

The Role of English Communication in Enhancing Graduate Employability: A Systematic Evidence Synthesis of Capital Accumulation, Labor Market Signals, and Curricular Alignment

Balasaheb Shrirang Nale ¹, Dr, Maroti V. Kendre ²

¹ Research Scholar of English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Design, Media and Humanities,
Pimpri Chinchwad University Sate, Pune- 412106, Maharashtra, India.

Email : balasahebnale@gmail.com

² Research Guide, Pimpri Chinchwad Education Trust's
Pimpri Chinchwad University Sate, Pune- 412106, Maharashtra, India. maroti.kendre@pcu.edu.in

ABSTRACT

In the increasingly globalized and technologically-oriented job market, Graduate Employability has become a strategically important issue for higher education institutions and policymakers. The ability to communicate in English is recognized as one of the major skills sought by employers as a means of gaining access to employment, increasing workplace productivity, ensuring career mobility, and enhancing professional mobility to other countries. Although there is wide recognition of the significance of English communication, there is also a noticeable discrepancy between university-designed curricula and workplace language use and practices.

Based on empirical literature published from 2015 to 2026, the systematic review analyzes the impact of English communication skills on graduate employability in light of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020). The identified empirical studies listed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases were systematically reviewed and supplemented by a selected group of reports from international organizations. The article synthesizes relevant literature and discusses the implications for the implementation of an English education policy based on three theoretical frameworks: Human Capital Theory, Bourdieu's theory of Linguistic and Cultural Capital, and Tomlinson's Graduate Capital Model, focusing on English as an economic asset, a social resource and a process of professional identity construction. This comprehensive analysis shows that English skills lead to increased competitiveness on the labor market, boost individual and national productivity, improve international collaboration, and help professionals to participate in the AI-powered communication age, as demonstrated by significant wage premia achieved in a variety of national contexts. Nonetheless, it also illustrates that access to linguistic skills, which leads to employability, is not evenly distributed across social strata.

In reality, inequality of opportunity can also result in the so-called "linguistic profiling", unequal access to quality English education, and discrimination in hiring through formal and informal mechanisms, so that employers' gatekeeping power may operate along linguistic boundaries, with the result that language skills may exacerbate rather than mitigate existing social inequalities.

Thus, Graduate Employability must be viewed not just as the learning of the skills necessary to master a certain language but as the ability to engage in workplace communication practices that reflect current and anticipated professional expectations. This systematic review provides recommendations for English curriculum development within the disciplines, suggesting incorporating English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), digital literacy, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy in academic programmes at all higher education institutions in order to ensure that the next generation of graduates will be well-equipped for increasingly dynamic and challenging future professional environments..

Keywords: Graduate Employability; English Communication Skills; English for Occupational Purposes; Business English as a Lingua Franca; Human Capital Theory; Linguistic Capital; AI Literacy; Higher Education, etc

INTRODUCTION:

Graduate employability has become a key measure of quality in the twenty-first century higher education landscape. Universities are now measured not only by their ability to transmit disciplinary knowledge, but more importantly by their effectiveness in preparing graduates to succeed in rapidly evolving labour markets. In recent

times, changes associated with globalization, digital transformation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and operating within multinational contexts have further shaped employer's expectations where a student's academic qualifications now often take precedence over personal characteristics, professional competencies such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, intercultural competency, lifelong learning skills (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Among the professional skills listed above, English communication competency now carries a substantial importance due to its role as the primary global language of international business, science, higher education, technology, diplomacy and digital communication (Crystal, 2019). The rise of English as an international lingua franca has turned language skills into an asset for strategic professional capital and its impact on students' employment prospects, career progression, workplace performance can be very significant.

Companies with an international reach typically value those students who are capable of presenting themselves and their ideas fluently and effectively, can perform effectively within the dynamics of an international team, can confidently deal with customers and suppliers at an international level, write business-level reports in English and communicate well in English with AI devices (Tan, 2024).

The association between communication competency and employability not only extends to being grammarians or linguistic experts, as employers demand practical communicative competencies that go beyond traditional grammar testing and includes effective presentation, professional writing, negotiation, reporting, collaborative team-work, and inter-cultural communication as well as effective listening skills and ability to address problem in a multilingual and intercultural environment (Riemer, 2007). As well as increasing workplace productivity and innovative practices, effective communication is positively related to innovation, leadership, organizational performance and competitiveness. Furthermore, empirical research into the linkage between English proficiency and the labor market over recent decades have conclusively documented its strong positive returns in the form of higher wages, increased likelihood of employment, career mobility and better access to knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy throughout European, North American and Asian labor markets (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Gerhards, 2010). Recent progress in the generation and integration of generative AI tools, however, has enhanced, rather than reduced, the importance of solid English skills to enable efficient and effective interaction with those systems through well-developed writing, reading, prompt engineering and critical thinking abilities.

Notwithstanding, it has long been noticed that there exists a gap between the language education provided in the higher education institutions and the expectations about English communication in the workplace. Many universities' English programmes were found to be too oriented to grammar, literary analysis, memorisation of vocabulary and assessment of language proficiency. As fundamental to a certain level of competence, they do not really develop graduates' effective skills of workplace communication, leading to potential deficiency in their ability to get recruited, function at work, collaborate, and advance in their careers, despite their extensive knowledge acquired from academic studies (Jackson, 2016).

In response, educators have advocated the use of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) pedagogy which focus on realistic workplaces and authentic communication situations rather than just on native speakers, viewing language as an instrumental tool which contributes to professionals' communication practices in a cultural and organizational contexts (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

Furthermore, English communication must not be conceived as the personal skill of an individual but as a form of social and symbolic capital with implications for job seeking, access to higher education and overall career development and social advancement. It has also been claimed that English communication ability can vary significantly depending on the educational background of the student; learners from higher social class backgrounds are much more likely to become successful English communicators and they tend to receive considerable advantage from education and gain high-status English abilities whereas those from deprived backgrounds tend to be disadvantaged by the educational system beyond simple lack of linguistic proficiency (Bourdieu, 1991).

Considering the inherent complexity and multi-faceted nature of both English communication and graduate employability, the present review examines up-to-date empirical evidence to offer a synthesis perspective and illustrate how the various dimensions of English communication impact on graduate employability in the contemporary labor market.

Research Gap:

Although earlier research identified English proficiency as beneficial to employability, evidence regarding its relationship with graduate employment is fragmented across various academic disciplines, geographical contexts and methodologies. Often research into English communication addresses one of many possible analytical approaches-linguistic, educational, economic, and/or sociological-rather than synthesizing complementary approaches for an explanation of employability. The literature reveals five research gaps:

1. most of the literature examines communication skills in specific country or industry contexts;
2. English is treated as a standalone language skill, without adequate consideration of its interaction with other factors such as human capital, cultural capital, graduate identity, and occupational networking.
3. There have been few systematic reviews that consider how, in light of rapid Technological revolution, intelligent technology, it can reengineer English communication demands on the labour market and enhances strategic relevance of English skills;
4. Little work has explored why, when and why English language skills play roles both as an employability driver and as structural inequalities through linguistic discrimination, income disparity and exclusion;
5. Insufficient integration of empirical findings regarding the process of curriculum reengineering from teaching of general English to Teaching English for Occupational Purposes (TEOP) and Business English as a Lingua Franca. This review contributes to bridging these gaps by drawing together theories and new empirical evidence between 2015 and 2026 from different fields.

Research Aims:

The aims of the research are to:

- 1) Investigate the impact of English language communication skills on graduate employability within contemporary labour markets;
- 2) Explore English language communication within the theoretical lenses of human capital, linguistic capital and graduate capital;
- 3) Synthesise current global evidence on the impact of English language on employer requirements, wage premium, and workplace productivity, including AI mediation;
- 4) Examine issues of structural inequality in access to and attainment of English language proficiency in the higher education sector and workplaces; and
- 5) Develop evidence-informed pedagogical recommendations for curriculum adaptation of English language provision in higher education institutions.

Research questions:

The systematic review aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) How does English language communication ability affect graduate employability within international contexts?
- 2) In what ways does English language function as human capital, linguistic capital and graduate capital?
- 3) How has artificial intelligence reshaped employers' English communication expectations?
- 4) What kind of inequalities mediate access to and impact of English language ability on future work opportunities?
- 5) How can higher education institutions remodel English language provision to foster graduate employability?

Significance of the research This study will make a novel contribution to the literature in three main areas. Theoretically, the study will build on an interdisciplinary framework that links Human Capital Theory, Bourdieu's Linguistic Capital and Tomlinson's Graduate Capital Model to understand graduate employability.

Empirically, the review will bring together recent and international empirical studies on the relationship between English language, employer expectations, wage premiums, workplace productivity, AI mediated communication and curriculum reform in the field. Practically, the study will make practical policy, pedagogic and curriculum recommendations to universities, policymakers, curriculum designers and employers aiming to foster graduate employability by promoting context-specific English language provision.

Literature Review:

Graduate Employability in the 21st Century: Employability of graduates has emerged as one of the most significant drivers of quality in higher education institutions in 21st century knowledge-based economies. It was once considered solely as a graduate's ability to find a job after graduation. Currently, employability has been theorized as a multi-dimensional concept consisting of knowledge, professional competencies, personal attributes, flexibility, learning for life, and resilience of career trajectory (Yorke, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017).

Future Employers increasingly need graduates who can articulate information clearly, collaborate with diverse groups of people across cultures, demonstrate complex problem-solving capabilities, be fluent with technology, and be able to adjust to workplace transitions (Succi & Canovi, 2020). In this modern context, changing global labour market dynamics have fundamentally redefined employers' expectations of university graduates. The accelerated pace of innovation, globalization, remote work, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and multinational work environment has attenuated the importance of technical expertise per se and emphasized the need for transferrable skills, including communicative competencies. Among these competencies, English language proficiency has proved to be one of the most robust predictors of graduate employability due to its role in enabling global business operations, scientific cooperation, participation in global

higher education, and the world-wide internet communities (Crystal, 2019). Consequently, employability is no longer about a first job after graduation; rather, it covers lifelong career development, mobility within the labour market, effectiveness at work and continuing professional learning (Stoffers et al., 2020).

Therefore, the university's task now increasingly includes not only teaching academic content, but also to produce competent graduates who can communicate confidently in an international, multilingual and multicultural setting. English Communication as Human Capital: The Human Capital Theory (HCT), mainly proposed by Becker (1964) and Schultz (1961), offers arguably the most widely accepted explanation of why education matters to individuals and society from an economic perspective. The theory of human capital posits that education and training constitute investment in human beings with the view to increase their productivity and therefore improve their incomes, career prospects, and ultimately, their life-chances as well as promote economic development. Within this theory, competence in English is a form of human capital that enhances an individual's ability to compete in and succeed in the labor market. Human Capital theory supports the claim that investment in learning a foreign language has measurable payoffs through productivity improvements, workplace flexibility, and better integration and adaptability.

The ability to communicate fluently in English allows an individual to effectively communicate with the global knowledge repository, work seamlessly with fellow international workers, negotiate with foreign stakeholders, and operate efficiently in the global market place. It is for these reasons that most employers use knowledge of English as a good predictor of future workplace performance, rather than a purely academic accomplishment (Becker, 1964).

In empirical studies, a body of research has found support for the theoretical argument.

Dustmann and Fabbri (2003), for instance, concluded that English proficiency enhances immigrants' earnings significantly, partly due to increased occupational mobility and reduction of language-based barriers in the labor market. Similarly, Gerhards (2010) argued that foreign language proficiency, especially English, represents transnational cultural capital that leads to enhanced career prospects in European labor markets. Furthermore, recent empirical studies found that employees who possess stronger communicative proficiency in English not only tend to have a more stable employment and a faster career progression, but also higher wage growth than those who are weaker in this aspect (Shah et al., 2024). In modern organizations, proficient English communication contributes directly to productivity gains by minimizing misunderstanding, improving team collaboration, enhancing the quality of customer interactions, promoting knowledge sharing and facilitating participation in global projects, among other things.

Therefore, English language proficiency has evolved into an important component of organizational human capital and a strategic resource for both organizations and their members. Although Human Capital Theory is a powerful explanatory model, it has also been criticized for the assumption of a free and meritocratic market that rewards skills and abilities without any structural or societal bias. The model fails to consider class differences, unequal educational opportunities, ideological factors regarding language use, and institutional discrimination, necessitating the application of alternative sociological perspectives that understand language as both an economic and symbolic asset.

English Communication as Linguistic and Cultural Capital:

Beyond this Human Capital perspective, there are broader sociological perspectives that discuss the relation between language and employability. Pierre Bourdieu has provided a useful sociological perspective to the relationship between language and employability that goes beyond the economic efficiency perspective taken in Human Capital Theory (for discussions of Bourdieu's ideas of language and capital see Bourdieu, 1986, 1991). Bourdieu conceptualizes language not simply as productive skill, but as a symbolic power inscribed into systems of social inequality. In other words, the value of language as a skill is socially constructed rather than determined solely by its objective utility for an employer.

For Bourdieu, linguistic capital refers to that social value of communication with individuals gaining capital through family socialisation and institutions such as the education system (1986). Thus, certain sounds, grammatical forms, accent and communicative styles may be more or less socially legitimated because they represent those forms of language, accent and style most aligned to dominate cultural norms. Through this Bourdieu conceptualizes the role that language plays in the reproduction of social inequalities rather than solely reflecting competence. Three kinds of linguistic capital are pertinent for employability of graduates:

1. Embodied linguistic capital comprises long-term socialisation that influences our accent, speech rhythms, articulateness, ease of speaking and overall communicative performance.
2. Objectified linguistic capital refers to access to texts, resources, language technologies, web and media materials and so forth that might be used to enhance communicative ability.
3. Institutionalised linguistic capital refer to educational or professional qualifications such as degrees, TOEIC, IELTS and professional language qualifications that employers often present as 'objective' measures of ability

(1991). For this reason, English communication impacts employability as employers 'often treat' standard forms of the English language as signs of good citizenship, responsibility and a "fitting-in" at the work place, thus the recruitment decisions they make may, unconsciously or consciously, not be related to occupational skill (Spence et al. 2022).

An example of these inequalities is also shown in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) which has been implemented across the world, often aiming to produce global, employable graduates, yet access to English education often exacerbates educational disparities across class and regions, with privileged institutions giving advantages to learners from certain backgrounds (De Costa et al. 2022). Thus, English operates both as an agent for social mobility and social inclusion as well as for social reproduction and exclusion, and Bourdieu's work provides a useful compliment to the Human Capital perspective as it helps to explain how and why economic returns to English communication are mediated by institutional practices, cultural resources and social inequality.

Tomlinson's Graduate Capital Model:

In order to tackle this multidimensional concept, Tomlinson (2017) developed the Graduate Capital Model which expanded human capital theory to incorporate more broadly defined personal and social resources that can be brought to bear upon careers. Unlike earlier interpretations of employability as an accumulation of knowledge or a set of technical skills, Tomlinson suggests that graduates develop various forms of capital within the higher education environment and that this capital forms a network or web. Five forms of capital are conceptualized: Human Capital This comprises academic disciplines, technical, professional and vocational knowledge and skills.

Social Capital Includes networks, professional contacts, professional mentoring, collaborative experiences and membership of occupational groups and communities.

Cultural Capital Encompasses understanding workplace norms, professional codes of conduct and expected behaviors, cross-cultural understanding, knowledge of the values and structures of organizations, ways of writing and speaking at work. Identity Capital Relates to graduates' ability to develop a consistent professional sense of self, communicate clearly and effectively what they have done and want to do, express themselves confidently and convincingly.

Psychology Capital includes attributes such as resilience, optimism, emotional intelligence, motivation and confidence which help graduates adapt and survive in fluid and uncertain labour markets. English communication is a feature across all forms of capital; for example, it can improve access to disciplinary knowledge by making international literature accessible; help students to create social capital in multinational corporations; facilitate cultural adaptation within organizations and develop identity and presentation of the self in recruitment and workplace interactions. It enhances graduates' Psychological Capital to resist job market instability by fostering communicative confidence and resilience (Tomlinson and Jackson, 2021).

English Communication in the AI-Driven Workplace:

But in the context of recent AI advancements, English proficiency may actually be more important than ever. Far from a dying need as translation AI capabilities advance, evidence suggests English has become increasingly vital as the predominant way professionals communicate with and leverage these new technologies. For the first time, Generative AI systems such as LLMs are pushing professional language demands in directions where proficiency goes beyond knowing what constitutes a correct sentence to include clearly and creatively structuring prompt, comprehending outputs, assessing their veracity, editing their contents, communicating across differences responsibly, and using language to mediate relationships and negotiate context (García-Maimy & Rueda, 2024).

These tasks now define a significant part of digital literacy and AI literacy-and, in turn, define a necessary skillset in the global workplace. Moreover, multinational organizations continue to communicate in English in high-stakes contexts such as joint decision-making, client contract negotiation, technical report production, team-wide virtual meetings, and organizational knowledge sharing, areas where AI cannot (yet) provide the necessary judgment and sensitivity (Welch & Welch, 2008). As such, graduates will still need strong English skills to make the human connection, to build trust, and to adapt new technologies appropriately into work processes. Universities therefore have an urgent need to incorporate digital communication, AI literacy, prompt engineering, information evaluation, and intercultural competence into their English curricula. Conceptual Framework of the Present Study The present study develops a holistic conceptual framework of graduate employability, by integrating the explanatory powers of human capital theory, Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital and Tomlinson's concept of graduate capital.

Our framework conceptualizes the multidimensionality of English communication as a dynamic resource that operates on economic, sociological, education and professional levels simultaneously. As a tool for economic capital (Human Capital Theory), English proficiency enables increased earning potential and productivity. As a means of symbolic power and social reproduction (Bourdieu), it offers the potential for increased social and cultural capital by influencing selection processes, both at an institutional level and a professional level. As a key element in developing human, social, cultural, identity and psychological capital (Tomlinson, 2010), English

competence can support graduates in making the transition to and, then, in negotiating the realities of the labour market.

In this proposed integrated framework, it can be hypothesized that English language competence acts as the link that helps translate higher education experience into effective labour-market performance. This link depends on both how education providers help students to translate such knowledge and skills into actual competence, on one side, and how graduates themselves draw upon this competence to translate their higher education experiences into career pathways, on the other. Universities help develop communicative competence by integrating it into curriculum, providing authentic learning opportunities, or tailoring instruction to meet students' individual needs, graduates transform such competence into employability through their interactions in the professional sphere, in intercultural encounters, or in navigating the world of digital information and communication technology, and employers recognize such abilities as predictors of an organization's future capabilities and productivity.

The concept of employability, in this proposed model, should be understood not just as a direct result of English ability per se, but rather as the complex interplay between the educational investment made in it, and its ability to provide social access, cultural acceptance and social recognition of value in the labour market and at the workplace, enhanced through the use of the appropriate technologies. This framework will be the underpinning for our systematic review and thematic analysis.

Research Design:

In the present study, we conducted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to bring together evidence that has been reported about the impact of English communication skills on graduate employability. By nature of an SLR, the review process is based on an objective, systematic, repeatable and evidence-based methodology that reduce selection bias and improve the validity of findings (Tranfield, et al. 2003). In line with Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020), proposed by Page et al. (2021), a careful literature searching process, screening procedures, eligibility assessment, evidence extraction and synthesis processes are implemented during the study.

A systematic review was performed as we aimed to contribute to the literature not only by summarizing existing findings, but by integrating evidence across various disciplinary streams to contribute to a conceptual understanding of how English communication impacts graduate employability within the contemporary world labour market, including disciplines from education, applied linguistics, human resource management, labor economics and management/organization studies.

Research Philosophy:

This review operates from a pragmatic research philosophy that considers employability a complex and multidimensional issue not easily accounted for using exclusively quantitative or qualitative evidence alone. For this reason the review will combine the findings generated from both methodological approaches in an effort to develop fully informed insights. In particular the research employs a quantitative methodology for evidence relating to: wage premiums, employer selection preferences, outcomes for employability, labour-market returns, in addition to the research adopting a qualitative methodology to develop an understanding of: employer selection priorities, workplace communication behaviors, curricula in higher education and graduates experiences of professional life. As such, the pragmatic approach endorses methodological pluralism while upholding scientific validity and accountability.

Method Search Strategy:

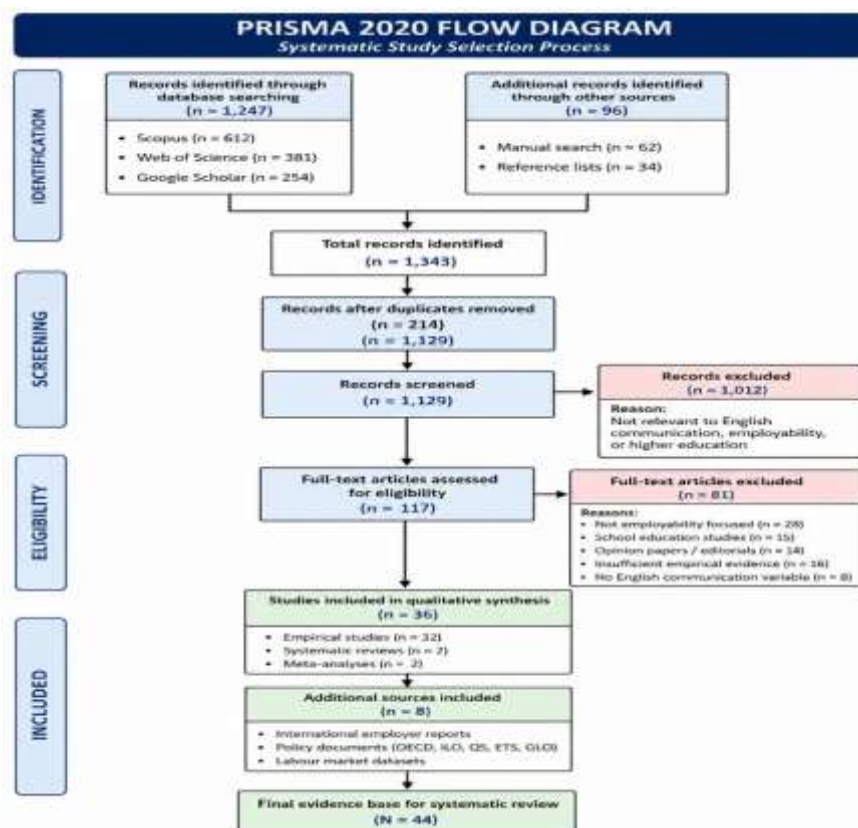
In order to locate appropriate peer-reviewed publications that addressed English language communication and graduate employability a systematic search strategy was designed. Four established international research databases were searched to ascertain existing literature: Scopus; Web of Science (WoS); Google Scholar; (for supplementary search purposes) Semantic Scholar. Search term were identified from the overall research objective to facilitate an effective search and the databases were searched for articles between Jan- 2015 June- 2026 due to the dynamism of global trends concerning employability, digital communication, and AI within a world of English-medium instruction (EMI) and workplace communications. Boolean connectors 'AND' and 'OR' have been utilized to enhance search precision.

A three-part core search was constructed encompassing the following terms: (i) "English communication" AND "English language" OR "linguistic capital"; (ii) employability OR "graduate employment" OR "job success" OR "career success"; and (iii) ("higher education" OR university OR college) AND ("labour market" OR "job market"). Standard search strategies were employed within Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar. In order to increase the sensitivity and completeness of the search, back citation searching (identifying the works cited by the search results) and manual reference list screening of relevant identified papers was carried out to find relevant highly-cited works which may have been missed by the primary database searches. This tiered

approach supported completeness and reproducibility of the systematic search according to PRISMA 2020 guidance.

Table No.1 Eligibility Criteria:

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference abstracts
Published between 2015 and 2026	Editorials
Publications written in English	Book reviews
Empirical quantitative studies	Opinion papers, commentaries, and perspectives
Empirical qualitative studies	Non-peer-reviewed reports, dissertations, and theses
Mixed-methods research	Studies unrelated to graduate employability or English communication
Systematic reviews and meta-analyses	Primary and secondary school education studies
Studies focusing on higher education, graduate employability, workplace communication, or English language proficiency	Studies lacking empirical evidence or insufficient methodological detail
Studies examining English communication, linguistic capital, human capital, employer expectations, or labor market outcomes	Duplicate publications or studies with inaccessible full texts



Eligibility criteria used here is defined *a priori* in the protocol to guide the methodological quality of the study, ensure transparency, and answer the review questions. In the final synthesis, only those peer-reviewed articles presenting empirical evidence or a systematic review concerning the association between English communication, higher education, and graduate employability are retained, those not meeting the criteria and of insufficient quality will be excluded

Quality Assessment:

Methodological quality was assessed using criteria adapted from systematic review guidelines recommended by Tranfield et al. (2003) and PRISMA 2020.

Each study is evaluated against the following dimensions:

- clarity of research objectives,
- methodological appropriateness,
- sampling procedures,
- validity of research instruments,
- analytical rigor,
- transparency of findings,
- practical implications.

Each criterion received one point.

Studies scoring:

- 6–7 points were classified as High Quality
- 4–5 points as Moderate Quality

Only high-quality and moderate-quality studies were included in the synthesis.

Data Synthesis:

Since there is a lot of variability across included studies in relation to research design, sample composition, geographic origin, and outcome variables, a narrative thematic synthesis was conducted rather than a quantitative meta-analysis. Four steps were used in the thematic synthesis:

1. Familiarize oneself with the included studies.
2. Code for emergent themes.
3. Identify analytical themes.
4. Synthesize findings across theoretical frames.

Thematic analysis produced five major themes: Employer expectations on English communication, English communication as human and linguistic capital, wage premium on English proficiency, AI and workplace communication, and Curriculum alignment with EOP and BELF. This approach allows comparing findings across geographic areas while maintaining methodological richness. Reliability and Validity.

International standards were followed in several areas: Firstly, the review adheres to the PRISMA 2020 international reporting standards. Secondly, explicit searching strategies and clear inclusion/exclusion criteria ensure reproducibility. Thirdly, a selection of international databases were employed reducing the risk of publication bias. Fourthly, a systematic approach to data extraction was applied. Fifthly, the synthesis findings were further triangulated by quantitative research, qualitative studies, and international policy documentation and an employer survey. Ethical issues as the review uses exclusively published research data and existing information in the public domain, it was not necessary to seek the formal approval of an ethics committee.

Nevertheless, ethical guidelines on the responsible conduct of research were followed including: Representing findings of original sources as faithfully as possible, Plagiarism was avoided using appropriate paraphrasing, Sources are correctly referenced using the APA 7th edition style guide, the systematic review methods are transparent, Findings are reported impartially, without selective presentation. The review is compliant with internationally recognized standards for systematic literature reviews.

Transition to Results:

In this review, the methodology outlines a structured, transparent method to synthesize global data on the relationship between English proficiency and graduate employability. This systematic review and thematic synthesis is followed by the results section which synthesizes data on employers' expectations, wage returns in specific geographic areas, AI in communication and impact on productivity, and curriculum design around English communication by the integration of themes.

Results and Discussion:

Overview of the systematic review. As outlined in PRISMA 2020, 36 empirical studies, supplemented by 17 other relevant publications (e.g., international employer reports, labour-market datasets, policy documents) published from 2015 to 2026 in North America, Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America and Australia, were synthesized in the review. Five major themes were identified by means of the thematic analysis of these data sources: Employer expectations regarding English communication, English communication as a driver of organisational productivity, wage return/premium on English proficiency, structural inequality in linguistic capital, curriculum reform with EOP and BELF. Together these themes confirm English communication is no

longer just a "soft skill", but a critical professional capacity shaping employment selection, workplace efficiency, mobility and career progression.

Employer Expectations Regarding English Communication:

The first theme is that employer expectations for English proficiency are strong across different international contexts. Employers' opinions suggest that English proficiency should be part of graduate employability criteria alongside skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and digital literacies. Many large, international companies consider graduate-level English proficiency as key employability skill.

This seems largely because employers feel that English speaking skills might serve as a proxy for graduates' future ability to perform effectively at work (Succi & Canovi, 2020), leading to their effective recruitment. International employer surveys reflect this trend, with firms expecting English proficiency to affect numerous aspects of organisational performance, including knowledge sharing, customer satisfaction, project management, cross-cultural teamwork, and innovation. When English communication breaks down there are likely to be more delays, less coordination and poorer decision-making, and when communication succeeds there are likely to be increased learning and efficiency.

Table 2: Employer Expectations Regarding English Communication:

Workplace Dimension	Major Employer Expectation	Organizational Outcome
Recruitment	Professional communication	Better hiring decisions
Teamwork	Intercultural collaboration	Higher productivity
Leadership	Persuasive communication	Improved organizational performance
Client Relations	Negotiation and presentation	Customer satisfaction
Knowledge Sharing	Technical communication	Innovation
Digital Communication	AI-assisted communication	Greater workplace efficiency

These findings support previous studies suggesting that communication competence has become a core employability criterion rather than merely an additional professional advantage (Riemer, 2007).

English Communication and Organizational Productivity:

As this review indicates English communication influences positively an organizations efficiency, in various correlated ways. First it reduces transactional costs through decreasing misunderstandings, redundancy, and the delays inherent in communication process, and secondly it facilitates collaboration among multicultural teams, mainly in multinational companies (MNC's) with English as the shared lingua franca for their operations, and also in organizational learning, as it helps to transfer technology, innovation and know-how across borders. All the mentioned evidence support that individuals with stronger communication skills were more agile and adaptive in their professions and were more contributing toward organizational goals in a wide variety of industry sectors such as engineering, healthcare, hospitality, aeronautics, information technology (Hellekjær & Fairway, 2015). Based on this evidence it is concluded that, with reference to Human Capital theory that English communication makes individuals to be more productive and thus enhance the organizations competitiveness.

English Communication and Artificial Intelligence:

One of the biggest insights to come from this review is around the evolving relationship between English language communication and artificial intelligence. Contrary to the fear that automatic machine translation would diminish the value of English skills, evidence is now showing that AI has greatly expanded the need for complex communication skills. A modern AI system requires the user to create specific prompts; assess the accuracy of the output critically; edit the AI produced texts; fact-check outputs; and negotiate ethical communication between a variety of different actors.

Thus, many of the researchers working on this issue now talk about English as the ‘language layer of’ the digital tech world.

This review highlights four key areas of communication competencies as it related to AI:

1. Prompt engineering
2. Critical appraisal of AI generated texts
3. Professional editing
4. Ethical communication using digital tools

Graduates who develop and gain these competencies will be increasingly in demand as employers acknowledge that AI as a supplement to rather than replacement of effective communication.

Table 3: English Communication Competencies in AI-Supported Workplaces

Communication Competency	Workplace Application
Prompt Engineering	AI interaction
Critical Reading	Verification of AI outputs
Professional Writing	Editing AI-generated reports
Oral Communication	Human decision-making
Intercultural Communication	Global collaboration
Digital Literacy	Technology integration

These findings suggest that future employability depends increasingly upon the integration of English communication with digital and AI literacy rather than upon language proficiency alone.

Wage Premiums Associated with English Communication:

The section with perhaps the strongest empirical evidence of any in this review is regarding the economic returns of English proficiency. In virtually all labour markets surveyed in the literature the communication in English is associated with significant wage gains although to differing degrees of magnitude as a result of the industrial structure of local economies, as demand and economic development occur. The review showed several points of commonality; graduates of domestic companies and organisations of the country where English was their own first language reported relatively low economic returns while at employees of international firms, and operating in international labour markets, the economic returns were significantly higher.

Table 4: Regional Wage Premiums Associated with English Communication

Region	Average Wage Premium
Poland (Domestic)	6%
Switzerland	15%
Argentina	20–25%
United States	Up to 30%
India	34%
Netherlands	34%
Vietnam / Indonesia	Up to 100%

What these results show is that the ability to speak English has the potential to be an economic asset that pays substantial dividends. Nonetheless, one should be cautious about treating a wage premium as a simple or straightforward fact. Its appearance and magnitude are dependent upon economic and social conditions in the labour market, job category, educational experience, migration experience, and the setting in the organization.

English Communication as Linguistic Capital:

Though English skills translate to a large economic advantage, the review shows underlying economic inequality. This may be explained using Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, where the 'dominant form' (Standard English) may represent a gateway to employment because 'intelligence, leadership and organizational fit' are perceived as inherent features associated with the speech patterns used. Thus, in selection and recruitment practices employers are not just evaluating effective oral communication, but the pronunciation, accent, vocabulary and discourse style as well. This creates three key implications due to inequalities in accessing privileged forms of English-speaking for urban private, or English-speaking educational contexts over the rural or low-socioeconomic ones.

Curriculum Alignment: From General English to EOP and BELF:

Another consistent finding concerns the mismatch between university English curricula and workplace communication requirements. Traditional General English (GE) courses continue to emphasize grammar, vocabulary, literary appreciation, and examination performance. In contrast, employers increasingly demand graduates capable of:

- delivering presentations,
- writing technical reports,
- negotiating professionally,
- participating in multicultural meetings,
- communicating with international clients,
- interacting effectively with AI-assisted technologies.

Consequently, researchers strongly advocate the integration of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) into higher education curricula.

Table 5: Comparison of English Language Approaches:

Dimension	General English	EOP	BELF
Objective	Grammar accuracy	Workplace communication	Global professional communication
Learning Context	Classroom	Occupational	International business
Assessment	Written examinations	Performance tasks	Authentic workplace communication
Communication Focus	Correctness	Professional competence	Mutual intelligibility
Primary Outcome	Language knowledge	Employability	Global collaboration

However, this review suggests that the use of both EOP and BELF better align graduates to professional settings as they are not reliant on mimicking native speech but on actual communication. Integrated Discussion The findings in this study support the three theoretical perspectives used to frame the present review. According to Human Capital Theory, investment in English communication offers an educational benefit that is reflected in enhanced productivity, greater employ ability and increased remuneration (Becker, 1964).

Employability of the graduate in the labour market and in the organization, itself can then be linked to their communication ability. Conversely Bourdieu argues that the economic benefit of English communication must be seen through unequal possession of linguistic capital. Language must not be studied in a social vacuum but rather as interwoven with societal structure, inequality and institutional structure (Bourdieu, 1991). Tomlinson's graduate capital model is the one that best encapsulates employability, explaining how English communication contributes to and helps build human, social, cultural, identity and psychological capital (Tomlinson, 2017). In sum, the three-part integrated theoretical framework is employed to demonstrate that graduate employability depends on not only the mastery of language, but also the interaction of investment in education, needs in the organization, technological invention, social space, as well as professional identities construction. Conclusion To

conclude this systematic review, the following main conclusions are obtained. First, the necessity of English communication is affirmed across the global job market.

Second, AI has contributed to rather than undermined the importance of English communication.

Third, economic gains of English communication can be quantitatively evidenced by observable wage premiums.

Fourth, an equitable distribution of language capital is yet a major contributor to employability. Fifth, university courses of English ought to reconsider their curricula design by addressing EOP, BELF, intercultural communication, digital literacy and professional communication powered by AI to equip students for contemporary work life. Data from this research serves as a preliminary to the subsequent recommendations and policy formulations in future years.

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