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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN THE AI ERA

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ABSTRAK

Integrasi teknologi kecerdasan buatan telah memicu perdebatan akademis mengenai pentingnya kompetensi linguistik manusia di berbagai sektor ketenagakerjaan global. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji persepsi institusional pemberi kerja mengenai pentingnya kemahiran berbahasa Inggris dalam meningkatkan peluang kerja di tengah pesatnya perkembangan kecerdasan buatan. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data empiris dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan para pemimpin organisasi di empat sektor: pendidikan, layanan kesehatan, layanan publik, dan perbankan. Temuan tematis menunjukkan bahwa bahasa Inggris tetap menjadi kompetensi inti yang tak tergantikan di seluruh industri yang diteliti, serta berperan berdampingan dengan infrastruktur digital. Sektor pendidikan dan perbankan menempatkan bahasa Inggris sebagai kriteria perekrutan yang mendasar, sementara sektor layanan kesehatan dan layanan publik memandangnya sebagai keterampilan yang bernilai secara kontekstual. Alih-alih membuat keahlian linguistik menjadi usang, perangkat kecerdasan buatan justru berfungsi sebagai mekanisme pendukung yang menuntut kemahiran aktif manusia demi optimalisasi *prompt engineering* dalam operasional. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penguasaan bahasa Inggris tetap menjadi aset sosial-ekonomi yang strategis, yang memperkuat daya saing tenaga kerja serta memperluas mobilitas karier institusional dalam ekonomi pengetahuan global yang semakin terotomatisasi.
Kata Kunci: *Kemahiran Bahasa Inggris, Lingkungan Kerja Berbasis AI, Keterampilan Kerja, Tenaga Kerja Digital*

ABSTRACT

The integration of artificial intelligence technologies has sparked scholarly debate regarding the necessity of human linguistic competence across globalized labor sectors. This study aims to examine employers' institutional perceptions of the importance of English language proficiency in enhancing employment opportunities amid the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence. Employing a qualitative case study design, empirical data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with organizational leaders across four sectors: education, healthcare, public service, and banking. The thematic findings demonstrate that English remains an indispensable core competency across all examined industries, functioning alongside digital infrastructures. The education and banking sectors position English as a fundamental recruitment criterion, whereas healthcare and public service view it as a contextually valuable skill. Rather than rendering linguistic expertise obsolete, artificial intelligence tools serve as assistive mechanisms that demand active human proficiency for optimal operational prompt engineering. This study establishes that English language mastery remains a strategic socio-economic asset, reinforcing workforce competitiveness and expanding institutional career mobility in an increasingly automated global knowledge economy.
Keywords: *AI-driven workplace, digital workforce, employability skills, English language proficiency.*

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INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency is widely recognized as a primary factor that significantly enhances an individual's access to sustainable employment opportunities (Ahamed, 2023; Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). Within the modern labor landscape, English operates as an essential medium of international communication that heavily determines organizational recruitment decisions (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). The possession of advanced linguistic competence not only equips job seekers with competitive advantages but also facilitates broader career mobility (Khoiruman & Irawan, 2025). Employers consistently prioritize proficient candidates to maintain seamless operational interactions across diverse geographical and cultural boundaries (Ting et al., 2017). Consequently, English language mastery has transformed into a strategic prerequisite for navigating the demands of the twenty-first-century globalized economy.

In Indonesia, the necessity for a globally competitive workforce has intensified alongside expanding international corporate partnerships and export-oriented digital industries. National enterprises operating in financial, educational, and technological domains increasingly establish English proficiency as a mandatory standard for applicant screening (Basalamah et al., 2020). Higher education institutions have attempted to address this demand by institutionalizing specialized *English for Specific Purposes* curricula across diverse degree programs (Sari, 2018). Nevertheless, substantial empirical evidence indicates that a considerable segment of local job seekers still possesses linguistic capabilities below international corporate standards. This persistent disparity highlights an urgent need to evaluate how industry requirements align with contemporary human capital preparation.

The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence tools that perform instantaneous machine translation introduces profound complexities into institutional recruitment paradigms. Modern *AI-powered* linguistic platforms offer sophisticated automated solutions that enable real-time multilingual communication without requiring advanced human language mastery (Fitria, 2021). This technological development has generated widespread concerns regarding whether human English proficiency remains indispensable for securing employment in automated workplaces. Some organizational analysts hypothesize that heavy reliance on algorithmic translation might diminish the perceived value of conventional language learning. Consequently, rigorous scholarly investigation is needed to clarify how modern employers evaluate English competence when automated tools are readily available.

Previous empirical research has extensively established that international corporations depend on English to sustain cross-border communication and commercial negotiations. Multinational organizations systematically prioritize candidates with strong communicative capabilities to ensure organizational efficiency and cross-cultural cohesion (Ting et al., 2017). Functioning as a global *lingua franca*, English continues to dominate international scientific discourse, technological innovation, and transnational enterprise governance (Crystal, 2003). Workplace communication studies further demonstrate that high linguistic competence directly correlates with enhanced employee productivity and promotional opportunities (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). Therefore, linguistic ability has traditionally been treated as an irreplaceable form of human capital in competitive employment sectors.

Recent technological advancements demonstrate that algorithmic models cannot fully replicate human contextual pragmatics, cultural nuances, and interpersonal negotiations. Automated systems frequently struggle with domain-specific idiomatic expressions and complex professional interactions that require empathetic human judgment (Ahamed, 2023).

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Furthermore, operating sophisticated *AI* platforms, designing precise system prompts, and interpreting technical documentation require strong English literacy (Khoiruman & Irawan, 2025). Contemporary technology enterprises increasingly recruit linguistically proficient personnel to oversee automated workflows and manage international technological ecosystems (Gonzalez-Lloret, 2019). However, research exploring institutional recruitment perspectives across varied public and private sectors remains limited; hence, this study examines employers' strategic valuation of English proficiency in the *AI* era.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative exploratory case study design to investigate employers' institutional perceptions regarding the strategic relevance of English language proficiency amid the advancement of artificial intelligence technologies. A qualitative paradigm was selected because it enables an in-depth, contextual examination of human experiences, institutional policies, and organizational decision-making processes in real-world professional environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted across five distinct institutional settings situated in Metro City, Lampung, encompassing the education, healthcare, public service, and banking sectors. Research participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques to ensure that all respondents possessed direct authority over recruitment, talent evaluation, and human resource management (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The key participants included a human resource division head from the Social Security Agency on Health, an administrative director from Muhammadiyah Public Hospital, an assistant vice president from Bank Negara Indonesia, a curriculum vice principal from SMP Muhammadiyah Ahmad Dahlan, and the school headmaster from SMP Cahaya Bangsa.

Empirical data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended thematic protocols concerning recruitment criteria, workplace productivity, and *AI* technology utilization. The primary interview data were triangulated through institutional documentation analysis, which included official recruitment guidelines, personnel evaluation rubrics, and organizational archival records to ensure construct validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data analysis followed the standardized six-phase thematic analysis framework, comprising data familiarization, initial code generation, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining, and final narrative synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The qualitative coding system for respondent roles and structural sector categorizations was systematically modeled to capture cross-sectoral variation in institutional requirements. Data trustworthiness and interpretive credibility were established through participant member-checking procedures, thick descriptive contextualization, and an explicit audit trail of all analytical decisions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The methodological sequence ensured that institutional perspectives were captured systematically without evaluative bias or premature factual assumptions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The structural profile of the research participants and their corresponding institutional sectors are presented below:

Table 1. Research Participants and Sectoral Classifications

No.	Institution	Sector	Participant Position	Code

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1	Social Security Agency on Health (BPJS Kes.)	Public Service	Head of HR, General Affairs, and Communication	R1
2	Muhammadiyah Public Hospital (RSUM)	Healthcare	Head of Human Resources Development	R2
3	Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI) Sub-Branch	Finance / Banking	Assistant Vice President Branch Business Manager	R3
4	SMP Muhammadiyah Ahmad Dahlan (SMP MuAD)	Education	Vice Principal for Curriculum	R4
5	SMP Cahaya Bangsa (SMP CB)	Education	Headmaster	R5

Based on Table 1, the research successfully engaged five executive representatives spanning four essential socio-economic sectors. Participants R1 and R2 represent public welfare and clinical health management, whereas R3 provides strategic banking insights. Participants R4 and R5 represent secondary educational institutions implementing national and international curricula. This diverse institutional composition ensures that the qualitative dataset captures a comprehensive spectrum of professional workplace expectations.

Here is the empirical summary outlining employers' evaluations regarding English proficiency and its operational impact:

Table 2. English Proficiency and Its Impact on Workplace Productivity

No.	Institution	Institutional Perspective on English	Impact on Employee Productivity
1	SMP CB	Core competency embedded in bilingual schooling.	Substantially improves instructional delivery and mission achievement.
2	SMP MuAD	Strategic asset required for international classes.	Accelerates pedagogical effectiveness in Cambridge curriculum delivery.
3	RSUM	Important for accessing medical terminology.	Enhances technical precision and international clinical networking.
4	BPJS Kes.	Contextually valuable for strategic partnerships.	Facilitates external institutional collaboration and digital literacy.
5	BNI	Mandatory capability for corporate banking services.	Directly drives promotional trajectory and client communication efficiency.

Based on Table 2, all participating employers acknowledge that English proficiency positively influences organizational productivity, although the degree of application varies across sectors. In educational institutions, active English mastery directly determines teacher performance in bilingual classrooms. In banking, linguistic competence serves as a direct driver of promotional mobility and operational speed. Conversely, healthcare and public service sectors associate English with technical documentation comprehension and external stakeholder engagement.

The institutional perspectives on artificial intelligence integration and its interaction with English competence are summarized below:

Table 3. Artificial Intelligence Integration and Relevance to English Competence

No.	Sector	Organizational Stance on AI Integration	Key Impact on English Relevance
1	Education	Utilized as an administrative and pedagogical aid.	Reinforces English needs for effective prompt engineering.
2	Healthcare	Restricted to personal administrative assistance.	Sustains passive English needs for medical literature.

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3	Public Service	Deployed for strategic data purchasing and IT tasks.	Elevates English requirements for technical systems operation.
4	Finance / Banking	Extensively adopted for efficiency and drafting.	Establishes English as mandatory for verifying algorithmic outputs.

Based on Table 3, artificial intelligence is universally categorized as an operational aid rather than a replacement for human language proficiency. Across the education and banking sectors, the utilization of *AI* systems has heightened the necessity of English proficiency, as high-quality prompts and output validation depend on strong human linguistic capabilities. In healthcare and public services, *AI* platforms facilitate routine administrative tasks while leaving core professional communicative requirements intact.

The synthesized sectoral policy landscape regarding English recruitment requirements and functional implementation models is outlined below:

Table 4. Cross-Sectoral Recruitment Policies and Functional Characteristics of English Use

No.	Institution	Policy Implementation Status	Characteristic of English Utilization
1	SMP CB	Mandatory Key Performance Indicator and recruitment filter.	Active, immersive, and integrated across daily operations.
2	SMP MuAD	Prerequisite for Cambridge curriculum teachers.	Active but bounded within specific academic disciplines.
3	RSUM	Non-mandatory, considered an advantageous qualification.	Primarily passive, focusing on technical and medical reading.
4	BPJS Kes.	Evaluative criterion for specialized public relations roles.	Context-specific, concentrated in external communication divisions.
5	BNI	Compulsory standard verified via standardized testing.	Active, institutionalized, and linked to career advancement.

Based on Table 4, recruitment policies exhibit pronounced variation between internationally connected institutions and domestically oriented public bodies. Educational institutions and commercial banks enforce rigorous screening mechanisms, incorporating standardized language benchmarks into hiring protocols. In contrast, healthcare and public welfare bodies adopt flexible criteria, treating English as an auxiliary qualification.

Discussion

The empirical findings confirm that English language proficiency remains an indispensable asset across the modern professional landscape, despite the rapid proliferation of automated digital technologies. Employers across the examined sectors view English not merely as an isolated communicative tool, but as a gateway to technical knowledge, global innovation, and cross-border institutional collaboration. This perspective aligns with recent macroeconomic evidence demonstrating that English continues to serve as the dominant *lingua franca* across globalized knowledge networks and digital production systems (Mäkelä & Stephany, 2024). In the contemporary workplace, language mastery signals an applicant's capacity to engage with complex professional tasks and adapt to modern technological infrastructures. Furthermore, linguistic competence operates as a foundational element of twenty-first-century workplace skills, reinforcing digital literacy, collaborative problem-solving, and cross-cultural communication (Hariharasudan & Kot, 2018). Consequently, English retains its strategic position as a primary determinant of individual employability within increasingly competitive domestic and international labor markets.

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A notable disparity in the institutional valuation of English proficiency emerges between globally integrated sectors and domestically focused public organizations. In the banking and bilingual education sectors, English proficiency is fully embedded within recruitment criteria, routine workflow expectations, and formal employee performance metrics (Çal et al., 2022). Commercial financial institutions operate within interconnected global networks that require personnel to interpret international market data, negotiate with multinational partners, and maintain rigorous reporting standards (Golesorkhi et al., 2019). Conversely, public service and regional healthcare institutions exhibit a more context-dependent orientation, where English is primarily utilized for passive tasks such as reading technical manuals or medical terminology. This divide indicates that the operational necessity of English is fundamentally shaped by an institution's exposure to international workflows (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). While internationally aligned industries treat English as an essential core competency, domestic public institutions often position it as an auxiliary skill.

Rather than diminishing the value of human linguistic expertise, the integration of artificial intelligence technologies has reinforced the operational necessity of English proficiency. While modern *AI-powered* translation tools can process multilingual text rapidly, they cannot fully reproduce contextual nuance, social pragmatics, and professional accountability (Ahamed, 2023). Within the investigated workplaces, employees frequently utilize *AI* systems to enhance productivity, yet effective system interaction relies heavily on English-formulated prompts and precise command structuring. This finding corresponds with empirical research showing that active English literacy enables users to optimize their interactions with advanced automated platforms and specialized software (Mardhiah et al., 2024). Furthermore, automated linguistic outputs require critical evaluation and professional refinement by human experts to prevent costly operational errors (Zou et al., 2023). Therefore, artificial intelligence functions as a productivity-multiplying instrument that complements, rather than displaces, sophisticated human language competence.

The localized socio-economic context of Metro City significantly influences how employers conceptualize and prioritize English language requirements across different industries. Situated outside major metropolitan economic centers, regional institutions serve predominantly local populations, which naturally reduces the frequency of face-to-face foreign language interactions. Under these structural conditions, domestically oriented institutions often lack the immediate external market pressures required to institutionalize comprehensive foreign language training policies (Çal et al., 2022). Nevertheless, forward-looking educational institutions and financial enterprises in the region maintain international language standards to prepare clients and students for broader socio-economic participation (Prasetya, 2023). This dynamic illustrates that institutional culture and strategic foresight can sustain high language standards even in localized settings. The functional value of English in regional labor markets is therefore shaped through an interplay between immediate local operational needs and broader aspirations for global connectivity (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). This alignment between academic instruction and professional demand is increasingly critical as regional economies transition toward digital-centric sectors that require proficiency for global mobility and workplace integration (Alshehri et al., 2026; Chan & Tse, 2025; Hafriana et al., 2026; Mualim et al., 2026; Rzayeva & Ashrafova, 2026).

The integration of strong English proficiency and artificial intelligence literacy forms the foundation of human capital development in the emerging *Society 5.0* paradigm. Modern organizations increasingly seek professionals who can combine linguistic proficiency with digital competence to navigate automated systems and lead collaborative initiatives (Basalamah

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et al., 2020). Pade pedagogical models must adapt to this reality by incorporating *AI-assisted* language learning platforms that build both communicative fluency and technological literacy (Aryanti & Santosa, 2024). Educational curricula must evolve beyond basic grammatical instruction to cultivate analytical reasoning, digital communication skills, and prompt engineering capabilities (Khoiruman & Irawan, 2025). Furthermore, cross-sectoral human resource development frameworks must support continuous language learning across both public and private institutions (Babar et al., 2026; Bratanych, 2026; Kolekar, 2026; Osman et al., 2025). Ultimately, individuals who combine robust English proficiency with digital capabilities will maintain a distinct competitive advantage in an increasingly automated and interconnected global economy.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that English language proficiency remains a critical determinant of employability and institutional performance across diverse sectors in the era of artificial intelligence. While automated technologies have streamlined translation and administrative documentation, empirical findings confirm that *AI* acts as a supporting mechanism rather than a substitute for human linguistic competence. Active English proficiency proves indispensable for operating *AI-driven* systems, engineering precise instructional prompts, verifying automated outputs, and executing complex, high-stakes professional negotiations. The education and banking sectors maintain English as a core recruitment requirement and performance metric, whereas healthcare and public service sectors treat it as a specialized, context-dependent asset. These results directly answer the primary research objective by establishing that human language competence and artificial intelligence form a complementary relationship that enhances operational productivity and career mobility. Consequently, English mastery remains an essential prerequisite for workforce competitiveness within automated and globally interconnected modern labor markets.

These conclusions offer valuable practical implications for educational policymakers, corporate leaders, and human resource directors. Higher education institutions must update language curricula by embedding digital literacy, *AI-assisted* collaborative learning, and professional communication skills to bridge institutional gaps between academic preparation and market expectations. Organizational managers, particularly in public service and healthcare settings, should establish structured language development frameworks to support internationalization and system digitalization. This study has certain limitations, as its empirical scope was restricted to a single regional context with a modest sample of five institutions. Future research should expand this inquiry through larger multi-regional investigations and quantitative structural equation modeling to analyze how varied levels of technological integration impact language requirements across emerging industries. Conducting longitudinal studies tracking career trajectories of *AI-proficient*, bilingual employees would provide deeper insights into workforce development in the digital age.

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