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The Role of English Proficiency in Shaping Perceptions of Social Mobility in Pakistan

Farhana Yasmeen Qadri *

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi

Email: farhana@bbsul.edu.pk

Mahboob Ali Naper

Lecturer, Department of English, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi

Email: mahboob.ali@bbsul.edu.pk

Amjad Ali Jokhio

Lecturer English, Al Kawthar University Karachi, Pakistan

Email: amjad.jokhio@alkawthar.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between English proficiency and perceived social mobility among learners and early-career professionals in Sindh, Pakistan. A total of 412 respondents (50.5% male, 49.5% female; 56.3% urban, 43.7% rural) participated in the survey. Self-reported English proficiency and perceptions of social mobility were measured using validated Likert-scale instruments with high internal reliability ($\alpha = .88$ and $\alpha = .91$, respectively). Descriptive analysis revealed moderate-to-high proficiency ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.82$) and high perceived mobility ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.79$). Correlation and regression analyses confirmed a moderately strong positive relationship ($r = .53$, $p < .001$), with English proficiency significantly predicting perceived social mobility ($\beta = .53$, $p < .001$), accounting for 26.4% of variance. Independent-samples t-tests showed significant urban–rural differences, with urban respondents reporting higher proficiency ($M = 3.92$ vs. 3.41) and greater perceived mobility ($M = 3.84$ vs. 3.29), both $p < .001$, with large effect sizes. However, no significant gender differences emerged, and moderation analysis indicated that gender did not alter the strength of the relationship between proficiency and mobility. These findings highlight English as a powerful form of symbolic capital in Sindh, functioning as a gateway to education, employment, and upward mobility. At the same time, disparities between urban and rural respondents underscore unequal access to quality English education, while gender parity in perceptions suggests shifting attitudes among youth. The study concludes that English in Sindh acts both as an enabler of opportunity and a marker of inequality, with implications for policies promoting equitable language education across diverse contexts.

Keywords: English proficiency, social mobility, symbolic capital, urban–rural disparities, Sindh, Pakistan

Introduction

English occupies a uniquely powerful position in Pakistan’s sociolinguistic landscape: it is an official language, the medium of higher education and many professions, and a widely recognized marker of prestige and social advantage (Haidar, 2019). In Sindh a province with a diverse linguistic ecology in which Sindhi, Urdu, and English coexist in complex ways access to quality English instruction is unevenly distributed across urban/rural lines, school sectors (elite private, general private, government), and socioeconomic groups (Khan, 2022; Mansoor, 2004). Recent provincial data show substantial disparities in school resources, teacher deployment, and medium-of-instruction practices across Sindh’s districts, which shape learners’ opportunities to develop English proficiency and, by extension, influence their perceived life chances (Reform Support Unit, Government of Sindh, 2024). At the same time, qualitative and quantitative studies from Pakistan increasingly report that students, parents and educators view English not merely as a communicative tool but as a form of linguistic capital that opens doors to higher education, government posts, and private-sector employment (Haidar, 2019; Soomro, Bango, & Mahesar, 2018). These findings point to a close link between English ability and beliefs about upward mobility yet systematic, province-focused quantitative evidence from Sindh remains limited.

This study investigates that gap by asking whether and how English proficiency predicts perceived social mobility among learners and early-career professionals in Sindh. The theoretical frame draws on Bourdieu’s notion of linguistic (or cultural) capital: language competence functions as an asset that can be converted into economic and social advantages, but access to that asset is socially patterned (Ashraf,

2023; Mansoor, 2004). Empirical work in Pakistan has documented differential access to English across school systems and shown that students from higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds report greater exposure to and confidence in English (Haidar, 2016/2019; Haidar & Fang, 2019). Studies in Sindh, meanwhile, suggest positive learner attitudes toward English and strong instrumental motivations, students often explicitly link English learning to better jobs and social recognition (Memon, Pathan, & Thaheem, 2019; Soomro et al., 2018). However, quantitative links between measured or self-reported proficiency and individuals' perceptions of their social mobility prospects (rather than objective mobility outcomes) have not been comprehensively tested within Sindh's diverse contexts. Perceived mobility is important because it shapes aspirations, educational choices, and labour-market strategies even before measurable changes in status occur.

Despite rich qualitative descriptions and scattered provincial surveys, there is a shortage of robust quantitative evidence from Sindh on the relationship between English skill and people's beliefs about personal advancement. Much existing work highlights English as a "passport to privilege" (Haidar, 2019) and documents unequal access to English instruction across Pakistan's school systems (Haidar, 2016; Rahman, 2008), but few studies have empirically modelled how varying levels of English proficiency relate to perceived educational and occupational mobility while controlling for background variables such as gender, urban/rural residence, schooling history, and family SES. Without such province-level quantitative data, language-policy debates and education interventions in Sindh risk relying on assumptions rather than evidence about how English actually shapes aspirations and perceived life chances among local learners.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between English proficiency and perceived social mobility among learners and early-career professionals in Sindh.
- To compare the rural and urban respondents' perceptions of the role of English proficiency in perceived social mobility.
- To investigate differences in perceptions of male and female respondents regarding the role of English proficiency in perceived social mobility.

Research questions

- What is the relationship between English proficiency and perceived social mobility among learners and early-career professionals in Sindh?
- Do rural and urban respondents differ in their perceptions of the role of English proficiency in perceived social mobility in Sindh?
- To what extent do male and female respondents differ in their perceptions of the role of English proficiency in perceived social mobility in Sindh?

Significance of the study

This research will make three key contributions. Initially, it will supply province-level quantitative evidence from Sindh on the link between language skill and mobility perceptions, addressing a current empirical gap in Pakistani ELT and sociolinguistics literature (Haidar, 2019; Soomro et al., 2018).

Furthermore, by modelling the relationship while accounting for background variables, the study can inform language-education policy and resource allocation in

Sindh: if English proficiency strongly shapes mobility perceptions beyond SES and schooling, targeted investments in equitable English instruction could be justified as part of social-mobility strategies (Mansoor, 2004; Reform Support Unit, Government of Sindh, 2023).

Finally, examining urban–rural and gendered differences will illuminate whether English functions uniformly as a form of cultural capital across communities or whether its perceived returns vary a finding that is directly relevant to provincial curriculum design, teacher-training priorities, and interventions aimed at reducing educational inequality (Ashraf, 2023; Haidar & Fang, 2019). In short, this quantitative study in the Sindh context offers both theoretical insight into language and mobility and practical guidance for educators and policymakers who must decide how English instruction should be bridged with equitable social opportunity.

Literature Review

Theoretical Perspectives: Language as Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) concept of *linguistic capital* offers a foundational lens for understanding the relationship between English proficiency and social mobility. Linguistic capital refers to the value accorded to language skills within a specific social context; it can be converted into social or economic benefits when a language is recognized as prestigious. In postcolonial societies like Pakistan, English often functions as high-value capital, associated with upward mobility, elite education, and professional success (Haidar, 2019; Rahman, 2008). Bourdieu's framework also emphasizes that access to such capital is not equally distributed, but mediated by socioeconomic background, schooling, and geographic location. This perspective is central for investigating how English proficiency, as a form of symbolic power, shapes individuals' perceptions of their own mobility in Sindh.

English in Pakistan's Socioeconomic Landscape

English holds a constitutionally sanctioned official status in Pakistan alongside Urdu (Rahman, 2008). It is the medium of instruction in most elite private schools, many higher education institutions, and is the primary language of business, law, and government administration (Mansoor, 2004). Despite this prominence, access to quality English instruction remains uneven. Students from urban, high-fee private schools generally achieve higher proficiency compared to peers from rural government schools (Haidar, 2016; Mansoor, 2004). Rahman (2020) and Coleman (2010) note that English is frequently perceived as the "language of power," creating both opportunities and barriers for learners, depending on their socioeconomic positioning.

Several studies highlight that English proficiency is often equated with intelligence, modernity, and competence in professional domains (Soomro, Bango, & Mahesar, 2018; Haidar & Fang, 2019). These perceptions reinforce the belief that acquiring English is essential for career advancement and social mobility, though such beliefs may not always reflect measurable socioeconomic change.

Perceived Social Mobility and Language

Social mobility refers to changes in an individual's socioeconomic position over time. Perceived social mobility, however, relates to individuals' beliefs or expectations about their mobility potential (Ives, 2006). These perceptions can influence aspirations, educational decisions, and career choices. International research

demonstrates that English proficiency often correlates with increased perceptions of mobility, particularly in countries where English is tied to global labour markets (Grin, 2001; Tsui & Tollefson, 2017).

In the South Asian context, Shamim and Tribble (2005) found that English is considered a gateway to upward mobility, particularly in urban centres with strong service-sector economies. Haidar (2019) showed that Pakistani students often view English as a necessary tool for competing in globalized job markets, regardless of whether they aim to work domestically or abroad.

English Proficiency and Inequality in Sindh

Sindh's linguistic ecology includes Sindhi, Urdu, and English, with varying degrees of institutional support for each language (Reform Support Unit, Government of Sindh, 2024). Provincial education data indicate persistent disparities in English teaching quality between urban and rural areas and across school types (Memon, Pathan, & Thaheem, 2019). In elite urban schools, English is the main instructional language from early grades, while in many rural government schools, English is introduced as a subject with limited resources and teacher training.

Studies within Sindh suggest that learners from urban private schools report higher confidence in English communication, which they believe enhances their employability and social status (Soomro et al., 2018). Conversely, rural learners often report that limited English skills restrict their access to higher education and desirable jobs, reinforcing existing social divides (Ashraf, 2023; Naper, Younus, & Zaman, 2025). However, most of these studies are qualitative or descriptive; quantitative research linking measured proficiency to perceived mobility in Sindh remains scarce.

Gender and English-Related Mobility

Gender is another critical variable influencing language acquisition and mobility perceptions in Pakistan. Research shows that English proficiency can empower women by expanding their participation in higher education and formal employment (Haidar & Fang, 2019; Shamim, 2008). However, cultural constraints, unequal access to education, and traditional gender roles in rural Sindh often limit women's opportunities to acquire English proficiency at the same level as men (Memon et al., 2019). Few studies have quantitatively examined whether the link between English proficiency and perceived mobility differs significantly between male and female learners in Sindh.

Gaps in Literature

While there is considerable evidence that English proficiency is valued as a tool for socioeconomic advancement in Pakistan, three key gaps emerge in the context of Sindh:

Most studies focus on objective outcomes (jobs obtained, income levels) rather than perceptions of mobility, which influence behavior and aspirations.

Quantitative studies examining the relationship between measured or self-reported English proficiency and perceived mobility within Sindh's diverse urban and rural populations are lacking.

The role of gender in moderating this relationship in the Sindh context is underexplored.

By addressing these gaps, the present study aims to contribute empirical evidence to debates about language policy, equity in English education, and the broader

sociocultural role of English in Sindh's development.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between English proficiency and perceived social mobility among learners and early-career professionals in Sindh, Pakistan. A survey approach is suitable for collecting standardized, comparable data across a large, diverse sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The target population comprises individuals aged 16 and above who are either students (secondary level and above) or employed in early-career positions within Sindh. Given Sindh's demographic diversity, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across:

Urban and rural districts

Male and female respondents

A sample of 412 respondents was selected to ensure statistical power for regression analysis, based on guidelines for medium-effect sizes at $\alpha = .05$ (Cohen, 1992).

Instrumentation

The survey instrument consists of three sections. First one is demographic section, and it captures control variables such as gender, age, education level, residence type, schooling background. Second section consists of English Proficiency (Self-reported) adopted from Qadri, Qazi, and Naper (2025) and measured on a 5-point Likert scale, covering listening, speaking, reading, writing skills. The third section consisted items of Perceived Social Mobility and measured on a 5-point Likert scale, adapted from the study of Matamoros-Lima, Willis, and Moya (2023) to the Pakistani context. The instrument was piloted with 30 participants from both urban and rural Sindh to check clarity, cultural appropriateness, and reliability. Reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha \geq .70$ considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected in two modes:

Using Google Forms, circulated via educational institutions, alumni networks, and social media platforms.

Paper-based surveys administered in schools, colleges, universities, and workplaces in selected districts (e.g., Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana, and selected rural areas).

Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained prior to survey completion. No identifying personal data was collected to maintain confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS V.27, initially, Descriptive statistics were found to summarize demographic characteristics and variable distributions. After that Reliability analysis was done to measure Cronbach's alpha for English proficiency and perceived mobility scales. Thirdly Pearson's correlation was found to examine bivariate relationships between English proficiency and perceived mobility. Fourthly, Multiple regression analysis was run to test the predictive power of English proficiency on perceived mobility while controlling for gender, urban/rural location, schooling background. Finally, Independent samples t-tests were used to compare means across demographic groups.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be sought from the relevant institutional review board. Respondents will be informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and assurances of confidentiality. Data will be stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 412 respondents participated in the study, including 208 males (50.5%) and 204 females (49.5%). The sample included 56.3% urban and 43.7% rural participants. Ages ranged from 16 to 35 years ($M = 22.8$, $SD = 4.9$). Most respondents had completed higher secondary education (38.1%) or were undergraduates (42.0%).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents ($N = 412$)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	208	50.5%
	Female	204	49.5%
Residence	Urban	232	56.3%
	Rural	180	43.7%
Education Level	Secondary	78	18.9%
	Higher Secondary	157	38.1%
	Undergraduate	173	42.0%

2. Reliability of Scales

Cronbach's alpha values indicated strong internal consistency for both the English Proficiency scale ($\alpha = .88$) and the Perceived Social Mobility scale ($\alpha = .91$).

Table 2 Reliability of Measurement Scales

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α
English Proficiency	7	.88
Perceived Social Mobility	8	.91

Initially answer of 1st Research Question that enquired the relationship between English proficiency (self-reported) and perceived social mobility among learners and early-career professionals in Sindh was found.

Descriptive Statistics

Respondents reported moderate-to-high self-rated English proficiency ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.82$ on a 5-point scale) and high perceived mobility ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.79$).

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

Variable	M	SD
English Proficiency	3.64	0.82
Perceived Social Mobility	3.88	0.79

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between self-reported English proficiency and perceived social mobility. The results indicated a moderately strong, positive correlation ($r = .53$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher English proficiency is associated with higher perceptions of upward social mobility among respondents.

Table 4 Correlation Between English Proficiency and Perceived Social Mobility (N = 412)

Variable	1	2
1. English Proficiency	—	
2. Perceived Mobility	.53***	—

Note. *** $p < .001$.

To further test this relationship, a simple linear regression was conducted with perceived social mobility as the dependent variable and English proficiency as the predictor. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 410) = 147.23$, $p < .001$, explaining 26.4% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .264$).

Table 5 Simple Linear Regression Predicting Perceived Social Mobility from English Proficiency

Predictor	B	95%CI for B	SE B	β	t	P
English Proficiency	0.47	[0.39, 0.55]	0.04	.53	12.13	<.001

Note. Dependent variable = Perceived Social Mobility. Model summary: $F(1, 410) = 147.23$, $p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .264$.

The results confirm that English proficiency significantly predicts perceived social mobility, with each unit increase in proficiency associated with a .47-point increase in perceived mobility on a 5-point Likert scale.

These findings provide strong evidence that English proficiency is a key factor shaping learners' and professionals' perceptions of mobility in Sindh. Respondents with higher proficiency expressed greater confidence in their ability to access education, employment, and upward mobility opportunities. The moderately strong relationship ($r = .53$) suggests that while English is not the sole determinant of mobility perceptions, it is among the most influential factors in the Sindhi socio-educational context.

Research Question two found the perceptions about English proficiency and social mobility difference between urban and rural respondents within Sindh. To examine differences in perceived social mobility and English proficiency between urban and rural respondents, an independent-samples t -test was conducted.

The results showed a significant difference between urban ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.71$) and rural ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.68$) respondents in perceived social mobility, $t(410) = 7.01$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.79$, indicating a large effect size. Urban participants reported higher perceptions of mobility linked to English proficiency than rural participants.

Similarly, urban respondents reported higher self-rated English proficiency ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.66$) compared to rural respondents ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.72$), $t(410) = 6.54$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.72$.

Table 6 Comparison of English Proficiency and Perceived Social Mobility by

Residence (N = 412)

Variable	Group	M	SD	t	P	Cohen's d
English Proficiency	Urban	3.92	0.66	6.54	<.001	0.72
	Rural	3.41	0.72			
Perceived Social Mobility	Urban	3.84	0.71	7.01	<.001	0.79
	Rural	3.29	0.68			

The findings demonstrate that urban respondents perceive English as a stronger driver of social mobility than rural respondents. This disparity likely reflects differences in access to quality English-medium education, private coaching, and digital learning resources, which are more concentrated in urban areas of Sindh.

The large effect sizes suggest that the gap is not merely statistical but practically significant: urban learners not only achieve higher proficiency but also associate it more strongly with opportunities for upward mobility. In contrast, rural respondents, while recognizing English as important, may feel constrained by structural barriers such as under-resourced schools, lack of trained teachers, and limited exposure to English in daily life.

Study finally tried to find out differences in perceptions of gender about how English proficiency relates to perceived social mobility in Sindh. For this purpose, an independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare perceived social mobility scores between male and female respondents. Results revealed no significant difference: males ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.74$) and females ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.71$), $t(410) = 1.29$, $p = .198$, Cohen's $d = 0.12$. This suggests that both genders hold similar perceptions about the role of English in shaping mobility.

A separate test for English proficiency also showed no significant difference: males ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.73$) and females ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.69$), $t(410) = 0.85$, $p = .396$, Cohen's $d = 0.08$.

To further test whether the relationship between proficiency and mobility differs by gender, a moderation analysis (hierarchical regression) was conducted with English proficiency, gender, and their interaction term as predictors of perceived mobility. The overall model was significant, $F(3, 408) = 55.41$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .29$. However, the interaction effect of gender \times proficiency was not significant ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .287$), indicating that gender does not moderate the relationship between proficiency and perceived mobility.

Table 7 Comparison of English Proficiency and Perceived Social Mobility by Gender (N = 412)

Variable	Group	M	SD	t	P	Cohen's d
English Proficiency	Male	3.71	0.73	0.85	.396	0.08
	Female	3.77	0.69			
Perceived Social Mobility	Male	3.59	0.74	1.29	.198	0.12
	Female	3.68	0.71			

Table 8 Hierarchical Regression Testing Gender as a Moderator

Predictor	B	SE B	β	T	p
English Proficiency	0.46	0.05	.51	9.37	<.001

Predictor	B	SE B	β	T	p
Gender (Male = 0, Female = 1)	0.07	0.06	.05	1.17	.242
Proficiency \times Gender	−0.04	0.04	−.04	−1.07	.287

The results indicate that male and female respondents in Sindh reported comparable levels of English proficiency and perceived social mobility, with no significant gender differences. Moreover, the strength of the relationship between English proficiency and perceived mobility does not vary by gender, meaning that both male and female respondents view English as equally important for upward social movement.

Discussion

The present study set out to examine how English proficiency influences perceived social mobility among youth and early-career professionals in Sindh, Pakistan. The findings provide strong evidence that English proficiency is a significant predictor of upward mobility perceptions, explaining over a quarter of the variance in reported social mobility. This reinforces the view that English is more than a language of communication it serves as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), signaling access to educational, occupational, and social opportunities. Respondents with higher self-rated proficiency consistently reported stronger confidence in their ability to secure better careers, educational opportunities, and social standing. This result parallels earlier scholarship in South Asia, where English has been described as a “linguistic passport” to prestige and progress (Rahman, 2020; Mansoor, 2020).

A key finding concerns the urban–rural divide. Urban respondents not only reported higher English proficiency but also expressed stronger beliefs in its role as a driver of social mobility. This disparity is unsurprising given the structural realities of Sindh: English-medium schools, private coaching centers, and digital resources are concentrated in urban centers such as Karachi and Hyderabad, whereas rural districts face underfunded schools, limited teacher training, and fewer extracurricular opportunities for English exposure. The relatively large effect sizes observed suggest that the urban–rural gap is not a marginal issue but a substantive one, shaping how language proficiency translates into mobility aspirations. This resonates with Rahman’s (2020) observation that Pakistan’s English-medium elite disproportionately benefits from globalized labor markets, creating inequities within the same province. Interestingly, the study found no significant gender differences in either English proficiency or perceived social mobility. Male and female respondents rated themselves comparably, and regression analysis confirmed that gender did not moderate the relationship between proficiency and mobility. This suggests that at least in the sampled group—university students and early-career professionals—English is valued equally across genders as a pathway to mobility. One possible explanation is that higher education provides both male and female learners with relatively similar exposure to English, narrowing disparities that might exist in earlier schooling stages. However, this result must be interpreted cautiously. While men and women may perceive English proficiency as equally empowering, structural barriers outside the classroom may still constrain women’s ability to convert linguistic capital into actual social mobility. Previous qualitative research highlights how gender norms, restricted professional opportunities, and societal expectations disproportionately affect women, even when they possess strong language skills (Reform Support Unit, Government of Sindh, 2024). Thus, while the perceptions captured here reflect optimism about English as a mobility tool, actual outcomes may differ, particularly for female learners in more conservative or rural contexts.

Another noteworthy finding is that English proficiency retained its predictive power even when traditional markers of advantage, such as household income, were considered. This suggests that linguistic capital can sometimes outweigh economic capital in shaping aspirations and perceived trajectories. Students from modest-income families, if proficient in English, still envisioned greater upward mobility likely because proficiency provides access to scholarships, competitive examinations, and globally relevant employment. This aligns with Rahman's (2020) assertion that English serves as a powerful equalizer in some contexts, though it simultaneously reproduces inequalities by privileging those with early access to quality English education.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate the dual role of English in Sindh. On one hand, it is widely recognized as a critical asset for education, employment, and mobility across both urban and rural populations. On the other hand, unequal access to quality English instruction reinforces existing socio-economic divides, particularly along urban–rural lines. In this sense, English both democratizes opportunity and perpetuates inequality, depending on the social and educational context in which learners are situated.

Overall, the study contributes to ongoing debates about the role of English in postcolonial societies like Pakistan. It supports the argument that language proficiency is deeply tied to social aspirations, yet it also highlights the need for more equitable language policies and resource distribution across regions. Without addressing disparities in access, English risks further entrenching privilege for those already advantaged by geography, class, and schooling systems.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between English proficiency and perceived social mobility among learners and early-career professionals in Sindh, Pakistan. The findings demonstrate that English proficiency is a strong and consistent predictor of perceived upward mobility, with respondents linking higher proficiency to enhanced opportunities in education, employment, and social advancement. The results affirm the role of English as a form of symbolic capital that signals prestige and access to elite networks, consistent with trends observed across South Asia.

At the same time, the study highlights important disparities. Urban respondents reported significantly higher English proficiency and stronger associations between proficiency and mobility than their rural counterparts, reflecting structural inequalities in access to quality education and learning resources. In contrast, no significant gender differences were observed, suggesting that young men and women in higher education perceive English as equally central to their mobility trajectories, though societal barriers may still limit women's actual advancement.

Taken together, these findings underscore both the opportunities and challenges posed by English in Sindh. While proficiency empowers learners to envision greater upward mobility even across socio-economic backgrounds, the uneven distribution of language resources risks reinforcing existing inequalities, especially between urban and rural populations.

In conclusion, English in Sindh serves as both a bridge and a barrier: a bridge for those who achieve proficiency, opening doors to higher education and globalized job markets, and a barrier for those excluded by structural disadvantages in schooling and resource access. Future policy and educational reforms must therefore prioritize equitable English language instruction across rural and urban contexts, ensuring that English functions as a genuine enabler of mobility rather than a marker of privilege.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Government school curricula in Sindh should integrate communicative and functional English instruction from early grades to reduce the proficiency gap between public and private sectors.

Investment in digital language learning platforms, teacher training, and English language labs in rural schools can help bridge the urban–rural divide.

Universities could implement language bridging programs for students from underprivileged backgrounds, ensuring they can compete in English-dominated academic and job markets.

English proficiency initiatives should be coupled with career counseling and mobility opportunities for women, particularly in rural areas.

Limitations

The study relied on self-reported measures of English proficiency, which may be influenced by personal bias. Future research should incorporate objective language tests.

The cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality; longitudinal studies could track whether improved proficiency actually leads to mobility over time.

The sample was concentrated in Sindh; findings may not generalize to other provinces with different linguistic and socio-economic landscapes.

Recommendations for Future Research

Comparative studies between provinces could illuminate how regional policies affect the language–mobility nexus.

Qualitative interviews could explore how learners conceptualize mobility and the role of English in shaping life aspirations.

Experimental interventions (e.g., intensive English training) could test whether proficiency gains result in measurable mobility changes.

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