



Graduates' English Communicative Skills and Professional Success: Perspectives from Universities and Industry stakeholders in Bangladesh

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Abstract

In today's competitive employment market, graduates must be proficient in English communication to succeed professionally. Specifically, fluency in spoken English, professional writing skills, presentation skills, and interpersonal communication in English are critical factors that contribute to workplace success. This study investigates how far university graduates' English communicative abilities contribute to their success in securing employment and performing effectively in the workplace. This paper broadly examines the needs of graduates for English communicative skills to progress in their careers. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The study was conducted at three purposively selected public universities in Bangladesh: the University of Dhaka, Jagannath University, and Jahangirnagar University. 50 students were purposively sampled, and 15 industry stakeholders from private banks, multinational companies, and English-medium schools in Dhaka were interviewed to explore workplace English proficiency expectations. The findings indicate a strong correlation between English communication skills and employment opportunities. However, many graduates face challenges in professional writing, public speaking, and business communication. Furthermore, the results highlight a considerable distance between the communication demands of the professional world and the English instruction provided at the university level, which results in unpreparedness for real-world communication challenges. In this regard, to enhance graduates' global competitiveness, the study recommends urgent curriculum modifications that prioritize business-oriented communication, industry-aligned training, and real-world English applications.

Keywords: Challenges in Professional Success; Communicative Skills; EFL Learning in Bangladesh; Employability; English for Professional Success

Introduction

English has come into existence as one of the most useful and widely used languages for communication in the contemporary period. Suna & Durmuşçelebi (2013) acknowledge it as one of the world's most extensively spoken languages. In

the modern world, English has emerged as the universal medium of communication which is considered as a crucial global lingua franca, bridging cultures, education, business, travel, aviation, international sports, and driving economic and academic progress worldwide (Rao, 2019). Consequently, the world has become more interconnected, accessible, and conducive to sharing information, making it more comfortable for everyone (Rao, 2019). It plays almost an irreplaceable role in the field of education as it is used as the medium of instruction and the language of textbooks. Many universities across the world implement English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) courses for first-year students. According to Demont-Heinrich (2008), approximately 400 million people speak English as their first language, while an additional 2 billion individuals use it as a second or foreign language. Moreover, it is utilized in various global organizations such as OPEC, EFTA, ASEAN, BRICS, INTERPOL, and NATO as a language for official communication (Broughton et al., 2003).

In today's interconnected and globalized economy, English communicative skills have also become a fundamental requirement for employability success. Fatema and Sultana (2020) contend that acquiring EFL has become critically essential in Bangladesh due to the necessity of English proficiency for pursuing higher education and securing employment. Also, proficiency in English not only enhances an individual's ability to interact effectively in diverse professional environments but also significantly expands job opportunities across various sectors. However, despite the growing emphasis on English proficiency, a noticeable disconnect remains between what students learn within academic institutions and the communicative competencies demanded by employers. Most of the time, there is a gap between the existing academic curriculum and professional requirements. Here lies the significance of understanding English proficiency needs, especially in English communicative skills, for employability success, with a special focus on three prominent public universities in Bangladesh.

Building on this understanding of the growing necessity for English proficiency in academic and professional domains, several scholars and reports have emphasized its direct influence on career advancement and employability. According to Stiglitz (2002), an individual can cultivate a prosperous career if they possess proficiency in the English language. Multinational companies and

international organizations often prioritize candidates with strong English skills, as these are essential for roles involving cross-border communication, negotiation, and collaboration. Rao (2019) states that "most job providers ask for language skills, especially communication skills in English." Individuals who lack confidence and proficiency in English speaking encounter challenges in securing desirable job opportunities, often hindering their ability to attain their preferred jobs (Zeigler, 2007). Furthermore, Torres et al. assert that (2019) English language proficiency is regarded as essential for effective business communication in the majority of workplaces. In fact, the English language enjoys such a special status in the global economic market that even literate people are deprived of it because they lack it. For example, The National Employability Report by Aspiring Minds reports that a company specializing in employability solutions identified insufficient proficiency in English and computer skills as primary reasons for the unemployability of graduates (Bharathi, 2016).

In light of these perspective, in the modern global economy, there is a growing need for young, skilled workers who possess both technical expertise and strong academic abilities, particularly in English language proficiency (Hendarman, 2010). Also, in the context of intense business and workforce competition among several Asian nations, including Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh English emerges as a crucial language. Roshid and Chowdhury (2013) assert that we cannot ignore the reality that inadequate English proficiency and computer skills render graduates unfit for employment. Likewise, many corporate professionals contend that although graduates and postgraduates in management possess the necessary technical qualifications, they often fail to succeed in interviews due to inadequate communication skills. Accordingly, the inability of these students to express themselves effectively during interviews and larger forums can be attributed to stage fright and a lack of self-confidence (Juhdi et al., 2007). Interviews are primarily conducted in English. Consequently, when a candidate struggles to articulate their thoughts in English, it often leads to 80% of subsequent interview stages not proceeding as anticipated. So, proficiency in English is essential for individuals working abroad or engaging with people from different nations, especially for non-native countries like Bangladesh.

Having established the global importance of English in various sectors, including employability, we now turn to the context of Bangladesh. Rahman et al. (2019) have elaborated on why countries like Bangladesh emphasize learning English. He says that Bangladesh, grappling with poverty and low literacy rates, now seeks integration into the global economy. 90% of engineering graduates in Bangladesh express a strong desire to improve their English-speaking skills to secure their preferred jobs (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Some students believe that by learning English for their academic purposes, they will naturally improve their overall English skills, and this improvement will help them secure good jobs in the future (Sultana et al., 2019). Likewise, Krhutova (2009) claims that proficiency in English is vital for many jobs over the world, offering better career opportunities and social standing. English, once reserved for the educated elite, is increasingly essential in the modern job market, especially in corporate sectors.

Given this growing demand, Bangladesh is currently emphasizing the importance of fostering the expansion of English education and proficiency (Rahman et al., 2019). To attain this goal, the National Education Policy of 2010 introduced various modifications to the English curriculum, highlighting its role as a key communication tool. This approach aims to enhance students' proficiency, enabling them to utilize English effectively for diverse purposes, including knowledge acquisition, higher education, and securing employment opportunities both nationally and internationally (National Curriculum, 2012, p. 2). Sultana et al. (2019) found that English language courses for diploma engineering students at a public university in Bangladesh lack effectiveness in improving speaking skills. Moreover, the current curriculum focuses mainly on the structural aspects of language, neglecting functional skills. So, they recommend updating courses to include more practice with textbooks, multimedia, assessments, and speaking feedback to enhance communicative proficiency among learners.

In Bangladesh, a significant number of science and engineering graduates demonstrate limited proficiency in English language skills, encompassing writing, reading, listening, and speaking (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). Aktar (2012) thinks that the educational system bears responsibility for this situation. During SSC and HSC exams in English, students often resort to memorization to pass, and teachers' inadequate training fails to impart effective language skills. Consequently,

engineering students enter university without achieving fluency in English. This study explores how university graduates' English communicative skills impact their employability success by assessing current proficiency levels, analyzing the impacts on employability, and identifying challenges faced. The study also focuses on providing crucial insights for enhancing graduates' readiness for the competitive global job market. This study intends to answer the following research questions:

- A. How do graduates' English communicative skills contribute to employability success?
- B. How do English communicative skills address unemployment issues and create prospects for employability success?

Research Methodology

The main objective of this study is to investigate the contribution of university graduates' English communicative skills to their professional success while also examining the alignment of these skills with the graduate attributes outlined in the Outcome-Based Education Curriculum (OBEC) standardized by UGC and BAC, from both academic and industry perspectives. Additionally, the study consulted stakeholders to explore existing realities concerning university graduates and identified areas for improvement in English language skills relevant to professional access.

Hence, the study utilized a mixed methodology, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions. According to Enosh et al. (2014), employing mixed methods enabled researchers to offer thorough and detailed responses to their research questions. The qualitative method, along with open-ended questions such as interviews, self-reflective responses, and document analysis, provided in-depth insights into participants' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to their English language skills.

Research Setting and Population Sampling

Table 1: Distribution of Male and Female Professionals from the Three Universities

Institution	Jagannath University	Jahangirnagar University	University of Dhaka
Female	06	10	12
Male	12	04	06
Total Participants	18	14	18

The setting of the study comprised three major public universities in Bangladesh, namely, Jagannath University, Jahangirnagar University, and the University of Dhaka. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who had recently graduated and were entering or seeking professional employment, thereby ensuring their experiences were relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling is appropriate for exploratory mixed-methods research where the aim is to gather in-depth perspectives from information-rich participants (Patton, 2002).

A total of 50 graduates were selected purposively based on criteria such as recent graduation (within the last two academic years) and their engagement in job-seeking or employment activities requiring English communication skills. From Jagannath University, 18 participants were selected (6 females and 12 males); from Jahangirnagar University, 14 participants (10 females and 4 males); and from the University of Dhaka, 18 participants (12 females and 6 males).

In addition, 15 stakeholders or employers were purposively selected from diverse professional fields, including multinational companies (5), private banks (5), and English-medium schools (5), all of whom frequently employed graduates and valued English communicative skills.

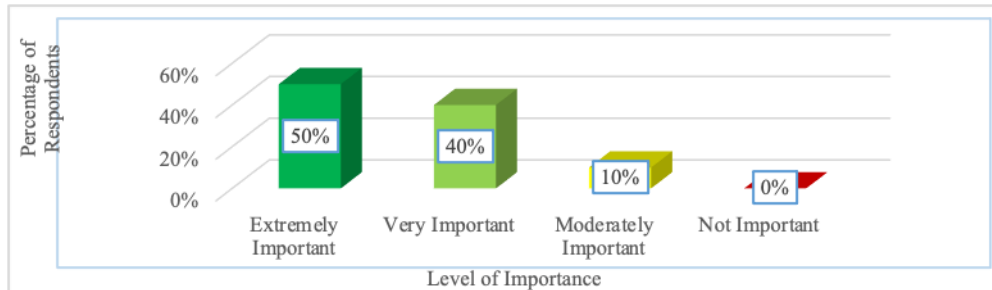
Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Data collection involved both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires to explore a combination of structured facts and customized realities. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the graduates' English communicative skills and the challenges they faced. This study utilized Microsoft Word and Excel to analyze the data, and Napkin AI to generate info graphics aiming to provide actionable insights into how English language proficiency influenced academic and professional success. Moreover, participants were asked to describe the perceived impacts of their English proficiency. Their responses were thematically analyzed, and codes were generated based on recurring patterns. The five 'pros' listed in Figure 05 represent the most frequently mentioned benefits. No significant cons were identified by participants.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Figure 1: Importance of English communication skills in securing employment



The findings presented in Figure 1 highlight the overwhelming significance of English communication skills in securing employment, as perceived by respondents. An overwhelming majority, 50%, identified these skills as "Extremely Important," while 40% considered them "Very Important," indicating that a combined 90% of participants view English communication proficiency as critical to employment prospects. This suggests a strong correlation between English language skills and employability in the current job market. Only 10% of respondents deemed it "Moderately Important," and notably, none (0%) regarded it as "Not Important," reinforcing the near-universal recognition of English communication as a key factor in professional success. These findings underscore the need for enhanced English language training in educational institutions to meet labor market demands.

Figure 2: Confidence levels in using English for professional communication: meetings and presentations

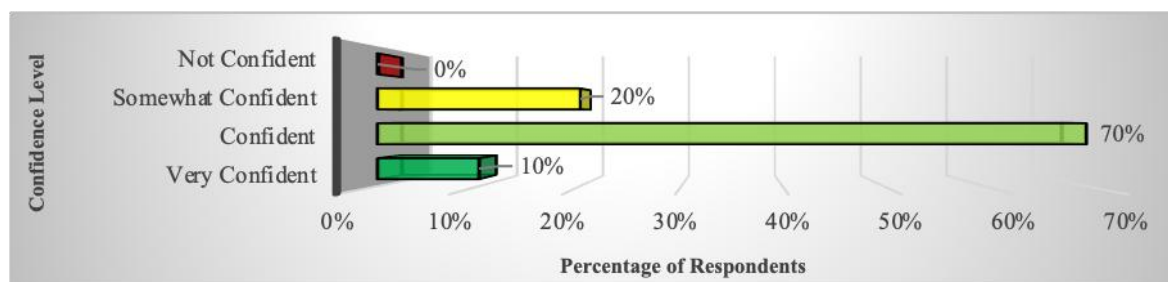


Figure 2, "Confidence Levels in Using English for Professional Communication: Meetings and Presentations," reveals significant insights into participants' self-assessed language proficiency in professional contexts. The majority of respondents (70%) identify as "Confident" in their ability to communicate effectively in meetings and presentations, suggesting a strong sense of competency in professional English

use. A smaller but notable portion, representing 20%, are "Somewhat Confident," indicating moderate assurance but potential areas for improvement. Only 10% classify themselves as "Very Confident," suggesting that while most participants are proficient, relatively few exhibit complete mastery. Interestingly, no respondents identified as "Not Confident," highlighting a baseline level of comfort across the cohort. These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions to elevate more participants to the "Very Confident" level.

Figure 3: Frequency of English usage in current job roles

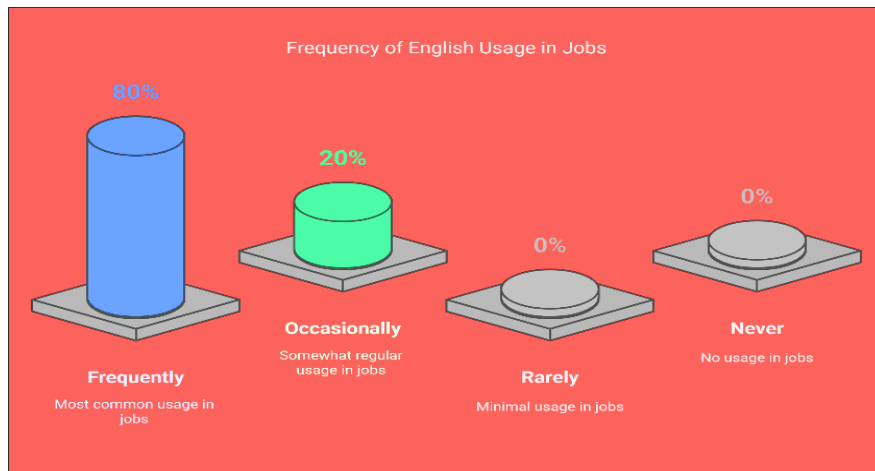
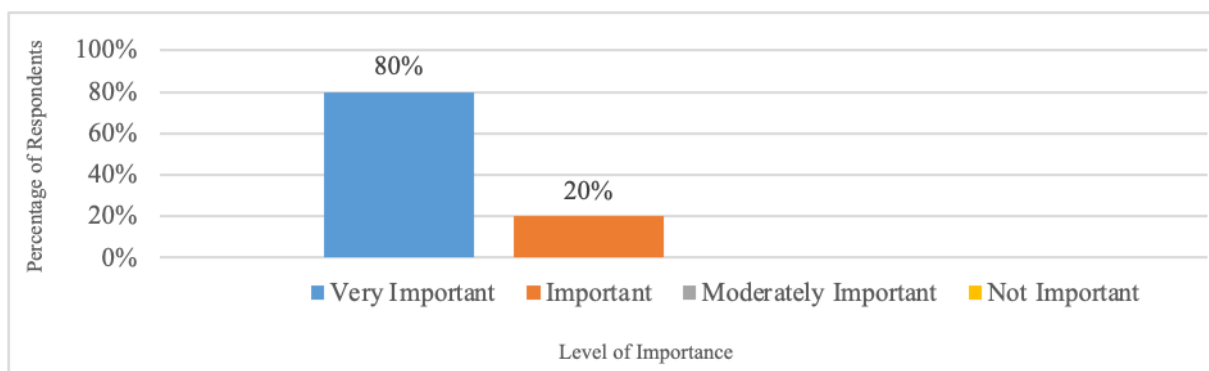


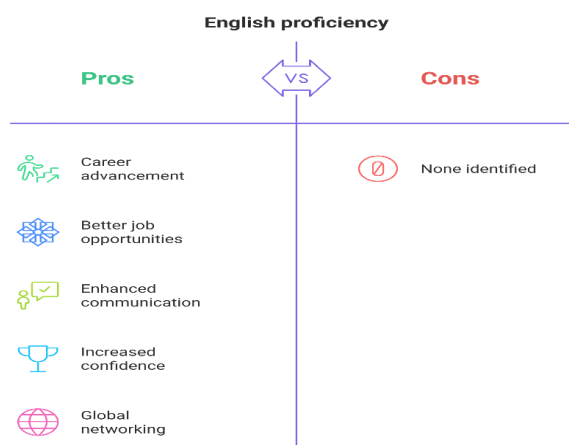
Figure 3 presents significant findings regarding the application of English in professional contexts. According to the data, 80% of the respondents' report using English frequently in their current roles, highlighting its predominance as a necessary language for workplace communication. A smaller portion, 20%, indicated occasional use of English, suggesting a selective or context-specific application. Notably, none of the participants reported using English rarely or never, indicating that English holds substantial importance across the sampled job roles. This data underscores the critical role of English in contemporary professional environments, particularly in positions requiring frequent communication or interaction with international stakeholders.

Figure 4: The impact of English public speaking skills on professional success



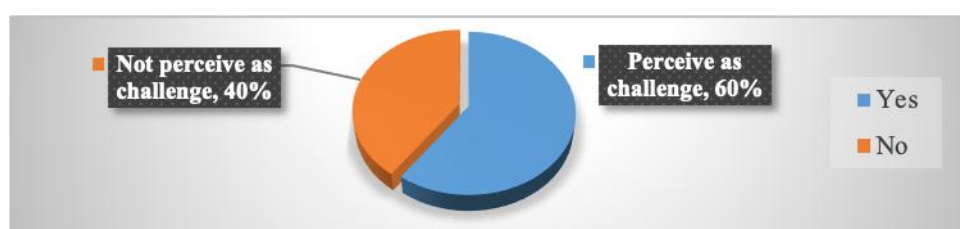
The data presented in the figure, reveals a significant correlation between proficiency in public speaking and professional achievement. The overwhelming majority of respondents (80%) classified English public speaking skills as "Very Important" for career success, highlighting its pivotal role in professional environments. Additionally, 20% of respondents indicated these skills as "Important," suggesting a widespread recognition of their value, albeit to a lesser degree. Notably, no respondents considered public speaking skills to be either "Moderately Important" or "Not Important," underscoring a consensus on the critical impact of such abilities in advancing professional opportunities. This finding emphasizes the need for focused training in public speaking within English language education, particularly in professional and academic contexts.

Figure 5: Perceived impact of English proficiency



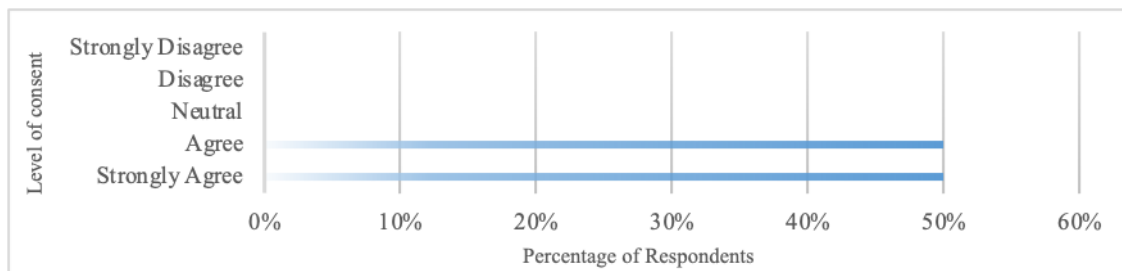
The figure shows that participants view English proficiency as having a distinctly positive impact, with no disadvantages identified. Specifically, it highlights that English fluency can lead to career advancement, better job opportunities, enhanced communication, increased confidence, and broader global networking, suggesting that participants overwhelmingly perceive English proficiency as an asset with no reported downsides.

Figure 6: Challenges in international mobility due to English language skills



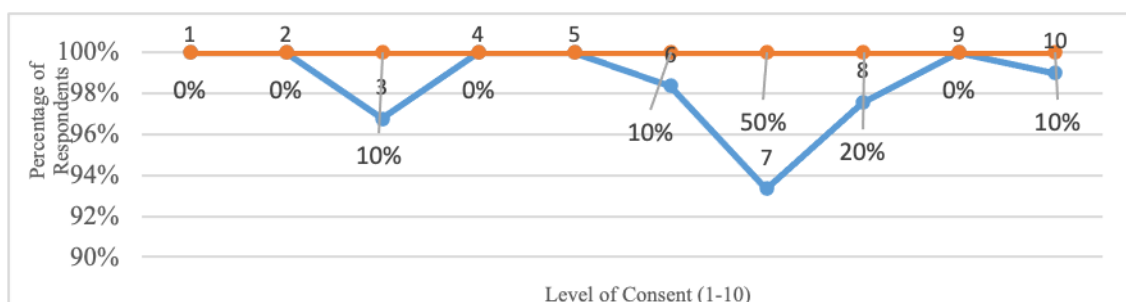
The data presented in Figure 6, indicate that 60% of respondents identify English language skills as a significant barrier to international mobility, while 40% do not perceive it as a challenge. This finding suggests that, although a majority view language proficiency as a substantial obstacle, a considerable portion of individuals-nearly two-fifths-believe that other factors may play a more prominent role in determining mobility.

Figure 7: Perceptions on the impact of English skill improvement on career prospects



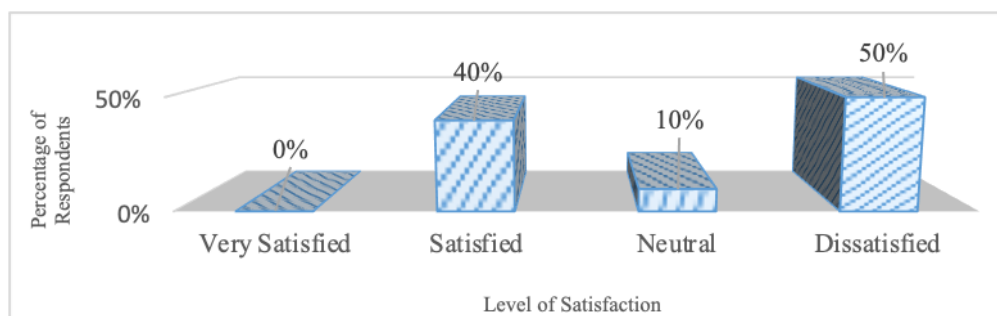
The findings presented under the title "Perceptions on the Impact of English Skill Improvement on Career Prospects" indicate a strongly positive perception among respondents regarding the importance of English proficiency for career advancement. Specifically, 50% of the participants strongly agree, and another 50% agree that enhancing English skills positively influences career prospects. Notably, there are no neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree responses, indicating an overwhelming endorsement of the role of English language improvement in professional development. While this distribution reflects a unanimous positive sentiment within the sample, it is important to interpret this finding within the context of the study's participant group and sample size. The results suggest a significant perceived value of English proficiency in professional development, aligning with broader trends in an increasingly globalized job market. However, caution is advised in generalizing this finding beyond the studied population without further large-scale investigation.

Figure 8: Perceived effectiveness of university-level English language training for professional purposes

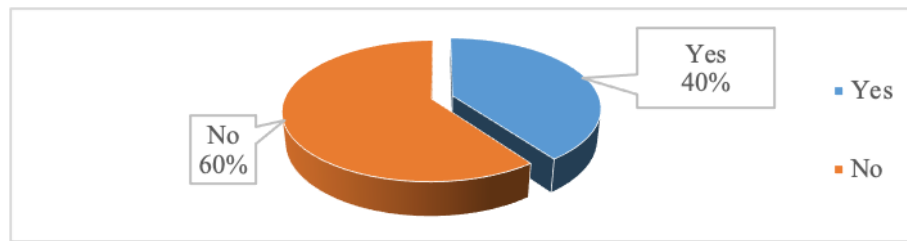


The data on the perceived effectiveness of university-level English language training for professional purposes reveals a wide distribution of responses across different rating levels. Notably, 50% of the respondents rated the effectiveness at level 7, indicating that a significant portion of professionals perceive the training to be relatively effective, though not outstanding. Meanwhile, 20% rated the training at level 8, suggesting a positive, though not exceptional, and evaluation. A smaller group, 10%, rated the effectiveness at level 3, reflecting a more moderate view. Interestingly, no responses were recorded for levels 1, 2, 4, 5, or 9, which highlights the absence of both highly negative and mediocre assessments, while 10% of respondents rated the effectiveness at the highest level, 10, indicating that a small proportion of students find the training excellent. This distribution suggests that while the majority of students view the training positively, there remains room for improvement to enhance its perceived effectiveness.

Figure 9: Student satisfaction with university support for professional English communication skills development



The findings of the survey on student satisfaction with university support for the development of professional English communication skills reveal a polarized response. No students (0%) reported being "Very Satisfied," while 40% of respondents indicated that they were "Satisfied." However, a notable 10% expressed a "Neutral" stance on the matter. More concerning is the fact that the majority of students, representing 50% of the total respondents, reported being "Dissatisfied" with the support provided by the university in this area. These results suggest a significant gap in meeting student expectations regarding professional English communication skills development, warranting further investigation into the effectiveness of the current support mechanisms.

Figure 10: Perception of English proficiency for professional success

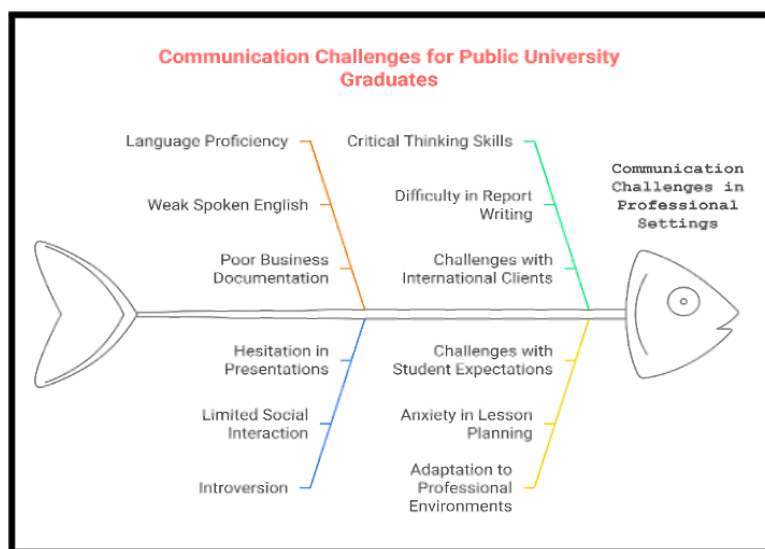
The survey results indicate that a majority of respondents, 60%, do not believe their English language skills are sufficient for professional success, while 40% of participants feel confident in their language proficiency for such purposes. This suggests a significant portion of the population perceives a gap in their English competence in relation to career advancement. The findings highlight the need for further investigation into the factors contributing to this perceived inadequacy, and potentially indicate a broader issue regarding English language education and training in professional contexts.

The responses collected from students regarding the improvement of English communication skills for professional alignment reveal several critical areas of focus. Students strongly emphasized the need for frequent speaking practice, particularly through formal presentations and viva sessions, to build public speaking and confidence skills. In addition to oral communication, the importance of professional writing abilities, such as drafting emails and reports, was consistently highlighted. Students also advocated for the inclusion of more practical and interactive activities, such as debates, language clubs, and English-based competitions, within the university curriculum to foster active language use. Furthermore, they suggested leveraging digital tools, online courses, and IELTS preparation programs to enhance their overall language proficiency. Continuous feedback from mentors and exposure to industry-specific materials were also considered essential strategies for aligning communication skills with professional expectations. These key findings are summarized in the table below:

Table 2: Students' Key Comments on Improving English Communication Skills for Professional Alignment

S.I	Key Responses
1.	Frequent speaking practice through presentations and viva sessions is essential.
2.	Professional writing skills, like email and report writing, need greater focus.
3.	More practical activities like debates and language clubs should be introduced.
4.	Digital tools and online courses can significantly improve communication skills.
5.	Feedback from mentors and industry reading help align communication to professional standards.

Stakeholders' Perception of Graduates' English Communicative Skills and Employability Success

Figure 11: Communication Challenges Faced by Public University Graduates in Professional Settings

The study reveals that graduates from public universities in Bangladesh face statistically and thematically significant challenges in English communication across various professional settings. The challenges were identified based on stakeholder interviews, where over 80% of participants reported communication weaknesses, and supported by survey data indicating 78% of students felt unprepared for professional English use.

In multinational companies, public university graduates struggle to integrate with colleagues from private universities due to weaker spoken English skills. Despite holding advanced degrees, such as MBAs in business disciplines, some graduates exhibit poor performance in professional communication, particularly in presentations, memo writing, and business documentation.

One stakeholder from a multinational company remarked, "We often find that although public university graduates have strong technical knowledge, their inability to present ideas clearly in English affects their performance during meetings and client interactions."

Their interactions with foreign colleagues are hindered by difficulties in understanding tone, intonation, and specialized vocabulary. Many also display introverted tendencies, which further impede their ability to communicate effectively. Similarly, graduates employed in international private banks face difficulties in business communication, including drafting professional emails, engaging in conversations with international clients, and writing reports.

A senior manager from an international private bank stated, "Our new recruits from public universities often struggle to compose emails or reports that meet international standards, and this impacts their confidence and productivity in their first few months."

The ability to think critically, an essential skill in the banking sector, also appears to be a challenge, highlighting a potential gap in their academic preparation. In the field of education, particularly in English-medium schools, public university graduates encounter initial difficulties in adapting to the instructional methods and materials, which are primarily in English. The transition period is often marked by anxiety, as they struggle with lesson planning, conducting discussions, and delivering effective lectures.

One academic coordinator from an English-medium school commented, "Many new teachers from public universities find it challenging to plan lessons and lead discussions confidently in English during their early months, which sometimes affects classroom engagement."

Furthermore, adjusting to the personalities and expectations of students from upper-income backgrounds proves to be a challenge, given that most public university graduates come from middle-class backgrounds. They also face obstacles in both intra-class and extra-class communication, which affects their overall teaching effectiveness. Although many eventually learn to adapt, the initial phase is often daunting, underscoring the need for targeted training to enhance their communicative competence in professional settings.

Discussion

How do graduates' English communicative skills contribute to employability success?

The findings of this study highlight that graduates' English communicative skills are crucial for employability success. Most participants acknowledged that their English proficiency was essential for obtaining employment and demonstrating confidence in professional settings. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of English proficiency in enhancing employability in globalized job markets (Tirumala, 2020; Rahman & Pandian, 2018).

However, many graduates admitted deficiencies in public speaking and business communication skills, pointing to a mismatch between academic training and professional demands. As found by Hamid (2010), despite formal instruction, graduates often lack practical communication competencies required in workplaces. This underscores the need for targeted university-level interventions focusing on business writing, public speaking, and real-world language engagement.

Furthermore, perceptions of English language programs at universities were mixed. Some graduates found them beneficial, while others felt inadequately prepared for professional communication. Similar findings were reported by Kabir (2015), who argued that traditional curricula often emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical communication skills. These challenges call for integrating outcome-based education (OBE) approaches to better align academic training with industry expectations.

Thus, the results reaffirm that enhancing graduates' English communicative competence significantly contributes to improving their employability prospects and advancing their professional success.

How do English communicative skills address unemployment issues and create prospects for employability success?

The study found that limited English proficiency acted as a major barrier to securing employment both nationally and internationally. Graduates' effective communicative skills were found crucial for achieving international mobility and participating in the global economy. Moreover, participants highlighted that the

ability to articulate ideas in English during interviews and workplace interactions influenced career progression, networking, and leadership.

Graduates also noted that inadequate practical application of English, limited exposure to business contexts, and insufficient interactive learning opportunities restricted their career advancement. These findings suggest that universities must develop industry-relevant curricula that emphasize real-world communication skills and offer experiential learning opportunities, such as internships, language immersion programs, and industry collaborations.

Additionally, structured training in public speaking (through debates, formal presentations, etc.) was identified as essential for career growth and leadership development. As discussed by Spencer-Oatey (2013), effective communication skills not only facilitate employment but also enhance cross-cultural competencies and negotiation skills necessary for leadership roles.

Overall, this study confirms that strengthening English communicative skills can address unemployment challenges and unlock greater prospects for employability success, especially in the context of an increasingly interconnected global economy.

Conclusion

The main objective of the present study was to explore how graduates' English communicative skills contribute to their professional success and address unemployment issues by creating prospects for employability in Bangladesh.

The study found that strong English communicative skills significantly enhance graduates' chances of employability and professional growth. Universities, particularly public institutions, must take proactive measures to strengthen these skills to meet the demands of the competitive job market. Additionally, the results suggest that bridging the gap between academic English training and professional communication requirements is critical for graduates' career success.

The findings highlight the need for revising the existing academic English curriculum to better align with professional and industry expectations. Such revisions should focus on developing practical communication abilities, assessing the direct impact of English skills on employability outcomes, and addressing the specific challenges that graduates face in professional settings.

The study carries important implications for policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders. Strengthening English communicative competencies can significantly reduce graduate unemployment and enhance workforce readiness.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies tracking graduates' professional progress related to their English communication abilities. Comparative studies between private and public university graduates and across different regions of Bangladesh could provide further insights. Additionally, exploring employer expectations in diverse industries would offer a broader understanding of the evolving demands for English communicative skills in the professional landscape.

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