



Role of English Language Proficiency in Enhancing Employability in India: A Narrative Review and Conceptual Framework (With Policy and Skills- Ecosystem Linkages)

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Abstract- English proficiency in the multi-lingual labour market in India frequently serves as both a signalling device (employers use it to filter job applicants by excluding those who are not ready to work) and a productivity skill (because it allows communication, documentation, and coordination n.b. it is also an important predictor of educational attainment). The evidence synthesized in this research paper on the relationship between the English language proficiency and the employability outcomes in India, including the employment access, wage returns, job mobility, workplace and career progression, is based on peer-reviewed economic and education research, and the skills-system and employer-facing reports. The review has strong evidence of an English premium in earnings and jobs with heterogeneity across age cohort, education, gender, geography and sector. Meanwhile, unequal access to quality instruction in the English language, along with limited room to practice, also lead to the development of skill gaps, especially among rural youth and the first generation learners. Based on the literature review, the paper will support a piece of conceptual mechanism framework through which English proficiency is associated with employability through (i) human capital (task performance), (ii) labour-market signalling (screening), (iii) social capital and networks and (iv) mobility to higher-productivity sectors. There is a narrative review approach in the presence of clear inclusion criteria and thematic synthesis. The paper is summarized with some practical implications to higher education, vocational skilling, and workplace training: make English-to-workplace communication part of domain learning, differentiate instruction to occupational standards, and make provision of disadvantaged learners through an integrated, practice-based training with testing and evaluation.

Keywords- English proficiency, employability, India, wage premium, skills development, vocational training, labour market, communication skills.

I. Introduction

Rapid structural changes in India influence the concept of employability: the growth of services and IT-enhanced employment, the increased interest of the youth in the formal sector, and the ongoing redefinition of job-suitable skills. In this new terrain,



proficiency in English language has gained special labour-market value. Higher education, corporate communication, customer facing services, global supply chains, and most of the standardized processes of professional environments all use English. Thus, employers often use the English proficiency as one of the fundamental employability skills, sometimes, as the direct skill on productivity and sometimes, as an indication of the education level, confidence, and professional attitude.

There exists a large amount of evidence in labour economics that language skills may bring about returns on earnings that are measurable since they increase productivity as well as allow one to get access to a better job. Empirical research has recorded wage premiums relating to English proficiency in India and revealed that returns are different between cohorts and education groups. Indicatively, national representative data provides positive wage returns to English with age and schooling heterogeneity (Azam, Chin, and Prakash, 2013). Likewise, causal effects of the probability of learning English on wages have been estimated by the use of policy-experimental evidence through an exogenous change in English instructions policy (Chakraborty and Bakshi, 2016).

Nevertheless, an employability lens should not be limited to wages only. Employability comprises of the skills that enable people to acquire a job, retain it, and advance. English supports interview performance, coordination within workplaces, communicating with clients, safety regulations, working digitally, and lifelong learning as the responsibilities of the job grow to focus more on incorporating hybrid skill bundles (communication + digital + domain skills). Research on employers worldwide confirms the importance of English in the operation of the workplace cuts across industries (Cambridge English & QS, 2016). In India, the English has been directly integrated in the skills ecosystem establishments through the use of English in skilling systems and employability modules, guided by the demands side employer expectations (NSDC/MEPSC occupational standards; public policy notes).

Problem statement

Although English is seen as an employability advantage, Indian students and interns usually encounter an employed gap: sufficient technical skills, but lacking in communication ability to make effective employees. Disparities in the opportunity to receive good English instruction and practice can lead to the occurrence of sustainable differences among rural/urban settings, school settings, and socioeconomic status groups. The effect is that instead of being a skill which the system is dependable in cultivating, sometimes English is a barrier of sorts, of filtering the candidates out of chances.

Research objectives

This paper aims to:

- Generalize the research findings on the connection between English proficiency and the employment outcomes in India.
- Find ways of explaining why English has an impact on employability (productivity, signalling, networks, mobility).
- Study patterns and limitations of English skill acquisition (participation, completion, opportunity).



- Offer a conceptual framework and measurement methodology, which is India-relevant to future empirical research.
- Give higher education, vocational skilling and policy implications.

Research questions

- What does the evidence tell regarding wage and employment returns in India to English proficiency?
- How, by which processes, does English proficiency affect employability?
- Who is the one that will gain most and who will be locked out because of English barriers?
- What are the program and policy strategies that can be used to increase English-for-employability in an effective and equitable way?

II. Literature Review

Conceptualizing employability and “English for work

The meaning of employability is usually conceived of as the set of transferable skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals can use to be hired, work in their capacity and career advancement in the labour market. In the literature on employability models around the world, communication competence, which encompasses the ability to convey ideas clearly and fluently in the work environment and pragmatically in an organizational context, is a central theme as the majority of the jobs involve coordination, collaboration, and exchange of information. English proficiency can also serve in the Indian context as a convenient conveyor of communication competence since numerous recruitment practices, as well as work systems, are conducted in English, particularly in services, corporate work and inter-state or international business. Notably, workplace English extends beyond grammatical correctness and also incorporates functional language usage in email, reports, instructions and communication with clients, interactional competence, teamwork, meetings, negotiation and problem-solving, professional pragmatics which is tone, politeness strategies, turn-taking and clarity under pressure, and digital practices of communicating using chat tools, project updates, and documentation norms. The evidence that supports the employer viewpoint indicates that capability to communicate and to use language has impact on the employability as it lowers the costs of coordination, enhances customer satisfaction, and prevents operational errors, thus language and communication are the core factors of productivity and not strictly academic (Cambridge English & QS, 2016).

Human capital English proficiency: productivity and task performance.

Human capital theory states that education and skills are productive and hence more wages and jobs. The direct impact on productivity of English proficiency is that jobs that demand reading manuals and technical instruction, documentation writing, team work, or using training materials which are mostly in English. The increasing IT services and business-process outsourcing, e-commerce, and the growth of formal-sector service jobs in India has added pressure on the use of English-mediated work practices, which has enhanced the labour-market worth of English skills. The empirical data on the national level shows that it is possible to measure the returns to earnings in case of English proficiency, making it possible to argue that English has



no fewer than economically productive skills (Azam et al., 2013). Customer facing jobs and globally integrated jobs at the sector level might have higher marginal returns due to the close relation of communication quality with service outcomes, customer retention and organizational performance indicators.

English proficiency: labour-market signalling: screening and selection.

Besides productivity impacts, the signalling theory implies that employers can use observable characteristics in inferring unobservable productivity, particularly where the employers are unable to obtain a perfect measure of the job performance of the candidate prior to employment. The aptitude of English as a screening signal is potentially strong in India due to the common assurances that the skill is linked to superior education, higher exposure to professional conventions, increased confidence and presentation competencies and willingness to operate in corporate communication cultures. This signalling game can reinforce inequality: not only do candidates with privileged origins of education receive preference because they actually are competent in languages, but English is socially construed as an indicator of employability and professionalism, and also because English is socially coded as a symbol of fit. Because of this, English can be concurrently a skill and a gate keeping system which influences access to opportunity.

Causal evidence of policy experiment English instruction and wage.

One of the major strengths of the Indian evidence base is that there is availability of policy variation, which facilitates causal inference. The exogenous language policy intervention by Chakraborty and Bakshi (2016) that influences the likelihood of the English learning yield negative wage outcomes in cohorts that were exposed to less English instruction, therefore, providing a causal depiction of the English premium. This type of quasi-experimental evidence is particularly valuable since it goes beyond simple correlations such as how English skills may simply be a by-product of greater socioeconomic privilege and how exposure to English in later stages can impact future economic performance the other way around.

Heterogeneity: education, cohort, gender and geography.

The benefits of English proficiency are not equally distributed among the population and there is indication of systematic heterogeneity. English is frequently a supplement to higher education, that is, the higher the premium, the higher is the ability to occupy complex jobs or perform in high-skill jobs. Cohort variations in returns can also occur due to the changes in labour-market structures, sector composition, and diffusion of English with time, which change the marginal value of English skills to different age groups. Gender processes are also important since English may open women to formal service work and enhance their mobility into higher pay jobs, yet limitations on safety, mobility, discrimination, and care load may diminish the potential of women to translate the accomplishment of language competencies into labour-market achievement. The rural-urban disparity is also significant due to the common low-quality of instruction, lack of immersive practice, and the exposure to few professional networks experienced by rural learners which can diminish the power of the English-based enhancements of employability. The wider changes in the labour-market opportunities associated with globalisation can also redefine the educational



investments, such as language and IT-related skills, which strengthen the dynamic relationship between economic change and human capital creation (Shastry, 2012).

Constraints in skills acquisition and program barriers.

Learning functional spoken English can be challenging to poor learners even when English has the benefits of labour-market because they lack time, opportunity costs are high, they do not have any supportive practice environments and because of the social-psychological barriers they face through anxiety, fear of judgment, and lack of confidence. The use of English training contexts indicates that there are significant barriers to consideration with regard to participation and completion meaning that supply-side expansion cannot be sustained without training that would alleviate the constraints and maintain the practice. Program design is an important issue then: successful programs should offer multiple speaking, realistic work tasks and feedback and designs that allow learners to continue even when restricted (Jain, Maitra, and Mani, 2019).

Skills ecosystem and the expectations of the employers in India.

The ecosystem of skilling and employability in India is becoming more and more oriented to the English language as a base employability skill. The National Occupational Standards contain units like the Use Basic English for Employability that codify the anticipated competences and allow correlation of curriculum design, curriculum delivery and curriculum assessment. Such communications about vocational training have also focused on embedding English and employability to enhance labour-market performance. Also, the skills reports done by the employers and the tests like the India Skills Report series give monitoring of the trends in employability and often point to the communication and workplace readiness as the determining factor in placement and performance, supporting the demand-side focus on functional English.

Global context: future of work and bundles of skills.

The future of work can be defined as being cross-functional skill bundles where, communication, analytical thinking, digital competence and adaptability work synergically to influence employability. According to large employer surveys, reskilling and transferable core skills will be used to shape careers particularly as job descriptions will be transformed through technology and restructuring of organizations (World Economic Forum, 2023, 2025). In this regard, such an ability as English proficiency can serve as an enabling skill, which helps to access training content, collaborate across teams and geographies, work within digitally mediated work environments, and move between roles thus making the practice of employability not only entry-level but also career lifecycle-wide.



Figure 1. Conceptual Mechanism Framework Linking English Proficiency to Employability in India

III. Methodology

Research Design

In this study, the research design is the narrative review, through a systematic search, screening, and theme synthesis to investigate the role of English language proficiency in influencing the outcomes of employability in India. To answer this question, a narrative review would be appropriate since the evidence base has a wider range of areas, such as labour economics, education and training research, and policy and skills-ecosystem research. The review will not attempt to estimate pooled effect sizes, but instead seek to combine quantitative data on returns and causal influences with qualitative and evaluative data on skill formation and institutional structures in order to bring into view a holistic and context-based view of the English-employability relationship (Green et al., 2006).

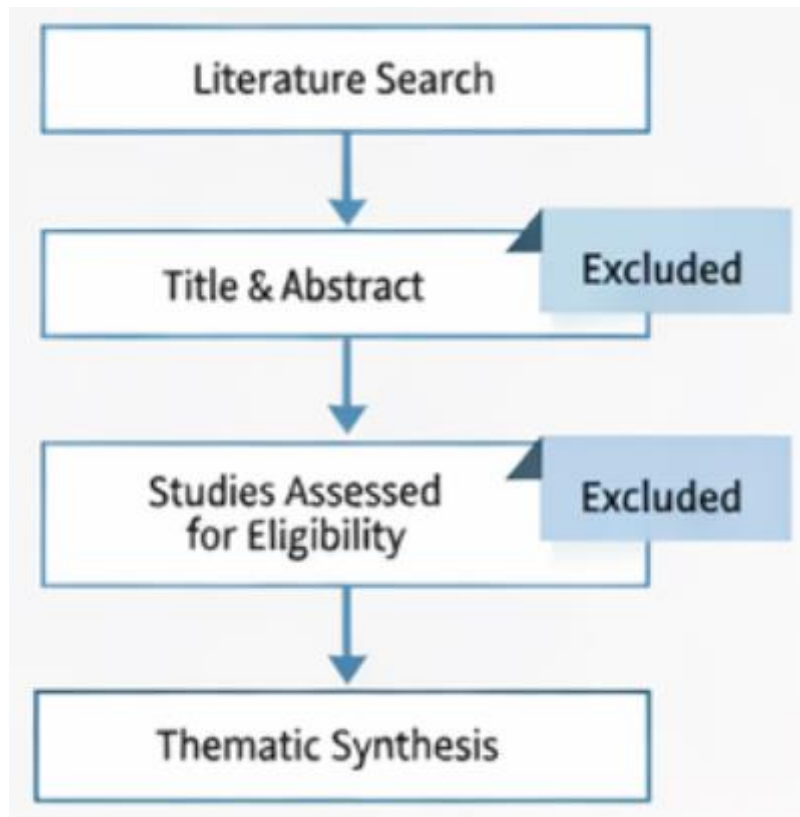


Figure 2. Research Design Flowchart of the Narrative Review

Data Sources

The review is based on four broad types of sources. In the first place, peer-reviewed journal articles and working papers that study English proficiency and labour-market performance in India that includes wages, employment probability, and occupational mobility were identified. Second, assessment research and studies of English training programmes were consulted, and especially the limitations impacting the acquisition of spoken English and participation of learners. Third, international studies of workplace English and communication skills, conducted by employers, were also included to reflect demand-side attitudes to employability. Lastly, policy and skills-ecosystem reports, such as National Occupational Standards (NOS) and skills landscape reports, employability studies and future-of-jobs reports were reviewed. The most important policy and institutional publications were obtained in the official repositories like the British Council India publications, NSDC/ MEPSC NOS pages and PDFs, the government press releases and India Skills Report documents.



Figure 3. Data Sources and Evidence Types Used in the Review

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Relevance and credibility were ensured by the explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies on English language proficiency and its association with employability outcomes in India were included, with those which had causal or quasi-experimental designs as their priority given priority, barriers to the acquisition of spoken English discussed in terms of training interventions, or connections to employability were explicitly made in policy documents. Unincluded sources included those that lacked a straightforward focus on employability (such as linguistic analyses only), untrustworthy or untraceable ones, and those studies that were not India-based but were only used sparingly to provide theoretical context.

Several approaches exist that can be used to conduct screening and synthesis.

The screening was done at the title and abstract level in the first phase in order to define the relevance of the Title and abstract to English proficiency and employability. Preference was given to full texts where possible in the form of journal articles, working papers and institutional reports. The chosen literature was analysed thematically in four categories, by analysing it under, (i) labour-market returns and employment outcomes, (ii) mechanisms of connecting English proficiency with employability, (iii) barriers and equity-related constraints, and (iv) policy and training implications. This themed synthesis allowed carrying out a systematic comparison of various sources without losing the contextual richness (Popay et al., 2006).

Future Empirical Work Measurement Framework Proposal.

Based on the assessed evidence, the paper suggests an operational measurement framework that can be used in future empirical studies within the framework of a survey, mixed-method design, and programme evaluation. The framework includes quantifiable levels of English proficiency and employability and allows greater

conformity to measure the results (entry, retention, progression, and earnings) and factors of context and equity-related limitations.

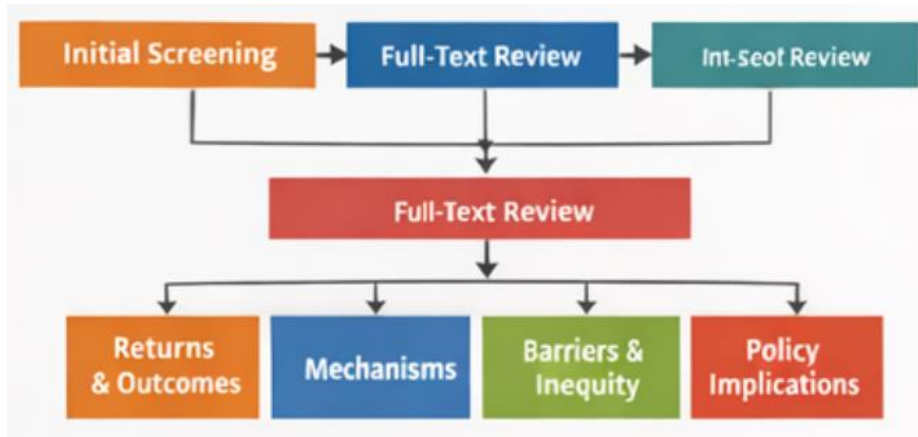


Figure 4. Screening and Thematic Synthesis Process

Table 1 Operational definitions and measures

Construct	Sub-dimensions	Example indicators (measurement)	Why it matters for employability
English proficiency	Functional literacy	Reading workplace documents; form filling; comprehension test	Enables task execution and compliance
English proficiency	Spoken interaction	Role-play performance; interview simulation; fluency/clarity rubrics	Affects hiring, teamwork, customer service
English proficiency	Workplace pragmatics	Email tone; politeness; turn-taking; clarity in meetings	Reduces miscommunication costs
Employability	Job entry	Interview success; time-to-job; placement rate	Captures access to employment
Employability	Retention	Probation completion; attendance; supervisor rating	Captures sustainability of employment
Employability	Progression	Promotions; role complexity; wage growth; growth	Captures upward mobility
Context	Equity and constraints	SES, region, school type, gendered mobility constraints	Explains heterogeneity in returns

IV. Results

Since it is a review paper (not a primary dataset study) the results are reported in the form of synthesized themes of the literature and policy documents.

Theme 1: In India, English proficiency is related to positive wage and employment returns.

The best statistical evidence suggests that the English skills are rewarded in the Indian labour market. The analysis that is done nationally shows positive returns, implying that English is economically valued and that it has been increasing its value through globalization (Azam et al., 2013). The statement that lower wages can be reduced with decreased English exposure is supported by the evidences that include the policy changes indicating the presence of a causal channel (Chakraborty and Bakshi, 2016).

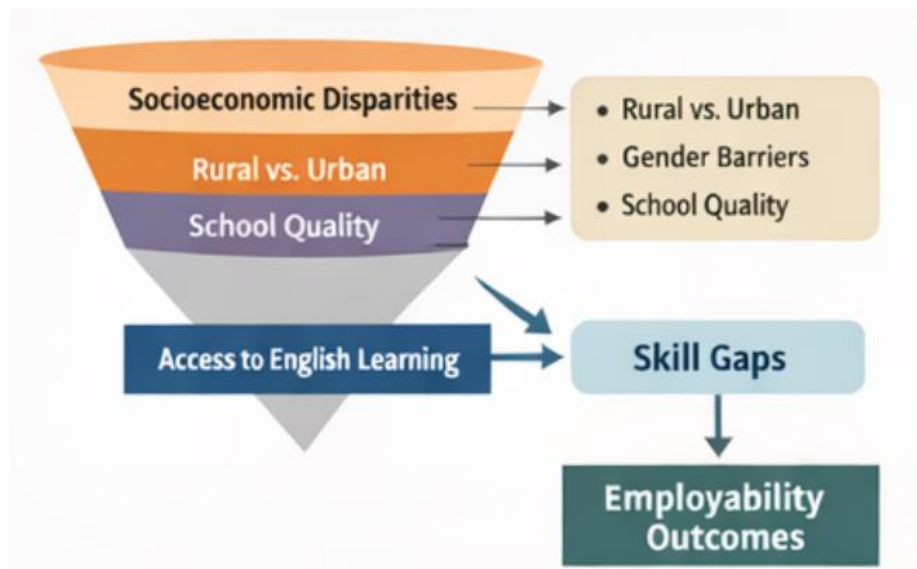


Figure 5. Pathways of Inequality in English Skill Acquisition and Employability

Theme 2: The theme is that returns are job dependent, education dependent and complementary of English.

English is used as a complementary skill, the benefits of it are greater when it is combined with education, digital skills, or technical proficiency. English has the potential of accessing improved productivity spheres where documentation, coordination and customer communication is common. Similar evidence by global employers also focuses on the fact that English is useful when organizations act internationally, where they depend on international information flow, or where they have customers who speak multiple languages (Cambridge English & QS, 2016).



4.3 Theme 3: English influences Employability deals with productivity as well as signalling.

The interviews, group discussions, or written tasks conducted during the hiring procedures often involve English. Consequently, the English shapes employability both due to enhanced performance at the workplace and due to the fact that it affects the selection in the recruitment process. The signalling channel has the potential to contribute to inequality: the similar candidates in terms of technical skill might be selected differently because of the creation of an impression mediated through English and a perceived professionalism.

Theme 4: There is a limited acquisition of skills; training results are based on design and support.

The experience of English training has shown that time, confidence, practice environment and opportunity cost may constrain participation and completion. Among the main results is that any program should decrease barriers and provide an opportunity to practice speaking in the long term, not only classroom (Jain et al., 2019).

Theme 5: Policy and ecosystem documents become more formal on the use of English as employability skill.

The system of skilling in India has formalized English-for-employability in form of occupational standards and training systems. The NOS unit on basic English gives specifications of competency expectations and facilitates standardized training and assessment. The issue of embedding English and employability skills to enhance the probability of placement in terms of vocational training is also observed in the public policy communication. The skills landscape reports also indicate the changing employability requirements and significance of foundational and transferable skills.

Theme 6: Future of work enhances the worth of communication and constant learning.

The reports on employer outlook highlight the skills moving towards analytical thinking, communication, and adaptability, and the fact that reskilling on the large scale is required (World Economic Forum, 2023, 2025). This means that in India, English proficiency can make an impact on employability as it allows it to access training material, cross-functional teamwork, and transfers to new employment

Table 2 Summary of key evidence used in this review

Evidence type	Source examples	What it supports
National wage returns	Azam et al. (2013)	English premium in earnings; heterogeneity patterns
Quasi-experimental causal	Chakraborty & Bakshi	Policy-induced reduced



Evidence type	Source examples	What it supports
evidence	(2016)	English learning probability lowers wages
Global employer/workplace language evidence	Cambridge English & QS (2016)	English as workplace skill; employer demand and skill gaps
Training constraints evidence	Jain et al. (2019)	Barriers to acquiring spoken English; importance of supportive design
Skills ecosystem formalization	NSDC/MEPSC NOS + Government notes	English embedded into standards and vocational structures
Future skills outlook	WEF (2023, 2025); OECD (2019)	Communication + digital skills as core; continuous learning

V. Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion: Implications of the Synthesis

The evidence on the synthesis suggests that the proficiency in English language is a factor enhancing employability in India in a number of mechanisms that are interconnected and strengthening. To start with, English is human capital, which increases productivity in English-related activities like documentation, coordination, communication with clients and availability of training materials. Second, English is a labour-market indicator, it determines who hires and who is hired since employers often equate English proficiency with professionalism, confidence, and readiness to work in a job through hiring and selection activities. Third, English helps in building up social capital because it allows different access to professional networks, referral, and flow of information especially in urban and formal labour markets. Lastly, being fluent in English facilitates industry and occupational mobility that enables employees to shift into more productive industries and participate in lifelong upskilling, which is becoming an increasingly essential part of the fast-changing labour market (Azam et al., 2013; Chakraborty and Bakshi, 2016).

Meanwhile, the advantages of the English proficiency are unevenly distributed. Those learners who have been exposed to English at an early age, who have been provided with good learning conditions and whose skills at spoken language have been sustained over an extended duration are in better positions to convert the skills they have acquired in English to employability benefits. On the other hand, poor students, particularly students in rural areas, first-generation students, students who are not exposed to practice ecosystems, and others might start perceiving English as a venerated instead of facilitating skill. The asymmetrical transformation of language competencies into labour-market performance indicates that English for employability must be regarded as an equity and systems problem subject to institutional access, training design and social context, and not merely a classroom level issue of instruction (Jain et al., 2019).



Education, Skilling, and Employers implications.

The results have a significant implication to the educational and vocational training and employment systems. English-for-workplace competencies in higher education ought not to be taught as separate grammar-oriented courses; rather, they should be integrated into disciplinary work (through such tasks as laboratory reports, presentations, project documentation, and collaborative work, among others). The performance-based tests, including role-plays, interview simulation, and teamwork communication rubrics, are more consistent with the language needs at the workplace and employability results.

Higher Education	Vocational Training	Employers
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Figure 6. Alignment of English-for-Employability Across Education, Skilling, and Workplace Systems

In terms of vocational skilling and policy, the curriculum must be structured based on competency descriptors of the National Occupational Standards type and be based on real-life tasks of workplace language. The programme design must clearly cover barriers to attendance and enrolment through flexible scheduling, blended and practice-based learning designs, peer speaking circles and confidence-enhancing pedagogies. Moreover, the outcomes that are monitored and evaluated should go beyond test scores and also cover the placement rates, retention, and supervisor feedback to measure the sustainability of the employability gains (NSDC, 2024; Jain et al., 2019).

On the part of employers, the imprecise skills like good communication skills that are used to recruit employees should be substituted with job specific language requirements with onboarding and in-job support. It is possible to lessen excessive reliance on pre-hire screening and facilitate more inclusive and productive workforce development by offering workplace language mentoring, communication templates, and microlearning (Cambridge English and QS, 2016).

VI. Conclusion

The English language proficiency is an important factor influencing Indian employability with consistent finding of wage and jobs-access premiums with plausible cause and effect relationships that are shown on policy-experimental

research (Azam et al., 2013; Chakraborty and Bakshi, 2016). Nevertheless, where the access to quality learning and meaningful practice is not even, then English can also reproduce the existing inequalities. An increase in English teaching is not therefore the best move to make, but rather, the creation of a practice-based, occupation-focused, English-to-work training that is built into the education and skilling systems. This direction is based on real performance assessment, and is associated to tangible job outcomes, which provides a more sustainable and fair avenue of improving employability in India.

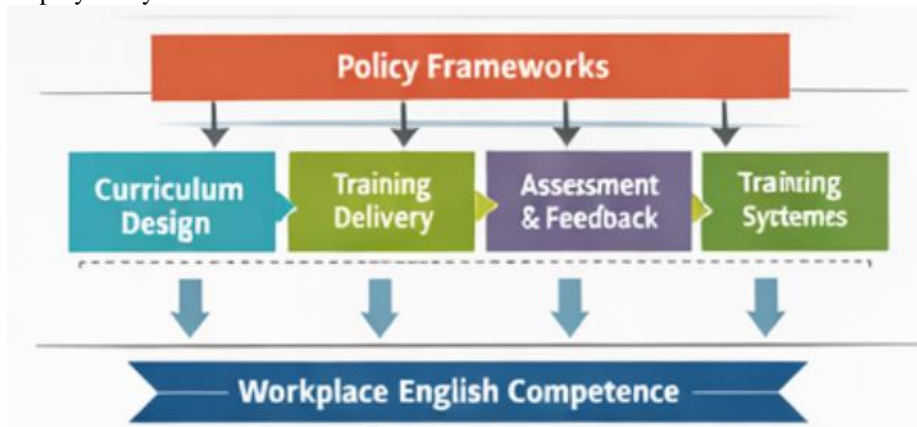


Figure 7. Policy-to-Practice Model for Equitable English-for-Work Training in India

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