Second-Language Capability as Conditional Career Capital: A Systematic Review of Educational, Behavioural, and Workplace Mechanisms

Shi Qiu Yun

Zhejiang Yuexiu University

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100900309

Received: 20 September 2026; Accepted: 25 September 2026; Published: 09 October 26 2026

ABSTRACT

Second-language capability is increasingly recognised as a career resource, but evidence linking it with career-relevant outcomes remains fragmented across education and workplace research. This systematic literature review synthesises 33 peer-reviewed empirical studies published from January 2021 to September 2026 and identified through Scopus and Web of Science. Evidence was examined across linguistic capability and psychological resources, educational and developmental factors, behavioural activation mechanisms, and workplace and contextual conditions. Findings indicate that proficiency alone is not uniformly associated with career value. Direct career evidence links language capability with mobility, status, participation, and related outcomes, whereas learner and educational studies primarily identify developmental precursors. Behavioural mechanisms such as career exploration, voice, and knowledge sharing provide possible pathways, while job demands, language policies, team environments, and linguistic inclusion may enable or constrain these relationships. The review therefore conceptualises second-language capability as conditional career capital rather than a universally beneficial credential. This synthesis clarifies evidence boundaries and informs future career-development research, language education, and organisational language management.

Keywords: second-language capability, conditional career capital, career outcomes, employability, behavioural activation, workplace language, systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Second-language capability has become increasingly relevant to career development as organisations rely on multilingual teams, cross-border coordination, and internationally distributed work. In this review, it refers to the linguistic, pragmatic, interactional, and intercultural resources that enable individuals to use an additional language effectively in educational and professional settings. Recent evidence positions such capability as a potential career resource. Workplace language proficiency and organisational language policies have been associated with employability, mobility, collaboration, and knowledge transfer (Bhar & Chua, 2025). Corporate-language fluency has also been associated with peer-granted status, idea contribution, and informal leadership emergence in multinational teams (Guzman & Reiche, 2024).

Second-language capability nevertheless represents only one resource within a broader career-development process. Psychological readiness, educational development, behavioural activation, and workplace conditions are therefore treated as related influences rather than as equivalent components of the capability itself. Career competencies can support individuals in managing changing work demands, although their conceptualisation remains diverse (Talluri et al., 2024). Time-lagged evidence further associates foreign-language proficiency with career-environment exploration and self-initiated mobility, suggesting that comparable language capability does not necessarily correspond with identical career outcomes across employees (Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024).

Accordingly, understanding the career relevance of second-language capability requires attention to how it is developed, activated, and situated within workplace conditions. This systematic literature review synthesises

contemporary evidence across educational and workplace settings to examine resources, behavioural mechanisms, contextual conditions, and career outcomes across different career stages.

Problem Statement

A contemporary challenge is the uneven translation of second-language capability into career-relevant value across educational and workplace settings. A 2025 mixed-method study involving 250 language graduates and ten employers or supervisors identified differences between graduates' language-related preparation and employers' expectations concerning communication, teamwork, cultural competency, and other professional skills (Suo et al., 2025). Workplace evidence likewise suggests that language proficiency is not associated with uniform career outcomes. In foreign subsidiaries, proficiency has been linked with career exploration and self-initiated mobility, while contextual conditions shape how these relationships appear across employees (Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024).

The wider evidence remains dispersed across language education, career development, employability, and multilingual workplace research. It spans educational precursors, workplace mechanisms, and direct career outcomes, which should not be treated as equivalent evidence. Career-development scholarship also notes that language remains insufficiently integrated into explanations of career identity and development in linguistically diverse workplaces (Stojanović & Robinson, 2024). An integrated synthesis is therefore needed to clarify these relationships across career stages.

Limitations

This systematic literature review is subject to several limitations. It focuses on peer-reviewed empirical studies published in English, which may exclude relevant evidence reported in other languages, conference proceedings, dissertations, or industry publications. The included studies also differ in methodological quality, construct definitions, populations, and contexts, while some examine direct career outcomes and others examine educational or workplace precursors. Such variation limits direct comparison and requires caution when interpreting patterns across studies. In addition, the review synthesises existing evidence rather than generating new longitudinal or employer-reported data. Consequently, the findings identify recurring associations, mechanisms, and contextual patterns rather than establishing causal relationships or universal effects across career stages and workplace settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Second-Language Capability and Career Outcomes

Second-language capability has increasingly been conceptualised as a career resource whose relevance extends beyond academic proficiency. Longitudinal evidence from foreign subsidiaries associates English competence with promotion, wage growth, and career satisfaction through career encouragement and social-capital development (Peltokorpi, 2023). Time-lagged research also links foreign-language proficiency with career-environment exploration, self-initiated mobility, and turnover-related behaviour, suggesting that language capability may shape how employees navigate career opportunities rather than only task performance (Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024). Among migrant employees, higher destination-language proficiency has likewise been associated with better professional-level matching and job satisfaction, although these relationships vary across demographic groups (Bloemen, 2023).

The career relevance of language capability also appears through social and communicative processes. Official corporate-language fluency has been associated with peer-granted status, employee voice, idea quality, and leadership emergence in multinational teams (Guzman & Reiche, 2024). Conversely, culture-related linguistic differences involving honorific, indirect, and empathic expressions have been linked with lower perceived professional competence and weaker workplace integration among skilled migrants (Xie & Peltokorpi, 2025). Graduate-focused evidence further indicates that employers value clarity, adaptability, speaking confidence, and context-appropriate communication rather than formal accuracy alone (Ali et al., 2025).

Taken together, the evidence supports treating second-language capability as a linguistic and communicative resource whose career relevance varies across populations and settings. Direct career outcomes include mobility, advancement, job matching, and satisfaction, whereas participation, voice, leadership emergence, and workplace integration represent related workplace outcomes or mechanisms. These distinctions are retained in the subsequent synthesis.

Individual Language and Psychological Resources

Individual language and psychological resources may shape whether second-language capability is used in communicative and career-relevant situations. Linguistic proficiency provides a functional basis for workplace interaction, but proficiency alone does not ensure effective participation. Research on recent Hong Kong graduates found that inadequate English proficiency and limited professional knowledge were associated with workplace communication difficulties, while vulnerable professional identity sometimes discouraged help-seeking (Chan, 2021). Malaysian evidence similarly identifies anxiety, low self-efficacy, and hesitation as barriers to workplace English use despite perceived language knowledge (Ali et al., 2026).

Willingness to communicate (WTC) represents psychological readiness for active language use rather than a career outcome itself. Among 392 second-language learners, growth language mindset positively predicted WTC, with linguistic risk-taking mediating this relationship (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2024). Evidence from 450 EFL learners likewise linked L2 grit with WTC through ideal L2 self and growth language mindset (Ebn-Abbasi et al., 2024). Because these studies concern learners rather than workplace outcomes, they provide indirect evidence about psychological precursors to later communicative behaviour.

Self-efficacy and intercultural competence provide a closer connection between individual resources and employability. Among 206 working undergraduates, self-efficacy contributed to the relationship between intercultural competence and employability (Zhan et al., 2024). Anxiety may constrain performance under particular conditions. Across three experiments, Haans and van Witteloostuijn (2024) found that foreign-language use improved convergent thinking among participants with low foreign-language anxiety but reduced performance among those with high anxiety. These findings indicate conditional relationships rather than uniform career effects.

Overall, the evidence distinguishes linguistic capability from psychological resources such as WTC, self-efficacy, professional identity, mindset, grit, risk-taking, and anxiety. These factors may support or constrain the use of second-language capability, but their evidence ranges from indirect learner-level precursors to more career-proximal employability and workplace outcomes.

Educational and Developmental Resources

Higher education may support the development of career-relevant second-language competence through curriculum design, professional communication training, experiential learning, and intercultural exposure. Formal language education appears most relevant when learning outcomes correspond with workplace communication requirements. Interviews with STEM and business graduates from an English-medium university associated English-medium instruction with perceived language development, employment access, and workplace communication, although perceived benefits depended on graduates' ability to apply English professionally (Karim et al., 2023). Employer and student evidence also identifies a mismatch between university emphasis on formal accuracy and workplace expectations for clarity, spoken confidence, adaptability, listening, and context-appropriate communication (Ali et al., 2025). Kamil et al. (2025) further identified linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies as dimensions of professional communication relevant to graduate employability.

Experiential learning provides another developmental pathway by exposing students to authentic professional requirements. Al-Abri et al. (2024) associated university-industry internship participation with perceived development in communication, teamwork, workplace participation, intercultural competence, and career clarity. These outcomes suggest occupationally relevant development, but they remain mainly perceived developmental outcomes rather than direct career effects.

Internationalisation and intercultural learning provide complementary developmental opportunities. Telecollaboration among tertiary learners was associated with intercultural communicative competence, English-use confidence, linguistic competence, and digital communication skills (Yeh, Qi, & Yang, 2024). Related online intercultural interaction supported intercultural awareness and communicative competence among EFL students (Yeh, Qi, Lin, et al., 2024). In China, collaborative discussion, reciprocal interaction, and critical reflection within internationalisation-at-home supported intercultural competence, while insufficient foreign-language competence could restrict engagement (Wu et al., 2025). International extracurricular activities, including foreign-language learning, were also significantly associated with intercultural competence among 2,633 Chinese university students (Wang et al., 2025). These studies mainly provide evidence of educational precursors rather than subsequent career outcomes.

Collectively, workplace-aligned curricula, professional communication training, English-medium exposure, internships, telecollaboration, and internationalisation represent developmental resources that may improve the professional applicability of second-language capability. Their relationship with later career outcomes should remain distinct from evidence directly measuring employment, mobility, or advancement.

Behavioural Activation and Workplace Language Use

Second-language capability may acquire career relevance when linguistic resources are activated through career and workplace behaviours. Career exploration represents one such pathway. Two time-lagged studies linked English proficiency with career-environment exploration and self-initiated headhunter contacts, which were subsequently associated with turnover-related outcomes among host-country employees in foreign subsidiaries (Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024). Workplace communication provides another pathway, as language barriers can restrict participation, shared sensemaking, and knowledge processing in multinational teams (Tenzer et al., 2021).

Language use is also associated with employees' opportunities to contribute knowledge and influence others. Limited non-native-language capability has been linked with weaker social interaction and tacit knowledge sharing, while code-switching by linguistic bridge actors supported knowledge exchange (Canestrino et al., 2022). Stronger corporate-language fluency has likewise been associated with voice behaviour, contribution quality, peer-granted status, and leadership emergence (Guzman & Reiche, 2024). These relationships are not uniformly beneficial. Multilingual-team interviews identified comprehension difficulties and cognitive workload alongside more tolerant interaction and alternative associations during creative work (Loderer et al., 2024). Experimental evidence also found lower team creative performance under foreign-language use, although stronger proficiency and virtual interaction reduced part of this disadvantage (Muehlfeld et al., 2025).

Social interaction and knowledge exchange provide further behavioural pathways. Among Chinese multinational-corporation employees, English proficiency was associated with stronger international employee role identity and, subsequently, greater knowledge sharing with foreign colleagues (Han et al., 2026). Peltokorpi (2026) similarly linked interaction frequency and avoidance with information sharing and knowledge transfer between host-country employees and expatriates. In highly multilingual workplaces, informal language-advice networks formed through voluntary language-related knowledge seeking and sharing may also support interpersonal interaction and social integration (Al-Naemi et al., 2026).

Overall, the evidence identifies career exploration, communication participation, employee voice, social interaction, knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, and language advice as behavioural mechanisms associated with the career relevance of second-language capability.

Workplace and Contextual Conditions

The career relevance of second-language capability varies with its alignment to job and organisational requirements. Language demands differ across occupational roles rather than operating as a uniform proficiency threshold. Suzuki et al. (2023) found that English literacy skills were particularly important for managers, whereas oral skills were more important for non-managerial employees in relation to work performance. Sociolinguistic competence was also associated with appropriate language use across work

situations. This suggests that person-job language alignment may be more informative than undifferentiated proficiency.

Corporate language policies represent another contextual condition. Using experimental and interview evidence from multinational corporation employees in China, Hsu et al. (2024) found that English adoption was associated with both language ability and the perceived legitimacy of headquarters' language policy. Positive legitimacy judgments supported adoption even among employees with relatively weak language ability. In contrast, Lauring et al. (2025) found that employees resisted or reinterpreted English standardisation when prescribed language use conflicted with departmental tasks or external stakeholder requirements. These findings suggest that policy functionality can enable or constrain workplace language use.

Team and wider social environments may further condition participation. Guzman and Reiche (2024) found that colleagues' predominant language altered the relationship between official corporate-language fluency and peer-granted status, indicating that the relevance of individual fluency varies with team language configuration. Cross-country evidence also suggests that societal language ideologies may support or discourage professional participation when particular standards of acceptable language use prevail in the workplace (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2024).

Linguistic discrimination represents an additional constraint on career opportunity. A German field experiment found that applicants speaking with a Turkish accent received fewer positive responses during initial employer contact than otherwise identical standard-German speakers (Schmaus & Kristen, 2022). Among migrant professionals, language-based discrimination was also reported across physical and virtual workplaces, although its form became more subtle and organisational in virtual settings (Back & Piekkari, 2024).

Collectively, job-specific language demands, language policies, policy legitimacy, team language configuration, societal language ideologies, work modality, and linguistic inclusion or discrimination are best treated as contextual or boundary conditions. They may enable, constrain, or redirect the relationship between second-language capability and career-relevant outcomes rather than functioning uniformly as direct predictors or statistical moderators.

Research Gaps

Despite growing empirical attention to second-language capability and career development, three integrative gaps remain. First, evidence is fragmented across linguistic capability, psychological resources, educational precursors, and career outcomes. Studies separately examine proficiency, willingness to communicate, self-efficacy, professional identity, intercultural competence, curricula, internships, and international exposure (Chan, 2021; Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024; Zhan et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2025). Evidence proximity also varies because some studies assess career outcomes while others examine developmental precursors. An integrated synthesis is therefore needed across these evidence types.

Second, behavioural pathways linking language capability with career-relevant outcomes remain dispersed. Existing studies examine career exploration, communication participation, employee voice, knowledge sharing, social interaction, and language-advice behaviour separately (Guzman & Reiche, 2024; Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024; Han et al., 2026; Al-Naemi et al., 2026). Their combined role across different career stages and workplace settings remains insufficiently synthesised.

Third, workplace conditions remain insufficiently integrated with capability development and behavioural activation. Job-specific language demands, corporate language policies, team language configurations, societal language ideologies, virtual work, and linguistic discrimination are associated with differences in how language capability is used and valued (Suzuki et al., 2023; Hsu et al., 2024; Back & Piekkari, 2024; Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2024; Lauring et al., 2025). These factors are better treated as contextual or boundary conditions rather than assumed statistical moderators. Their role across career stages requires integrated synthesis.

Table 1: Research Gaps and Alignment with Research Questions

Research Gap	Evidence Presenting the Gap	What Remains Unclear	RQ
Gap 1: Fragmented capability, psychological, and educational evidence	Studies separately examine proficiency, WTC, self-efficacy, professional identity, intercultural competence, curriculum alignment, internships, and internationalisation (Chan, 2021; Zhan et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2025; Al-Abri et al., 2024).	How linguistic capability, psychological resources, and educational precursors are associated with career-relevant outcomes across career stages.	RQ1
Gap 2: Fragmented behavioural pathways	Career exploration, voice, interaction, knowledge sharing, and language-advice behaviour are examined separately (Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024; Guzman & Reiche, 2024; Han et al., 2026; Al-Naemi et al., 2026).	How behavioural pathways connect second-language capability with career-relevant outcomes across settings.	RQ2
Gap 3: Workplace conditions insufficiently integrated	Job-specific language demands, policy legitimacy, team language configuration, societal language ideologies, and discrimination are examined as contextual influences (Suzuki et al., 2023; Hsu et al., 2024; Back & Piekkari, 2024; Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2024; Lauring et al., 2025).	How workplace conditions enable, constrain, or redirect relationships between second-language capability and career-relevant outcomes.	RQ2

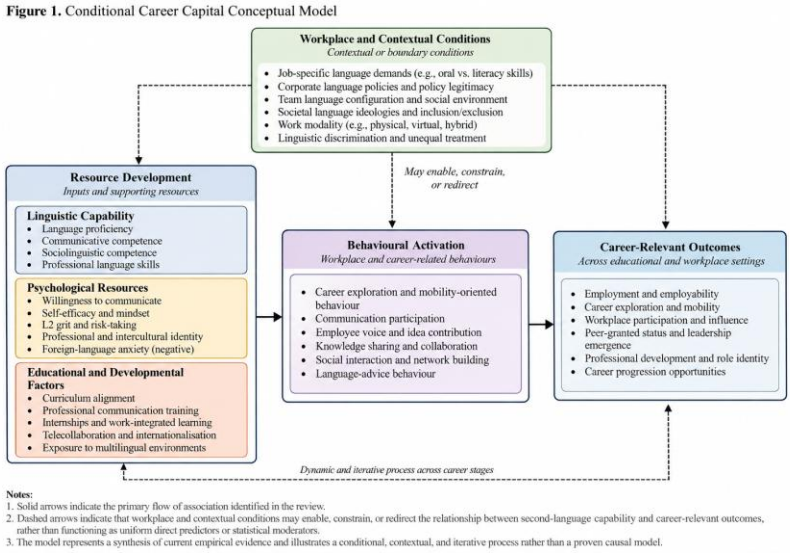


Figure 1 integrates the identified evidence domains into a conditional career capital framework.

Second-language capability is positioned as the core linguistic resource, while psychological and educational resources support its application. Behavioural activation represents possible pathways to career-relevant outcomes, whereas workplace conditions may enable, constrain, or redirect these relationships. The model represents an evidence synthesis rather than a tested causal structure.

Research Questions

- RQ1: What linguistic capability, psychological resources, and educational factors are associated with career-relevant outcomes across career stages?

- RQ2: How do behavioural activation mechanisms and workplace conditions relate to the career relevance of second-language capability?

Research Objectives

- RO1: To synthesise evidence on linguistic capability, psychological resources, and educational factors associated with career-relevant outcomes across career stages.

- RO2: To examine behavioural activation mechanisms and workplace conditions associated with the career relevance of second-language capability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This systematic literature review synthesised contemporary empirical evidence on second-language capability and career-relevant outcomes across educational and workplace settings. The review followed PRISMA 2020 principles for identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and study selection (Page et al., 2021). Peer-reviewed English-language studies published from January 2021 to September 2026 were searched in Scopus and Web of Science because the topic spans language education, employability, career development, organisational behaviour, and multilingual workplace research.

The search strategy combined two concept groups. Language terms included “second language,” “foreign language,” “language proficiency,” “English proficiency,” multilingual*, bilingual*, “communicative competence,” “willingness to communicate,” “corporate language,” and “workplace language.” Career and workplace terms included employab*, career*, “work readiness,” “job readiness,” workplace*, employee*, mobility, promotion, participation, “knowledge sharing,” “employee voice,” leadership, integration, and performance. AND and OR connected the groups. Population terms were not compulsory because relevant evidence spans students, graduates, employees, multinational teams, migrant professionals, and other workplace populations.

Eligible studies were peer-reviewed empirical articles in English that examined a second-language or multilingual factor together with a career, employability, professional-development, workplace-behaviour, or workplace-context outcome relevant to the research questions. Studies limited to language acquisition or classroom achievement without career or workplace relevance were excluded. Conceptual papers, reviews, conference proceedings, dissertations, and non-peer-reviewed publications were excluded from the empirical synthesis, although relevant reviews informed the conceptual background.

Duplicates were removed before title and abstract screening, followed by full-text eligibility assessment against the predefined criteria. Reference lists of eligible studies were checked for additional empirical articles. Thirty-three empirical studies formed the final evidence base. The complete PRISMA selection counts, full-text exclusion reasons, citation-search additions, protocol status, and screening and extraction responsibility should be reported from the original review records.

Data Analysis Plan

The 33 included empirical studies were analysed through structured data extraction and thematic synthesis. A standardised extraction matrix recorded author and year, geographical context, sample characteristics, research design, language-related construct, educational or developmental factor, behavioural mechanism, workplace condition, career-relevant outcome, and principal empirical finding. This structure enabled systematic comparison across disciplinary, educational, and occupational settings.

The extracted findings were coded into four analytical domains: linguistic and psychological resources, educational and developmental resources, behavioural activation mechanisms, and workplace and contextual conditions. Recurring subthemes were then identified inductively, including proficiency, willingness to communicate, self-efficacy, professional identity, internships, professional communication training, career

exploration, employee voice, knowledge sharing, corporate language policy, job-specific language demands, and linguistic inclusion.

Comparative thematic synthesis examined whether reported relationships were positive, negative, conditional, or mixed and identified areas of convergence and contradiction. Evidence was also distinguished by proximity to career outcomes as direct career evidence, workplace-mechanism evidence, educational-precursor evidence, or contextual evidence. This prevented developmental or behavioural indicators from being interpreted as equivalent to demonstrated career outcomes.

For RQ1, linguistic capability, psychological resources, and educational factors were synthesised in relation to career-relevant outcomes across career stages. For RQ2, behavioural mechanisms and workplace conditions were examined in relation to the career relevance of second-language capability. The final synthesis used thematic narrative analysis and summary tables linking evidence domains, mechanisms, contexts, outcomes, and representative studies.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The synthesis of 33 empirical studies indicates that second-language capability is associated with career-relevant outcomes through linked processes of resource development, behavioural activation, and contextual conditioning. Proficiency alone does not consistently correspond with career value. Linguistic capability operates alongside psychological and educational resources, while its relevance varies according to whether individuals use it in career-related behaviours and whether workplace conditions support, constrain, or redirect such use.

For RQ1, linguistic capability is associated with several career-relevant outcomes, although the evidence varies in proximity to those outcomes. Foreign-language proficiency has been linked with career exploration and mobility-related behaviours, while corporate-language fluency is associated with peer-granted status, voice quality, and leadership emergence (Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024; Guzman & Reiche, 2024). Recent graduates may encounter workplace communication difficulties when language proficiency is insufficient for unfamiliar professional genres (Chan, 2021). Psychological resources provide mainly indirect evidence: growth mindset, linguistic risk-taking, L2 grit, and ideal L2 self are associated with willingness to communicate, whereas foreign-language anxiety may constrain performance (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2024; Ebn-Abbasi et al., 2024; Haans & van Witteloostuijn, 2024).

Educational evidence provides a second component of RQ1 but is generally more proximal to capability development than to realised career outcomes. Employer and graduate studies emphasise practical communication, adaptability, sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse competence, and strategic communication as relevant to employability (Ali et al., 2025; Kamil et al., 2025). Internship participation has been associated with perceived development in communication, teamwork, workplace participation, and career clarity (Al-Abri et al., 2024). Telecollaboration, internationalisation-at-home, and international extracurricular activities are likewise associated with intercultural communicative competence and related developmental outcomes (Yeh, Qi, & Yang, 2024; Wang et al., 2025). RQ1 therefore identifies linguistic capability, psychological resources, and educational precursors as distinct but related evidence domains.

For RQ2, the synthesis identifies behavioural activation as a set of pathways associated with the career relevance of second-language capability. Career exploration is linked with proficiency and mobility-related behaviour (Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024). In employment settings, communication participation, employee voice, idea contribution, knowledge exchange, and social interaction provide additional mechanisms. Official-language fluency has been associated with contribution quality and informal influence (Guzman & Reiche, 2024), while English proficiency has been linked with international employee role identity and knowledge sharing among Chinese multinational-corporation employees (Han et al., 2026). These findings support behavioural pathways without implying that all produce direct career outcomes.

Workplace conditions further qualify these relationships. Job roles require different combinations of oral and literacy skills, so general proficiency does not necessarily align with role-specific performance requirements

(Suzuki et al., 2023). Language-policy legitimacy is associated with employees' willingness to adopt a corporate language (Hsu et al., 2024), while standardised policies may be resisted when they conflict with departmental tasks or stakeholder requirements (Lauring et al., 2025). Linguistic inequality can also constrain professional participation across physical and virtual workplaces (Back & Piekkari, 2024). These findings support treating job demands, organisational policies, team language environments, work modality, and linguistic inclusion as contextual or boundary conditions rather than uniform direct predictors or statistical moderators.

Overall, the review integrates dispersed evidence into a conditional account of how second-language capability may acquire career relevance. Linguistic capability constitutes the core resource, while psychological readiness and educational development may support its use. Behavioural activation provides possible pathways through which capability becomes visible in career and workplace settings, and contextual conditions may enable or constrain these relationships. On this basis, second-language capability is cautiously conceptualised as conditional career capital rather than a universally beneficial credential.

Table 2: Integrated Synthesis of Findings

RQ	Evidence Domain	Evidence Proximity	Principal Factors or Mechanisms	Synthesised Finding	Representative Studies
RQ 1	Linguistic capability	Direct/career-proximal	Proficiency, professional communication competence	Associated with workplace communication, career exploration, mobility, status, and influence, but proficiency alone does not correspond uniformly with career value.	Chan (2021); Peltokorpi & Presbitero (2024); Guzman & Reiche (2024)
RQ 1	Psychological resources	Mainly indirect	WTC, self-efficacy, mindset, L2 grit, ideal L2 self, risk-taking, anxiety, professional identity	Associated with readiness to use language, but much evidence concerns learner or developmental outcomes rather than realised careers.	Sadoughi & Hejazi (2024); Ebn-Abbasi et al. (2024); Haans & van Witteloostuijn (2024)
RQ 1	Educational development	Educational precursor	Curriculum alignment, communication training, internships, telecollaboration, internationalisation	Associated with professional and intercultural capability development rather than direct career outcomes.	Al-Abri et al. (2024); Yeh, Qi, & Yang (2024); Ali et al. (2025); Kamil et al. (2025)
RQ 2	Behavioural activation	Workplace mechanism	Career exploration, participation, voice, knowledge sharing, social interaction	Behavioural mechanisms provide possible pathways linking language capability with career-relevant workplace outcomes.	Peltokorpi & Presbitero (2024); Guzman & Reiche (2024); Han et al. (2026)
RQ 2	Workplace conditions	Contextual / boundary evidence	Job demands, language policy, policy legitimacy, team	Workplace conditions may enable, constrain, or	Suzuki et al. (2023); Hsu et al. (2024); Back

			language environment, virtuality, inclusion	redirect the relevance of language capability.	& Piekkari (2024); Lauring et al. (2025)

Recommendation

The review suggests that future research should examine second-language capability together with psychological resources, behavioural pathways, and workplace conditions rather than as an isolated predictor of career success. Longitudinal and multi-source designs may clarify whether observed associations persist across time and sources (Peltokorpi & Presbitero, 2024). Comparative studies across occupations and organisational contexts are also needed to test when particular language capabilities are more strongly associated with career-relevant outcomes.

For universities, the synthesis supports closer alignment between language education and professional communication demands. Evidence from employers and graduates highlights clarity, adaptability, spoken confidence, listening, and appropriate tone as relevant to workplace preparation (Ali et al., 2025). Presentations, workplace writing, negotiation, teamwork, intercultural communication, internships, telecollaboration, and related experiential activities can therefore be considered as curriculum options whose career effects require further evaluation.

For employers, the evidence supports matching language requirements to actual job functions rather than applying uniform proficiency expectations. Language policies should also reflect departmental tasks, stakeholder communication, and team language configurations because standardised policies may be resisted when they conflict with practical requirements (Lauring et al., 2025). Inclusive opportunities for multilingual employees to participate, share knowledge, and contribute ideas are reasonable organisational responses, although their effects on advancement should be evaluated rather than assumed.

For graduates and employees, the review suggests treating second-language capability as an applied resource rather than solely a qualification. Developing communicative confidence, intercultural competence, professional vocabulary, and willingness to communicate, together with experience in multilingual projects or professional interaction, may support career-relevant language use. Overall, these recommendations are evidence-informed proposals rather than established interventions. Universities, individuals, and employers can address capability development, behavioural use, and workplace conditions, but the resulting career benefits should be tested through longitudinal, comparative, and multi-source research.

Table 3: Evidence-Informed Recommendations

Stakeholder	Evidence from Review	Evidence-Informed Proposal	Evidence Status
Researchers	Linguistic, psychological, behavioural, and contextual evidence remains fragmented.	Test integrated models using longitudinal and multi-source designs.	Requires further testing
Universities	Professional communication demands may differ from conventional language instruction.	Consider integrating workplace communication and occupation-specific tasks.	Inferred from employer and graduate evidence
Universities	Experiential activities are associated with communication and intercultural development.	Expand internships, telecollaboration, and authentic multilingual activities where feasible.	Developmental evidence

Employers	Language demands differ across jobs and organisational units.	Align language requirements with actual communication tasks.	Supported by workplace evidence
Employers	Policy legitimacy and functionality are associated with language use.	Design flexible language policies aligned with departmental needs.	Supported by contextual evidence
Employers	Language differences are associated with participation, voice, and knowledge sharing.	Provide inclusive opportunities for multilingual participation.	Evidence-informed organisational proposal
Graduates and employees	Qualifications alone do not ensure workplace application.	Develop professional language use, confidence, and intercultural competence.	Requires career-outcome evaluation

REFERENCES

1. Al-Abri, M., Denman, C., Al Alawi, M., & Al Ajmi, M. (2024). Enhancing employability through university-industry linkages: Omani engineering students' perspectives of the Eidaad internship programme. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 11, 565. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02779-y
2. Al-Naemi, M., Lee, H.-J., & Reade, C. (2026). The unexpected upside of high language diversity: Social integration through language advice networks. Journal of Management, 52(7), 2699–2732. https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063251337067
3. Ali, Z., Bhar, S. K., & Ishtiaq, M. (2026). Student perspectives on workplace English: A qualitative study of language skills, psychological barriers, and employability training in Malaysia. Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 11, 76. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-026-00450-4
4. Ali, Z., Bhar, S. K., Mahmood, S., Mokhtar, R., & Mohd Ali, A. Z. (2025). Reforming English for employability: Insights from employers and graduates in a Malaysian context. Forum for Linguistic Studies, 7(9), 801–816. https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i9.10249
5. Back, H., & Piekkari, R. (2024). Language-based discrimination in multilingual organizations: A comparative study of migrant professionals' experiences across physical and virtual spaces. Journal of World Business, 59(3), 101518. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2024.101518
6. Barner-Rasmussen, W., Gaibrois, C., & Wilmot, N. V. (2024). Perfection, hybridity or shutting up? A cross-country study of how language ideologies shape participation in international business. International Business Review, 33(1), 102189. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2023.102189
7. Bhar, S. K., & Chua, Y. E. (2025). Language as career capital: A scoping review of human capital development, employee mobility, and HR implications in multilingual organisations. Administrative Sciences, 15(11), 421. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15110421
8. Bloemen, H. G. (2023). Language proficiency of migrants: The relation with job satisfaction and skill matching. Empirical Economics, 65(6), 2899–2952. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00181-023-02445-3
9. Canestrino, R., Magliocca, P., & Li, Y. (2022). The impact of language diversity on knowledge sharing within international university research teams: Evidence from TED Project. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 879154. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.879154
10. Chan, C. S. C. (2021). University graduates' transition into the workplace: How they learn to use English for work and cope with language-related challenges. System, 100, 102530.
11. Ebn-Abbasi, F., Fattahi, N., Azari Noughabi, M., & Botes, E. (2024). The strength of self and L2 willingness to communicate: The role of L2 grit, ideal L2 self and language mindset. System, 123, 103334. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103334

12. Guzman, F. A., & Reiche, B. S. (2024). A chorus of different tongues: Official corporate language fluency and informal influence in multinational teams. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 182, 104334. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2024.104334
13. Haans, R. F. J., & van Witteloostuijn, A. (2024). Does foreign language liberate or limit creativity? Three experiments on foreign language anxiety and use, and divergent and convergent thinking. International Business Review, 33(4), 102305. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2024.102305
14. Han, X., Li, J., Li, Y., & Lim, V. K. G. (2026). Language, role identity, and knowledge sharing in emerging-economy MNC headquarters: Evidence from Chinese parent country nationals. Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, 64(3), e70090. https://doi.org/10.1111/1744-7941.70090
15. Hsu, A. J. C., Au, K., & Dowejko, M. K. (2024). Weak in ability but still follow what the headquarters asks: A legitimacy-based view of MNC employees' adoption of English. Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, 62(1), e12396. https://doi.org/10.1111/1744-7941.12396
16. Kamil, M. A., Syed Husain, S. S., & Abdul Kadir, Z. (2025). Professional communication for employability: A qualitative study of graduate and employer insights. Business and Professional Communication Quarterly, Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/23294906251358387
17. Karim, A., Islam, M. S., Hamid, M. O., Rahman, M. M., & Amin, E. U. (2023). Language ideology, development of English proficiency, and performance in professional communication: Voices of STEM + business graduates of English medium university. Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 8, 27. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-023-00200-w
18. Lauring, J., Jonasson, C., & Sanden, G. R. (2025). When can resistance to a standardization policy result in destandardization? The case of corporate language implementation. International Business Review, 34(4), 102446. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2025.102446
19. Loderer, A., Muehlfeld, K., Wilken, R., Moritz, A., & Slomski, V. (2024). The language barrier as a springboard towards (team) creativity: An exploratory study of foreign language use in teams. International Business Review, 33(2), 102247. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2023.102247
20. Muehlfeld, K., Loderer, A., Semrau, T., & Wilken, R. (2025). Foreign language use, virtuality, and the creative performance of dyadic teams. Management International Review, 65(1), 145–173. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-024-00557-1
21. Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., ... Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ, 372, n71. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71
22. Peltokorpi, V. (2023). The "language" of career success: The effects of English language competence on local employees' career outcomes in foreign subsidiaries. Journal of International Business Studies, 54(2), 258–284. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-022-00544-4
23. Peltokorpi, V. (2026). A common identity model perspective on the interactive effects of dual identity in intergroup relations: Host country national employees' interactions with expatriates in foreign subsidiaries. Applied Psychology, 75(1), e70069. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.70069
24. Peltokorpi, V., & Presbitero, A. (2024). Foreign language proficiency, career behaviors, and turnover-related outcomes: A social cognitive career theory perspective of host country national employees in foreign subsidiaries. Applied Psychology, 73(4), 2153–2177. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12543
25. Sadoughi, M., & Hejazi, S. Y. (2024). Growth language mindset and willingness to communicate: Contributions of linguistic risk taking and learning experience. Acta Psychologica, 248, 104367. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104367
26. Schmaus, M., & Kristen, C. (2022). Foreign accents in the early hiring process: A field experiment on accent-related ethnic discrimination in Germany. International Migration Review, 56(2), 562–593. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183211042004
27. Stojanović, M., & Robinson, P. A. (2024). A critical conceptual framework for understanding career development in linguistically diverse individual and organizational contexts. Career Development International, 29(3), 297–310. https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-07-2023-0229
28. Suo, Y. M., Suo, Y. J., Romli, T. R. M., & Adam, Z. B. (2025). Enhancing employability: A study on professional skills development among Arabic language graduates in Malaysia. Education + Training, 67(7–8), 802–820. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-10-2024-0485

29. Suzuki, M., Ando, N., & Nishikawa, H. (2023). Discontinuity of required oral and literacy skills across job roles in achieving high work performance: An fsQCA approach. International Business Review, 32(4), 102072. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2022.102072
30. Talluri, S. B., Uppal, N., Akkermans, J., & Newman, A. (2024). Towards a self-regulation model of career competencies: A systematic review and future research agenda. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 149, 103969. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2024.103969
31. Tenzer, H., Pudelko, M., & Zellmer-Bruhn, M. (2021). The impact of language barriers on knowledge processing in multinational teams. Journal of World Business, 56(2), 101184. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2020.101184
32. Wang, X., Huang, J., & Yin, H. (2025). Exploring the relationships between international extracurricular activities and the intercultural competence of Chinese domestic university students. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 109, 102303. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2025.102303
33. Wu, X., Tao, J., Zhu, L., Lin, J., & Jiang, H. (2025). The acquisition of intercultural competence among international and domestic students in China through an internationalisation at home programme. Language and Intercultural Communication, 25(1), 91–108. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2024.2326122
34. Xie, J., & Peltokorpi, V. (2025). It is not only what you say, but how you say it: A language attitude perspective of skilled migrants' culture-related linguistic skills and workplace integration in multinational corporations. Journal of International Management, 31(2), 101235. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2025.101235
35. Yeh, H.-C., Qi, G. Y., Lin, M.-W., & Chen, N.-S. (2024). Oral translanguaging in telecollaboration: Effects on EFL learner intercultural awareness, learning and communicative competence. System, 124, 103357. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103357
36. Yeh, H.-C., Qi, G. Y., & Yang, S.-H. (2024). Beyond borders: Telecollaboration for internationalization at home in tertiary education. Distance Education, 45(2), 334–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2024.2338713
37. Zhan, H., Cheng, K. M., Wijaya, L., & Zhang, S. (2024). Investigating the mediating role of self-efficacy between digital leadership capability, intercultural competence, and employability among working undergraduates. Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning, 14(4), 796–820. https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-02-2024-0032