

Impact Of English Proficiency On Employee Performance: A Systematic Review Of Workplace Studies

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that investigates the impact of English Language Proficiency (ELP) on employee performance across various workplace contexts. Contained on ten peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025, this review identifies patterns, contradictions, and research gaps in how English proficiency shapes job performance, communication, promotion, and organizational inclusion. Findings indicate that ELP significantly enhances productivity, team collaboration, and access to career opportunities, particularly in multinational or cross-cultural environments. However, many organizations still fail to provide sufficient training support, creating barriers for non-native speakers who experience psychological challenges such as communication anxiety and lack of confidence. Thematic analysis reveals that ELP is not only a tool for effective communication but also a symbol of global competence and professional credibility. Contradictions in the literature emerge regarding reliance on standardized English tests versus practical workplace fluency. Moreover, the review highlights a lack of longitudinal studies tracking ELP's long-term effects on career progression and leadership. This study concludes that ELP should be treated as both a strategic asset and a developmental priority within organizational policies and employee training programs. The insights provided aim to guide HR professionals, educators, and policymakers in designing more inclusive, context-specific English training that aligns with global workforce demands. The review contributes to a deeper understanding of how language proficiency can influence economic and career outcomes in an increasingly English-dominated professional landscape.

INTRODUCTION

English Language Proficiency (ELP) has become a key requirement in the global workplace. English plays an important role as a lingua franca in business communication, education, technology and international diplomacy. In an increasingly globally connected professional environment, mastery of English is no longer considered a plus, but rather a basic requirement to be able to actively participate in cross-border business activities. English proficiency enables individuals to access international information, expand their networks and perform professional duties more effectively (Graddol, 2006) (Crystal, 2012). As globalization and digital transformation increase, many companies demand a workforce that is not only technically competent but also has the ability to communicate in English. In various sectors such as tourism, information technology, higher education, and the export industry, English proficiency, especially in speaking and listening, is considered a key indicator of job success (Ting, Marzuki, & Chuah, 2017) Some multinational companies even set English as the official corporate language to strengthen cross-country coordination, such as Rakuten in Japan (Neeley, 2012). This shows that ELP is a strategic asset that can affect work efficiency, team collaboration, and involvement in organizational decision making (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

Various empirical studies have shown that ELP has a positive impact on improving individual performance, career development, and commitment to the organization. For example, research by (Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015) found that English proficiency is related to affective commitment to the company's global strategy, while (Peltokorpi, 2022) stated that employees with high English proficiency have greater opportunities for promotion and internal mobility. On the other hand, a number of studies have also highlighted the gap between English language teaching in educational institutions and

professional communication needs in the world of work. (Singh & Choo, 2012) revealed that many graduates are unable to meet the standards of oral communication required by companies, creating a gap between industry expectations and the actual competence of graduates. Similar findings also emerged in a study by (Youngblood, Ramirez, & Chen, 2021) who noted the lack of contextualized English training in the hospitality sector.

While the influence of ELPs on job performance has been widely researched, the studies are still scattered and have not been systematically analyzed. Some studies only focus on the relationship between ELPs and recruitment, while others highlight their influence on organizational loyalty and commitment. Therefore, there is a need for a literature review that is able to synthesize these findings in a comprehensive manner, in order to provide an overall picture of the strategic role of English in the world of work. Based on this background, the problem raised in this study is how English proficiency affects aspects of employee performance in the context of a globalized professional world, as well as what patterns, contradictions, and gaps emerge from previous studies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to evaluate the influence of English Language Proficiency (ELP) on employee performance in various professional work contexts. This approach is considered appropriate because it comprehensively examines empirical findings from various disciplines and countries, as well as identifying common themes, discrepancies in results, and research gaps (Md Yatim, Ne'matullah, John, Yusof, & Sulaiman, 2024). This method also offers advantages in terms of transparency and procedural replicability, which are crucial in scientific research.

This review process was structured based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines as developed by (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & The PRISMA Group, 2009). The process involved article searching, selection, quality evaluation, and thematic analysis of relevant, scientifically published literature. The articles reviewed in this study were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: studies published between 2015 and 2025 written in English, published in peer-reviewed journals, and directly addressing the relationship between ELP and work performance or organizational dynamics. Articles that focused on language learning in formal or academic educational contexts, were not written in English, or did not contain empirical data were excluded from the analysis (Ball, 2024)

A literature search was conducted in leading scientific databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using a combination of keywords such as "English language proficiency," "employee performance," "workplace communication," "language training," and "English for Specific Purposes." The initial search yielded 158 articles, which were then screened through title, abstract, and full text screening to ensure relevance to the research objectives. After the screening process, 10 primary articles were selected for further in-depth analysis (Ernawati, Widiastuti, Harun, & Biduri, 2024).

The quality of the articles was evaluated by adapting the PRISMA guidelines and considering indicators of methodological reliability and practical relevance, such as clarity of research objectives, instrument validity, and contribution to understanding ELP in the workplace context. Articles that did not meet the minimum quality standard of 75% based on the checklist were excluded from further analysis. All collected data were analyzed using a thematic approach. Each finding was coded and categorized based on key themes emerging from the literature, such as the impact of ELP on recruitment processes, workplace communication, promotion opportunities, organizational engagement, and psychological barriers experienced by non-native speakers in a global workplace (John, Yusof, & Kamil, 2021). This thematic analysis was chosen because it provides flexibility in interpreting the meaning of the qualitative data in depth and context. With this approach, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive and up to-date synthesis of the contribution of ELP to job performance and provide relevant recommendations for the development of language training policies and vocational education curricula in the global era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of ten peer-reviewed articles reveals that English Language Proficiency (ELP) plays a significant role in various aspects of employee performance. A consistent pattern across studies indicates that speaking and listening skills are the most influential components of English proficiency in workplace communication. ELP contributes not only to interpersonal interactions but also to productivity, career advancement opportunities, and organizational engagement. Several studies show that global companies prioritize ELP during recruitment and promotion processes. For instance, (Ernawati, Widiastuti, Harun, & Biduri, 2024) found that English proficiency improved collaboration and task efficiency in Indonesia’s manufacturing sector. Similarly, research by (Md Yatim, Ne’matullah, John, Yusof, & Sulaiman, 2024) and (John, Yusof, & Kamil, 2021) identified English skills as a strong indicator of professional competence and upward mobility. Beyond technical communication, ELP was also associated with enhanced self-confidence and social acceptance in multicultural work settings.

However, a substantial training gap remains. According to (Pearson, 2025), although 90% of employees acknowledge the importance of English training, only 30% of organizations provide it. This mismatch creates communication barriers that hinder employee performance, especially among non-native speakers. (Ball, 2024) highlighted psychological challenges such as communication anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of making mistakes as common issues affecting participation in teamwork and decision-making. Collectively, the reviewed studies affirm that ELP is a valuable asset in navigating the demands of a globalized workplace. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of ELP depends heavily on context-sensitive training programs, inclusive organizational culture, and strong institutional support. To clarify the pattern of ELP contributions to job performance, and to identify similarities and differences across studies, the following table presents a summary of the main findings from the reviewed articles.

No.	Author(s) & Year	Context/Country	Main Findings	Additional Notes
1	Ernawati et al. (2024)	Indonesia	ELP improves productivity and team collaboration in the manufacturing sector	Speaking skills were most influential
2	Md Yatim et al. (2024)	Multinational	English skills influence promotion opportunities and cross-departmental mobility	Important for recruitment and career development
3	John et al. (2021)	Global/ASEAN	ELP associated with professional credibility and employer trust	Seen as a sign of global competence
4	Pearson (2025)	Global	90% of employees need English training, but only 30% of companies provide it	Reveals a major training gap
5	Ball (2024)	Global	Non-native speakers experience anxiety and lack of confidence when using English	Affects informal interaction and team engagement
6	Ting et al. (2021)	Malaysia	Graduates struggle with interactive spoken communication despite academic English ability	Need for ESP and workplace-context training
7	Peltokorpi (2022)	Japan	ELP enhances promotion and access to internal decision-making networks	Functions as symbolic capital
8	Yamao & Sekiguchi (2015)	Japan	ELP linked to affective and normative commitment to globalization strategies	No correlation with continuance

				(financial) commitment
9	Clement & Murugavel (2018)	India	Speaking proficiency is key for interviews and promotion	Fluency impacts career mobility
10	Neeley (2012)	Japan (Rakuten)	English-only policy caused anxiety and social exclusion among non-native speakers	Highlights the need for HR language support

DISCUSSION

In response to the first research question how English language proficiency influences various aspects of employee performance it is evident that ELP plays a critical role across multiple dimensions of professional life. ELP enhances interpersonal communication, task efficiency, access to promotion opportunities, and social integration in diverse teams. It is not just a communication skill but a marker of global competence, as emphasized by (Md Yatim, Ne’matullah, John, Yusof, & Sulaiman, 2024) and (Ernawati, Widiastuti, Harun, & Biduri, 2024). Employees with strong English skills are better equipped to contribute in international forums, understand cross-border documentation, and build professional relationships across cultures.

Regarding the second research question, which explores patterns, contradictions, and research gaps, several key insights emerged. A recurring pattern is that while organizations recognize the importance of ELP, few provide the training required to support it (Pearson, 2025). Another common contradiction lies in the emphasis on formal test scores (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS) during recruitment versus the actual need for informal, functional communication in the workplace (Ball, 2024). This suggests that standardized testing may not fully reflect the communicative demands of real-world work environments.

Moreover, the review reveals a research gap in longitudinal studies tracking how ELP influences long-term career development and leadership trajectories. Most studies adopt cross-sectional designs, which limits understanding of how English proficiency evolves and interacts with workplace experience over time. Future research should explore ELP as a dynamic competency that grows and shifts with professional roles and responsibilities. In summary, the findings affirm that English language proficiency is no longer optional but essential in today’s global labor market. However, to maximize its impact, organizations and educators must go beyond standardized assessments and invest in continuous, contextual, and inclusive language development initiatives.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has examined the role of English language proficiency (ELP) in shaping various dimensions of employee performance in diverse workplace contexts. Drawing from ten peer-reviewed studies, the findings consistently show that ELP significantly enhances communication effectiveness, team collaboration, career mobility, and overall organizational engagement. Employees with strong English proficiency are more likely to be trusted by employers, promoted to cross-functional roles, and integrated into multicultural teams.

Furthermore, the review highlighting improvements awareness among companies of the strategic importance of English skills. However, this awareness is not yet matched by concrete institutional efforts, as many organizations still lack adequate language training programs. Non-native speakers often face psychological barriers such as communication anxiety and self-doubt, which hinder their participation in decision-making and informal work interactions. These challenges suggest that ELP must be addressed not only as a skill but also as an emotional and social competency.

The review also identifies critical gaps in existing research. Most studies focus on short-term outcomes or recruitment contexts, while long-term effects of ELP on leadership development, job retention, and innovation remain underexplored. Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches to understand how English proficiency evolves across career trajectories and how it interacts with organizational support systems. In conclusion, English language proficiency is a vital factor in modern

workforce performance. It functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a strategic asset that shapes professional identity and opportunity. Stakeholders including educators, HR departments, and policymakers must collaborate to bridge the gap between language expectations and employee support by implementing targeted, context-specific training initiatives.

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