

The Role of English as a Global Language in Shaping Future Economies and Saudi Arabia's Economic Growth and Global Integration: A Review Article

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Abstract

English plays a significant role in facilitating global economic interaction through international trade, knowledge exchange, and access to global markets. It has become a key language of business, technology, innovation, and higher education, and is increasingly associated with economic development. In Saudi Arabia, ongoing transformations under Vision 2030—particularly in economic diversification, innovation, and global competitiveness—have further increased the strategic importance of English. As the country expands its global engagement and participation in international markets, English supports communication, collaboration, and knowledge transfer across sectors. This study adopts a qualitative review approach to examine the role of English as a global language in shaping economic outcomes, with reference to Saudi Arabia's economic growth and global integration. The analysis draws on a range of existing research sources, including journal articles, case studies, policy reports, and academic publications. The selected studies explore the relationship between English proficiency and key economic dimensions, including labor and employment, trade and global integration, human capital development, the digital economy and innovation, and foreign investment and tourism. These dimensions align with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). The findings suggest that English proficiency is consistently associated with positive economic outcomes across multiple domains. Rather than acting as a standalone skill, English appears to serve as an instrumental factor supporting workforce development, international engagement, and participation in knowledge-based economies. While the study does not establish causal relationships, it highlights recurring patterns in the literature linking English to broader processes of economic development and global integration. These insights are particularly relevant to Saudi Arabia's efforts to enhance human capital, strengthen global competitiveness, and achieve sustainable economic transformation.

Keywords: English proficiency; economic development; global integration; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Saudi Arabia.

1. Introduction

English is central to globalization, serving as the primary means of communication in international trade, science, diplomacy, and education. In commerce, economic power has made English the language of banking, finance, and business transactions worldwide. English has become the language of communication and cooperation in science and technology. In diplomacy, English is either an official or working language of international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, ASEAN, and others. In education, English is becoming the medium of instruction in higher learning institutions worldwide, providing access to knowledge, especially in science and technology. These roles highlight the significance of English in global cooperation, growth, and information sharing (Crystal, 2003). English has gained the status of a global language and continues to expand its dominance. This increase can be attributed to several factors, especially economic influence. English has evolved and is spoken by millions worldwide. Transportation, international trade, and advances in communication have significantly contributed to its spread. English is regarded as a vehicle of economic growth (El Garras, 2025).

Cross-border relations in trade, diplomacy, tourism, and education have been on the rise amid globalization and the digital age. This increased interconnectivity demands a common communication channel to maintain global interactions. English has served as the global lingua franca. In non-English-speaking countries, economic outcomes largely depend on English language proficiency. On the individual level, higher proficiency means greater employability and higher wages. At the national scale, a high level of English proficiency is viewed as a valuable factor for economic development (Li et al., 2022). Moreover, the English language cannot be underrated in its macroeconomic importance. It helps the growth of international trade and investment by minimizing communication barriers among economies. The absence of a common language may hinder business, indicating linguistic limitations. English also facilitates growth and interaction in all aspects, be it in economic, societal, or personal. Research indicates a positive relationship between English proficiency and economic development in both Europe and Asia. Besides, English tends to lower transaction costs compared to other languages like French, Spanish, or Arabic. It is worth noting that a shared language, such as English, has a greater economic effect on foreign direct

investment than trade itself (Alhendi, D ávid, Fodor, Adol, & Balogh, 2021).

Furthermore, English as a universal means of communication is a very important social, cultural, intellectual, linguistic, political, and economic entity. The rising global demand for competent English users has created an urgent need for high-quality English language education worldwide. As a result, most countries, including Saudi Arabia, have sought to balance English-language teaching with their national development objectives. In this context, the Saudi Ministry of Education has enhanced the teaching of English as a foreign language to advance the country's national interests. Therefore, with the changing environment characterized by the 'new economy', 'new knowledge', and 'new vocationalism', Saudi Arabia needs to adopt effective measures to ensure it achieves a high level of English literacy (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). In line with Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia remains determined to transform the education system by enhancing and modernizing the learning environment. The vision is also instrumental in educating English-language workers and in enabling job seekers to gain the skills to use English alongside Arabic. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is important in Saudi Arabia, as it facilitates international investment and overall economic growth. Therefore, fluency in English is currently viewed as a necessity in the job market. This increased focus on the English language is reflected in English-language programs and school-university curricula in the country (Banafi, 2025).

Despite growing evidence linking English proficiency to economic outcomes, existing research remains fragmented and has largely focused on specific sectors or individual dimensions of economic development. In Saudi Arabia, previous studies have primarily examined the role of English in educational reform, curriculum development, and workforce preparation in relation to Vision 2030. Consequently, there is a lack of comprehensive review studies that synthesize the broader economic significance of English, particularly its implications for labor markets, trade, innovation, economic growth, and global integration within Saudi Arabia's transition toward a knowledge-based and future economy. Addressing this gap is important because a clearer understanding of the economic role of English can inform language policies and support the country's long-term development objectives.

Against this background, the present review synthesizes evidence from diverse academic and policy sources to examine the role of English as a global language in shaping future economies and its implications for Saudi Arabia's economic growth and global integration. Accordingly, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between English proficiency and economic development and is guided by the following research questions.

This study addresses the following research questions: (1) What trends and findings have past research revealed about the relationship between English language proficiency and global economic growth? (2) What role does English language proficiency play in economic growth and global integration, based on existing research? (3) What are the various dimensions of economic development and growth that are influenced by English language proficiency?

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Proficiency and Economic Integration in a Globalized World

English, as the lingua franca, has been embraced by native and non-native speakers alike as a means of communication in business and organizational settings. It is needed across all major sectors, including science, trade, education, tourism, and banking (Rao, 2019). English language proficiency in global economic integration is considered an effective indicator of a nation's ability to drive economic growth by producing goods and services. It also has a positive correlation with national investments in human capital, such as education, health promotion, and standards of living. The fact that the adult population is more proficient in English, especially across a range of economic sectors, indicates a more flexible and internationally oriented workforce (Education First, 2024). Learning English is more than a personal objective for many individuals around the world; it has also become an economic necessity. In non-English-speaking nations such as China, Russia, and Brazil, proficiency in English leads to better opportunities at both the local and international levels. Proficiency is directly associated with income levels, as individuals with a strong command of English tend to have above-average incomes. On the personal level, improved language skills offer more employment opportunities and improved living conditions (McCormick, 2013).

English contributes to international commerce and economic growth, facilitating market access, reducing communication barriers, and supporting global trade. Investment in English language education also contributes to human capital development by equipping individuals with the skills needed to compete in the global economy and participate more effectively in international economic activities (Chowdhury et al., 2024). As the dominant language of business, digital communication, and professional networks, English enables companies to engage more effectively in cross-border transactions, reduce communication barriers, and access international opportunities (La Voz de Lanzarote, 2025). Consequently, many countries increasingly regard English as a strategic asset and an integral component of development policies aimed at promoting trade, innovation, and sustainable economic growth. English proficiency also supports transnational interaction and collaboration and contributes to economic competitiveness and international trade performance (Shaharuddin, Wahab, Safian, & Osman, 2022).

Overall, the literature suggests that English has become an important medium of international communication and economic integration, particularly in business and global markets. Consequently, English proficiency is increasingly regarded as both a personal and national economic asset that supports employment, productivity, and participation in the global economy.

2.2 English Language in Saudi Arabia: An Overview

In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education's initiative to teach English in the first grade of primary school was intended to enhance early language development and improve overall educational outcomes. Today, it contributes to Vision 2030 by equipping students with the skills needed to fit into the modern labor market. As the country has expanded its economic openness and is increasingly engaged with international industries, English skills are becoming more important. The Ministry aims to improve students' skills in speaking, reading, and writing English, bridging the gap between academic preparation and labor market demands. The reform also aims to ensure that graduates are better positioned to contribute to national development and to align education with the human capability development program and the country's vision (Ministry of Education, 2021). Under Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has decided to equip its workforce to become highly proficient in English so that it remains competitive in the global arena and supports economic and social development. English proficiency is in high demand and is becoming a prerequisite in many professions. This growing need reflects a new awareness of English's role in fostering science and technology in Saudi Arabia (Al-Seghayer, 2023).

As Saudi Arabia advances toward the goals of Vision 2030, English can facilitate the nation's achievements through economic diversification, innovation, and globalization, which are driving workforce development and international engagement. Through the implementation of educational programs, the country is training its people to meet future needs and ensure it becomes globally competitive. These efforts are evidence of a broader shift in educational policy, where English proficiency is viewed as the gateway to future cooperation with the global world, access to new economic horizons, and the full use of human resources. Despite the increasing role of English, Saudi Arabia ranks 108th out of 113 countries on the EF English Proficiency Index. This low score highlights the urgency of significant improvement in English teaching among Saudi citizens (Mayor, 2024). English proficiency offers clear economic benefits in Saudi Arabia and is increasingly regarded as an important factor in employability and career advancement. Given the widespread use of English in many workplaces, strong language skills are becoming increasingly valuable in the Saudi labor market (Pearson, 2024).

Overall, in line with Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia increasingly views English proficiency as a strategic asset for human capital development, economic diversification, and global competitiveness. Investments in English education reflect the country's commitment to preparing its workforce for participation in an increasingly globalized and knowledge-based economy.

2.3 Previous Studies

This review critically examines the role of English in shaping global economies and explores how its status as a global language is associated with patterns of economic growth. The literature suggests that countries that strategically promote English language proficiency often gain a competitive advantage in the global economy. Previous research broadly associates English proficiency with economic development and global integration across diverse contexts (see, e.g., Adawiyah & Gumartifa, 2022; Agustiana et al., 2024; Atadjanova & Kurbanova, 2023; Chowdhury et al., 2024; Fonseca & Arias, 2022; Lekha & Kanthimathi, 2021; Li et al., 2022; Newman, 2023; Ozaki, 2022; Sadaf et al., 2025; Sakhare, 2024; Vidak & Golemac, 2021).

In Saudi Arabia, several studies have examined the relationship between English language proficiency and economic outcomes, particularly in relation to achieving the objectives of Vision 2030.

A major strand of the literature focuses on English language policy and educational reform as mechanisms for supporting economic diversification and human capital development. Al-Mwzaiji and Muhammad (2023) argued that Vision 2030's emphasis on economic diversification, globalization, and private-sector development has increased the demand for stronger English education. They recommended reforms in curriculum development, teacher training, and quality assurance, concluding that English proficiency is essential for economic diversification and human capital development. Similarly, Ismail and Namaziandost (2025) examined the relationship between EFL policy, economic transformation, and sustainable development and identified gaps in the current curriculum, particularly the absence of ESP in STEM disciplines. They proposed policy reforms, industry-specific skills, and stronger public-private collaboration to support human capital development and sustainable economic diversification. Likewise, Ndiaye et al. (2024) evaluated ELT strategies, curricula, and course specifications and concluded that, despite the strategic importance of English to Vision 2030, the development of ELT and EFL practices remains slow and requires further improvement.

Another line of research emphasizes the alignment of English curricula with labor market needs and future economic projects. Karim and Jamshed (2023) investigated how business English curricula in Saudi universities correspond to the linguistic requirements of Vision 2030, particularly in anticipation of the NEOM project. Their findings showed that students generally viewed the ESP curriculum as effective in developing the linguistic skills needed to meet the changing demands of the Saudi labor market. Similarly, Al-Mukhallafi (2019) examined the effectiveness of English language teaching in Saudi universities and highlighted the importance of equipping young people with English skills for labor market participation. However, the study concluded that shortcomings in instructional quality and institutional support continue to hinder the achievement of Vision 2030's educational objectives.

A third area of research concerns the contribution of English language programs to workforce preparation and socioeconomic development. Banafi (2025) explored students' perceptions of the extent to which English Language Programs align with Vision 2030 and found that these programs are contributing to the preparation of graduates for the labor market. Nevertheless, the study also emphasized the need for further improvements in university-level English education to maximize its socioeconomic benefits in Saudi Arabia.

Despite the contributions of existing research, the broader economic significance of English in Saudi Arabia, particularly its role in labor

markets, economic growth, and global integration, remains underexplored. Accordingly, the present review synthesizes evidence from diverse academic and policy sources to examine the relationship between English proficiency and economic development and to highlight its implications for Saudi Arabia's economic growth and global integration. The findings may contribute to the development of more effective language policies and a better understanding of the socioeconomic value of English in the Saudi context.

3. Methodology

This qualitative review examines the role of English as a global language in shaping global economies and its relevance to Saudi Arabia's economic growth and global integration. The study is contextualized by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), as well as by human capital development, workforce participation, innovation, and sustainable economic transformation. Data sources included academic and institutional resources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical and case studies, conference papers, policy reports, and academic books published between 2010 and 2025. These sources were identified through databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR, as well as institutional repositories such as EF Education First and the British Council. Keywords that guided the search process included: *English language proficiency*, *English and economic growth*, *employability and English*, *English and globalization*, *human capital and language*, and *English and trade*. Reference lists of other studies were also reviewed to identify additional sources. The study adheres to a systematic screening method inspired by PRISMA to enhance transparency. However, because this is a qualitative review and purposive sampling is used, the process is not described quantitatively. The research included four steps in the selection process: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, as presented in Figure 1.

PRISMA-Inspired Study Selection Flow

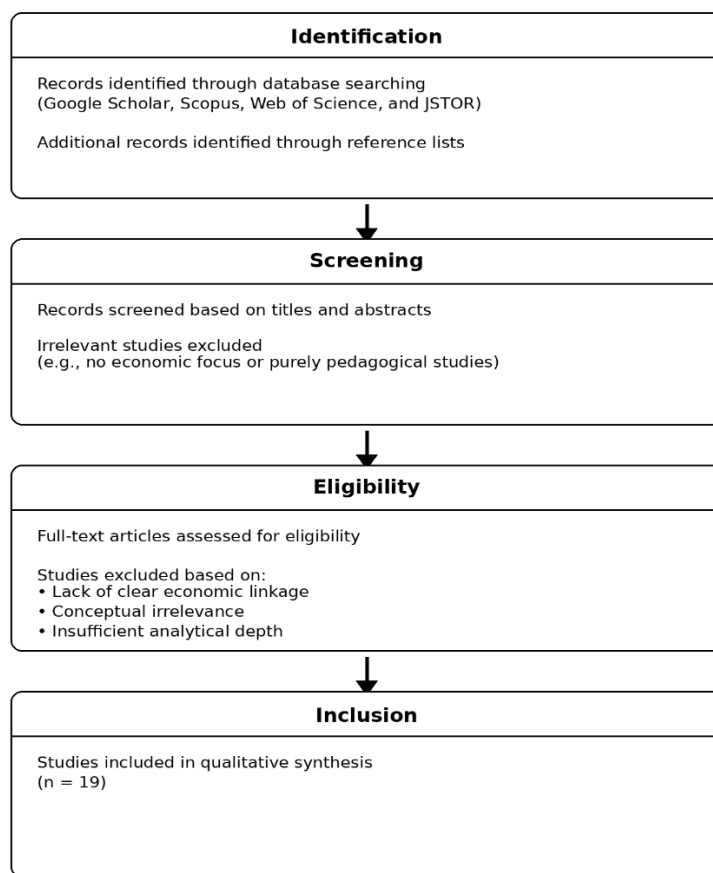


Figure 1. Study selection process (PRISMA-inspired framework adapted for qualitative review).

The review of the studies was conducted in two stages: first at the title and abstract level and then at the full-text level. A total of 19 studies were selected through purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) for their conceptual relevance to the research objectives. Studies were included if they clearly addressed the relationship between English language proficiency (or English as a medium of communication) and economic outcomes such as employment, income, productivity, trade, or human capital development. Studies that focused solely on English language teaching without a clear economic connection were excluded. The selected studies were analyzed individually, and key information—such as authorship, year, focus, and economic implications—was systematically extracted (see Table 1). The findings of this review are organized around six core themes derived through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes represent

SDG-linked economic dimensions: (1) labor and employment, (2) trade, commerce, and global integration, (3) human capital and education, (4) digital economy and innovation, (5) macroeconomic growth and development, and (6) foreign investment, tourism, and other sectors (see Figure 2).

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings from 19 international research sources that examine the economic importance of the English language, highlighting its complex role in shaping global economies. The evidence indicates that English proficiency is consistently associated with multiple dimensions of economic development. Table 1 lists the selected research sources, including journal articles, surveys, case studies, conference papers, policy papers, and scholarly books. These findings are further categorized into several themes to illustrate the implications and impact of English on global economic development and to provide better insight into the economic effects of English proficiency. This thematic organization is based on the synthesis of the literature reviewed, and the results are consistent with the conclusion that English language proficiency is multidimensionally related to economic outcomes. Across the literature, common trends connect English to major economic areas, analyzed as themes, that include: (1) labor and employment, (2) trade, commerce, and global integration, (3) human capital and education, (4) digital economy and innovation, (5) macroeconomic growth and development, and (6) foreign investment, tourism, and other sectors – represented in Figure 2. These themes reflect the diversity of impacts and the recurrence of patterns across global and regional studies. This study demonstrates that English has an impact on various sectors of the economy, including labor markets and trade, as well as on human capital development, innovation, and foreign investment. These findings align with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), underscoring the importance of English proficiency for sustainable economic development. The findings below answer the research questions by evaluating trends in the existing literature (RQ1), defining the role of English across different areas of the economy (RQ2), and identifying the main aspects of economic growth affected by English proficiency (RQ3).

4.1 Labor and Employment

Among the most common findings is that English proficiency increases competitiveness in the labor market and individual employability (see Table 1/ Figure 2). Regarding language competence, McCormick (2013) noted that English proficiency has become a key element in the labor market, economic growth, and global integration, and that it brings high wages, revealing that language proficiency is closely linked to competitiveness in recruitment procedures and global competitiveness. Similarly, Erling and Seargeant (2013) report that proficiency in the English language offers greater access to the labor market and opens doors to global labor markets. More recent studies also support this theme. According to Sadaf et al. (2025), English is one of the elements of human capital development, which enables access to high-skilled, high-paying jobs, facilitating social mobility and economic inclusion. They find that English proficiency not only raises wages but also broadens work opportunities in the globalized sector. Similarly, English proficiency levels improve labor market performance through better workplace communication and competitiveness (Education First, 2024). Likewise, Li et al. (2022) relate English proficiency to higher employability and increased income.

Another related study by Roshid (2018) shows that the English language makes people economically stronger by providing access to better jobs and career growth. According to Lekha and Kanthimathi (2021), English is a key consideration in recruitment, outsourcing, and access to high-paying jobs, which not only leads to personal income growth but also increases the service industry's national output. Fonseca and Arias (2022) also observe that English fluency is a vital factor in the workplace across commerce, tourism, and business, and is increasingly a focus of educational reforms aimed at building an employment-ready workforce. Taken together, these studies point to English as a kind of labor capital that helps people gain access to more and better employment opportunities, higher wages, and more secure employment, as well as to the harmonization of national labor markets with international standards. The results are well aligned with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), particularly regarding employability, productive employment, and inclusive participation in the labor market.

Collectively, these findings associate English proficiency with broader access to employment, higher earnings, and labor market participation. However, the literature primarily demonstrates a positive association rather than a direct causal relationship between English proficiency and labor market success.

4.2 Trade, Commerce, and Global Integration

Another dominant finding underscores the significance of the English language in promoting international trade and globalization (see Table 1/ Figure 2). In this regard, Sakhare (2024) illustrates that the English language enhances international trade, market access, and economic growth, and even non-urban areas are offered economic opportunities. Similarly, Agustiana et al. (2024) argue that international business performance is tied to labor productivity and that English is a primary factor in business growth, efficiency, and negotiation. Chowdhury et al. (2024) support this trend, stating that English is a key to international business, market access, and the knowledge economy. Similarly, Roshid (2018) links English proficiency to facilitating trade and improving business efficiency, particularly by minimizing trade barriers worldwide. At the macroeconomic level, Ufier (2015) demonstrates that English proficiency increases exports, national income, and access to global markets by increasing industrial competitiveness.

Building on this evidence, Li et al. (2022) associate English proficiency with international trade performance and competitiveness, thereby justifying its contribution to economic development policies in Asia (e.g., South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan). In addition, as Brooker (2018) notes, English also enables access to the global economy, and competence in national languages is directly associated

with international competitiveness. Similarly, Erling and Seargeant (2013) underscore the importance of English in international trade. Besides, as a lingua franca in global trade and cooperation, English plays an increasingly important role in globalization (Education First, 2024). Similarly, Adawiyah and Gumartifa (2022) prioritize the English language as a means of accessing international markets through cross-border business communication. Collectively, these studies show that the economic value of English is inevitable because it facilitates international trade, commerce, and greater integration of the world into the trade networks. These findings align with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), particularly regarding the expansion of trade scope, productivity, and integration into the global economy.

Collectively, the reviewed studies indicate that English facilitates international trade and economic integration by reducing communication barriers and improving access to global markets. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that English should be viewed as an enabling factor that supports international engagement rather than the sole determinant of trade performance and competitiveness.

4.3 Human Capital and Education

The role of English in human capital development may be considered one of the issues observed in the reviewed studies (see Table 1/Figure 2). As illustrated by Sadaf et al. (2025), the development of human capital is closely tied to English language proficiency, as it is associated with higher wages and promotions. Similarly, Chowdhury et al. (2024) identify English as a major element of the knowledge economy and labor market development and highlight its role in long-term skill formation and human capital improvement. On the policy front, Atadjanova and Kurbanova (2023) highlight the possibility of incorporating English into economic planning, thereby ensuring access to world markets and adherence to global development goals. Ufier (2015) also corroborates this idea by treating investments in English proficiency as human capital investments that bring national competitiveness and income growth. Likewise, Roshid (2018) builds on this argument by envisioning English as an economic capital, in which language proficiency empowers individuals and states economically by creating a labor force that can compete in global markets. Here, the English language serves as a strategic human resource to improve learning outcomes, performance, and innovation. These outcomes relate to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) – skills development, labor readiness, and sustainable economic progress.

Overall, the literature highlights English proficiency as an important component of human capital development and long-term skill formation. However, the reviewed studies also imply that the economic benefits of English are likely to depend on how effectively language education is aligned with broader educational and labor market needs.

4.4 Digital Economy and Innovation

English has come into the limelight for its role in technological growth, outsourcing, and the expansion of the service sector. Mastery of English enables economies to participate in the digital age and foster innovation-based growth. As shown in Table 1/Figure 2, Lekha and Kanthimathi (2021) demonstrate that English fosters growth in outsourcing and the service sector, international trade, foreign business operations, and online jobs in the digital economy. Similarly, Vidak and Golemac (2021) link English proficiency to the integration of the digital economy, income levels, workforce competence, and overall economic and social development. Adawiyah and Gumartifa (2022) argue that English proficiency promotes entrepreneurship and innovation and improves labor competitiveness. Their examination shows that English enables participation in globalized, innovation-based entrepreneurial activities. Ozaki (2022) provides further evidence that English has contributed to the growth of the service sector, labor and industrial relations, human capital development, and foreign investment inflows. Overall, the ability to communicate in English is a key driver of digital participation and innovation, connecting local workforces to global markets. It supports traditional service industries while also creating opportunities in technology-based industries, entrepreneurship, and outsourcing. These results indicate that English proficiency should not be analyzed separately from innovation, digital literacy, and competitiveness in the service sector. These findings align with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) regarding digital innovation, service-sector growth, and productivity.

The findings collectively suggest that English facilitates participation in digital and innovation-driven economies by improving access to information, technology, and international collaboration. However, the reviewed evidence presents English as a supporting component of service-sector growth and entrepreneurship rather than as an independent cause of digital transformation.

4.5 Macroeconomic Growth and Development

Various studies confirm macroeconomic benefits associated with English proficiency (see Table 1/ Figure 2). At the macroeconomic level, English proficiency is significant for the economic growth and development of nations. McCormick (2013) directly correlates English proficiency with economic growth, gross national income, and global integration, demonstrating that it affects recruitment, development, and competitiveness. In the same vein, a report by Education First (2024) highlights the role of English in enhancing national competitiveness, innovation, and workplace performance in a more globalized economy. These results depict a strong relationship between English proficiency and economic growth. Additionally, Ufier (2015) demonstrates that mastering English helps increase national income, exports, and returns on investment in human capital, largely because domestic industries become more competitive and more internationally oriented. Vidak and Golemac (2021) go even further by linking English proficiency to broader economic and social development, income growth, and the transition into the digital workforce. Similarly, Wu et al. (2019) suggest that language skills and economic dominance are inseparable and find correlations between English proficiency, regional output, market growth, and national competitiveness. Overall, these studies have shown that English proficiency is an important macroeconomic factor driving long-run economic growth, industrial productivity, and international competitiveness. It affects the level of national income, boosts industrial

performance, and improves a country's standing in the world economy. These macroeconomic outcomes are closely aligned with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), particularly in terms of productivity, competitiveness, and sustainable economic development.

Although the reviewed studies consistently report positive associations between English proficiency and macroeconomic indicators such as national income, competitiveness, and productivity, the evidence remains largely correlational. Therefore, the literature suggests that English proficiency should be understood as one of several factors associated with economic development rather than as an independent driver of growth.

4.6 Foreign Investment, Tourism, and Other Sectors

The findings also indicate that English promotes market-specific development in investing, tourism, and business (see Table 1/Figure 2). Brooker (2018) emphasizes that it contributes to attracting foreign investment and developing competitive, skilled human capital in line with global development priorities. Similarly, a report released by the British Council (2010) identifies English as an effective driver of foreign investment, export growth, and employment and skills development. According to Fonseca and Arias (2022), English proficiency is a key factor facilitating greater access to work, trade, business, tourism, and corporate communication. Their results also indicate that English facilitates the formulation of national curricula and enhances competitiveness in the global market. This view is supported by Sakhare (2024), who shows that English encourages business and trade development and enhances market access. It has thus been proposed that English education is significant for economic integration, employment, and the maintenance of a balance in language use. The findings suggest that to be globally competitive and diversify the sector, English skills are vital. Around the world, under different economic conditions, English is used to conduct economic operations across sectors, further reaffirming its status as a significant economic driver. Overall, the studies reviewed indicate that English proficiency supports economic growth at the individual and national levels, facilitating increases in income, development indicators, and foreign investment. Consequently, English is becoming a strategic resource in national policy deliberations and global business competition. These sector-specific findings are directly aligned with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) in terms of job creation, investment facilitation, and sustainable growth.

Taken together, the reviewed evidence shows that the economic contribution of English extends across employment, trade, innovation, services, and investment. However, the breadth of these associations also indicates that English operates through interconnected educational, institutional, and market processes rather than producing uniform economic effects across all countries and sectors.

For RQ1, which examines trends and insights from previous research, the reviewed studies consistently demonstrate a strong relationship between English language proficiency and economic outcomes across a range of contexts. As discussed in Sections 4.1–4.6, the literature reveals recurring patterns linking English proficiency to multiple dimensions of economic development and global integration.

In relation to RQ2, the findings indicate several ways in which English proficiency is linked to economic growth and global integration. Specifically, English improves access to labor markets by strengthening the communication skills required in professional settings, thereby enhancing employability and earning potential. It also supports international trade and global business by facilitating cross-border communication and reducing language barriers. Furthermore, English enables knowledge sharing and innovation by providing access to global research, digital content, and technological advancements. It also helps align education systems with labor market demands, particularly through approaches such as English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), patterns that are consistently reflected across the reviewed literature.

Regarding RQ3, the results confirm that English proficiency is linked to multiple aspects of economic development, as reflected in the six thematic areas identified in this study: labor and employment; trade and global integration; human capital and education; the digital economy and innovation; macroeconomic growth; and foreign investment and tourism. These areas are closely interconnected and collectively demonstrate the multifaceted contribution of English to economic development.

Across the six thematic areas, the reviewed literature consistently portrays English as an important enabling resource that supports participation in labor markets, international trade, innovation, and global economic integration. Rather than functioning as a standalone determinant of economic growth, English proficiency appears to contribute to economic development through its interaction with broader educational, institutional, and economic processes.

Table 1. Review of research on the correlation between the English language and economic growth

S/N	Researcher(s)	Type of Research	Year	Region	Focus	Key Research Findings	Related Economic Implications
1.	Sadaf et al. (2025)	Academic Journal Article	2025	Global	English, globalization, and economic opportunities	English is valuable capital in globalization—boosting careers, income, and mobility. It is essential in high-tech, finance, and tourism, offering wage premiums and better prospects.	Human capital development High-skill & high-wage employment Social mobility & economic inclusion
2.	Sakhare, A. S.	Academic Journal Article	2024	Global	English, commerce, international perspective	English is vital for international commerce—facilitating transactions, trade, and market access, etc. Promoting English education enables employment, economic integration, and balanced language use.	Economic development International trade facilitation Market access & expansion
3.	Agustiana et al.	Academic Journal Article	2024	Indonesia / Global Context	English language proficiency, the global economy, and business communication	English proficiency enhances smoother business operations, particularly in international collaboration and negotiations. Company training in English fosters productivity and global competitiveness.	International trade Labor productivity Cross-border business growth Human capital development
4.	Chowdhury et al.	Academic Journal Article	2024	Global	English in global trade, economic development, and international commerce	The English language serves as a vehicle for trade, legal communication, and access to knowledge. It fosters human capital and cultural exchange, acting as a catalyst for economic growth.	International trade Market access Knowledge economy Workforce development
5.	Education First	Global Index Report	2024	Global	Global benchmarking	English boosts competitiveness, supports innovation, and improves workplace communication in a globalized world.	Economic growth Global cooperation Innovation Labor market
6.	Atadjanova & Kurbanova	Conference Paper	2023	Global	language and economics	Language shapes economic, social, and human development and plays a role in economic policy and global market integration.	Language policy Global market access
7.	Adawiyah, D., & Gumartifa, A.	Case Study	2022	Indonesia / Global	English language teaching, globalization, and economic growth	English is key to globalization and business—vital for workforce mobility, global market access, and innovation-driven entrepreneurship.	Economic growth Entrepreneurship & innovation Labor market competitiveness
8.	Fonseca, K. A. B., & Arias, R. S.	Case Study	2022	Costa Rica	English for education and economy	English enables participation in business, tourism, and commerce. It is essential for employment and for the national curriculum to prepare a globally competitive workforce.	Employment & job opportunities Commerce & trade Tourism industry Corporate communication
9.	Li et al.	Empirical Panel Study	2022	Asia	English proficiency and economic development	English enhances development via competitiveness, employability, and income. Countries prioritize English proficiency to support economic development.	Global integration Human capital development International trade & competitiveness Labor market outcomes
10.	Ozaki	Review Study	2022	Philippines	Impact of English on economic development	English contributes to the economy through the call center and ESL sectors. It is rooted in education and drives growth in outsourcing. English is important for the workplace and overseas employment.	Services sector growth Labor dynamics Industrial growth Human capital development Foreign investment

11.	Lekha, M. S. & Kanthimathi, K.	Academic Journal Article	2021	India / Developing Countries	Linkage between English and economics	English drives growth—boosting jobs and salaries, improving social mobility, and promoting communication and competitiveness in trade, outsourcing, and the digital economy.	Outsourcing & service sector growth Human capital development International trade & business communication Digital economy & internet-based jobs
12.	Vidak, N., & Golemac, Z.	Survey / Academic Study	2021	Croatia / Global	English language and economy in the digital world	English is essential to the workforce in the digital economy—linked to income, global access, and better economic outcomes.	Economic & social development Income levels Digital economy integration
13.	Wu et al.	Conference Paper	2019	China	Language and economic interaction	Language aligns with economic power. English and Japanese are growing in influence due to globalization and MNCs, affecting workforce adaptability and regional productivity.	Workforce competence Economic attractiveness Regional productivity Market expansion & global competitiveness Workforce adaptability
14.	Brooker, D.	Review Research Article	2018	Global	English language, socio-economic development	English enhances employability, income, and competitiveness. It supports foreign investment and SDGs, forming part of national development policies.	Higher employability & earnings Participation in the global economy Competitive & skilled workforce
15.	Roshid, M. M.	Book Chapter	2018	Global / Bangladesh	English, empowerment, and economic development	English empowers people economically through better jobs and global communication. Gaps in English education hinder labor market alignment.	Language as economic capital Employment & career advancement Trade facilitation & business efficiency
16.	Ufier, A.	Academic Study	2015	139 Countries	English language skills and national income	English improves national income and exports by making domestic industries more competitive and globally connected.	National income Exports Human capital investments Global market access
17.	McCormick, K.	Research Article	2013	Global	English language, economic growth	English drives economic growth and higher salaries, influencing GDP, GNI, and HDI. It is essential for recruitment, development, and global competitiveness.	Labor market competitiveness Economic growth Global integration Gross national income
18.	Erling, E. J. & Seargeant, P.	Book / Policy Study	2013	India, Bangladesh, Africa	English and development	English supports development—boosting access to jobs, competitiveness, and policy alignment for globalization.	Labor market competitiveness Participation in global trade Better job access
19.	British Council	Organizational Report	2010	Global	Policy and globalization	English supports job access, investment, exports, and middle-class growth and international development.	Employment & skills development Foreign investment attraction Export growth



Figure 2. Economic impacts of English proficiency by theme: An overview

4.7 English Proficiency and Saudi Arabia's Economic Growth and Global Integration

Under Vision 2030, which emphasizes economic diversification, a knowledge-based economy, and domestic human capital development, English serves as a significant enabler across Saudi Arabian labor markets, trade, innovation, tourism, and macroeconomic development. Specific programs have been implemented to develop and apply English in the global economy as part of broader educational reforms. These programs are based on the recognition that investment in language development will yield economic growth, international cooperation, and a stronger local talent pool. In this respect, the encouragement of English is consistent with the overall objectives of Vision 2030, as it promotes innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability (Mayor, 2024). The use of English in Saudi Arabia's workplaces is widespread, and its importance is growing. Mastery of English is directly linked to professional growth, career mobility, and better job prospects. Those with more proficient language skills have greater opportunities to secure better employment, earn higher salaries, and advance in their careers. Core communication skills, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, have become increasingly essential across various sectors in the country. Employees themselves tend to associate job satisfaction and career development with their English proficiency (Pearson, 2024).

Meanwhile, it has been claimed that there is a gap between current levels of English proficiency and labor market demands. Numerous Saudi employees report that their English education is not fully aligned with workplace needs, and a significant percentage believe that stronger language skills would improve their performance and employment opportunities. Although this need exists, only a limited number of companies offer systematic language training, indicating the need for greater support in both the state and non-state sectors. English proficiency is thus vital for remaining competitive, keeping pace with technological change, and achieving long-term career growth (Mayor, 2024). Under Vision 2030, English has become an increasingly critical prerequisite in both the government and the private sector, influencing recruitment, performance, and promotion. University graduates who are more proficient in English are more likely to secure better jobs and earn higher incomes. To that end, English may be interpreted as a form of human capital that enhances workforce competitiveness, supports large-scale national initiatives such as NEOM, and contributes to Saudi Arabia's increased involvement in international markets and networks (Al-Seghayer, 2023).

From a broader economic perspective, under Vision 2030, increased English proficiency supports economic diversification, participation in the international labor market, and national competitiveness. As the language of international business and multinational companies,

English helps integrate Saudi Arabia more fully into the global economy (Banafi, 2025). This trend is reflected in the growing use of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs, both of which are part of the Human Capability Development Program within Vision 2030. These initiatives aim to align educational outcomes with labor market needs and international standards. EMI enhances overall language proficiency and international academic interaction (Alqarni et al., 2024), while ESP programs address industry-related skill gaps, especially in sectors such as tourism and hospitality (Al-Malki, 2023). Simultaneously, the role of English in Saudi Arabia is not merely functional; it is also linked to broader social, economic, and professional opportunities (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

English is also a strategic element in Saudi Arabia's digital transformation and innovation agenda. As the dominant language of global knowledge and research, it facilitates access to international information, global research networks, and interaction with technology-driven industries. Investments in digital education and English language development are strategic moves to create a knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy (Al Fraidan & Alaliwi, 2024). In this regard, language policy not only supports communication skills but also digital literacy, workforce competitiveness, and long-term economic diversification (Ismail & Namaziandost, 2025). On the macroeconomic level, English can help Saudi Arabia move toward a diversified, knowledge-based economy by increasing labor productivity, developing human capital, and expanding exposure to global markets. Empirical evidence shows that English proficiency is associated with better employment and income outcomes among Saudi graduates (Alqarni, 2018). Moreover, English is a major language in the service sectors, tourism, and foreign investment, all of which are key aspects of economic diversification. In tourism, for example, workforce readiness requires effective English communication skills (Aldosari et al., 2025), and ESP programs can help address current skill gaps and enhance professional competence (Al-Malki, 2023). In a broader sense, English enables communication with international markets and enhances the global orientation of economic activities (Al-Seghayer, 2023).

The reviewed Saudi studies collectively suggest that English proficiency is increasingly intertwined with the country's economic transformation and workforce development objectives under Vision 2030. At the same time, the literature consistently points to the need for continued improvements in English language education, curriculum quality, and labor market alignment to maximize its potential socioeconomic benefits.

The Saudi findings broadly reflect the global patterns identified in Sections 4.1–4.6. While the international literature links English proficiency to labor market participation, human capital development, international trade, innovation, sectoral growth, and global economic integration, the Saudi studies place greater emphasis on workforce preparation, curriculum reform, ESP, and educational alignment with Vision 2030. This comparison indicates that English performs similar enabling functions in both contexts but also reveals that Saudi research has focused more strongly on education and workforce readiness than on trade, foreign investment, tourism, and broader economic performance.

Overall, the reviewed evidence positions English proficiency as an important facilitator of Saudi Arabia's economic transformation under Vision 2030. Through initiatives such as EMI and ESP, English can support knowledge transfer, human capital development, and closer alignment between education and labor market needs. Accordingly, its role is closely linked to the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

5. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present research design is a qualitative review using purposive sampling of 19 international research sources, including academic journal articles, surveys, case studies, conference papers, policy reports, and similar materials. Because the study relies entirely on secondary data, it may not include primary empirical evidence from Saudi Arabia, which can be a limitation when considering context-specific labor market dynamics or stakeholder perspectives. Moreover, the relatively small number of reviewed studies may limit the applicability of the findings. The literature also spans diverse geographic and economic contexts, which may affect the applicability of the results to Saudi Arabia. These limitations can be addressed in future studies by adopting a mixed-methods or quantitative design, i.e., surveys and interviews in Saudi Arabia. These approaches would complement the present study and offer more comprehensive insights into the issue under investigation.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative review examined how English, as the global language, has shaped global economies and its relevance to Saudi Arabia's economic growth and global integration into world markets. The study drew on a thorough analysis of 19 scholarly sources, including academic journal articles, surveys, case studies, conference papers, policy reports, and academic books. Across regional and global settings, the reviewed evidence consistently associates English proficiency with labor and employment, trade and commerce, global integration, human capital and education, the digital economy and innovation, macroeconomic growth and development, and foreign investment, tourism, and other sectors, which are presented in this study as the economic impacts of English proficiency by theme. These dimensions align closely with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). The findings reveal that English proficiency is strongly linked to positive economic outcomes, such as expanded international trade, enhanced labor market performance, and engagement in innovation-driven economic activities. The study suggests that English can contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth when carefully integrated into the education system and economic policies. Hence, the study concludes that English proficiency should not be treated solely as an educational concern but should be recognized as a significant element of a country's economic policy and development plans. Thus, English functions as an

economic resource for individual employability, earnings, national economic growth, and global economic integration, and it promotes relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Based on the reviewed evidence, several policy implications emerge for Saudi Arabia. First, English language education should be more closely aligned with labor market requirements by expanding relevant ESP provision and strengthening appropriately designed EMI initiatives in disciplines linked to economic diversification and future industries. Second, continued investment in curriculum development, teacher training, and the quality of English instruction is necessary to strengthen human capital and workforce competitiveness. Third, stronger collaboration between educational institutions, policymakers, and industry stakeholders is needed to ensure that English language competencies correspond to emerging economic needs under Vision 2030.

Declaration of the Use of AI

The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.5) solely for language editing, grammar checking, spelling correction, and punctuation review during the preparation of this manuscript.

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No additional data are available.

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