

The Impacts of English Language Proficiency on Employment Opportunities

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Abstract

This study mainly aimed to investigate the impacts of English language proficiency on employment. Therefore, it tried to present answer to the research questions. A questionnaire with 22 closed-ended items was utilized to collect the data from 250 individuals who were graduated from English department of Takhar, Kunduz, and Badakhshan universities. Some of the study participants were employed and some of them were unemployed. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The result of the study revealed that the importance of English was associated with increased connectivity due to globalization. The study also concluded that the importance of English for finding jobs and making a career was well-established. To conclude, it can be said that English and employment are correlative with each other and English language proficiency is amongst the top global employment skills in the viewpoint of educated individuals in Afghanistan academia.

Keywords: Proficiency, English language, employment conditions, impacts, effects.

Introduction

Today the world countries and Afghanistan in particular are witnessing a third industrial revolution namely communication revolution. This successively is having an important impact on business and workplace. In the international commercial sphere English has become lingua-franca of the business world regardless of geographical, social, political or religious differences (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). It is being recognized as one of the sixth official languages of the United Nations. Previously people used to get a job if they possessed expertise in their respective fields, but in the current era the specific skills should be complemented with communication skills. The need for giving emphasis on English communication development is of utmost important in the present scenario with an objective to make the job aspirants gainfully employed (Granovetter, 1983).

In the last few decades, the importance of English raised to a vast extent (Lucas, 2004). It has become an important instrument of communication, both at the international and intra-national levels over the years. The importance of spoken English is even more because there are many cases where one knows their subject well, but they fail to communicate it in good manner (Batra, 2013). Therefore, the practice of spoken English is absolutely necessary. Learning English in a country where it is not an original language like Afghanistan opens a series of opportunities for the individuals. In today's corporate world, the need for operative communications have been recognized and accepted more than the technical knowledge (Adelman, 1990).

Globalization which has created an impact on all walks of life, has also helped the spread of English. It has transformed English into the predominant language of the world and it is the prominently used language in almost every walk of life. Further, globalization has a deep relation with English language (Antonia-Silles, 2018). Globalization and English language both

have insightful impact on employment (Debrah & Smith, 2002). A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country. English is the language of global economy, international banking, most scientific publications, and advertising for popular brands, internet communications, and international law.

Moreover, English plays a key role in Afghanistan job market now as it has been important around the globe in the last few decades. In terms of participation in the global economy, the employees may have to acquire the necessary skills, particularly English language to better demonstrate their abilities in the workplace (Akramy, 2022; Akramy, et al., 2022b; Al-Issa, 2014). Currently in Afghanistan context, gaining jobs with satisfactory salary and privileges requires good English language proficiency. Hence, the present study aimed to seek the effects of English language proficiency on employment opportunities in Afghanistan. This study is going to be conducted to help Afghan students who are currently students in different higher education institutions and those who have already graduated to solve their English language problems while facing in the job interviews and the responsibilities they will hold in the workplace.

This study will be significant because most of the studies were conducted in developed and developing countries where there are better infrastructure and facilities, though, Afghanistan has been facing decades of war and instabilities which resulted in the deficiency of resources and limitation of technological facilities. Unfortunately, no study was found to focus on the effects of English language proficiency on employment conditions in Afghanistan. Therefore, this research will address the gap by investigating the effects of proficiency in English language on employment and it offers insights into the preference of the English proficiency and getting jobs.

The current research study aims to explore and investigate the relations and effects of English language proficiency on employment conditions in Afghanistan. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated to assess the objectives of the study.

1. What is the relation between English language proficiency and employment?
2. How does English language proficiency affect career opportunities for Afghanistan graduates?

Literature Review

Globalization which has created an impact on all walks of life has also helped the spread of English language (Appadurai, 2001). Globalization has transformed English into the predominant language of the world (Rahman, 2020) and it is the prominently used language in almost every walk of life. It is used as an international language and remains the official language of many countries in addition to its role as the language of instruction, particularly of advanced education (Kamran & Mansoor, 2017). So far, scholars and researchers have attempted to label strong connection between English language and globalization under various terms: English as Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2007), English as International Language (Sharifian, 2009), or World English (Crystal, 2003). Hence, research on the role of English in creating nations unfolds that this language is utilized as a gateway to enter into prestigious social positions (Coleman, 2010; Haidar & Fang, 2019). Thus, English plays a pivotal role in assessing the suitability of graduates for gaining employment. The importance of English in international students' mobility has also been well recognized for many years, as manifested in the international English language competency tests (Doan & Hamid, 2019; Xion & Yuan, 2018).

Roshid and Chowdhury (2013) carried out a study about English language proficiency and its effects on employment in Australia. The findings of the study reported that English language has generally been seen as one of the important determinants of employment in recent decades in the English-speaking areas. They found that English language proficiency has a positive impact on employments and earnings. Another study was conducted by Casale and Posel (2011), who found out that English language proficiency affected career opportunities of Saudis graduates well. The results of his study also showed that 32% of the participants were employees that speak English while 38% of the participants were unemployed and did not speak English. Furthermore, the findings showed that those who are fluent in English have more employment opportunities than those who do not.

Moreover, Gazzola and Mazzacani (2019) researched about English competencies and employment. The findings indicated that 90% of participants emphasize on the positive effects of English proficiency on employment and job performance. Similarly, Abbas et al. (2021) studied about English language proficiency as global employment skill. The study concluded that English is amongst the top-sought skills for jobs in the future. Also their study proposes a similar argument that the English language is a tool in the workplace that could assure success to promotion in any working environment. Hence, it could also be concluded that the job market requires more expertise in English language. Youngblood et al. (2020) and Yasmin et al. (2016) also conducted a study to compare English language learning with the needs of the job market. The focus

of study's objective was on the hotel industry and human resource management. He recommended that English is very much necessary for students so that they could easily adopt to the job and place themselves in the concerned market (Rahman, 2020).

According to another study conducted by Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) on language proficiency and labor market, the findings revealed that in simple regression, language proficiency is associated with higher employment probabilities and with higher earnings. Also, their findings showed that 73% of employees in Pakistan need English language as a main issue of employment. Another study which assessed employers' perception on Malaysian graduates focused on the services sector (Ismail et al., 2011). The authors had respondents who were made up of senior human resource managers in the services industry surveyed on graduate's performance and the difference, if any, between local graduates and overseas graduates. Though overall the employers are satisfied with graduates' performance, there were still room for improvement. The authors found that the respondents felt that graduates needed to improve soft skills, which include communication skills, Malay and English language proficiency, writing skills, thinking skills, decision making and problem-solving skills, ICT skills, work planning, value and ethics, self-confidence, characteristic and attitude as well as leadership and personality. In addition, the authors found that employers felt that local graduates were better at skills among others such as problem solving and being a team player, while overseas graduates were better in study area, thinking skill and English language proficiency (Ismail et al., 2011).

The use of English has exponentially increased in Afghanistan since the arrival of the international community particularly the USA in Afghanistan in 2001. Currently, English is used in many areas in the country. It is widely used in education, business, economy, government, and media, e.g., social networking sites (Daqiq, 2021; Orfan, 2020; Orfan et al., 2021; Noori et al., 2022).

Methodology

Research design

The researchers used a quantitative research design in carrying out this study. A survey questionnaire with 22 items were used to explore effects of English language proficiency on employment. Furthermore, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data.

Participants

The participants of the study were 250 students who graduated from English department of Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan universities. The researchers have purposefully chosen 280 graduated students in Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan cities to fill out a questionnaire. Only 250 participants were ready to fill in the questionnaire and return to the researchers. As table 1.0 shows, 16% of participants were self-employed, 24% of were unemployed, and 60% of the participants were staff working in different offices. Their ages ranged between 21 and 28. To make clear, the majority of them (84%) were between 21-23 years old, 12% of them aged between 24-26 years old and only 4% of them were aged between 27 and above years old. They were speakers of three local languages. More than 39.6% of participants were Dari speakers. 32.4% of them were Uzbek speakers and 28% of them were Pashto speakers respectively.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents.

demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	150	60%
	Female	100	40%
	Totally	250	100%
Position	Self-Employment	40	16%
	Unemployment	60	24%
	Employment	150	60%
	Totally	250	100%
Age	21-23	210	84%
	24-26	30	12%
	27-28	10	4%
	Totally	250	100%
Language	Dari	99	39.6%
	Uzbek	81	32.4%
	Pashto	70	28%
	Totally	250	100%

Validity and reliability

The researchers sent the questionnaire to two university professors to have their comments and feedback for further improvement. After the researchers received the feedbacks and comments, they reformed and incorporated them into the instrument to improve the validity of the instrument (Daqiq & Akramy, 2023). To prove the reliability of each item in the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a pilot study among ten English senior students in the class to check the reliability of the questionnaire.

According to Bonett and Wright (2015), conducting a pilot study is to ensure and assess the clarity, confidentiality, and the stability of the questionnaire items designed in a research study. Towards the relation between English language proficiency and employment (0.883) and effects of English language proficiency on job performance (0.778) which was greater than 0.07. Therefore, the questionnaire which was employed in the current study was considered appropriate to collect data from the participants.

Table 2: The Reliability Test of the Questionnaire items.

Category	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
The relation between English language proficiency and employment	0.883	13
Effects of English language proficiency on job performance	0.778	9
Total		22

Data collection instrument

The authors carried out a thorough review to design and develop the questionnaire. They adapted the questionnaire items from relevant literature (Ali et al., 2020; Abbas et al., 2021). The questionnaire contained three main parts. The first part sought the demographic background of the respondents, (i.e., gender, age, and first language). The second part composed of 13 items that elicited participants' responses towards the relation between English language proficiency and employment in Afghanistan while the last part of questionnaire with 9 items sought to determine the effects of English proficiency on job performance. The participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, and 4= Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was read by two experts in the English department of Takhar University and problematic items were revised based on their comments and feedback (Akramy & Aiyaz, 2022).

the participants. Authors have also traveled to Kunduz and Badakhshan province to collect the data. The questionnaire was designed with a consent letter and it was anonymous because what perspectives the participants shared were confidential and used for research purposes only. The consent letter was prepared to take permission whether the participants were willing to take part in the study or not. The participants were asked to read the instructions and complete the questionnaire (Akramy et al., 2022a). The researcher informed that there were no true or false responses, what mattered was their response to each given statement. He also encouraged the participants to ask about any instruction or item that seemed unclear or ambiguous to them. The letter also explained the aim and purpose of the study and highlighted the importance of the findings in this study about effects of English language proficiency on employment, particularly in Afghanistan community. Answering each item of the questionnaire took only 1-2 minutes.

Data collection procedure

The data were purposefully collected from 250 graduated students from three public universities of Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan. The six weeks (one month and half) from October 1st to November 14th of 2022) were taken to collect the data from

Data analysis

The data were numerically coded and inserted into SPSS version 26.0 for analysis. The data were closely examined to make sure the participants completed the questionnaire appropriately although all items in the questionnaire were created as

mandatory. Descriptive statistics were employed to determine the percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation of the data. Moreover, inferential statistical analyses were conducted to determine differences between responses of the participants. Independent sample T-test was also used to explore the differences in the responses of two groups of the respondents, i.e., gender.

Result

The relation between English language proficiency and employment

The first thirteen items of the questionnaire sought to explore the relation between English language proficiency and employment. As table 3.0 shows, participants gave a highly positive answer towards the role of English proficiency and employment. 92% of them accepted that English language proficiency helps them to get an international job which indicate that labor markets and companies in all over the world need to employees that they have proficiency in English and can communicate with whole people live in any country. Therefore, Afghanistan is not exception of this. 80% of participants agreed and strongly agreed that English language skills are mandatory for finding a suitable job; which this reveal that English is a good

key for finding a suitable job. 92% of people whom took part in this research strongly agreed and agreed that English language proficiency is essential for their future careers. Therefore, it shows that all students graduated from university needs to have English skills. Over 76% of participants reported that English language skills help to make an individual’s merit at the time of job writing/screening test. Around 92% of them declared that English language proficiency makes them able to find a good paying job. Accordingly, the need for learning English as a communication skill is of most extreme significance in the present situation with a target to get a well-paid job. 68% of the participants believed that English language proficiency is the basic proviso to employment. 82% of respondents stated that English language proficiency makes an impact on the interviewers’ committee. 84% of all participants strongly agreed and agreed that English language proficiency makes them top in the list among other candidates. Also interviewers can shortlist candidates based on English communication skills. 40% of them accepted that mastering on English language skills is necessary to understand the job-related advertisements, but this item had the less agreement. Therefore, it is concluded that English language proficiency has positive effects on employment according the study findings.

Table 3: Relation between English language proficiency and employment.

No	Statements	% A & SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	English language proficiency helps me to get an international job	92	4.01	0.897
2	English language skills are mandatory for finding a suitable Job	80	3.69	0.984
3	English language proficiency breaks the barriers for me to find job	88	3.89	0.939
4	English language proficiency is essential for my future career	92	4.00	0.864
5	English language skills help to make an individual’s merit at the time of job written / screening tests	76	3.21	1.063
6	English language proficiency makes me able to find a good paying job	92	4.05	0.725
7	English language proficiency is the basic proviso to employment	68	3.20	1.201
8	Proficiency in English language makes an impact at the time of job written tests	82.4	4.09	1.019
9	English language proficiency makes an impact on the interviewers’ committee	88	3.80	0.98
10	English proficiency makes me top in the list among other candidates	84	3.99	0.81
11	Interviewers can shortlist candidates based on English communication skills	84	3.80	1.01
12	Mastering on English language skills is necessary to understand the job-related advertisements	40	2.90	1.204

13	Employers would be happy to interview and recruit candidates who have better English language skills compared to others	60	3.09	0.895
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A = Agree (3); SA = Strongly Agree (4)

The impacts of English proficiency on job performance

The second nine items of the questionnaire explored the effects of English proficiency on job performance. As the table 4.0 shows, the majority of the participants (72.8%) strongly agreed and agreed that the English language proficiency helps them at getting promotion at their jobs. 28% of them reported that the English language proficiency helps them present their ideas elaborately; this item shows that English proficiency does not have considerable effect on elaborating ideas in Afghanistan. 50% of them believed that lack of English language proficiency has negative effects on career success in Afghanistan. 45% of them accepted that employees with lack of English communication skills face difficulties while performing their

departmental activities. 93% of them strongly agreed and agreed that English language skills increase their chances of career success. Over 59.2% of them declared that strong command in the English language becomes the reason to get high incentives. 80.8% of people who took part in the current research indicated that a fluent English speaker advances his career easily in the management hierarchy. 58.4% of them strongly agreed and agreed that proficiency in English language makes them prominent among other employees and the last item revealed that 56.8% of the participants believed that English language proficiency makes them satisfied in workplace. Finally, regarding to table 4.0 it is noticeable that English language proficiency has direct effect on job performing in Afghanistan.

Table 4: Impacts of English Proficiency on Job Performance.

No	Statement	% A & SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
14	The English language proficiency helps me getting promoted at my job.	72.8	3.20	1.080
15	The English language proficiency helps me present my ideas elaborately	28	2.54	0.964
16	Lack of English language proficiency has negative effects on career success in Afghanistan	50	3.02	0.821
17	Employees having a lack of English communication skills face difficulties while performing their departmental activities	45.2	3.81	1.060
18	English language skills increase my chances of career success	93.2	4.21	0.985
19	Strong command in the English language becomes the reason to get high incentives	59.2	3.12	0.769
20	A fluent English speaker advances his career easily in the management hierarchy	80.8	3.52	0.795
21	Proficiency in English language makes me prominent among other employees	58.4	3.46	0.603
22	English language proficiency makes me satisfied in workplace	56.8	3.42	1.07

A = Agree (3); SA = Strongly Agree (4)

Discussion

The study investigated effects of English language proficiency on employment. The results of the study showed that English language proficiency is important to find a suitable and well-paid job. The findings are parallel with those of the research conducted by Pandey and Pandey (2014), Abbas et al. (2021), and Viedeyona and Sihotang (2012), who reported that job is easier to obtain by those graduates who have studied or learnt practical English. However, it is not in line with the result of the study by Coleman (2010), who reported that their participants responded that they got job, but English was not important.

The results also showed that the lack of English language skills is a major obstacle for Afghan graduated students to get a job, especially well-paid jobs. Around 80% of participants believed that lack of English language proficiency is a principal obstacle for employment. This is in line with studies carried out by Lucas (2004), Batra (2013), and Adelman (1990). The author believes that those staff who could speak English language well were also able to succeed at job interviews.

Moreover, the findings revealed that most of participants believed proficiency in English language makes an impact at the time of job written tests. This finding is associated with the studies carried out by Rahman (2020) and Ismail et al. (2011). In countries that English is the main or native language, all

interviews will have to be done with English but in a country like Afghanistan English is not the native language and most of interviews will be done with local languages and staff communicate with people in languages spoken in the community. English is only used and spoken when the companies or organizations attempt to introduce their products to the world market where they communicate with foreigners in English.

The study also yielded that English language proficiency is essential for future career because the world has become a global village. It is easy to interact with people from across different countries, and this can easily happen through English language since they do not understand the language of each other. There are so many multinational companies that have employees from many countries and they use English to communicate with their employees. Therefore, it serves a crucial role for them in these companies. There is increased interconnectivity among the people from a different regions, and the credit for this goes to English as well. The finding is consistent with the result of a study conducted by Abbas et al., (2021). It reported that English plays a pivotal role in assessing the suitability of graduates for gaining employment.

In addition, the finding indicated that over 93% of participants believed English language skills can increase their chances of career success. This has showed that how much English language proficiency has effects on getting jobs and job performances. The studies carried out by Rahman (2020), Pandey and Pandey (2014), Canagarajah (2007), and Adelman and Vogel (1990), who reported that communication skills in English can result not only to an improved social life, but also better job opportunities in the future, confirmed the finding of this study. From job interviews to the actual professional world communication skills, knowing English is very crucial, and being proficient in English means being able to communicate clearly and effectively.

Eventually, all the findings of the study emphasized positive points of English language proficiency on employment in Afghanistan. The study showed that getting well-paid jobs, jobs at both the national and international level, getting promotions, and breaking barriers for employment opportunities are necessary to be more proficient in English language. Hence, it is essential for future employment success and getting jobs. These findings are parallel with those of researches conducted by Bleakley and Chin (2004), Carliner (2000), Tainer (1998), Khadria (2001), Hussain (2018), Gazzola and Mazzacani (2019), Youngblood et al. (2020), Yasmin et al. (2016), Dustmann and Fabbri (2003), and Rao (2016). They reported in their studies that English language proficiency is significant for finding a suitable job for now and future. The participants of the studies also believed that students with English language skills can find jobs faster and easier than those who cannot communicate in English well.

Conclusion

The current study was conducted to investigate the effects of English language proficiency on employment. The study concludes that English language proficiency is the top-sought skills for jobs in the future. The study also proposes that English language is a tool in the workplace that could assure success to promotion in any working environment. Hence, it can be concluded that the job market in Afghanistan and elsewhere

abroad requires expertise in English. Furthermore, it has been found in the study that the importance of English was associated with increased connectivity due to globalization. It also concludes that the importance of English for finding jobs and making a career was well-established. Consequently, it can be inferred that English language proficiency is amongst the top global employment skills in the viewpoint of educated individuals in Afghanistan academia.

The Study Implications

In the light of the findings, the study proposed numerous implications. In terms of good English service delivery, the Ministry of Education in association with Ministry of Higher Education should assign more experienced and expert English teachers at schools and universities to teach English to students with a high quality. That is because when the students graduate from high school and universities, they may have to be equipped with English language skills. This can help them succeed in getting admission to their favorite field of studies at the bachelor and masters levels, finding jobs and expanding a network of friends and colleagues around the world. Furthermore, English should be included in entrance (country-wide) exam to be able to enter universities to continue their education at the high level. There should also be incentives allocated by the related sectors among teachers of English in both schools and universities to better create a friendly and communicative English classrooms for their students.

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