

## **Language, Employment and Economy in Bangladesh**

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**Abstract** : This article traces the intricate relationship between language, employment, and the economy in Bangladesh while addressing the challenges of fostering this connection. In an era of globalization and rapid technological advancements, the role of language proficiency in enhancing employability and driving economic growth is more crucial than ever. Besides, as a country characterized by linguistic diversity, Bangladesh faces unique challenges and opportunities in leveraging language as a catalyst for economic growth. The coexistence of Bangla as the official language and various minority languages shapes the dynamics of employment and economic development. Language proficiency, particularly in English, plays a pivotal role in enhancing employability and accessing global job markets. However, addressing disparities in language education and ensuring inclusive language policies remain key challenges for promoting equitable economic growth.

**Key-words**: language, employment, economy, linguistic diversity, language proficiency, communication skills, language policies, education, technological advancements, globalization

### **Introduction**

Language barriers pose significant obstacles in terms of employment opportunities and earning potential for individuals, especially in an increasingly globalized world. These linguistic challenges can manifest in various ways and have far-reaching effects on both individuals and societies (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). According to language economist François Grin (2006), perceptions about intricate social, political, and economic matters frequently suffer from insufficiently informed viewpoints. Thus, it becomes crucial to examine available evidence that sheds light on the correlation between English language proficiency, economic progress, and

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improved employability. This examination is pivotal in guiding both policy formulation and practical strategies (Erling et al., 2015).

Conversely, individuals lacking English competency encounter challenges in job seeking, particularly for well-compensated roles. Ineffectiveness in English proficiency translates to earnings loss (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003). Mastery of English is hence imperative for career advancement within local and international firms, as well as for facilitating the enhancement of technical knowledge and skills. Proficiency in English serves as the bedrock for developing "process skills" – problem-solving and critical thinking capabilities crucial for navigating the dynamic global work environment, in which English assumes a progressively pivotal role.

### **Language Proficiency and Employment**

In the context of Bangladesh, language proficiency holds particular significance due to the country's economic and cultural interactions on a global scale. Bengali (Bangla) is the official language of Bangladesh, and while it is widely spoken within the country, there are several ways in which language proficiency can impact employment especially international trade and businesses, outsourcing, tourism and hospitality, international organizations and so on (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013).

In today's competitive job market, effective communication skills are essential within workplaces. Particularly under the umbrella of globalization, the role of English as a communication tool holds significant importance in employment opportunities worldwide (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Rivera-Batiz, 1990; Shields & Price, 2002). English proficiency often proves decisive in securing higher-paying positions (Casale & Posel, 2011; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003) and is associated with heightened organizational productivity.

Language skills play a pivotal role in the labor market, particularly English language proficiency. Numerous studies, including research by Casale and Posel (2011) has delved into this topic. Chiswick and Miller (1996; 2002; 2005; 2007) through empirical investigations have extensively explored the correlation between the language

skills of migrants and their earnings in host countries.

Language proficiency plays a prominent role in shaping one's employment prospects and success in the professional world. In today's interconnected global economy, effective communication is a cornerstone of successful business interactions, and being proficient in the relevant languages can significantly enhance one's employability. Industries such as international trade, diplomacy, tourism, and cross-border business rely heavily on individuals who can seamlessly bridge language barriers. Fluency in multiple languages is particularly essential for roles like translators, interpreters, and international sales representatives, where accurate communication is paramount Dustmann & Fabbri (2003).

Moreover, even in fields that may not appear language-centric, such as technology or healthcare, strong language skills are still highly advantageous. Clear communication with colleagues, clients, and customers is essential for efficient collaboration and problem-solving. Employers often seek candidates who can navigate complex ideas and instructions with ease, ensuring a smooth workflow and minimizing misunderstandings. Additionally, language proficiency can bolster one's confidence during interviews and networking events, enabling them to present themselves articulately and leave a lasting impression on potential employers (Erling 2017; Khan & Chaudhury, 2012). Their findings consistently support the notion that adept language proficiency positively influences earnings. This underscores the essential connection between language competence and favorable outcomes in the labour market.

### **Language Diversity and Economic Niche**

The global count of languages present in the world is undergoing a steady decline. According to some assessments, approximately 90 percent of the 6,000 or more languages spoken worldwide are currently at risk of endangerment, and there is a high likelihood that these languages might vanish within the span of this century (Krauss 1992). A notable concern raised by numerous observers is the potential jeopardy faced by the world's cultural diversity due to these widespread language extinctions (Pool, 1970). A well-

established fact is that economic growth and development play a fundamental role in driving the diminishing array of languages found globally. This aspect is often regarded as an inexorable force that is contributing to the gradual disappearance of a significant majority of existing languages, drawing parallels to its influence on the decreasing biodiversity across the planet. This process has been likened to the way economic growth contributes to the reduction of the world's biological diversity.

The relationship between economic development and language diversity is intricate. This complexity arises from a two-way causation. One direction of causality stems from economic development to language diversity. This connection can be explained as follows: Economic progress relies on specialization and trade, necessitating a shared communication method (De Grauwe, 2006).

This, in turn, fosters the adoption of a common language. Consequently, as countries advance economically and expand their trade networks domestically and internationally, a prevalent language emerges, impacting local languages. Over time, this process can contribute to the reduction and extinction of numerous local languages, resulting in a decline in language diversity (Nettle, 1996).

Language's network externalities amplify these dynamics. Network externalities refer to how a language becomes more valuable as more people use it. As a language grows, its utility rises, motivating non-speakers to switch. This trend can lead to a scenario where everyone adopts the common language, contributing to the decline of local languages and reduced diversity (Potowski, 2010).

Conversely, there is an evident causal connection as well. A shared language enhances trade by easing communication. Extensive research on international trade patterns confirms that countries speaking the same language tend to engage in more trade. This relationship supports the idea that common languages foster both trade and subsequent economic growth.

## **Language and Global Market**

In an interconnected world where international trade and collaboration are the norm, effective communication is essential. The global market consists of diverse cultures, languages, and backgrounds. Proficiency in widely spoken languages, such as English, Spanish, Mandarin, or French, allows individuals and businesses to bridge cultural gaps and communicate with stakeholders across borders (Goodyear, 1996). International trade often involves intricate negotiations and contractual agreements. A solid grasp of the language used during negotiations ensures clarity and prevents misunderstandings that could lead to costly disputes. Accurate communication is crucial for drafting legally binding contracts that protect the interests of all parties involved (Fairclough, 2006). Being able to communicate directly with potential clients, partners, and customers allows for a more personalized approach to marketing and sales. This leads to better market penetration and a higher chance of success (Gray, 2013).

Proficiency in foreign languages enables access to valuable market research and trend analysis from international sources. This insight helps businesses understand local preferences, competition, and emerging opportunities, allowing for informed decision-making (Park, & Wee, 2012).

Language proficiency facilitates networking at international conferences, trade shows, and industry events. Engaging in meaningful conversations with peers, experts, and potential partners can lead to collaborative opportunities that would be challenging to achieve without effective communication.

## **Language Policies and Education**

Language policies formulated by governments and the design of educational curricula exert a substantial influence on the level of language proficiency within a population, which, in turn, significantly shapes the employment opportunities available to individuals. The way in which countries approach language education has far-reaching implications for their competitiveness in the global workforce and their ability to actively participate in

international trade and diplomatic engagements (Grin, 2006).

The impact of government language policies and educational systems on employment prospects is profound. Governments that establish well-structured language policies, emphasizing the teaching of languages that hold relevance in global trade, diplomacy, and technological advancements, position their citizens advantageously in the international job market. Proficiency in languages such as English, which often serves as the lingua franca of international business and communication, enhances a country's workforce competitiveness on the global stage (Islam, 2015).

This proficiency fosters effective cross-border communication, enabling individuals to seamlessly engage in negotiations, collaborate with international colleagues, and cater to diverse client bases. Conversely, an inadequately designed language education framework can result in limited employability and hinder a nation's economic growth (Tollefson, 2002). Educational curricula that fail to prioritize the teaching of languages in demand by industries and global markets place individuals at a disadvantage. Without the necessary language skills, job seekers may struggle to secure positions that require international communication and collaboration, which are increasingly integral components of today's interconnected economy (Haboud & Limerick, 2017). By offering instruction in languages that align with global trade trends and international relations, educational institutions can empower students with the linguistic tools needed to excel in a competitive job market. Moreover, these language education initiatives should be designed to cater to different proficiency levels and learning styles, ensuring that a broader spectrum of individuals can acquire the necessary language skills.

### **Technological Advancements and Language in Bangladesh**

Technological advancements are playing a transformative role in reshaping language dynamics within Bangladesh. As the country embraces digital innovation and expands its technological infrastructure, the intersection of technology and language has profound implications for communication, education, business, and

cultural exchange (Anwaruddin, 2015). Local languages are becoming more accessible through digital platforms, enabling a wider population to engage online in their native languages. This accessibility enhances digital inclusion and empowers individuals who may have been previously marginalized due to language barriers. Technological tools and applications are revolutionizing language education. Online language learning platforms provide opportunities for individuals to learn and improve their language skills at their own pace. This is particularly relevant for English proficiency, as many platforms offer English language courses that cater to the needs of learners in Bangladesh (Mallick et al., 2020).

Artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) are enabling breakthroughs in language technology. Automated translation services, chatbots, and virtual assistants are bridging language gaps and facilitating cross-border communication. These tools have the potential to enhance international trade and collaboration.

### **Challenges and Future Directions in terms of Bangladesh**

Linguistic diversity, with its potential benefits, brings along a set of challenges that can impact societal harmony and inclusiveness. These challenges are rooted in disparities in opportunities and the potential for social fragmentation. Overcoming these hurdles necessitates proactive and well-thought-out strategies, including promoting inclusive education, offering language training, ensuring equal job prospects, and preparing the workforce to navigate the transformation driven by automation and artificial intelligence (AI). While linguistic diversity can enrich a society, it might inadvertently lead to uneven access to opportunities. Individuals proficient in languages relevant to global trade, technological advancement, and cross-cultural engagement may find themselves better positioned for coveted roles. Those who lack such language skills may face barriers to accessing high-growth sectors, inadvertently exacerbating economic inequalities (Rahman, & Pandian, 2018). A diverse linguistic landscape, though valuable, can sometimes hinder effective communication and understanding. Language barriers can

sow the seeds of misinterpretation and miscommunication, potentially resulting in fractured interactions and hampered social cohesion. To address these challenges, a future-oriented approach involves investing in inclusive education that transcends linguistic boundaries. Implementing language training programs that cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds equips individuals with skills that align with global trends, ensuring equitable access to opportunities (Hamid et al., 2013).

The path forward demands strategic policies that ensure equal employment opportunities regardless of language proficiency. Organizations can play a pivotal role by fostering environments that embrace linguistic diversity and actively promote equal growth prospects. As automation and AI redefine work dynamics, language skills remain integral. Future directions should emphasize upskilling and reskilling initiatives that prepare the workforce not only for technological advancements but also for the nuanced demands of global communication (Hossain, 2016).

While striving for inclusivity, it's imperative to bridge the digital divide that can disproportionately affect certain linguistic communities. Ensuring access to technology and digital resources levels the playing field, enabling all to benefit from language-enhancing tools. Amid the pursuit of global languages, preserving cultural identities is crucial. Future efforts should acknowledge and appreciate indigenous languages and dialects, promoting their preservation alongside the pursuit of linguistic inclusivity (Erling et al., 2012). Overcoming linguistic challenges necessitates a collaborative effort involving governments, educational institutions, businesses, and civil society. By joining forces, stakeholders can design comprehensive policies that promote linguistic equity, education, and a level playing field in the job market.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the interplay between linguistic diversity's advantages and challenges underscores the need for deliberate and forward-thinking actions that harness its potential for holistic societal advancement. While the complexities of navigating multiple



languages can introduce complications, the benefits that can be reaped through skillful management and strategic planning are vast. This involves implementing comprehensive measures that foster the inclusive growth of all linguistic communities. Initiatives in inclusive education, for instance, can ensure that language diversity is not a barrier to quality learning. By providing resources and tools that cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds, educational systems can empower individuals from all walks of life, bridging gaps and enhancing social integration.

Furthermore, embracing linguistic diversity as a catalyst for economic progress requires concerted efforts toward equal employment opportunities. Policies that promote language proficiency alongside skills can help level the playing field, ensuring that individuals are not excluded from professional growth due to linguistic limitations. By valuing and supporting linguistic talents, societies can create environments where every voice contributes to the collective progress.

Ultimately, the balance between embracing linguistic diversity and addressing resulting inequalities lies at the heart of a harmonious future. Through well-considered policies, education that respects cultural identities, and a commitment to providing equal opportunities, societies can bridge divides and create environments where differences are celebrated and harnessed for collective growth. By recognizing that linguistic variety is an asset that enriches societal fabric, and by implementing measures that transform these differences into strengths, a thriving and inclusive future becomes an achievable reality.

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