The literature consistently identifies Pakistan's dual education system as one of the principal contributors to unequal English language outcomes. English-medium private schools generally possess better-qualified teachers, modern instructional resources, smaller class sizes, and greater exposure to communicative teaching methodologies than government schools. In contrast, most public schools, particularly those located in rural areas, continue to rely on traditional grammar-based instruction, rote memorisation, overcrowded classrooms, and limited opportunities for practical language use. As a result, students graduating from English-medium institutions generally demonstrate substantially higher levels of communicative competence than graduates from Urdu-medium or regional-language schools. This disparity subsequently translates into unequal opportunities within higher education and the labour market.

The nationwide employability survey conducted by Aga Khan University provides compelling evidence of this educational divide. The study concluded that graduates from private educational institutions consistently demonstrated stronger English communication skills and consequently enjoyed greater access to professional employment than graduates from public-sector institutions. Employers similarly reported that English proficiency frequently differentiated successful applicants from otherwise equally qualified candidates, reinforcing the importance of educational background during recruitment processes. These findings suggest that educational inequalities extend beyond academic achievement

and directly influence labour market competitiveness.

The British Council's assessment of English proficiency among university students further illustrates the magnitude of the challenge. According to the reviewed report, only a small proportion of Pakistani university students achieved advanced levels of English proficiency, while the majority remained at intermediate or lower proficiency levels. Particularly concerning were the findings related to speaking and communicative competence, where most students demonstrated limited ability to communicate effectively in professional contexts. These findings indicate that even students who successfully complete higher education frequently enter the labour market without the language competencies demanded by employers. Consequently, many graduates experience difficulties during recruitment interviews, workplace communication, report writing, and customer interaction despite possessing relevant technical qualifications.

Socioeconomic status represents another significant determinant of English language proficiency identified throughout the reviewed literature. Families with higher incomes are generally better positioned to enrol their children in elite English-medium schools, purchase supplementary educational materials, arrange private language tuition, and provide access to digital learning resources. Conversely, economically disadvantaged households frequently depend upon under-resourced government schools where English instruction remains inadequate. This unequal distribution of educational opportunities reinforces intergenerational patterns of socioeconomic inequality, as children from affluent families are more likely to acquire the language skills required for high-paying professional occupations.

Urban-rural disparities further exacerbate these inequalities. Educational institutions located in major cities such as Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi generally possess superior educational infrastructure, qualified English teachers, language laboratories, internet connectivity, and opportunities for extracurricular

language development. Rural schools, however, often face shortages of trained teachers, instructional materials, technological resources, and professional development programmes. Consequently, rural students encounter considerable disadvantages in developing English communication skills despite possessing comparable academic potential. These geographical disparities subsequently contribute to regional inequalities in employment opportunities, occupational mobility, and income generation.

The reviewed literature also emphasizes the sociolinguistic dimensions of English language inequality. Rahman (2002, 2004) argues that English occupies a privileged position within Pakistan's linguistic hierarchy, functioning as a symbol of social status, educational prestige, and professional success. Rather than serving merely as a medium of communication, English has become closely associated with elite identity and access to positions of influence within government, business, higher education, and the corporate sector. Consequently, proficiency in English increasingly reflects social privilege rather than individual ability alone. This symbolic dimension reinforces employers' perceptions regarding educational quality and professional competence, often benefiting graduates from elite educational institutions irrespective of actual job performance. The systematic review further indicates that educational inequalities have become increasingly significant in the context of globalization and digital transformation. Access to online learning platforms, international scholarship opportunities, scientific publications, professional certification programmes, and global employment platforms frequently depends upon English proficiency. Students lacking adequate English skills therefore experience restricted access to knowledge resources that could otherwise enhance their employability and professional development. This creates a cumulative disadvantage whereby limited English proficiency reduces opportunities for acquiring additional human capital throughout individuals' careers.

Importantly, several reviewed studies caution against interpreting employability differences

solely through the lens of individual effort or motivation. Instead, they emphasize that language proficiency is strongly shaped by structural conditions including educational policy, institutional capacity, teacher quality, curriculum design, and socioeconomic inequalities. Consequently, labour market disparities associated with English proficiency should be understood as reflecting broader inequalities within Pakistan's education system rather than simply differences in personal ability.

3.6 Policy Interventions for Improving Employability

The sixth theme emerging from the systematic review concerns policy interventions designed to strengthen English language proficiency and improve graduate employability. The reviewed literature indicates widespread agreement among policymakers, educators, employers, and international development organisations that improving English language education represents an important strategy for enhancing workforce competitiveness and supporting sustainable economic development. Nevertheless, existing interventions have produced mixed outcomes because many programmes focus primarily on language training while paying insufficient attention to broader structural inequalities affecting educational quality and labour market access.

Pakistan's national education policies have consistently recognised English as a compulsory subject throughout primary and secondary education and have maintained its status as an official language used extensively within higher education, government administration, and professional occupations. However, the reviewed studies suggest that implementation of these policies remains inconsistent across provinces and educational institutions. Significant variations in teacher qualifications, curriculum quality, classroom resources, and pedagogical approaches have limited the effectiveness of English language instruction, particularly within public-sector schools. Consequently, despite formal policy commitments, substantial disparities in language

proficiency continue to characterise Pakistan's educational landscape.

International organisations have attempted to complement national efforts through targeted employability programmes. One of the most widely discussed initiatives identified in the literature is the English Works! programme, supported by the United States Department of State. The programme combines intensive English language instruction with soft-skills development, leadership training, digital literacy, and career guidance to improve young people's employability. Evaluations suggest that participants generally experience increased confidence, stronger communication skills, and improved readiness for professional employment. The programme also emphasises practical language use through presentations, teamwork, interviews, and workplace simulations, thereby addressing some limitations of traditional classroom instruction.

However, critical analyses reviewed in this study argue that programmes such as English Works! frequently adopt a market-oriented perspective that frames employability primarily as an individual responsibility. Ali and Salam-Salmaoui (2024) contend that promotional materials often present English proficiency as the principal solution to youth unemployment while paying comparatively little attention to structural barriers including educational inequality, poverty, gender disparities, regional underdevelopment, and limited employment opportunities. Consequently, although such initiatives undoubtedly improve participants' language skills, their long-term effectiveness depends upon broader reforms capable of addressing systemic constraints affecting labour market participation.

The British Council has similarly played a significant role in supporting English language education through teacher training, language assessment, curriculum development, and research initiatives. Its studies have provided valuable evidence regarding English proficiency levels among Pakistani students and highlighted weaknesses in communicative competence despite years of formal language instruction. These findings have informed recommendations advocating greater emphasis on communicative

teaching methodologies, continuous teacher professional development, formative assessment, and classroom interaction rather than memorisation and examination-oriented learning. The reviewed literature consistently identifies teacher quality as one of the most important determinants of successful language policy implementation. Many English teachers, particularly within government schools, receive limited opportunities for professional development and frequently lack confidence in communicative teaching approaches. Strengthening teacher education through continuous professional training, certification programmes, mentoring, and technology-supported instruction therefore represents a recurring recommendation across the reviewed studies. Improving teachers' own English proficiency is viewed as essential for enhancing students' communicative competence and long-term employability.

Curriculum reform also emerges as a major policy priority. The literature suggests that English instruction should increasingly emphasise workplace communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, presentation skills, report writing, digital communication, and collaborative learning rather than isolated grammar exercises and examination preparation. Aligning English curricula with employer expectations would better prepare graduates for professional environments while simultaneously improving the relevance of higher education to labour market requirements. Another important policy implication concerns integration of English language education with digital literacy and vocational training. As Pakistan's digital economy continues to expand, employability increasingly depends upon combinations of technical expertise, digital competencies, and effective English communication. Incorporating English instruction within vocational education, entrepreneurship programmes, information technology training, and professional certification initiatives could therefore enhance graduates' competitiveness in both domestic and international labour markets.

The reviewed studies further advocate stronger collaboration between universities, employers, government agencies, and industry associations. Employer participation in curriculum design, internship programmes, graduate tracer studies, and workplace communication training would enable educational institutions to better align language instruction with evolving labour market needs. Such partnerships could reduce existing skills mismatches while facilitating smoother transitions from higher education to employment. From an equity perspective, the literature strongly recommends expanding access to quality English education among disadvantaged populations. Targeted scholarships, rural teacher deployment, digital language-learning platforms, community learning centres, and publicly funded English support programmes could help reduce disparities between urban and rural regions as well as between public and private educational institutions. Addressing these inequalities would not only improve individual employability but also contribute to more inclusive patterns of economic growth.

3.7 Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

One of the most significant contributions of a systematic literature review is the identification of knowledge gaps that can guide future academic inquiry. Although the reviewed literature consistently establishes a positive relationship between English language proficiency and employability, it also reveals substantial methodological, theoretical, and contextual limitations within the existing body of research. These shortcomings restrict the generalisability of current findings and underscore the need for more rigorous, multidisciplinary, and policy-oriented investigations. Addressing these research gaps is essential for developing evidence-based language policies capable of promoting inclusive economic development and improving workforce competitiveness in Pakistan.

The first and most prominent gap identified during the review is the absence of robust econometric evidence measuring the economic returns to English language proficiency in

Pakistan. Unlike India, where Azam et al. (2014) quantified the wage premium associated with English proficiency using nationally representative labour market data, Pakistan lacks comparable large-scale empirical studies. Most Pakistani research relies on descriptive surveys, employer perceptions, case studies, or qualitative interviews that demonstrate associations between English proficiency and employability but do not estimate the magnitude of economic returns. Consequently, policymakers currently lack precise evidence regarding the extent to which improvements in English language proficiency translate into higher wages, reduced unemployment, occupational mobility, or productivity gains. Future research should therefore utilise nationally representative datasets such as the Pakistan Labour Force Survey (LFS), Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey, or graduate tracer studies to estimate the causal relationship between English language proficiency and labour market outcomes using advanced econometric techniques.

A second limitation concerns the predominance of cross-sectional research designs. The majority of reviewed studies collect data at a single point in time, making it difficult to establish causal relationships between English proficiency and long-term career development. Although graduates and employers consistently perceive English as an important determinant of employability, cross-sectional evidence cannot adequately explain how language skills influence career trajectories over time. Longitudinal research following graduates from university into the labour market would provide stronger evidence regarding the long-term effects of English proficiency on employment stability, promotions, earnings growth, job satisfaction, and occupational mobility. Such studies would also enable researchers to examine whether the economic returns associated with English proficiency increase, decline, or remain stable throughout individuals' careers.

The review also reveals important limitations regarding sample representativeness. Many Pakistani studies rely on relatively small samples

drawn from individual universities, private companies, or specific urban centres. For example, employer surveys frequently focus on selected industries such as telecommunications, banking, or higher education, while neglecting manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and the informal economy. Similarly, several studies are concentrated in major metropolitan areas, including Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, providing limited understanding of labour market dynamics in rural regions and less-developed provinces. Future investigations should therefore adopt nationally representative sampling strategies encompassing diverse sectors, educational institutions, socioeconomic groups, and geographical regions to improve the external validity of research findings.

Another important gap concerns the measurement of English language proficiency itself. The reviewed literature demonstrates considerable variation in how researchers assess language competence. Some studies rely on participants' self-reported proficiency, whereas others use employer perceptions, educational background, or general communication skills as indirect indicators of English ability. Very few investigations employ standardised language assessments such as IELTS, TOEFL, Aptis, or CEFR-based proficiency scales. Consequently, inconsistencies in measurement reduce comparability across studies and complicate efforts to estimate the true economic value of English language proficiency. Future research should incorporate objective and internationally recognised language assessment instruments alongside self-reported measures to enhance methodological reliability and validity.

The systematic review further identifies a lack of interdisciplinary integration across the existing literature. Research concerning English language proficiency is often conducted independently within education, linguistics, labour economics, sociology, public policy, or management disciplines. As a result, studies frequently examine isolated aspects of the issue without considering the broader socioeconomic mechanisms linking language education, labour market institutions,

human capital formation, and economic development. Future scholarship would benefit from interdisciplinary frameworks integrating theories from economics, educational policy, sociolinguistics, organisational behaviour, and development studies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how English proficiency influences employability within complex social and institutional environments.

Another notable gap concerns the limited attention given to gender disparities in English language proficiency and labour market outcomes. Although women constitute an increasingly important segment of Pakistan's educated workforce, relatively few studies explicitly investigate whether English proficiency generates similar economic returns for male and female graduates. Cultural norms, occupational segregation, mobility restrictions, and differential access to educational resources may influence the relationship between language skills and employability differently across genders. Future research should therefore adopt gender-sensitive analytical frameworks to examine whether English proficiency contributes equally to employment opportunities, career advancement, entrepreneurial participation, and wage growth for both men and women.

Similarly, the reviewed studies provide insufficient attention to rural populations and marginalised communities. Most available evidence originates from urban educational institutions and formal-sector employers, leaving substantial knowledge gaps regarding the experiences of rural youth, vocational trainees, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and economically disadvantaged households. Understanding how English language proficiency affects these groups is essential for designing equitable language policies that contribute to reducing rather than reinforcing socioeconomic inequalities. Comparative studies examining differences between urban and rural labour markets, public and private educational institutions, and various provincial contexts would substantially strengthen the evidence base available to policymakers.

The emergence of digital labour markets also presents important opportunities for future

research. Pakistan has experienced rapid growth in freelancing, digital entrepreneurship, remote employment, e-commerce, software development, and business process outsourcing. Nevertheless, relatively little empirical research has examined how English language proficiency influences participation in these emerging sectors. Future studies should investigate the relationship between English competence and digital employability, including online freelancing income, international client acquisition, remote work performance, digital entrepreneurship, and participation in global knowledge networks. Such research would provide valuable insights into the evolving role of English within the knowledge economy and support policies promoting digital inclusion.

Methodologically, future systematic reviews could benefit from incorporating quantitative meta-analysis where sufficient comparable data become available. The present review employed thematic synthesis because of substantial heterogeneity in research designs, measurement approaches, and outcome variables. However, as empirical evidence continues to accumulate, future researchers may be able to conduct meta-analyses estimating pooled effect sizes for the relationship between English proficiency and employability outcomes. Such analyses would generate more precise estimates of economic returns while enabling comparisons across countries, educational systems, and labour market contexts.

Finally, future research should evaluate the effectiveness of language-related policy interventions through rigorous impact assessments. Although programmes such as English Works!, teacher training initiatives, and curriculum reforms have been implemented in various parts of Pakistan, relatively few studies systematically evaluate their long-term effectiveness using experimental or quasi-experimental research designs. Randomised controlled trials, difference-in-differences analyses, and longitudinal programme evaluations could provide stronger evidence regarding which interventions most effectively improve English proficiency, employability, and labour market performance.

4. Discussion

The findings of this systematic literature review demonstrate that English language proficiency has evolved beyond its traditional function as a medium of communication to become a strategic form of human capital that significantly influences employability, earnings, occupational mobility, and economic competitiveness in Pakistan. Across the reviewed literature, a consistent pattern emerges: individuals possessing stronger English language skills experience greater access to employment opportunities, improved career advancement, and higher labour market returns than those with limited proficiency. Although the reviewed studies differ in methodology, geographical scope, and analytical focus, they collectively reinforce the proposition that English proficiency has become an increasingly important determinant of labour market success within Pakistan's rapidly globalising economy. These findings not only support existing theoretical perspectives but also provide important insights into the structural challenges that continue to shape unequal access to economic opportunities.

The findings strongly support Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which conceptualises education and skill acquisition as productive investments that enhance workers' productivity and generate economic returns through increased earnings and improved employment prospects. Within this theoretical framework, English language proficiency functions as a specialised form of human capital that enables individuals to communicate effectively, acquire technical knowledge, collaborate within diverse organisational environments, and access information embedded in global knowledge networks. The reviewed evidence consistently demonstrates that English proficiency complements rather than substitutes formal education. Graduates possessing equivalent academic qualifications frequently experience different labour market outcomes depending upon their level of English competence, suggesting that language skills represent an independent source of economic value. This observation extends Becker's theoretical proposition by illustrating how linguistic competence has become

an increasingly valuable productive asset within knowledge-based economies.

The review also confirms that the economic value of English language proficiency in Pakistan reflects broader processes of globalisation and economic integration. English has become the dominant language of international business, higher education, scientific research, digital communication, multinational corporations, and technological innovation. Consequently, employers increasingly require workers capable of communicating effectively within multilingual and internationally connected professional environments. The reviewed literature indicates that this demand is particularly pronounced in sectors such as information technology, banking, engineering, healthcare, higher education, aviation, telecommunications, and international trade, where English serves as the principal medium of professional communication. Therefore, the employability benefits associated with English proficiency should not be interpreted solely as linguistic advantages but rather as reflections of broader structural transformations occurring within contemporary labour markets.

A particularly important finding concerns the relationship between English language proficiency and graduate employability. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that employers regard English communication as one of the most desirable employability skills alongside technical expertise, digital literacy, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. This finding suggests that employability is increasingly multidimensional, requiring graduates to integrate disciplinary knowledge with effective interpersonal and professional communication. English proficiency facilitates participation in interviews, workplace discussions, report writing, presentations, negotiations, and client interactions, thereby enhancing graduates' ability to contribute effectively within organisational settings. These findings align with international employability literature, which increasingly recognises communication competence as a fundamental component of workforce readiness in the twenty-first century.

The review further highlights the growing importance of English language proficiency within Pakistan's expanding digital economy. Digital transformation has fundamentally altered patterns of employment by creating opportunities for remote work, freelancing, e-commerce, software development, digital marketing, online education, and international outsourcing. Participation in these emerging sectors depends heavily upon English communication because international clients, digital platforms, technical documentation, and virtual collaboration predominantly operate in English. Consequently, language proficiency has become a prerequisite for participation in global digital labour markets, enabling Pakistani professionals to compete internationally despite geographical constraints. This finding suggests that English proficiency contributes not only to traditional forms of employment but also to emerging models of work associated with technological innovation and digital entrepreneurship.

Despite these positive labour market outcomes, the systematic review simultaneously reveals substantial structural inequalities that constrain equitable access to the economic benefits associated with English language proficiency. Educational disparities between public and private schools, urban and rural institutions, and different socioeconomic groups remain among the most persistent challenges identified throughout the reviewed literature. Students attending elite English-medium schools generally acquire stronger communicative competence because they benefit from qualified teachers, better educational resources, interactive pedagogies, and greater exposure to English-language environments. Conversely, many students enrolled in government schools experience limited opportunities to develop practical communication skills due to inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, examination-oriented instruction, and limited classroom interaction. Consequently, differences in labour market performance frequently reflect unequal educational opportunities rather than differences in individual ability or motivation.

This finding has important implications for understanding the relationship between language policy and social inequality. Rather than functioning solely as an instrument of socioeconomic mobility, English proficiency may simultaneously reinforce existing patterns of inequality when access to quality language education remains uneven. Graduates from affluent families generally possess greater opportunities to develop English competence and therefore enjoy privileged access to professional employment, while economically disadvantaged students often encounter structural barriers that restrict their labour market competitiveness. The review therefore suggests that English operates both as a mechanism for promoting individual economic advancement and as a factor contributing to the reproduction of broader socioeconomic disparities. This dual role represents one of the most significant policy challenges identified by the reviewed literature.

Another important contribution of this review concerns the distinction between perceived and objectively measured employability outcomes. Most Pakistani studies rely primarily upon employer perceptions, graduate surveys, or qualitative interviews, consistently indicating that English proficiency enhances recruitment prospects and career progression. However, relatively few studies employ longitudinal data or econometric methods capable of establishing causal relationships between language proficiency and long-term labour market performance. Consequently, while the reviewed evidence strongly suggests positive economic returns associated with English proficiency, the precise magnitude of these returns remains uncertain within the Pakistani context. This limitation underscores the need for future empirical research employing nationally representative datasets and advanced statistical methodologies to quantify the economic value of English language skills more accurately.

The systematic review also identifies important implications for educational policy. Existing language education policies have successfully recognised the importance of English within Pakistan's education system; however,

implementation challenges continue to undermine policy effectiveness. Variations in teacher quality, curriculum design, classroom resources, assessment methods, and institutional capacity contribute to inconsistent educational outcomes across regions and educational sectors. The reviewed literature consistently recommends shifting from traditional grammar-oriented instruction towards communicative language teaching approaches that emphasise speaking, listening, writing, presentation skills, workplace communication, and critical thinking. Such reforms would better align educational outcomes with employer expectations and labour market requirements.

Furthermore, the review highlights the importance of integrating English language education with broader employability initiatives. English proficiency alone cannot guarantee successful labour market outcomes if graduates lack technical expertise, digital competencies, entrepreneurial skills, or practical workplace experience. Therefore, language education should be embedded within comprehensive employability strategies combining vocational training, digital literacy, internship programmes, industry partnerships, career counselling, and continuous professional development. Such integrated approaches are more likely to produce graduates capable of adapting successfully to rapidly changing labour market conditions.

The findings also carry broader implications for Pakistan's national development agenda. Improving English language proficiency contributes directly to enhancing workforce productivity, attracting foreign investment, strengthening export competitiveness, expanding participation in global value chains, and supporting innovation-driven economic growth. Moreover, enhanced English proficiency facilitates access to international scholarship opportunities, scientific collaboration, technological knowledge, and global research networks, thereby strengthening Pakistan's capacity to participate within the international knowledge economy. Consequently, investments in equitable English language education should be viewed not merely as educational reforms but as long-term

investments in national economic development and human capital formation.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that improving English language proficiency should not be pursued at the expense of Pakistan's rich linguistic diversity. Several reviewed studies caution against framing English as superior to national or regional languages. Instead, policymakers should promote multilingual competence, whereby English serves as an additional economic resource while Urdu and regional languages continue to fulfil essential cultural, social, and national functions. Such a balanced approach can strengthen employability without undermining Pakistan's linguistic heritage or cultural identity.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review synthesised evidence from 15 selected studies to examine the economic significance of English language proficiency for employability in Pakistan. The findings consistently demonstrate that English language proficiency functions as a valuable form of human capital that enhances graduates' employment prospects, earning potential, career progression, and access to competitive labour markets. Across the reviewed studies, English proficiency emerged as a key determinant of employability, particularly in higher education, multinational organisations, the corporate sector, and occupations requiring effective communication skills. The review further revealed that employers increasingly perceive English language competence as an essential workplace skill, reflecting the growing integration of Pakistan into the global knowledge economy. However, the literature also highlights persistent structural challenges, including disparities in access to quality English language education between public and private institutions, urban and rural areas, and different socioeconomic groups, which continue to constrain equitable employment opportunities and reinforce existing labour market inequalities.

Overall, this review contributes to the existing literature by integrating evidence from education, labour economics, and language policy to provide a comprehensive understanding of the

relationship between English language proficiency and employability in Pakistan. The synthesis suggests that improving English language education should be regarded not only as an educational priority but also as an economic investment capable of strengthening workforce competitiveness and supporting sustainable national development. The review also identifies important gaps in the existing body of knowledge, particularly the limited availability of longitudinal, nationally representative, and econometric studies that quantify the economic returns of English language proficiency in Pakistan. Addressing these gaps will provide stronger empirical evidence to inform future language and education policies. Consequently, policymakers, higher education institutions, and industry stakeholders should collaborate to strengthen English language instruction, reduce educational inequalities, and align graduates' language competencies with the evolving demands of domestic and international labour markets.

6. Policy Implications

The findings of this systematic literature review have important implications for education policy, labour market development, higher education governance, and national economic planning in Pakistan. The reviewed evidence consistently demonstrates that English language proficiency has become a strategic economic resource that enhances employability, increases labour productivity, facilitates occupational mobility, and strengthens participation in the global economy. However, the review also reveals that the benefits associated with English proficiency remain unevenly distributed because of persistent educational inequalities, socioeconomic disparities, and regional differences in access to quality language education. Consequently, improving English language proficiency should not be viewed merely as a linguistic objective but as a comprehensive human capital investment capable of promoting inclusive economic growth and sustainable workforce development.

The first policy implication concerns **reforming English language education across all levels of the education system**. The reviewed literature

indicates that although English is taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan, existing instructional approaches often fail to develop practical communication skills required by employers. Traditional teaching methods remain heavily dependent on rote memorisation, grammar translation, and examination-oriented learning, limiting students' ability to communicate effectively in professional environments. Therefore, curriculum reforms should emphasise communicative language teaching approaches that integrate listening, speaking, reading, writing, critical thinking, presentation skills, report writing, and workplace communication. Such reforms would enable students to acquire functional English proficiency rather than merely theoretical knowledge of grammatical structures.

A second policy implication involves **strengthening teacher education and professional development**. The review consistently identifies teacher quality as one of the strongest determinants of students' English language achievement. Many English teachers, particularly in public-sector schools, have limited opportunities for continuous professional development and often lack confidence in communicative teaching methodologies. Government agencies, teacher training institutions, and universities should therefore invest in regular in-service training programmes, certification courses, digital teaching competencies, classroom observation systems, and mentoring initiatives that enhance both teachers' language proficiency and pedagogical expertise. Improving teacher capacity would substantially improve the quality of English language instruction throughout Pakistan's education system.

The systematic review also highlights the importance of **reducing educational inequalities between public and private educational institutions**. Significant disparities in educational resources, infrastructure, qualified teachers, technological facilities, and classroom environments continue to produce unequal English language outcomes among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Policymakers should prioritise investments in

government schools through improved educational infrastructure, language laboratories, digital learning resources, libraries, internet connectivity, and recruitment of qualified English language teachers. Such investments are particularly important in rural and underdeveloped regions where students currently experience limited opportunities to develop the communication skills demanded by contemporary labour markets.

Another important implication concerns **integrating English language education with employability and skills development programmes**. The reviewed literature demonstrates that employers increasingly expect graduates to possess combinations of technical expertise, digital literacy, communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, and professional competence. Consequently, English language education should not be delivered in isolation but should be embedded within broader employability frameworks that include vocational education, entrepreneurship training, internship programmes, career counselling, and workplace simulations. Universities and technical institutions should collaborate with employers to design curricula that reflect contemporary labour market requirements while ensuring that language learning remains relevant to professional practice. The findings further emphasise the need for **stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and industry**. Many employers report a mismatch between graduates' communication abilities and workplace expectations, suggesting insufficient interaction between educational institutions and the labour market. Universities should establish partnerships with employers through internship programmes, graduate tracer studies, advisory boards, industry-based projects, guest lectures, and workplace communication workshops. Such collaboration would enable educational institutions to continuously update curricula according to evolving labour market needs while providing students with practical opportunities to apply English communication skills in professional contexts.

An additional policy implication relates to **digital transformation and workforce competitiveness**.

The systematic review demonstrates that English language proficiency has become increasingly important within Pakistan's expanding digital economy, including freelancing, software development, digital marketing, e-commerce, business process outsourcing, and remote employment. Government policies promoting digital inclusion should therefore incorporate English language training alongside information technology education and digital skills development. Establishing community-based digital learning centres, expanding access to online English language platforms, and integrating language instruction within digital literacy programmes would strengthen Pakistan's capacity to compete within global digital labour markets.

The review also suggests that policymakers should adopt **equity-oriented language policies** that ensure all students have access to quality English language education regardless of socioeconomic status or geographical location. Targeted interventions, including scholarships, rural teacher incentives, mobile learning technologies, subsidised language training, and bridge programmes for disadvantaged students, can reduce disparities in educational outcomes and improve labour market inclusion. Such initiatives would contribute directly to reducing educational inequality while promoting broader social mobility.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that **English language policy should be aligned with Pakistan's broader economic development strategies**. As Pakistan seeks to enhance exports, attract foreign direct investment, expand the information technology sector, and strengthen participation in global value chains, a workforce possessing strong English communication skills becomes increasingly important. Investment in English language education should therefore be recognised as part of national human capital development rather than solely an educational reform. Coordination among the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, the Higher Education Commission (HEC), provincial education departments, industry associations, and private-sector employers will be essential for developing coherent policies that align

educational outcomes with labour market demands.

Finally, the systematic review highlights the importance of **promoting multilingualism rather than linguistic replacement**. While English proficiency provides significant economic advantages, it should complement rather than displace Urdu and Pakistan's regional languages. Multilingual education policies that strengthen competence in English while preserving national and cultural linguistic identities can simultaneously promote employability, social cohesion, and cultural diversity. Such an approach recognises that economic competitiveness and cultural preservation are complementary rather than conflicting policy objectives.

7. Limitations of the Study

Despite providing a comprehensive synthesis of the existing literature, this systematic review has several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. First, the review relied exclusively on published studies available in English-language databases between 2000 and 2025. Consequently, relevant unpublished reports, government documents, dissertations, conference proceedings, and studies published in regional languages may not have been included. Although the selected databases provided extensive coverage of education, labour economics, and public policy research, the exclusion of grey literature may have limited the comprehensiveness of the review.

Second, the reviewed studies employed diverse research designs, sampling strategies, measurement instruments, and analytical approaches. This methodological heterogeneity prevented the use of statistical meta-analysis and required the adoption of a thematic synthesis approach. While thematic synthesis enabled the integration of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods evidence, it did not permit estimation of pooled effect sizes or precise measurement of the economic returns associated with English language proficiency.

Third, much of the Pakistani literature reviewed consisted of cross-sectional surveys, employer perceptions, and qualitative investigations rather

than longitudinal or experimental studies. Consequently, many findings identify associations between English language proficiency and employability without establishing definitive causal relationships. The absence of nationally representative econometric analyses also limits the ability to quantify the exact wage premiums associated with English proficiency in Pakistan.

Fourth, the review focuses primarily on Pakistan while incorporating selected international studies for comparative purposes. Although this contextual focus strengthens the relevance of the findings for Pakistani policymakers, the conclusions may not be directly generalisable to countries with different educational systems, labour market structures, or language policies.

Finally, the review is subject to the inherent limitations of systematic literature reviews, including potential publication bias and variations in the methodological quality of included studies. Although quality assessment procedures were employed to enhance the reliability of the synthesis, the conclusions remain dependent upon the quality and availability of existing empirical evidence.

Recognising these limitations provides important context for interpreting the findings and highlights the need for future research employing longitudinal designs, nationally representative datasets, objective language assessments, and rigorous programme evaluations to strengthen the evidence base concerning the economics of English language proficiency in Pakistan.

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